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What Works in UN Resident Coordinator-led Conflict Prevention: Lessons from the Field

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What Works in UN Resident Coordinator-led Conflict Prevention: Lessons from the Field

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This policy paper is part of a broader research project carried out by the UNU Centre for Policy Research (UNU-CPR) with the support of the UK Mission to the United Nations, on the role of UN Resident Coordinators in Conflict Prevention. The project aimed to extract lessons from case studies of Resident Coordinator-supported preventive action in nine countries (Bolivia 2000-09; Colombia 2012-16; Guinea 2009-15; Guyana 2003-15; Kenya 2008-17; Kyrgyzstan 2010-17; Malawi, 2011-17; Nepal 2007-15; and Tunisia 2011-17). All case studies and this paper can be accessed at cpr.unu.edu.

INTRODUCTION

UN Secretary-General António Guterres has placed conflict prevention at the top of his agenda. For this agenda to deliver, one of the key challenges is to make Resident Coordinators (RCs) in conflict-prone countries without a peace operation more effective prevention actors.

While so-called “non-mission settings” are widely recognised as the frontline of preventive action (peace operations tend to get deployed once efforts to avert outbreak of violent conflict have failed), they also tend to be contexts where the UN faces some of its most acute challenges in making prevention work. This is because RCs, who head the UN’s presence in such places, face significant political, mandate, and resource constraints.

Against this background, the UNU Centre for Policy Research (UNU-CPR), with the generous support of the UK Mission to the United Nations, has undertaken a research project to extract lessons from case studies of RC-supported preventive action in nine countries. The project has two central aims: first, to produce analytical narratives detailing how RCs and UN Country Teams (UNCTs) have engaged preventively across various settings; and second, to identify good practices of what has worked in RC-supported prevention in the past, and why, and how those lessons might be relevant to RCs in other settings.

The project applies a broad definition of prevention, including prevention of the outbreak, continuation, escalation and recurrence of conflict. It looks at both long-term programmatic measures to address underlying conflict drivers (including human rights abuses) as well as shorter-term, reactive interventions to deal with sudden crisis.

In selecting our case studies, we deliberately picked relative “success” cases, i.e. cases in which RCs are generally considered to have meaningfully contributed to prevention. The reason for this bias in favour of success is not because we think one should not examine and learn from failure. It is because the RC system’s shortcomings, pathologies, and failures – in terms of its role in conflict prevention – have been comparatively well studied, most prominently in the 2012 report of the Internal Review Panel on UN Action in Sri Lanka.

By contrast, the UN has invested less effort in systematically studying the anatomy of good practice in RC-supported prevention. This is understandable. Good practice does not generate the same calls for accountability as outright failure. And success in prevention is notoriously difficult to prove because it is based on the counter-factual assumption that absent the UN’s action the outcome would have been greater levels of violence or conflict.

As a result, the UN’s (relative) success stories in RC-supported prevention are rarely written up or known to anyone outside the small circle of UN staff who were directly involved. Meanwhile, the UN’s claims of success in any specific RC-led preventive engagements are difficult to verify in the absence of independent validation, which, in turn, undermines a systematic approach to learning. We hope this project will provide such validation and an evidence base on which to build learning.

The nine case studies on which this project is based, and which are annexed to this policy paper, include: Bolivia 2000-09; Colombia 2012-16; Guinea 2009-15; Guyana 2003-15; Kenya 2008-17; Kyrgyzstan 2010-17; Malawi, 2011-17; Nepal 2007-15; and Tunisia 2011-17.

Each case study is based on: an extensive desk review of open source material and internal UN documents; and semi-structured (mostly desk-based) interviews with key UN personnel in the field and at UN headquarters, national actors, country experts and other relevant interlocutors. In total, 171 individuals have been interviewed for this project, including 17 RCs.

In pursuing its research, UNU-CPR benefited from the support and cooperation of relevant RC Offices, UNCTs and UN headquarters departments. Research constraints on the research resulted from the fact that some of the case studies stretch back a decade or more, with relevant documentation often hard to trace or no longer available, and some relevant UN personnel difficult to locate. Only one field trip was undertaken for this study (Tunisia). Because of the largely desk-based nature of the exercise, we could interview only a limited number of national stakeholders whose perspectives would surely have enriched this study.

The primary questions guiding the case study researchers were: where, how and why did RCs manage to play a meaningful prevention role? Secondary questions considered: the in-country conditions that allowed RCs to play a preventive role; how RCs carved out political space and identified or engineered entry points for preventive action; and what key capacities, mechanisms and resources RCs drew upon in that endeavour. It should be noted – and will be evident in our case studies – that our bias in favour of good practice did not lead us to shy away from identifying and drawing lessons from any shortcomings we found.

Our audience for this project is primarily the UN itself. First and foremost, our research findings are targeted at RCs deployed in countries facing risks to their stability, staff in RC Offices, and interested members of UN Country Teams. We wrote the case studies with them in mind, hoping they might find inspiration by reading about the often creative and innovative ways in which their peers have overcome constraints to carve out effective prevention roles. We also expect the case studies, along with this policy paper, will be of use to UN Headquarters entities who are tasked with supporting RCs in their prevention roles, including the Development Operations Coordination Office (DOCO), UN Development Programme (UNDP), UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA), and the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO). And finally, we expect these findings to be of interest to those within the broader UN policy community who are following the prevention discourse, including representatives of member states and think tanks.

The paper is divided in three parts. The first part will lay out efforts, undertaken over the past decade and a half, to put in place policy frameworks, guidance, mechanisms and capacities that would support RCs in their prevention role. The second part will present the findings of the nine case studies organised around the following themes: the critical importance of RC selection the overall contribution of RC-led

prevention in our case studies; leveraging entry points; local-level preventive engagement; norm protection; context and risk analysis; driving country-team wide preventive action; funding for prevention and staff capacities; and lessons learning and knowledge management. The third, and final, part, will provide a number of recommendations for UN headquarter departments.

I. CONTEXT

Any endeavour to improve the preventive role of RCs in non-mission settings must consider the structural constraints RCs face to “do prevention” and past efforts to mitigate those constraints. This section will review the significant efforts that have been made over the past decade and a half in strengthening RC prevention roles. It will argue that, while important progress has been achieved, further improvement of RCs’ preventive performance will depend largely on better practice on the ground, which this project hopes to inform.

The constraints of the RC system are rooted in its origins, going back to General Assembly resolution 32/197, which tasked RCs, who would be selected “in consultation and with the consent of the government concerned,” with the “coordination of, operational activities for development carried out at the country level.”¹ As such, RCs lack an explicit mandate to engage in political activities. Host country authorities often insist they stick to their (narrowly defined) development mandates and not meddle in internal political affairs. Moreover, most RCs come from development or humanitarian backgrounds and often lack experience in political crisis management or human rights issues.

As a result, RCs are strongly incentivised to be highly deferential to the preferences and sensitivities of the host government, on whose consent their presence and the implementation of their programmes depend. The prospect of being “PNG’d” (i.e. declared persona-non-grata) is a sword of Damocles that constantly dangles over their head. This has made some RCs and UNCTs reluctant to take the risks necessary to engage politically, or has led them to remain silent in the face of government actions undermining peace, stability or human rights. Yet, they are appointed by the UN Secretary-General and represent the norms and principles of the United Nations.

To address and compensate for these deficits and constraints, the UN, starting in the early 2000s, embarked on efforts to establish and strengthen support structures and to provide guidance to enhance the preventive potential of RCs in conflict-prone non-mission settings. These efforts, which will be summarised in the following paragraphs, have enhanced the capacities of RCs to engage in conflict prevention, although significant challenges remain.

Starting in 2003, with the adoption of the “Human Rights Approach to Development Cooperation,” the UN Development Group has produced a range of **guidance material** meant to better equip RCs and UNCTs with the tools to identify and programmatically address conflict drivers, including human rights violations. This material includes, most recently, guidance notes on natural resource management (2013);² capacity building in post-conflict contexts (2013);³ conflict analysis (2016);⁴ human rights (2016);⁵ and UN

Development Assistance Frameworks (“UNDAFs”, 2017). The last of these highlights, at the outset, the “primacy of prevention” and the “importance of having a whole of UN system approach to sustaining peace and building peace in fragile and conflict-affected settings.” It lists “Leave No One Behind” as its first programming principle, focused on “addressing multidimensional causes of poverty,” in particular inequalities and discrimination, which lie at the heart of so many conflicts.⁶

In 2004, the UN Department for Political Affairs (DPA) and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) established the ‘**Joint Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention,**’ under which both entities work together to assist relevant RCs through the deployment of mid-level (i.e. P4 or P5) “Peace and Development Advisors” to advise them on conflict-sensitive development programming and possible conflict prevention initiatives. Starting with five PDA posts in 2004, the programme grew to 20 PDAs by 2010 and has expanded further to 42 PDA by 2017. As the case studies in this project have confirmed, PDAs have become one of the most important assets for RC-led preventive action.⁷ Complementing the PDA role are **human rights advisors (HRAs)**, who have been deployed by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to RC Offices since the early 2000s to pursue human rights activities.⁸ As of 2016, HRAs were stationed in 19 countries, all of which were non-mission settings.⁹

In 2006, the Secretary-General established the **Peacebuilding Fund (PBF)** to fund catalytic post-conflict peacebuilding initiatives, in particular those undertaken by UN entities. Managed by the Assistant-Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support, the PBF has become the prime (and in many cases the only) risk-tolerant funding mechanism for RC-led prevention initiatives in non-mission settings, often complemented through the (short-term) deployment of technical expertise. This PBF role has become all the more important with the closure, in 2014, of UNDP’s Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR), whose quick funding modalities (through the BCPR trust fund) and policy support had been an instrumental Headquarters-based asset supporting RC-led prevention.¹⁰

Starting in 2008, DPA, the UN’s lead department on conflict prevention, spearheaded a push to ensure RCs with relevant skills and experience would be deployed to complex political environments. This included efforts to make “political acumen” part of the assessment criteria for the RC roster (“pool”). (To make it into the pool, candidates need to pass a screening process at the RC Assessment Centre, that is widely recognised as highly professional, impartial and demanding.) DPA also assumed a more active role on the **Inter-Agency Advisory Panel (IAAP)**, which recommends to the Secretary-General candidates from the pool for RC vacancies, to help ensure that RCs with the right profile are deployed to conflict-prone settings.¹¹ In 2014, upon prodding by DPA and OHCHR, core human rights and political responsibilities were included in the RC’s job description, somewhat compensating for the lack of a legislative mandate to engage politically.¹²

RC selection is the most rigorous recruitment process for senior personnel across the UN system, yet efforts to ensure deployment of RCs with suitable profiles to crisis settings

continue to run up against three difficulties: First, political competencies are difficult to assess, measure, and train. Second, as the IAAP process often takes the form of inter-agency back scratching—where agencies agree to support one candidate in return for the promise of reciprocal support for “theirs” in the future—criteria such as political acumen sometimes fall by the wayside.¹³ And third, host country governments, who have to formally agree on the Secretary-General’s nomination of an RC, often reject candidates they deem to be too politically-minded or too outspoken on human rights, with little push-back from the UN system. This, in the words of one UN official, “sends the message to Member States that they can ‘RC shop’ at will.”¹⁴

In 2010, the UN Development Group embarked on an effort to address a “**capacity gap**” in RC Offices in crisis and post-crisis situations. The effort identified key functions that these offices would need to fill in order to meet the heightened demands of these situations, in particular in terms of coordination and strategic planning. It led to the addition of Strategic Planners and Coordination Officers to a handful of RC Offices, but mostly in mission settings.¹⁵ Funding shortfalls meant that the capacity gap was never fully closed. And subsequent efforts to beef up RC Offices through an interagency cost-sharing agreement never came close to equipping RCs with the capacities needed to rally fragmented UN agencies behind common objectives, including with respect to prevention and peacebuilding.¹⁶

Around the same time as the capacity gap effort, the publication of a seminal Secretary-General’s report on peacebuilding¹⁷ provided the impetus for senior-level discussions at the UN on how to improve close cooperation between UNDP and DPA, i.e. the two UN entities at Headquarters most relevant to providing guidance to RCs facing crisis situations, but whose relationship had been traditionally fraught.¹⁸ These discussions culminated in a 2012 decision by the Secretary-General’s Policy Committee on “**Special Circumstances in non-mission settings.**” The decision put in place a HQ-based coordination mechanism that intended to ensure close cooperation between UNDP and DPA, in order to provide better support to RCOs in crisis situations.¹⁹ That decision also stated that RCs who are PNG’d “for implementing the UN system-wide strategy should not have their contracts terminated, and should have priority for placement in similar roles.” However, “special circumstances” were only very rarely invoked, so the policy had little impact and was soon superseded by a new policy.²⁰

That new policy was the “**Human Rights Up Front**” (HRUF) initiative and Action Plan, launched by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in 2013. HRUF emerged in response to the 2012 report of the “**Internal Review Panel on United Nations Action in Sri Lanka,**” which laid bare the UN’s “systemic failure” to adequately respond to the mass slaughter of tens of thousands of civilians by government forces during the last stages of the conflict in Sri Lanka in 2008–09.²¹ The initiative aimed to transform the UN’s organisational culture by integrating human rights as the “lifeblood” of the UN across its entities and making it a priority at the operational level.²² It also included a commitment to ensure RCs in crisis contexts would have a “suitable profile”²³ and created a number of operational and coordination mechanisms aimed at enhancing support to RCs in their prevention role.

For instance, Regional Monthly Reviews (RMRs), a UNHQ-based, director-level forum to discuss emerging situations of tension, were partly designed to facilitate access by RCs to political and analytical support at UN Headquarters. Small, multi-disciplinary “Light Teams” were conceived to quickly, but temporarily, deploy to crisis countries to provide human rights and political expertise to RCs.

HRUF led to some improvement on the ground. A 2017 stocktaking report found that it has generated increased support among UN senior staff for RCs “taking up politically difficult issues.”²⁴ It also found indications “that many (but certainly not all) CCA/UNDAFs have more prevention and human rights content” and noted that demand by RCs for relevant human rights and prevention expertise is on the rise.²⁵

However, the UN’s response, since 2016, to the unfolding crisis in **Myanmar**, which displays several parallels with the Sri Lanka case a decade earlier, in particular “the inability for the UN to come up with a coherent strategy that the system as a whole will be forced to follow”²⁶ suggests that a new culture of human rights and prevention has yet to fully take root. The 2017 HRUF stocktaking acknowledges that “[m]any senior managers in the field and at UNHQ prefer to avoid even discussing human rights issues out of concern for political sensitivities” and that HRUF “remains an aspiration.”²⁷ It is revealing that a senior UN official, in 2016, told incoming RCs at their induction not to “push that rights stuff too hard, as we don’t want more RCs to get PNG’d.”²⁸ The downsizing of the HRUF team in the Secretary-General’s office in 2017 and early 2018 might be read by some as echoing that message.

Ongoing shortcomings reflect the fact that HRUF and other efforts cannot fully compensate for the more structural limitations of the RC system in crisis situations. Yet, a **legislative overhaul** of that system – one in which RCs would be imbued by the General Assembly with explicit political and human rights responsibilities and capacities – is about as **unrealistic** as reforming the veto system in the UN Security Council. Indeed, many member states within the Group of 77, as well as Russia,²⁹ remain vehemently opposed to any overt “politicisation” of the RC role, notwithstanding the call for a better integration of UN action across the peace, development, and human rights pillars implicit in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.³⁰

These political constraints are reflected in the **Secretary-General’s reform, prevention, and “sustaining peace” agendas**. On the one hand, his February 2018 Prevention Platform and his March 2018 Sustaining Peace report highlight the responsibility of RCs in driving UN action that is “risk informed” and “help[s] to build peaceful and inclusive societies.”³¹ On the other hand, his UN Development System Reform proposals that were endorsed by Member States in May 2018 did not refer to the RCs’ preventive role and did not significantly enhance RCs’ capacities to play this role. That said, the Secretary-General’s 2017 decision to shift the chairmanship of the UN Development Group – and thus the reporting line of RCs to UN Headquarters – from the UNDP Administrator to the Deputy Secretary-General may reinforce the political role of RCs and enhance HQ-support for calculated risk-taking by RCs in the pursuit of prevention, for which some past UNDP Administrators tended to have

limited tolerance out of concern it might complicate the development endeavour.

Overall, the Secretary-General's vision suggests that evolving practice by RCs on the ground, rather than institutional reform at UN Headquarters, will improve their prevention performance. It is against this background, that this project, including the country case studies, hopes to provide lessons and inspiration that prove to be helpful for RCs to fulfil that vision.

II. FINDINGS FROM CASE STUDIES

The following section will summarise key findings emerging from nine case studies that explore what has worked and why in RC-led prevention in: Bolivia 2000-09; Colombia 2012-16; Guinea 2009-15; Guyana 2003-15; Kenya 2008-17; Kyrgyzstan 2010-17; Malawi, 2011-17; Nepal 2007-15; and Tunisia 2011-17.

The findings point to a wide range of entrepreneurial and innovative practices RCs have developed on the ground. The findings are organised along the following ten themes: 1) the overall contribution of RC-led prevention in our case studies; 2) the importance of deploying RCs with suitable profiles; 3) effective ways to create entry points; 4) the value of local-level preventive engagement; 5) ways to ensure norm protection without jeopardizing consent; 6) the multiple benefits and uses of context and risk analysis; 7) methods to drive country-team wide preventive action; 8) the prevention-enhancing benefit of drawing on UN-wide capacities; 9) ways to enhance staff capacities for prevention; and 10) lessons learning and knowledge management.

It should be acknowledged at the outset that the lessons from these past cases will only serve as an incomplete guide on how to maximize the preventive potential of RCs going forward. The cases under review for this study preceded the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Sustaining Peace agenda, which adds urgency to and provides entry points for moving prevention even further upstream, with enhanced reliance on the full spectrum of development interventions and greater focus on the issue of inclusion. This, however, does not take away from the validity of the following lessons and findings from our case studies.

1. RC-led prevention can work

The fundamental finding across the case studies is one that confirms this project's premise: notwithstanding the constraints within which RCs operate, RC-supported prevention can work. While RC-led preventive action was not the determining factor in any of our cases in deciding between peace and conflict, a credible case can be made that many of the countries we studied emerged less conflict-prone due to the preventive work carried out by RCs and UNCTs.³² Our case studies point to manifold instances in which RCs and UNCTs meaningfully supported peace processes and national dialogues, advanced peacebuilding after conflict, addressed underlying conflict drivers, averted local-level escalatory conflict dynamics, prevented electoral violence, or strengthened national prevention capacities.

Specific examples from our case studies where RC-supported preventive action had an impact include the following:

- In Colombia, RC-led action helped ensure civil society and victims' participation in the peace process with the FARC-EP and supported the government in undertaking early planning for the implementation phase of an agreement.
- In Kyrgyzstan, peacebuilding projects mounted in the aftermath of the 2010 outbreak of violence helped reduce grievances of disaffected youth in the short-term and ethnic tensions in the mid-term.
- In Bolivia, in the 2000s, thanks to its credibility and high-level access, the UNDP Country Office's HDR team and political analysis unit, PAPEP, advised leading government figures on how to avert political crises. In 2008, the RC and PAPEP helped ensure the success of the country's 2008 constitutional dialogue by exerting moral pressure on the parties to remain committed to the talks through to the end.
- In Nepal, RC-led peacebuilding activities had a confidence building impact on the peace process by compensating for the departure of the UN peace operation (UNMIN) in 2011. In 2012, local-level facilitation work by the RCO's field offices helped mitigate the risk of wider intercommunal violence. And RC/UNCT-led support to the successful rehabilitation and integration of a subset of cantoned Maoist combatants, was critical to remove major hurdles to the peace process.
- In Guyana, an RC-led Social Cohesion Programme developed in 2003 provided the space and framework for civil society dialogues, which, in turn, created a conducive atmosphere for the first peaceful elections in decades in 2006. In the run-up to the 2015 elections, an RC-sponsored panel of eminent persons, "Guyanese for Peace," and an associated "situation room" provided early warning and response to election-related tensions, ensuring that the contested 2015 elections resulted in a peaceful change of government.
- In Guinea, the RC worked closely with the UN Regional Office for West Africa (UNOWA) on an intensive preventive diplomacy effort during Guinea's tense return to constitutional order following a coup d'état in 2009. Subsequently, the RC supported the transition, particularly by spearheading a risky – but ultimately successful – effort at Security Sector Reform.
- In Tunisia, the RC played a discrete, yet important, role in supporting the early years of the democratic transition by assisting the country's first democratic elections, inclusion of human rights provisions in the new constitution, and the establishment of a transitional justice commission.
- In Kenya, in the period following the 2007-08 electoral violence, the RC supported the strengthening of local prevention capacities, which in turn have helped prevent a recurrence of mass violence in subsequent elections.

2. Pick RCs with a Suitable Profile to Countries at Risk

Another central finding of our case study is that for RCs to successfully spot and seize entry points for preventive engagement they must have sound political judgment and the ability to operate politically. Several of our case studies demonstrate how the arrival of a new RC can dramatically enhance – or reduce - the RCO's and UNCT's prevention role. Personality, style and political acumen (or lack thereof) matter a great deal.

Political acumen is difficult to define, but in our case studies seems to have been a function of a) an understanding that conflict prevention and the promotion of human rights is an integral part of an RC's role; and b) a readiness to take calculated risks. Prior political experience and/or experience in conflict- or post-conflict countries might be helpful but is by no means a sine qua non, as evidenced by the effective prevention role played by various RCs across our case studies who came to the function with a pure development background. By contrast, a willingness to draw on and work with relevant UN headquarters departments and "knowing whom to call" to get dedicated support in terms of political guidance and technical expertise proved important traits for RCs to enhance their prevention role. Moreover, as preventive action often requires additional resources, RCs who have played an outsized prevention role have also often proven to be adept fund-raisers (more on that below).

This places a premium on deploying RCs with suitable profiles to countries in transition or at risk of instability. Yet, all too often RCs with profiles poorly suited for political engagement are selected for such challenging settings. As the ultimate decision on RC selection (other than host country consent) rests with the Secretary-General, s/he wields the power to ensure that it is in line with his prevention agenda.

Meanwhile, it is equally important to put in place systems that would ensure replacement of RCs in countries that face a sudden major crisis or opportunity requiring political engagement, but where the RC is unwilling or unable to play such a role.

3. Seize and Create Entry Points

The case studies also provide further insights on the difficulties that RCs face in engineering, managing and nurturing host country consent for prevention initiatives. As mentioned earlier, RCs are appointed "in consultation and with the consent of the government concerned," and therefore, they constantly run the risk of overstepping narrow lines set by host country authorities. Their effectiveness as both development and prevention actors tends to rise and fall with the degree of buy-in they obtain from the government. Put simply: prevention works best where RCs have a willing partner in the government.

Of course, the problem is that even in the best of circumstances the willingness of governments to be partners in prevention is often fickle – especially where the government is a party to a conflict. It is striking that in all our case studies, a major "shock" helped open up political space for the RC to engage preventively and/or for the UNCT to switch from business-as-usual development work into prevention or peacebuilding

mode. In some cases, these "shocks" were 'positive', as in: the peace process in Nepal following the 2007 peace accords; the peace process with the FARC-EP in Colombia; or the democratic transition in Tunisia post-Arab Spring. In other cases, they were 'negative,' as in: the electoral violence in Guyana in 2002 and in Kenya in 2007-08; the outbreak of interethnic violence in Kyrgyzstan in 2010; the coup d'état in Guinea in 2008, which was followed by massacre against anti-government protesters in 2009; recurrent political crises from 2000-05 and the 2008 Pando massacre in Bolivia, or violent street protests in Malawi in 2011.

Recognising and seizing the openings presented by such shocks is a prerequisite for RCs to play meaningful prevention roles. To do so, RCs must carefully engage governments to build trust, explore entry points, and ensure buy-in. There is no template guidance on how RCs can go about this and different situations will require different tactics. But our case studies highlight five overarching findings with respect to entry points:

First, build relationships of trust: Several RCs covered in the case studies proved adept at creating entry points by building relationships of trust with high-level government officials. In Kyrgyzstan, in 2012, the RC used his personal relationship with the President to plant seeds for government "requests" for UN support in peacebuilding. In Kenya, in 2013, the RC was effective in personally engaging the newly-elected President directly around cooperation on prevention initiatives within the UNDAF, helping overcome tensions that had been created by the ICC indictments in 2013. In Colombia, starting in 2013, the RC effectively used a pre-existing relationship with the High Commissioner for Peace, whom he had known for years, to create entry points. UNCT staff also proved able to create entry points through relationship-building, as in the case of Bolivia where UNDP's largely national staff enjoyed strong networks with key national actors. And in Guyana, in 2004, the RC relied in particular on UNICEF's established contacts and credibility to lead on certain issues, helping to open doors for him.

Second, maintain impartiality: Several case studies reinforce the importance – and challenge - of RCs maintaining an impartial stance in the face of often polarized relations between the government, on the one hand, and the opposition and/or civil society on the other. In several of our cases, including Bolivia, Guyana of Kenya, Malawi, RCs have proven particularly impactful in prevention terms by helping to create spaces for representatives of government, the opposition and civil society, to engage in constructive dialogues on how to reduce tension, mitigate conflict risk, and address popular grievances. Being seen by all parties as an impartial interlocutor was thus critical for RCs to be effective in that role.

Third, respect the parameters of nationally-led prevention: Across our case studies, RCs combined successful preventive action with (mostly) keeping a low profile that respected the role of national counterparts, who will always be in the 'driver's seat.' In Tunisia, the RC refrained from claiming credit in public for the UN's considerable electoral and constitutional support. In Guyana, in his effort to build government support for the UN's social cohesion programming in the early 2000s, the RC dedicated the first few months of his tenure to being in

“listening mode,” signalling that any preventive engagement would respond to local needs and priorities. In [Colombia](#), in recognition of longstanding sensitivities to a UN role in peacebuilding, the RC coordinated the UNCT’s prevention efforts closely with the requests of national actors, while avoiding to present himself as a protagonist of the peace process for the sake of relevance. In [Kenya](#), the RC helped the government to leverage the country’s considerable local and national capacities in the design of its national peace architecture, including its robust, well organized civil society, reinforcing broad-based, inclusive national ownership.

Fourth, have something to offer: In all our case studies, RCs and UNCTs leveraged the fact that they had “something to offer” that attracted government engagement around prevention initiatives. What they had to offer usually fell into one of the following categories:

- *Original analysis and data:* In [Bolivia](#), for instance, the RC leveraged data gathered by UNDP’s governance unit PAPEP through regular opinion polls or Delphi surveys to make itself a valuable interlocutor for high-level officials (see section on analysis for further detail);
- *Technical expertise:* In [Tunisia](#), for instance, the RC was able to position the UN as a credible, trusted and qualified ‘partner of choice’ in areas such as elections, constitutional support, and transitional justice. The fact that the RC was able to attract highly-qualified staff with Arabic language skills overcoming the “hegemony of English speaking experts in all rosters” was an added plus; and
- *Money:* across our case studies, RCs leveraged their potential role as “rainmakers” for entry points, either by helping to mobilize the international community behind nationally-led prevention initiatives (e.g. in [Kenya](#) in 2008, where the RC fundraised in support of the fledgling peace infrastructure); in the form of PBF-funding (e.g. in [Guinea](#) where the PBF provided significant funding for security sector reform), or agency funds (e.g. in [Malawi](#), where UNDP programming funds helped backstop the National Dialogue in 2011-12, in which the RC Played a prominent role).

Fifth, make the most out of looming elections. In several case studies, RCs used the promise of legitimacy that UN imprimatur tends to offer, to gain government support for prevention initiatives, especially around electoral processes. Looming elections have thus emerged as important entry points for innovative preventive action, in light of the risk that they serve as a trigger for violence. In [Guinea](#), in the run up to the Presidential elections in 2015, the RC provided critical support to the ‘Women’s Situation Room’ (WSR). Designed to prevent and manage violence during elections periods, and to generate a relationship between early warning, early response and conflict resolution, the project involved the training and deployment of over 600 female election observers across the country, to raise concerns and lower tensions. The women played a particularly important role in decreasing the possibility of fraud, and increasing levels of trust in the process. In [Kenya](#), in the run-up to the 2010 constitutional referendum, the RC supported the launch of the Uwiano Platform for Peace, pulling together various national

conflict analysis capacities and early warning networks, and coordinating electoral violence prevention efforts among a range of actors. The Uwiano Platform is particularly noteworthy for its effectiveness in crowd-sourcing early warnings of violence through a free mobile text-messaging service, and its ability to process and respond to early warning in real time.

The high-points of preventive action in [Guyana](#) were in the run-up to the 2006 and 2015 elections, where prevention-minded RCs developed innovative models of preventive engagement. In 2014, the RC facilitated the creation of an eminent persons panel (“Guyanese for Peace”), which engaged in peace messaging and mediation, and a Situation Room, which, inter alia, monitored social media for signs of unrest, reacting in real-time to rising tensions and countering inflammatory “fake news.”

However, the cases of [Guyana](#), [Tunisia](#), and [Kenya](#) also show how UN focus on and donor interest in prevention tends to fade once elections are over, constituting missed opportunities to help build even stronger local and national foundations for self-sustaining peace.

4. When political space is constrained at the national level, go local

When entry points at the national level appear closed, some RCs and UNCTs have engaged preventively at the local-level in ways that paid off when political openings eventually emerged. While such local engagement, including by partnering up with local civil society actors, may fall short of adding up to a cumulative effect at the national level, our case studies show it can help UNCTs establish relationships and gain insights on local-level dynamics – all of which it can build on once opportunities for preventive action at the national level emerge.

For instance, in [Colombia](#), UNDP undertook local-level peacebuilding during the Uribe presidency, at a time when very little space for the UN to do prevention work at the national level existed. This work helped the UN build networks in and knowledge of the territories most affected by the conflict, which eventually positioned it to support nationally-led prevention efforts when political space opened up.

In [Kenya](#), when the government narrowed the political space for the UN at the national level, as it did from 2015 onwards, the RC re-focused on meaningful prevention programming at the sub-national level. The RC spearheaded area-based programming in volatile border regions, working with local partners, and building capacity and contacts with local programming (e.g. governance, peacebuilding).

In [Tunisia](#), the RC’s preventive and political role was extremely constrained during the authoritarian regime of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali (1989-2011). Yet, engagements led by the RC prior to 2010 provided useful building blocks for what came next, particularly with respect to local-level human rights-based programming in the 2000s, on which the office was able to build when political space opened up following the revolution.

5. Protect UN Norms

The inherent difficulty of the RCs' prevention role lies in the fact that maintaining host country consent seems sometimes difficult to reconcile with the imperatives of prevention, and of safeguarding and promoting UN values, norms and principles. While, again, template guidance will remain elusive, our case studies show that the dilemma does not need to be a binary choice between sacrificing principles on the altar of host-country consent or taking a moral high-ground at the cost of engagement and consent. Instead, the goal should always be to constructively engage the host government – but based on UN values and principles.

In [Tunisia](#), for instance, in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, the RC was able to provide human rights-focused assistance to the constitution-making process by framing it as technical assistance helping Tunisia adopt international standards and good practices, which laid the basis for the UN's ongoing engagement of the government on human rights issues. In [Nepal](#), the RC proactively used the UNDAF to reorient the UNCT towards addressing exclusion and marginalisation, while touching upon issues sensitive to the government. In [Bolivia](#), successive national Human Development Reports produced by UNDP in the early 2000s, showed sensitive political issues can be addressed without endangering the UN's position, if based on impartial and insightful analysis.

Where RCs run afoul of host governments because they hold up UN principles, as happened in [Guyana](#) in 2002, they need – but have not always been able – to count on support from UN Headquarters. To encourage calculated risk-taking, the Secretary-General will need to reaffirm the message that RCs who are PNG'd in the pursuit of prevention and human rights will enjoy job security.

6. Analyse This

UN policy and guidance documents³³ have long called for UN development programming (UNDAFs) to be embedded in analysis, with Common Country Analysis (CCAs) expected to encompass, inter alia, peace and security perspectives, human rights, and gender equality, and to be complemented, in fragile settings, by specific risk analysis.³⁴ Alas, it is not always standard practice. In several of our case studies, UNCTs were, at least before crisis had broken out, insufficiently attuned to conflict risk, especially with respect to the role of exclusion in driving instability – an issue that tends to touch upon national sensitivities. [Nepal](#) in the two decades prior to the peace process is a stark example where neglect of this dimension allowed for elite capture of aid flows exacerbating conflict risk.

Our case studies confirm – in both positive and negative ways – that analysis is an essential prerequisite for RCs and UNCTs to engage in prevention, and point to innovative and effective ways of carrying out analysis and using it.

Make the most out of big picture analytical documents: Some of our case studies suggest that CCAs are often approached as a cumbersome “box-ticking” exercise. Others reaffirm the potential of the CCA to inform conflict-sensitivity of UNDAFs and rally UNCT members behind a prevention vision. In [Nepal](#), the RC and the UNCT in 2011 spearheaded

the development of a new CCA which eschewed the traditional sectoral or themed approach and instead zoomed in on the all-important question of exclusion, centring on questions of which groups had been left behind by recent development gains and why, as well as how longstanding group grievances might jeopardise peace. In [Colombia](#) and [Bolivia](#), landmark HDRs that analysed the causes of conflict and future risks served as reference texts for UNCT programming the way that a CCA might do elsewhere.

Make analysis an ongoing activity: Our case studies also show that even the most rigorous of CCAs, which constitute a single, “big picture” assessment undertaken every four years at the outset of the program cycle, are insufficient to ensure conflict sensitivity. Conflict sensitivity by nature, requires constant adaptation to political processes that tend to be non-linear, contested, characterised by setbacks, and different from one locality to another. Programme implementation within the UNDAF therefore needs to be accompanied by ongoing context analysis, including at the local level, and needs to allow for mid-way adjustments in light of changing circumstances. In all our case studies, RCs relied on a Peace and Development Advisor or another qualified UNCT staffer to produce regular analysis for the benefit of the UN system, donors and/or national actors.

Make context and risk analysis a participatory process: Our case studies point to examples where participatory research and analysis processes have helped generate host country buy-in for UN prevention endeavours, foster agreement among national stakeholders on sensitive issues, and strengthen local capacities. In [Kenya](#), in 2008, the RC and the government established a dynamic Conflict Analysis Group linked to the Prime Minister's Office, with the participation of civil society. This Group provided entry points for the UN to influence government policy reforms and align UN programming accordingly. In [Guinea](#), a ‘Peace Caravan,’ comprising UN and state representatives as well as religious and civil society leaders, toured the country for three months in 2007, to analyse societal tension. They generated analysis and forged relationships, which the UNCT continued to draw on in following years. Also in Guinea, in 2011, the RCO ran a conflict analysis exercise that lasted several months and consisted of dialogue workshops involving the government, women's and youth groups, trade unions, and others. The workshops resulted in agreement among local stakeholders to prioritise the sensitive issue of security sector reform and seek UN support therein. In [Bolivia](#), several HDRs in the 2000s won global UNDP awards for excellence. They were notable for their ability to tackle controversial issues head on, and to draw on the inputs of key national figures in highly participatory research processes that helped ensure policy impact.

Link local analysis with national priorities: With UN Country Teams – and national elites – often having a very “capital centric” outlook, it is important to ensure that context analysis is informed by local-level political dynamics in rural areas. In [Nepal](#), the establishment of four small “field offices” in 2011 provided the RC Office with important insights on rising risks and tensions in remote district, helping raise awareness among political leaders in Kathmandu and generating early response on the ground. In [Colombia](#), UNDP drew on its presence and links with civil society in territories most affected

by the conflict to inform two landmark HDRs on the causes of the conflict, which helped shape the national debate about peace. They remain reference texts for peacemakers in the country.

Draw on information and analysis of the entire country team: In many settings, UN agencies have significant field coverage and insights on local-level dynamics that remain untapped for prevention purposes. Some of our case studies show the potential of RCs maximizing the value of UNCT-wide information by integrating information and field reporting from all country team members. In 2015, the RC in [Colombia](#) expanded OCHA's humanitarian information management system and turned it into an interagency system producing holistic development-peacebuilding-humanitarian analysis.

Use analysis as entry point: In [Colombia](#), the RC strategically used data from his integrated analysis system, as well as other sources of analysis (such as a UN-commissioned study on the economic benefits of peace), to advocate for a ceasefire and confidence-building measures. In [Bolivia](#), PAPEP gathered its data through regular opinion polls, Delphi surveys of decision-makers, focus groups, in-depth interviews with actors across the political spectrum, and more. This data, and its team's practicable, scenario-based analysis, made it a valuable interlocutor for senior government officials and politicians (with the latter, naturally, always interested in polling data in particular).

Gear analysis towards influencing policy-makers: At the UN, analysis is seen largely as a means to support UN action. Several of our case studies show that it can be effectively geared towards influencing host-government action. In [Bolivia](#), UNDP's prospective political analysis unit (PAPEP) gathered and analysed primary data to develop prospective scenarios and corresponding roadmaps for high-level decision makers. While PAPEP's Latin America regional program has since (unfortunately) wound down, its methodology of scenario-planning offers valuable lessons for RCs and UNCTs elsewhere to engage national interlocutors around concrete discussions on a country's political trajectory. In fact, PAPEP's methodology is currently being applied by the UN Country Team in [Nepal](#) and elsewhere. In another example from [Bolivia](#) of how primary data can bolster prevention efforts, the RC there published, at strategic moments during the 2008 dialogue, PAPEP survey data showing most Bolivians wanted the dialogue to continue. This helped exert moral pressure on the negotiating parties to remain committed to the talks through to the end. In [Sri Lanka](#), which is not part of our case studies, the RC also employed perception and other surveys to engage and influence the actions of the government.³⁵

7. Drive Conflict Sensitivity and Rally the Country Team Around the Prevention Flag

Driving "One UN" approaches to conflict prevention remains one of the most difficult challenges faced by RCs. RCs have no directive authority over other UNCT members and rely largely on their power of persuasion to rally fragmented UN agencies around the prevention flag. This is because agencies tend to dance to the tune of their own headquarters and donors rather than to that of the RC. It is particularly difficult to find compelling examples of RCs who have successfully "mainstreamed" conflict sensitive programming across

UNCTs. That said, some of our cases point to effective ways in which RCs have made some headway in aligning UN Country Team members behind a prevention or peacebuilding vision.

Make the most out of the CCA and UNDAF: While CCAs are often approached by RCs as a box-ticking exercise, UNDAFs are often treated as a task in retrofitting the pre-existing programmes of individual UN agencies around a single framework. At the same time, CCAs and UNDAFs are two of the very few coordinating tools RCs have at their disposal, so there is a premium on getting the most out of them to mainstream conflict sensitivity across UNCTs. In [Nepal](#), both the 2011 CCA and the 2013-17 UNDAF were organised around inclusion, the key priority emerging from the peace process. However, the Nepal case also shows that for CCAs and UNDAFs to perform this function, they require lengthy inter-agency consultations to establish UNCT-wide ownership. Such consultations tend to be resource-intensive in terms of staff time, calling for adequate resources and capacities.

Complement the UNDAF with peacebuilding strategies: Inflexible, four-year planning cycles, such as the UNDAF, are inherently ill-suited to ensure conflict sensitivity in volatile situations, which might require repeated adjustments of programme implementation to changing situation on the ground. Several RCOs, including in [Kyrgyzstan](#), [Nepal](#), [Colombia](#), [Tunisia](#), and [Guinea](#), have therefore developed shorter-term peacebuilding priority plans and post-conflict strategies, which are more geared towards driving UNCT-wide preventive action in transition contexts. In [Tunisia](#), for instance, when the UNDAF was left outdated in the wake of the 2011 revolution, the RC developed a three-year Transition Strategy that served as a flexible reference guide for UNCT-wide action which allowed for adaptation to changing dynamics and proved a helpful tool for the RC to fundraise among the country-based donor community for transition support.

Mind the data gap: For the UNDAF to drive conflict sensitive programming in settings marked by exclusion, it helps if indicators are sensitive to such realities and based on disaggregated data that can track the impact of development interventions on vulnerable groups. This in turn requires that outcome indicators are formulated accordingly; and that baseline data that disaggregates according to marginalised groups and gender is either available – or can be generated. Given the data scarcity in many developing countries, this is a gap that cannot always be filled, but where possible, efforts should be undertaken to make amends.

Cross-border, area-based and thematic programming can align the UNCT behind prevention goals: Given the difficulty of driving UNCT-wide prevention programming across sectors and regions, some RCs have successfully operationalised "One UN approaches" to prevention through "area-based" programming targeting historically marginalised areas and "cross-border programming" aimed at stabilizing volatile border regions. In [Kenya](#), two area-based programmes created a common agenda for all UN agencies focused on improving service delivery in two northern provinces suffering from chronic instability. The RCs in [Kenya](#) and [Kyrgyzstan](#) have initiated "cross-border" programmes, in partnership with their counterparts in Ethiopia and Tajikistan, respectively, in

both cases mobilizing multiple agencies to join forces around complex peacebuilding projects.

Elsewhere, promoting programming around specific prevention themes that cut across the mandate area of multiple UN agencies has proven a useful tool to foster common approaches around prevention. In [Tunisia](#) and [Kyrgyzstan](#), for instance, RCs have successfully leveraged emerging programming around Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) to align country team members behind common prevention goals.

Enhance UNCT literacy on conflict sensitivity: Understanding among development actors on how to ensure conflict sensitivity in development programming is often mixed. UNDP's conflict sensitivity unit in [Nepal](#), established upon initiative of the RC, shows that such units can enhance – the often very limited – literacy around conflict sensitive programming not only within the UNCT but also the host government. That experience also suggests that such units might be best located within the RCO. In [Guinea](#), the RCO drew on BCPR to provide UNCT wide training on conflict-sensitivity. In [Colombia](#), the RCO organised a peacebuilding training session, facilitated by a Swiss research institute, for the UNCT.

Practice what you preach: The demography of staff composition has emerged in several case studies as a critical factor to ensure UNCT-wide conflict sensitivity, in particular in settings affected by structural exclusion of ethnic groups. Indeed, the staff composition of UN agencies (as well as that of local implementing partners, such as local NGOs) tends to reflect the exclusion and marginalisation affecting the host countries, with disadvantaged groups often severely under-represented. This, in turn, negatively influences programme design and implementation. The UNCTs in [Kyrgyzstan](#) and [Nepal](#) made concerted efforts to address these imbalances, highlighting the need for such efforts to be led by directives from the RC him/herself. In [Nepal](#), in an effort to enhance representativeness of the UN's staff profile, the RC initiated a UNCT-wide Joint UN Trainee Programme for Socially Excluded Groups, which helped increase the pool of qualified candidates among historically marginalized groups and could serve as a model for UNCTs elsewhere.

Leverage pooled funds: Dedicated pooled funding mechanisms for UN peacebuilding activities have long been hailed as key tools to help RCs enhance UNCT coherence around preventive action. Such funds in [Colombia](#) and [Nepal](#) shows how their alignment with prevention and peacebuilding outcomes, can drive joint peacebuilding programming. These experiences reinforce the importance of a) projects being specifically tailored for vulnerable populations or geographic areas; b) modalities being flexible and allowing for rapid mobilisation and disbursement of funds; and c) ensuring involvement of key stakeholders in project design, including at the community level.

Exert your authority through persuasion: In some settings, RCs have been able, through persuasion, to promote more coherent approaches around prevention. In [Kyrgyzstan](#), for instance, the RC promoted a “single-entry point” approach to conflict prevention by discouraging individual UNCT entities from engaging the Government independently of one

another on joint projects which related to peacebuilding and prevention. The recent institution, as part of Secretary-General Guterres's development system reform, of UN agencies' dual reporting lines to both their agency headquarters and the RC should help the latter in making such practices more common.

8. Draw on and Leverage other UN Entities – at Headquarters and in the Field

In the face of the political and resource constraints faced by RCs, their willingness and ability to leverage and draw on the support of other parts of the UN system in the pursuit of prevention becomes essential. Such prevention-specific support served as an important complement to the essential backstopping RC Offices received from UNDOCO in terms of guidance development and support to the RCs' coordination and strategic planning function.

Call on DPA for political back-up and support: One key resource is the Department of Political Affairs, which across the case studies has served as a critical asset to RCs in terms of high-level political messaging, political guidance, information on dynamics within intergovernmental bodies, and deployable political expertise, for instance through its Mediation Support Unit and Mediation Stand-by Team, the latter a service provider that is explicitly at the disposal to RCs.

In [Nepal](#), the link between the RCO and the RC Office was institutionalized in the form of a DPA Liaison Office, (co-located with the RCO and financed by DPA), offering a useful model for enhancing political and preventive engagement of RCs, that could be applied beyond settings marked by a transition from a mission to a non-mission setting. The [Nepal](#) case also suggests that for such Liaison Offices to live up to their full potential in terms of enhancing the preventive role of RCs, they should be closely integrated into the work of the RCO and prevention-related activities of the UN Country Team.

In [Malawi](#), following the 2011 crisis, the RC managed to position himself as an essential partner and backstopping mechanism for the mediation and dialogue effort led initially by DPA and later by the UN Office at Nairobi. In the context of looming 2014 elections, the RC, concerned about further polarization, activated the Under Secretary-General for Political Affairs to nudge the main political leaders to issue the televised Lilongwe Peace Declaration, which helped defuse tensions.

Align your efforts with that of Regional Political Offices where they exist: In countries covered by one of the UN's regional political offices (UNOWA in West Africa or UNRCCA in Central Asia), RCs have at times successfully leveraged their alignment with the respective Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (SRSGs) and heads of regional offices to enhance their own preventive role. Indeed, given the difficulties RCs often face in engaging in overt political activities, SRSGs can provide cover and assistance.

In [Kyrgyzstan](#), in the aftermath of the June 2010 crisis, the RC effectively complemented the head of UNRCCA in his efforts to provide good offices and facilitate dialogue among

the political actors. In [Guinea](#), in the context of international efforts to mediate a return to constitutional order following the 2008 coup d'état, the RC supported mediation efforts co-led by UNOWA, serving at different points in the process as advisor, 'connector', 'Secretariat', and liaison between international efforts and dynamics on the ground. The Guinea case also demonstrates the potential of an SRSG and the RC collaborating on the basis of a "good cop, bad cop" division of labor in their respective engagement with host country authorities, with the former, due to his mandate, having greater leeway to have frank and vocal disagreements with the President compensating for the RC's constraints in pushing the envelope on issues sensitive to the government.

Draw on UNDP: UNDP, through its staff on the ground and its HQ-based capacities and funds, emerged across several case studies as being central to the RC's prevention endeavour. Often perceived – fairly or unfairly – as being inherently sceptical of RCs adopting a more political role, UNDP is also the only UN agency with a mandate aligned to the prevention agenda – through its governance programming – and with dedicated prevention capacity at UNHQ. Many of our case studies highlight the reliance of RCs on UNDP capacities, including [Bolivia](#) (where the RC's preventive role was based on PAPEP capacities), [Colombia](#) (where UNDP staff supported all major RC-led prevention initiatives), and [Nepal](#) (where UNDP housed an entire conflict prevention unit that was at the RC's disposal).

In several of these countries, as well as [Guinea](#) and [Guyana](#), UNDP's Bureau for Conflict Prevention and Recovery (BCPR) offered significant technical expertise and funding (through its prevention fund) and its closure in 2014 was perceived to have left a gap. These experiences indicate that delinking the RC function from that of the UNDP Resident Representative (RR) might prove a double-edged sword, undermining an RC's ability to leverage UNDP capacities to the same degree if s/he is not also an RR.

Maximise your prospects for PBF funding and leverage it: For RCs and UNCTs to become effective prevention actors they require funding, both to enhance the capacities of their own office, as well as to in terms of quick access to funds for time-sensitive prevention initiatives. Given that RCs have limited core resources, in many of our cases their preventive engagement and success was at least partly a function of their ability to raise additional funds, either from UN Headquarters or locally.

The Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) has emerged in recent years as probably the most important source of funding underpinning RC-led preventive engagement. In 2016 alone, the PBF invested around US\$ 35 million in nine non-mission settings. Part of the PBF's significance in RC-led prevention is the scarcity (especially after the closure of UNDP's Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery) of any other funding mechanisms that allow for relatively speedy access of funds with a high degree of flexibility (allowing for trial and error approaches) and tolerance for risk, which is an inherent feature in most prevention-related projects. In [Guinea](#), for instance, the PBF was the only actor willing to take the leap of faith to invest money during a volatile transition, standing up a successful Security Sector Reform project, which subsequently attracted other major funders. In several of our cases, the PBF funded

RC-led prevention projects, or multi-project peacebuilding priority plans, as in [Nepal](#), [Kyrgyzstan](#), and [Guinea](#).

The PBSO staff managing the PBF at UN Headquarters exercise an important quality control function in reviewing project proposals and offering support in their design. In that process, RCs tend to maximise their chances to receive funding by embedding proposed prevention and peacebuilding programming in political analysis and a political strategy. This places a premium on close cooperation between RCOs and DPA. It also calls for staff capacities in the RCO who can translate risk analysis into peacebuilding programmes or projects, which many RCOs lack. Meanwhile, PBSO's insistence on ensuring the funded projects are tailored towards peacebuilding and prevention allows RCs' to push back against UN agencies who seek to benefit from PBF funding by simply rebranding existing development programming.

And even the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) might at times prove useful: The case of [Guinea](#) shows the potential value of the Peacebuilding Commission in reinforcing RC-supported prevention. There the RC successfully leveraged the fact that, in February 2011, Guinea had been placed – at its own request – on the agenda of the PBC. In subsequent years, the PBC proved a useful forum to draw a modicum of international attention to Guinea, attract international support for RC-led initiatives, and to ensure a degree of donor coordination and fund mobilization, especially with respect to Security Sector Reform.

9. Be creative in expanding – and getting most out of – staff capacities

Driving preventive action in an interagency setting with strong national sensitivities is extremely labour intensive and calls for dedicated staff to conduct rigorous and ongoing analysis, lead careful consultation and coordination processes, manage pooled peacebuilding funds, develop prevention and peacebuilding projects, and more. Yet, most RC Offices have only a few core staff primarily focused on development coordination functions. Thus, any staff capacity that can be dedicated to prevention will add significantly to an RC's ability to "do prevention". One RC interviewed for this project described a "chicken and egg problem" whereby to add dedicated prevention staff he would need to raise funds, but to raise such funds he required staff. In our case studies, several RCs who proved effective prevention actors also proved adept at securing additional staff capacities.

Empower your PDAs: As is well established, often the most important staff resource for RCs to do prevention, are the PDAs deployed under the UNDP-DPA Joint Programme.³⁶ Most of the specific prevention and peacebuilding initiatives and projects covered in our case studies were only possible because of the presence of a PDA, or a "PDA-like" staff. Our case studies also show the remarkable ability of PDAs to mount prevention initiatives and strategically engage with national stakeholders at senior levels, especially if they are empowered by the RC and provided with political access (e.g. [Kenya](#), [Colombia](#), [Tunisia](#), or [Guyana](#)). The case studies also show that the potential of the Joint Programme is at times undermined by 1) the recurrent problem of PDA positions being left vacant during critical periods because of recruitment

problems, funding shortfalls, interrupting momentum and risking closure of entry points (e.g. [Kyrgyzstan](#), [Kenya](#), [Guinea](#), and [Guyana](#)); and 2) by the fact that PDAs rarely have access to ready funding once deployed, calling for investments into the Joint Programme's "catalytic funds."

Explore other sources to expand your capacities: In some settings, RCs were able to draw on disparate sources of staff and funding to significantly expand the size of the RC Office beyond the PDA to drive preventive action. In [Colombia](#), the RC managed to expand his office from three to eight staff, recruiting individuals with international experience in peacebuilding and post-conflict transitions. He did this by combining funding from several sources, including UNHQ (through a DOCO crisis country package, which raised the RCO's core support), UN Agency co-funding, locally-raised contributions from Sweden, and secondments from Switzerland and Norway. In [Tunisia](#), the RC was able to increase staff from 3 to 6 (including a UN Volunteer and a fellow from UN-DESA). In [Guinea](#), the RC prevention role benefited significantly from timely deployment of staff capacity from PBSO, and UN-Women; and the availability of former SRSG General Cissé who helped forge entry points with the Guinean military on the sensitive issue of security sector reform. In [Kyrgyzstan](#), in 2013, the RC relied on the support from a Swiss-based NGO, PeaceNexus, in carrying out a major peacebuilding needs assessment. In both [Kyrgyzstan](#) and [Guinea](#), the RC Offices were strengthened through the deployment of political affairs officers by the two respective regional political offices, UNOWA and UNRCCA.

The potential and limits of local fundraising: The [Nepal](#) case illustrates the potential of the RC Office in expanding its capacity through local fundraising efforts, increasing its capacity to several dozen staff, including four field offices in remote districts. In [Kenya](#), private sector funding supported one RCO staff to manage its SDG Partnerships Platform. The [Nepal](#) case also shows the difficulty of sustaining the funding at levels necessary to maintain the expanded capacity, especially when peace or transition processes hit a snag – as they often tend to. If donors and the UN are going to establish such capacities, they need to be prepared to sustain them for the medium-term and be willing to absorb setbacks.

Look for and make the most out of national staff: The case studies also highlight the prominent role that national staff have played in several case studies as a critical prevention resource that might be all too often underused given widespread concerns that national staff cannot be "neutral" about their own country. That concern might at times be valid. Yet, several of our case studies reveal the unique comparative advantage of national staff, including in-depth knowledge of a country and strong networks with political, economic and social leaders – combined with adherence to UN values, including impartiality – can be more important for prevention than real or perceived 'neutrality'. For instance, in [Bolivia](#) (one of our only two cases without a PDA), national UNDP staffers drove the UN's prevention efforts, leveraging these comparative advantages, at times acting as "insider mediators", while also benefiting from wearing UN blue to protect their autonomy. (The quality of Bolivian national UNDP staff was such that both the RC and DPA argued at the time against deployment of a PDA). In [Guyana](#), a national staffer served as the key architect of the renowned social

cohesion programme. In [Guinea](#), a former Guinean minister, who served in a senior peacebuilding function in the RCO, was critical to the success of the Security Sector Reform endeavour because of his credibility and deep relationships in the country.

Bridge the gender gap: Across our case studies, the low representation of female staff in UN roles supporting RC-led prevention was glaring. Most strikingly, of the 22 PDAs or "PDA-like" staff covered by our case studies, 18 were male. For the UN to credibly claim that gender equality and empowerment is key to its prevention effort, it will need to make urgent improvements cleaning up its own house.

10. Record good practice

While doing this project, we discovered that information about the role of RCs in conflict prevention is often scattered, hidden, or difficult to access. Given the sensitivities surrounding RC-led prevention and funding constraints, success stories often remain untold and independent evaluations of preventive engagement, for instance of social cohesion programmes or efforts to build "infrastructures of peace" are rare. The "End of Assignment Reports" of RCs might contain interesting insights but are kept confidential (and could also not be accessed for this study). As a result, the good (and bad) practices emerging from RC-led preventive interventions are not systematically recorded.

Record good practice and draw on national stakeholders:

One of our cases, Bolivia, demonstrates the value of recording good practice in terms of the UN's prevention activities. After the 2008 dialogue, UNDP's Democratic Dialogue Regional Project undertook a detailed report on the experience, which has proven a key resource for those interested in the UN's prevention role in Bolivia (including for this case study).³⁷ (This project aimed to collect and analyse lessons learned from conflict prevention experiences in the region.)³⁸ Further, UNIC in La Paz conducted interviews with key national actors immediately after the dialogue, asking them in what ways the UN's role in the dialogue was helpful. UNIC held on to these interview transcripts and provided them to this author. Being able to draw on insights from national actors themselves, who were speaking immediately after the dialogue, on the UN's role is a crucial resource for lessons-learning. Such interview transcripts can help move the UN away from relying on its own sources and staff recollections regarding the UN's role in a situation, which for obvious reasons are less reliable. In the future, RCs and UNCTs may wish to consider conducting such interviews with national actors right after major prevention experiences as standard practice.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS EMERGING FOR UN HEADQUARTERS

This project and the case studies were primarily geared towards gathering lessons from and informing practice in the field. However, several of the findings summarized on preceding pages carry potential implications for efforts at UN Headquarters to improve the role of RCs in conflict prevention. The following recommendations for consideration at UN Headquarters are based on these findings.

- **Select RCs with political acumen:** The project highlights the importance of deploying RCs with suitable profiles to conflict-prone settings. The Inter-Agency Advisory Panel (IAAP) should place more consistent focus on political acumen when recommending candidates to the Secretary-General to fill RC vacancies in such settings. As the ultimate decision on RC selection (other than host country consent) rests with the Secretary-General, he will want to ensure that IAAP recommendations are in line with his prevention agenda.
- **Create procedures for replacement of RCs in crisis situations:** It is equally important to put in place systems that would ensure, in exceptional circumstances, replacement of RCs in countries that face a sudden major crisis or opportunity requiring political engagement, but where the RC is unwilling or unable to play such a role.
- **Have RCs' backs:** Where RCs run afoul of host governments because they hold up principles they need to count on support from UN Headquarters. To encourage calculated risk-taking, the Secretary-General will need to reaffirm the message that RCs who are PNG'd in the pursuit of prevention and human rights will enjoy job security.
- **Strengthen the Joint Programme:** Our case studies reaffirm the critical value of the Joint Programme for RC-led prevention in non-mission settings. To consolidate the programme's gains and further strengthen it, DPA and UNDP should undertake a concerted fundraising effort to ensure PDAs can be deployed on longer-term contracts and to increased the Joint Programme's "catalytic funds."
- **Preserve and enhance UNDP as a prevention asset:** UNDP is often perceived – fairly or unfairly – as being inherently sceptical of RCs adopting a more political role. Yet, through its staff on the ground and its HQ-based capacities and funds, UNDP emerged across our case studies as being central to the RCs' prevention endeavours. The closure of BCPR in 2014 was widely perceived on the ground as having weakened preventive capacities and funding accessible to RCs. Current efforts to reform the RC system need to consider how delinking the RC function from that of the UNDP Resident Representative can be pursued without reducing the value of UNDP as a prevention asset to RCs.
- **Promote innovative context and risk analysis practices:** The case studies highlight rich and innovative risk analysis practice on the ground – both in terms of how to do it and how to use it. Our case studies offer lessons in how to undertake dynamic analyses, make analysis a participatory process, leverage analysis for entry points, and gear analysis toward impacting host government policies in favour of prevention. UN DOCO, which has long tried to promote and improve risk analysis in RC Offices, should disseminate these and other innovative practices across relevant RC Offices.
- **Promote conflict sensitive practices beyond the CCA and UNDAF:** UN policy documents and guidance arguable place excessive faith in CCAs and UNDAFs as tools to ensure conflict sensitivity. If adequately staffed, RCOs can use CCAs and UNDAFs as important opportunities to drive UNCT-wide conflict sensitive programming. However, four-year planning cycles, such as the UNDAF, are inherently ill-suited to ensure conflict sensitivity in volatile situations, which might require repeated adjustments of programme implementation to changing situation on the ground. UNHQ should explore ways how to enable RCOs to lay this role, for instance through establishment of conflict sensitivity units.
- **Ensure inclusiveness in agency staffing:** The demography of staff composition has emerged in several case studies as a critical factor to ensure UNCT-wide conflict sensitivity, particularly in settings affected by structural exclusion of ethnic groups. Indeed, the staff composition of UN agencies (as well as that of local implementing partners, such as local NGOs) tends to reflect the exclusion and marginalisation affecting the host countries, with disadvantaged groups often severely under-represented, negatively influencing programme design and implementation. UNHQ might want to encourage a "staff review" across all RCOs to promote more inclusive hiring practices.
- **Address the gender gap:** Across our case studies, the low representation of female staff in UN roles supporting RC-led prevention was glaring. For the UN to credibly claim that gender equality and empowerment is key to its prevention effort, the Joint Programme should make recruiting female staff in these functions a priority.
- **Systematise lessons-learning related to RC-led prevention:** This project suggests there is significant room for improvement in the way RC-led prevention is recorded, assessed, and evaluated, and how lessons and good practices are identified and disseminated. Relevant UN headquarters departments, in particular UNDOCO, should encourage – and fundraise for – more regular use of independent evaluations. Yet, evaluations are expensive and will not be possible for all experiences. There are other, 'lighter,' ways of recording good practice. For instance, these departments can encourage RCs and UNCTs to undertake interviews with national actors immediately after successful prevention experiences (such as at the conclusion of a political dialogue, election or major prevention programme) about what parts of UN support were most useful. The insights of national actors are crucial for lessons-learning, helping to move the UN away from relying on its own sources and staff recollections regarding the UN's role – which, for obvious reasons, will be less reliable.

Endnotes

Cover Image: UN Photo/ Evan Schneider. Secretary-General Visits Southern Sudan. Children taking part in the welcoming of Secretary-General Kofi Annan in Rumbek, as he arrived today in southern Sudan, making good on a promise to visit southern Sudan once the comprehensive peace agreement was concluded.

- 1 UN General Assembly, "Restructuring of the Economic and Social Sectors of the United Nations System," UN General Assembly Resolution 32/197, 19 December 1977. The mandate of the RC system is in paragraph 34 of the Resolution's Annex, entitled "Conclusions and recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Restructuring of the Economic and Social Sectors of the United Nations System".
- 2 UNDG-ECHA, "Natural Resource Management in Transition Settings," UNDG-ECHA Guidance Note, January 2013.
- 3 UNDG, UN Guidance Note on Effective Use and Development of National Capacity in Post-Conflict Contexts," 29 July 2013.
- 4 UNDG, "Conducting a Conflict and Development Analysis," February 2016;
- 5 UNDG, "Guidance Note on Human Rights for Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams," 2016.
- 6 UNDG, United Nations Development Assistance Framework Guidance, 2017.
- 7 UNDP and DPA, "Joint UNDP-DPA Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention," Annual Report 2016, p.10.
- 8 See "Towards Principled and Consistent Engagement in relation to Human Rights Advisers to UN Country Teams," Human Rights Advisers' Review, 21 July 2006.
- 9 Since 2013, new HRA deployments are carried out under the framework of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) Human Rights Mainstreaming Mechanism (UNDG-HRM) co-chaired by OHCHR and funded through a Multi-Donor Trust Fund to support the implementation of the 2012 UNDG strategy for the deployment of new human rights advisers. See <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/Pages/HumanRightsAdvisorsIndex.aspx>
- 10 In 2016, the PBF entered into a formal partnership with the Joint Programme, and has cost-shared 50% of ten PDA positions in 2017 and it also finances several of the Human Rights Advisor positions. UNDP and DPA, "Joint UNDP-DPA Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention," Annual Report 2016, p.4
- 11 On the RC screening and selection process see: UNDG, "Guidelines for the Selection and Appointment of Resident Coordinators," 30 November 2009.
- 12 UNDG, "UN Resident Coordinator Generic Job Description," approved by the UNDG on 6 February 2014.
- 13 A 2013 report by the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) on the selection and appointment process of RCs noted that "informal bargaining and negotiations on candidates outside the IAAP were frequent practices, with most decisions on candidates being 'pre-cooked' and 'pre-determined' through bilateral discussions" a process that was frequently described as "horse-trading," ... with agencies not only lobbying heavily to push through their candidate of choice but also trading votes in exchange for support for other positions." See Istvan Posta and Gopinathan Achamkulangare, "Selection and appointment process for United Nations Resident Coordinators, including preparation, training and support provided for their work," Joint Inspection Unit, Geneva, 2013 para 68.
- 14 Interview with UN official, 2 October 2017.
- 15 UNDG, The Capacity Gap Effort Donor Report: Results Achieved," 16 June 2014.
- 16 Dalberg, "Independent Review of the UNDG System-wide Cost-Sharing Agreement in Support of the UN Resident Coordinator System: Findings Report," Prepared for the UN Development Group, August 2017.
- 17 UN Secretary-General, "Peacebuilding in the Immediate Aftermath of Conflict," A /63/881-S /2009/304, 11 June 2009.
- 18 A demand for better coordination was, inter alia, enshrined in a May 2009 decision by the Secretary-General's Policy Committee.
- 19 The Policy Committee decision on "Special Circumstances in Non-Mission Settings" issued in January 2012, outlined that in situations of armed conflict, heightened political instability or social unrest, the Secretary-General may decide to declare activation of a special circumstances mode for a limited period of time. Within 48 hours of the designation of special circumstances, an inter-agency task force co-chaired by the appropriate DPA senior official and the chair of the relevant regional UNDG team should be established.
- 20 Michele Griffin, The Exercise of Influence: The Secretary-General and Decision-Making at the United Nations, unpublished draft Research Report completed in context of un Sabbatical Leave Programme, September 2016, page 116.
- 21 Report of the Secretary-General's Internal Review Panel on United Nations Action in Sri Lanka, November 2012.
- 22 The Human Rights Up Front Initiative features significant overlap with the previously mentioned UN policy on "Special Circumstances." While the relationship between the two policies was never formalized, HRUF, in practice, came to supersede the "Special Circumstances" policy. That is slightly problematic because the latter covered not only situations with a risk of large-scale human rights violations or atrocity crimes but any kind of political crisis in non-mission settings.
- 23 "'Rights Up Front' Detailed Plan of Action," internal UN document, 10 July 2013, p. 4-6.
- 24 "Human Rights Upfront – Taking Stock and Looking Ahead", internal UN document, 28 October 2017, p. 3
- 25 "Human Rights Upfront – Taking Stock and Looking Ahead", internal UN document, 28 October 2017, p. 5
- 26 Charles Petrie, "Repositioning the UN", internal note on the UN role in Myanmar written by the lead author of the Internal Review Panel on Sri Lanka in his private capacity, 11 April 2017.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Interview with UN Official, 2 October 2017.
- 29 "Non-paper on the proposals of the Secretary-General on the repositioning of the United Nations Development

- System," undated document circulated in October 2017 among UN member states by the Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations.
- 30 UN General Assembly, "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," A/res/70/, 25 September 2015
 - 31 UN Secretary-General, "Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace," Report of the UN Secretary-General to the General Assembly and the Security Council, A/72/707 - S/2018/43, 18 January 2018, p.6-9. UN Secretary-General, "Integrated Prevention Platform on Prevention," Interoffice Memorandum, 9 February 2018, p. 7.
 - 32 Eight out of ten of our cases registered improvements in their "fragility score" -- as measured by the Fund for Peace's Fragile States Index (FSI) -- either during or immediately following the RC-led preventive interventions covered in our case studies. This correlation does not necessarily imply causality between UN action and an improvement in the fragility score, but it strengthens the conclusion reached by the qualitative analysis presented in our case studies, namely that UN preventive action, in combination with other factors, helped improve the outlook of the countries under consideration. The FSI ranks 178 states according to their fragility as determined by twelve indicators, including the Security Apparatus; Factionalized Elites; Group Grievance; Economic Decline; Uneven Economic Development; Human Flight and Brain Drain; State Legitimacy; Public Services; Human Rights and Rule of Law; Demographic Pressures; Refugees and IDPs; and External Intervention. See <http://fundforpeace.org/fsi/>.
 - 33 UN Secretary-General, "Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace," Report of the UN Secretary-General to the General Assembly and the Security Council, A/72/707 - S/2018/43, 18 January 2018; UN Secretary-General, "Integrated Prevention Platform on Prevention," Interoffice Memorandum, 9 February 2018; UNDG, United Nations Development Assistance Framework Guidance, 2017.
 - 34 UNDG, United Nations Development Assistance Framework Guidance, 2017.
 - 35 Busin Mcube and Lach Fergusson, "Joint UNDP-DPA Programme: Mid-Term Evaluation Report, 2015-17," January 2018, p. 25.
 - 36 Mcube and Fergusson, "Joint UNDP-DPA Programme: Mid-Term Evaluation Report, 2015-17."
 - 37 "It was not how we imagined it." A documentary on PAPEP was also produced. See: "The Experience of PAPEP in Bolivia: Supporting Change in Peace and Democracy." UNDP Conflict Prevention and Dialogue. www.democraticdialoguenetwork.org/app/documents/view/en/2112/9.
 - 38 "It was not how we imagined it." v. Email exchange with Gastón Aín Bilbao, March 2018.