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

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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 in southern Sudan, making good on a promise to visit once the comprehensive peace agreement was concluded.
Contents

What Works in UN Resident Coordinator-led Conflict Prevention: Lessons from the Field
by Sebastian von Einsiedel 5

Case Studies

Bolivia 2000-09
by Cale Salih 20

Colombia 2012-16
by Cale Salih 40

Guinea 2009-17
by Josie Lianna Kaye 59

Guyana 2003-15
by Wendy MacClinchy 74

Kenya 2008-17
by Wendy MacClinchy 90

Kyrgyzstan 2010-17
by Josie Lianna Kaye 106

Malawi 2011-17
by Francesco Galtieri 122

Nepal 2007-15
by Sebastian von Einsiedel 132

Tunisia 2011-17
by Josie Lianna Kaye 146
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What Works in UN Resident Coordinator-led Conflict Prevention: Lessons from the Field

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

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.” 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 programatically address conflict drivers, including human rights violations. This material includes, most recently, guidance notes on natural resource management (2013); capacity building in post-conflict contexts (2013); conflict analysis (2016); human rights (2016); 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. 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. 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. As of 2016, HRAs were stationed in 19 countries, all of which were non-mission settings.

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.

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. 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.

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. 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.”

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. 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.

Around the same time as the capacity gap effort, the publication of a seminal Secretary-General’s report on peacebuilding 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. 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 RCs in crisis situations. 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.

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. 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. It also included a commitment to ensure RCs in crisis contexts would have a “suitable profile” 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.” 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.

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” 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.” 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.” 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, 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.

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.” 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.

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’etat 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 internecine 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 PASEP 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 documents 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. 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 to 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 Tunisia, 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 Nepali RC also showed 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. However, 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 show 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, PBSOs’ 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 forum 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. 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 from a 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 widespread concerns that national staff cannot be “neutral” about their own country. That concern might at times be.

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 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.
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 argue place excessive faith in CCAs and UNDAFs as tools to ensure conflict sensitivity. If adequately staffed, RCs 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 RCs 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.


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 Advisors position. UNDP and DPA, “Joint UNDP-DPA Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention,” Annual Report 2016, p.4


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.


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.


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.


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
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; Fractionalized 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/.
Bolivia 2000-09

Cale Salih*
Introduction

Bolivia in the 2000s experienced several political convulsions and milestones: from having no less than six presidents in the span of the first five years of that decade (2000-05); to the election of the country’s first indigenous president, Evo Morales, in 2005; to a constitutional crisis that threatened an outbreak of violence in 2008. Headlines in September 2008 warned of a nation on the brink of civil war.1 Yet, at crucial junctures along the way, national actors managed to swerve away from these escalatory dynamics, averting the risk of violent conflict. Most notably, the government and opposition parties negotiated an agreement in 2008 allowing for a new constitution that would “re-found” the state, a watershed achievement for conflict prevention amidst exceptionally high levels of political polarisation. The United Nations, primarily through the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and Resident Coordinators (RCs), provided crucial support to national actors at these junctures.

This case study demonstrates the role of UNDP’s Country Office in Bolivia, and particularly its Human Development Report (HDR) team and Project of Political Analysis and Prospective Scenarios (PAPEP), in advising senior policymakers on pathways toward de-escalation at key moments. It also looks in-depth at the role of the RC and PAPEP in supporting the national actors in reaching an agreement in the 2008 dialogue. It ends with lessons learned from the Bolivian experience which may be transferable for RC and UNCT-led prevention in other crisis contexts.

1. Conflict and Causal Analysis

Bolivia is among the poorest and most unequal nations in South America. With around 60% of the population identifying as part of an indigenous group, it has the highest proportion of indigenous people in any country in the region. Bolivia’s main dividing line runs between the western highlands, host to La Paz, the seat of political power; and the eastern lowlands, home to the “Media Luna” (half-moon) departments of Santa Cruz, Beni, Tarija and Pando, where most of Bolivia’s wealth is concentrated. An ethnic faultline overlays this divide, with indigenous populations mostly concentrated in the highlands and white and mestizo Bolivians mostly living in the Media Luna lowlands. Inequality, social exclusion and the weakness of state institutions have given rise to a very high level of political and social conflict throughout the country’s modern history.

In the 20th century, Bolivia witnessed several military coups, recurrent indigenous, campesino and workers’ uprisings and protests, and jerky transitions in and out of civilian rule. Grievances among mostly indigenous cocaleros intensified throughout the 1980s and 1990s, as aggressive and US-financed coca eradication campaigns “outpaced the income-generating capacity of alternative development.” Meanwhile, neoliberal reforms, including “shock therapy,” alleviated hyperinflation but were blamed for exacerbating poverty and inequality. In the 1990s, the International Monetary Fund conditioned a loan on Bolivia’s commitment to privatise public enterprises, including national oil refineries and the local water agency in Cochabamba; the World Bank supported privatisation and discouraged water subsidies. Rising water prices sparked protests in Cochabamba, marking the start of what became known as the “Cochabamba Water War.”

The Water War set off a convulsive five-year period during which Bolivia had no less than six presidents. Then-President Hugo Banzer Suárez, dying of cancer, was replaced by his Vice-President, Quiroga in 2001. Next, Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada won the 2002 elections, enjoying a brief second shot at the presidency (having previously served in the early 1990s), until protests against his neoliberal policies, namely with respect to gas privatisation (the “Gas War”), forced him out. Carlos Mesa, Lozada’s Vice-President, assumed power in 2003, only to also be forced out less than two years later when rising fuel prices sparked anti-government protests. Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Eduardo Rodriguez, who was among those constitutionally in line to assume the presidency from a Vice-President, took over as caretaker president in mid-2005. Finally, in December 2005, indigenous, campesino and urban middle-class voters helped make Evo Morales – a prominent cocalero activist and protest leader – the country’s first indigenous president.

Morales’s election marked a major shift in Bolivia’s political history, moving it away from democracia pactada – “a closed, prearranged democratic system” – among the establishment parties, and toward a political system “more dependent on a zero-sum game of political positioning.” Two longstanding political demands surfaced, bringing into sharp focus the faultlines in the country: first, calls for a new constitution that would “re-found” the state, mainly by indigenous, left-wing and other groups in the West that blamed the country’s existing economic model for persistent inequality, and second, demands for greater departmental (regional) autonomy, promoted mainly by groups linked to the private sector and center and right-wing political forces in the Media Luna. Disputes over hydrocarbon management and revenue sharing intensified the polarisation, as one of Morales’s first acts as President was to nationalise the sector.

In mid-2006, Bolivia held elections for a Constituent Assembly (CA), in which Morales’s Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) won a simple majority but fell short of the two-thirds required to pass a new constitution. Soon thereafter, the CA was established in Sucre, Bolivia’s constitutional capital (while La Paz hosts the executive and legislature). Yet, disagreements over the substance and procedural rules of the CA polarised parties, as the MAS argued that the rule requiring a two-thirds majority to pass the new constitution only applied to
the final constitutional text, and not for commission reports. The opposition (and most legal analysts) disagreed.

The streets also reflected the political polarisation, as civic movements in opposition regions, which had grown more radical than the opposition parties, initiated strikes, blockades, and sometimes violent demonstrations. Further, Chuquisaca civic leaders, supported by parts of the opposition, revived a historical demand to confer full capital city status to Sucre (shifting it from La Paz), which paralyzed the CA and led to violent clashes between protestors and police. Street pressures frustrated efforts by the government and opposition parties to reach agreements over the CA, autonomy demands, and government policies.

Amidst rising polarisation and to escape disruptions caused by unrest in Sucre, the ruling party relocated the CA to the outskirts of the city at La Glorieta High School for a final plenary session in November 2007. Only MAS representatives attended this session, where they approved a general version of the Constitution and authorised the transfer of the CA to Oruro to iron out the details. In Oruro, in the absence of most opposition representatives, the MAS delegates approved the full constitutional text in December. The opposition argued that the sessions in La Glorieta and Oruro violated agreed procedures and were thus illegitimate. With the crisis yet unresolved, the CA, “as a space for dialogue and agreement, had failed.”

In early and mid-2008, various attempts at dialogue between the ruling party and the opposition faltered. Meanwhile, the Media Luna departments began organising and winning unofficial autonomy referenda, which Bolivia’s National Electoral Court (and the Morales government) declared illegal. The Court later demonstrated its independence by also declaring that a referendum on the Oruro constitution would require Congressional approval (as opposed to being organised by Presidential decree). Adding to the electoral complexity and political tensions, a “recall referendum” was held in August 2008, approving the mandates of the President and Media Luna prefects, but revoking those of opposition prefects in La Paz and Cochabamba.

Violence soon broke out in opposition regions, including clashes between pro-autonomy demonstrators and police. On 11 September 2008, Bolivia witnessed its most lethal incident of political violence in years as clashes between government and opposition supporters left several pro-Morales indigenous protestors dead. The Pando massacre shocked Bolivians and prompted the government and opposition to immediately agree to a formal dialogue.

The first phase of the dialogue began on 12 September, just one day after Pando, and lasted for four days. This phase focused on preparing a consensus agenda and broad-ranging consultations aimed at mollifying the increasingly radical civic movements aligned with autonomists and eastern businesses. The second phase of the dialogue took place between 18 September-5 October 2008 in Cochabamba, involving the President, Vice-President, political parties and opposition prefects and with the participation of international observers, including the UN. Although this phase failed to reach an agreement, progress was made toward harmonising the draft constitution with the autonomy demands and conditions were put in place to continue the dialogue in Congress. In Congress, the opposition agreed, in exchange for government concessions, to support legislation for a referendum on the new constitution. This referendum was held in January 2009, and 61% of voters approved the document, marking a historic de-escalation of this cycle of Bolivia’s political crisis.

2. RC Prevention Role

UNDP’s role in Bolivia: from the late 1990s to the election of Morales

Historically, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) has been the main prevention actor within the UN Country Team (UNCT) in Bolivia. As such, this case study will focus on its role, relations with the government and other national actors, and its reputation in the country.

High-quality HDRs

UNDP has historically been perceived as a credible, informed actor in the country. The late 1990s and early 2000s were a “golden era” for UNDP, during which it produced several exemplary Human Development Reports (HDRs) and enjoyed particularly strong relationships with senior policymakers, as well as with the Church, the Ombudsperson, civil society, and syndicates. The HDR team was then headed by Fernando Calderón, a prominent Bolivian public intellectual with strong political, social and economic networks across Latin America. Calderón “understood and spoke the language of politics and had a personal entry to people across the political spectrum,” and as such helped ensure the HDRs would enjoy a high profile in Bolivia. He also advised the RC/UNDP Resident Representative at the time, Carlos Felipe Martínez, on the country’s political dynamics. Martínez, for his part, was considered a politically-minded RC who saw UNDP’s analytical capacities as a prevention tool to be leveraged.

The HDR team served as an “in-house think tank” for the UN, and their many award-winning reports helped shape the national debate about the politics of development. The 2000 HDR, for instance, received a UNDP award for excellence in participation and policy impact. According to an evaluation, the report’s most notable qualities included that: it was “written from the perspective of a participant in Bolivia’s development process, rather than from the perspective of an omniscient and detached observer” (no doubt the HDR’s largely Bolivian expert staff had much to do with this); it was analytical, explaining the significance of, rather than merely reporting, facts; it defined human development and clearly laid out how it could be achieved; and, most importantly, it
addressed head-on the most polarising aspects of Bolivia’s development (such as the effects of globalisation on inequality) without alienating key interlocutors.\textsuperscript{42} Indeed, rather than damaging UNDP’s relationships in government and civil society, the HDR’s willingness to tackle, with high quality analysis, such controversial issues became a source of prestige for the Country Office.\textsuperscript{43}

Using political scenarios

Beyond influencing the public debate through its reports, UNDP in the late 1990s and early 2000s played a secondary role, in collaboration with other actors such as the Church, the Ombudsperson and civil society, in accompanying national dialogue processes.\textsuperscript{44} In early 2001, the HDR team developed prospective political scenarios for the Church, which was then playing a leading role in these dialogues.\textsuperscript{45} The team then adapted this scenario-building approach to feed into the 2002 HDR, which argued – just ahead of an exceptionally convulsive period in Bolivian politics – that the country’s development process was at a critical juncture, and pointed to high levels of political polarisation and social conflict as symptoms of structural crises.\textsuperscript{46} To develop the scenarios, the team drew on the debates and inputs of key national figures, including the main presidential candidates, generating a highly participatory process and ensuring policy impact.\textsuperscript{47} The resulting HDR won a UNDP award for excellence in participatory and inclusive processes;\textsuperscript{48} and became a key reference point for UNDP’s prevention work over the next decade.\textsuperscript{49} The team shared the scenarios produced for the 2002 HDR with the government and key opposition figures, including supporters of then-first time presidential candidate Evo Morales.\textsuperscript{50}

This experience with the 2002 HDR demonstrated how prospective scenario building could be a powerful tool for understanding policy processes in Bolivia and capturing the attention of senior policymakers from across the political spectrum. The team thus continued to prepare political scenarios, called the Project of Political Analysis and Prospective Scenarios (PAPEP),\textsuperscript{51}

In 2002, during Sánchez de Lozada’s tumultuous second term as president, the PAPEP team generated an analytical scenario warning of a serious political crisis that would likely end his presidency (at least) without urgently addressing key interlocutors.\textsuperscript{52} Indeed, rather than damaging UNDP’s relationships in government and civil society, the HDR’s willingness to tackle, with high quality analysis, such controversial issues became a source of prestige for the Country Office.\textsuperscript{43}

PAPEP also identified two key challenges for the President: first, the need to strengthen democracy by actively including social movements in political processes; and second, the need to set Bolivia on the path to becoming a regional hub for natural gas and thereby advance development.\textsuperscript{53} (Sánchez de Lozada balked at the analysis. In the end, as described above, he was ousted in 2003 and replaced by Mesa.)

Calderón and a member of his team, Armando Ortuño (later head of PAPEP Bolivia), also presented the scenarios to then-Vice President Carlos Mesa, showing he was likely to become the country’s next president.\textsuperscript{56}

Calderón recalled another story that demonstrated both how in demand PAPEP was and the insights of its prospective analysis:

“The authorities of the multinational energy companies operating in Bolivia also invited us to present our scenarios. One of my conclusions was that there would be a political crisis and the government didn’t have resources, and if we didn’t raise taxes by 18% for the energy sector, there would be an economic collapse with political repercussions. The head of one of the companies pulled me aside and said, look, I don’t know about the other companies, but if ours has to pay one dollar more in taxes, we will leave this country. The next year Evo Morales came to power, and he nationalised the hydrocarbon sector and he raised taxes on the sector to 80% - they paid and they didn’t leave.”

Of course, confronting the most powerful political and economic actors in the country with scenarios, some of them unfavourable to their positions, put UNDP, which is in the country at the behest of the government, in a difficult spot. Even though these scenarios were always presented non-publicly and from the standpoint of a neutral technical professional analysis rather than in advocacy mode, “it is very difficult to tell the Emperor he has no clothes,” recalled Calderón. Yet, Calderón explained, the benefit of giving leaders a clear sense of their options, and the consequences of their choices among those options, outweighed the risks such delicate conversations might pose to UNDP’s position in the country. “It’s a game, and sometimes you lose and sometimes you win,” he said. “But the institution has to enter the game. Otherwise, what is the UN for?”\textsuperscript{57}

Creation of PAPEP

In 2003, in collaboration with two prominent Uruguayan political scientists – Diego Achard and Luis Eduardo Gonzalez - PAPEP began developing its first methodological toolkit for developing prospective analysis.\textsuperscript{58} In addition to public opinion surveys, PAPEP conducted focus groups, in-depth interviews with social, political and economic elites, and Delphi surveys (closed ended questionnaires sent to elites on potential political developments).\textsuperscript{59} Designed as a prevention tool for RCs, PAPEP focused on: developing short- and medium-term political scenarios; facilitating high-
level discussions on key policy issues; and working with and strengthening prospective political analysis capacities of key national institutions. It produced written outputs – such as analytical reports, institutional roadmaps, and assessments of public policies and development projects – and offered political advice to key policymakers.

Soon after its creation in Bolivia, Malloch Brown and Elena Martínez, then Director of UNDP's Bureau of Latin America and the Caribbean, supported Calderón and his team in expanding PAPEP into a regional program. When (Carlos Felipe) Martínez was appointed RC in Argentina, Calderón went with him to set up another PAPEP there; the team also formally established PAPEP in Honduras, where Achar and Gonzalez had already been supporting UNDP's conflict prevention role. Thus, PAPEP became a regional program of UNDP. Antonio Aranibar stayed in Bolivia, and became the head of the PAPEP Bolivia (and later the head of the regional PAPEP). As part of the regional program, Calderón established a high-level PAPEP advisory committee comprising Latin American policymakers representing the highest levels of government, and renowned academics. The input of the advisory network provided key material for PAPEP scenarios and helped generate policymaker buy-in at senior levels. Further, members of the network at times gathered to discuss PAPEP scenarios and collaborate on regional comparative studies.

PAPEP and the HDR team became “the two think tanks” of UNDP in Bolivia, with the former quickly becoming a go-to source for high-quality prospective analysis to assist national authorities’ decision-making, while the latter remained a respected source of analysis on Bolivia’s political and economic development. They benefited from academically strong, interdisciplinary and cohesive teams, led largely by national staff who had worked with Calderón on HDRs before the creation of PAPEP.

Mesa’s resignation and the rise of Morales

In November 2003, at the request of President Mesa, the Secretary-General sent an envoy to Bolivia: Jose Antonio Ocampo, then head of the UN’s Department for Social and Economic Affairs (DESA). Ocampo began traveling frequently to Bolivia to facilitate dialogue among the political parties, and between the government and social movements. He proved adept at creating entry points, developing a close relationship with the Mesa administration and later with some figures in the Morales one (discussed below). While in Bolivia, Ocampo leveraged UNDP’s data and analytical capacities to develop advice and facilitate political talks, thereby demonstrating how Special Envoys can draw on UNCT capacities for prevention.

After Mesa resigned amidst crippling protests, the military invited the Coordinators of the HDR (George Gray Molina) and of PAPEP (Aranibar) to share their survey data and political analysis. Molina and Aranibar, both Bolivian staffers, advised the military against assuming power temporarily (warning that would be seen as a coup) and provided strong evidence that the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Eduardo Rodríguez, represented the best option to succeed Mesa for the consolidation of democracy. This recommendation was based both on: PAPEP flash survey data that showed the public preferred Rodríguez over the other two candidates who would be constitutionally in line to succeed Mesa; and on a comprehensive stakeholder mapping that showed none of the country’s major political, economic or social actors strongly opposed Rodríguez. Swayed by the data, the military did not assume power and shortly thereafter endorsed Rodríguez, who became President in June 2005 with the mandate to hold elections within one year.

Just days after Rodríguez was sworn in, Ocampo and Calderón provided him with a PAPEP-produced political roadmap, based on the premise that his presidency represented a unique window of opportunity to resolve the political crisis through a democratic process. The roadmap urged Rodríguez not to limit his mandate to the organisation of a presidential election, but also to engage in political negotiations to facilitate congressional elections and the first-ever elections of prefects, in an effort to unblock Bolivia’s political jam. President Rodríguez successfully implemented this agenda, leading to the late 2005 elections that brought Morales to power and marked a new era in Bolivian politics.

The election of Evo Morales in 2005 brought a newcomer who disrupted Bolivia’s whole political system, introducing new faces in government and diluting the UN’s networks. The Morales government, which championed anti-imperialist rhetoric, was more sceptical than prior administrations of multilateral advice. Meanwhile, new hydrocarbons taxes (which came with the nationalisation of the sector) overnight made the Bolivian government significantly less dependent on international aid. Ocampo continued his work during the early years of Morales’s presidency, including by advising the government on economic issues, developing strong relationships with the ministers of planning and of hydrocarbons. However, the UN lost this entry point with the Morales administration after Ocampo left, as the new Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon in 2007 did not appoint a new Special Envoy. Instead, the Secretary-General sent Jan Egeland, his Special Adviser, on mission to Bolivia to assess the government’s needs and develop recommendations.

In addition to the new cast of government characters, new opposition powers emerged, including the Media Luna prefects and regional civic movements who gained newfound political weight over traditional political parties.

In the aftermath of the historic shifts propelled by Morales’ victory, RC leadership was largely missing. Then-RC Antonio Molpeceres left La Paz prematurely in 2007, and a merry-go-round of ad interim RCs ensued, causing confusion, lack of continuity and leadership, eroding the UN’s profile in the country and staff morale. However, new funds from UNDP's now-defunct Bureau for Crisis Prevention (BCPR) in 2007
helped establish a robust UNDP Democratic Governance Team focused on conflict prevention. The Team, which became the new institutional home of PAPEP, helped reinvigorate UNDP's prevention role.79 This positioned UNDP to begin supporting the Constituent Assembly, which had been installed in 2006, and to produce two high-quality HDRs in 2007 (on state reform) and 2008 (on natural resources).80

Resources for prevention

By 2006, PAPEP was receiving financial support from UNDP's BCPR, its Regional Bureau for Latin America, and the Democratic Governance Thematic Trust Fund.81 RCs, who also serve as UNDP Resident Representatives, participated in efforts to raise additional funds for PAPEP and broader UNCT programming, though with mixed results. In 2008, a then-ad interim RC contracted a consultant to undertake donor outreach, with the approach of visiting aid agencies to gather information about their funding priorities and develop a concept note accordingly.82 The resulting proposal was "Frankenstein-ish," combining disjointed pieces contributed by different agencies, and failed to raise funds. When RC Yoriko Yasukawa arrived in Bolivia in 2008, she turned this on its head: instead of asking the donors what they could fund, she tasked PAPEP with putting together a concept note around building a culture of peace in Bolivia, using in-country realities rather than donor priorities as a starting point. The UNCT was invited to contribute to this vision, but only within the framework of the concept note, resulting in a more coherent proposal. Through this approach, the UNCT secured around US$4 million of support from the Spanish development agency, AECID, channelled through the Millennium Development Goals Fund (MDG Fund) for the thematic window of Conflict prevention and consolidation of peace.83 These funds sustained some PAPEP activities from 2009-12.84 During these years, PAPEP operated with an average annual budget of only USD 700,000 – very small by think tank industry standards,85 and evidence that the Project punched above its weight. (See below for details on declines in PAPEP's funding after 2012, which led the Project to wind down in 2015.)

Comparative strengths of the UN

The remainder of this case study will focus on the RC and UNDP's support to national actors in the lead-up to and during the 2008 constitutional dialogue. However it is first important to take stock of how the HDR and PAPEP teams' work since the late 1990s had helped consolidate three comparative advantages for the UN, which the UN was then able to build on in 2008.

First, networks: Although UNDP had weaker ties to the MASistas than to prior governments, it remained relatively well-connected to key state institutions and political and social actors that later became protagonists in the 2008 dialogue. Several of these actors were or had worked with UNDP on prior projects; this ensured UN access to these actors at critical moments.86 For instance, the Vice-President, Alvaro Garcia Linera, a sociologist by training, had been frequently invited during his university professor days to discuss prospective political scenarios.87 The President of the National Electoral Court, José Luis Exeni, was formerly the principal researcher of the HDR, and a personal friend of the head of the regional PAPEP (Aranibar). Similarly, the MAS Minister of the Presidency, Juan Ramon Quintana, had also interacted with the HDR, which made access to him easier for the RC and others.88

Further, UNDP for two years had been providing technical and financial support to the Constituent Assembly, and the HDR team was at the time working on a Report partly focused on the Assembly. The contacts and knowledge of the CA that UNDP had developed through this work proved important further down the line when constitutional issues grew to be at the heart of the political crisis. Finally, UNDP had managed to maintain relationships with both the government and the opposition despite the high levels of political polarisation.89 For instance, it maintained a liaison officer in the Office of the Prefect of Santa Cruz, which helped build relationships for the UN in the Media Luna departments.90

Second, capacity for primary data gathering and political analysis: PAPEP was a data-rich unit, with every PAPEP study involving extensive primary data gathering.91 It was primary data, and particularly public opinion surveys – which, naturally, always interest politicians – that gave PAPEP an analytical edge and created high-level demand for its work. As George Gray Molina argued: "[UNDP] had data that journalists and even politicians didn't have… we were able to see microtrends that journalists couldn't see... we would present it to both the government and the opposition, every player… There is nothing like that in Latin America that can do the 360-prospective analysis today."92

Third, informational credibility and the UN's soft power: UNDP's track record of well-regarded HDRs and PAPEP analysis helped build informational credibility for the UN. This, combined with the UN's "soft power" – that is, the perception of the UN as a relatively impartial actor operating on the basis of UN values – which enabled UNDP to use its data effectively and strategically to advocate for prevention.93

PAPEP scenario-building and theory of change

In the lead-up to the 2008 crisis, PAPEP identified and presented to national interlocutors three possible scenarios:

1. Political dialogue between the government and opposition aimed at finding a consensus solution. This was the most desirable scenario but appeared unlikely due to high levels of distrust and polarisation between the parties.

2. Partial political deal limited to the opposing sides agreeing on the basic rules for carrying out the constitutional and departmental autonomy referendum. This scenario could break the deadlock, but
would likely only ease tensions in the short-term.

3. No political dialogue. This would lead to greater polarisation and increase risks to Bolivia’s stability.\(^{74}\)

PAPEP’s theory of change – i.e. that only a meaningful political dialogue could make the difference between a consensus solution or greater polarisation – drove the UN’s interventions over the coming period. Along with a 2007 mission to Bolivia of the Framework Team (an interagency forum at UN headquarters in New York to discuss and develop UN-wide prevention strategies in conflict-prone countries), PAPEP began identifying key actions that would help move the country toward the best possible scenario and avert the worst.\(^{95}\) They urged the parties to sit down and talk, presenting to them PAPEP polling data that showed the majority of Bolivians wanted a dialogue,\(^{96}\) and creating informal spaces for dialogue to build confidence among the parties. These efforts complemented work by the Bolivian Foundation for Multiparty Democracy (FBDM) in 2007, which supported informal dialogues that enabled senior MAS and opposition leaders to jointly identify points of contention and develop early technical proposals – proposals that later proved crucial in saving time and providing substance to the negotiations in Congress.\(^{97}\)

Support to the National Electoral Court

One of the most important actions PAPEP decided on was to further strengthen the institutional capacities of the National Electoral Court, which it had identified as a “catalyst institution”\(^{98}\) for conflict prevention that “could not fail,”\(^{99}\) due to its role in managing the electoral processes that had become central to resolving the conflict.\(^{100}\) PAPEP had worked with the Court on previous occasions and benefited from a close personal relationship between Aranibar (the Bolivian head of the national PAPEP at the time) and the President of the Court, Exeni. PAPEP presented Exeni with strategic advice, prospective political analysis, legal and technical assistance, and more.\(^{101}\) This relationship was in large part demand-driven, with Exeni at times convening PAPEP experts to ask for analysis on specific policy questions, including sensitive topics deemed better handled by the UN.\(^{102}\) PAPEP advised Exeni during crucial periods of the crisis, including around the time that the Court took the decisive step of rejecting the constitutional referendum in early 2008.\(^{103}\) An evaluation found that the existence of a strong catalyst institution – the Court – as a national counterpart for PAPEP was a key factor in determining the relatively high impact the Project had in Bolivia.\(^{104}\)

The September 2008 dialogue

After the Pando massacre on 11 September 2008, the government and opposition agreed to hold an urgent dialogue in Cochabamba with international observers to avert the risk of similar violent incidents occurring elsewhere. Initially, the government was hesitant to accept international involvement,\(^{105}\) being somewhat wary of multilaterals deemed too close to Washington, such as the Organization of American States (OAS) and the UN. However, just months earlier in Brasilia, Morales had helped found the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), which was dominated by government allies such as Brazilian President Lula da Silva and Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and offered an alternative to the D.C.-based OAS. Gastón Aín Bilbao, who formerly coordinated UNDP’s Democratic Dialogue Regional Project for Latin America, has argued that the UNASUR option made international observation more palatable to the Morales government.\(^{106}\) With the government consenting to international involvement, the opposition was in turn able to insist on the involvement of actors it deemed most trustworthy – namely, the OAS, UN and European Ambassadors.\(^{107}\) In all, around 20 observers participated, including UNASUR, OAS, the UN, the European Troika (EU, UK, France), and the Methodist and Evangelist churches.

As the dialogue began immediately after Pando, there was no time to wait for UN headquarters to dispatch a senior mediator.\(^{108}\) Thus, RC Yasukawa, who had just arrived in Bolivia a few months before, decided to attend herself, accompanied by the new Coordinator of PAPEP, Armando Ortuño, a Bolivian staffer, as her political advisor. UNASUR and OAS dispatched veteran diplomats – Juan Gabriel Valdés, former Foreign Minister of Chile, and Dante Caputo, former Foreign Minister of Argentina. Valdés and Caputo were “the main protagonists”\(^{109}\) among the international observers, at times stepping into semi-mediation roles.\(^{110}\) (Both Valdés and Caputo had in fact collaborated with PAPEP on projects before.\(^{111}\) ) The European Troika was represented by the three countries’ respective ambassadors in Bolivia.

The dialogue was impromptu and chaotic, involving “multiple actors and very little formal political culture.”\(^{112}\) It kicked off with a round of insults that shocked many of the international observers. Although the creation of technical commissions added some structure to the debate, many procedural issues and roles of international observers were left largely unclear. Amidst much improvisation, the role of the UN – and that of other international observers – was never defined, but rather evolved along with the dialogue.\(^{113}\) Although at the start, the UN played mostly the role of a silent observer or witness, it gradually took on a more vocal role, especially as the dialogue moved to Congress and the national actors saw the need for more substantial international support.\(^{114}\)

RC’s approach and role in the dialogue

RC Yasukawa arrived just months before the 2008 dialogue started, marking an end to a long and frustrating period of ad interim RCs. She arrived in La Paz amidst a complex political crisis, with rising polarisation and new political actors emerging on both the government and opposition sides. Her background, with UNICEF, had taken her to

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\(^{95}\) The September 2008 dialogue.

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other conflict-prone states in Latin America, including Ecuador and Mexico, but she did not have formal training in mediation or conflict resolution. Further, she had no prevention capacities to draw on within the RC Office, which consisted of only a coordination officer and an assistant. For instance, there was no Peace and Development Advisor (PDA) in Bolivia that she could draw on for political advice.

RC Yasukawa overcame these limitations by drawing on UNDP\(^{115}\) as part of her own team, and empowering national staff within it, turning to them to guide her through the country's politics. She drew on UNDP's existing networks to meet early on with government figures (e.g., MAS Minister Quintana) and the opposition (e.g., Santa Cruz Prefect Ruben Costas) to convey the UN's wish for peace and dialogue. Further, as described above, she benefited from the political advice of Ortuño, who, though a national UNDP staffer, assumed the role of de facto PDA. Indeed, the national UNDP team was so strong that the Bolivia desk officer at DPA and the RC felt that an international PDA was not necessary in Bolivia.\(^{116}\)

Once at the dialogue, the RC and Ortuño adopted a "less is more" approach, focusing their efforts on building confidence among the national parties to the dialogue, specifically by exerting moral pressure on the parties to avoid breakdowns and attain an agreement.\(^{117}\) Rather than providing input on the substance of the talks or imposing a structure on the dialogue, they accepted and worked within the rhythms and (dis)order set by national actors. They prioritised their role in this way for at least three reasons: first, at least during the Cochabamba phase, the government was not comfortable with a more vocal UN role; second, they understood that classic mediation mechanisms would likely fail in this less formalised environment in which, as Ortuño put it, the national actors "work within the chaos;"\(^{118}\) and third, chiming in on the substance of the talks risked making the UN appear partial to the arguments of one side or another.\(^{119}\)

As a UNDP report noted: "Although perhaps less proactive compared to traditional mediation, the [UN's] actions [in the dialogue] were complex in that they required both commitment and caution, a correct understanding of the real advocacy possibilities and limits, respect for the rhythms and logic of national actors, and above all, a sense of realism and modesty in all interventions."\(^{120}\)

The continual accompaniment of the observers – through very late nights and difficult junctures – offered the parties moral support to continue the effort.\(^{121}\) The UN also proactively sought to keep the parties at the table. For instance, when the dialogue threatened to break down due to the withdrawal of opposition prefects,\(^{122}\) the RC and some other observers met with them, heard out their grievances, and then conveyed these complaints to the Vice-President, which helped pave the way for their return to the dialogue.\(^{123}\)

In what was perhaps the most important UN intervention in pressuring the parties to remain committed to the talks, the RC decided to publish, via press releases prepared by PAPEP and the UN's Information Centre (UNIC) in La Paz, PAPEP polls that showed that the vast majority of Bolivians wanted the political actors to continue the dialogue, even if it meant sacrificing key aspects of their own proposals.\(^{124}\)

Poll results were published at two strategic moments to add momentum to the dialogue: first, before the dialogue was announced, in order to convey to the parties that the Bolivian people were demanding they sit down and talk; and then

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**The role of national staff in prevention**

There is a tendency within the UN to assume that national staff cannot be "neutral" about their own country, and thus cannot play effective politically-oriented roles. This case study has demonstrated, to the contrary, that national staff can play a crucial role in prevention – and that entry points, original analysis, and adherence to UN values, including impartiality,\(^{125}\) can be more important than real or perceived "neutrality" for such work. For instance, the stories described above about Calderón's influence in Bolivia, Aranibar and Molina's meeting with the military, and Aranibar's close relationship with the President of the National Electoral Court, show how national actors can uniquely combine UN impartiality and values with their knowledge of and contacts in their own country to influence policy in favour of prevention. At times, Bolivian staffers seemed able to cross over into becoming actors in national political processes, while also benefiting from wearing UN blue to protect their autonomy.

The role of Armando Ortuño as the RC's political advisor in the 2008 dialogue offers further insight into how national staff can advance UN prevention efforts. As Gastón Aín Bilbao put it, Ortuño was the epitome of an "insider mediator," a Bolivian national who "knew the tricks and triggers and could decide on a line of intervention."\(^{126}\) He had prior senior experience in government (for instance, as Vice-Minister of Planning) and maintained close ties to many senior government actors. In addition to working effectively on prevention with external actors, Ortuño was a key prevention resource for the UN internally. For instance, he periodically presented national context analyses to the UNCT – these fluid updates were more central to the RC's approach than the UN's standard tool of a Common Country Assessment (CCA), a bulkier process and document.\(^{127}\)

It is of course rare to find, whether among international or national staff, individuals with the analytical capacities, country expertise and contacts to match those of the Bolivian UNDP staffers mentioned in this report. And all of these individuals have since undertaken high-level prevention-oriented work in countries outside of Bolivia.\(^{128}\) Each context will require an RC to assess the right person for the job – in some cases that will be a national, and in others it may be an international. But it is important for RCs to consider national staff as a potential prevention resource, rather than assuming only internationals can play such a role.
again during a near-breaking point in the dialogue itself, when PAPEP polls showed that over 90% of Bolivians wanted the dialogue to continue. The publication of the polls also helped show the vast majority of Bolivians supporting dialogue that they were not alone in their beliefs and convictions. As the RC recalled: “Sometimes in these very loud and shrill conflicts, the voices of ordinary people get lost... so to say look you’re forgetting what your own people want, they don’t want this conflict. The political actors were saying we can’t even touch one comma, and the people were saying so no I’m completely willing to discuss it.” The poll results received significant media coverage, helping to position the UN as a public voice on the conflict. As described below, national actors cited these polls as helpful in sustaining the dialogue.

The RC and Ortuño also provided analysis to other observers. For instance, because the UN was the only international actor at the dialogue with an in-house analysis unit (PAPEP), other observers frequently looked to it (and specifically to Ortuño) for its reading of the political context. The UK Ambassador at the time, Nigel Baker, explained that Ortuño helped the observers “operate on the basis of objective analysis at a time when a lot of subjective analysis was going on and when it was very easy to be accused by the government or the opposition of being on one side or another... People will look to the UN for this kind of objective information, especially in heated political situations.” In addition, due to the UN’s contacts with local media and communications capacities, the UN at times issued public statements on behalf of the international observers.

The RC’s political instincts also helped her coordinate the actions of the observers at critical moments to the benefit of the dialogue. For instance, when the opposition prefects withdrew, the government asked the international observers to serve as witnesses to the signing of partial agreements (thereby conferring international legitimacy to them). The RC and some other observers felt it would be ill-advised to witness the signing of an agreement only in the presence of MASistas, as such a move would damage their impartiality. She thus worked with other observers to coordinate a common position among them against witnessing the signing.

Further, the RC coordinated action within the UN itself, by working closely with the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) to generate Secretary-General statements in support of continued dialogue at key moments. As Carlos Vergara, at the time DPA’s desk officer for Bolivia, said: “We tried to find the opportunity whenever the SG had to make a statement echoing what she was saying locally, so it was synchronised messaging that reinforced the notion that the RC is not only speaking on her own behalf but also has the backing of NY.”

Finally, a key aspect of the RC’s approach to the dialogue and prevention more broadly in Bolivia was a communications strategy in support of peace. As she recalled:

“For me, one of the first steps was to get people [in the

UNCT] used to the idea that we were a public voice, and because we didn’t have an RC before there was nobody to do that. With many RCs, I think there’s a perspective that if we do get involved in political issues we try to do it under the radar, and in private dialogue with the actors, that it’s not our place to say things publicly.”

Under her leadership, the UNCT collectively launched a public communications campaign in support of peace and dialogue called Convivir, Sembrar Paz (Coexist, Sow Peace), which was led by UNIC, the HDR team, and PAPEP, and organised in partnership with other UNCT members, the Ombudsperson’s Office, and a Bolivian non-profit organisation specialised in conflict transformation (UNIR). It was run on a shoe-string budget, initially with modest funds cobbled together from the RC Office, the World Bank and some UNCT members, and in a second phase with more substantial resources from the global MDG Fund. The UN’s strong relationships with national institutions and local media helped ensure that, despite its limited budget, the campaign reached a wide audience. A poll conducted just months after the campaign’s launch showed that a quarter of Bolivians recognised the campaign.

UN’s contribution to prevention

Although the 2008 dialogue did not resolve Bolivia’s challenges with inequality, social and economic exclusion, and ethnic and regional divides, nor the country’s manifold and resulting social conflicts, it did avert the immediate risks of violence and division, and marked a new chapter in Bolivian politics under Morales. As Ortuño remarked:

“I am almost convinced that Bolivia is not Venezuela in large measure because of the 2008 accord. The opposite of what happened with Chavez took place; Morales won the political election but had to make concessions to the autonomistas of Santa Cruz. This moderation made for a much stronger government and made possible a unity that exists today. The regional [autonomy] issue has basically disappeared from the political discourse of the country, and this wouldn’t have been possible without the 2008 accords. In a way, the Bolivian revolution was pactada (pacted), and this was very good for the country.”

The most important factor that accounted for the success of the 2008 dialogue was the political will on the part of the negotiating parties to make key concessions, including the government’s willingness to make adjustments to the draft constitution, and the opposition’s willingness to negotiate on the basis of the Oruro document, which it had considered illegitimate. As RC Yasukawa remarked, in the absence of that political will, no external pressure or advice could have made an agreement happen.

Because this will existed, the UN and other observers managed to contribute to the process, adding value primarily by exerting moral pressure on the parties to remain committed...
to talks through to the end. Fortunately, because UNIC in La Paz conducted interviews with key national actors right after the dialogue ended, and provided the author with those transcripts, one can hear from national actors themselves how they assessed the UN’s contribution.

Carlos Romero, who led the dialogue on the government side, acknowledged that “nobody wanted to break [the dialogue] before the presence of the representatives of the international community. [Their presence] helped enormously to consolidate the dialogue space, especially with the department prefects.” Similarly, when asked in what moment he felt relief amidst the desperation of the moment and could see the light at the end of the tunnel, opposition Prefect Ruben Costas answered: “In the extraordinarily successful decision of the international community to sit down [at the dialogue].” Costas also crediting the UN and the European Troika with obligating the government to sit down with the opposition in a dialogue.

Several observers highlighted the RC’s approach of exerting moral pressure as impactful. Opposition Senator Rigo Pinto said in 2009 that when at some point the dialogue threatened to derail, Yasukawa urged the parties to “make an effort for the country for which all of you are here.” “These words,” Pinto said, “were words of reflection for all of us. We had advanced so much, swam so much, to die on the beach. I think the presence of these people was what motivated an agreement that resulted in the Constitution… and although [the issues] are not fully solved, at least [the prospect of] a confrontation is much more distant.”

The positive impact of the RC’s decision to publish poll results on the negotiations was also confirmed by multiple national actors. For instance, when asked whether the polls had impacted the negotiations, Carlos Romero answered: “Of course yes, because… there was the pressure of public opinion, and the majority’s feelings about the dialogue were translated and spread through mainstream media. This consolidated the state of public opinion and in some way also helped add pressure for a way out [of the crisis] through dialogue.” Opposition deputy Alejandro Colanzi concurred: “I must recognise the function of the UN, which in these days precisely publicised a poll about the theme of the unity of the country… I think this was one of the various determinants in the search for dialogue and consensus.”

National actors also highlighted the informal spaces for dialogue that UNDP and others (namely the Bolivian Foundation for Multiparty Democracy, IBDM) had organised in the lead-up to the 2008 dialogue. Romero later referred to these dialogues as having been “very useful” because they allowed us to at least identify the points of conflict. “At some point, I said, [developing] an inventory of the points of conflict is in and of itself an advance. And this could not be done solely by debating within one of the parties – it had to be done with the other party.”

As for PAPEP, an independent evaluation concluded:

“It would be safe to assume that without PAPEP the outcome of the constitutional crisis of Bolivia and the possibilities for a dialogue would not have been the same. It does not imply that PAPEP was the sole responsible [sic] for the success of the dialogue; however, PAPEP was a major enabler of the processes through the quality and legitimacy of the analysis it offered all involved parties for the solution of the conflict… PAPEP was also particularly instrumental in the advocacy with national actors to ensure political ownership and commitment of the decisions made by actors.”

According to the evaluation, PAPEP’s “almost decisive” impact in Bolivia was attributed to: “the well-positioned UNDP Country Office and the decisive role of the Resident Coordinator, the existence of a strong national institution-catalyst [the National Electoral Court], long history of PAPEP’s presence in Bolivia and strong political connections and networks of the Team.”

Finally, and most importantly, an October 2008 survey showed that two-thirds of Bolivians felt that UN support in its capacity as observer and witness to the dialogue was significant. Further, polls conducted about a month after the dialogue in urban areas showed that about half of Bolivians were satisfied with the results of the dialogue and the changes to the Constitution – though important departmental differences existed, with populations in opposition strongholds Tarija and Santa Cruz being less satisfied than those in the mostly pro-MAS departments of La Paz and El Alto.

**After the dialogue**

RC Yasukawa’s role in the 2008 dialogue afforded her political capital and a strong media profile, both of which she put to use to advocate for peace in subsequent years. She openly pointed out problems that needed to be corrected, including on sensitive political issues, with senior government officials; coordinated messages to the government with local ambassadors to reinforce key points; and issued public statements expressing concern about government actions deemed repressive or undemocratic. She also became a vocal UN advocate for human rights and peace, with some perceiving her as having been stronger and more outspoken on human rights than even OHCHR in Bolivia. Further, when the political front calmed down, the RC attempted to shift the focus of the UN’s work toward urgent social and development needs, in recognition that these issues “were themselves expressions of inequality and injustices that fed into political conflict.”

The Morales government did not object to RC statements pointing out problems in the country or even in its specific approach; to the contrary, the government continued to meet with her regularly and requested UN support for certain dialogue processes. As Ortuño recalled: “By the time she was halfway through her term she had become an important
person in Bolivian politics, she was listened to by national actors. It would have been difficult to imagine ‘Yoriko’s subsequent work without those weeks of the dialogue.’

However, after RC Yasukawa left Bolivia, it became clear that the RC’s prevention role would depend very much on the style, personality and vocation of the RC her or himself. The new RC, who was seen as partial and lacking knowledge of governance issues, was asked to leave by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs after just a year and a half.

As for UNDP, after the dialogue and with the support of the MDG Fund, it worked with legislators to draft framework laws related to the implementation of the agreement. Further, UNDP undertook projects aimed at generating spaces for informal dialogue and strengthening political parties, the conflict resolution capacity of the Ombudsman, and the National Electoral Court. Meanwhile, the regional PAPEP grew to work in many Latin American countries, and between 2010-12 PAPEP participated in workshops to introduce its methodology to RCs/RRs in other regions, including the Middle East during the Arab Spring. An evaluation found that PAPEP had been exceptionally impactful in Bolivia, but also that it had contributed to prevention and strengthened UNDP elsewhere in the region, namely in Paraguay and El Salvador.

However, the conditions that made PAPEP so successful in Bolivia – including the especially capable national UNDP team, the tight-knit networks among that team and key national actors, the existence of strong counterpart institutions (e.g., the National Electoral Court), and the proactive role of the RC in leveraging PAPEP as a prevention tool – were not always replicable elsewhere. For instance, according to the evaluation, though PAPEP produced solid political analysis in Honduras in the lead-up to a 2009 coup, it was not able to influence political decision-making to avert a political crisis. This relative lack of impact was often attributed to “the reserved and cautious position of the RC in Honduras,” and UNDP’s excessive preoccupation with being perceived as “neutral,” which inhibited preventive action.

PAPEP winds down

Despite PAPEP’s remarkable successes in Bolivia, three factors led to its unofficial demise in 2015: shifts in UNDP’s funding model; weaker political backing in headquarters; and a “turn to the left” in Latin American politics that emphasised sovereignty and non-intervention.

First, around 2012, the new UNDP Administrator, Helen Clark, began a substantial restructuring of the organisation, which included abolishing BCPR, one of PAPEP’s most important sources of funding. UNDP’s general financial problems led to increased reliance within the Programme on a service delivery funding model, in which projects that generate cost recovery take priority. This was felt particularly acutely in Latin America, where a strong emphasis within UNDP on resource mobilisation, particularly through the model of cost-sharing with governments, was perceived as having eclipsed other priorities. In some middle-income Latin American countries, this approach made UNDP increasingly reliant on government contracts – particularly their sizeable overheads – for revenue. Such a funding model can complicate efforts to do effective prevention work, which often requires a degree of autonomy from the government. Projects like PAPEP cannot be sustained with such a service-delivery model, as they require core funds that reflect UN impartiality (as opposed to government-linked funds), and they do not generate cost recovery.

Second, the shifts at headquarters were not only financial but also political – the new UNDP administration after 2009, by many accounts, was more risk-averse with respect to political engagements that could complicate development programming. As demonstrated by the stories above, projects like PAPEP require strong political backing from headquarters to have maximum impact on the ground.

Third and finally, as Gastón Aín Bilbao has argued, the regional configuration in Latin America shifted by 2010 in ways that shrunk the space for PAPEP-like initiatives. The rise of left-leaning leaders in the preceding years in many Latin American countries marked newfound opposition to the Washington Consensus of the 1990s and greater sensitivity with respect to the role of the international community in domestic politics. According to Bilbao: “No matter how well conceived PAPEP was, or how talented its staff was, a series of new barriers and hurdles arose for a project of that nature to exert influence and contribute to political agendas.”

All three of these factors contributed to the winding down of PAPEP, which no longer exists as an active regional program, but transferred its knowledge to the still-active Democratic Dialogue Regional Project.

3. Lessons

Political will on the part of national parties to reach a negotiated solution and baseline consent to a UN role are preconditions for productive UN preventive action: The Bolivian experience shows that the UN’s ability to meaningfully contribute to prevention depends, first and foremost, on the existence of sufficient political will of the national parties. That is, the key parties to the conflict – those capable of “vetoing” any deal and returning the country to escalatory dynamics – must largely prefer a non-violent solution over violence and be willing to make key concessions to attain that preference. The UN cannot generate this political will; it can only build on it if it already exists. Beyond being committed to at least give dialogue a chance, national actors must also consent to a UN role if the organisation is to have any space to work. Where the UN is perceived by one side as being too close to another, positioning the UN’s role with those of others (for instance, in the Bolivian case, UNASUR) can help build consent.

RCs must be politically attuned to openings for prevention:
To play effective prevention roles, RCs must have strong political instincts and see the promotion of UN values, including with respect to peace and human rights, as an integral part of their roles. RC Yasukawa demonstrated both when she quickly agreed to the request for UN support at the 2008 dialogue, and exerted moral pressure at various points on the parties to remain committed to the dialogue. For instance, her decision to publish poll results showing most Bolivians supported the dialogue at strategic junctures was a clear example of political smarts. Further, simply reminding the parties of the greater good proved important – RCs can and should deploy the ‘moral voice’ of the UN to such prevention ends. Politically-attuned RCs are also key for sustaining a UNCT’s prevention capacities: Bolivia shows that PAPEP-like initiatives will perform best where there exists such an RC or other UN official who understands and leverages the initiative as a prevention tool (consider, for instance, the relative lack of PAPEP’s impact in Honduras in the lead up to the 2009 coup, which was blamed on the cautious approach of the RC there). RCs who are afraid of or uninterested in politics, or who see conflict prevention and the defence/promotion of human rights as being outside their mandates, will miss such openings and are unlikely to understand the value of the UNCT’s prevention capacities. The detrimental impact of the absence of strong RC leadership was starkly demonstrated in Bolivia in the lead-up to the 2008 dialogue, when for 13 months a merry-go-round of ad interim RCs damaged the UN’s profile as a prevention actor and staff morale at a critical moment.

RCs and UNCTs should develop “anticipatory relationships” that allow effective preventive action when political openings arise: RCs and UNCTs can dramatically enhance their preventive potential by establishing, cultivating and maintaining relationships with political, economic and social leaders who are likely to emerge as relevant actors in future situations of political turmoil or crisis and might offer the UN with entry points or leverage for a preventive role. (This should be done not only with respect to conflict prevention per se, but also to build broad consensus and sustained collective efforts around shared development objectives.) In Bolivia, UNDP managed to do this at the highest levels of government, thanks to the HDR and PAPEP teams’ longstanding and personal relationships with key national actors. Fernando Calderón, in particular, built high-level networks of experts and Latin American leaders for PAPEP to draw on. These networks enriched UNDP’s political analysis, ensured that analysis reached key audiences, and created entry points for critical prevention efforts.

HDRs can build the UN’s credibility as a prevention actor: In Bolivia, UNDP’s high-quality HDRs dating back to the late 1990s lent the Country Office significant informational and analytical credibility on issues related to political conflict and development – credibility that future RCs were able to cash in on. Among the factors accounting for the HDR’s success were: the high quality and strong contacts of the team’s national staff, which enabled the Reports to be written from the perspective of a participant in rather than a distant observer of Bolivia’s development; the Reports’ emphasis on analytical over descriptive text; and the team’s willingness to tackle, with solid analysis, contentious issues head-on, which bolstered the Country Office’s credibility. Indeed, Bolivia shows that HDRs can tackle politically sensitive issues without endangering the UN’s position if they ground such points in credible analysis. Finally, it pays off to focus HDRs on issues that are likely to emerge at the heart of future political crises – as UNDP in Bolivia discovered, when, as it built contacts and knowledge for an HDR focused on the Constituent Assembly, constitutional issues became central to prevention (see above: anticipatory relationships).

Conflict analysis gives the UN a role: If RCs and UNCTs want to play a prevention role, they need to have something to say. Original, high-quality conflict analysis based on primary sources, combined with the UN’s “soft power” as an impartial actor with universal values, gives RCs and UNCTs added value. Survey and other primary data help create entry points as national actors are more likely to call upon the UN – and hear out its advice – when it has something original to say. This lesson was demonstrated over and over again in Bolivia – from the scenarios giving Calderón a solid basis from which to alert Presidents Sánchez de Lozada and Mesa to the risks of impending political crises, to the military consulting – and taking into account in its decision-making on presidential succession after Mesa’s resignation – survey data and analysis presented to them by Aranibar and Molina, to the observers drawing on Ortuño’s reading of the political context in the 2008 dialogue. Dedicated resources and expert staff capacities are required for the UN to be able to undertake such analysis.

Good analysis isn’t enough; how you use it matters just as much: To have policy relevance and impact, PAPEP-like initiatives must do more than just produce data and analysis; the UN must put that information to use to effect policy change in support of prevention. It can do so by, inter alia: briefing high-level policymakers on prospective scenarios and the projected consequences of their choices (i.e., an early warning tool); strengthening national “catalyst institutions” that will be key to prevention; and strategically publishing at critical moments survey data showing pro-peace public opinion to pressure policymakers to commit to non-violent solutions. Further, on the basis of solid conflict analysis, the UN can design informal spaces for dialogue that allow national actors to jointly identify contentious issues and encourage the early development of compromise proposals – important foundations for future, formal dialogues.

National staff can be a game-changing prevention asset to RCs: While, as this project’s other case studies demonstrate, international PDAs can play a crucial role in supporting RC prevention roles, Bolivia demonstrates that national staff can also step into such a role – often with unique comparative advantages. The right national staff can bring in-depth knowledge of a country and strong networks with political,
economic and social leaders. Further, they do not require the resources needed for an international PDA, which, given the costs entailed, might not be available to all RCs who need dedicated prevention staff. While there may be concerns about whether national staff can be “neutral” about politics in their own country, this case study has demonstrated that entry points, original analysis, and adherence to UN values, including impartiality, can be more important for prevention than real or perceived “neutrality.” (Further, PAPEP’s experience in Honduras demonstrates that an excessive preoccupation with being perceived as neutral can in fact inhibit preventive action.) Finally, the PAPEP scenario-building methodology itself is designed to mitigate problems of objectivity. As Aranibar put it, “it is not about what you would like to happen in your country, but rather about the actual possibilities.”

Prevention requires backing from headquarters: The UN, which is in a country at the behest of the government, depends on the support and cooperation of national authorities to get anything done. Yet, sometimes effective preventive action requires UN actors to speak truth to power and warn governments about projected crises and the consequences of their decisions. Backing from senior leadership in headquarters is crucial to enabling UN staff on the ground to walk this tightrope. Mark Malloch Brown’s support for PAPEP playing an outsized political role in Bolivia was key to enabling Calderón and others to have difficult, honest conversations with national actors about impending crises. The Bolivian experience also demonstrates that PAPEP-like initiatives require dedicated funds that reflect UN values and impartiality. In Bolivia, BCPR was an important source of such funds for PAPEP. While such funds do not have to come exclusively from headquarters (in Bolivia, the MDG Fund also proved important), they likely will need to come from sources independent from the host government. A service-delivery model is unlikely to sustain PAPEP-like initiatives, which do not generate cost recovery.

An RC’s institutional link to UNDP can be a vital lifeline: Particularly in countries where RC Offices are very small and resource constraints do not permit even a PDA, the capacities, expertise and networks of UNDP are likely to constitute an RC’s most important prevention assets. In the case of Bolivia, RC relied to a significant extent on UNDP, and especially PAPEP, prevention capacities - even benefiting from the head of PAPEP acting as her political advisor. Had she been unable to do this, her prevention role likely would have been more limited.

RCs can observe high-level political dialogues: Sometimes, RCs might be better placed than Special Envoys or SRSGs to react quickly to requests for support from political dialogue processes – assuming an RC is in place with the necessary political acumen. In the case of Bolivia, because the request for support came on extremely short notice, the RC was best placed to react in real-time. In contexts where the UN is not being called upon to mediate or structure a process, RCs can be most useful by focusing their efforts on exerting moral pressure on the parties to stay at the table. Within such an approach, RCs can draw on UNCT capacities to help inform the actions of other observers, build confidence among the national parties, and arrange for Secretary-General statements in support of the dialogue to reinforce the role of UN actors on the ground at critical junctures (this requires close coordination with DPA).

Record good prevention practice – and draw on the perspectives of national actors: The Bolivian case demonstrated 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). 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.

Use communications as a prevention tool: Too often, the UN views communications a public relations task to promote its own work. As RC Yasukawa has argued: “the purpose of communications is to advance our mission, not to market ourselves.” Bolivia demonstrates that preventive communications will work best where RCs have something original to say, drawing on the UN’s primary data (such as polls) and unique insights, and where the UN maintains strong relationships with local media and national institutions that can help amplify the message, compensating for limited communications campaign budgets.
Endnotes

Cover Image: UN Photo/ Amanda Voisard. 21 September 2016. President of Bolivia Addresses General Assembly.

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6 Ibid. p.1.


9 Segura, R and Bellamy, C. 2009, p.4. Shock therapy was pioneered by Jeffrey Sachs in Bolivia.


14 Ibid. p.2.

15 Segura, R and Bellamy, C. 2009, p.4. Other key polarizing factors included: disputes over the new administration’s central policy reforms, namely with respect to the the distribution of fiscal resources; and Bolivia’s regional relationships, with the country under Morales starting to align itself with Venezuela or Ecuador on some political issues and with Chile, Brazil and Argentina on other issues of economic importance (e.g., gas negotiations). Molina, George Gray. 2008, p.7.

16 The ballot had also asked voters whether they wanted greater autonomy for the departments were held; an overall majority rejected autonomy, but the Media Luna states voted in favor, bringing into stark view the east-west divide in the country.

17 Molina, G G. 2008, p.7.; This rule was included in the 2006 law that convoked the CA. “It was not how we imagined.” 2011, pp. 5.

18 Ibid. p.7.

19 Ibid. p.7.

20 “It was not how we imagined it.” 2011, p.5.

21 In November 2007, a violent clash between police and student protestors in favor of making Sucre the country’s capital left two dead. Molina, G G. 2008, p.8.

22 “It was not how we imagined it.” 2011, p.5.

23 “It was not how we imagined it.” 2011, pp.5-8. (Citation applies to whole paragraph). See also: Molina, G G. 2008, p.7.


27 “It was not how we imagined it.” 2011, p.42.

28 Ibid. p.43.
30 “It was not how we imagined it.” 2011, p.43.
31 Ibid. p.25.
33 “It was not how we imagined it.” 2011, p.43.
34 The central concession was Morales’s promise to seek only one more five-year term. Obviously, this point of the accord did not age well (Morales is still President at the time of writing). “Bolivia reforms ‘deal reached.’” BBC News. 21 October 2008, news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7681413.stm.
36 “It was not how we imagined it.” 2011, pp.43.
37 Interview with Armando Ortuño, November 2017.
38 Interview with Marc Andre Franché, December 2017.
39 For instance, Opposition Senator Tito Hoz de Vila praised Martínez’s role, saying he would get involved in the issue of strengthening Bolivia’s democracy and “did a great job.” Interview with Tito Hoz de Vila conducted by Robert Brockmann. UNIC La Paz, transcript courtesy of UNIC La Paz.
43 Weeks, J and García, O. 2003; p.46.
44 These included a National Dialogue in 2000, for which UNDP, drawing on its 2000 HDR’s conclusions, advised on participatory process design and coordinated the support of international donors. An evaluation found that while this dialogue “would have occurred without UNDP’s help, that help greatly facilitated its success as a vehicle of social inclusion.” Ibid. p.35.
45 Interview with Antonio Aranibar Arze, February 2018.
49 Interview with Antonio Aranibar Arze, February 2018.
50 Interview with Fernando Calderón, March 2018. The HDR team conducted interviews with and/or presented scenarios to various opposition leaders, including leaders of the Water War, syndicates and the Mallku (leader of the Aymara). Email exchange with Fernando Calderón, March 2018.
51 Interview with Antonio Aranibar Arze, February 2018. Around this time, UNDP’s Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean also created the Democratic Dialogue regional project aimed at providing technical support and facilitation services to multi-stakeholder dialogue processes in the region. Email exchange with Gastón Aín Bilbao, March 2017.
53 Interview with Fernando Calderón, March 2018.
56 Interview with Fernando Calderón, March 2018.
57 Ibid. (Citation applies to whole paragraph and prior block quote.)
58 Interview with Antonio Aranibar Arze, February 2018.
Delphi surveys are closed-ended surveys that can be quickly carried out via email correspondence with senior officials (PAPEP surveys often asked how likely the respondent considered a particular event was to happen). Though the survey sample is too small to be statistically significant, Delphi surveys proved “qualitatively important because they allow for identifying consensus among leaders of opinion on the likeliness or not of possible future developments.” “The PAPEP Experience: Strengthening Political Capacities for Development.” UNDP- PAPEP. October 2011, p.23.

PAPEP had two overarching objectives: first, to strengthen strategic actors’ abilities to confront governance challenges and make decisions that contribute to prevention; and second, to strengthen RC/RR’s capacities for prospective political analysis to support conflict-sensitive planning and programming. “Report on the Evaluation of the Regional Political Analysis and Prospective Scenarios Project (PAPEP).” 2012, p.16.

Ibid. p.28.


For instance, the network included: Juan Gabriel Valdés (former Chilean Foreign Minister); Marco Aurelio García, advisor to then-Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva; Ana María Romero de Campero, President of the Senate and Human Rights Ombudswoman of Bolivia; and Carlos Álvarez, a former Vice-President of Argentina. Ex-President of Brazil Fernando Henrique Cardoso also contributed to various PAPEP initiatives. See: “Una Brújula para la Democracia.” PAPEP. March 2008, www.democraticdialoguenetwork.org/app/documents/view/es/2084/235.


Interview with George Gray Molina, October 2017.

Interview with Fernando Calderón, March 2018.

“It was not how we imagined it.” 2011, p.14.

Segura, R and Bellamy, C. 2009, p.5.

Interview with George Gray Molina, October 2017.

Interviews with Carlos Vergara (October 2017), George Gray Molina (October 2017) and Antonio Aranibar Arze (February 2018). Also see “UN envoy holds ‘positive’ meeting with new Bolivian President.” UN News Service. 14 June 2005, reliefweb.int/report/bolivia/un-ensayo-holds-positive-meeting-new-bolivian-president.


Compounding the political shifts, strong political backing for the Morales government from Brazil (Lula), Argentina (Kirchner) and Venezuela (Chavez) dramatically reconfigured the country’s political alliances. Email exchange with Antonio Aranibar Arze, March 2018.

“It was not how we imagined it.” 2011, p.14., and email exchange with UN official, April 2018.


Ibid.

“It was not how we imagined it.” 2011, p.14.


“It was not how we imagined it.” 2011, p.17.


Interview with Santiago Daroca, February 2018.

The UNCT also received funds from the MDG fund for windows focused on gender, infant nutrition, and development and the private sector. In total, the UNCT received around US$28 million from the MDG Fund. “Bolivia.” Fondo Para El Logro De Los ODM. April 2013, www.mdgfund.org/sites/default/files/Bolivia%20Joint%20Programmes%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf.

UNDP more broadly, UNHCR, UNICEF, UN Women and UNODC also benefited from the funds allocated to the peace window. Ibid.

“Una carta de navegación para PAPEP.” Internal UN document.

“It was not how we imagined it.” 2011, p.30.

Interview with Carlos Vergara, October 2017.

Interview with Yoriko Yasukawa, November 2017.


Interview with Carlos Vergara, October 2017.
92 Interview with George Gray Molina, October 2017.
93 Ibid. As Gray Molina explained: “We used [our] data in combination with the soft power of the UN... we had UN values, so the data was seen as objective and we were using it to push toward something better than a slide into violence and conflict.”
94 PAPEP, inter alia, articulated a roadmap toward ratifying a new constitution and addressing regional autonomies through referenda; undertook public opinion polls on key public policy issues; produced regular political reports based on primary and secondary data and interviews; and created informal spaces for dialogue among national actors. “Report on the Evaluation of the Regional Political Analysis and Prospective Scenarios Project (PAPEP).” 2012, p.48.
95 Ibid. p.48.
96 Interview with Yoriko Yasukawa, November 2017.
100 These included the autonomy referenda in May-June 2008 (which the CNE rejected); the recall referendum of 2008; and the referendum to approve the new Constitution, which was ultimately accomplished in January 2009. “It was not how we imagined it.” 2011, p.31.
101 Specifically, PAPEP provided the President of the CNE, Exeni, with: “(i) Strategic political advice; (ii) regular institutional and political scenarios; (iii) Legal and technical assistance to back the NEC’s plenary sessions’ resolutions’ elaboration; and (iv) institutional advocacy with political and social actors.” “Report on the Evaluation of the Regional Political Analysis and Prospective Scenarios Project (PAPEP).” 2012, p.48.
102 Interview with Armando Ortuño, November 2017.
103 Ibid.
105 “It was not how we imagined it.” 2011, p.23.
106 Aín Bilbao, G. 2012, pp. 99-107. Further, the government supported a UNASUR-created commission to investigate the Pando massacre.
107 “It was not how we imagined it.” 2011, p.11.
108 Initially, the government’s invitation to the UN mentioned only an “inauguration to the dialogue.” Hence, the RC and Ortuño thought they would go to Cochabamba briefly, and then return to La Paz and think through how the UN could best support the dialogue. The RC began discussing with DPA the possibility of sending a high-level mediator from headquarters. However, there turned out to be no time to wait for headquarters to dispatch an envoy, as the dialogue started immediately upon their arrival in Cochabamba, and Yasukawa and Ortuño had to decide on the spot to stay and observe on behalf of the UN. Interview with Yoriko Yasukawa, November 2017.
109 Interview with Yoriko Yasukawa, November 2017.
110 “It was not how we imagined it.” 2011, p.27. According to Gastón Aín Bilbao, “Before, during and after the negotiations, the representative of UNASUR [Valdés] exercised good offices between [the opposition and the government], suggesting and thinking of possible solutions to issues that made it difficult to overcome the crisis.” Aín Bilbao, G. 2012, pp. 100-107. Further, the government supported a UNASUR-created commission to investigate the Pando massacre.
112 Interview with Armando Ortuño, November 2017.
113 Interview with Ruben Costas conducted by Robert Brockmann, UNIC La Paz, 2009; transcript courtesy of UNIC La Paz.
114 As Carlos Romero said, due to the complexity of the Congress phase, “it was perhaps no longer enough [for the observers] to just witness the dialogue... they assumed some role as dialogue managers... to find alternatives that unlocked polarizing issues... [they] gave tranquility to the political scene, they pacified the country, and they managed to make viable the Referendum for the Political Constitution of the State.” Interview with Carlos Romero conducted by Robert Brockmann, UNIC La Paz, 2009; transcript courtesy of UNIC La Paz.
115 The RC also worked closely with UNIC to manage and distribute her office’s public communications in support of peace, and with OHCHR in later years on some human rights issues. Interviews with Yoriko Yasukawa and Robert Brockmann, November 2017.
116 Interview with Carlos Vergara, October 2017. RC Yasukawa concurred, saying she would not have wanted any international PDA in place of Ortuño as her political advisor. Interview with Yoriko Yasukawa, November 2017.
117 “It was not how we imagined it.” 2011, p.23. As the RC recalled, “It was a kind of cheerleading, moral support that was
important. It was about being by the side of national actors through difficult endeavors, and simply saying you’re not alone.” Interview with Yoriko Yasukawa, November 2017.

118 As Ortuño explained: “Usually, mediators try to get the actors to enter into their logic, but this is less likely to work when the actors are less formalized, more disorganized and more polarized. Classic mediation mechanisms fail [in these contexts] because the actors don’t accept order; they work within the chaos. We learned in the dialogue that we couldn’t impose practices of negotiation or mediation on the actors; instead we had to accompany the dialogue even if it wasn’t always coherent.” Interview with Armando Ortuño, November 2017. Yasukawa concurred: “It was a situation that was super chaotic, disorganized, incomprehensible at times but one in which if you go, you have to adjust to that chaos and improvisation… improvisation is part of how people work and it does not work that we as foreigners come and say but, what is this disorder, here there needs to be order and methodology.” Interview with Yoriko Yasukawa conducted by Robert Brockmann, UNIC La Paz, 2009; transcript courtesy of UNIC La Paz.

119 Interview with Armando Ortuño, November 2017.

120 “It was not how we imagined it.” 2011, pp. 32-33.

121 The RC likened this continual accompaniment to the way “friends are there for one another in times of difficulty.” Interview with Yoriko Yasukawa, November 2017.

122 They withdrew in protest of the arrest of a citizen in Tarija. Interview with Armando Ortuño conducted by Robert Brockmann, UNIC La Paz, 2009; transcript courtesy of UNIC La Paz.

123 Interview with Yoriko Yasukawa, November 2017.

124 In August 2008, polls showed that 83% of the population across Bolivia’s diverse regions wanted non-violent solutions approaches to change in the country. In September, 92% of respondents were demanding that the dialogue continue. It was not how we imagined it, 29. For additional poll results, see “Del Conflicto al Acuerdo: Los Bolivianos Frente a la Crisis.” 2009.

125 As explained in the report of the High Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations: “Impartiality must mean adherence to the principles of the Charter and to the objectives of a mission mandate that is rooted in Charter principles. On the ground, the impartiality of the United Nations missions should be judged by its determination to respond even-handedly to the actions of different parties based not on who has acted but the nature of their actions.” Although this refers to UN peace operations, Yasukawa noted it should also apply to UNCTs. Yasukawa email exchange, March 2018.

126 Interview with Gastón Aín Bilbao, November 2017.

127 Interview with Yoriko Yasukawa, November 2017.

128 For instance, George Gray Molina is now the Chief Economist in UNDP’s Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean; Antonio Aranibar is now the Head of the UN Mission in Medellin; Armando Ortuño is now senior political advisor to several UNDP offices in Latin America; Santiago Daroca is now a Peace and Development Advisor (PDA) in Guatemala. International staff who worked with the HDR and PAPEP teams in Bolivia, too, moved on to senior prevention functions at the UN; for instance, Marc Andre Franché is now the head of the UN Peacebuilding Fund.

129 Internal UN documents, 2017.

130 Internal UN document, 2017.

131 Interview with Yoriko Yasukawa, November 2017.


134 Interview with Yoriko Yasukawa, November 2017.

135 Interview with Nigel Baker, January 2018.

136 Interview with Yoriko Yasukawa, November 2017.

137 In 2009, Yasukawa said: “My instinct was in this moment was to say no, I think no, because though we may only be signing as witnesses, what the public will see is us only with the government side signing something, and this would be fatal… imagine the message this would send to society.” Interview with Yoriko Yasukawa conducted by Robert Brockmann, UNIC La Paz, 2009; transcript courtesy of UNIC La Paz.

138 “It was not how we imagined it.” 2011, p.33. For an overview of these statements, see p.34 of the same document.

139 Interview with Carlos Vergara, October 2017.


141 Interview with Yoriko Yasukawa, November 2017.

142 Internal UN document, 2017.

143 Internal UN document, 2017.

144 Interview with Yoriko Yasukawa, November 2017.

145 Interview with Armando Ortuño, November 2017.

146 “It was not how we imagined it.” 2011, p.26.

147 Interview with Yoriko Yasukawa, November 2017.

148 Other conditions that helped ensure the dialogue’s success included: restricting participation to a small number of participants; the absence of the media; the establishment of technical committees to harmonize the draft constitution
with autonomy statutes; and the strong public demand for dialogue in the aftermath of the Pando massacre. “It was not how we imagined it.” p.11.

149 Interview with Carlos Romero conducted by Robert Brockmann, UNIC La Paz, 2009; transcript courtesy of UNIC La Paz.
150 Interview with Ruben Costas conducted by Robert Brockmann, UNIC La Paz, 2009; transcript courtesy of UNIC La Paz.
151 Ibid.

152 According to Costas, RC Yasukawa played a “fundamental” role in the dialogue: “With her prudence, with her, so to say, sweetness (dulzura), she makes one feel confident and enables one to say what he feels and believes. And surely she played a very determinant role, very important. Of course, the government did not want facilitators, nor observers, nor did they ever accept it. But at the end and of the day, [the observers] transformed into facilitators and witnesses, even though the government did not want to see this situation.” Senator Pinto similarly praised Yasukawa’s role personally, saying “I always highlight the presence of Yoriko and that deep look of hers, and [her] concern that an agreement and consensus would be reached.” Opposition senator Tito Hoz de Vila said: “very few times have we had people like Yoriko [as RC/UNDP RR] the definitive role[s were those] of the two EU ambassadors, of Yoriko, and Raul Lagos.” Interviews with Roger Pinto, Ruben Costas, and Tito Hoz de Vila, conducted by Robert Brockmann, UNIC La Paz, 2009; transcript courtesy of UNIC La Paz.

153 Interview with Carlos Romero conducted by Robert Brockmann, UNIC La Paz, 2009; transcript courtesy of UNIC La Paz.
154 Bohrt explained that because he had already adopted a pro-dialogue position, the publication of the polls only helped to reinforce his existing position; however, he did feel that the publication of the polls influenced key actors within PODEMOS. He added that the polls probably influenced government actors to continue the dialogue. PODEMOS Senator Pinto said the polls represented “a cry of the whole society, and indicated that he felt the polls must have impacted the government, as “if seven people in a poll tell them there needs to be dialogue, the government cannot ignore it.” Interviews with Alejandro Colanzi, Carlos Bohrt, and Roger Pinto, conducted by Robert Brockmann, UNIC La Paz, 2009; transcript courtesy of UNIC La Paz.

155 Interview with Carlos Romero conducted by Robert Brockmann, UNIC La Paz, 2009; transcript courtesy of UNIC La Paz.
158 “It was not how we imagined it.” 2011, p.32.

160 For instance, the RC publicly deplored the (government’s) break up of a peaceful march against a proposed highway that would run through territory mostly inhabited by indigenous groups, and against the alarming number of judicial cases against opposition politicians. See: “Violenta represión de gobierno boliviano contra marcha indígena.” El Universo. 25 September 2011, www.eluniverso.com/2011/09/25/1/1361/violenta-represion-gobierno-boliviano-contra-marcha-indigena.html.; The UN in Bolivia also put out several press statements expressing concern about government actions deemed repressive or undemocratic, including the alarming number of judicial cases against opposition politicians. See: “Naciones Unidas Manifiesta Su Preocupación Por Los Conflictos Sociales Y Los Procesos Judiciales a Personalidades De La Oposición.” ONU Bolivia. www.nu.org.bo/noticias/comunicados-de-prensa/naciones-unidas-manifiesta-su-preocupacion-por-los-conflictos-sociales/.
162 Email exchange with Yoriko Yasukawa, March 2018.
163 For instance, the RC supported dialogue between two departments engulfed in a border dispute, as well as a dispute between the government and indigenous groups regarding the right to consultation. Yoriko interview.
164 Interview with Armando Ortuño, November 2017. For instance, UNDP, drawing on the input of various UNCT members, supported a mixed commission of senators and deputies in drafting a framework law for autonomy, thereby helping to address one of the most contentious issues of the preceding decade. Interview with Santiago Daroca, February 2018.
165 “It was not how we imagined it.” 2011.
166 For instance, UNDP, drawing on the input of various UNCT members, supported a mixed commission of senators and deputies in drafting a framework law for autonomy, thereby helping to address one of the most contentious issues of the preceding decade. Interview with Santiago Daroca, February 2018.
168 To determine impact, the evaluation assessed perceptions about PAPEP’s impact, measured political change against a theory of change, and analyzed the quality of PAPEP’s tools for influencing decision-making and strengthening capacities internally (within the UN) and externally (among national actors). The evaluation found: “In Bolivia, 72% of
respondents believed that PAPEP’s impact has been highly positive and almost decisive both internally and externally, and that PAPEP has contributed to avoiding a major nation-wide confrontation of 2009.” “Report on the Evaluation of the Regional Political Analysis and Prospective Scenarios Project (PAPEP).” 2012, pp.5-7.

169 See the evaluation for a list of “minimum but not sufficient” conditions for PAPEP to function successfully. Ibid. p.77-78.

170 Ibid. p.67.

171 The evaluation notes that the Honduras case demonstrates how “the famed neutrality” of UNDP can result in inaction and an obstacle to political impact. Ibid. p.10.


174 Ibid.

175 Email exchange with Gastón Aín Bilbao, March 2018.


177 Aín Bilbao, G. 2012.

178 Yasukawa argued that leveraging the weight of the ‘moral voice’ of the UN to remind national actors of the greater good and the need to avert violence “does have impact on moderating the actions of political actors, or at least getting them to think about [their actions] a little more… and even if it doesn’t I still see it as something the UN must try.” Email exchange with Yoriko Yasukawa, March 2018.


180 This lesson is adapted from a lesson in: Weeks, J and García, O. 2003, p.46.

181 “It was not how we imagined it.” 2011, pp.20-21. Carlos Romero, who participated in the joint analysis of contentious issues in the fBDM dialogues, said: “One of the lessons that we got from this dialogue process is that a dialogue must first be cascaded; that is to say, we built some technical devices that were key to propel the dialogue in the first moment, and in the second moment we took the dialogue with the prefects, and in the third moment with the National Congress.” Interview with Carlos Romero conducted by Robert Brockmann, UNIC La Paz, 2009; transcript courtesy of UNIC La Paz.

182 Interview with Antonio Aranibar Arze, February 2018.

183 As Ortuño said, “the experience of Bolivia shows that delinking the RC from UNDP could create complications for the RC’s role in conflict prevention – perhaps Yoriko wouldn’t have had such support from PAPEP and UNDP’s Constituent Assembly project if there hadn’t been an institutional link.” Interview with Armando Ortuño, November 2017.

184 “It was not how we imagined it.” 2011, p.37.


186 “It was not how we imagined it.” 2011, v.; Email exchange with Gastón Aín Bilbao, March 2018.

Colombia 2012-16

Cale Salih*
Introduction

In 2016, the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army (FARC-EP), negotiated a peace deal that marked an end to a half-century of conflict. The peace deal was a result of four years of intensive talks in Havana, Cuba, where the two sides negotiated agreements on an agenda. Following several rounds of failed negotiations in prior decades, as well as unsuccessful attempts at solving the conflict militarily, the peace deal marked a major milestone in Colombia’s history and has – despite ongoing implementation challenges – been widely hailed as a (relative) peacebuilding success story.

The negotiations constituted direct talks between the national actors, with no third-party mediator and limited international involvement. The UN had no permanent seat in the room, yet it managed to play a secondary role, largely from the sidelines, in support of the peace process. Strong UN Resident Coordinator (RC) leadership and a significant UN Country Team (UNCT) field presence in Colombia, where over 2,000 overwhelmingly national UN staff work, enabled the UN to meaningfully support nationally-led prevention efforts. The aim of this case study is to draw lessons learned from the UN’s experience in Colombia in the lead-up to and during the peace process, to offer guidance to RCs and UNCTs in other transitional contexts regarding how to support nationally-led prevention efforts.

The case study first provides context on the causes and consequences of Colombia’s conflict with the FARC-EP, as well as the 2012-16 peace process. It then analyses the historical role of the UN in the country, and the reasons for Colombia’s sometimes ambivalent relationship with the world body. Against this backdrop, it lays out the strategy and vision of RC Fabrizio Hochschild (who was RC in Colombia from 2013-16), focusing on how he oriented the UNCT toward supporting the peace process, established entry points with national actors for a more substantial UN role, and mobilised resources and capacities for prevention. The case study then zooms in on a select number of RC-led, interagency prevention-oriented initiatives, aiming to understand the entry points, substance and impact of each. Finally, the case study ends with lessons learned from Colombia regarding how RCs and UNCTs can contribute to nationally-led prevention efforts in transitional contexts.

1. Country Context

History and causes of the conflict

For decades, the conflict with the FARC-EP has been one important piece of a larger picture of interconnected political and criminal violence afflicting Colombia and causing humanitarian problems. The causes of these forms of violence are varied, though a prominent factor that contributes to the conflict with the FARC-EP is the uneven presence of state institutions, particularly in the peripheries where many marginalised groups live. In these territories, a confluence of political and criminal violence has emerged, with the state confronting – and sometimes having colluded with – a range of conflict actors.

Historically in Colombia, land ownership has been concentrated in the hands of a few, with marginalised groups being pushed toward the unclaimed peripheries beyond the full reach of state institutions and the formal economy.7 During a decade-long conflict (1948-58) between the dominant political parties – Liberal and Conservative – known as La Violencia, rural Liberal and Communist groups mobilised campesino self-defence guerrilla groups, which the Conservatives fought with hired assassins and counter-guerrilla forces.7 A coup in 1953 brought to power General Rojas Pinilla, Colombia’s commander-in-chief, whose anti-Communist position escalated the conflict with the guerrillas.8 The Liberal and Conservative parties cooperated to overthrow the Pinilla regime in 1957 and backed the installation of a military junta in its place. Soon thereafter, the Liberal and Conservative parties formed the National Front, agreeing to a shared monopoly of power, thereby closing the space for other social and political movements.9

The National Front’s limited progress on agrarian reform converged with the radicalisation of university students in the 1960s, giving rise in 1964 to the Cuban-inspired National Liberation Army (ELN).6 In 1966, Communist Party-influenced campesino self-defence groups remade themselves into the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC, later renamed FARC-EP for Ejército del Pueblo, or People’s Army). Other guerrilla groups cropped up, and throughout the 1970s began employing extortion and kidnapping methods to finance their activities. In the 1980s, a paramilitary-led “dirty war” against the FARC-EP’s political arm, the Patriotic Union (UP),7 poisoned prospects for a peace deal that would transform the guerrilla group into an unarmed political party.10 Throughout this period and continuing into the 1990s, right-wing paramilitary groups proliferated, acting as defensive forces for landowners, especially cattle ranchers, to fight guerrilla groups and counter land reform efforts.9

Drug trafficking also increased toward the end of the 1970s, with the peripheries beyond the reach of state control providing ideal conditions for illicit crops.10 By the early 1980s, big drug cartels had emerged, dominating criminal markets and representing the main source of insecurity in Colombia.11 Paramilitary groups engaged in drug trafficking and illicit mining.12 In many cases, they also provided private security for drug cartels.13 By the 1990s, taxing, producing and trafficking coca had also become a source of revenue for the FARC-EP, helping sustain its conflict with the state.14 Organised crime also corrupted the state itself: in 1995, for instance, the country’s president was accused of having accepted campaign contributions from the Cali cartel.15

The state, with US military support, fought powerful drug cartels throughout the 1990s, eventually dismantling the
national structures of those in Medellín and Cali. Rather than disappearing, however, these cartels crumbled into localised "mini-cartels" across the country. Bogotá and Washington stepped up their collaboration in 2000 with the launch of Plan Colombia, a controversial, military-heavy counter-narcotics initiative that in practice spilled over into counter-insurgency. Plan Colombia targeted coca cultivation while attempting to extend state authority to areas under FARC-EP control.

The Pastrana government's (1998-2002) attempted peace negotiations with the FARC-EP in a demilitarised zone known as El Caguán. These talks failed spectacularly, ending after the FARC-EP hijacked a plane to abduct a Senator and the government, with US support, bombed guerrilla enclaves in response. The collapse of the process – which was mainly due to a lack of sufficient political will on either side to reach a compromise agreement - provoked rising public support for a hardline military approach, which was at the centre of right-wing Alvaro Uribe's presidential campaign. Uribe, who was elected President in 2002, launched an aggressive counterinsurgency campaign against the FARC-EP, leveraging a Colombian military significantly strengthened by Plan Colombia. Meanwhile, he pursued negotiations with paramilitary groups, leading to the demobilisation of members of the umbrella United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC). However, from 2003-12, an estimated 20% of AUC members remade themselves into smaller criminal outfits.

The legacy of uneven state presence across Colombia’s territory, as well as the confluence of politics and criminality has persisted, with many rural areas still marked by absent, low or corrupted state capacity. In these parts of the country, the state lacks a monopoly on the use of force, service delivery and tax collection. Small criminal groups have collaborated with larger criminal organisations and armed groups such as the FARC-EP and ELN, further blurring the lines between criminal and political violence in Colombia. In some areas, paramilitary successor groups continue to commit violence against land restitution activists. As UNU-CPR has written, "most aspects of daily life in these areas have been governed by armed and criminal groups that have either filled the vacuum left by the absence of the state or replaced or supplanted the state."

The 2012-16 peace talks

After a half-century of conflict and several unsuccessful negotiation attempts, in 2012 the government and the FARC-EP embarked on a formal peace process with relatively promising conditions. Colombia’s new president, Juan Manuel Santos, was more supportive of peace talks than his predecessor, Uribe. The FARC-EP, militarily weakened and pushed largely back to the peripheries by counterinsurgency operations during the Uribe years, appeared to recognise that continued conflict would “permit[t] survival but little else.” Direct talks between the government and FARC-EP began in Havana, with Cuba and Norway serving as guarantor countries and Venezuela and Chile as accompanying states, on an agenda to address: integrated agricultural development; political participation; end of the conflict; solution to the problem of illicit drugs; victims; and implementation, verification and ratification. Early progress was made on integrated agrarian development, illicit drugs, and political participation, and the parties agreed in 2014 on principles for the discussion of the agenda item on victims. After two years of steady progress, the FARC-EP declared a unilateral ceasefire in December 2014.

However, challenges remained. The talks took place in the absence of a bilateral ceasefire, a decision that was made to allow the government to continue putting military pressure on the FARC-EP, preventing it from using peace negotiations to win time or strengthen its military capacity (as had happened in El Caguán). Widespread public scepticism that the FARC-EP would actually disarm, and forceful political opposition to the talks meant that the parties were under pressure to avoid breakdowns that would embolden political detractors. Yet, questions of transitional justice and the need to provide the FARC-EP with robust security guarantees to disarm proved particularly difficult sticking points. Lack of clarity around whether the ELN would enter formal peace talks threatened to complicate the implementation of a possible peace accord with the FARC-EP in regions facing ongoing ELN-related violence.

In 2015, the FARC-EP’s unilateral ceasefire broke down following an airstrike by the Armed Forces, provoking an escalation in violence that threatened the process and strengthened its detractors. This crisis, however, “injected new urgency to do whatever it took to protect a project neither side could afford to let fail.” The parties returned to the negotiation table within days, and soon thereafter reached an agreement on the establishment of a truth commission, helping put the process back on track. Shaken but standing, the process went on to resolve the most contentious issues on the agenda, including transitional justice, the terms of a ceasefire, and security guarantees for disarmament, reaching a final accord in Summer 2016. The two sides also agreed that a civilian-led UN mission would, as part of a tripartite mechanism involving the government and the FARC-EP, monitor and verify the FARC-EP’s disarmament, the ceasefire and cessation of hostilities. Though the peace deal was defeated in a 2016 referendum, Congress ratified a revised accord soon thereafter and the parties proceeded to the implementation phase.

2. Historical role and perception of the UN in Colombia

Colombia’s relationship with the UN has at times been ambivalent. On the positive side, due to the humanitarian, peacebuilding and development needs generated by decades of conflict, the UN Country Team (UNCT) there has grown into the largest UN development presence in Latin America. As of 2015, 24 agencies, funds and programs operated in the
country, relying on over 2,200 people in 46 cities and 138 field offices in 102 municipalities. The bulk of the UNCT’s funding comes from the Colombian government, and about 95% of UNCT staff in the country are Colombian nationals. Some Country Team members, namely UNDP, OHCHR, and humanitarian agencies have long worked on conflict-related issues in historically-neglected areas most affected by the conflict. This work has generated strong relationships in those areas between the UNCT and civil society, including victims’ groups.

The UNCT’s presence in these territories has enabled it to develop a deep understanding of the causes of the conflict. Two landmark Human Development Reports (HDR) reflect this understanding: one in 2003 that identified inequality and exclusion as root causes of conflict, and another in 2011 that analysed rural-urban disparities. Both of these texts shaped the national debate about peace and continue to be basic reference texts for peacemakers in Colombia, including UN Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAF), Common Country Assessments (CCA), and UNCT programming.

Most notably, UNDP undertook significant local-level peacebuilding work through its Programme on Reconciliation and Development (REDES) program, which built off the 2003 HDR's recommendations. The program, which started in 2004, focused on historically marginalised communities, including women, youth, Afro-Colombians, campesinos, and indigenous people in territories most affected by the conflict. REDES and other UN programmes in these zones were based on the premise that peace can be built locally even amidst ongoing conflict if efforts are made to address multifaceted root causes of the conflict. This approach had some shortcomings, namely with respect to the challenge of linking up disparate local-level efforts to have a cumulative effect on peacebuilding at the national level. However, it helped the UN establish key relationships with civil society, mayors and governors, and develop expertise on prevention-related issues at the regional and local levels. This constituted crucial groundwork for future prevention efforts.

Another key UN-supported forum during the Uribe years (2002-10) was the so-called “London-Cartagena Process,” a framework for dialogue and cooperation among the Colombian government, civil society and the international community. Coordinated by the UN Resident Coordinator (RC), at the time Bruno Moro, this framework offered the UN a role in facilitating interactions between the government, civil society, and the international community around humanitarian and human rights issues. This was a valuable platform during a period the Uribe administration when, as discussed below, there was very little political space in Colombia to discuss the conflict.

On the negative side, the UN has at times been perceived warily as an international actor with an outsized role in a relatively strong and democratic state such as Colombia. Sensitivities about a UN role in peacebuilding in particular date back to the failed peace talks with the FARC-EP in El Caguán in the early 2000s. A UN envoy (James LeMoyne) was sent to provide good offices to the process; by the time he arrived, however, the process was already collapsing. Through his sometimes-flashy efforts to revive an already “moribund process,” he came to be seen by many Colombians as having overstepped his role, inserting himself centre-stage as the process was entering the brink of collapse. Although, as described above, the Caguán process collapsed mainly due to insufficient political will on the part of the negotiating parties (rather than the UN’s intervention), the legacy of El Caguán “set a negative precedent regarding the role of international actors in peace processes in Colombia.” After this episode, an unwritten rule prohibiting the UN from engaging non-state armed groups emerged, preventing the UN from facilitating dialogue or even interacting with the FARC-EP. (This “rule” was loosened during the 2012-16 peace talks, when, as discussed below, the RC and others began traveling to Havana, and was made moot by the arrival of the Security Council-mandated UN Verification Mission in 2016.)

After El Caguán, the hardline security policies of President Uribe, elected in 2002, narrowed the space for UN engagement in peacebuilding even further. The Uribe administration did not acknowledge the existence of an armed conflict, addressing the violence instead in terms of “narcoterrorism.” During these years, the RC and UNCT often had to dance around the vocabulary of “conflict,” and design politically-oriented programming aimed at creating the conditions for a peace process, “disguised through the flexibility of [their] mandates.” Indeed, UNDP’s focus on local-level peacebuilding emerged in part by default, given that the UN had little space to work on conflict-related issues at the national level. Since the Uribe years, lingering perceptions that the UN lacks neutrality and/or infringes on sovereignty have reinforced hesitation or outright opposition among some national actors regarding a UN role in peacebuilding. The government, and in particular the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has conveyed discomfort at times with the pronounced UN peacebuilding, human rights and humanitarian presence in the country. As the government considered inviting the Security Council to deploy a cease-fire monitoring mission, it weighed concerns about Colombia being compared with “failed states” prominent on the Council’s agenda. Further, the UN has been perceived by many in Colombia as a left-leaning organisation, and some sectors in the armed forces have considered it as being close to the positions of the FARC-EP. OHCHR’s criticism of Colombia’s human rights record, especially regarding army and paramilitary abuses such as “false positives,” has long been a thorn in the relationship. At the start of the peace process, the FARC-EP was also deeply sceptical of the UN, seeing it as partial to the government and the US. Its view had been coloured by UNODC’s significant role in illicit crop substitution, which had threatened an important part of the FARC-EP’s support base, the coca growers.
3. RC-led Strategy for a UNCT Role in Support of the Peace Process

At the start of the peace process in 2012, partly in an effort to avoid controversy similar to that caused by UN involvement in the Caguán process, President Santos minimised the role of international actors in the Havana talks, shunning the possibility of an external mediator and emphasising instead a “Colombian process for Colombians” (though, as noted above, four states played accompanying and guarantor roles). Further, in order to ensure the confidentiality of the talks, the government restricted public participation, leaving little room for civil society - the UNCT’s main national partners besides the government.

Without a seat in the room, it was not apparent at the outset what role, if any, the RC and UNCT would play in the process. The first opportunity for a role emerged from a discreet conversation between the Head of UNDP’s Peace Area (Alessandro Preti), the PDA embedded in the RC’s office (then Denise Cook) and a member of Colombia’s Congressional Peace Commission (Congressman Ivan Cepeda). The latter conveyed a proposal for the UN to help Congress channel public participation in the peace process. The UN staffers considered this a positive role for the UN to play, and it was later green-lighted by RC Moro. These early conversations led to UNDP-organised regional tables on peace process agenda items, which in turn prompted the first formal request from the negotiating parties for UN support to the peace process by facilitating public participation (see Public Forums section below).

Fabrizio Hochschild, who has a strong background in peacebuilding and humanitarian affairs in diverse conflict-affected countries, took up the post of RC in Colombia in 2013. He arrived with an “almost peacekeeping mentality,” expecting the UNCT to kick into high gear to support and prioritise the peace process and a possible post-accord scenario. His strategy for UNCT engagement was premised on the idea that the peace process presented a unique window of opportunity to address historical inequalities and structural factors that give rise to conflict recurrence at the national and local levels. As one UN official put it, “the peace process became the [UNCT’s] strategy.” To achieve his vision, RC Hochschild sought, inter alia, to build relationships that would create new entry points for a more substantial UN role in support of the process; to orient the UNCT toward prioritising the peace process; to prompt early planning both within the state and the UNCT for a post-conflict scenario; and to raise new resources and build new analytical capacities for the Office of the RC (RCO) and the UNCT more broadly.

Relationship building and entry points

When RC Hochschild arrived in Colombia in 2013, his predecessor (Moro), the PDA and UNDP had already carved out the first entry point for the UNCT with the regional tables and public forums on peace process agenda items. Yet, many within the Colombian state still preferred to keep the UN at bay. RC Hochschild tried to overcome such resistance by demonstrating that the UN could support government priorities around the peace process in a low-key manner, “without seeking protagonismo for protagonismo’s sake.”

RC Hochschild leveraged his pre-existing relationships in Colombia, most importantly with the High Commissioner for Peace Sergio Jaramillo, who he had known for years and who was seen as representing a part of the government that harboured a “secret sympathy for the UN.” Often with the support of Jaramillo, RC Hochschild quickly set about establishing new relationships at the highest levels of government, including with President Santos, who is said to have valued his judgment. The RC’s background in peace operations proved useful in cultivating these high-level relationships, as it enabled him to advise the government on the UN’s potential role in supporting the implementation of a peace agreement and to facilitate its dialogue about a verification mission with relevant UN headquarters departments. Further, the RC and his Office built close relationships in the diplomatic community, especially with Norway, which sat inside the Havana process; and with other national and international actors operating in the territories most affected by the conflict, including the Church, civil society and the ICRC.

However, the RC’s relationship with national actors who were more mistrusting of the UN remained difficult. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in particular continued to resist a pronounced UN role and was wary of the RC’s high profile in the country. Further, significant efforts by the RC and others in the UNCT to engage sceptics of the peace process – such as supporters of Uribe and some within the armed forces – fell short of shifting their positions (though to be fair, as one observer put it, “note even the Pope could move them”). However, many UN staff believe these efforts, which are ongoing by senior UN officials in the country, could prove useful in the long-run, especially given that presidential elections will take place in 2018.

Orienting the UNCT

RC Hochschild, recognising the UNCT’s expertise on the conflict, saw a need to shift the Team’s stance from one of dealing with the consequences of war to one of contributing to the peace process. In his view, the UNCT could leverage three main comparative advantages to reorient its work around the peace process: first, its resources, networks and logistical capacities across the country, combined with its reputation (at least in some segments of society) as a more or less neutral actor, which enabled the UNCT to convene, particularly in regions most affected by the conflict, diverse groups of people in a deeply polarised society; second, the UNCT’s reach into rural Colombia and access to government elites, which positioned it to facilitate dialogue between the peripheries and the capital; and third, its ability to tap into the UN’s global expertise on prevention, combined with its
understanding of on-the-ground realities in rural Colombia, which afforded it unique informational credibility and a strong basis on which to advocate for peace. The RC aimed to strengthen these comparative advantages further. For instance, he encouraged UNCT members, some of which already had a presence in the territories affected by the conflict, to shift an even greater share of their presence from departmental capitals into more rural and neglected parts of the country. He also pushed for more holistic and granular UNCT analysis at the local level (see Analytical capacities below). These and other efforts were in line with a “territorial” approach, a guiding principle in the UNDAF and CCA, as well as in the Colombian High Commissioner for Peace’s own vision for post-conflict peacebuilding. A “territorial approach,” thus, became a unifying theme between the government and the UN.

While parts of the UNCT were receptive to the RC’s push to prioritise the peace process, other parts that had been hesitant since the start to rally explicitly around the talks remained lukewarm. First, some humanitarian actors were concerned that an emphasis on reaching a “post-conflict” situation would risk underplaying persistent humanitarian needs arising from ongoing armed conflicts, such as with the ELN. Humanitarian actors were also concerned that the end of the FARC-EP conflict could generate new protection risks, as other armed groups could move in to fill the vacuum left by the FARC-EP. Thus, there was a tension between the RC’s two hats, as Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator: he needed to balance his efforts to focus the Team’s posture on the peace process with signals that he was mindful of ongoing humanitarian concerns related to and beyond the conflict with the FARC-EP. Second, there was some concern within the UNCT that explicitly supporting the Havana process would mean entering the political fray, given that the peace process had come to be seen as a political project of the Santos administration. Third, some within the UNCT who had been living and working amidst conflict conditions most of their lives felt the peace process was unlikely to succeed, and that by aligning itself too closely with it the UN could get burned.

RC Hochschild deployed a range of tools and incentives to bring the UNCT as a whole on board with a more robust interagency approach to supporting the peace process. Most importantly, he helped gather the UNCT around concrete joint initiatives – and new funding for those initiatives - in support of the peace process (see Resources below). Further, the RCO organised UNCT retreats in which agencies were asked how they were planning to reorient their programming to the peace process. It also organised a peacebuilding training session, facilitated by a Swiss research institute, for the UNCT. The PDA (at this point Jared Kotler) frequently convened meetings of the UNCT Peace Group, comprising key agencies working on conflict-related issues, in order to ensure regular exchange of information and analysis around the peace process. In a further effort to foster joint prevention programming on the ground, the RC supported the creation of inter-agency Local Coordination Teams (see below), and the establishment of “UN Houses” that co-located UNCT members in certain localities.

The RC also drew on his strong relationships in UN Headquarters (UNHQ), delivering messages from the Secretary-General and other key figures in New York to reiterate that the peace process was considered the chief priority in Colombia for the UN. It is important to note, however, that the RC’s relationships with parts of UNHQ were difficult, as some in New York saw him as being too forward-leaning (not waiting to coordinate with UNHQ) and/or playing too political a role for an RC in the public sphere.

Planning for the post-conflict

Drawing from his experience in other conflict situations, and the UN’s experience globally, Hochschild frequently stressed the importance of early planning for a possible post-accord scenario. Partly due to the parties’ decision to negotiate under the principle that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed, the government had done little early planning for implementation while the talks were still underway. In 2014, the RCO, with input from the UNCT Peace Group, drafted a strategic framework for the UN’s and international community’s contributions to the early implementation of the peace accord. The draft strategy emphasised the need for quick-impact projects in priority regions that would demonstrate early peace dividends in the first year after the accord. The RCO had two audiences in mind for the draft strategy: first, the government, to prompt early planning for post-accord stabilisation; and second, the UNCT, to foster collective thinking regarding how it could contribute to the post-conflict phase.

The RC presented the UN draft to the government, which cautioned that the UN should not get ahead of the government’s own articulation of a post-conflict aid framework, and then immediately began working on its own post-conflict strategy. The RC, rather than insisting on the UN draft, welcomed this decision and dropped the UN draft, and then began supporting the new and understaffed Ministry for Post Conflict, which took the lead on developing the government’s Rapid Response strategy. For instance, the RCO seconded a consultant who had worked on the UN draft to the Ministry.

Further, the RC, drawing on his background in peace operations, helped pave the way for the UN Political Mission that the parties eventually agreed to in 2016. Between 2013-15, the RC and PDA helped facilitate discussions between the Colombian government and UN Secretariat regarding possible modalities of such a mission. The RC and PDA also supported the work of Jean Arnault, who in 2015 was appointed, at the request of the negotiating parties, as the Secretary-General’s delegate to the sub-commission on disarmament.
4. RC Resources and Analytical Capacities

Resources

Hochschild helped raise new resources to enable a larger UNCT role in supporting the peace talks and early planning for the post-conflict. One of the first things he did in Colombia was 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.

Hochschild also led fundraising efforts for new inter-agency initiatives in support of the peace process. For instance, the UN Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) provided USD2 million in funds to an interagency communications campaign aimed at contributing to a culture of peace (see Respira Paz below).

The most significant contribution the RC made to resource mobilisation was the establishment of a UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) for Post-Conflict in 2016, which has since raised over USD83 million in support of stabilisation and peacebuilding in the post-accord phase. The Steering Committee of the multi-window Fund is co-chaired by the RC (now Martin Santiago Herrero) and the Colombian government’s High Commissioner for Post-Conflict, with significant donor participation. This arrangement has allowed for a high degree of national ownership and alignment with national priorities, but has also caused some questions regarding the identification of projects. During its first two years, the MPTF invested 65% of its resources in stabilisation and early peace dividends in the territories most affected by the conflict, with the remaining 35% in support of establishing new institutions created by the peace agreement. These include the Agency for Territorial Renovation, the Post-Conflict Office, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, the Truth Commission and the Unit for Disappeared Persons. However, during the initial phase, partners in the MPTF, including the UN, wanted to see further support to initiatives identified and implemented by local partners, in particular civil society organisations in conflict-affected territories – an objective that has been only partially achieved.

Analytical capacities

The UNCT’s large presence in the territories affected by the conflict provided the UN with a deep understanding of the causes and consequences of the conflict. Over time, OCHA built a strong information management system that drew on data collected by local humanitarian teams, which comprised both UN entities and international humanitarian NGOs across the country. The RCO frequently drew on OCHA’s information capacities, but lacked a system of its own that could incorporate data on peacebuilding and development, in addition to humanitarian trends. Starting in late 2014, with OCHA facing funding cuts and a phased draw-down of its operations, the RCO, OCHA and UNDP began developing plans to adapt OCHAs information management system to serve the entire UNCT, covering humanitarian, development and peacebuilding trends analysis. Local humanitarian teams were later refashioned into inter-agency Local Coordination Teams co-led by a humanitarian and development agency, thus generating interagency units at the local level capable of feeding information into the new system. The new information management unit, established in 2015 and called UMAIC, draws on information gathered by these Local Coordination Teams to respond to key UNCT needs.

The RC strategically used data from UMAIC, as well as other sources of analysis, to advocate for the peace process. For instance, after the FARC-EP lifted its unilateral ceasefire in 2015, the RC used humanitarian trends data showing that the original ceasefire had resulted in lower rates of attacks on civilians and internal displacement to advocate for a bilateral ceasefire and other confidence building measures. This was done through public advocacy, including press conferences and Op-eds, as well as closed-door diplomacy with key government counterparts, including the government’s negotiating team. Further, the RC promoted a 2014 joint study by UNDP and the Colombian research centre, CERAC, about the economic benefits of peace. The study demonstrated that conflict has cost Colombia an average of 4 percentage points per year in terms of gross domestic product. It is difficult to assess how much impact these efforts had on the national conversation, but it appears to have helped reinforce arguments made by national actors in favour of peace.

5. RC-led interventions and initiatives

During the case study period, UNCT members undertook a wide range of peacebuilding activities, from OHCHR’s work on human rights monitoring and helping state institutions, the private sector, and indigenous authorities to incorporate human rights standards, to UNDP’s support for urban-rural youth exchanges, management of hydrocarbon-related social conflicts, and transitional justice; to UNHCR’s work on internal displacement; to FAO’s support for land restitution processes, which sought to address a key root cause of the conflict. While many of these are important and worth studying, this section will focus on a select number of RC-led, inter-agency initiatives in support of nationally-led prevention efforts.

Public Forums

From 2012-13, and at the request of the Congressional Peace Commissions (House and Senate), the UN, led by UNDP, organised 18 regional tables (Mesas Regionales) in nine different regions of Colombia to discuss, gather and systematise proposals on peace process agenda items. In late 2012, following the conclusion of the regional tables on the first agenda item, the government and the FARC-EP, in joint communiqués, formally requested the UN and the
National University (NU) to co-organise major public forums (Foros) on peace process agenda items.\textsuperscript{110} The NU was seen as ideologically closer to the FARC-EP, and thus helped compensate for perceptions on the part of the FARC-EP of the UN as being closer to the government. The forums were largely funded by the government. Over 12,000 people took part in these platforms for citizen participation, which resulted in the co-organisers organising around 3,000 citizen proposals to the negotiating parties in Havana.\textsuperscript{111}

The most important and high-profile of the forums requested by the negotiating parties were those on Victims in 2014. These forums gathered victims of various actors in the armed conflict (e.g., FARC-EP, national security forces, paramilitaries, ELN) in Colombia and of various types of human rights violations (e.g., sexual violence, people whose relatives had been assassinated, kidnapping victims, forced displacement).\textsuperscript{112} Multiple UNCT members participated in the organisation of the forums, ensuring the participation of marginalised groups\textsuperscript{113} and women.\textsuperscript{114} Despite the organisers’ efforts to be inclusive, the victims’ forums did give rise to tensions among some who felt excluded, requiring RC Hochschild to personally intervene at times to defuse tensions.\textsuperscript{115}

It is difficult to measure the impact of the forums on the substance of the peace talks. According to experts Segura and Mechoulan, some government functionaries said the drafting commission would frequently review the proposals conveyed to the parties, while “others admitted to having mostly ignored these documents as time went by and the rhythm of the negotiations became more demanding.”\textsuperscript{116} Further, despite efforts on the part of the UN and NU to persuade those opposed to or sceptical of the peace process to attend, the Forums mainly mobilised sectors of society that already backed the peace process.\textsuperscript{117} What is more clear is that the regional tables and forums marked the first entry point for the UN to support the peace process. Through these early activities, the UN demonstrated to the negotiating parties its ability to quickly and effectively respond to requests and be trusted to support the process without overplaying its hand.\textsuperscript{118} The Forums also allowed the UNCT to come together and support concrete initiatives through a “whole-of-UNCT” approach, as most UNCT members supported the forums by providing staff and other resources.\textsuperscript{119} Thus, while there is insufficient evidence to conclude that the Public Forums influenced the substance of the peace talks, they do appear to have positioned the UN as a credible actor that could, at least from the side-lines, provide effective support for the peace process.

Victim’s delegations

The Public Forums, which represented the first time that victims participated, albeit indirectly, publicly and collectively in the peace process, warmed the negotiating parties up to the idea of direct participation of victims at the talks.\textsuperscript{120} Given the UN’s and NU’s roles in organising the Forums, the parties once again looked to them, along with the Episcopal Conference of the Catholic Church, which added moral legitimacy to the triumvirate, to organise five 12-person victims’ delegations to travel to the talks.\textsuperscript{121} These “Victims’ Delegations” proved to be a key innovation of the Colombian peace process, and arguably the most important – and complex - contribution of the RC and UNCT.

Selecting 60 delegates from a diverse universe of 7 million victims was bound to be a contentious process. The UN, as “a neutral broker that could take a lot of political fire”\textsuperscript{122} and an organisation with strong links to victims’ communities, was uniquely well-positioned to take on the challenging task.\textsuperscript{123} The negotiating parties set forth broad, and rather vague, selection criteria,\textsuperscript{124} which the RC and various UNCT members, along with the other two co-organisers, worked to interpret and apply.\textsuperscript{125} The final list included victims from various regional, socio-economic, and personal backgrounds;\textsuperscript{126} victims of assorted actors in the armed conflict, including paramilitaries, the state, the FARC-EP, the ELN and in many cases of multiple parties to the conflict; and victims of diverse types of violations.\textsuperscript{127} Despite painstaking efforts on the part of the organisers to explain the selection process and criteria,\textsuperscript{128} and to be as inclusive as possible, the exercise proved controversial, generating a great deal of scrutiny over how many victims from each “side” were chosen.\textsuperscript{129}

Despite the perhaps inevitable politicisation of the selection process, there is widespread agreement that the Victims’ Delegations were a crucial contribution to the peace process. According to Sergio Jaramillo, the Victims’ Delegations were “without question the most emotional moment of the whole peace process. They gave their views and testimony in what one might imagine a truth commission to look like, except they were talking to the two sides that were trying to end the conflict and that, in some cases, had serious responsibility for some of the things the victims were talking about.”\textsuperscript{130} RC Hochschild, for his part, explained that the Victim’s Delegations gave substance to the frequent refrain by the negotiating parties that victims were “at the centre of the peace process.”\textsuperscript{131} Roddy Brett, a Colombia expert, argues that the proposals that the Delegations conveyed to the negotiating parties “directly shaped the Victims’/Transitional Justice Agreement, eventually signed in December 2015.”\textsuperscript{132} Further, Segura and Mechoulan have written that the Delegations generated a “radical change” on the part of the FARC-EP, whose leaders had previously shown little concern for apologising to victims (or were even mocking of the idea).\textsuperscript{133} Indeed, during the Victims’ Delegations’ trips to Havana, there were many instances of FARC-EP and government representatives offering apologies to the victims – often in informal spaces, such as during lunches or on breaks.\textsuperscript{134} The FARC-EP’s first formal act of apology took place in Bojayá, the site of one of the worst civilian massacres by the group, and it was the “direct result of engagement with one of the participants of the Victims’ Delegations – Leyner Palacios – a community leader from Bojayá.”\textsuperscript{135}
While the Victims’ Delegations were widely considered a vital part of the process, it is important to note that a high percentage of the victims who participated were re-victimised, with many receiving threats and harassment, upon their return from Havana to Colombia.\textsuperscript{119} A UNDP study on lessons learned from the experience concludes that if the idea of the delegations were to be replicated in another context, more should be done to anticipate the risks to participants as early as possible, and to ensure that relevant state authorities have put in place sufficient protection measures.\textsuperscript{137}

**Direct input into the talks**

In addition to facilitating the participation of others (civil society and victims) in the peace process, the RC and UNCT also at times participated directly in the talks. In close coordination with government counterparts, they provided technical support and thematic advice to the negotiating parties. With varying degrees of RCO coordination, the following UN agencies provided direct support to the parties in Havana at various points during the talks: UN Women (on gender);\textsuperscript{138} UNICEF and IOM (on the separation of minors from the ranks of the FARC-EP); UNODC, FAO and IOM (on substituting illicit crops); OHCHR (on transitional justice); and UNHCR (on humanitarian aspects); among others. The RC and relevant agencies also helped coordinate support from UN headquarters in NY, including visits by the SRSG for Children and Armed Conflict Leila Zerrougi (whose input was highlighted by Sergio Jaramillo who was particularly important)\textsuperscript{139} and the SRSG on Sexual Violence in Conflict (Zainab Hawa Bangura).\textsuperscript{140} This direct participation helped create a role for the UNCT in the post-accord phase, as the negotiating parties named in the final peace accord many of the entities that visited Havana as actors upon which they had agreed to request implementation support.\textsuperscript{141}

**Respira Paz**

The 2012 talks began amidst an atmosphere of widespread public scepticism that the FARC-EP was genuinely willing to disarm, and that negotiations could end Colombia’s decades-long conflict. Especially among urban populations that no longer tangibly experienced the conflict in their daily lives, the absence of peace ranked low on many Colombians’ list of concerns, after unemployment, insecurity and the high cost of living.\textsuperscript{142} Against this backdrop, and at the request of the Colombian government, several UNCT members worked under the leadership of the RCO, UNIC, UNICEF and UNDP to develop a major communications campaign to mobilise public opinion in support of peace.\textsuperscript{143} The first phase of the campaign (2013-14) was titled *La Paz es Mia* (Peace is Mine) and funded by the Norwegian Embassy in Bogotá.\textsuperscript{144} In July 2014, with 2 million USD in PBF support and additional funds from Norway and UNDP,\textsuperscript{145} the UNCT launched a second, much larger phase, titled *Respira Paz* (Breathe Peace).\textsuperscript{146}

Respira Paz aimed in particular to influence Colombians who were either indifferent to or sceptical of the feasibility of peace, as well as youth and women.\textsuperscript{147} However, due to the intense polarisation around the peace process, the UNCT opted not to explicitly campaign for the agreements being negotiated in Havana.\textsuperscript{148} Instead, *Respira Paz* adopted a lighter and more indirect message about peace: that by taking a deep breath, Colombians can reduce tensions and find peace in their daily interactions with others. The campaign, which was developed in collaboration with a Colombian ad agency, was delivered through various media, including: a mobile cinema;\textsuperscript{149} music;\textsuperscript{150} TV and radio commercials; radio serial dramas (*radionovelas*); social media campaigns; and peace-related events in conflict-affected areas.\textsuperscript{151}

Despite these innovative approaches, *Respira Paz* had mixed results when measured against initial expectations. A PBF evaluation found that the campaign was most effective in conflict-affected rural areas where the UN already had a strong presence and consolidated relationships with civil society.\textsuperscript{152} *Respira Paz* resonated less in urban areas, where it had to compete with a saturation of political messaging and campaigns.\textsuperscript{153} Moreover, there is little evidence to suggest that *Respira Paz* managed to shift the positions of those indifferent to or sceptical of the possibility of peace, as had been initially hoped.\textsuperscript{154} In hindsight, however, it appears that it was unrealistic to expect that a UN campaign – with less than USD 3 million in a middle-income country of 48 million people – could shift public opinion on an issue as polarising as the peace process with the FARC-EP at the time in Colombia.\textsuperscript{155} As those involved in the campaign began to realise these limitations, they adapted their approach, deciding to focus their remaining resources in the conflict-affected peripheries where the campaign had more bang for buck, rather than on national advertising.\textsuperscript{156} Finally, an unexpected positive outcome of the campaign was that *Respira Paz* contributed to enhancing the UN’s image as an unified actor committed to peace in Colombia.\textsuperscript{157}

**Social dialogues**

During the case study period, the RCO, UNDP and OHCHR played the UN’s most direct peacemaking role on a track technically separate from, but related in substance to, the peace process with the FARC-EP: facilitating dialogue between the government and *Cumbre Agraria*, a coalition of campesino, Afro-Colombian and indigenous organisations. The dialogue emerged after agrarian strikes escalated in 2013, culminating in hundreds of thousands of farmers blocking roads to demand a range of concessions from the government, ranging from subsidies for local producers and restrictions on imports, to access to credit and debt management.\textsuperscript{158} The strikes threatened to paralyze the country and cause shortages of basic goods even in Bogotá. Given the UNCT’s longstanding involvement in facilitating dialogue between the government and civil society,\textsuperscript{159} the government looked to the UN to help resolve the situation. Between 2014-16, the RC and OHCHR\textsuperscript{160} served as guarantors to the *Mesa Única*, a negotiation platform involving the government and *Cumbre Agraria*.\textsuperscript{161} The RC was often represented at the
dialogue by the PDA or the Head of UNDP’s Peace Area, but Hochschild attended himself when a high-level presence was needed to add extra energy to the process.\textsuperscript{162} The Mediation Support Unit also dispatched an expert from the Standby Team (Graciela Tapia) to advise on process design.

The implementation record of the agreements reached through the Mesa Única was very mixed, often leading to renewed protests.\textsuperscript{163} Although the UN stepped in to try and restart negotiations whenever this happened, there was a sense, even within the UN, that political will was lacking from the outset on the part of the government to follow through on certain financial commitments. This created a tricky situation for UNDP, which was asked by the government to support the implementation of some agreed projects,\textsuperscript{164} before it was clear that the money was on the table to finance these works. UNDP thus had to carefully navigate this position in order to avoid being scapegoated for non-implementation of any agreements if the funds did not materialise.\textsuperscript{165}

Despite these challenges, Cumbre Agraria proved an important prevention experience on several counts. First, despite the apparent lack of political will to follow through on commitments, “dialogue for dialogue’s sake”\textsuperscript{166} proved to be an important “pressure valve”\textsuperscript{167} that could help ease strikes and protests at critical moments.\textsuperscript{168} Second, although it was technologically separate from the Havana process, the Mesa Única offered a space in which the social dimensions of the conflict – which the more restricted Havana agenda could not comprehensively address – could be discussed.\textsuperscript{169} In this way, Mesa Única was “a mirror of what was happening in Havana.”\textsuperscript{170} Third, the government viewed the UN’s role in the Mesa Única as useful, helping to placate, even if not ultimately resolve, a difficult situation. This was particularly important for OHCHR, which was able to demonstrate that it could leverage its strong relationships with campesino and other social groups using its rights-based approach to help the government, rather than only to criticise the state.\textsuperscript{171} In sum, despite a widespread sense that the Mesa Única fell short of resolving Colombia’s myriad social conflicts, it helped prevent tensions from escalating into large-scale violence at a particularly delicate time.

**Overall contribution of RC and UNCT activities to prevention**

The government and the FARC-EP reached a final peace accord in 2016 thanks to the efforts and commitment of national actors, not as a result of the contributions of the UN or other internationals. However, there is evidence that the RC and UNCT contributed to filling discrete but important gaps during the peace process.

Where the RC’s and UNCT’s efforts bore the most fruit, they played to their comparative strengths, namely their longstanding relationships with civil society in territories affected by the conflict and their global expertise on prevention. The Victims’ Delegations stand out as the RC’s and UNCT’s most important contribution to the peace process, as they were widely considered a watershed in the talks that left strong impressions on the negotiating parties. Although there is little evidence that the Public Forums influenced the substance of the talks, they constituted a platform for public participation in an otherwise largely closed-off process and positioned the UN to support the peace process more substantively. Direct UNCT inputs into the Havana process appear to have been useful, especially with respect to the release of children from the ranks of the FARC-EP, gender mainstreaming, demining, coca crops substations, and victims’ rights. The RCO provided significant support to the government in undertaking early planning for the implementation of a potential peace accord, including with respect to paving the way for a UN mission. And the Mesa Única, though technically separate from the Havana process, offered an important space for dialogue on broader social issues related to the conflict.

Where the UN’s efforts bore fewer fruits, it reached beyond its comparative strengths, aiming, for instance, to engage or influence those sceptical of the peace process (as in the case of the Respira Paz campaign).

In 2016, the UN Security Council unanimously approved a UN Mission in Colombia with a limited mandate, focused on verifying the laying down of arms of the FARC-EP, and monitoring and settling disputes related to the ceasefire and cessation of hostilities. In 2017, a second mission, the UN Verification Mission in Colombia, was established;\textsuperscript{172} its mandate was recently expanded to, on a temporary basis, verify a temporary truce between the government and the ELN.\textsuperscript{173}

The new RC (Herrero) must grapple with UNCT-UN Mission relations – a sometimes difficult dynamic, given that the Mission is not an integrated one – and ongoing challenges related to the implementation of the accords. However, due to the efforts of his predecessors and the UNCT, the current RC can benefit from a number of conditions that were not in place in 2012, including: a more unified UNCT stance and voice with respect to supporting the peace process; recognition of the relevance of the UN among key stakeholders, including the government, and the public with respect to peace implementation; a UNCT that has an explicit role in the implementation of the peace accord, enshrined in the agreement itself; a strong interagency analysis unit through UMAIC; and significant funding available through the MPTF.

6. Lessons for RCs and UNCTs

**Even when political space is limited, opportunities for preventive action exist:** In some contexts, the RC’s and UNCT’s room for manoeuvre with respect to prevention efforts is extremely limited. Still, RCs, PDAs and UNCTs can lay important groundwork for future preventive action if and when political space broadens. During the Uribe presidency in Colombia, the UN could not do high-profile work on the
conflict at the national level. Yet, UNDP developed peace and development programming at the local level, building key networks with civil society and other actors in territories most affected by violence. Such activities laid the groundwork for enlarged future programming in the context of the Havana process. Similarly, landmark analyses on underlying drivers of fragility carried out by UNDP in 2003 and 2011, through its HDRs, helped position the UNCT, and in particular UNDP, as a credible source of knowledge on the conflict once the process was underway.

In transition settings, deploy RCs with relevant experience and relationships: In countries undergoing or attempting to undergo transitions from war to peace, an RC with experience in post-conflict settings will likely be best positioned to spot pitfalls, opportunities and gaps in a transitional process. In Colombia, this was particularly important with respect to early planning for the implementation of a peace accord, and paving the way for a role for the UN therein. Further, it pays off to choose RCs with pre-existing contacts in the country, both in government and diplomatic spheres, and/or the ability to quickly establish such contacts.

A bigger RC prevention role requires a stronger RCO: In order to play a bigger prevention role, RCs require dedicated advisors and support staff with the appropriate political and technical skills. In the Colombian case, DOCO's crisis package provided critical seed funding for the RC to beef up his office; the RCO then assembled together funds from diverse sources, including agency cost-sharing, locally-raised donor contributions and secondments, in order to sustain the RCO after DOCO's funding ran out. Further, in the Colombian case, recruiting RCO staff with expertise and experience in peacebuilding, humanitarian assistance, development and human rights proved crucial to foster cross-pillar and inter-agency approaches to prevention. The decision by DPA to discontinue the PDA position following the arrival of the UN Mission – on the argument that "non-mission" settings should be prioritised for deployments – temporarily deprived the RCO of a key capacity for ensuring a political lens would be applied to the UNCT's development work. Although the RCO in Colombia replaced this capacity by bringing in a peacebuilding adviser through a bilateral donation, the Colombian experience suggests that the rule of thumb that PDAs are not required in non-mission settings should not be applied rigidly in non-integrated mission settings, in which the RC continues to have politically challenging responsibilities in parallel to that of the Mission.

Integrated analysis can usefully inform prevention programming and advocacy: Strengthening the ability of the RCO to generate integrated analysis, drawing upon information available across UNCT members can dramatically enhance its situational awareness and inform prevention programming and advocacy. In the case of Colombia, the RCO and OCHA built on pre-existing humanitarian information capacities to create a more holistic information management unit linked to interagency coordination teams at the local level. The RC strategically used data on the benefits of a ceasefire, as well as other analysis on the economic benefits of ending the conflict, to advocate for a bilateral ceasefire and confidence-building measures.

Be a good guest - but be willing to take calculated risks: Especially in middle-income countries with relatively strong institutions, RCs need to be particularly sensitive to the parameters of nationally-led processes, looking to empower national actors rather than replace them. This may result in a smaller role for the UN. However, RCs also need to understand when to take calculated risks in pushing national actors, proactively communicating in media, and taking initiative on key issues without necessarily waiting to be asked (as in the case of the RCO's initiative on developing a post-conflict strategy in Colombia). In such situations, it is important for RCs to know that UNHQ has their back.

Build a common vision for the UNCT: In transitional contexts, RCs need to build a common vision for the UNCT from the outset. In the case of Colombia this was achieved through a series of UNCT activities—retreats, common trainings, joint initiatives—as well as processes—such as the development of a post-conflict strategy—geared at aligning the UNCT behind peacebuilding objectives.

Pooled funding can help foster results-based investments and “one-UN approaches” to prevention: Aligning funds to stabilisation and prevention outcomes instead of individual UN mandates can be an especially effective tool to rally the UNCT around joint programmes, as agencies will naturally go where the money is. Moreover, in the case of Colombia, the RC looked early to bilateral donors and global funds, in particular the PBF, to ensure availability of early and flexible funding for the initial phase of stabilisation and peace implementation. The establishment of a Multi-Partner Trust Fund can also help foster interagency programming in the implementation phase of a peace agreement. (In Colombia, during the MPTF’s second year of operation, 12 out of 13 UN projects supported involved two or more agencies.) Such Funds should focus limited resources on the most urgent priorities in the aftermath of an accord, such as demonstrating early peace dividends in areas hardest hit by the conflict or providing start-up funding to critical institutions or new programmes for peace. The Funds require strong technical secretariats to ensure they remain focused on those priorities.

Play to the UNCT’s strengths: RCs and UNCTs are likely to be most successful if their interventions build on their comparative advantages. In the case of Colombia, a key UNCT strength lay in its strong presence and relationships in territories most affected by conflict. The RC understood these comparative advantages, seeking to strengthen them further and leverage them to create entry points for the UNCT where it had value-added to nationally-led prevention efforts. For instance, the Public Forums and Victims’ Delegations positioned the UN as a platform for public participation in the Havana process. (By contrast, efforts to change the minds of
sceptics is rarely a game the UN plays well, and in Colombia proved less productive. While it is necessary for the UN to engage with diverse groups along the political spectrum, including political opposition, this engagement might be more productively oriented toward relationship-building rather than attempting to shift opinion(s).

**UNCT members can provide multi-dimensional technical advice to negotiating parties in peace processes:** Especially where UNCTs have a strong understanding of the causes and consequences of conflict in a national setting, country offices can be well-placed to provide expert advice to negotiating parties in a peace process, independently or in collaboration with the UN’s global thematic experts (such as SRSGs on Children and Armed Conflict or on Sexual Violence in Conflict).

**Where necessary, couch the UN’s role:** The UN’s strength in highly politicised talks comes through its impartiality, which needs to be actively sought and preserved. Where the UN is perceived from the outset as partial (or, as in the case of Colombia, perceived to lean different ways by different actors), looking for partnerships with national actors (such as, in the case of Colombia, a left-leaning University and the Church in the organisation of the Victims’ Delegations) can help provide balance and greater legitimacy to specific interventions.

RCs and UNCTs may be particularly well-placed to facilitate dialogue over slow-burn social conflicts: RCs and UNCTs can play important roles in facilitating dialogue between governments and diverse social groups aimed at preventing or easing slow-burn social conflicts driven by highly local dynamics. Staff working at the local level in relevant regions should be equipped with facilitation and other prevention-related skills, as they are likely to be called upon to do much of the legwork. In the case of Colombia, the Mesa Única dialogue demonstrates that RCs and UNCTs, given their country expertise and continuous presence in a country, can be well-placed to facilitate such dialogues, which require sustained accompaniment over potentially long periods of time. Indeed, it would appear they are far better placed for such dialogues than would be high-level envoys flown in to mediate for short periods. Though RCs and UNCTs cannot create political will and should thus be careful not to be scapegoated if negotiated commitments are not upheld, “dialogue for dialogue’s sake” can contribute to easing tensions.

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1 Note on approach and scope of the case study: For this case study, and all other cases in this project, UNU is taking a magnifying glass to the role of the UN. This is because the aim of the project is to provide the UN with a sense of “what works” in UN prevention. By definition, this magnifying glass makes the UN’s role central to this paper; it is important to remember, however, that the UN played a secondary role in Colombia’s peace process. For a broader overview of the central roles played by national actors, and the secondary roles played by various international actors including and beyond the UN, in the Colombian peace process, see the following list of references: International Crisis Group reports on Colombia from 2012-16. To access see “Colombia.” International Crisis Group, www.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-caribbean/andes/colombia.; Segura, Renata and Delphine Mechoulan. “Made in Havana: How Colombia and the FARC Decided to End the War.” International Peace Institute, February 2017, www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/IPI-Rpt-Made-in-Havana.pdf.; Brett, Roddy. “Stabilisation and Political Settlements: Colombia Case Study.” UKHMG Stabilisation Unit, June 2016. Bouvier, Virginia M. Colombia: Building Peace in a Time of War. United States Institute of Peace Press, 2009.


3 Ibid p.12.


5 Ibid p.12.

6 Ibid p.12.


De Boer et al. 2017, pp.7.


18 Brett, R. 2016, p.28.

19 For more details, see Brett, R. 2016, p.28.


29 Ibid p.34.
33 “Colombia: Peace at Last?” 2012, ii.
34 Ibid, ii.
39 Ibid p.5.
40 Ibid p.7.
43 This count includes IOM, which is associated with the UNCT and contributes to the UNDAF.
45 “Colombia: Bringing the link between peace and development into focus.” DPA Politically Speaking, 2015.dpa-ps.atavist.com/pdaamericas.
51 Brett, R. 2014, p.25.
53 Personal interview with Bruno Moro. 2017. Further, the UNCT played a key role in facilitating dialogue between high-level functionaries and human rights groups through the Mesa Nacional de Garantías, a framework that was revived in recent years and continues to this day. “Gobierno reactiva Mesa Nacional de Garantías por salida de paramilitares.” El Heraldo, 21 October 2014. www.elheraldo.co/nacional/gobierno-reactiva-mesa-nacional-de-garantias-por-salida-de-paramilitares-170821.
55 Segura, R and Mechoulan, D. 2017. In early 2002 LeMoyne convinced Pastrana to allow him to try to restart talks, meeting with the FARC-EP and apparently persuading them to agree to a ceasefire, briefly raising hopes for the process (Fawcett, Louise. “Participación internacional en conflictos armados: los esfuerzos de las Naciones Unidas por lograr la paz en Colombia.” Proceso de paz en Colombia: Participación de actors internacionales, edited by Sandra Borda Guzmán and Fernando Cepeda Ulloa, ECIE Ediciones, 2012, pp.125.). However, the FARC-EP just weeks later hijacked a domestic flight to abduct a senator, in what was “the last straw after three years of frustrations during which the FARC-EP took advantage of the demilitarized zone to reorganize and strengthen its forces” (Segura, R and Mechoulan, D. 2017, pp.7.).
56 Then-President Pastrana accused LeMoyne of having “behaved as more of a negotiator than a facilitator,” which created “more problems than solutions.” Fawcett, L. 2012, p.125.


Interview with UN official, October 2017.

Moro, B. November 2017.

Interviews, UN officials.


False positive is “the euphemism used... to describe army killings of young civilians passed off as guerrilla casualties.” See: Vieira, Constanza. “Santos Says Colombia Doesn’t Need U.N. Human Rights Office.” Inter Press Service, 18 July 2013. reliefweb.int/report/colombia/santos-says-colombia-doesnt%28680%29t-need-un-human-rights-office. Further, former OHCHR-Colombia head Michael Fruhling sharply criticized Colombia’s Justice and Peace Law which was a controversial but central tool for the demobilization of the AUC; this was seen as a misplaced and intrusive rebuke of the government’s peacebuilding strategy. Fawcett, L. 2012, p.91.


However, the High Commissioner for Peace apparently did envision a role for a UN Mission for the post-conflict from the outset. Segura, R and Mechoulan, D. 2017.

The General Accord that marked the start of the talks in 2012 noted the possibility of the parties to the talks agreeing to “delegate to a third party the organization of spaces for participation.” See: “Appendix B: General Agreement for the Termination of the Conflict and the Construction of a Stable and Lasting Peace.” International Crisis Group, “Colombia: Peace at Last?” Latin America Report No.45, 25 September 2012, peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/CO_120826_General%20Agreement%20for%20the%20Termination%20of%20the%20Conflict.pdf.; However, there was no indication at that point that this would be the UN. Interview with Denise Cook, former Peace and Development Adviser, 2017.

Interview with Denise Cook, 2017.

Interview with UN official. 2017.


Interview with UN official, October 2017. The UNDAF 2015-19 also reflects this, being based on the premise that Colombia has an exceptional opportunity to close historical gaps and address structural factors that give rise to conflict recurrence at the national and local levels.

Email exchange with UN official, 2018.


Interviews with UN officials. October 2017.

Interview with Fabrizio Hochschild. October 2017.

For instance, UNDP opened an office in Quibdó, Chocó during this time. Email exchange with Sabina Stein, formerly Political Affairs Officer seconded by Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs to the Office of the RC. February 2018.

For the RC, enfoque territorial (territorial focus), meant two things: first, that the UNCT work should target territories most affected by the conflict and the inequalities that lie at the root of the conflict; and second, that it should adopt a differentiated approach depending on the needs of different regions. Enfoque territorial also aligned with the Colombian High Commissioner for Peace’s concept of paz territorial, (see Jaramillo, Sergio. “La Paz Territorial.” Oficina Del Alto Comisionado Para La Paz, 13 March 2013. www.interaktive-demokratie.org/files/downloads/La-Paz-Territorial.pdf.) and was enshrined in the 2014 CCA and the 2015-19 UNDAF. For the CCA see: “Colombia: Situacion de la Paz, la Equidad y el Desarrollo Territorial.” El Sistema de las Naciones Unidas (SNU), 2014. ims.undg.org/downloadFile/753c2b2e730f4b56b6d81d1625fbc8c3806d1054bd6d7c568f4eda517a7.

Email exchange with Sabina Stein. February 2018.

For more on the humanitarian dimension after the peace accords, see Marcos, Francisco Rey and Sophie Duval.”La dimension humanitaria tras los acuerdos de paz: propuestas para la comunidad internacional en Colombia” Informe, January 2015. http://iecah.org/images/stories/publicaciones/informes/Informe_Final_IECAH.pdf. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)’s funding in Colombia has been slashed and the Office will be forced to close in 2018 despite ongoing violence against land claimants, human rights defenders and community leaders.
in areas previously held by the FARC-EP. Further, clashes between other armed groups attempting to control strategic areas previously held by the FARC-EP have provoked forced displacement. Nevertheless, Colombia's humanitarian situation overall has improved significantly due to the peace process and the bilateral ceasefire. As a UN official explained: “What we have now is more a protection and human rights crisis than a humanitarian crisis. The reduction in humanitarian funding should not be an issue as long as it is paralleled by efforts to strengthen state institutions and promote the entrance of development and peacebuilding actors in regions where only humanitarians used to work.”


Internal UN document.


At first, parts of the UNCT initially resisted what was perceived as a top-down imposition of a strategy from the RC's Office that emphasized the role of some agencies more than others. In response, the RCO backtracked to incorporate more inter-agency input into the draft, creating a more inclusive process and thereby helping alleviate concerns. Stein, S. October 2017.

Internal UN document, October 2014.

The consultant seconded by the UN had also worked on the UN's draft strategy. Stein, S. October 2017.

For instance, in 2015, the RC and PDA supported a visit by the head of DPA (Jeffrey Feltman) to Colombia to meet with President Santos to discuss modalities of a political mission. As a prelude to to Feltman's visit, DPA and the RC Office, in consultaion with a number of agencies based in Colombia produced a paper for the government presenting options on roles the UN could play in the implementation of a possible peace agreement. “PDA report April-May 2015.” United Nations, Internal document, 2015.


DOCO soon thereafter “downgraded” Colombia, which meant the Office could not benefit from raised core funds, but continued to raise additional support from Sweden and Norway.

Ohrstedt, P. October 2017.

“UN Post-Conflict MPTF for Colombia.” UN, 27 June 2017. www.un.org/webcast/pdfs/170627pm-colombia.pdf. PBF was one of the first donors to the MPTF, providing 3 million USD for joint work on reparations to victims in areas close to FARC cantonment sites. http://www.co.undp.org/content/dam/colombia/docs/MPTF/undp_co_Hoja1MPTF.pdf Further, the MPTF has partnered with other international funds, including those of the World Bank, the EU and IADB, to prevent duplication. “UNDG Report September 2017.” UNDG, Internal document, 2017.

This priority is at the heart of the government's own post-conflict strategy, see Guáqueta Girvin, Alexandra and Nataly Sarmiento Eljadue. “Respuesta Rapida: Una estrategia de estabilización y generación de confianza en la paz.” Presidencia de la Republica, viva.org.co/PDT_para_la_Construccion_de_Paz/Estrategia_de_Respuesta_Rapida/1.%20Estrategia%20de%20Respuesta%20R%C3%A1pida.pdf.

Relevant international NGOs, such as ICRC, also participate. Interview with Gerard Gomez. November 2017.

Unidad de Manejo y Análisis de Información Colombia (UMAIC) responds to three key UNCT needs: 1) mapping UN Relevant international NGOs, such as ICRC, also participate. Interview with Gerard Gomez. November 2017.

Internal UN document.


108 Most UNCT members participated in the Mesas, although UNDP initially bore the brunt of the work and the financing. Interview with Denise Cook, 2017.
113 Those in attendance included representatives of campesinos, indigenous groups, Afro-descendants, trade unions, LGBTI, and others. “Participación masiva en foro final del proceso de paz.” Universidad Nacional de Colombia. 3 February 2016, agenciadenoticias.unal.edu.co/detalle/article/participacion-masiva-en-foro-final-del-proceso-de-paz.html
114 “Participación masiva en foro final del proceso de paz.” 2016.
115 For instance, a group of victims of paramilitaries and the state protested against the Barrancabermeja Forum, claiming the organizers had excluded them; RC Hochschild met with the protestors personally. See: “Víctimas colombianas denuncian exclusión del foro de ONU sobre proceso de paz.” La Vanguardia. 11 July 2014, www.lavanguardia.com/politica/20140711/54411828201/victimas-colombianas-denuncian-exclusion-del-foro-de-onu-sobre-proceso-de-paz.html. In another vivid example, during the Cali Forum, RC Hochschild had to physically intervene to defuse a clash that started when a group of participants accused a man in attendance of being a neo-Nazi infiltrating the Forum by posing as a victim. “Inconformismo en Primera sesión de foro de Víctimas en Cali.” El Espectador. 3 August 2014, www.elspectador.com/noticias/nacional/inconformismo-primera-sesion-de-foro-de-victimas-cali-articulo-508385. Video of the incident, including Hochschild’s intervention, here: “Eduardo Romano, exlíder neonazi agrede periodistas en encuentro de víctimas – Cali.” YouTube, uploaded by Las2orillas, 6 August 2014, www.youtube.com/watch?v=PpPhxxNylZs.
117 Ibid p.29.
118 According to Sergio Jaramillo, through the forums, the UN and in particular the RC, demonstrated how they could support the peace process. Jaramillo, S. 2017.
119 Interview with UN official. October 2017.
120 Brett, R. 2016.
122 Ohrstedt, P. October 2017.
123 Sergio Jaramillo acknowledged that choosing the victims was an extremely difficult task that required impartiality, logistical capacity and “serious leadership,” which the UN, and in particular Hochschild, was able to bring. Jaramillo, S. 2017.
124 These included: principles such as balance, plurality and fairness (sindéresis); that delegates needed to be direct victims (as opposed to participating in representation of others); and that the composition of the delegations must reflect the total universe of human rights and IHL violations that took place in the armed conflict. See “Joint Communiqué.” The delegations of the National Government and the FARC-EP, Havana, 17 July 2014, www.altocomisionadoparalapaz.gov.co/mesadeconversaciones/PDF/Comunicado%20Conjunto,%20La%20Habana,%2017%20julio%202014-Versi_n%20Ingl_s_0.pdf. According to UNDP, the organizers interpreted sinderesis as the capacity of the victims to speak with rectitude and honesty, and to express the pain of their specific case while also having the capacity to transcend that ordeal in order to demonstrate how their personal experience could be emblematic and representative of other similar cases. Brett, Roddy. “La Voz de lasVictimas en la Negociacion: Sistematizacion de una Experiencia.” PNUD. March 2017, www.undp-co-victimas2016ajustado-2017.pdf.
125 Ibid. Involved UNCT members included UNHCR, OHCHR, UNDP, UN Women, and UNICEF.
127 These included violations of the right to life, extrajudicial executions (including “false positives”), abduction, sexual

128 “Primera delegación de víctimas viaja a La Habana a encuentro con la Mesa de Conversaciones.” 2014.

129 Brett, R. 2017, pp.25. In particular, the choice of Piedad Cordoba, a former Senator who was kidnapped by paramilitaries in 1999 and was considered by some, especially on the right, to be a FARC-EP sympathizer, added to the politicization of the process. “Piedad Córdoba viaja a La Habana en condición de víctima.” Semana, 15 December 2014, www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/piedad-cordoba-en-el-grupo-de-victimas-que-van-la-habana/412314-3.

RC Hochschild addressed some of this public controversy, contending: “the truth is more complex and more variedated; many of the victims are victims of various perpetrators. Some don’t know who was the perpetrator. And there are perpetrators who are or were victims.”

130 Jaramillo, S. 2017.


132 Brett, R. 2016.


135 Email exchange with Sabina Stein. February 2018.

136 UNDSS received formal complaints from 14 of victims, while another 10 said they were victims of harassment and threats upon their return home; thus, around 40% of the victims were re-victimized, largely, according UNDSS, by a right-wing group with paramilitary roots called Las Aguilas Negras. Harassment of victims on social media networks was also a key problem. Brett, R. 2017, p.7.

137 Brett, R. 2017, p.73 and p.93.

138 UN Women accompanied multiple delegations of women and LGBT organizations, as well as one delegation of experts on sexual violence, to Havana to provide expert input to the sub-commission on gender. According to IPI, “the continuous presence of women and LGBT experts and advocacy groups in Havana during the process had a significant impact on the members of both delegations. It opened their eyes to the importance of both having women present at the table and of taking gender issues seriously – particularly for the FARC-EP, which had been accused of violating women’s rights both within and beyond its ranks.” Segura, R and Mechoulan, D. 2017, p. 16.

139 Jaramillo, S. 2017.

140 MSU further supported the RCO, as well as the Norwegian delegation to the peace process, with wide-ranging technical support, including on “early implementation of the peace agreement, UN engagement with non-state armed groups, women’s participation in the peace process, and mechanisms to ratify an eventual agreement, among others. Numerous confidential technical papers were prepared at the request of the RC. MSU also provided technical feedback on strategic documents produced by the RCO.” Email exchange with Sabina Stein, 2017.

141 These include: UNDP and FAO for agricultural reform; UNESCO and UNDP for reintegration of former combatants; OHCHR on the situation of persons detained for belonging to or collaborating with the FARC-EP; security guarantees and human rights of victims; UNODC on the dismantling of criminal organizations and the solution to the problem of illicit drugs; and UN Women, along with the Representative of the SG on Sexual Violence in Conflict, on gender. See Final Peace Accord, pages 215-16.

142 PBF independent evaluation of Respira Paz campaign, p. 5.

143 PBF evaluation, p.5 and p.48.

144 PBF evaluation.

145 When the PBF-funded portion of the campaign concluded, the RC coordinated a six-month extension, funded by an additional 150,000 USD from the Norwegian Embassy, to spread the campaign’s message to more regions affected by the conflict than had been originally envisioned. UNDP also put skin in the game, contributing 100,000 USD through its Territorial Alliances for Peace and Development project, as did the Colombian government through in-kind contributions worth 300,000 USD. PBF evaluation.

146 PBF evaluation.

147 “UNDP Innovative Practice Note April 2016.” UNDP, Internal document, 2016. In terms of specific objectives, Respira Paz sought to: 1) contribute to the creation of a culture of peace and reconciliation; 2) highlight the benefits of peace, in terms of security, economic growth, development; and other aspects; 3) generate a positive attitude toward peacemaking; and 4) create a sense of shared responsibility for the promotion of peace and reconciliation. PBF evaluation.


149 One particularly powerful component of the campaign was the critically acclaimed film Mateo, which is based on the story of a young boy in Barrancabermeja. Mateo, which Respira Paz brought through mobile cinema to about 50 of Colombia’s municipalities, was praised for showing the realities of what people live through in the areas most affected by the conflict. PBF evaluation.

150 See for instance “Bomba Estéreo RESPIRA PAZ - ONU Colombia.” Youtube, uploaded by ONU Colombia, 18 July 2014,
In these areas, the message of the campaign interacted with existing UNCT initiatives, such as UNDP supported youth programs in Meta and Nariño. PBF evaluation.

Flaws in the Monitoring and Evaluation set-up made it impossible to measure the effects of the campaign on public opinion.

Interview with UN official. October 2017.


Ibid.

As a UN official explained, “when Cumbre Agraria would get frustrated over a lack of follow through and threaten to raise temperature again, the UN would come in to try to get the parties to sit down together and keep cooler heads prevailing so there would not be bloodshed.” Interview with UN official. October 2017.


Republic of Guinea 2009-17

Josie Lianna Kaye*
Introduction

When President Lansana Conté died on 24 December 2008 after decades of authoritarian rule, political repression and under-development, it took only a few hours before a group of young military officers – acting in the name of the Conseil National pour la Démocratie et le Développement (CNND) and led by Captain Moussa Dadis Camara – enacted a bloodless, military ‘coup’1. The constitution, all state institutions and the activities of trade unions and civil society organizations were suspended with immediate effect. The ‘junta’, as it became known, made bold promises concerning anti-corruption, economic transparency and ‘free and fair’ elections, leading many Guineans to flock to the streets in celebration, anticipation and hope for change.2 While the specific group of individuals that took power was relatively unknown to the public, Conté’s health had been in decline for over a decade and there was a widely held expectation that the military would eventually step in to fill the void.

The joy with which the move was received by the Guinean public and political parties was matched in equal measure by the dismay with which it was received by the international community, where the ‘junta’ was unanimously condemned: the African Union’s Peace and Security Council (AU-PSC) suspended Guinea’s membership, calling for a return to constitutional order; the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) held an extraordinary summit in Abuja, also suspending Guinea and outlining five conditions3 for a return to constitutional order; echoing the sentiments of their regional counterparts, both the European Union (EU) and the United States (US) went onto suspend all development assistance, bar humanitarian aid;4 and the Paris-based Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF) suspended Guinea’s participation in all francophone multilateral co-operation initiatives, except for programmes directly of benefit to civilians or to the consolidation of democracy.5

Even before international pressure could really take effect, the situation on the ground began to unravel, and over the course of 2009 it went from bad to worse. Just days after the military coup the new leader appeared “increasingly erratic and messianic.”6 Concerns about levels of commitment to the transitional roadmap and elections in particular became progressively prominent among political parties and civil society alike. A loose umbrella movement comprised of both trade unions and political parties, called the Forces Vives de la Nation (FVN) emerged as counter-weight to CNND and, increasingly, the “euphoria of the 2008 Christmas season was replaced by talk of war, confrontational politics, and increasing mistrust.”7 Tensions continued to rise during the course of 2009 as a result of Camara’s expression of intent to seek the presidency in elections that were scheduled for 31 January 2010,8 despite prior promises that no members of the junta would seek personal power.

Dialogue over the democratic transition process fell into complete disarray: the junta blocked the creation of a National Transitional Council – a cornerstone of the entire process; political discussions on state media were banned; the leaders of political parties and civil society representatives became targets of military intimidation and harassment; and the formation of CNDD-related ethnic militias across the country had a de-stabilising effect at the local level and created mistrust between junta leaders and other sections of the military.9 It was within this tense context that Guinea witnessed one of its most violent episodes to date: On 28th September 2009, under the banner of the FVN, political parties, trade unions and members of civil society assembled in Conakry Stadium in a show of unity, support and discontent with the CNDD broadly speaking and in opposition to Camara’s bid to run for president specifically. Security forces were charged to disperse the gathering, killing over 150 people, and injuring more than 1500.10 Security forces were also accused of perpetrating the mass rape of women protestors11 and, in the days that followed, soldiers “attacked and looted neighbourhoods throughout the capital that were known as opposition strongholds.”12

The spectre of civil war loomed large, not least since, in addition to these local dynamics, the spill-over effects from sub-regional conflicts in Sierra Leone and Liberia had destabilised Guinea throughout the 2000s. And yet, not only has Guinea avoided succumbing to large-scale violence, it has embarked on a largely successful – albeit incomplete – political transition, marked by the holding of Presidential elections in 2010, legislative elections in September 2013, the formation of the National Assembly in January 2014, and, the holding of Presidential elections in October 2015 when the sitting president, Mr. Alpha Condé was re-elected.13 Furthermore, the first local elections since the era of military dictatorship were finally held in February 2018 after a thirteen year delay. How did Guinea step back from the ‘brink’, and what role did the United Nations (UN) broadly speaking, and the UN Resident Coordinator (RC) along with the UN Country Team (UNCT) specifically play in preventing violence from spiralling into civil war? What steps did the RC and the UNCT take to foster the required dialogue and necessary compromises in the context of Guinea’s political transition?

This case study will argue that the RC and UNCT made an important contribution to conflict prevention, crisis response and peacebuilding in Guinea as a result of the crucial ability of UN actors specifically and the international community as a whole to act in concert, towards shared goals, in a (largely) coordinated, efficient manner. The RC acted in predominantly politically ‘savvy’ ways and, at no point in the 2009-14 timeframe – which will be the main focus of this paper – did s/he do so alone. Far from it, s/he leveraged and/or worked in concert with the UN Office for West Africa (UNOWA)14 with support from the UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA), UN Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) and Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), and a critical role was also played by the former United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) entity known as the Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR). Outside of the UN system, the RC depended upon...
the International Contact Group (ICG), the so-called ‘Troika’ (made up of the AU, UN and ECOWAS), the EU, the US, and France, amongst others. Putting aside some of the favourable elements of the context, any successes the RC enjoyed can and should be attributed to his/her ability to see him/herself as a part of a greater whole, rather than a ‘lone ranger’ taking on the task of supporting the political transition in isolation. This required: an intricate understanding of the context, a deep appreciation of each actor’s comparative advantage within that context; and, the ability to communicate, mobilise and synergise with multiple actors at any given moment.

1. Country Context

Underlying conflict risk factors

Guinea borders Guinea-Bissau, Senegal and Mali in the north, Côte d’Ivoire in the east and Liberia and Sierra Leone in the south, and has a 320km coastline along the Atlantic Ocean. Despite its rich mineral wealth, Guinea sits among the world’s least developed countries: with over 9 million people, in 2015 it ranked 178th out of 187 countries in UNDP’s Human Development Index, and has a long history of “poor macroeconomic performance, weak governance structures, political instability, and insecurity.” Progress that was made following the beginning of Guinea’s political transition in 2010 was quickly unraveled by the crisis associated with the Ebola Virus Disease in 2014, which was a tragic and momentous setback for the country. The outbreak undoubtedly contributed to a drop in the GDP growth rate from 2.3 per cent in 2013 to 0.1 per cent in 2015. These diverse dynamics and conflict risk factors can only be explained and understood against the background of Guinea’s historical trajectory.

A former French colony, Guinea ‘inherited’ a highly centralised state system, which left very limited space for autonomy at the local level, or any real degree of political pluralism— or, indeed, any significant capacity for political participation. Thus, the French colonial system created a “centrally directed hierarchy of territorial bureaucrats who exercised control throughout the country.” When Guinea gained independence in 1958, its first President, Ahmed Sékou Touré took over these structures and used them to secure and perpetuate his authoritarian regime, characterised as “Stalinist, violent and repressive.” Lasting 24 years, his regime served to reinforce colonialist legacies towards identity politics. Unlike his predecessor Touré, who was from the ‘Malinké’ ethnic group, President Conté was a ‘Soussou’, one of the smaller minority groups. Until Conté’s appearance on the national stage, ethnicity had played little to no role in provoking or exacerbating tensions in the country, but in 1990, Guinea introduced political pluralism through the holding of a national referendum to adopt a new constitution, a process of multiparty politics which moved the country towards identity politics.

Thus, political parties based on ethnic identity were born: the Rassemblement du Peuple de Guinée (RPG) ‘represented’ the Malinké group, led by Alpha Conde and dominated the Upper Guinea region; the Union pour la Nouvelle République (UNR), led by Mamadou Ba, and the Parti du Renouveau et Progrès (PRP) led by Siradiou Diallo, dominated Middle Guinea and was largely Fulani-based. Meanwhile, the ruling party, Parti de l’Unité et du Progrès (PUP) led by Conté, dominated by business, economic and security interests which could not be toppled from its powerful position on the domestic landscape as a result of ethnically-based, highly fractured and divided opposition. On the basis of these dynamics, Conté won the first multiparty presidential elections in 1993, was re-elected in 1998 and 2003, and continued to rule the country until his death in 2008, following illness.

Medium-term political dynamics affecting conflict risk

President Alpha Condé was democratically elected to the presidency in 2010 – following the second ‘bloodless military coup’ led by Camara in 2009 – setting in motion the political
transition process is ongoing to this day. As this case study will demonstrate, while progress has been made on Security Sector Reform in particular, significant conflict risk factors remain, underscoring the notion that the transition is far from over. The 2015 elections, for example, which saw Conde re-elected, were considered largely flawed. Despite significant reforms of the security sector, the justice sector remains extremely weak, with concerns raised by Human Rights Watch over “prison overcrowding, unprofessional conduct by judicial personnel, and a lack of judicial independence.”

And, more than eight years on, there is still no justice for the crimes committed in September 2009 in the Conakry Stadium, and many suspects remain in government posts. Impunity has also been extended to the security forces and “militias” involved in other acts of political violence both before and after President Conde took office, including “the alleged killing by the security forces of some 130 unarmed demonstrators in 2007, some 60 opposition supporters protesting the delay in holding parliamentary elections in 2013-14, and at least 10 people in the run-up to the 2015 presidential poll.”

Slow economic growth will remain a persistent challenge for Guinea in the years ahead, as a result of: limited economic diversification; inadequacies in agricultural, mining and fisheries value chains; insufficient support for entrepreneurship; poor employment opportunities for women and youth; and slow formalization of the informal sector. As outlined by UNDP, efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) “had little impact on reducing poverty and social inequalities: 55 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line and there are strong urban (35 per cent) and rural (65 per cent) disparities.” This is fueled in part by high unemployment rates, which remain at around 50.4 per cent for women and 83 per cent for youth.39 State-society relations are characterized by high-levels of mistrust and negative perceptions, including the perception that state processes are insufficiently transparent and inclusive especially when it comes to mining-related initiatives.

In light of the forthcoming Presidential elections in 2020, one of the most significant concerns revolves around the continued personalisation and ethnic-based character of political parties, which still serve as vectors for personal gain, nepotism, corruption and patronage. In this context, political violence remains a relatively consistently applied “practice”: in 2016, for example, a battle between the UFDG leader and his vice president quickly escalated into a violent confrontation, leading to the death of a journalist as a result of a stray bullet; and, unrest flared following the 2018 local election when protesters claiming vote-rigging and proxy ballots to the advantage of President Conde, clashed with riot police – leading to multiple deaths. The peaceful conduct of the forthcoming elections, therefore, will depend on the ongoing political dialogue between the Government and the opposition concerning the electoral register and the composition of the national electoral commission, and the continued ability of the international community to monitor and provide targeted, coherent – and coordinated – support as and where necessary.

2. RC-Supported Prevention Initiatives

The UNCT role prior to the coup

Much of the focus of the UN prior to the September 2008 coup was not specifically concerned with conflict prevention. The UNCT was very much aligned with the Government’s focus on poverty reduction, not least as the country witnessed a dramatic increase in poverty from 49.2% in 2002 to 58% in 2010, despite concerted efforts to focus on the implementation of the MDGs. The UNCT placed state weakness front and centre in its analysis of the causes of insecurity and under-development, underscoring in the 2007-11 UNDAF, for example, the “instability of institutions” and the “deterioration of the capacities of the administration.”

That focus began to change already in 2007, however – on the part of the RC and UNDP at least – in the context of a general, country-wide strike which began on January 10. The Union Syndicale des Travailleurs de Guinée (USTG), which called the strike, cited the increasing instability of the regime, repeated health scares, chaotic cabinet reshuffles, mismanagement of the economy, and corruption. In the second week of the strike more than 20 people were killed and over 150 wounded when security forces opened fire on protestors, and authorities arrested around 15 union leaders and officials.

The strike increasingly took on the form of a popular uprising. The UN Secretary-General at the time, Ban Ki-moon, called upon the Government of Guinea to exercise maximum restraint on its security forces, and urged the parties to engage in dialogue in order to find a peaceful resolution to the dispute. Meanwhile, behind the scenes, RC Mbaranga Gasarabwe wasted no time. An experienced RC with solid knowledge of the West Africa context, Gasarabwe was already in extensive contact with ECOWAS and Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah, the then-Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) for UNOWA, the UN’s Dakar-based regional political office in West Africa, concerning the deteriorating political context and preparations for political dialogue and mediation. UNOWA and OHCHR, working closely with the RC, deployed a joint short-term mission to Guinea to investigate human rights violations. Gasarabwe also reached out to PBSO concerning the need for funds to support the political dialogue and efforts to foster social cohesion, and requested a Peace and Development Advisor (PDA), who arrived in 2008. She also drew extensively upon the support of the Mano River Women’s Network, active in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia to help ensure the gender dimension was taken into account by the ongoing mediation efforts. Many of her former colleagues attribute Gasarabwe’s effectiveness to a combination of her proactive approach as
well as prior life experiences: a native of Rwanda, she was all too aware of how quickly conflicts can escalate, and of the tragic consequences of failure to prevent them from doing so. She was also a risk-taker. So when, during the 2007 crisis, representatives of the trade unions came to her office insisting they were under threat and in need of protection, and despite pressure from New York to evacuate as the security risk level reached stage 4, she decided to stay. Recalling the failure of the UN to protect vulnerable populations in Rwanda, she allowed the ‘asylum-seekers’ to seek refuge in the UN compound and requested UN security to protect the building. Signing a letter which relinquished the UN of any responsibility for her actions, she then took a non-UN vehicle before sunrise on a Sunday morning and drove 30 miles outside of Conakry to President Conté’s residence – at a time when almost the entire country was against him. Given Conté was fully aware of the protection she was offering to the trade unions in her compound, and also of the UN planes being used to distribute food and medicines to populations in need as the humanitarian situation worsened, it was unclear how she would be received, but she was determined to do everything she could to prevent the security situation from unravelling.

Sitting in front of the President, who had been the object of weeks of protest and outrage following the deaths of protestors, she used this moment to explain that Guineans were tired of the corruption and inefficiency of the people he had selected to lead the country (alluding to his Prime Ministers). The people were calling for a new Prime Minister, she explained, and as their President he had a responsibility to respond to their wishes. Going one step further, she reminded him that just one-week prior former Liberian president Charles Taylor had been sent to The Hague to face war crime charges – a comment which abruptly interrupted his otherwise quiet nodding of agreement. Deciding to take a softer tone, she explained that she could not sit back and watch the country fall into further disarray and insisted upon the need to find a peaceful solution. Having listened to her for some time in absolute silence, she was unsure of how he would respond. When he finally spoke, her relief was palpable: “Looking at your face”, he said, “you have not slept, you’re concerned, and you have come here to my house when no one else wants to come. I believe you love Guinea.” By 8pm that evening, the President made an address to the nation indicating his willingness to nominate a new Prime Minister, leading to public celebrations in Conakry.

A crisis was averted. But Guinea’s underlying conflicts were far from resolved and it was certainly the beginning rather than the end of political dialogue. On 25 June 2008, the UN Secretary-General designated Guinea as eligible for PBF support and preparations got underway for Guinea’s first Peacebuilding Priority Plan (PPP). The UNCT as a whole, however, was not yet positioned in ‘prevention mode’ – and was, rather, still operating according to the “logique de développement” and “planification classique.” The elaboration of PPP1, therefore, was an opportunity to ‘rally the UNCT’ around a collective goal, and to develop a shared understanding of the challenges that needed to be addressed.

It was in this spirit that the RC embarked on two key initiatives which laid the ground for the deepening of the RC and UNCT prevention strategy in the years that followed: the first was a UNCT-wide training led by BCPR in partnership with UNOWA on conflict prevention, combined with extensive technical support from BCPR on context analysis; and, the second was a ‘caravane de la paix’ which toured the entire country with the objective of understanding the source of the deep cleavages within Guinean society, an understanding that would underpin the elaboration of the first PPP. The peace caravan, which included UN and state representatives along with religious and civil society leaders toured the country for three months, calling for calm and moderation, while simultaneously seeking to understand the roots of the 2007 crisis and the continued instability.

RC efforts to support the transition and international mediation efforts

Adjusting the UN’s Peacebuilding Strategy to the Coup and its Aftermath

When President Conté died at the end of 2008 and the military took over, Gasarabwe and her PDA had already been in extensive preparations for PPP1. The dramatic change in context risked jeopardizing their efforts to date: against the background of the AU and ECOWAS suspending Guinea and the World Bank suspending its Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility, there were concerns that PBSO, too, would ‘pull the plug’ as it might see support for Guinea at this time as a ‘risky’ move, especially at a time when other actors sought to put pressure on the military ‘junta.’ Not despite but indeed because of these dynamics, PBSO took the unusual and risky ‘risky’ move, especially at a time when other actors sought to put pressure on the military ‘junta.’ Not despite but indeed because of these dynamics, PBSO took the unusual and risky decision to approve PPP1 regardless of the fact that Guinea was under the control of a military regime as the result of coup. This was not a simple process, however, and the steps involved demonstrated the relatively burdensome process required to access funds in this complex, rapidly changing context.

The final version of PPP1 – which had been agreed upon with the UNCT, PBSO and government under President Conté – was submitted to the UN’s Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) for approval in early December, just weeks before Camara seized power. As a result of the profound changes brought about by the coup, PPP1 had to be updated and then re-submitted to the PBC in April 2009. Projects in support of the PPP then had to be formulated, a relatively lengthy process involving five different agencies (UNDP, UN-OHCHR, UNFPA, UNIDO and UNESCO). These projects were at a relatively advanced stage when the September 2009 stadium violence took place, in response to which the PBC and PBSO required that the PPP and associated projects be updated once more. With significant support provided by the PDA
who drove the entire PPP and project elaboration process and helped ensure the formulation of the projects were anchored as much as possible in the 2008 Peace Caravan process, projects were elaborated in three key domains: 1) inclusive and sustainable dialogue; 2) human rights, citizenship, security, and justice; and 3) empowerment of youth and women. Despite these challenges, the PPP enjoyed high-level buy-in from both government (junta) actors at the level of the Prime Minister, and civil society as well as strong support from key international partners including the United States, France, Germany, Spain, Japan and the EU, which certainly helped with the decision to release funds despite the unusual context. Running from March 2009 until February 2012, the PPP had an initial two-year phase focused on the transition, and a second phase focused on the consolidation of transition results. However, given the initial delay in PPP formulation caused by the December 2008 coup and the deteriorating national context, the RC could not wait for PBF funds to be approved and dispersed to elaborate and implement a crisis response and conflict prevention strategy. In January 2009, therefore – and in light of the irrelevance of the 2007-11 UNDAF – the RC and key development partners decided to elaborate ‘a support programme for the transition process in Guinea.’ The programme, or transition strategy, was designed to support the Government (junta) to define and implement a transition action plan, which included, inter alia, creating an enabling conditions for elections, revising the constitution and key laws, and putting in place relevant institutions for the transition. While never formally approved by the government, the transition strategy served as an informal guide for the work of the RC and the UNCT during this particularly turbulent period.

**International Mediation Efforts: From the coup to the January 2010 Ouagadougou Accords**

In parallel to these RC-led endeavours, the December 2008 events also triggered internationally-led mediation efforts to negotiate a return to constitutional order in Conakry. Within a month of the coup, an International Contact Group (ICG) for Guinea was established, jointly chaired by the president of the ECOWAS Commission, Mohamed Ibn Chambas, and the AU special representative to Guinea, Ibrahima Fall. Its members included: the United Nations, the Community of Sahel-Saharan States, the European Union, the Mano River Union, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, the Francophonie, and the African Member States of the UN Security Council. The ICG helped facilitate a united front for support to the ECOWAS framework (i.e. the “five conditions” outlined above) for engaging with the Government (junta), notwithstanding support for the coup leaders voiced by both Senegal and Libya.

The September 2009 stadium massacre fundamentally changed the dynamics – sparking a number of new international attempts to put pressure on the junta. This violent event added a sense of urgency to international engagements: the imperative was no longer simply a restoration of constitutional order, but preventing a possible full-scale ethnic civil war. International pressure on the junta included: targeted sanctions and arms embargoes by the AU, EU and ECOWAS; the establishment of a Commission of Inquiry into the stadium massacre and the threat of ICC prosecution. ECOWAS appointed Blaise Compaoré as mediator, supported by a troika arrangement between the AU, ECOWAS and UNOWA, with a UN mediation advisor based in Conakry. International efforts began to stall, however, when the first transitional roadmap presented by Compaoré did not exclude a priori the possibility that Camara could participate in the elections. This sparked outrage amongst members of the Forces Vives and undermined support for a Compaoré-led mediation within the ICG.

However, dramatic events once again changed the situation on the ground when, on 3 December 2009, just one year after the military coup led by Dadis Camara, one of his bodyguards shot him in the head, nearly killing him. He was immediately evacuated to Morocco where he received emergency treatment and General Sekouba Konaté – a key rival – took over as the leader of the transitional government, a ‘power switch’ which created an unlikely but fortunate opening for mediation and security sector reform. An ECOWAS-led mediation process began in Ouagadougou and just a few weeks after his near-death, Dadis Camara arrived to participate in the mediation process, sparking tensions between those that favoured military-, and those that favoured civilian-rule.

On 15 January 2010, Camara and Konaté signed the Ouagadougou Accord, which created a unity government with a civilian prime minister appointed by the opposition; promised elections within six months; and identified the reform of the security sector as a priority (implementation of the Security Sector Reform aspects of the accord will be addressed in detail below). These accords were followed by the signing of a ‘pact,’ supported by ECOWAS, the AU and the UN, between the two presidential candidates – Alpha Conde and Cellou Diallo – outlining their intentions to hold peaceful elections, and extensive efforts to ensure calm when the elections were repeatedly postponed due to technical difficulties. During this difficult time, the UN was able to capitalise upon the credibility garnered by both the RC and UNCT who, unlike other external actors, stayed put in-country throughout the duration of the crisis.

On the UN side, the political lead role on Guinea from early 2009 onwards had fallen to SRSG Said Djinnit, who in February of that year had replaced Ould Abdallah as head of UNOWA. Djinnit played an instrumental role following the stadium massacre in securing the cooperation of junta leader Camara with the Commission of Inquiry, and in convincing Camara’s replacement, Konaté, to commit to a transitional government...
in December 2009. Recognising the importance of Security Sector Reform to stability in Guinea (arising largely from the fact that the potential spoilers were in particular members of the junta and mid-ranking officers involved in the coup, who risked losing the most from a transition to civilian rule), SRSG Djinnit, ever since October 2009, also ensured that each meeting of the International Contact Group or of the sub-regional, regional and UN peace and security organs incorporated some language on the need for security sector reform, laying the ground for concrete action to come.

While the RC was not in the ‘driving seat’, the internationally-led mediation efforts were fully supported by RC Gasarabwé, who served at different points in the process as advisor, ‘connector’, ‘Secretariat’, and liaison between international efforts and dynamics on the ground. The RC had established strong relationships with members of the junta and civil society, relationships that could be leveraged to call for restraint, calm and de-escalation. One key initiative prior to her departure in January 2010 was to bring women who were close to the political leaders at the time together to launch a campaign calling for peace and calm. This was a risky initiative given the polarisation between political leaders and parties; through this high-level engagement in between the two rounds of the Presidential elections, she was able to appeal to common interest at the political level, but also at the level of civil society through their links to women’s groups and civil society organisations.

Preparing the ground for Security Sector Reform

The overarching peacebuilding priority emerging from the Ouagadougou Accords was Security Sector Reform. In order to move this agenda item forward in the wake of the accords, UNOWA, ECOWAS and the African Union, coordinated closely to prepare a comprehensive assessment of the security sector. Mindful of the failure of a previous ECOWAS mission, composed of a delegation of Chiefs of Defense Staff from West African states - which had been barred from any meetings by Guinean authorities after its arrival to Conakry in January 2010 - the joint assessment was carefully tailored.

The joint assessment was headed by General Lamine Cissé, who had been appointed as ECOWAS Special Envoy to Guinea in January 2010. Cissé deployed to Guinea on 1 February 2010, supported by a small UN team (partly consisting of staff seconded by UNOWA) providing technical expertise and financial resources. A former Chief of Defence Staff and Minister of Interior of Senegal, as well as head of the UN’s peace operation in the Central African Republic, Cissé was chosen purposely to play a critical role in this regard. As a senior military figure from a neighbouring state, he was well-respected and viewed as an ‘insider’ from the perspective of junta members and the broader security sector. He was therefore a credible interlocutor and would play, in the following years, a vital role in helping the SRSG to ‘open doors’, build relationships in Conakry and beyond, and convince potential spoilers to participate in moving the process forward. Once General Cissé and his team had produced a draft assessment, they conducted public consultations of the draft document in key cities around the country, publicised via radio. The goal of these hearings was to road-test the draft, enable a wide range of voices to give their inputs and ensure buy-in from and a sense of ownership by key constituencies outside the capital. Much like the ‘caravane de la paix’ that toured Guinea in 2008, this exercise also included experts from key partners (EU, USA and OIF) as well as high-level representatives, including the Special Representative of the President of Burkina Faso and ECOWAS Mediator for Guinea, General Ali Traore, a retired and respected Guinean army General, and General Cissé himself – who generously agreed to undertake the three-week journey. Meanwhile, behind the scenes, the RC’s inputs in this process were critical as many of the relationships in the regions were ones built up over several years of UN presence across the country.

Following this highly participatory consultation process, SRSG Djinnit, on 4 May 2010 and acting on behalf of the UN, AU, and ECOWAS, handed the joint report to the Head of State for the transition, General Sekouba Konate. This brought the assessment phase of the security sector reform process to a conclusion and constituted a starting point for its concrete implementation. The short-term, mid-term and long-term recommendations agreed upon with the Guinean transitional authorities became the national roadmap for the security sector reform process. The commitment demonstrated by the Interim President at the hand-over ceremony bolstered the reform process. UNOWA remained engaged in proposing ideas and concepts for the implementation phase.

As an immediate follow-up, President Conde, who had emerged victorious from the December 2010 elections, requested the establishment of a Security Sector Reform Advisory Team (SSRAT) to provide strategic guidance to the national authorities. Deployed in 2011 with the support of the PBF, it was placed under the SRSG’s supervision to allow for tight coordination with the political processes underway, raising initial – but ultimately unsuccessful – opposition by the RC who was keen to oversee that process himself. The assassination attempt against the President at his private residence in July 2011 illustrated the urgency of pushing forward with the reform of the security sector, with strong international support. The President was actively involved in selecting the General Officer to lead the SSRAT (with Canadian General Marc Caron being the first to serve in that role), and gave personal instructions to visibly locate the SSRAT office at the Presidency, not far from his office, with full access to its head, sending a clear message to his military entourage.

Implementing Security Sector Reform

With the roadmap for security sector reform in place as a result of the 2010 joint assessment, and with the SSRAT anchoring the issue (and international support thereto) in the President’s office, focus now turned to the equally difficult task of moving forward its implementation.
While SRSG Djinnit continued to play the lead role at the political level (in 2010 alone, SRSG Djinnit flew from Dakar to Conakry around 40 times, with security sector reform always high on his agenda), at the programmatic level, this effort was led by Anthony Kwaku Ohemeng-Boamah who had assumed his position as RC in Guinea in February 2010. Of Ghanaian origin, Ohemeng-Boamah was embarking on his first experience as RC in Guinea but brought extensive West Africa knowledge and over ten years of high-level experience with UNDP to the table.

To translate security sector reform into concrete programming and secure the necessary funding, Ohemeng-Boamah had to embed the issue in the second iteration of the UN’s Peacebuilding Priority Plan (PPP2) for Guinea, which was elaborated in the course of 2011. In this context, the RC embarked on a highly inclusive stakeholder consultation process, co-facilitated by the RC and staff members deployed by PBSO. Its main goal was to generate a game plan for and broad stakeholder buy-in (including from the military) into what the joint assessment report had identified as the immediate priority for security sector reform, namely the retirement of a large number of military officers and professionalisation of the army, in order to reduce the risk of coup d’états.

Securing strong national buy-in for this endeavour was essential, not least in light of President Conde’s concerns that making changes to the army so soon after elections could create new conditions for a ‘coup’. This consultation process lasted around six months, and involved over 150 key stakeholders, including political representatives, the military, women’s and youth groups, trade unions, and Civil Society Organisations.

Eventually, PPP2 featured 8 security sector reform projects with a budget of just over US$15 million, the most important of which involved ‘retiring’ 3,928 out of 24,000 soldiers with a ‘pension package’, a transparently operated programme which essentially ‘bought out’ military personnel by paying the arrears that had been blocking the security sector reform process. (The other priority areas included in the PPP2 were national reconciliation and jobs for young people and women, which are briefly discussed below).

To oversee implementation as well as national appropriation, oversight and monitoring of the PPP2 and its projects, an inclusive National Joint Steering Committee (JSC) was set up, with broad participation from Government, the UN, civil society and key donors, and chaired by the Prime Minister. Subsequently, Ohemeng-Boamah effectively used his role in that committee to enlist support from other international actors for the security sector reform endeavour. At working level, PPP2 was managed by a Secretariat (to the JSC), placed under the RCO, and was directed by a national coordinator, Thierno Aliou Diaoune, former Minister of Youth and Sport, who had previously been active in civil society, and who was widely respected by all parties.

Given the political sensitivities involved, it was no doubt unusual for an RC to assume such a prominent role in security sector reform initiatives related to the professionalisation of the army and, specifically, the ‘retiring’ of a large number of military professionals. Ohemeng-Boamah is widely commended for his enthusiasm to engage in this space, and the efforts he made to develop and implement the programme. His personal experience was critical in this regard: his father operated in the security services and he felt extremely comfortable working in this field (unlike many RCs), while simultaneously understanding its strategic importance.

Particularly noteworthy is the RC’s productive use and leveraging of other UN assets and capacities in the pursuit of security sector reform and their effective coordination into a coherent strategy. Informally, the RC – as well as SRSG Djinnit – continued to rely heavily upon strategic advice and support of General Cissé. After leading the joint security sector assessment in 2010, Cissé never reassumed an official role in Guinea but he remained closely involved behind the scenes, visiting the country regularly to facilitate political access, and to move the process forward, with double reporting lines between UNOWA and the RCO.

The RC also worked closely with the Security Sector Reform Advisory Team, called upon strategic support from UNOWA as and where necessary, and relied upon the advice, guidance and support of the UNDP Administrator who made the necessary calls amongst HQ colleagues as and when required to secure internal, political support. Ohemeng-Boamah also successfully leveraged the fact that, in February 2011, Guinea had been placed – at its own request – on the agenda of the PBC, which 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 mobilisation, especially in the field of security sector reform.

Within the RCO, the coordinator of the JSC Secretariat, Aliou Diaoune, is credited with having played a particularly instrumental role in the context of security sector reform thanks to his influence with national stakeholders. A former minister in Guinea, he managed all the funds related to the PPP and performed PDA-like functions. He served as an advisor to the RC, relationship-builder and manager and was responsible for steering all the PPP-related programmes. Most colleagues give him important credit for their successes, including on security sector reform. Aliou Diaoune was tragically assassinated in early 2015 and, while the motivation for the assassination has never been proven, the event underscored the particular risky nature of peacebuilding work for national staff.

In light of the fact that bilateral donors were unlikely to take the reputational risk required to pour money into security sector reform – i.e. the very sector that had been responsible for the turbulence of recent years – PBF support for the
endeavour in the context of PPP2 was vital for the success of this effort. PBF funding has also been catalytic in encouraging other donors to come forward following ‘proof of concept’ – notably the World Bank (US$ 25 million), the Japanese embassy (US$ 3 million) and the EU (US$ 20 million).

Finally, the RC’s engagement on security sector reform benefited from being aligned with the diplomatic activities of SRSG Djinnit and the joint strategy deployed by Djinnit and Ohemeng-Boamah with the support of multiple actors proved largely successful. The engagement of an envoy alongside the RC in the Guinean transition also allowed for a degree of “good cop, bad cop” division of labour between the two in their respective engagement with host country authorities. While both SRSG Djinnit and Ohemeng-Boamah cultivated very close relationships with the government – relationships which benefitted the security sector reform process – the former had, due to his mandate, greater leeway to have frank and vocal disagreements with President Conde and compensate for the RC’s constraints in pushing the envelope on issues sensitive to the government, most notably with respect to reconciliation and electoral reforms.

Overall, the RC’s engagement on security sector reform was successful and the early retirement of several thousand officers was implemented as planned. While UN engagement on security sector reform benefitted from the strong political will of both Konaté and President Conde, the RC and others succeeded to use these political openings as entry points for effective support to a difficult transition. Progress on security sector reform also helped unlock other peacebuilding processes and allowed for greater discussions on national reconciliation which were difficult to have prior to the reform process.

National Reconciliation, Job creation, and electoral support

Other areas of PPP2 were also important, although the evaluation noted that some interviewees were left with the impression that security sector reform was prioritised to the detriment of other vital areas of conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Under the second pillar, national reconciliation, the RC and UNCT led the development of a peace infrastructure, including Communal Peace-Building Synergies (SCAP), young people’s clubs in the neighbourhoods, and national consultations in support of reconciliation, for example, paying particular attention to women and vulnerable people. Under the last pillar, jobs for young people and women, initiatives were considered critical but impact was limited in comparison to resources allocated, with one beneficiary stating: “Where you picked us up is where you left us.”

Alongside the PPP process, SRSG Djinnit and Ohemeng-Boamah were both actively engaged in preventing tensions and violence around the legislative elections, which experienced multiple delays. Support in this regard involved an audit of the electoral voters roll and the deployment of independent electoral experts to increase the level of transparency and trust in the process, led by UNDP, with a view to strengthening the Independent National Electoral Commission.

PBF support also proved important to support the peaceful holding of elections. It made quick funds available for urgent election-related projects on: mediation; reintegration of “les enfants de Kalia” (trained in Guinea Forestiere by Dadis Camara’s people) – who could be easily mobilised during the electoral period; support to the security forces to maintain order during the electoral period in the full respect of human rights; and a ‘post-electoral’ project to prevent violent contestations after the elections and to promote peaceful acceptance of results. The overall envelop amounted to about US$ 5 million and underscored once more the flexibility and ‘nimbleness’ of the PBF to step-in when required.

Specific Prevention Interventions and Initiatives

In the case of Guinea there were numerous initiatives, projects and programmes launched by individual UN agencies, in particular UNDP, aimed at addressing specific conflict drivers or advancing specific prevention objectives. This section, however, will only look at those initiatives and approaches in which the RC had a significant role and/or which were jointly carried out in an interagency context and which hold particularly valuable lessons for RCs elsewhere. Security sector reform is the ‘cause celebre’ of UN engagement in Guinea, but since it has already been extensively discussed above, it is not included below.

Consultative Committees in Mining Localities (CCMLs) for conflict prevention

With large deposits of bauxite, gold, diamonds, and iron ore, Guinea is one of the most resource rich countries in Africa, with a strong potential for other minerals including uranium, zinc, cobalt, platinum, nickel, silver and high-quality granite. During the period of Ohemeng-Boamah’s time as RC, there was increasing interest from major multi-nationals, such as Rio Tinto, in mining in Guinea. Historically speaking, however, the work of mining companies has been ‘de-linked’ from sustainable development in Guinea and often contributed to an increase rather than a reduction in tensions. Prior to the elaboration of the CCMLs, mining-related conflicts were a relatively common occurrence in Guinea, leading to demonstrations, clashes with security services, and – often, deaths.

Engagement in this area took place on three axes. First, the RC engaged with the Chamber of Mines to establish a regular platform between the UN and the Ministry of Mines to discuss private sector-related environmental, social and human rights-related issues around mine sites. Second, it included the provision of technical support to the government on the negotiation of contracts, to ensure greater transparency and accountability, as well as adherence to Corporate Social
Responsibility principles. And, thirdly, the engagement had a conflict prevention component, developed by UNDP, in partnership with other UNCT entities, the World Bank, BCPR and PBSO. All three initiatives benefited from the support of the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Mines.

As a result of this last initiative, eighty-two Consultative Committees in Mining Localities (CCLMs) were established throughout the country, with the goal of preventing and/or resolving conflicts between local communities and mining companies – forming part of the broader peace and social infrastructure established and supported through the PPP. The PPP evaluation found that these committees served as key tools for conflict prevention and peace consolidation at the local level, and supported efforts to foster the sustainable exploitation of mineral resources in Guinea. Given their effectiveness and the increasing activity in both mining and agricultural sectors, the evaluation recommended the strengthening of such mechanisms in light of the important role in conflict prevention at the local level. The CCLMs, therefore, could provide a good model for other countries with a heavy extractive and/or private sector footprint.

The Women’s Situation Room

The RC-supported project on 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 was managed by the gender advisor seconded in 2012-14 by UN Women and PBSO to the RCO, with a mandate to support the PBF Secretariat, working closely with the PDA and UNOWAS. It benefited from extensive civil society participation and support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Guinea is one of several West African countries to have benefited from a WSR.

The initiative, conceptualised initially by the Angie Brooks International Centre, was first used in Liberia’s elections in 2011, and has since been replicated in other African countries. In Guinea, in the run-up to the Presidential elections in 2015, the project involved the training and deployment of over 600 female election observers across the country, to raise concerns and lower tensions – reporting back to a central group of women operating in Conakry. The women were responsible for reporting all incidents of violence or threats to peace and, once reported back to the Secretariat, the information was passed on to a team of leaders and eminent persons, operating on standby and ready to intervene when necessary. This team was also in close contact with the police and the NEC, and could be activated to respond to specific events if necessary.

The women played a particularly important role in decreasing the possibility of fraud, and of increase levels of trust in the process. The initiative is also widely credited as having had a particularly stabilising effect at the local level, while simultaneously empowering women and strengthening their capacities as peace actors. As stated by UN Women, these platforms help “rally women, youth, media, stakeholders, professionals, religious and traditional personalities and institutions to ensure a transparent and peaceful electoral process.”

Participatory workshop on conflict analysis (2017)

While falling outside the main focus of this case study (which looks mainly at 2009-14), the conflict analysis exercise underway in Guinea in 2017, led by RC Seraphine Wakana who arrived in Guinea in August 2014 in her first position as RC, demonstrate continued commitment on the part of the RC and the UNCT to ensure conflict prevention remains at the heart of engagements. The initiative is commendable also due to its highly participatory nature. The project was made possible thanks to additional funding (US$50,000) made available to the PDA in the context of the DPA-UNDP Joint Programme.

In July 2017, the conflict analysis exercise, which forms part of the project on strengthening social cohesion, led by UNDP in partnership with the Ministry of National Unity and citizenship, gathered more than 140 stakeholders from the government, Parliament, social and economic council, local government across the country, unions, civil society representatives, academics, as well as multilateral and bilateral partners and UNCT entities. The exercise was designed to inform the creation of a ‘conflict map’ for Guinea, a greater understanding of the root causes of conflict, and enhanced knowledge of the main actors and potential ‘flashpoints’, as well as potential conflict mitigation strategies.

The exercise helped participants ‘organise’ conflicts into eight categories: Mining related, land-related, socio-economic, political, inter-communal, electoral, human rights violations-related, and water and electricity-related. The exercise also helped generate greater clarity on how a wide range of UNCT programmes can be made more conflict sensitive. Unfortunately, due to the timing of the project – when the UNDAF process had almost been fully rolled out, the findings of the exercise were not included in the context of the UNDAF, but it has influenced the nature of the new projects funded by PBF for the period 2017-18 as well as the content of specific initiatives within the UNDAF and is likely, therefore, to the overall conflict-aware stance of both the RC and UNCT.

Peacebuilding Resources and RCO Capacities

A significant part of the resource mobilisations strategy led by the RC has focused on the PBF, not least given the fact that, especially during the turbulent years from 2008-10, most donors had withdrawn their support for Guinea. Under PPP1, the RC was able to raise US$ 1.2 billion between 2007 and 2010, under ‘tranche 1’, and around US$15 million in 2011 under ‘tranche 2’, when the thematic areas were re-oriented to be in line with the Ouagadougou Accords. Following
Guinea being put on the agenda of the PBC, Guinea received a total of US$69 million dollars, corresponding to 31 projects in three priority areas, including: security sector reform (US$15 million); national reconciliation (US$21 million); and jobs for young people and women (US$8.5 million), and support for the Secretariat and Steering Committee was over US$2.5 million.\textsuperscript{130}

Following a request for additional support from RC Gasarabwe, one of the first ever PDAs was deployed to Guinea in 2008. From 2012, Guinea didn’t benefit from a continued and stable presence of a PDA until the deployment of Waly Ndiaye in January 2016. During this time, the RC depended on the PBF Secretariat that had been established within the RCO and which consisted of one a national staff person, who was assisted by an M&E specialist. A gender advisor with a mandate to support the PBF Secretariat was deployed in August 2012 for two years. In 2014, the RCO also benefitted from a strategic planner who was deployed briefly, and a Senior Ebola crisis advisor, also financed by PBF.

More broadly speaking the RC benefited, however, from the tremendous support of the UN System, and from the international community more broadly. UNOWA in particular, with support from DPA, provided significant support through the deployment of a security sector reform advisor deployed extensively but intermittently from 2009-14, and through the establishment of SSRAT, also funded by PBF. PBSO provided very ‘hands on’ support since 2011 (starting with support on the organisation of the 2011 consultation process), with frequent in-country visits by the PBSO Guinea desk officers and, with a PBF project manager operating from New York. The UNDP administrator during 2010-13 in particular was very helpful, providing behind the scenes political support from New York, and BCPR provided extensive technical support, advice and trainings; UNDP in-country also provided critical support managing the Secretariat of the Fund in Guinea and, more broadly, given the UNDP lead on many of the projects associated with the transition. The UN staff college also provided ongoing trainings to the UNCT, financed by the PBF, as previously discussed. Outside of the UN system, support from ECOWAS and bilateral actors has been instrumental.

3. Overall Contribution of RC- and UNCT to prevention

As summarised by one researcher: “That Guinea did not experience further atrocities and the situation did not deteriorate into broader ethnic conflict that risked destabilizing the region is largely due to the effective preventive action taken during this time. These targeted efforts included preventive diplomacy, arms embargoes, travel bans, and threats of International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecutions. The case of Guinea is a rare example of how domestic, regional, and international actors using an array of primarily non-coercive and proximate measures can prevent a recurrence of mass atrocities.”\textsuperscript{131} Direct intervention by the RC in 2007 seems to have helped nudge the President to nominate a new PM, defusing a volatile crisis situation. Drawing on relationships in his country, the RC also helped provide entry-points for SRSG Djinnit, who was de facto leading the international response. The RC, furthermore, spearheaded a major security sector reform endeavour, funded by the PBF, that led to the retirement of a large number of military officers and professionalisation of the army, thereby reducing the risk of coup d’états. Successful engagement on security sector reform also provided both the political space and the ‘proof of concept’ required for other international donors to buy into – and provide funding to – the reform process and the transition more broadly. Overall, working with and leveraging other UN and non-UN actors anchored the approach that allowed the RC to have a meaningful impact on prevention and transition dynamics in Guinea.

4. Lessons, Good Practices and Recommendations

The RC is a key piece in a broad system of prevention-oriented actors, and the relationship between the RC and SRSGs/regional offices is key: The RC is able to significantly enhance their prevention role by leveraging other parts of the UN System to this end – in the case of Guinea closely working with a regional political office (UNOWA), PBSO, the PBC, the UNDP Administrator, a former UN force commander (General Cissé) – as well as key actors outside of the UN System, in particular regional and sub-regional actors. The relationship between the RC and the SRSG was critical from a prevention perspective and enabled them to play a ‘game’ of “good cop, bad cop” as and where necessary; this relationship works best where there is a clear division of responsibilities and a collaborative approach to strategy development.

RCs need to be political and often need to be risk-takers, and to be supported as such: The bold move on the part of RC Gasarabwe to first protect the trade union representatives, and then to make the trip to visit the President was a courageous move, which ultimately had a constructive outcome. The UN can support RCs to be risk takers but making it clear that they their careers will not suffer if the risk ‘backfires’ (it would not be a ‘risk’ if they knew the outcome would be positive, after all). The system ‘hierarchy’ must support efforts on the part of the RC to take (calculated) risks.

Making progress means engaging in complex and unpredictable situations: The ‘junta’ was open to working on peacebuilding, but for the UN this meant engaging with a government which had mounted a coup and which was accused of human rights violations. Non-engagement in this situation would almost certainly have been less constructive. Indeed, engagement in this context enabled the UN to make progress and gain entry points at a critical moment in Guinea’s political trajectory.
Peacebuilding endeavours must be based on participatory conflict analyses, and require a significant resource investment: In Guinea, the UNCT developed innovative ways of conducting conflict analysis in 2008, for example (with the ‘caravane’ exercise), but the evaluation maintained that there was a disconnect between programmes and the country context, and limited impact. This point demonstrates that the UN may lack staff who have the capacity to translate conflict analysis findings efficiently into projects and programmes. The RC/UNCT learnt from this experience and, the 2011 PPP2, for example, was embedded in an exemplary conflict analysis exercise with extensive stakeholder engagement, leading to a programme which had sufficiently greater levels of impact than its predecessor. Inclusive stakeholder engagement is vital for national buy-in, especially on sensitive areas of programming, such as security sector reform.

The PBF (and PBSO) tolerance for risk makes it a unique actor in the international system: The Guinea case demonstrates the importance of PBF as one of the few, if not the only, actor with a risk tolerance that allows it to engage in difficult situations such as Guinea post-coup, when all the other actors were withdrawing their support, and on issues such as security sector reform. This support paid off, as it was catalytic both programmatically and financially. These cases show that RCs are successful in engaging the PBF if they are willing to take risks themselves, have strong relationships in-country, are able to anchor programming in sound analysis, and present a clear and targeted vision for what they want to achieve. Furthermore, the cost of ‘peace’ for the UN amounted to only US$ 70 million over a decade, compared to the billions spent in countries affected by conflict, and which require a political or peacekeeping mission.

RCs have a constructive role to play in supporting international mediation efforts: Guinea demonstrates that RCs can play a helpful, complementary role in supporting international mediation efforts. In Guinea, the RC was particularly helpful, playing the role of advisor, ‘connector’, ‘Secretariat’, and liaison between international efforts and dynamics on the ground.

PDAs are a critical resource and the absence of a PDA can have a detrimental effect on the RC and UNCT; the PDA, however, is not the only critical resource for RCs in transition contexts: The absence of a PDA at a critical moment in the transition, as demonstrated in many of case studies, can have a detrimental effect on the ability of the RC to stay abreast of political developments in the country context, while simultaneously designing responses to them. But the PDA was not the only resource that the RC depended upon: the RC response was enhanced massively by the timely deployment of staff capacity from HQ, UNOWA, and UNWomen; the availability of General Cissé and the Subsequent Generals to advise the RC, and the RC’s ability to leverage them for entry-points with the junta, and the military was also key. The RC needs a “team” of PDAs, with specific expertise provided in line with the needs of the country in question.

Several innovative examples from Guinea merit further analysis and could be replicated (with contextual adaptation) elsewhere: The work on Security Sector Reform, the Women’s Situation Room and the Consultative Committees in Mining Localities are creative examples of RC-led initiatives that would benefit from more analysis and possible replication/adaptation in other country contexts.

RCs can use the PBC to their advantage: The RCs are able to use the fact that host countries no longer need to be ‘on the agenda’ of the PBC to receive support. Countries can request to use the PBC as a forum for analysis and discussions, and, therefore, for political accompaniment, donor coordination and mobilization.
Endnotes

Cover Image: REUTERS/Luc Gnago. 25 June 2010. Guinea’s presidential candidate Alpha Conde, leader of Rassemblement du Peuple de Guinea (RPG), gestures as he arrives for a presidential campaign rally in Conakry.

* This paper is based on secondary resources (listed below) and 14 interviews with RCs, PDAs and other RCO staff, other UNCT staff, national interlocutors of RC/UNCT Guinea, and, UNHQ staff via phone. The lead writer/researcher would like to sincerely thank all those who participated in this process for their active participation and generous comments, both in the context of interviews and the review process that followed.


3 (1) establishment of a Transitional National Council including civilians; (2) establishment of a consultative forum with representatives from all Guinean stakeholders; (3) organization of free and fair elections within 2009; (4) nonparticipation in elections of CNDD members, the transitional prime minister, or members of his government; and (5) respect for human rights and the rule of law as well as fight against impunity and drug trafficking. Taken from: Will, Antonia. “Convergence on who terms? Reacting to coups d’états in Guinea and Madagascar.” African Security, December 2013, p.51.


5 Koko, S. 2010, p.104.


7 Koko, S. 2010, p.103.


10 Koko, S. 2010, p.103.


14 Now known as the UN Office for West African and the Sahel (UNOWAS).

15 ACAPs, Country Profile, Guinea.


19 Ibid, p.54.


23 Ibid, p.506.

24 Picard, L A and Moudoud, E. 2010, p.58

25 Ibid.


28 Kikoler, N. 2015, p.17.

29 “The Peul (Fulani) are the largest ethnic group, making up 40% of Guinea’s population. The Malinke comprise 30%, and the Soussou 20%. The remainder consists of different communities inhabiting the Forest region. Guinea’s four geographical regions largely correspond to the main ethno-linguistic groups. The Peul mainly inhabit the Fouta Djallon mountain plateau in Mid-Guinea. The Malinke are concentrated in Upper Guinea, in the Niger plains. The Soussou are the dominant population along the coast in Maritime Guinea, including in Conakry.” Taken from: ACAPs, Country Profile, Guinea.

30 Guinea’s second largest ethnic group.


32 Ibid, p.300.


72
President Lansana Conte in 2004.

86 Kikoler, N. 2015, p.12
87 Erwin van Veen, Guinea’s transition from military rule to weak policing, Clingendael, March 2014.
88 Interview, United Nations Official, conducted via phone, 6 February 2018; Kikoler, N. 2015, p. 8.
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid
91 UN Office, Comments on draft, March 2017.
92 Ibid.
93 UN Official, Comments on draft, March 2018.
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97 UN Official, Comments on draft, March 2018.
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100 Ibid.
101 At the request of President Conde, SSRAT was co-led by three officials: General Marc Caron (Canadian), General Gutierrez, (Spanish), and Gen Vadeboncoeur (Canadian). These advisors played a prominent role in the implementation of security sector reform and, particularly, in deflecting attention away from the President when conducting high-risk reforms and towards the security sector reform advisors. They also played a critical role in mobilising resources through a dedicated national security sector reform steering committee framework, which was established by President Conde.
102 Ibid.
103 Interview, RC Ohemeng-Boamah, conducted via phone, 22 January 2018
104 Ibid.
105 UN Mission Report of the PBC Guinea Configuration’s Chairperson’s visit to Conakry, February 2013.
107 Interview, RC Ohemeng-Boamah, conducted via phone, 22 January 2018
108 Interview, UN Official, 3 June 2018.
109 Ibid.
110 Interview, United Nations Official, conducted via phone, 22 February 2018
111 Following Guinea being put on the agenda of the PBC, Guinea received a total of $69 million, corresponding to 31 projects in three priority areas, including: security sector reform ($15 million); national reconciliation ($21 million); and jobs for young people and women ($8.5 million), and support for the Secretariat and Steering Committee was over $2.5 million.
112 Interview, United Nations Official, conducted via phone, 6 February 2018
113 Interviews, United Nations Officials, conducted via phone, January and February 2018.
115 Interview, United Nations Official, conducted via phone, 22 January 2018.
117 UN official, March 2018.
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119 Kikoler, N. 2015, p.17
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122 Interview, United Nations Official, conducted via phone, 30 January 2018
123 Pellezzi, Alessandra, comments on draft, March 2018.
124 Bah, M D. 2014.
127 Ibid.
128 Ibid.
130 Transtec 2017
131 Kikoler, N. 2015, p.2.
Guyana 2003-15

Wendy MacClinchy*
Introduction

Following highly contested national elections in 2001, politically- and racially-charged violence swept across Guyana’s capital, Georgetown, and the surrounding countryside. The crisis revealed deep social cleavages and weak governance capacities, with many warning that the country was nearing the point of state failure. Although the UN had been present in Guyana for decades, its focus on social and economic development meant the Organization had little political engagement when the crisis broke out. The UN had to shift quickly from a purely development-oriented approach to a conflict prevention role.

This case study explores the UN Resident Coordinator-led response to the crisis in Guyana, in particular the efforts to end the immediate risks of widespread violence following the 2001 elections, while also working to address the deeper root causes of conflict. It focuses on key moments in the UN’s preventive engagement from 2003-15, identifying how the consecutive Resident Coordinators (RCs) during this period – Richard Olver (1999-2002), Jan Sand Sorensen (2003-04), Youssef Mahmoud (2004-06), Aboubacry Tall (2007-09), Mamadou Karray Lamine-Tinguiri (2009-11), and Khadija Musa Youssef Mahmoud (2012-16) – developed and implemented conflict prevention strategies and initiatives. It especially focuses on the UN’s national Social Cohesion Programme (SCP) (2003 – 06) that led a pivotal ‘national conversation’ among Guyanese citizens about community identity and inter-racial harmony, leading, in 2006, to Guyana’s first completely violence-free elections in its history.

The SCP’s implementation proved catalytic, leaving a lasting legacy among Guyanese society of relative inter-ethnic harmony, even if it would take longer for deeper institutional and governance reforms to take hold. Importantly, the program was built on citizens’ direct participation, helping to impart social norms of non-violence and social unity, which ultimately contributed to a shift in prevailing views about community and inter-ethnic identity. Successor programs to the SCP strengthened community security and local capacities further, evidenced by peaceful elections in 2011 and 2015, again with support from the RC and UN Country Team (UNCT). This paper explores how UN Resident Coordinator-led responses directly contributed to these changes and made a significant contribution to conflict prevention in Guyana.

Guyana was an early test case for UN interagency cooperation on conflict prevention outside of mission settings and remains a compelling illustration of the impact that limited, strategically deployed prevention resources can have at the right place and time.

1. Country Context

“The story of Guyana is, to a deeply disturbing degree, the story of political exploitation of the race factor by every political leader from every point on the ideological spectrum.”

The root causes of Guyana’s persistent violence can be traced back to historical competition between its two predominant racial groups – Afro-Guyanese and Indo-Guyanese – over resources and political power. Politicians’ incitement of racial divisions during electoral periods have preyed on fears of ethnically-based dominance, and have reliably sparked violence for decades. In the absence of strong accountability or justice institutions in the country, and in the face of deep economic and social marginalization, violence has been an all-too typical means to a political end in Guyana. A brief description of the sources of these tensions provides important context for the 2002 crisis.

Colonial legacy and inequality

As a Caribbean country with a population of less than 800,000, Guyana’s demographic composition, and the political exploitation of it, is a primary cause of its instability. Guyana’s history of racially-defined politics has its roots in the period of British colonial rule in the 19th century. In 1838, Great Britain’s abolition of slavery caused a mass exodus from plantations when former slaves moved to the coast, creating settlements of small farms and triggering a labour shortage, which was filled by imported indentured workers, mostly from India. These newcomers from India were resented and viewed as strike-breakers for accepting British low wages.

Ethnically divisive “divide-and-rule” colonial policies prescribed a strict social hierarchy and division of roles within the plantation economy. Afro-Guyanese, descendants from African slaves, educated in Christian schools converted to the faith, entered civil service roles, industry and business in urban areas. In contrast, East Indians, descendants of indentured labourers from the Indian subcontinent, were excluded from schools at the time, settling in rural areas to become tradesmen or rice and sugar farmers. Segregation deepened across economic and social spheres, with trade and labour unions dominated by either group, permanently bifurcating civil society in wholly separate identities. From these separate foundations, ethnically-based political parties emerged to lead the independence movement to end British rule.

The independence movement and the politics as a struggle for ethnic survival

Starting from the independence movement of the 1950s and early 1960s, ethnic solidarity drove political mobilization with “vote for your own” rallying cries that cultivated and reinforced entrenched negative stereotypes and fear of the other. Political movements were born of and catalysed this polarization. Guyana’s winner-takes-all political system – defined by communal loyalty politics and without meaningful power-sharing arrangements – further fuelled ethnic tension and fears. Such fears were systematically manipulated with
The violence that characterises this period also derives from the lack of a national-level dialogue or reconciliation following decades of slavery, colonial rule and ethnically-based policies. At each new electoral process, the prospects for national unity and/or social cohesion retreated further, as identity-politics and mutual distrust instead drove political agendas. Neither side saw political advantage in adopting policies that would build accountability or inter-communal dialogue, which was reflected in the total lack of institutions at the state or local level that could advance reconciliation.

In the absence of any power-sharing or conciliation systems within a highly centralized national governance structure, the political motivation of each side has historically been to acquire power and hold onto it at all costs.

**Successive elections trigger inter-ethnic tensions**

From its independence in 1966 until 2001, Guyana’s electoral cycles reliably triggered tensions among the two leading ethnic groups. This occurred primarily between two groups: Indo-Guyanese supporting the People’s Progressive Party (PPP) and Afro-Guyanese supporters of the People’s National Congress (PNC). The Indo-Guyanese were the majority ethnic group (43% per 2002 census), with the Afro-Guyanese the second largest (30.2%). Smaller ethnic groups of mixed-race and indigenous Amerindians, marginalized under colonial rule, were politically powerless, except as a “swing” vote upon which the two main parties occasionally depended.

From 1968 to 1992, the PNC ruled on the basis of a quasi-socialist agenda, nationalizing industries to favour its own patronage networks and using the security services to suppress dissent and target opponents. This led to deep resentment among the PPP and its supporters. The 1992 elections took place amidst riots, targeted assassinations and ethnically-charged political violence. Following their 1992 victory, the PPP put in place equally discriminatory policies that fed further polarization in the country. Again, following the 1997 contested electoral results, there were weeks of riots in Georgetown and environs, with both sides fuelling violence. The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) intervened at the time to mediate a peace agreement, which included provisions for new elections in 2001, and electoral reforms that criminalised racially-charged/hate speech. A subsequent agreement between the two sides was meant to accelerate deeper constitutional reforms focused on power-sharing, but slow and inadequate implementation meant that by 2000 there were few incentives for the parties to cooperate. International organizations including CARICOM, the Commonwealth of Nations and the Carter Center were brought in on several occasions between 1992 and 2001 to help resolve outstanding political disputes, with little success.

The 2001 elections were deeply polarizing, in part because the many complaints by the PNC about the 1997 electoral process had not been addressed. Public suspicion about the voter registry was unresolved, while international election observers cited widespread irregularities in both registration and dissemination of results. The narrow victory by the PPP was strongly contested by the PNC and its supporters, with the PNC eventually boycotting Parliament. A failed mediation by the Commonwealth Secretariat between President Bharrat Jagdeo and the former (PNC) President Desmond Hoyte was followed by violent protests and the storming of the President’s offices. Sporadic street violence continued through 2001 and into 2002, with increasingly clear signs of inter-ethnic factors driving attacks.

The crisis reached a boiling point in early 2002 when between 200-400 civilians were reported killed amidst allegations of state-sponsored, extra-judicial killings by criminal groups across the country. The military was called in to maintain public order, but with widespread resentment against the state – particularly among PNC supporters – and a deeply polarized government, tensions continued to mount and violence continued. In July, a CARICOM conference in Georgetown brought international media attention to the country, as the World Bank declared Guyana to be suffering from a “crisis of governance” and many international stakeholders warning that it could become a failed state.

The following section describes how UN Resident Coordinator-supported action – largely focused on development and socio-economic issues in Guyana – put in place a consultative conflict prevention approach for the country in the face of this crisis.

2. **RC-Supported Prevention Initiatives**

This section examines the UN Resident Coordinator’s role in conflict prevention efforts in Guyana in the period between 2003 and 2015, with the focus on the 2003-06 UN-led Social Cohesion Program, which catalyzed transformational change in Guyanese society, breaking a decades-long cycle of violent national elections.

**Context: The UN in Guyana prior to 2003**

With a light footprint and long commitment, a handful of UN agencies have been supporting Guyana’s development since 1952. Few entry points existed for the UN to engage in politically-driven prevention work outside of building capacity of the election commission. However, this changed in July 2002, when the outbreak of major violence created an entry point for conflict prevention work in Guyana.

At the time, RC Richard Olver was concluding his three-year tenure in Guyana, but before leaving indicated that the UN stood ready to lend support to national dialogue and peacebuilding if there was political will by the parties, declaring that Guyanans needed to “reach across the divide” and calling for “a whole series of measures to help build trust.
in this society.” Specifically, he suggested to build on the grassroots work of the United Nations Association of Guyana (UNAG) in establishing Community Peace Councils as local mediation and dialogue mechanisms. This was a clear signal by the UN that it was ready to help the Guyanese through their crisis and the first overt entry point for the UN into a conflict prevention role. Unfortunately, it would take the UN more than a year to replace Olver after he departed in the spring of 2002.

Genesis of the UN’s Conflict Prevention Strategy in Guyana

Conflict analysis, joint capacity and early setbacks

In 2002, without an RC on the ground, the UNDP Resident Representative, as acting RC, led consultations with the Carter Center and the Commonwealth Secretariat on how best to respond to the crisis, with guidance from UNDP and DPA in New York. In December 2002, in support of this effort, an inter-agency team from UN Headquarters embarked on a joint needs assessment mission to Guyana. They conducted an analysis of the risks of continued unrest and future electoral violence. The mission defined four major challenges: 1) political deadlock between the parties over failure to implement previous accords and their withdrawal from mediation efforts; 2) increase in violence among poor, disaffected communities coupled with political discontent, and leading to state security forces abuses and extrajudicial killings; 3) weak government capacity to deliver basic public services “suggesting possible state failure;” and 4) heightened acrimony and racially polarized public discourse.

The team’s analysis confirmed UNDP Guyana’s concerns of the existential threat this volatility posed for Guyana’s stability if left unaddressed. Recommendations emerging from this mission led to a decision by the UN’s since-disbanded Interagency Framework for Coordination on Early Warning and Preventive Action (aka “the Framework Team”) to directly support conflict prevention in Guyana with specific staff capacities, funding, and inter-agency guidance for a program that would later become the Social Cohesion Project (SCP). The subsequent active role of the Framework Team at UNHQ in supporting the SCP was cited as an important source of assistance and guidance during the SCP, representing input from DPA, UNDP, The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), within an informal coordination structure and regular contact.

While these plans constituted a relatively clear way forward for the UN, the political context to develop the program remained prohibitive. During 2002 so-called “death squads” roamed the streets, and extrajudicial killings with clear political/ethnic dimensions continued. But when the UNDP country office raised with national authorities the possibility of a violence prevention/social cohesion program, it was “stonewalled” for four months, unable to get meetings with or cooperation from government representatives on any issue.

At the same time, as the country descended into violence, several citizen’s groups driven by public sentiments that political elites were failing the Guyanese, inserted themselves into the public dialogue to break the impasse and advocate for reconciliation and a cessation of violence. However, the groups, too, were viewed as partisan, and the effort fell apart.

Despite these challenges, and further to the Framework Team’s commitment of support, the UN on the ground took preparatory steps to build its own capacity to take forward the work if the opportunity arose, including the deployment by UNDP and DPA of an experienced Peace and Development Advisor (PDA) – the first deployment of a PDA ever – and a Human Rights Advisor to Georgetown. A Program Management Unit (PMU) was established as a joint capacity between UNDP and the RC’s Office to begin work on designing a prevention program. Between December 2002 and May 2003, in close collaboration with the UN core team in New York, they developed an inter-agency programme based on the analysis of the joint mission, with the PDA leading the programme design with a conflict prevention orientation. However, in doing so they operated within tight constraints set by the government at the time. Indeed, the government prohibited use of the word “conflict” and blocked any overt attempts at prevention or governance capacity strengthening.

As a result, the small prevention team within UNDP’s PMU used the very small entry point they had, namely HIV training, as a way to get a foothold into working with government institutions on prevention. This included, initially all in the HIV context, leadership training with elements of ‘emotional intelligence’ which began to carefully introduce themes such as mutual respect. With this foothold, they began to introduce more deliberately, discussions around acceptance of diversity and issues related to inter-ethnic co-existence. Later, this approach was also adopted in their technical support to the Elections Commission.

Defining the RC role: Program setbacks and lessons in diplomacy

In June 2003, the deployment of a new RC, Jan Sand Sorensen, brought initial progress but also introduced a new set of obstacles and delays in the UN’s support to conflict prevention in Guyana. Among his first priorities was to implement the multi-dimensional program the joint PMU team had developed with the aim of de-escalating tensions and enhancing social cohesion. A Danish national and former RC in Latvia with an ILO background, Sorensen set up a Thematic Group on Peace and Social Cohesion with UNCT members as well as local and international stakeholders to oversee implementation of the UN’s nascent Social Cohesion Programme. Abandoning the status quo, a view began emerging from within the UN that rather than trying
to mediate a solution, it would help create the space and capacities for Guyanese to play this role themselves.\textsuperscript{38} With increased donor interest in Guyana and an enhanced UN role therein, the RC came to co-chair with the Guyanese President the High-Level Donor Committee and its subsidiary Thematic Group on Governance. This opened high-level political channels and the possibility of greater access for prevention-related programming for the UN.

But this high-level initiative also increased Sorensen’s own public profile and left him vulnerable in a highly charged political atmosphere. With so-called “death squads” continuing to perpetrate serious violence on civilians, and widespread suspicions that these groups were acting with at least tacit support from the government, European ambassadors based in Georgetown pressured Sorensen to issue a joint statement on behalf of the “international community”. This was the first joint international statement, and it condemned state-sponsored violence, human rights abuses and political incitement.\textsuperscript{29}

This statement created a huge rift between the RC and the Government.\textsuperscript{30} President Jagdeo responded to it by writing a no-confidence letter to the UN Secretary-General, taking advantage of Guyana’s “active presence and visible profile” in New York.\textsuperscript{31} UN leadership in NY responded by sending a fact-finding mission to Guyana and Sorensen was left with little political leverage for the remaining six months of his term.

Social Cohesion as a Conflict Prevention Strategy

With the RC still in country but effectively made a lame duck, the joint UN-PMU team was nonetheless able to continue with “low-profile” training on conflict prevention, early warning, and conflict-sensitive development programming led by the PDA, as well as human rights training led by the Human Rights Advisor. There was no political engagement between the UN and the government for many months while the PMU quietly led “track II or III” engagement to develop the SCP.\textsuperscript{32}

The launch of the SCP eventually became possible when three key factors came together. The first was that the donor community, by 2003, became convinced of the need to contain the spiralling violence and the threat it posed to development gains, openly calling for a conflict prevention agenda. The second was a shared realization, even if only a tacit one, of the failure and poor prospect of past and ongoing mediation efforts. Guyana suffered from “mediation fatigue” after more than five decades of failed external mediation attempts through high-level diplomacy.\textsuperscript{33} The third was the interest of the government, under pressure by growing international concerns Guyana was becoming a failed state, in legitimacy offered by stable, violence-free elections. If it was to avoid being viewed as a country in conflict (and the perceived risks to its sovereignty that may pose), it needed to project stability. For this, it needed the UN.

Eventually, the UN became seen as a useful ally to the government, able to use its neutrality to manage the various programs in a way that would not disrupt the fragile ethnic/political balance in Guyana. And the government saw the UN as a source of support too: capable of mobilizing funding for public programs, development and election support, it was a key ally in the efforts to acquire and sustain funding. As a result, the UN-led Social Cohesion Program (SCP) became the preferred channel for all conflict prevention programs.

A New Theory of Change Emerges

The deployment of a PDA and its new focus on conflict prevention allowed the UN to update what was widely considered a poor and outdated Common Country Assessment (CCA).\textsuperscript{34} The PDA, South African conflict resolution specialist Chris Spies, led a new, widely consulted conflict analysis which summarized Guyana’s core challenges as consisting of weak and non-inclusive governance, poor leadership, racial identity politics, inequality and poverty, pervasive mistrust between groups, and a legacy of historical grievances.\textsuperscript{35}

The PDA concluded that perennial, high-stakes power struggles, meant that political opponents rarely cooperated; and “yet all of them spoke about the need for cohesion and prosperity.”\textsuperscript{36} At the core of Guyana’s conflict, and its single biggest hurdle for peace and stability, was a fundamental trust deficit between the two prominent ethnic groups. Therefore, building confidence between these groups was the key to prevention in Guyana. It required Guyanese citizens outside the political arena to take the first steps, and in doing so, reclaim ownership of their destiny. If a safe space for an honest exchange of views, without fear of reprisal, could be found, then civil society could “find its own voice in the national dialogue” and begin holding their politicians, and each other, accountable.\textsuperscript{37}

It was from this premise that a new theory of change emerged, one aimed not at mediation, but deeper “conflict transformation.”\textsuperscript{38} Reckoning with the failures of elite mediation in which political dialogue excluded the general population, this approach would be inclusive, bottom-up and organic. It would define, for the first time, a role for regular citizens in influencing Guyana’s path.\textsuperscript{39} With a focus on individual human relationships within the conflict rather than its structural causal factors,\textsuperscript{40} it constituted a novel effort to build national capacities for peace and justice in tandem.

\textit{Citizen dialogue and creating conditions for peace to ‘erupt’}

In its convening role, the UN helped create these safe spaces for Guyanese to open meaningful channels of dialogue, on the basis of which trust could be built. The deliberate avoidance of specific outcomes or closure was by design, since its very informality was seen as essential to fostering cooperation.\textsuperscript{31}
Comparing the new approach with the previous one, Chris Spies noted that “before May 2003, dialogue attempts focused on the issue of negotiation – “talk to each other because you have to!” – in order to avoid chaos and implosion.”42 This was mainly done through external mediation attempts. By contrast, the SCP shifted to enabling the conditions in which dialogue could occur – “talk to each other because you want to” – as a “logical and safe thing to do.”43 The model offered a path from social fragmentation to cohesion, but with a built-in agility that does not dictate that the path is sequential. Spies based the Social Cohesion Project design on a proven model (Development Practice Framework) adapted from Community Development Resources Association, a South African NGO advancing inclusive community dialogue for social change.44

The Social Cohesion Project was managed by the RC’s conflict prevention team, led by Chris Spies (his PDA), and including conflict experts and specialized UNDP program staff, in particular Lawrence Lachmansingh, a UNDP national programme staff who proved key to the program’s success. Under the RC’s direct supervision and support, the PDA led the six-month design of the programme (December 2002 – May 2003) through its three-year implementation (May 2003 – December 2006).45 They assembled an ethnically mixed team, recruiting local residents with a background in youth work with regional development councils.46

The SCP is noteworthy for several reasons: 1) the inclusivity of its scope (including dismantling racial bias and reclaiming civic voices and roles); 2) its focus on building trust as a means of “humanizing” each other; 3) its local ownership with Guyanese driving the agenda; and 4) the efficacy of its strategy to network disparate segments of Guyanese society across its racial divisions (E.g. Guyana Peace Builders Network). It employed a comprehensive range of techniques and activities designed for maximum impact and inclusion.47

The fact that the SCP’s approach aligned with the widely held Guyanese view that durable peace would not come without justice, equity and development motivated broad participation in the process, as did the strong demand for safe spaces to talk to one another, to air grievances, reconcile with past injustices, and begin to trust again.48

Without a specific pre-determined outcome, a series of stakeholder dialogue forums in informal, small-groups allowed people to listen to one another in a context of mutual respect, from which relationships of trust emerged organically. The forums gave voice to a multitude of stakeholders. Technical skills in mediation, peacebuilding, early warning, human rights, peace education and conflict transformation were imparted through workshops, trainings, study tours and trips abroad.49 Participants then launched their own initiatives as a multiplier effect dispersed their impact throughout the country.50

**Overview of select SCP activities (2003-06)**

**Efforts to promote dialogue:** In the lead up to 2006 elections, the most significant of the SCP’s efforts was a bottom-up dialogue space created through Multi-Stakeholder Forums (MSFs) and National Conversation, engaging broad cross-segments of civil society (citizens, community leaders, politicians). MSFs tailored to specific groups – youth, women, religious leaders – and local regions, became most well-known features of the program.

**Efforts to build national conflict management capacity:** This set of activities focused on developing the conflict management capacity of local governance institutions and other important constituency by providing training to police, the Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC), Regional Development Councils, youth groups, trade unions, community organizations, and political party leaders.

**Media training and support:** In 2004, UNDP led consultations among journalists, editors and others in media, supported drafting responsible broadcasting legislation, helped design responsible journalism courses at Guyanese Universities.

**Peace Research and Education:** In the framework of the SCP, the UN, in 2004, convened national peace scholars, politicians and civic leaders in a national conflict analysis, resolution and governance conference, embedding conflict prevention awareness in the national higher education curriculum.

**Youth participation and local ownership:** The SCP’s Youth-Focused Community Based Initiatives targeted unemployed, out-of-school, “unattached” youth, often involved in violence and crime, in small funded and mentored community projects in violence-prone regions.55 Youth wings of the two political parties met in workshops; groups of youth and local officials participated in conflict transformation, civic education and human rights workshops. These youth returned to lead development projects in their own communities building skills training or recreational centres, libraries, and bridges.56

During this period, mediation was not abandoned. A Special Envoy to Guyana of the Commonwealth, Sir Paul Reeves, was facilitating “track one” political dialogue throughout the tense electoral and volatile periods between 2002 and 2006, positioning the UN to lead in the “track two” space.57

By the end of 2004, a new RC, Youssef Mahmoud, was deployed with an unusual senior political background (with DPA) which proved valuable experience in navigating the delicate relationship the UN had with the government, as well as advancing the UN’s efforts in social cohesion. Cognizant of his predecessor’s experience, he adopted a careful, modest
tact – knowing he needed to establish credibility, both with wary national counterparts and within the UNCT among which he faced doubters.

The power of modest diplomacy: “It’s not about you”

Mahmoud’s first opportunity to establish credibility would be his first test. A month after arriving, in January 2005, Guyana had its highest rainfall on record since 1888, causing devastating flooding and triggering a humanitarian crisis in Guyana’s most populated areas, officially declared “disaster areas.” The Poverty Reduction Strategy Plan (PRSP) was used as recovery framework. On 30 January 2005, Mahmoud visited flood-affected areas with national and international partners.\(^{58}\) The experience helped him gain a better understanding of the country and he used the humanitarian crisis as an entry point to forge a working relationship with the government. In order to create political space, he used humanitarian needs to build credibility, for himself, his role and for the organization – both out of expediency and necessity.\(^{59}\) He did this by highlighting humanitarian needs and responses, not himself, and by maintaining a low-profile, redirecting media attention to the UN’s local partners while methodically carving out political space for the UN.

Mahmoud credits the eventual confidence he won to three other key factors. First by suspending his preconceptions and instead listening deeply to build, gain and earn trust, he was able to gradually understand how in the Guyanese context, political power was maintained and exercised. This approach had the additional benefit of being culturally appropriate (tapping into the Guyanese affinity “to converse”). Second, he heeded lessons from the UN’s past missteps by withstanding pressure from influential bilateral donors to become their spokesperson while also avoiding being co-opted by elites. Third, he led by empowering others, understanding and fostering the leadership potential of his team on which he relied and for which he facilitated political access. For example, when he arrived, the RC relied on UNICEF’s established contacts and credibility to lead on certain issues, helping to open doors for him.

Mahmoud rallied the small UNCT behind a common direction, through a series of dedicated retreats. Importantly, this led to a conclusion that the UN’s strategy should not be driven by an assessment of Guyanese needs alone but should be complemented by an analysis of Guyana’s own capacities. Shifting the question from “what was going wrong?” to “what was going right?” revealed entry points for fostering lasting change. In particular, Guyana’s dynamic civil society and private sector were national assets whose capabilities could be strengthened, where pathways for dialogue could be forged, and which could become “entrepreneurs for peace”. In this way, Guyana’s resilience to violence would drive the agenda. Mahmoud then built this analysis, effectively replacing the CCA, into the UNDAF itself which revisited prior common objectives so that social cohesion would cut across its priority areas.

Preparing for the 2006 elections

By 2005, the SCP shifted its focus to the 2006 elections, engaging political parties and their youth wings in dialogue, tailoring programs to areas at highest risk for electoral violence, and promoting peace messaging in the media – with successful results. By 2005, SCP participants began to organize across their usual ethnic boundaries to form coalitions for peacebuilding work. For example, one of these, the Inter-Religious Organization (IRO) organized peace walks around the elections with civil society and politicians as a show of unity, and signed pledges for peaceful campaigning.\(^{60}\) One group, the Spirit of Guyana, became a key partner of the SCP. Other groups followed the lead, mobilizing women, youth, even bikers, for peace.

These developments served as indication of the SCP’s catalysing impact as a climate of restraint and deterrence took hold.\(^{61}\) Independent observers also credit the SCP with a “new dynamic” in Guyanese politics with engaged citizens and groups gaining visibility and progress toward constitutional reforms gaining momentum.\(^{62}\) By then, SCP partners included the government, the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO/WHO), and five UN agencies (UNFPA, UNDP, UNICEF, UNESCO, and UNIFEM).\(^{63}\)

The RC’s SCP team also leveraged both regional expertise and respected international resource persons with relevant experience. For instance, in April 2005 the UN brought in Roelf Meyer, a former South African cabinet member under Nelson Mandela, to lead a two-day national conflict transformation workshop between civil society leaders, political figures, parliament members and government officials.\(^{64}\) Its success prompted a series of multi-stakeholder forums within a comprehensive “national conversation” called for by the President. In fact, the conflict transformation workshop was the first time Guyanese citizens experienced the freedom to speak openly about their future without party-political dominance and interference.\(^{65}\)

Among the SCP’s most notable outcomes, were the “converts” the programme produced: participants who became change agents promoting peace in various ways.\(^{66}\) These citizen peacebuilders could now be found throughout society, influencing public opinion, championing unifying themes, and running for elected office. As intended, they, either through a public role or in their private lives, were empowered to influence public discourse. Lawrence Lachmansingh, one of the SCP’s managers in the PMU, noted frequent encounters with Guyanese citizens who participated in the SCP dialogue forums, who would appear over the following years in various public roles, as civic activists, local politicians, or parliamentarians – all espousing messages of racial harmony.

The 2006 elections became a turning point, the first ever in Guyana’s history to be free from violence. Despite the PPP’s fourth consecutive electoral victory, the PNC accepted the
result. Low voter turnout reflected both public fatigue and fear of electoral violence. This historic event was directly attributed to the success of UN’s Social Cohesion Program in independent studies, although violence prevention and election monitoring programmes of other organisations also contributed to the outcome.

But the SCP was also not without its challenges. Its grassroots approach was fragmented at times, and focusing on individuals in lieu of institutional governance capacity had limitations in terms of ensuring the sustainability of the program’s impact. Partly to balance this shortcoming, the 2006-10 UNDAF featured an “inclusive system of governance based on the rule of law” as one of three national priorities, embedding social cohesion and “equal access to justice, protection and security.” And because the SCP consciously avoided more “muscular” forms of mediation, there were no high-level channels in place to capture grassroots goodwill and translate it into political change or institutional capacity. One study suggests adjoining diplomatic pressure may have been able to exert leverage or offer incentives sufficient to enable those enlightened civic values gained from SCP to permeate the realm of policy. Others suggested it enabled the government to evade thorny political or social justice problem solving. Its successor program, the Enhancing Public Trust, Security and Inclusion (EPTSI), discussed in the next section, did eventually try to take these critiques on board in its design.

**Enhancing Public Trust, Security and Inclusion (EPTSI)**

Following the successful 2006 elections, the SPC program ended. With the departure of Mahmoud and his SCP team in the PMU, the political appetite, funding and UN leadership for social cohesion went dormant. It would be two years before the SPC’s successor would emerge. During this period of relative calm and economic growth, the new RC, Aboubacry Tall (Feb. 2007- June 2009), focused on other priorities. In 2008, the Framework Team in New York sent a joint mission of DPA-MSU and experts from UNDP’s Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR) to see if the program could be salvaged. They met with UNCT colleagues, government representatives, and partners to assess stakeholder interest and national capacity. They encouraged a reluctant RC to be supportive.

With homicide levels remaining high and “phantom squads” engaging in extrajudicial killings, the RC was able to negotiate the SCP’s resurrection with a government insistence on national ownership over direction of any new program. So, in a new incarnation of the SCP, the EPTSI programme (standing for “Enhancing Public Trust, Security and Inclusion”) was approved by the cabinet in November 2008 to strengthen community security and local-level conflict resolution, leading up to the next election in 2011. Such was government involvement, that the head of the Presidential Secretariat took a lead role in recruiting the RC’s new PDA, Trevor Clarke led the program from his arrival in March 2009. In this role, he conducted a baseline survey (completed in November 2009) revealing gaps in state provision of citizen security, finding a public trust deficit in police, reinforced by extrajudicial killings and arbitrary arrests of opposition members which were ascribed to state security forces.

The PDA’s analysis provided the evidence base informing program design and helped get donors on board, although many were concerned about the government’s influence over the program infringing on the UN’s impartiality. DPA and UNDP-BCPR helped design, and the latter also provided funding for the 3-year, US$7 million program with additional support from DFID, CIDA, and the EU.

In 2009, a new RC arrived, Mamadou Kiari Liman–Tinguiri (2009-11), who soon found himself in a difficult position, needing to maintain support for EPTSI from a sovereignty conscious government while having to defend the program to donors who complained the UN was too close to the government and couldn’t fairly represent their concerns. With the historical vulnerability of the RC in Guyana to pressure from both government and donors, any missteps could easily bring about the end of the program.

With limited political space at the centre, but eager to improve citizen security by building on the remains of community-level goodwill produced by the SCP, EPTSI aimed at violence reduction at the local level, with a particular focus on youth. By mid-2011, with neither a PDA nor an RC in place, a Kenyan Democratic Governance Advisor (George Wachira) was brought into the RCO/UNDP Project Management Unit to support EPTSI for five months. Part of EPTSI’s strategy was to precipitate a shift in Guyanese political engagement from ethnic/racial identity to an issues-based one. It tried to achieve this through:

- “Youth empowerment and livelihoods’ with youth vocational training, leveraging the national UNV program as a means to provide cross-ethnic conflict resolution training to marginalized young people”;
- “Enhancing community dialogue and social cohesion” in which the PDA led legislation-writing training programmes for local Guyanese lawmakers, and A ‘Reduced risks’ initiative working with media for positive, non-inflammatory coverage.

However, despite the project’s limitations, capacities built through EPTSI did eventually contribute to the peaceful conduct of the 2011 polls - at least in the internal assessment of the UN’s Political Affairs Department.

Although strong government control of EPTSI brought national ownership, it also subjected its conflict prevention work to the very partisan politics that historically drove those conflicts while limiting space for civil society design and leadership beyond the local level. At that time, the Ethnic Relations Commission formed in 2003 had fallen apart and would not be resumed for eight years, leaving no obvious
Guyana

national institutional home for a project focused largely on building capacity for conflict prevention.62

It was the incoming RC, Khadija Musa (Feb. 2012 – Aug. 2016) who was able to make political headway. In her first RC posting she demonstrated an early willingness to take political risks.63

The 2015 Election and Insider Mediation “Guyanese for Peace”

Guyanese resilience was tested again in the lead up to the 2015 elections, called early due to a tense political impasse. Historic racial tensions resumed when polling in advance of the vote predicted a close race threatening to end a two-decade reign of the ruling party and resurrecting the spectre of violence.

Against this background, RC Musa, with PDA guidance, tried to revive political dialogue efforts, carefully building confidence with both the ruling and opposition parties to position the UN as an impartial arbiter. Together, they produced a non-paper with possible steps for dialogue which was presented to the President. Despite the President’s personal willingness to listen and apparent inclination to make concessions, his party objected. When she then approached CARICOM for support, it declined.

Once parties started their electoral campaigns, the election’s high stakes became clear so the RC and PDA tried another, two-pronged approach. First, they would support the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) with technical assistance and advice, and media monitoring as they did for the 2011 elections in order to produce a conducive environment for peaceful elections.

Second, George Wachira, who in 2012 had assumed the post of PDA (2012-15)64 drew from his experience as a member of the Kenyan ‘Concerned Citizens for Peace’ network, which was a core part of Kenya’s national peace infrastructure, to tap into the UN’s extensive network of Guyanese citizens and groups established in the context of both the SCP and EPTSI programs to create a conflict prevention for and beyond elections (See Kenya case study of this project).

The most significant effort within this endeavor constituted the ‘Guyanese for Peace’ group, the creation of which was facilitated by the PDA with RC guidance. Group members served in their personal capacities and committed to promote peace through mediation, peace messaging, conflict analysis and response and early warning and response. Made up of sixteen respected public figures capable to influencing public discourse, abating tensions and directly engaging politicians, the group included an ethnically balanced mix of academics, two former election commission chairs, community and religious leaders, and importantly, a communications expert.65

During the electoral campaign, the group was inserted into a “Situation Room,” which the RC’s PDA-led team had set up to function as an early warning and response capacity for elections. From there, the Guyanese for Peace monitored social media activity for signs of unrest or inflammatory rumours which may spark violence, reacting in real-time to rising tensions and racially charged rumors. For example, during the tense vote counting, when false rumours spread of certain ethnic groups “marching into town” with weapons, Guyanese for Peace, contacted the local police station and residents negating the “fake news,” then posted real-time photos of calm streets, immediately diffusing tension. During this period, they also started an impromptu TV show, “Guyana first, Guyana wins” promoting peace messaging and calming tensions.

The Guyanese for Peace effort is significant for three reasons: 1) it was the first time a formal insider mediation role had successfully been used in Guyana’s national peace infrastructure; 2) it formalized a civil society role in that structure; and, most importantly, 3) it arguably contributed to a peaceful electoral process that had the strong potential to end in violence. The PDA recalled, “You can do little things with big impact.”

The biggest test, however, came on election day itself, when the vote count confirmed what the polls had predicted, with the results standing on knife’s edge and the multi-racial opposition party Alliance for Change emerging victorious, winning 33 out of 65 seats, with 32 seats going to the PPP. With the prospect of being unseated after 23 years in power, the outgoing president initially called the vote “rigged” and demanded a recount (notwithstanding the fact that international observers had assessed the election as “free and fair”). Behind-the-scenes the RC-led team66 and members of the Guyanese for Peace group engaged the incumbent president and opposition leaders, calling on them to exercise political maturity, adhere to pledges of codes of conduct, and refrain from incitement.67 Importantly, they also created space for the Elections Commission to ultimately certify the results. The RC explains, “What made us effective is that we had the ear of both sides.”68

Following the 2015 peaceful elections, the issue again was sustainability. Many of those interviewed pointed to the recurrent dilemma in conflict prevention work of simultaneously having to address symptoms and structural causes. After a gap, another PDA succeeded Wachira, staying less than a year. Guyanese for Peace disbanded following the elections. At the same time, structural reforms within UNDP eliminated BCPR, weakening UNDP’s ability to drive prevention programming on the ground.

Interviewees also cited the difficulty in maintaining momentum, leadership, funding and political incentives between elections. Elections, like other crises, can help “focus” the national conversation. Elections offer expedient political entry points for UN prevention work that should
be leveraged to build national capacities for peace. “But”, as one PDA observed, “when you succeed in prevention you remove the motivation of doing anything beyond.” 49. Focusing exclusively on near-term goals (peaceful elections) can mean a missed opportunity to help build local and national foundations for self-sustaining peace. To do this, RCs must overcome the “tyranny of the urgent” and open up space for strategic thinking about longer-term goals. Guyana’s PDAs also underscored the need to leverage what’s been done already, while including local partners in those efforts, but raised the challenge of how to encourage them to take ownership.

3. Overall Impact

There is a “unanimous view” that it was Guyanese civil society which deserves prime credit for breaking the decades-long cycle of electoral violence that allowed for peaceful elections in 2006. 50 The 2006 elections also helped to change public attitudes that had come to see electoral violence as normal.

Overwhelmingly, independent studies on the Guyanese experience also conclude that the UN’s Social Cohesion Programme can claim significant credit for providing catalytic support to national change agents by promoting interethnic dialogue and social inclusion and offering an alternative to violence to air grievances and promote group interests. 31 The SCP thus helped impart social norms of non-violence, promote social unity as citizens adopted different views about community identity and ethnic harmony as a direct result of their participation.

Independent reviews highlight in particular the effective role played by RC Youssef Mahmoud (2004-06) in, actively promoting and consolidating international support for peacebuilding and prevention, providing the necessary stimulus that helped ensure the 2006 elections would be non-violent. 52 He successfully exerted leverage with the government, established trust with national partners, and created entry points for the UN to work on politically sensitive prevention programs tailored to both Guyana’s needs and strengths.

Beyond the 2006 elections, the medium-term impacts of the SCP’s ‘cultural’ or ‘strategic’ peacebuilding became evident in the decade that followed. First, the tone of national discourse itself was not only tempered, but wholly transformed. The 2006 Presidential inaugural address emphasized cooperation, cohesion and harmony – terms echoed by local politicians and other officials. This language constituted a marked change in tone, as peace discourse borne of the SCP permeated cultural, business, religious and social circles. 53

Second, in 2008, civilian massacres prompted civic and political leaders to band together to solve the crisis and condemn human rights violations. Third, and perhaps most notably, a new, multi-ethnic political party emerged, the Alliance for Change, with messages of change and hope (with a slogan, “Don’t vote race. Vote change.”), and a rejection of racial violence, which quickly found popular resonance and emerged victorious in the 2015 elections as part of a broader coalition. Fourth, just as coalition politics became more common, since this period, census data revealed an increase in the incidence of inter-racial marriages. Meanwhile, funding, leadership and domestic political dynamics have inhibited the sustainability of the UN’s conflict prevention efforts since 2003. Following the 2006 elections, international interest and funding for peacebuilding in Guyana dried up; and with it, any immediate political incentives to continue with social cohesion. One study posits that the government’s and opposition’s participation in the SCP was merely a “marriage of convenience” rather than an endorsement of conflict transformation. 54 This may explain why, for various reasons, subsequent RCs were unable to maintain political space, leaving prevention programs to largely go dormant after 2006, except for electoral periods.

As RCs, following Mahmoud’s departure, adopted a conservative stance favouring good relations with the government over politically sensitive programming, the UNCT’s appetite for risk also diminished, reverting to a “don’t rock the boat” disposition. This has come at a cost. An external review of a later UNDAF (2012-16) found it lacked strategic focus, included “everything under the sun” and reported little progress in social cohesion, human rights and public security, attributed to “political interference.” 55 Governance and justice reforms remain elusive. The failure to leverage and build on the UN’s reputation, historical success and legitimising power to advance these issues, particularly when new conflict triggers loom on the horizon, surely constitutes a missed opportunity.56 Whether the UN can overcome this reticence will depend on its leadership, and whether lessons of the past will be heeded.

4. Lessons and Good Practices

Based on the above analysis of the experiences of the UN system in Guyana, the following lessons and good practices might be useful for RCs deployed in other fragile settings:

RC profile matters: If RCs are expected to do conflict prevention, they must have the skills, instincts and sensitivity for political engagement as well as the willingness to take calculated risks. In Guyana, RCs with political acumen, flexibility and a measured embrace of risk have found significantly greater success as preventive actors than those without these assets. But an RC empowered in this role must be able to rely on the support of Headquarters, if calculated risk-taking in the pursuit of prevention puts him or her at odds with the government as happened to RC Sorensen in 2002.

Engineering government consent for prevention initiatives by RCs is critical: The Guyana case shows that government support is essential for RCs assuming a proactive prevention role. The absence thereof had tied the UN’s hands in this respect prior to 2003 (limiting it to preventive engagement under the guise of work on HIV-AIDS programming). Consent
emerged as a result of a number of factors, in particular the government’s own realisation that it needed UN support to maintain legitimacy offered by stable, violence-free elections and avoiding a slide into open conflict. Pressure from the donor community helped as well, as did the RC’s and the wider UNCT’s able performance in humanitarian assistance in the aftermath of the 2003 flooding. Meanwhile, interpersonal approaches matter as well: Explaining his success in engineering consent, RC Youssef Mahmoud, keenly aware of the high risk of losing confidence of government counterparts, highlighted the importance of being a good listener. Resisting the “temptation” to problem-solve prematurely, listening allows RCs to understand political motivations, enabling anticipation of next moves and thus, entry points for prevention work.

While consent is critical, too close a relationship carries equal risks: Likewise, the Guyana case offers sobering lessons in safeguarding UN principles and mandates, while balancing the necessity for government support in a difficult political context, particularly when the government is a non-neutral actor in its conflict. In Guyana, the EPTSI program, developed in 2008 as a successor program of the SPC, suffered from the outset from the fact that it granted too much control and influence to the government, undermining its credibility among both donors and the people, its commendable work on local-level positive violence reduction and youth engagement notwithstanding.

Seize the opportunity of elections as entry point for preventive action: The Guyana case confirms that elections offer expedient political entry points for RCs and UN Country Teams that can be leveraged to engage in a broad range of activities to prevent electoral violence and build national capacities for peace. The high-points of RC-led preventive action in Guyana since 2000 were in the run-up to the 2006 and 2016 elections, where prevention-minded RCs managed to carve out a role for themselves by developing innovative models of RC-led preventive engagement around elections, such as the SPC in 2003-06 as well as support to the Guyanese for Peace group and the Situation Room in 2014-15. However, in Guyana, UN-focus on and donor interest in prevention faded once elections were held, constituting a missed opportunity to help build even stronger local and national foundations for self-sustaining peace. Successful work around preventing electoral violence should therefore be used as a basis for longer-term preventive engagement.

Peace and Development Advisors are key to RC prevention success, but inconsistency in deployment undermines their potential: With technical and political expertise, and experience in conflict prevention, PDAs bring critical prevention capacity to the RCO. When these PDAs are empowered with RC confidence and political access, they can function like a “Deputy RC”, capable of identifying opportunities where the UN’s comparative advantage and convening power can be best leveraged. Indeed, in 2003, the PDA was able to lay the foundation for and negotiate the first entry points with the government for the SCP during a time when no RC was in place. In Guyana, RC confidence and support allowed the PDA to identify and seize entry points where the UN could carve out a role to pursue long-term prevention goals, while insulating him/her from potential backlash or criticism (internal and external). UNCT relations also benefitted where the PDA was able to influence programme design and implementation with peacebuilding and conflict prevention. Also, the continuity of PDAs, on annual contracts, did prove problematic, particularly when coinciding with a concurrent gap in RC. Many interviewees noted how these gaps between RC and PDA deployments in Guyana interrupted momentum, risked gains, and made the UN vulnerable to being co-opted by the government.

Tailored headquarters support: In the case of Guyana, when UNHQ support was consistent, agile and tailored to specific country needs, the RC, PDA and his/her team were more effective. Its weaknesses (which led to its later disbandment) notwithstanding, interviewees unanimously agreed that the UN Framework Team backstopping Guyana with small group inter-agency discussions via monthly conference calls fostered a constructive exchange of ideas and problem solving, not just information sharing, that was focused on field needs and capable of meeting them, deploying experts, funds, capacity with positive results. Other PDAs also noted the regular communication offset the sometimes “lonely” nature of PDA work.

Prevention by another name: Language matters. In Guyana, the prevention effort was called “social cohesion,” a term resonating a positive concept of peace and unity beyond the absence of violence. It de-politicized and de-securitized the usual mediation on conflict prevention in an electoral context, among elites. By definition, civil society gained a voice, a role, and a power to change the nature of public discourse to one emphasizing building trust within individual relationships among society’s members, directly challenging divisive political rhetoric and its corrosive impact on Guyana’s social fabric. From a buzzword when first introduced, to an established social value fifteen years later, the term still carries currency in Guyana.

Civil society partnerships as political entry points: In a racially divided, violence-prone political context, civil society individuals and inclusive groups can rise to be a powerful “third force” in local and national politics, cutting across bifurcated social divides and racial biases when supported with skills, capacity and public confidence. RCs can coalesce UN technical and policy support to those ends, helping them carve out a role. In Guyana, subsequent capacity building enabled them to take ownership of and define the national peace agenda, thereby also protective them from aid dependence and external influence.

National staff as peace advisors: The Guyana case shows that the unique perspectives and guidance of national staff can provide an RC with invaluable insight, extensive local
Guyana

networks and deep knowledge of local conflict drivers, local perceptions and political dynamics. In this role, key national staff can identify and expedite trust-building with local partners, acting at times as a kind of inside mediator in brokering a UN role in political sensitive areas of work. Former RC Mahmoud highlighted the pivotal role of Lawrence Lachmansingh as one of the architects and a key manager of the Social Cohesion Program. Concerns over public perceptions of UN national staff neutrality can be managed and should not discourage their role.

Return on Investment (RoI): Colleagues interviewed for this study stressed that in a small nation like Guyana, interventions requiring relatively modest investments have shown disproportionally large impacts are possible, particularly where there is little donor interest, scant investment or where the UN may be among few other multilateral organizations in an uncrowded scene. The potential impact of investing in conflict prevention capacities in “off the radar” countries like Guyana is demonstrated by the SCP’s success.
Endnotes


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3 “Vote your own” is a translation of a PPP rallying cry in Hindi, “apan jhaat”. Myers, R and Calder, J. 2011, p. 27.


5 Myers, R and Calder, J. 2011, p. 28.


7 Ibid.

8 CARICOM was an organization mandated to regional economic cooperation. The peace agreement was known as the Herdan Accord, signed in January 1998. Chaubey, V et al. 2012.


10 Ibid


13 “Guyana Development Policy Review: The Challenges of Governance and Growth.” World Bank, Report No. 25640-GUA. 2003. By coincidence, a UN Headquarters staff was in attendance at the CARICOM conference when the violence broke out and was consequently an advocate for a UN conflict prevention role.

14 In July 2012, the RC confronted a situation in which media personalities later arrested for their role in the storming of the President’s Office tried to coopt the UN in get involved. Richards, Andrew. “UN has no role in legal matters from presidential office storming –Olver.” Stabroek News. July 2002, www.landofsixpeoples.com/news022/ns207123.htm.


16 After leaving Guyana, Olver became Associate Director of United Nations Development Group at UN HQ in New York. Ibid.

17 This would be first of two notable periods in which there was no RC deployed to Guyana. The second was between May 2008 and February 2009.


21 Ibid.

22 Interview with former UNDP deputy resident representative. October 2017.


24 The joint UN mission had representatives from DPA, UNDP, (Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean, Bureau of Crisis Prevention and Recovery), DESA, OCHA, and OHCHR. UNDP, 2014, p. 47. It also included three donors: the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the European Commission, and the UK Department for International

26 Consisting of the PDA (Chris Spies) a Human Rights Advisor (Maarit Cohonen) and a national conflict advisor (Lawrence Lachmansingh).

27 Notably, the project proposal, developed in consultation with civil society and some members of government, avoided the conflict prevention label. It multidimensionality reflects its collaborative design, encompassing political, development, humanitarian and human rights elements. “Improving Social Cohesion, Security and Governance in Guyana: A UNCT Project.” 2003.

28 Lund, M. 2015, p. 91.

29 The RC negotiated its language with guidance from UNDP and DPA.


33 Lund, M. 2015, p. 93.

34 The PDA, Chris Spies, deployed in September 2003, led the design and implementation of the Social Cohesion Program until November 2006. Lund 2015, p. 92.


38 Lund, M. 2015, p. 92.


43 Ibid

44 The Community Development Resources Association is based in Cape Town, South Africa. See: www.cdra.org.za/


47 These forums were actually a collection of 14 component projects among target stakeholder groups, including: Political leaders and parties, youths and local communities, the business community, trade unions, law enforcement officials (police, judiciary and magistrates), election processes and procedures (Guyana Elections Commission), Ethnic Relations Commission, Multi-Stakeholder Fora and National Conversation, local authorities (RDC training and pilot planning), peacebuilding process facilitators, media, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Parliament, Prime Minister and Presidents’ Offices.


50 Estimates conclude approximately 5% of Guyana’s total population were directly reached by SCP, and many more indirectly. Across Guyana, 164 district meetings resulted as follow up to SCP trainings, involving 1,650 people, with an additional 23,000 reached by SCP-supported media products. “Can fostering a culture of dialogue change the course of a nation? An evaluation of the Social Cohesion Programme. Key findings and Summary of Recommendations.” 2007, p.9.

51 The ERC ran public initiatives 2004-2006 (E.g. national film festival themed around peace and tolerance; conflict transformation workshops, consultative meetings).

52 A series of conflict mediation workshops for police were held between 2005-2006. From Guyana’s 10 regions, several were targeted (Regions 3, 4, 5, 6 and 10) in the program. Regional Democratic Chair (RDC) Chairpersons and counselors also participated in peacebuilding and conflict transformation workshops in Guyana and Turkey. UNDP, 2014, ‘Emerging

53 These include the Progressive Youth Organization (PYO) affiliated with the PPP and the Guyana Youth and Student Movement (GYSM) linked to the PNC. The UN enabled the leadership of these two groups to attend a summer peacebuilding institute program in the U.S.; UNDP, 2014, ‘Emerging Promising Practices in Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding,’ p. 49.


55 The program was based in parts of Georgetown and the nearby coastal areas with histories of election related violence.

56 Myers, R and Calder, J. 2011, p. 52.


59 In his dual Humanitarian Coordinator function, he cites, “I was a novice, I had no choice.” Interview with Youssef Mahmoud, former RC. October 2017.

60 Myers, R and Calder, J. 2011, p. 51.


64 The workshop’s goal was “to explore and exchange ideas from the conflict transformation perspective to help us collectively chart a peaceful course for the future.” Spies, C. 2005, p. 4.


68 Lund, M. 2015.

69 The Carter Center, the Organization for American States (OAS), USAID and DFID ran complementary violence prevention programs supporting the elections. OAS deployed long-term observers and short-term elections monitors, backed by several high-level visits. Babbitt (2012), p. 360.


73 The joint mission included Peter Barwick (DPA/MSU) and Chetan Kumar (UNDP/BCPR).


75 Tingirui had a UNICEF background and was formerly RC in Equatorial Guinea. As senior development experts, neither Tall nor Tingirui had political experience. Both were near retirement.


77 The UNDP Resident Representative was Acting RC then.

78 He later returned in 2012 as the PDA.


82 The dissolution of the Ethnic Relations Committee was prompted by an injunction filed by the PNC over complaints of its ethnic composition. During the dispute, most members had left. It wouldn’t resume until January 2018. See: www.ethnicrelations.org.gy/about3.html

83 Prior to her appointment to Guyana, Ms. Musa served as Deputy Resident Representative of the UNDP to Egypt. “New UN Resident Coordinator appointed.” Guyana Chronicle. 15 February 2012, guyanachronicle.com/2012/02/15/new-un-resident-coordinator-appointed. Also Interview with former PDA. January 2018.

84 In mid-2011, Wachira was deployed as a consultant (democratic governance advisor) in advance of elections that year. He stayed 5 months (observing there had been a 5 year hiatus without a PDA), returning as PDA in 2012.


86 This team consisted of the PDA, a UN Governance Advisor and a UN elections monitor.

87 “Guyana.” UN DPA. Mini-case study, Confidential document.

88 Personal interview with former RC Khadija Musa, March 2018.

89 Interview with former PDA. February 2018.

90 Simmons, T and Myers, R. 2006, p. 11.
Guyana

91 Myers, R and Calder, J. 2011, p. 75.
92 This also holds true for subsequent elections in 2011 and 2015. UNDP, 2007, p. 14; Simmons and Myers, 2006; Myers and Calder, 2011.
93 Myers, R and Calder, J. 2011, p. 69.
94 Ibid, p. 75.
96 E.g. The discovery of oil deposits with no revenue-sharing plan.
98 Interview. December 2017.
Kenya 2008-17

Wendy MacClinchy*
Introduction

Described as the “anchor state of East Africa,” Kenya’s strategic regional importance has made it a darling of sorts to the international aid community, which has invested substantially in the country’s nationally-led development. However, Kenya is also prone to chronic instability and vulnerability due to a number of risk factors, including inequality and exclusion, regional instability, resource competition, illicit trafficking, centralisation of political power, and high youth unemployment. In 2007-08, Kenya’s highly contested national elections ignited many of these risk factors simultaneously, resulting in mass violence, displacement, and deepened political and social rifts in the country. But the crisis also generated political will within Kenya to address some of the underlying political and socio-economic tensions that have kept Kenya vulnerable for decades, creating opportunities for the international community to assist in that endeavour.

This paper examines the UN’s preventive engagement in Kenya from the aftermath of the December 2007 electoral violence to the present, identifying the ways in which the UN system has worked to address underlying conflict drivers, de-escalate moments of tension, and help put in place viable national capacities for longer-term stability. In particular, this paper examines how the UN’s three successive Resident Coordinators (RCs) during this period – Aenas Chuma (2008-12), Nardos Bekele-Thomas (2013-16), and Siddharth Chatterjee (2016-current) – developed conflict prevention strategies and initiatives in an effort to mitigate conflict risks. These have ranged from support to building a standing national capacity for conflict prevention and the brokering of a Kenyan-Ethiopian agreement to address cross-border conflicts, to creating spaces for civil society dialogue and developing a national conflict assessment and analysis capacity. This case study shows the potential of RCs to carve out a conflict prevention role for the UN in sovereign-minded middle-income countries, in particular with respect to strengthening national prevention institutions.

1. Country Context

Roots of Kenya’s Conflicts

At the heart of Kenya’s instability lies an over-centralisation of political power and the difficulties faced by the state to provide basic governance in the peripheries, resulting in social, political and economic marginalization of large parts of the population. In this context, the country has experienced recurrent outbreaks of violence, particularly around highly contentious elections.

Historically, political power in Kenya has been concentrated in the presidency, which wielded its patronage power in favour of particular ethnic groups and communities over others. Over time, this has weakened – or prevented the development of strong – state and rule of law institutions in many of the country’s rural and economically marginalised areas, in turn enabling the proliferation of criminal networks. Widespread abuses by Kenyan security forces, combined with growing activity of armed groups, militarization of Kenyan society and pervasive impunity, have made violence a normalised aspect of political and social life in many areas.

Ethnicity plays a central role in the divisions within Kenyan society, and in how power is distributed by the elites. Composed of more than 40 distinct ethnic groups – with Kikuyu as the largest – political party affiliation in Kenya is largely driven by ethno-regional identity rather than by ideology. The willingness of political elites to mobilise their constituencies around rhetoric rooted in ethnicity and religion has added to the risk of violence. This is compounded by a winner-takes-all approach to politics, which is often viewed as a zero-sum game, raising the stakes of electoral outcomes. Political elites used public land as a patronage tool, primarily benefitting the Central Province Kikuyu tribe of Kenya’s first president. Non-Kikuyu politicians manipulated this grievance toward ethnic-based retributive violence.

Police and justice institutions, too, tend to manifest ethnic biases, undermining public confidence in the state. This sense of injustice and exclusion, varying according to one’s ethnicity or identity, remains a key driver of violence. Ethnic divides are also a factor in the competition for natural resources and land access, a major issue in the frontier pastoral areas in Kenya. Many of the deep-seated grievances over natural resources are rooted in the colonial era, when local administrators used divide-and-rule tactics amongst different communities. Slow and uneven progress on land reform, along with deeply embedded patterns of resource capture by elites, have led to the impoverishment of ethnic groups and sub-regions of the country. Particularly in the arid and semi-arid North, competition over water in drought-prone rural areas, and the recent discovery of natural resource deposits (minerals, oil, gas) has often served as a trigger for local conflicts, especially in the absence of adequate resource management systems.

Ethnic divides are compounded by socio-economic inequalities, driving Kenya’s instability, particularly in its frontier and border areas. Despite having recently graduated to middle-income country status, nearly 20 million Kenyans survive on less than $1.25 per day and there is strong evidence that economic growth has been accompanied by growing inequality. Youth unemployment runs high, helping drive criminality, extremism and violence. Climate change has also made Kenya increasingly vulnerable to extreme weather events, from severe flooding to drought, affecting food security and driving displacement, particularly in the marginalised peripheries.

Elections as a Conflict Trigger: Electoral 2007-08 Violence and its Aftermath

The December 2007 general elections in Kenya pitted President Mwai Kibaki of the Party of National Unity (PNU)
against Raila Odinga of the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM). It was the closest race since multi-party politics were re-introduced in 1992, and it took place against the background of a political party system polarised along ethnic lines. Odinga refused to accept the delayed results of Kibaki’s narrow victory, issued by the Electoral Commission of Kenya. Reported tampering in the vote tallying fed deeper suspicions in the credibility of state institutions and triggered a massive wave of violence in the country, resulting in the deaths of roughly 1,500 Kenyans, the displacement of 500,000 people within four months, and widespread destruction of property.

While intercommunal violence has a long history in Kenya, the scale of the carnage during the 2007-08 electoral period was unprecedented for Kenya. Attacks by ODM supporters on those of Kibaki’s in Nairobi’s ethnically mixed slums spread through the city and beyond, drawing in criminal gangs from other ethnic groups in many of the other cities in the country. Summary killings—often by gangs with clear political affiliations—prompted waves of violence in the poor urban areas of Nairobi and elsewhere. Widespread reports of police brutality deepened grievances amongst historically marginalised communities and reminded Kenyans of the state’s entrenched culture of impunity which failed to bring to justice perpetrators of past violence. Resentment against politicians who were linked to the violence grew dramatically, while the weak government response added to the levels of distrust in the state.

The levels of violence shocked most Kenyans, revealing the country’s deep social cleavages. The violence also hurt the economy and led to a rise in unemployment, in turn driving an increase in gang membership amongst youth in particular. As such, electoral violence was not only a result of deeper conflict drivers, it also served to reinforce them. Addressing the impact of the elections thus became the overriding priority for Kenya, and a key element in the country’s attempts to address its chronic instability.

**The Post-2008 Period: Opportunities and Limits of Reform**

While the crisis following the December elections was a major destabilising moment for the country, the scale of the violence also fuelled strong popular demand for systemic change in the country, opening a window of opportunity for key reforms that could help address the underlying socio-economic and political drivers of risk. Mediation efforts led by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan on behalf of the African Union resulted in a power-sharing agreement between President Kibaki and opposition leader Odinga, signed on 28 February 2008, ending the cycle of violence. A government of national unity was formed, the first step towards power-sharing across key ethnic and communal lines. Importantly, the parties also agreed on the adoption of a new constitution that would enshrine important governance reforms. In addition, the government committed itself to undertake steps towards addressing land reform, youth employment, judicial/police reform, anti-corruption measures and electoral reforms designed to broaden political participation. As one expert noted, “to Kenya’s credit, the moment was not wasted.”

A National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) created in 2008 under the National Dialogue and Reconciliation Agreement, was pivotal in filling a critical gap in moderating political discourse and creating a means for accountability. Tasked with promoting inter-ethnic harmony, it boldly confronted inflammatory political behaviour by “naming and shaming” offending politicians, which resulted in three being indicted for hate speech. Its wide-ranging work reviewed legislation for discrimination, investigated biased public sector hiring and proposed key legal and policy reforms.

In 2010, the new constitution was adopted in a referendum that was held without a single instance of violence. Key reforms enshrined in the document included devolution of executive, legislative and judicial powers to sub-regional levels, which would bring to a close the era of the “imperial president,” and help address the underlying issue of unequal distribution of wealth and authority between the centre and peripheries. But governance reforms at the centre also carried an unintended negative side-effect, because they increased the stakes of capturing power at the county level, and according to some experts may have increased local-level tensions around access to resources and control of municipal/county-level authority. The prevalence of local-level corruption, patronage networks and political violence rendered the implementation of the national reforms insufficient and placed a premium on further reforms at the municipal level.

Moreover, security sector reform did not keep pace with legislative reform and Kenyan security services remained highly centralised. As a result, there remained a crucial lack of state security presence in key conflict-prone areas, and widespread criminality and armed gang activity persisted.

Attempts at accountability for the violence following the 2007 elections were a double-edged sword: crucial for improving public perceptions of the state, but also politically divisive. A Commission of Inquiry emerged in 2008 to investigate crimes related to the post-election violence. Its report called for a special tribunal, stating if one was not set up within six months, its investigations would be referred to the International Criminal Court (ICC). A bill to establish the tribunal was rejected twice by the National Assembly. Accordingly, in 2009, the report, with a sealed envelope listing key instigators of the violence, was shared with the chief ICC prosecutor. In 2010, the ICC indicted six leading politicians on crimes against humanity, including Deputy Prime Minister Uhuru Kenyatta and Education Minister William Ruto, causing enormous tension within Kenya, and a backlash among the political class against the ICC’s infringement on national sovereignty.
The 2013 elections: Violence Avoided, Not Overcome

The March 2013 elections were Kenya’s next major test, the first under the new constitution. It pitted Odinga against Kenyatta of the National Alliance Party with the latter winning 50.5 percent of the votes.23 The elections were peaceful,24 in part due to the reforms carried out after the 2007 crisis. Unlike in 2007, the police and security services were restrained, the political parties agreed to a code of conduct limiting inflammatory public stances, and the media was sensitized to avoid divisive coverage.25 Odinga’s petition challenging the results was dismissed despite some acknowledgement of irregularities, and importantly without any resort to violence by any party.26 In fact, Odinga himself called on his supporters to remain peaceful, declaring that “any violence now will destroy this nation forever.”27

The decision to create inter-ethnic and cross-sectoral alliances played an important role in temporarily reducing tensions around the elections. For example, the alliance between the two largest ethnic groups—the Kikuyu and the Kalenjin—was seen as a key factor in avoiding heightened risk.28

However, violence avoided is not conflict overcome. And one audit of the 2013 elections found that “conflict fatigue” was the major factor in the peaceful elections, as “people realized they had more to lose than gain from violence.”29 The major conflict drivers remained very much under the surface.30 The breakdown of the Kikuyu-Kalenjin alliance, lack of follow-through on accountability for past electoral violence, and the failure to address deep-seated disputes over natural resources, all combined to set the stage for a violent 2017 elections.31

The 2017 elections: A Return to Violence

Many of the same factors that drove the 2007-08 electoral violence reappeared in the 2017 presidential elections, during which roughly 50 people were killed. The disputed vote in August prompted an Electoral Commission’s finding of manipulations and “irregularities”, and a surprise Supreme Court annulment of its results, calling for a re-run creating enormous uncertainty over the political process. Supporters of an opposition-called boycott prevented voting in hundreds of polling stations, resulting in violent police clashes, low voter turnout, and further polarization. State security forces were once again accused of using excessive force.32 The easy availability of small arms and slow pace of police reforms fed security risks.33

It is important to note that, in contrast to the 2007 crisis, this time Kenyans had been forewarned of the risk of violence and were better prepared. In fact, Kenya had put in place a national early warning and response system, which anticipated many of the conflict risks around the election, leading to the establishment of mitigating measures, which likely helped to prevent further escalation. However, today Kenya remains extremely tense and there is a very real risk that the deep social and political divides will again drive a descent into violence.

2. RC-Supported Prevention Initiatives

The 2007-08 Electoral Crisis as Entry Point and Opportunity

The UN has been a major development partner for Kenya since before the country’s independence in 1963, with programs largely focused on poverty reduction. In the 1980s, the UN and donor community unsuccessfully tried aid conditionality as a means to pressure a recalcitrant government towards public sector reforms.34 In light of heavy state control that stymied local development, donors and aid agencies often bypassed the government in favour of direct implementation of projects in partnership with local authorities and civil society.

By the 1990s, President Moi’s government led a systemic backlash against the aid community as a whole, harassing NGOs and aid agencies engaged in rights-based work, burning offices and arresting staff.35 Due to the lack of entry points at the national level during this time, throughout the early 2000s the UN strategy and posture in Kenya remained largely focused on the MDGs and humanitarian issues, without much attention to conflict prevention or early warning.

In the years leading up the 2007-08 electoral crisis, UNDP and national counterparts had jointly developed a programme on preventing electoral violence, which included training and sensitization programmes for political leaders, civil society and media practitioners. But even UN officials conceded that “none of these efforts seemed to have had substantial impact on the electoral process.”36

The electoral crisis of 2007-08, and the strong national commitment to far-reaching governance reforms opened important opportunities and entry points for the UN Country Team to adopt a more preventive posture focused on electoral violence, looking also to help create the conditions for tackling structural conflict drivers. In doing so, the UN played a “quiet but effective” role in enabling the national-level process to proceed, by providing strategic advisory and technical support, a convening and coordination role, as well as funding to the process.37

The period from 2007-17 can be divided along the deployment periods of the three consecutive RCs, as detailed below. Each RC built on the strategy of his/her successor, while adapting to the shifting political space and national priorities. In the immediate post-crisis period, the strategy was focused on helping strengthen Kenya’s national peace architecture, developing a participatory conflict analysis structure and national conflict prevention strategy, and a national early warning capacity that would prevent a recurrence of atrocities in future elections. Following a successful constitutional referendum in 2010 and peaceful elections in 2013,38 the RC and UNCT had to adjust their strategy to a shrinking political
space, while trying to address the underlying conflict drivers related to inequality and exclusion.

Building a National Standing Capacity and Strategy for Conflict Prevention, 2008–12

RC Aeneas Chuma was deployed in 2008, having previously served in Zambia (as RC) as well as Mozambique and Uganda (with UNDP), which provided him with relevant experience in fragile transition contexts. Using the political space created by the reform-orientation of the national government and the constructive relationships he managed to establish with the parties soon after his arrival, Chuma made it his primary objective to position the UN as a provider of effective support to the expansion and institutionalization of a fledgling national “infrastructure for peace” (see below box) and in doing so, restoring public confidence in state institutions.

Chuma’s overall approach was geared, on the one hand, towards providing technical and advisory support to government bodies in Nairobi charged with advancing peace and reconciliation in the country and, on the other hand, to help create political space and secure a formalized role for civil society in national prevention efforts.

Concretely, RC-led efforts focused on four sets of activities: First, the RC convened a broad coalition of stakeholders around discussions aimed at strengthening Kenya’s national capacities and institutions for conflict prevention and resolution, then embedding them into an overall architecture that would constitute a coherent and effective “infrastructure for peace.”

Second, the RC offered technical support, guidance and funding to the National Steering Committee on Peacebuilding and Conflict Management, so it could expand the network of local peace committees. This support also helped consolidate disparate Kenyan early warning initiatives into a common effort.

Third, the RC created an inclusive, highly participatory conflict analysis process, engaging government, partners and the UN into a common process, while influencing decision-making on policy and programmes.

And fourth, the RC supported the inception of the National Cohesion and Integration Commission with needs assessment and guidance, developing its strategy, fundraising and mobilizing international support, as well as supporting coordination.

In all these efforts, the RC relied heavily on the support of his Peace and Development Advisor (PDA), Ozonnia Ojielo, (deployed in July 2008), whom he empowered by facilitating high-level access to the government and a degree of autonomy. Prior to his deployment to Kenya, the PDA was instrumental in building Nigeria and Ghana’s peace infrastructure, an experience that proved valuable, not least as he was already known to many National Steering Committee (NSC) commissioners whom he had hosted a year earlier as members of a Kenyan delegation studying Ghana’s Peace Council.

Benefitting from these preexisting relationships, and from generous donor support in the post-crisis period, Ojielo led

Kenya’s Infrastructure for Peace

The term “Infrastructure for Peace” is generally used to describe a network of interlocked government, civil society and community institutions and capacities at the national and local level that promote peace and reconciliation. In the Kenyan context, it refers to a set of bodies and initiatives that include in particular:

- Local- and District-level Peace Committees that have their origin in the Wajir Peace and Development Committee established in the early 1990s in response to pastoral conflicts in Kenya’s northeast;
- The National Steering Committee on Peacebuilding and Conflict Management (NSC), originally created in 2001 to coordinate the local peace committees;
- The National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) established in 2008 by the National Dialogue and Reconciliation Agreement mediated by Kofi Annan in the aftermath of the Electoral Crisis;
- The National Focal Point on Small Arms and Light Weapons, created in 2003 to trace and respond to the widespread use of small arms. The Focal Point is located in the President’s Office and has task forces in 110 districts.

While many of the constituting elements of Kenya’s “infrastructure for peace” were in place prior to the electoral crisis of 2007-08, this crisis disclosed significant weaknesses and shortcomings, which subsequent efforts sought to address.

Source: Chuma and Ojielo (2012)
a lengthy consultation process, convening a broad range of stakeholders that resulted in the creation of two forums that would become key drivers for conflict analysis and conflict prevention programming in the country:

First, a Peace and Development Committee within the UNCT, which consisted of 13 agencies that met monthly to update its conflict analysis, review and adjust programming, and develop a common UN conflict prevention approach aligned to the national conflict prevention strategy.43

And second, a Conflict Analysis Group, embedded in the Office of the President consisting of civil society (the dominant force in that group), representatives of the President, and the UN. The Group was made responsible for scenario planning, policy briefs, conflict mapping, monitoring of conflict indicators and coordination with a new early warning platform.44 With advisory and technical support from the RCO and the UNCT, the Conflict Analysis Group led a series of consultations and their national conflict analysis surveys produced recommendations, which became the NSC’s operating framework. Institutionalising this latter forum within the President’s Office, helped elevate prevention to a national priority and provided the UN with a direct entry point to influence the Kenyan government’s deliberations on issues relevant to prevention.45

UN participation in the Conflict Analysis Group also allowed the UN to ensure the two forums could align their analysis and strategies. The two forums collaborated closely in a three-year conflict analysis process to ultimately produce, in 2010-11, “Uwiano”, Kenya’s first Peacebuilding and Conflict Prevention Strategy and national early warning and response mechanism (see below for further detail on Uwiano).46 By 2011, Kenya held its first National Peace Forum to convene a public dialogue toward a common vision of peace beyond the absence of conflict, presenting the findings of its Conflict Mapping and Analysis exercise.47 The final conflict prevention framework was finalised by 2012, from which a National Peace Policy was approved by Parliament. The Kenyan prevention framework, provided a helpful platform for the UN to engage in a wide range of activities aimed at reducing the risk of violence around the 2013 elections. For instance, UN entities funded training for Kenyan police in handling riots and in human rights, worked to sensitize major media outlets to violence risks, and supported the election commission to overhaul the machinery to prevent tampering.48 The relative success of the 2013 election process can be attributed in part to those, as well as the enormous broader efforts by the international community and the Kenyan authorities to avoid another 2007 experience (see below box).

But this success belied deeper challenges. Implementation of Kenya’s Peacebuilding and Conflict Prevention Strategy might have defused some triggers of electoral violence but underlying conflict drivers remained unaddressed. Illustrating often short-sighted aid policies, once donors had deemed the election a “success”, most prevention funding dried up shortly thereafter, just when this work was bearing fruit.49


While cooperation between the UNCT and the Kenyan government around preventing electoral violence was positive, relations between the two found themselves at a low soon thereafter as a result of the election victory of Uhuru Kenyatta and his deputy William Ruto. Both had been indicted three years earlier by the ICC for crimes against humanity because of their role in the electoral violence in 2007-08. Against the background of the indictments, Kenyatta ran on an anti-internationalist agenda of “reclaiming sovereignty” from foreign forces, of which the UN was depicted to be part and parcel. After assuming power, the Kenyatta government took a hostile stance vis-à-vis the UN, contributing to a refusal by the government to participate in key prioritization activities, and a year-long delay in putting in place a new UNDAF.50

Inventory of Prevention Programs, 2007-13

An extensive inventory done by Stanford University and the U.S. State Department between 2007 – 2013 found 38 conflict and electoral violence prevention projects active in Kenya during that period, ranging from $20,000 to $35 million U.S. dollars, most with multiple and cross-cutting aspects. Among those aimed at preventing and mitigating conflict, were projects on: hate speech monitoring, peace messaging, community dialogue and reconciliation, building the capacities of local peace structures, early warning and response (EWER), and deterring spoilers. Those dedicated to peaceful and credible elections included: building the capacity of the election management body (Electoral and Boundaries Commission, IEBC), civic and voter education, election observation, and professionalization of political parties. Only seven of these projects lasted beyond the 2013 elections.

Source: Cho, S Y et al. 2015.
This was the situation with which Nardos Bekele-Thomas, a long-time UNDP official with prior experience in Kenya, saw herself confront when she was deployed to Nairobi in September of 2013. The ICC indictments put the RC in a difficult position. On the one hand, cooperating closely with a President who was widely seen as having blood on his hands risked making the UN vulnerable to accusations that it was lacking commitment to justice and ending impunity. On the other hand, it would be difficult for any RC to shun a democratically elected leader, and for the RC to be able to drive UN programming in Kenya, including on prevention, access to and constructive relationships with the government would be essential. Faced with this dilemma, the RC chose a pragmatic approach, seeking active engagement of and a close partnership with the government.

Against this background, the RC decided to use the UNDAF as an “opportunity not to be missed” to repair the relationship with the Government, in particular by directly engaging the President in the UNDAF process. She also hoped the UNDAF would create an entry point for the UN to support constitutional governance reforms that would work toward Kenya’s underlying conflict drivers. In her initial courtesy call with the President, she underlined that both the UN and Kenya could “score” by working together on some of the key areas related to marginalization, which would secure his legacy.

While not uncontroversial and risk-free, tying the UN into a close partnership with the government built common ground and helped overcome a deadlock created by the ICC indictments. (The issue became moot when the ICC withdrew the indictment against Kenyatta in late 2014.) Indeed, shortly after the courtesy meeting, the President convened a joint meeting between the Government and the UN Country Team to chart a way forward together where they agreed on a common agenda focused on development, governance (devolution) and security, which was subsequently enshrined in the UNDAF. Featuring transformative governance as its first pillar and placing significant emphasis on the “Delivering as One” principle, the UNDAF was subsequently adopted in 2014, the first in Kenya’s history signed by the President himself in a public ceremony with the UN and international donors. According to those involved, this dramatically changed the dynamic: influential ambassadors now saw the UN as the entry point to the Presidency, and the President became an ardent proponent of channelling donor support via the UNDAF.

The President subsequently designated ministerial focal points to work with the UN on the key outcome areas of the UNDAF, and these ministries adopted the UNDAF’s reporting processes for measuring progress. According to UN officials involved, the UNDAF appeared to act as a unifying tool for the new administration and a “dramatic” change toward positive government/UN relations, while jointly targeting underlying conflict drivers as the strategic basis of the UN’s work in Kenya.

To give meaning to this objective, as well as the “Delivering as One” principle underlying the UNDAF, the RC subsequently spearheaded the development of two flagship projects in the northern borderlands (Turkana and Marsabit Counties), which would serve as a model for a new approach to area-based and cross-border development assistance in Kenya, targeting particularly marginalized communities (see below for further details).

Consolidating Gains (2016-17)

Siddharth Chatterjee, who was appointed as RC in 2016, had served in the UNCT Kenya as UNFPA representative for several years and could thus build on existing relationships with the Government and other UN agencies. He continued his predecessor’s “human security approach to development as a conflict prevention tool” which he expanded to encompass the nexus between climate change, poverty and violence in Northern Kenya. Importantly, Chatterjee also built on his predecessor’s efforts to forge public/private partnerships, leveraging stronger resource mobilization potential for development and conflict prevention in target areas. Private investment was key to a longer-term prevention strategy aimed at countering inequity and promoting inclusivity in Kenya’s margins. Calling private companies the “third force” in development, the RC brokered several large corporate partnerships for investments in the UN flagship programs in Turkana and Marsabit.

From these, he led Kenya to become the first global pilot for the SDG Philanthropy Platform, a public-private partnership (PPP) initiative pooling expertise and resources toward UN-Kenyan development priorities in areas affected by extreme poverty, marginalization and violence. The pilot uses “thematic accelerator windows” to channel these investments through a dedicated trust fund to specific priority sectors of the UNDAF and Kenya’s Vision 2030, targeting these geographically and thematically to where lack of access to basic social services and high unemployment are triggers for unrest, radicalization and violent extremism. High-profile corporate partners (e.g. Philips and Merck) and the Government of the Netherlands committed to the UN’s area-based flagship programs. The platform differs from similar programs in that it aims for longer-term transformative strategies, rather than limited-scope projects.

However, the Government’s commitment to implementing national level constitutional reforms and improve governance stalled during this period and it had still had not mended relations with many donors, refusing to approve many UN and donor programmes relating to governance issues. This inhibited prevention programs around judicial or security sector reforms, seen as particularly important in combating impunity in Kenya. The government’s lack of political will to support these important components of long-term conflict mitigation programming greatly limited the number of UN entry points as well. The UNCT’s strategy, therefore, was to focus energy on efforts at the county-level, in particular the...
flagship area-based programmes in Marsabit and Turkana counties, as well as an initiative to bring together seven historically marginalized counties [Garissa, Isiolo, Lamu, Mandera, Marsabit, Tana River and Wajir] to coordinate and advocate for local development.

3. Specific Prevention Initiatives

Whereas the above section was meant to provide a chronological narrative of the three subsequent RCs’ approaches to prevention, the following section will highlight three specific initiatives and approaches that were particularly relevant in terms of RC-supported preventive action.

Joint Cross-border Programme between joint Kenya and Ethiopia

Initially conceived by RC Bekele-Thomas in 2013-14, further developed in close consultation between the UN Country Teams in Nairobi and Addis Ababa, and officially established in December 2015 through RC-brokered negotiations between the Ethiopian and Kenyan governments, the “Cross-border Integrated Program for Sustainable Peace and Socioeconomic Transformation” constitutes an important innovation in RC-led preventive action in Kenya. The programme’s goal was to mediate intercommunal conflict and promote cross-border peace and development cooperation among border communities and 26 ethnic groups living in Kenya’s Marsabit County and Ethiopia’s Borana Zone, a region that is known for its vulnerability to chronic interethnic violence, poverty, violent extremism and resource competition. Viewed as economically and politically peripheral, the region historically has received scant aid or investment.

Concretely, the USD$200 million five-year programme consists of multi-ethnic district peace committees of elders on both sides of the border working together to maintain peace and promote harmonious coexistence with a catalytic impact. Elders have cited one indicator of their progress: a significant decline in the number of their youth becoming radicalized or joining extremist groups.

Other than playing a key role in setting up the programme in the first place, the UN subsequently took a lead in seeking support from donors and private sector investors based on ambitious development aims in: business, agriculture, infrastructure and health education. It leveraged joint investment opportunities for non-traditional potential funders and investors, a strategy that remains in place for the 2014-18 UNDAF. Currently, five UN agencies each from the two UNCTs in Kenya and Ethiopia (UNDP, UNICEF, UNAIDS, UN Women and UNFPA) participate in the initiative alongside the World Bank and several other public and private partners. It was the start of the UNCT Kenya’s area-based programming and remains a cornerstone of UN Kenya “Delivering as One” joint program.

Meanwhile, the RC struggled against internal obstacles and a lack of UN internal support as UN Headquarters and UN Regional Offices failed at first to buy into the programme. Through dogged persuasion, she eventually convinced her hierarchy and other relevant UN entities of the programme’s promise, and it was subsequently endorsed by both Kenya and Ethiopian governments at the highest level, as well as by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in December 2015. The UNDP administrator Helen Clark presided over a signing ceremony including President Kenyatta and Ethiopian Prime Minister Desalegn, as well as IGAD representatives, which took place in a tent set up at the border crossing, with half the tent standing on Ethiopian soil and the other half on Kenyan soil. The Moyale program is now widely regarded as model for regional cooperation, conflict prevention, mediation, dialogue and economic development, encompassing aspects for human trafficking and crime.

Conflict prevention area-based programming – Delivering as One Area-based program in the marginalized frontier counties

In 2013, the RC embarked on a concerted effort to target development resources at Kenya’s under-served and restive borderlands. This approach also became the basis for UNCT Kenya’s first Delivering as One joint programme, in Turkana and Marsabit Counties, which would become a key vehicle to shift the UN’s prevention strategy away from short-term electoral violence prevention to underlying conflict drivers associated with governance, socio-economic marginalization, and natural resources. By doing so, it also served the realization of one of Kenya’s key constitutional reforms - devolution - while aligning the UN to the government’s development framework.

In 2015, in an innovative pilot, the RC led the UNCT Kenya into an unprecedented provincial-level Framework Coordination and Partnership Arrangement with Turkana County (Kenya’s poorest), and Marsabit County (including the Moyale cross-border program), which is being expanded to other regions prone to violent conflict. The programme consisted of a number of elements, including:

- The establishment of conflict and vulnerability mapping, as well as a risk analysis and resilience framework called SHARED (Stakeholder Approach to Risk Informed and Evidence Based Decision Making) which tracks spatial data in the border region and other data points to understand conflict drivers and impacts;
- The creation of local Peace and Development Committees in hotspot areas where they didn’t exist before (an effort led by the RC);
- The launching in June 2017, by the RC and the Government, of the Turkana Transformation Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF), the first of its kind globally, to channel dedicated resources to the DaO Turkana program.

The programme had several specific characteristics that helped make it effective and potentially serve as good practice.
for similar efforts elsewhere. Firstly, it was characterized by a “highly participatory” inclusive planning process with civil society and local authorities. Secondly, the RC actively sought involvement and partnerships with the private sector, philanthropic foundations and NGOs. Specifically, drawing on her previous experience with the private sector, the RC effectively used her convening and coordinating roles to facilitate the signing of MOUs with several large corporations (E.g. Philips, Merck) and business networks (E.g. Africa Diaspora Network Entrepreneurs Organization). Finally, the effort was explicitly framed as a “Delivering as One” effort, which provided her with leverage over other UNCT members to align their programming behind this strategy (which sometimes required additional lobbying with individual agencies’ UN regional offices).

Uwiano Platform for Peace: Conflict Early Warning and Early Response mechanism

In May 2010, in the run-up to the constitutional referendum and building on the development of a peace infrastructure over the previous two years, the National Steering Committee, civil society and UNDP joined forces to form the Uwiano Platform for Peace. Consisting of the PDA-led national conflict analysis capacities within the NSC and a major consortium of Kenyan Civil Society Organisations called PeaceNet, it served as an operational umbrella group with a joint Secretariat responsible for coordinating and implementing electoral violence prevention efforts among a range of actors, and managing Kenya’s first national early warning and early response capacity. In this role, it monitored hate speech, incitement and tensions; partnered with media, led peace messaging campaigns, promoted dialogue, and led peace caravans and peace tents in 20 counties. Nationally, it led conflict sensitive journalism and peace monitoring trainings.

Most active during election periods, the high-profile platform is exceptional in three ways: 1) its effectiveness in crowd-sourcing early warnings of violence, made possible by an extensive network of partners and a free mobile text-messaging service; 2) its analytical capacity with analysts processing information in real time; and 3) its ability to translate those warnings into action in real time through its partnership with the National Police Service, particularly the Office of the Inspector General, which is critical for its security response capacity. It coordinated an extensive web of local, county and national peace committees.

RC Chuma was actively involved in Uwiano’s establishment, with consistent advocacy and political support to back national stakeholders, fundraising, ensuring technical support from UNDP and the PDA in particular. He helped broaden its membership to include the elections commission (IEBC) and UN Women to consult on gender-based violence training. The peaceful outcome of the 2010 constitutional referendum was partly credited to Uwiano’s work with local peace committees in defusing an estimated 200 incidents of potential violence. In the 2013 elections, a well-resourced Uwiano ignited a frenzy of activity with a rallying call, “Chagua Kenya, Chagua Amani” (Choose Kenya, Choose Peace). While some assessments of prevention efforts in Kenya suggest that UN and PeaceNet support was “crucial” to the peaceful election outcome in 2013, others offer a more critical account, pointing to some shortcomings that prevented the Uwiano initiative from living up to its full potential, including the fact that the early warning architecture was not integrated with efforts to address the root causes of conflict, and that the “episodic and events-based” early warning system was unable to sustain its effectiveness outside of periodic high-profile elections. In 2017, the platform was relaunched and scaled up, training police and convening forums on hate speech monitoring, community dialogue and mediation forums, deploying a vast network of 1,000 monitors including UNVs organized by the RC, focusing on the 29 (out of a total of 47) counties that were deemed at risk of violence. Despite irregularities that prompted sporadic violence in the 2017 elections, these early warning and monitoring activities are credited with helping avert larger-scale violence.

Uwiano was connected to a range of early warning and conflict tracking capacities, some of which were supported by the RC or UNDP, including Early Warning Early Response (EWER) Platforms producing real-time situation maps during and, after election day, Risk Management and National Social Cohesion Indices, a crime observatory working closely with the National Police Service and civil society, and IGAD’s Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN). In combination, the network of these platforms served a range of prevention functions by empowering civil society networks, serving to deter violence, providing early warning of violence risk, monitoring hate speech and promoting peace messaging.

4. Prevention Coordination and Capacity

The RCO, throughout the period under review, operated with very limited capacities that would underpin its prevention role. That capacity consisted of a Peace and Development Advisor (PDA), who played a key role in developing and coordinating a prevention strategy. (The PDA post was abolished just before the 2017 elections, which was widely seen as unhelpful.) In addition, the RC could draw on the support of a Human Rights Advisor who set up an information management system to connect stakeholders and serve as an early warning system, triggering alarms about the risks of violence in 2017 elections.

The RCO also managed to raise funds for three technical advisors to support the flagship projects in Marsabit and Turkana, as well as the SDG Philanthropy Platform. The UN Peacebuilding Fund briefly provided USD1 million in emergency funding in 2008 for United Nations Volunteers (UNVs) to support local peacebuilding initiatives in “hotspot” areas, and again later in 2016 for vocational training to Somali
refugees in Kenya to create incentives for their return.

Overall, the support and resourcing for the RCO to pay a prevention role was viewed as insufficient and inconsistent through the case study period. In a potentially promising effort to find cost-effective ways to bolster the RC’s prevention capacity, the RCO and UNDP are trying to put national PDAs in priority counties to liaise with local stakeholders and peace committees on conflict-sensitive implementation of their County Integrated Development Plans (CIDPs).

5. Overall Impact of RC-led Preventive Action

While the overall impact of the cumulative RC-led prevention efforts since 2007 is difficult to assess in quantitative terms, a reasonable case can be made that they played a meaningful role in mitigating short- and mid-term conflict risks in the country.

By seizing the post-crisis political moment, the RC provided strategic advisory and technical support to national efforts to strengthen prevention capacities within Kenya’s national peace architecture. Concretely, this support: a) helped establish a standing national capacity for conflict prevention and resolution; b) helped embed formal roles for civil society in the peace architecture, enabling a more constructive state-society relationship to take root; and c) bolstered the national conflict assessment and analysis capacity within the peace architecture, which in turn built the foundation for Kenya’s national early warning and response network. Thus RC-led efforts can convincingly claim some credit for the national peace architecture’s success in preventing a recurrence of 2007-8 atrocities in subsequent elections.

Moreover, RC-led efforts were key in driving the establishment of area-based development programming and cross-border prevention programmes, in an effort to target development programming at “hotspot” areas at high risk for conflict. This consolidated efforts aimed at addressing underlying conflict drivers and delivering development to especially marginalized communities.

6. Lessons and Good Practices

National Peace Architecture embeds prevention into the national DNA. Kenya’s peace architecture remains an example of global best practice, built from Kenyan grassroots into a formidable capacity within the highest Government office to each of Kenya’s 47 Counties. Crucial to its effectiveness were two factors: first, the central space and role it provided to civil society; and second, its anchoring within the Office of the President ensuring access to and influence over high-level political leadership.

Supporting national civic capacities acts as a powerful force multiplier. In Kenya, the RC and his PDA helped the Kenyan government to leverage Kenya’s considerable local and national capacities in the design of its national peace architecture. Including robust, well organized civil society, faith groups and NGOs with experience in reducing internecine and electoral violence in rural areas into national conflict prevention mechanisms (e.g. NSC, Uwiano) helped ensure broad-based, inclusive national ownership that was not only more effective in preventing electoral violence, but by its design, helped restore public trust and participation in Kenya’s institutions.

Flagship area-based programming can align UNCT, Government and partners behind prevention goals. A UN commitment to prioritize historically marginalized, volatile areas across its programs creates powerful incentives for peace, through improved access to services and aid, and economic development. It creates a common agenda inviting coherence, reinforces sub-national capacities, and can attract additional public and private investment. Innovative financing tools make securing these investments easier. Multi-donor Trust Funds tied to an area-based joint programme in a conflict-affected or historically marginalized area can transform development investments, even by non-traditional (e.g. private sector) actors, into peace dividends. In Kenya, these programs helped the UN and partners gain traction in sensitive prevention issue areas (e.g. human rights) because they were embedded within broader development objectives and funded programs.

Encourage cross-border cooperation among RCs. Strict adherence to national RC mandates discourages cooperative problem-solving among UNCTs across borders, and in peripheral areas where marginalization and violence can often occur. As our understanding of the transboundary nature of conflicts evolve, so too should our practice. Kenya’s multidimensional cross-border program simultaneously addresses violent extremism, human trafficking, economic development, local governance and inter-communal peace with mutually reinforcing objectives and means. Now offered as a global model of best practice, it reveals as much about the virtues of RC tenacity and outside-the-box problem-solving, as it does about the outmoded territorial tendencies behind internal obstacles the RC confronted along the way.

Joint conflict analysis between then UN and the government can open space for prevention. While the established tool of the Common Country Assessment (CCA) was not relied on regularly by any of the RCs under consideration in this study, the Kenya case still highlights the value of engaging the UNCT in a systematic conflict analysis effort. In Kenya, a dynamic and inclusive conflict analysis process was put in place in partnership with the government in the form of the Conflict Analysis Group, which helped build bridges for partnerships with civil society, provide entry points to influence government policy reforms, and align the UN behind a UNCT-wide prevention strategy subsequently enshrined in the UNDAF.

Political access matters. In Kenya, the dilemma faced by many RCs elsewhere, namely how to reconcile the imperative of seeking close working relationships with the government, which is necessary for effective programme implementation, with the imperative of tabling, when necessary, sensitive
issues central to conflict prevention, was particularly stark. In Kenya, where political space for RC-led prevention initiatives has been generally limited, RCs tended to tread softly around issues of human rights, transitional justice, security reforms, police brutality, or ethnic inequality, in the pursuit of constructive relationships with the government and in favour of high-level entry points for the UNCT to play a meaningful prevention role. While potentially risky and not uncontroversial, especially after the 2013 election that led to the inauguration of a President and Vice-President indicted by the ICC, this approach allowed the RC to identify and leverage political entry points to play a meaningful role in advancing the conflict prevention agenda in Kenya. In such contexts, deploying experienced RCs with political sensitivity to navigate such tricky relationships is vital.

Limited political space? Go subnational. In Kenya, when political space for the UN at the national level contracted, as it did during the tenure of RC Chatterjee, he was still able to carry out meaningful prevention programming at the subnational level in the context of areas-based programming, working with local partners, building capacity and contacts with local programming (e.g. governance, peacebuilding). This allows for building blocks to be established for more extensive peacebuilding engagement if and when the political space opens up later down the road.

The Peace and Development Advisor (PDA) is a critical prevention asset for RCs and should be strengthened. In each of the initiatives outlined in this case study (and many more not highlighted), the PDA was instrumental in its success. Kenya shows how experienced PDAs can identify and help create opportunities for potentially transformative conflict prevention by the UN. These PDAs worked best when they were empowered and given space by RCs to engage not only the UNCT and its partners, but with high-level government and civil society interlocutors. The effectiveness of the PDA tool was undermined by the fact that PDAs lacked ready access to funds to stand up prevention initiatives. In the words of one PDA: “Not having money feels like having one arm cut off.” Likewise, the limited duration of PDAs’ contracts inhibits the kind of medium-term planning and confidence-building required for sensitive conflict prevention work. Care should also be taken, when possible, to avoid poorly-timed elimination of PDA posts, as occurred in Kenya just before tense national elections in 2017.

Short and long-term prevention strategies need to be pursued in parallel. In Kenya, near-exclusive emphasis in the period immediately following the 2007-08 electoral crisis on prevention strategies around triggers of violence (e.g. around elections) meant missed opportunities in addressing root causes (ethnic marginalization, injustice). It is likely that an earlier effort to complement short-term attention to triggers (negative) with attention to address underlying factors would have led to even more sustainable prevention outcomes. In Kenya, RCs had to manage trade-offs between objectives to prevent recurrence of electoral violence with sensitive longer-term issues, which meant that that several key areas relevant to prevention remained unaddressed through UN programming, including public discourse, ending marginalization policies, Truth and Reconciliation, and Security Sector Reform (SSR).
The author would like to thank the following individuals for agreeing to be interviewed, reviewing the draft, and/or providing relevant documents: Aenas Chuma, Siddartha Chatterjee, Nardos Bekele-Thomas, Ozonnia Ojielo, Per Knutsen, Clever Nyathi, Anthony Agyenta, Raouf Mazou, Asfaw Kumssa, Amanda Seruamaga, Murithi Mutiga. Rainer Frenfeld, Vivianne Mmbanga Lugulu, Alessandra Cabras, Gabriel Rugalema, Nikolai Hutchinson, Eman Yarrow, Chip Bury, Arif Neky, Christopher Wakube, Razia Kimani, Michael Lund, and Emmie Auma. A special thank you to the UN Resident Coordinator’s Office in Nairobi and to Kenya’s Peace and Development Advisors for their valuable contributions. The author bears sole responsibility for any mistakes or omissions in this report, and the views expressed in this report are not necessarily shared by the individuals listed above.

4 Where ethnic ties bound Christians and Muslims together among the Luos, Kikuyus and Luhyas, for example, these divisions were often exploited for political gain. See: Guha, Shilpa. “Violent Extremism in Kenya - Rift Valley Forum Meeting Report.” Rift Valley Institute, February 2017, p.3.
6 In 1992 land reform manipulated by politicians into ethnic dichotomies between “indigenous” and “outsiders” under the guise of post-colonial redistribution but actually an extension of the patronage politics at the time.
14 Lindenmayer and Kaye. “A Choice for Peace?”
17 This was enabled by the UN-supported “Uwiano Platform” national early warning and response center, which was linked with local peace committees to defuse an estimated 200 incidents of potential violence. See: “Lessons Learnt Study: Peace and Development Advisors: Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention.” UN DPA. 18 January 2017.
18 For example, key governance authority was shifted from 8 provinces to 47 counties. Overall, this devolution plan became the basis of Kenya’s Medium-term Plan II/Vision 2030 to which the UN aligned its development planning and programming towards Kenya’s achievement of the SDGs.
Criminality was aided by the widespread availability of small arms left over from the Sudanese and Ugandan conflicts of decades before. See; Vivekananda, Janani. Peace Audit: Kenya. International Alert, 2015, pp. 74-75.

21 In 2008 a Truth Justice and Reconciliation Commission was also established to investigate historical injustices from 1963 to 2008.

22 In 2013, Kenyatta would go on to win electoral victory, becoming President. Charges were eventually withdrawn for lack of evidence after Kenya appealed to the UN Security Council and subsequently withdrew from the Rome Statute, the treaty establishing the ICC.

23 This time William Ruto served as Kenyatta’s running mate, winning the vice presidency.

24 Thirteen violent incidents were reported but with no disruptive consequences. “Kenya Case Study (Internal).” UN DPA. 2017.

25 A “peace evangelism” pervaded public discourse with effective media campaigns and public messaging on peace. Viewed by some observers as “over-correction” it proved effective in the near-term, even if it stifled any constructive public discourse on contentious issues underlying Kenya’s conflicts. Personal interview with Murithi Mutiga. 2017.

26 Odinga had run with a newly formed Coalition for Reforms and Democracy party, a multi-ethnic coalition popular with youth and some marginalized groups.


28 Some observers owe the 2013 peaceful elections to context rather than peace messaging: “(a) the formation of the Jubilee Coalition; (b) the ICC, which served as a deterrent for high level potential perpetrators and inspired a sense of nationalism that unified much of the populace; (c) the still-fresh memory of 2007/08, which no one wanted to experience again; (d) confidence in the judiciary and the IEBC; (e) the (self)- censorship of the media; and (f) the absence of an incumbent in the presidential contest.” Cho, S Y et al. 2015.


36 Chuma, A and Ojiole, O. 2012, p.27.


38 Cho, S Y et al. 2015.

39 NCIC, ACORD, national peace commissioners, peace monitors, grassroots groups.


42 Chuma, A and Ojiole, O. 2012.

43 This strategy embodied in the “Uwiano Platform for Peace” aimed to develop partnerships and a coordination platform for violence mitigation around the national referendum in 2010; strengthen synergies between local actors; develop

45 Ojielo, O. 2017. Within this context, UN-Kenya cooperation was also aided by Kenya’s endorsement in 2008 of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and put in place a Joint Assistance Strategy with the UN.
47 The National Peace Forum was organized in 2011 by the National Steering Committee on Peacebuilding and Conflict Management (NSC) and co-funded by various partners including the UWiano Platform for Peace, National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) and the Partnership for Peace and Security (PPS). See National Peace Forum Report and National Conflict Mapping and Analysis Report at www.nspeace.go.ke/resource-library/downloads/category/4-publications.html?


49 Cho, S Y et al. 2015.

51 Personal Interview with Nardos Bekele-Thomas, former RC for Kenya, October 2017.
53 This fostered a shift in approach from negative peace (the absence of violence) as the objective, to positive peace (building strong relations among communities and viable state institutions). This shift was enabled too by the success of the 2013 elections, which gave many donors and Kenyans the impression that the country was ready to move into a new phase of development. “UN Kenya Resident Coordinator Annual Report (RCAR),” UN Kenya. 2016. See also Akpendonu, T. et al., Keeping the peace: Lessons learned from preventive action towards Kenya’s 2013 elections, Geneva Peacebuilding Platform, Paper No. 10, December 2013, pp. vi-viii, www.gpplatform.ch/sites/default/files/PP%202013%20Kenya%20-%20Keeping%20the%20peace%20-%20Dec%202013.pdf.

54 The specific proposal cited the Turkana – Mandera Mothers as a rallying point for localized support to extremely vulnerable communities in the North, affected by poverty, exclusion and violence. 
56 In addition to these flagship programs, the RC tried to initiate a national dialogue process national vision to coalesce Kenyan civil society and Government around a shared future vision based on its new Constitution. She leveraged UNDP’s work in mobilizing 300 civil society groups in its ‘Amkeni Wakenya’ program, begun in the aftermath of the 2007 crisis to increase democratic participation and rebuild Kenya’s social contract, leading consultations across Kenyan state and society: government, opposition, private sector, faith-based organizations, civil society, community organizations, women and youth groups and media. However, planning for a dialogue process and subsequent national conference was scuttled for lack of political support. Bekele-Thomas, N. October 2017.

Though entry points were limited, the UN’s engagement on conflict prevention also included: preventing violent extremism and radicalization; mediation capacities in the national peace architecture; the Human Rights Up Front strategy, and regional coordination, in addition to election-related programming. Across these areas, the RC-led advocacy on sensitive issues that require political support and additional leverage. Outline 2016-2018 Strategy of UN engagement in Kenya (Internal). “Matrix of Implementation for the Strategy on United Nations Engagement in Kenya.” UN. February 2017;


Chatterjee, S. 2017;

The program is jointly supported by the UN and the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), an East African bloc supporting regional peace efforts, within a multi-year cross-border conflict prevention plan. Chatterjee, S. 2017; Mohamed, Amina and Tedros Adhanom. “Kenya and Ethiopia: A cross-border initiative to advance peace and development.” Thomson Reuters Foundation News. 5 January 2016. news.trust.org/item/20160105103325-lhafc/.

Bekele-Thomas, N. October 2017.
71 In previous electoral periods, analysts noted a higher incidence of conflict where these committees were absent.
74 Bekele-Thomas, N. October 2017.
78 UNDP support included training of media, police, peace committees, monitors targeted thematic areas on conflict prevention management and resolution (CPMR), Alternative Disputes Resolution (ADR), mediation, conflict sensitive reporting.
79 Kenya Prevention Case Study (Internal document) UN DPA, 2017, Kenya Case Study (Internal).
80 Backed by a surge of funding in advance of the 2013 elections, Uwiano trained 100 peace monitors, established “Peace Tents” in 20 counties to coordinate and share information: security alerts, conflict mediation, and emerging threats. Partners extended this network further. Citizens could report election related violence through a crowd-source platform, such as “Uchaguzi”, linked to first-responders, with other local spin-offs (e.g. “Safecoast“) (Cho, S Y et al. 2015.). In partnership with Uwiano, the US State Department supported deployment of officers to identify and deter potential

82 Chuma, A and Ojielo, O. 2012, p.35.
85 Personal Interview with RC Chatterjee October 2017; Personal interviews with Head of RCO Per Knutsson, October and December 2017.
86 The establishment of an information system emerged from a recommendation in Kenya’s Human Rights Up Front (HRUF) strategy. Personal interview with UNDP staff, New York, October 2017.
87 Interview with former PDA, October 2017.
Kyrgyzstan 2010-17

Josie Lianna Kaye*
Introduction

In June 2010, Kyrgyzstan experienced its worst crisis since its declaration of independence in 1991. What began as a fist-fight between Kyrgyz and Uzbek youth quickly escalated into large-scale ethnic violence, which spread from Osh to Jalalabad, Bazar-Korgon, and other towns and cities in southern Kyrgyzstan. These initial clashes were marked by inter-ethnic confrontations, violence and killings. Fuelled by fast-spreading rumours of murders, atrocities and sexual violence, Kyrgyz ‘gangs’ – outraged by the killings and violence – then descended on Uzbek neighbourhoods. Human Rights Watch concluded these attacks followed a consistent pattern: individuals in camouflage uniforms on armoured military vehicles entered Uzbek neighbourhoods, removing the makeshift barricades that residents had erected; armed men then followed, shooting and chasing away remaining residents, clearing the way for looters. Security forces either failed to intervene, or appeared to ‘take sides’, focusing their resources on “addressing the danger presented by Uzbeks, but not by Kyrgyz.” Throughout 11-15 June, mass killings, rape and destruction took place in at least fourteen areas of the city of Osh and in four other towns. The violence resulted in the death of at least 470 people – with around 2,244 seriously injured – and the displacement of 400,000 people, of whom 75,000 fled temporarily to Uzbekistan.

The crisis took place against the backdrop of extensive political turmoil that began earlier that year: large protests against rising energy prices and elite-level corruption took place in the city of Talas in February 2010, spreading to Bishkek on April 10, where riot police fired live ammunition into the crowd, killing 86 protestors. Two days later, President Bakiyev fled the capital and a provisional government (PG), headed by former foreign minister, Roza Otunbayeva, took power. Tensions began to rise during this period of uncertainty as a result of ethnically-charged narratives, often instigated by nationalists, extremists and criminal groups. An independent investigation into the June violence – the Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission (KIC), chaired by Dr. Kimmo Kiljunen – unequivocally tied the events in Osh to the “under-representation of ethnic Uzbeks in public life and the rising force of ethno-nationalism” and the “power vacuum” following Bakiyev’s departure. Framing the violence in Osh as “crimes against humanity”, the KIC also blamed the PG for having failed to foresee the violence and to develop a contingency plan to contain it. The report, perceived by the PG as biased, was largely rejected, and Kiljunen was declared “persona non grata.”

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The KIC report inadvertently created a confrontation between the international community and the Government of Kyrgyzstan at the very time when they needed to be working in concert towards the shared goals of peace and stability. Just as the UN was rallying behind the report and its recommendations, the Government used its response to the KIC to underscore the fact that “it had not received any assistance from the international community during the clashes, despite the main task of international organizations being to react to such problems.” And yet, contrary to these claims, the UN took meaningful action to respond to the escalating crisis behind the scenes in 2010, and, from 2011 onwards, played an important role in preventing a recurrence of conflict and in accompanying Kyrgyzstan on its pivotal peacebuilding initiatives.

On 24th November 2017, President Sooronbai Jeenbekov was inaugurated as Kyrgyzstan’s fifth President, marking the first transfer of power from one democratically elected president to another – a sign of how far the country has come since the tumultuous events seven years prior. This case study seeks to elucidate what role the UN Resident Coordinator (RC) specifically and UN Country Team (UNCT) more broadly played in this transition, and what steps the RC took to help prevent the onset, escalation, continuation and/or recurrence of conflict and instability in Kyrgyzstan at a period in the country’s trajectory when a collapse of the PG, for example, could have easily triggered a very different outcome. What strategies did the RC pursue in order to position the UNCT as a trusted – and long-term – partner during turbulent times?

Following a brief overview of the underlying conflict risk factors and medium-term political dynamics, this case study will argue that the RC played a critical role in 2010 in responding to the crisis and that, shortcomings of the UN’s approach notwithstanding, his swift actions contributed to a prevention of an escalation of the crisis. The RC then went on to support Kyrgyzstan in the development of a medium- to long-term peacebuilding approach, through access to resources from the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) – creating entry-points for addressing issues which have long been considered ‘too political’ or even ‘taboo’, including the marginalisation of minorities, relationships between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, cross-border relations with Tajikistan, and preventing violent extremism.

1. Country Context

Underlying conflict risk factors

A landlocked mountainous state, Kyrgyzstan gained independence after the dissolution of the USSR in 1991. While market-based economic reforms and the semblance of inclusive politics won Kyrgyzstan relatively swift branding amongst the international community as an “island of democracy”, post-independence stability was short-lived. Indeed, rather than a single episode of conflict, the crisis in June 2010 was part of a cycle of violence and instability that had lasted more than two decades, including in Uzgen in 1990, Batken in 1999-2000, Aksy in 2002 and Jalalabad in 2005, often accompanied by significant political upheaval.

Under Askar Akayev’s rule as Kyrgyzstan’s first president, political elites largely subverted attempts to reform the political system and co-opted economic reforms. His time in office was characterised by endemic levels of bribery and
Kyrgyzstan

corruption, and a progressive de-legitimization of the regime. Repressive politics began to dominate the political landscape in the early 2000s: when Akayev refused to step down at the end of his second term, “prominent opposition leaders were jailed, the President’s relatives began acquiring control over major media outlets, and protests intensified.”

Kyrgyzstan’s stability began to unravel when, in response to parliamentary elections perceived as fraudulent, civil unrest began to take hold. During the so-called ‘Tulip Revolution’ that followed in 2005, Akayev was finally forced from power, and fled the country.

His successor, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, hailing from the Jalalabad region in the country’s south (unlike Akayev who was a Northerner), tipped the balance in favour of a different set of ‘clients’ but remained otherwise true to the precedent set by his predecessor. Corruption, nepotism and bribery continued and these new power dynamics intensified ethnic competition between the southern Kyrgyz and Uzbeks.

Whereas Akayev had a slight orientation towards “a civic mode of nationhood” – albeit a cover for predatory politics – which saw ethnic Uzbeks represented in local authorities in southern Kyrgyzstan, Bakiyev quickly replaced them with southern Kyrgyz ‘allies’. This change in the ethnic ‘make-up’ of the political landscape of Southern Kyrgyzstan led to a deterioration of inter-ethnic relations and the build-up of resentment and fear, which can be directly tied to the violence that later erupted in Osh.

Consequently, when a second revolution brought down Bakiyev’s Government in April 2010, many southern Kyrgyz rightfully feared they may lose their newly acquired privileged position in whatever power constellation would emerge as a result of the PG.

Underpinning these episodes of violence and political instability were pervasive economic, social and geo-political conflict drivers, of both a national and regional nature. The rapid privatization of the agricultural sector – traditionally at the core of the Kyrgyz economy – in line with the free market reform programmes of the 1990s, has been particularly damaging for Kyrgyzstan. The move “dismembered the large collective farms and at the same time destroyed the vital support services that they provided.”

High unemployment in the countryside has led to increasing levels of rural to urban (and foreign) migration where, upon arrival, the majority fail to find jobs; historically speaking, Uzbeks have also dominated the business sector in the Ferghana Valley for generations, and that the “inter-ethnic clashes that occurred in southern Kyrgyzstan, Bakiyev quickly replaced them with southern Kyrgyz ‘allies’. This change in the ethnic ‘make-up’ of the political landscape of Southern Kyrgyzstan led to a deterioration of inter-ethnic relations and the build-up of resentment and fear, which can be directly tied to the violence that later erupted in Osh.

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Kyrgyzstan has struggled to develop a cohesive national identity since its separation from the USSR. According to the 2009 census data, the Kyrgyz are the country’s largest ethnic group (70.9%), followed by Uzbeks (14.3%), Russians (6.2%), and a wide range of other minorities, although it should be noted that Russians do not experience their minority status in the same manner as the Uzbeks. Despite efforts to unite citizens around the Kyrgyz language and other potential symbols of national unity, such steps – especially post-2010 – have only served to entrench divisions, and to heighten awareness of the low socio-political representation of minorities. Uzbeks especially, who are often labelled as having been the aggressors in the 2010 ethnic conflict, have been systematically marginalised from power. Lack of trust, particularly between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities, therefore, has contributed to social divisions and segregation, exacerbated by the absence of a formal reconciliation process.

From a geo-political perspective, Kyrgyzstan is wedged between China, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. Together with Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan is the source of the majority of the region’s water resources, via high mountain glaciers - scarce resources that Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan especially depend upon. From a regional perspective, water management is a consistent source of tension and plans to build hydro-electric dams provoke frequent protests from neighbours, and often lead to threats to cut off supplies of both natural gas and water. These dynamics are compounded by ongoing territorial disputes which also lead to occasional cross-border skirmishes of varying intensity. Despite these tensions, it should be noted that Uzbekistan played an instrumental role in stopping the 2010 violence from escalating; it could easily have exploited the situation to its own advantage but, instead, provided vital humanitarian assistance to refugees, and condemned cross-border ‘revenge raids’, which could well have triggered an inter-state conflict.

Kyrgyzstan is also situated along the so-called ‘northern drug trafficking’ route, and Osh has been described as the region’s “drug capital”. Drugs being ‘trafficked’ from Afghanistan to both Russia and Europe pass through Tajikistan, before arriving in Osh and then onto Bishkek before being smuggled through Kazakhstan to Russia. Drug trafficking is facilitated by the extensive porous border with Tajikistan, and fuelled by criminal gangs – tied intimately to high levels of poverty, unemployment, and the relative ease with which vulnerable people can be recruited into the ‘business’.

A UNODC report in 2012, furthermore, noted that drug trafficking and organized crime were sources of conflict in Kyrgyzstan, and that the “inter-ethnic clashes that occurred in southern Kyrgyzstan in 2010 have been used by ethnic Kyrgyz criminal groups to assume predominance over ethnic Uzbek criminal groups and to control the drug routes through this part of Kyrgyzstan.”

Medium term political dynamics affecting conflict risk

Only a fortnight after the June 2010 clashes, the PG held a referendum to approve a new constitution, which established, for the first time, a parliamentary system and led to Roza Otunbayeva assuming the Presidency – a first
Kyrgyzstan

for a woman in Central Asia. Despite the ongoing instability at the time, the OSCE and other international bodies gave a positive assessment of these democratic processes. Interviews with local counterparts, however, suggested that the “overwhelming majority of the voters did not understand what they were agreeing to, but were giving their assent in the hope that it would bring stability to the country.” Nonetheless, the referendum and the new constitution brought the required legitimacy for the PG to proceed, and allowed for parliamentary elections in October 2010, followed by presidential and local council elections in 2011 and 2012 respectively. During the 2010 election, a political party with a nationalist – rather than ethnically-based – agenda got the plurality of votes, and formed an opposition to the coalition government. In theory, these developments created a conducive environment for the implementation of the constitution, but this was undermined by continued infighting and jockeying for positions among political elites, which created tensions. Overall, the period continued to be marked by human rights violations.

President Atambaev, who succeeded Otunbayeva in December 2011, managed to contain ethnic tensions and ushered in a period of peacebuilding, enabling Kyrgyzstan to come ‘back from the brink.’ In doing so, he built on his predecessor’s achievements during her short presidency, including the creation of new institutions. Violence subsided during Atambaev’s term in office, even if resentment remained and antagonisms continued to fester. However, after six years in office, Atambaev left a “legacy of stalled reforms [and] an economy still struggling to attract outside investment.” Incoming President Sooronbai Jeenbekov has promised to “create a state where human rights are respected, on democratic principles,” but this remains a work in progress.

The ongoing marginalisation of minorities – and the resentment and conflict it breeds – has also created fertile recruiting ground for both criminal and extremist groups. Movements such as the Islamist Jihad Union, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and the Hizb ut-Tahir have long been a cause for concern – to varying degrees - most notably in the Ferghana Valley area, and increasingly in the Andijan and Namagan provinces of Uzbekistan. A 2016 ICG report on Islamic radicalization tied treatment by the state and ongoing feelings of injustice as a result of the events of June 2010 as key drivers of radicalisation in the region. While the link between extremism and poverty is weak at best, a recent study for the UN found that a majority of those associated with extremist groups were of Uzbek ethnicity, underscoring the relationship between radicalisation and marginalisation.

2. RC-Supported Prevention Initiatives

Historical role and perception of UNCT

Conflict prevention was not a priority for the RC or UNCT prior to the June 2010 crisis. The 2005-10 UNDAF focused mainly on poverty alleviation and social services; democratic governance; and, HIV/AIDS. The UNDAF highlights the “continuing closed character of institutions of governance and pervasive corruption” as well as the marginalisation of both women and minorities as important issues, but none of these or any other factors are identified as conflict risks. According to one interviewee, the RC Office (RCO) at this time, quite simply was in “development mode”.

While conflict prevention may not have been a priority for the RC or UNCT, it was not ignored entirely. UNDP undertook relatively extensive work in this area, providing technical support to a government-led ‘Peace and Development Analysis’ in early 2010. This process, envisioned as an extension of the then-UNDP Conflict-related Development Analysis (CDA) tool, was designed to establish a “common picture of the conflict prevention priorities in Kyrgyzstan”, thereby laying the foundations for the development of a national conflict prevention strategy. The Peace and Development Analysis process established a National Steering Board and Oblast Advisory Committees, put in place to both “legitimize the process and moreover address the priorities identified in the process.”

In principle, this was a promising approach for identifying conflict drivers. In practice, however, the process fell short of its objectives: tensions between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, and the endemic marginalization of Uzbeks from political and economic processes did not emerge as a priority. There are multiple reasons for this: some believe there was reluctance to speak about this sensitive issue in the context of a government-led, national process; the Oblast-level platforms were also considered too ‘political’; and, the facilitators of the process were Kyrgyz, presumably leaving Uzbeks uncomfortable raising the issue. And, despite the significant time and effort invested by UNDP and partners in establishing the platform/network on conflict prevention, it seems it was not ‘activated’ as a conflict prevention mechanism during the period of April-June 2010 when inter-ethnic relations were deteriorating – despite clear signs that violence could be expected. During the relatively protracted crisis from April to June 2010 “why didn’t we, as the UN, appeal to these platforms to ask for advice?” one UN interviewee asked. The Peace and Development Advisor (PDA) who was leading the process at the time was also not invited to UNCT meetings, underscoring the manner in which conflict prevention was a UNDP-led but not UNCT-wide initiative it needed to be, undermining the potential for early warning signs to be translated into early action.

While these local networks were not activated, reports and interviews of those involved at the time indicate that UN staff were instrumental in communicating to UN headquarters their alarm about the increasing tensions on the ground: “From the very early days of the constitutional crisis, UN staff kept the office of the 5G appraised of the escalating violence and the South-North divisions in the country.” According to one report, Lynn Pascoe, the then-Under-Secretary-
General for Political Affairs, urged Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to offer interim President Otunbayeva assistance in coordinating regional responses. Subsequently, in April 2010, Ban “dispatched veteran Central Asia diplomat Jan Kubiš, head of the UN Economic Commission for Europe, as Special Envoy to assess the situation and scope for the reestablishment of legitimate political authority.”

During this time, in close consultation with Kubiš, Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) Miroslav Jenča, who headed the UN Regional Center for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA) at the time, undertook efforts to provide good offices and facilitate dialogue among the political actors in Kyrgyzstan. These efforts were supported by the RC and UNCT, and coordinated with both the OSCE and EU Special Representative for Central Asia, Pierre Morel, in the form of a coordination mechanism known as ‘The Troika’. The Troika conducted five joint missions to the country between 2010 and 2011, and helped facilitate the relatively peaceful departure of the former President in April 2010. At the request of SRSG Jenča, the UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA) also deployed a Senior Reconciliation Advisor through its Mediation Support Unit to promote dialogue and reconciliation, along with other experts of DPA’s Standby Team of Mediation Experts and UNRCCA deployed a National Political Officer to Bishkek in August 2010 to backstop its efforts on the ground, as well as to provide support to the RC/UNC/T.

Despite these ‘behind the scenes’ efforts, the violence in June ultimately ended without any significant involvement by the UN. However, timely, coordinated and concerted support proved helpful during this period. Jenča, for example, provided the PG with advice on minimizing political violence and human rights violations; as a Troika ‘member’, he was also well-positioned to coordinate efforts with the EU and the OSCE both during and after the crisis. And, following a request of the Kyrgyz Interim Government, the Electoral Assistance Division (EAD) of the DPA, in coordination with UNDP, deployed several international advisors and an EAD desk officer to provide support, both for the June constitutional referendum and October parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan. Unlike the OSCE and the EU, the UN was perceived to represent the entire ‘international community’ (including governments from the region, and Russia), and was therefore able to play a more prominent role in these events. During this time, the SRSG provided critical support to the RC on how to coordinate UN efforts with respects to the PG.

**RC-led situation analysis, strategy and coordination**

When the crisis erupted in the Spring of 2010, Resident Coordinator Neal Walker had already been in-country for almost five years, and had a wealth of country-specific knowledge and contacts he could draw upon. He had previously held other senior positions in both UNDP and the Organization of American States (OAS), and therefore had strong knowledge of both the UN and the international system he could bring to bear. The conflict evidently had humanitarian, development and political dimensions and wearing both the hats of Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator he had a responsibility to respond to each of them. While UNRCCA was leading on the most urgent political elements of the crisis, RC Walker was focusing on the UNCT’s response, including measures to ensure safety and security of UN staff on the ground.

In the immediate aftermath of the June violence, RC Walker relied upon his own extensive knowledge of the country and, while he consulted extensively with the UNCT, many of the heads of agencies were relatively new and, consequently, less acquainted with the country context. He also depended significantly on his Senior Policy Advisor, a national staff member who had been working in the RCO for many years. While a great source of knowledge and contacts, the advisor had previously served as a Kyrgyz government official – which came with both advantages and disadvantages in terms of his vantage points and contacts with a diversity of individuals.

The RC, however, initially drew less upon the advice of the UNRCCA National Political Officer deployed to Bishkek. UNRCCA had explicitly requested that this officer be part of the UNCT, advising on prevention-related issues. Joining in August 2010, directly after the outbreak of violence, the staff person in question – who had no prior UN experience – received no on-boarding, no training and no orientation, was excluded from UNCT meetings, denied a working area, obliged to rent his own office space in the city, and operated largely as an ‘outsider’ for the first 8-12 months of his posting. His efforts to undertake political analysis were further frustrated by limited information-sharing on the part of the PDA (who, due to his complex Terms of Reference, served more as a resource person for UNDP than for the UNCT), just as his efforts to share political analysis were impeded by a perception of ‘competition’ between the UNCT and UNRCCA – a dynamic that arose, to a certain extent, during the UN response to the crisis over the summer, undermining the effectiveness of UN efforts.

These dynamics, however, did not prevent the RC from seeking opportunities for the UN presence on the ground to engage in peacebuilding efforts. An important opening for the RC’s engagement appeared when, in recognition of the risk of repeated violence, interim President Otunbayeva requested the UN in the summer of 2010 to assist with reconstruction and reconciliation in Osh and Jalalabad cities and oblasts, referring specifically to the implementation of “political measures on strengthening stability and peace, promotion of the economic development and creation of employment, improvement of administrative management on the local level, restoration of houses, medical and cultural institutions, schools as well as infrastructure – roads, telecommunication system, electricity lines and substations, water supply facilities.”
Kyrgyzstan

Being able to respond to this request in a positive and meaningful manner required the fast availability of resources. In this context, Walker efficiently drew upon the UN’s Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), one of the few UN mechanisms that allows for quick access to funds to underpin RC-led prevention efforts on the ground. Building on Walker’s prior contacts with the Fund, and in consultation with the PBF’s Chief and the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support – as early as October 2010 – the UNCT was able to access USD 3 million through the Fund’s Immediate Response Facility (IRF). The Fund’s investments supported projects related to youth reconciliation (led by UNDP, UNICEF and UNHCR); women’s empowerment (led by UNIFEM/UN Women); and, water management and conflict resolution (led by FAO and WFP).

In June 2011, in response to an official request from the government together with the acting RC (Walker had left his position in early 2011), Secretary-General Ban declared Kyrgyzstan eligible to access additional funding from the PBF, and an additional package of US$ 7 million was approved (known as IRF 2) for a set of six different peacebuilding projects related to administration of justice and building “infrastructures for peace.” By all accounts, funds were released and the projects implemented in a speedy manner, leading to a meaningful prevention impact on the ground. An evaluation of the IRF packages (1 and 2) conducted in 2012 found that the engagements: helped “create stability and a sense of normalcy”; reduced critical drivers of conflict – especially those related to youth; built important capacity with youth and women’s organizations, and within government ministries; and, “assisted communities’ re-engagement in independent, self-sustaining economic activities.”

Most importantly, the evaluation found that “momentum [was] created to address some of the key structural causes of conflict, namely those groups excluded from political and economic spheres in Kyrgyzstan.”

That said, according to a number of observers, these projects likely fell short of their full potential as an opportunity was missed to ground them in a broader conflict prevention strategy embedded in a solid conflict analysis. Indeed, no systematic conflict analysis had been undertaken to guide the work in the immediate aftermath of conflict and the conflict analyses that did exist were outdated and insufficient: for example, the UNDP Conflict and Development Analysis, initiated in 2007, did not take into account (the manipulation of) “ethnicity as a contributing factor to instability” and was not fully finalised until 2011 – after the release of funds for IRF 1. This fundamental gap in analysis was compounded by the absence of a risk analysis, which may have highlighted the dangers of being insensitive, for example, to the ethnic profile of staff, which proved to be a significant challenge during project implementation. In the absence of a systematic conflict assessment, the IRF 1 was designed and implemented on the basis of a humanitarian needs assessment, and therefore – in line with humanitarian principles – first targeted the communities most affected by the violence, who were largely Uzbek. Kyrgyz communities were angered by an international response that reached them significantly later than those they perceived as being the instigators of the violence in the first place – generating significant resentment, both towards the Uzbeks and towards the UN.

After these missteps, attributable at least in part due to the immense pressure the RC and UNCT were under in the midst of the June violence, there was evidence of significant ‘learning’ on the part of UNCT as it began to incrementally shift into conflict prevention ‘mode’ with the elaboration of IRF 2. This was facilitated by an increasing receptiveness – initially on the part of RC Walker and then on the part of the RC a.i. – to receive inputs from the UNRCCA officer who, as a result of his persistent efforts to gain the trust of the RC, was eventually invited to provide the UNCT with regular political briefings. The PDA was also brought further into the UNCT ‘fore’ and, to a certain although insufficient degree, out of his UNDP-focused role. Overcoming their initial reluctance to work together, the UNRCCA officer and the PDA eventually ‘joined forces’ and cooperated well on their shared tasks, including the elaboration of IRF 2. Indeed, the evaluation notes that IRF 2 (instigated under the leadership of Walker in March 2011, elaborated after his departure and approved in June 2011, just before the arrival of the new RC), “illustrates a better understanding of the causes of the conflict and willingness to allocate resources and encourage the government to engage in deeper structural reforms.” Most importantly, it was underpinned by a collective conflict analysis undertaken at the UNCT level. The diminishing tensions and the emergence from the immediate humanitarian crisis also gave the UNCT more time and space to dedicate to assessment, planning, government engagement and broader consultation.

When Alexander Avanessov assumed his position as Resident Coordinator in July 2011, the UNCT had begun ‘transitioning’ into a prevention posture, but much work remained to be done. He focused significant attention on integrating the UNRCCA political officer into the work of the RCO, reorienting the PDA’s TORs towards a UNCT-wide role, and further strengthening relationships with UNRCCA and UNHQ. He also encouraged UNCT members to work outside of their mandated ‘siloes’, steering them to work collectively on peacebuilding issues. Pushing towards a unified approach, he also strongly discouraged individual UNCT entities from approaching the Government independently of one another, especially on joint projects which related to conflict prevention.

A Russian national with solid understanding of the country context, relevant language skills and extensive regional knowledge, Avanessov was also well positioned to building relationships with different layers of Government and other stakeholders, in which he invested significant effort during his first year in office, laying the groundwork for subsequent UN peacebuilding engagements. There were four key, pre-existing entry points which facilitated his work during these first few months, and which were partly owed to the UN’s
Kyrgyzstan

longer-term track record and relationships of trust that had been built over the years: first, the willingness on the part of local authorities in Osh and Jalalabad, and other areas deeply affected by the conflict, to work with the UN on peacebuilding issues; second, the political will on the part of the President's office to explore how best it could collaborate with the UN; third, the strong desire on the part of non-governmental organizations to work with the UN across humanitarian, development and peacebuilding issues; and, fourth, the fact that the UNCT had internalized the lessons from its initial experiences of working with the PBF.

RC Avanessov then set about implementing a medium- to long-term strategy, working closely with SRSG Jenča and Secretary-General Ban, to elaborate a peacebuilding and prevention-oriented approach underpinned, once more, by PBF support. While ultimately effective, the strategy was initially met with some degree of resistance on several fronts. One of the initial challenges was the need to overcome the Government's desire to focus on immediate humanitarian and development needs; as underscored by Avanessov, "it took some work to help them take a longer-term, more strategic perspective." The Government was also concerned that accepting PBF funding would mean Kyrgyzstan would be perceived as a 'crisis country' in need of being on the agenda of the NY-based Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), which was widely perceived among UN member states as a forum tending to failed states. Avanessov dedicated significant efforts to explain that the mandate of the PBF allowed it to provide funding to countries not experiencing violent conflict and that acceptance of such funds would not indicate that the country was in crisis, but rather that it was averting it.

Furthermore, a linguistic misunderstanding almost entirely undid efforts to elaborate a peacebuilding package when the Government was made to understand that 'infrastructures for peace' – a term used to express a set of formal and informal domestic institutions elaborated to prevent conflict and promote peace – would not lead to the establishment of much needed roads, bridges, communication and sewage systems as the President had expected. Based upon this decision and working closely with the Government, the RC then set about putting the 'wheels in motion for the elaboration of Kyrgyzstan's first Peacebuilding Priority Plan (PPP). Having learnt the lessons of IRF1 and in line with the principles of conflict-sensitive programming, the development of the PPP was underpinned by extensive analysis and comparative insights. A context analysis – called "Peacebuilding Needs and Priorities Assessment" – was undertaken in the Spring of 2013 to ensure the PPP related projects responded to conflict dynamics and peacebuilding challenges. Led by the RC with support from the Swiss-based NGO PeaceNexus, which has been a key partner for the UN in Kyrgyzstan (see 'resources' section below for more information), the elaboration of the needs assessment was highly participatory – involving national counterparts, civil society and other development partners.

The findings of the needs assessment were, furthermore, informed by a UN Technical Expert Group in Kyrgyzstan that brought subject experts of various agencies together to inform the UNCT's engagement in the PBF process, and benefited from close collaboration with the UNRCCA.

To avoid duplication, the analysis was also informed by an extensive mapping of the activities of other entities, including the EU, World Bank, OSCE, etc. which all provided information on their long-term plans and strategies. Furthermore, the UN's Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) in New York, which manages the PBF, put the RCO and members of the JSC Secretariat in touch with key actors involved in the PBF process in Nepal, which allowed useful sharing of relevant experience, informing the design of the PPP in Kyrgyzstan.

As a result of the work of the UNCT and the JSC – and facilitated by the RC – three key priorities were elaborated on the basis of the needs assessment, and formed the centrepiece of the PPP: (1) implementation of critical laws, policies, and reforms to improve the rule of law, access to justice and human rights; (2) the establishment of local self-government bodies to reduce local tensions; and, (3) development of policies and initiatives that promote a common civic identity, multilingual education and respect for diversity and minority rights. According to many UNCT members active during this period, the PPP was "fully owned by the Government and responded fully to their needs," although the ownership, according to UN staff involved at the time, seems to have been more genuinely felt with respect to development issues than those related to human rights.

The task now remained to develop appropriate projects that would adequately address the identified priorities. That exercise was complicated by the fact that many UNCT members saw the promise of PBF funding as a convenient way of compensating for looming budget and staff cuts, with several agencies inclined to simply rebrand pre-existing programmes as peacebuilding, a practice facilitated by the
very broad understanding at the UN of what peacebuilding entails. As a result, more projects were proposed than could be accepted under the PPP, and for which PBF funding was available. The RC, therefore, proposed, and the UNCT agreed, that projects would be selected through a competitive process, an approach first piloted in Nepal and encouraged by PBF’s donors; each project, moreover, could have no more than two or three participating entities.

In theory, putting in place a competitive process seemed like a good practice and it was enacted in a transparent and rigorous manner. Projects were assessed according to criteria jointly decided upon by the UNCT; project proposals were assessed first by the UN Technical Experts Group, then by the JSC and an independent expert, Dan Smith (former chair of the PBF advisory group), was deployed to help review projects. A representative from the President’s Office was – thanks to the efforts of the RC – closely involved throughout both the formulation of the PPP and the selection process. In light of the inevitably competitive dynamics that emerged, the RC also established a relatively innovative (in the context of PBF-funded projects) ‘independent evaluation committee’, made up of representatives from other international organisations who were requested to assess the projects critically against the pre-established list of criteria and their individual merits.

That said, while the logic of the competitive process was “sound” – and in some respects, creative – and led to the selection of projects which were, on their individual merits, well-designed and in line with the priorities identified by the PPP, the result was, according to several UN officials, “a bit of a mess.” Indeed, the 10 projects eventually approved by the JSC had little relationship to one another, missed vital opportunities to be catalytic, and prevented the ‘whole from being more than the sum of its parts.’ According to the evaluation of the PPP, since the projects had been developed independently of one another, this process also contributed to: the duplication of project-level indicators each measuring their objectives within a PPP outcome but none measuring the impact of the PPP overall; a lack of coordination within site selection, “reducing possible strategic synergies among projects” and a duplication of similar activities from different projects in the same municipalities; duplication of implementing partners contracted for similar activities; concomitant high levels of administration costs across multiple agencies; and lack of a clear, and shared understanding amongst implementing partners regarding overarching PPP objectives. As underscored by one UNCT member, “in the end, we had a lot of interventions in a lot of different places, but not many places where we had many interventions; we were not aligned, we weren’t integrated... it simply wasn’t one initiative, but many, under the banner of the PPP.”

The ‘disconnect’ between the PPP as a government-owned strategy and as a UN-designed project led to other missed opportunities. The majority of PPP projects by-passed the Government since they were guided by the UNCT and implemented by local non-government partners. While this contributed to increased capacity for local NGOs, a more effective strategy would have strengthened both the institutions of government and the relationship between government entities and local partners. This would have required more capacities and significantly more time than was accorded by the PBF timeframes. As outlined by one interviewee, “the UNCT was tasked through the PBF to deliver specific outcomes, not to build the capacity of the government to deliver such outcomes” – another unfortunate missed opportunity.

Despite, or perhaps because of these structural problems, efforts were made on the part of the RC during implementation to ensure coordination with national and international development actors in-country. The JSC itself was highly collaborative, involving the Government, the RC, the UNCT, and key partners such as the OSCE and the EU, and civil society actors. With the RC representing the UNCT, a Development Partners Coordination Council was convened once a month, and every three months it met with the Prime Minister for a dialogue on development aid; a National Coordination Council on cooperation with development partners also took place, chaired by the Prime Minister and co-chaired by the RC (with USAID as alternate co-chair). An aid platform registering all ongoing development projects in the country was also developed. And, quite exceptionally, the World Bank representative became a full-fledged member of the UNCT in 2015, “an unequivocal recognition of the high regard for and the added-value of the work of the UNCT”, and undoubtedly a step in the right direction to ensure better coordination between these two UN System entities.

These measures went some way to addressing the challenges associated with the PPP project design which could – to some degree – be ‘ironed out’ during the course of implementation, but the competitive UNCT dynamics unleashed by the process were longer-lasting, somewhat undermining the RC’s efforts to foster collaborative and participatory methods of working. These efforts suffered further from the fact that the UNCT was without a PDA for more than two years as a result of predominantly bureaucratic hurdles, at a critical time in the PPP lifespan and Kyrgyzstan’s peacebuilding trajectory – leaving the UNCT without a key prevention asset.

Its shortcomings notwithstanding, there are indications that the PPP made a contribution to conflict prevention: there was a significant increase in the number of disputes addressed by local institutions; the reported number of violent disputes declined significantly; there were small increases in the reported trust and social equity in local-level state bodies; youth and women’s mobilization increased; and, perhaps most importantly, there was a “significant increase in percentage of respondents who reported positive changes to ethnic relations compared to the baseline.” The evaluation of the PPP praised in particular the “creation of networks [and] collaborative spaces at the national level” that facilitated further work on and funding of peacebuilding work, including...
at the local level. And, according to the evaluation, the most cited effects of individual projects “pertained to the spontaneous adoption of certain activities of practice by other local government authorities in areas beyond the target areas of a project and without PPP funding support” – indicating the positive ‘spill-over’ effects of PBF support.

In 2016, on the basis of recommendations from the PPP evaluation and as a result of extensive efforts by Avanessov, the UNCT and government embarked on a second PPP process, this time focused on preventing violent extremism (discussed below in greater detail) and a more collaborative process guided by the principle of ‘a coalition of the most willing.’ The second PPP process also overlapped with a highly innovative PBF-funded project on cross-border cooperation for sustainable peace and development (also discussed below in greater detail). When Mr. Avanessov completed his time as RC in mid-2017, the UNCT was flooded by letters of appreciation for his efforts and many staff lamented the ‘loss’ of a highly capable diplomat and leader.

Avanessov’s successor, Mr. Ozonnia Ojielo, who took on his role as RC at the beginning of 2018 and who looks back at 30 years of experience in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, is by all accounts off to an excellent start, with interviewees expressing appreciation so far for his collaborative, non-hierarchical and inclusive style. This is all the more encouraging as Mr. Ojielo will be facing a challenging agenda that includes, inter alia, advancing novel Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) programing, promoting inter-ethnic reconciliation, supporting the resolution of remaining border issues and promoting regional cooperation and economic development in the Ferghana Valley.

Specific interventions and initiatives

In the case of Kyrgyzstan there were numerous initiatives, projects and programmes launched by individual UN agencies, in particular UNDP, aimed at addressing specific conflict drivers or advancing specific prevention objectives. This section, however, will only look at those initiatives and approaches in which the RC had a significant role and/or which were jointly carried out in an interagency context, that also hold particularly valuable lessons for RCs elsewhere.

‘Cross border cooperation for sustainable peace and development’

The Cross-border Cooperation for Sustainable Peace and Development (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) project was launched in 2015, funded by PBF and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. Constituting the first cross-border initiative funded by PBF – which traditionally provides financing to national endeavours – the project brought together two RCs, two PDAs, and two UNCT configurations from both sides of the border. With a price tag of close to US$6 million, the project was designed to address conflict drivers in unstable border areas by: strengthening cooperation between security providers and communities; improving community infrastructure and natural resource management; increasing levels of inter-ethnic tolerance and understanding amongst youth; women’s active involvement in design and implementation of cross-border initiatives; conflict monitoring; and, community dialogue platforms.

Working in cross-border areas is an extremely sensitive undertaking, especially when it concerns issues related to scarce natural resources (such as arable land and water), and potentially controversial infrastructure projects. These sensitivities were compounded by the ongoing absence of border demarcation/delimitation, and a history of tensions and border violence between communities and border guards; in this context, “local conflicts can easily escalate up to higher levels of violence and lead to deterioration in the political climate between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.” Consequently, both governments were initially reluctant to engage in a project of this nature, fearing it would require compromises on political issues they were not willing or prepared to negotiate on and/or create the perception of a willingness to concede sovereignty to international entities.

Gaining the support of both governments required concerted efforts on the part of the UN and high levels of patience. The RCs on both sides of the border undertook extensive consultations with national officials to explain the rationale and benefits of the project, using trust built up over previous years. These efforts were assisted by the efforts of the UNRCCA, which used regional platforms as opportunities to lobby for the initiative. Similarly, representatives of the relevant funds and agencies (UNDP, UNICEF, WFP, FAO and UN-Women) at Headquarters also leveraged their relationships with the Permanent Missions of both countries to underscore the advantages of the project. The two RCs were also instrumental in getting all involved agencies and programmes to agree to work together on a relatively complex project. Much of the difficult and time-consuming 'leg-work' was conducted by the two PDAs, working in unison to develop a project document with scope, substance and terminology that was acceptable to two RCs, ten agencies, and – most importantly – two governments with tense relations and a history of violence between them. A task which involved, amongst other things, addressing hundreds of comments provided by both governments on a 40-page project document.

Once these initial challenges and associated delays were overcome, the project showed promising results. According to the first evaluation of the project, for example, “the project has contributed quite significantly to reducing tensions over water resources, as well as issues related to border-crossing rules, and attitudes towards the ‘other’ have been positively impacted.” The project successfully established a community-based conflict monitoring system (‘TRACTION’), the findings of which were discussed regularly with local authorities and leaders from both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in order to agree on joint responses. And the establishment of
small-scale natural resource management initiatives helped reduce tensions and facilitate border-crossing, with a key lesson being that “tensions were far more likely to be reduced by ensuring communities’ independent access to resources rather than encouraging shared use.”

The project was an instructive learning experience for the UN, paving the way for similar initiatives to learn from the strengths and weaknesses of the project. Many challenges were encountered which, with greater planning and careful management, could be avoided in subsequent phases of the projects, or similar projects in other contexts. One of the most important lessons underscored by interviewees and learned exercises concerned the issue of “mirroring” : the RCs, PDAs and UNCT entities involved adopted a mirroring approach designed to ensure coherence and balance between the work on either side of the border. Due to “different peacebuilding opportunities, entry points and governance structures”, this approach was not always appropriate and undermined efforts to ensure strategies were in line with the context – including the particularities of the national focal points, culture, and sensitivities which needed to be taken into account when designing and implementing the project.

**Electoral risk management tool**

Following extensive discussions among political parties, civil society and state institutions, several amendments to the electoral legal framework were made between 2011 and 2015. In May 2013, a Presidential Decree “On Measures on the Improvement of the Electoral System of the Kyrgyz Republic”, mandated a massive introduction of innovative technologies as a means of increasing the credibility of elections; the decree, for example, envisioned biometric voter registration, electronic voter identification, electronic voting and results management, etc. These changes, so close to the elections, led UNDP, in its electoral risk assessment, to raise concerns that the election might be contested or trust in the process diminished: the new biometric voter registration system was used for the first time; the required electoral deposit for political parties (returned upon receiving more than 5 per cent of votes) was raised 10 times (from around US$ 7,000 to US$ 70,000), potentially preventing certain candidates from competing; and there was a new requirement that only voters who register with biometric data (photo and fingerprints) would be able to vote, rejecting other forms of ID that had been used in the past. These changes, according to UNDP’s risk assessment, had contributed to increased levels of distrust in state-society relations and of negative attitudes towards the electoral process; there were concerns related to the disenfranchisement of Uzbeks.

Given the results of the risk assessment, the RC was concerned that these dynamics could undermine progress made on building relationships of trust, both horizontally and vertically within society, and fostering stability. More specifically, the rushed introduction of new technologies elevated public expectations of ICT as a panacea for improving confidence which, combined with the unresolved root causes and grievances related to the 2010 unrest, all contributed to the charged political atmosphere and elevated risks of election-related violence.

The RC was quick to use his relationship of trust established with the government and – after extensive discussions with the Prime Minister’s office – the Government accepted to work with the UN to address the issue through an inter-ministerial working group. Working closely with the National Institute of Strategic Studies (NISS), which sits under the Prime Minister’s Office – and in close partnership with PeaceNexus – an electoral risk management (ERM) tool was developed to monitor the various risks associated with the elections.

The electoral risk management tool was elaborated on the basis of 10 risk factors which were tracked using interactive maps able to assess the intensity of the risk factor, and how the risk factors evolved over time in different districts. Field monitors reported data to UNDP-trained NISS research offices who managed the database which was used to inform the ERM tool, and then coordinator compiled the analysis and reported to the governmental bodies and the office of the President. The findings were discussed in closed roundtables with representatives of the government ministries and other relevant state institutions. Then appropriate actions were taken to reduce tensions. This early warning system has been institutionalised by the NISS and is still operational today, demonstrating the sustainability of initiatives which are given strong government ownership from the outset.

**Preventing violent extremism (PVE)**

It is estimated that approximately 3,000 people from Central Asia have joined radical groups that are fighting in Syria and Iraq, and many of those are reported to be from Kyrgyzstan. Violent extremism in the country is tied to weak governance and rule of law, human rights violations, endemic political and economic marginalisation of certain populations, and religious fragmentation. Despite mounting evidence in recent years that extremism and radicalisation is a challenge that must be addressed, the Government of Kyrgyzstan has – until very recently – demonstrated little interest in addressing the issue head on. Only in 2016 did it begin to elaborate a counter-terrorism programme and, as with many such programmes which are often based on law enforcement measures, there were concerns raised that such initiatives may exacerbate rather than help address the issue.

Capitalizing on an expression of interest by the PBF to continue its support to Kyrgyzstan, and encouraged by the recommendation of the final PPP evaluation in 2017 to catalyse government support for PVE, the RC played an instrumental role behind the scenes in encouraging the Government not only to accept the need to address extremism and radicalisation, but also to develop a preventive response to it. When the Secretary-General’s UN Plan of Action on PVE was launched in 2016, the RC was able to leverage this global
plan to encourage the Government to consider the benefits of taking a preventive and transparent approach to PVE, sensitizing it along the way to the risk of mano dura (iron-fist) counter-terrorism policies being counter-productive and exacerbating the problem.

As a result of these efforts, a new PPP was approved in December 2017 as part of a new PBF package, with a budget of US$8,000,000 (the total value of the project is US$20,138,000 and funding is being sought amongst other international partners). The PPP, elaborated in close consultation with the Government, and featuring a strong component on institutional strengthening, will focus on four key areas: inclusive governance and justice system for preventing violent extremism; support to the prevention of radicalization to violence in prisons and probation settings; and, communities resilient to violent ideologies. The “ultimate purpose” of the project is aimed at “curbing the number of Kyrgyz citizens leaving for Syria or other countries as Foreign Terrorist Fighters as well as reducing the number of extremism and terrorist cases overall through a strengthened state partnership with the public in general and religious communities in particular.”

While this second PPP demonstrates widespread concern about the vulnerability of Central Asia to violent extremism, there is some unease within the UNCT that PVE is “eclipsing” other, equally important issues. While the first PPP made some impressive peacebuilding gains, the challenges it sought to address are far from being resolved. As underscored by one UNCT member, “PVE is an important issue, but it is not the only one.” The UNCT, therefore, under the leadership of its new RC has an important opportunity to either address outstanding peacebuilding issues collectively outside of the PPP process, or to use the PPP work on PVE as entry-points to address other related challenges, not least since many drivers of conflict and drivers of PVE overlap and intertwine with one another. It will, however, be vital to ensure that donor interest in PVE does not divert the attention of the RC/UNCT from other pressing issues.

**Resourcing**

Resources available to the RC increased significantly following the June 2010 crisis, which drew the eyes of the world – including UNHQ and donors – towards Kyrgyzstan. The RC was able to draw on a total of US$10 million for activities covering the transition until the elections in November 2011 and, in September 2013, PBF approved a further $15.1 million as part of the PPP. Since then, PBF has also provided an additional $1.6 million for work on Gender Responsive Peacebuilding (in 2014) and $3 million for the cross-border project with Tajikistan in 2015.

PBF funding and UN-wide support also allowed the RC to double the size of the RCO compared to pre-crisis levels, including staff focused on conflict prevention, such as the UNRCCA officer, and a PDA (a post that unfortunately remained vacant for two years from 2015-16). It should also be noted that due to a complicated TOR, the PDA was originally not part of the RCO (but sat within UNDP); however, following a PDA assessment mission in June 2015, it was recommended to move the PDA to sit under the RCO. Further staff assets were provided by PBSO in the form of five PBF missions, including to: provide guidance on M&E processes to improve the PPP results framework; develop an M&E plan; provide inputs on agencies’ project proposals; and, surge support to establish the JSC Secretariat prior to approving the overall PRF funds – which was vital for the successful completion of the PBF PRF process. The Secretariat itself also received US$ 850,000 from the PRF funding to ensure project oversight, promote partnerships, build the capacities of national counterparts, and ensure completion of the PPP; PBF Secretariat support also came with additional human resources: an overall coordinator, two M&E specialists, and a gender specialist. UNV supported two of those. In addition, funds were granted for monitoring/data collection exercises, which helped encourage cooperative oversight as well as substantively improve the interventions to support prevention.

The RC was also good at drawing on external assets, for instance by building on a partnership with the Swiss based NGO PeaceNexus, pointing to the importance of RCs looking beyond capacities within the UN system. However, questions arise whether the increase in RCO capacity is sustainable given that the post-crisis period has now passed and there may be an incremental shift back into ‘development mode;: However, the RC was able to raise significant new funds by successfully positioning the UNCT to undertake work on PVE, capitalizing on growing international interest in the PVE space, raising significant donors funds (US$8 billion as part of a PBF package, and an additional $12 billion is being sought from bilateral partners).

**3. Overall Contribution of RC and UNCT to Prevention**

The RC has made an important contribution to Kyrgyzstan’s peacebuilding trajectory. A credible argument can be made that the initial phase of post-crisis response led by RC Walker helped stabilise the country and mitigate a potential escalation of the conflict, in particular by attending to the needs of youth. However, the initial set of peacebuilding projects following the crisis also generated resentment among Kyrgyz communities, which might have been avoided had they been embedded in a proper conflict analysis and a more conflict-sensitive approach. However, there is an argument to be made that this outcome was unavoidable: the Government insisted that the ethnic Uzbeks were the perpetrators, but they were also the primary victims and the ones most in need of aid.

The second phase of RC-led prevention efforts, under the auspices of RC Avanesov, successfully leveraged entry-points with the Government that helped foster at least six years of support from PBF for conflict prevention and
peacebuilding endeavours, arguably helping bring about a reduction in ethnic tensions and mitigation of other conflict drivers. As the UNCT now embarks on its second PPP, with its new RC, Oronnia Ojielo, significant efforts will need to be made to balance the interests of donors in addressing PVE with the need to address the equally important, outstanding ‘business’ from the previous PPP – including the ongoing marginalisation of ethnic communities from political and economic life, and key regional relationships that can be leveraged for mutual political and economic gains.

4. Lessons, Good Practices and Recommendations

RCs should place inclusiveness and early warning at the center of their prevention agenda: The case of Kyrgyzstan confirms the importance of horizontal inequality and deep-seated exclusion (in this case of an ethnic group). The UN’s development-as-usual stance of the UNCT prior to the June 2010 violence confirms the tendency of RCs and UNCTs to downplay – at least until a major crisis breaks out – the issue of exclusion out of concern of offending the Government. This case study also highlights the importance, in settings affected by horizontal inequality, for RCs and UNCTs to show greater sensitivity to the UN’s own ethnic staff profile, which often mirrors the exclusion prevalent in the host country.

RCs should ensure that peacebuilding programmes and projects are embedded in conflict analysis: In Kyrgyzstan the funds for the first IRF1 were acquired rapidly and the projects implemented with equal speed, undoubtedly spurred by the dynamics of being in the midst of the emergency. While understandable, the absence of even a basic conflict analysis to underpin the initial set of peacebuilding projects arguably reduced the impact. A proper conflict analysis at the outset of the crisis might also have ensured a greater sensitivity to conflict dynamics in the context of humanitarian aid programming.

Effective RC-led prevention requires ready access to funding for peacebuilding projects, with the PBF in particular constituting a critical resource: Kyrgyzstan confirms the importance of the PBF as one of the few sources that RCs can draw upon to fund, on short notice, peacebuilding initiatives that other, more risk-averse donors, would shun. In Kyrgyzstan, the RC’s effective use of the PBF has highlighted the ability of PBF to provide funds in relatively short timeframes, as well as the importance of building up relationships over time. Good relationships between the RC and the government enabled him to overcome the initial resistance of the President to accept such funding, which was fuelled by concerns it would stigmatize Kyrgyzstan as a conflict country.

Pooled funding, such as that available through the PBF, is a key tool for the RC to foster inter-agency cooperation around prevention objectives: Pooled funding effectively helps ‘pull’ agencies out of their siloed mandates into more collaborative ways of programming. Pooled funding is also likely to encourage common approaches to analysis, programme design and implementation, leading to more efficient use of resources and less duplication in terms of programming, and programme monitoring and evaluation. Where competitive processes are established among the UNCT to select projects financed through pooled funding, RCs should devote special care to mitigate the risk of competitive dynamics undermining “one-UN” approaches.

Building trust with the government can create important entry-points for RC-led prevention: In Kyrgyzstan, the relationship of trust that RC Avanesov managed to build with the highest echelons of the Kyrgyz Government, including the President, created important entry-points for RC-led peacebuilding initiatives, by leading the government to explicitly request support even in sensitive areas such as conflict prevention that might previously have been no-go zones for the UN in the light of domestic sovereignty concerns. Of course, the success of this approach in Kyrgyzstan does not belie the fact that the imperative of building trust with the host government needs to be at times balanced with the imperative of standing up to the government in cases where government actions or policies are responsible for increasing conflict risk or human rights abuses. There is no template guidance on how to walk that tightrope and in any given case, requires judgement.

In light of the limited prevention capacities at his/her disposal, RCs should ensure full use of and cooperation among all staff dedicated to prevention and fully integrate them into the RCO and UNCT deliberations: In Kyrgyzstan, prevention assets at the disposal of the RC and UNCT, such as the PDA and a seconded political officer deployed from UNRCCA, could have been earlier and better incorporated into the deliberations of the RCO and UNCT. The subsequent full integration of these assets into the work of the RCO, strengthened the RC’s ability to become a driver of UNCT-wide prevention and peacebuilding initiatives. Indeed, PDAs and political officers are critical resources for the RC and to reach their full potential, should be empowered by the RC and positioned as UNCT-wide assets if they are to be effective at supporting the RC in his/her prevention goals.

Given the centrality of the PDA role, it is important to ensure that RCOs are not deprived of these assets for extended periods of time during critical peacebuilding periods: In Kyrgyzstan, the RC’s peacebuilding role was temporarily weakened by the two-year period during which the PDA position was vacant in 2015-16. Indeed, this arguably affected the quality of programmes and the RCO’s ability to fundraise as the majority of RCs rely on such resources precisely for these purposes. When gaps are unavoidable, intermediary solutions for ‘temporary PDA-like’ assignments should be explored to avoid PDA-vacuums.

RCs are most effective in ensuring ‘whole of UNCT’ responses – including on conflict prevention – when they encourage, as much as feasible and realistic, ‘single-point’ dialogue with the Government in the context of multi-
agency programmes, especially on sensitive topics. The approach of RC Avanessov of having a ‘single point’ dialogue (on issues related to the PPP) with the Government rather than agencies independently contacting the Government helped ensure greater coherence and overcome siloes, thus maximising the chances of the prevention/peacebuilding strategy succeeding.

Given the increasing relevance and popularity of PVE-related issues amongst donors, RCs must find ways to balance and/or leverage PVE work to address other equally important peacebuilding issues: In Kyrgyzstan, the RC was able to optimise his close relationships with the government to encourage a preventive approach to violent extremism; the concerns of some UNCT members, however, that PVE is only one of many issues that needs to be addressed should not be easily dismissed. Given that many of the drivers of violent extremism and conflict overlap, there may be opportunities to address all concerns but this must be done in a highly strategic manner.

In countries suffering from chronic instability in border areas, RCs can play an important role in driving cross-border prevention projects: The joint regional project with Tajikistan shows the potential of RCs – when partnering with RCs in neighbouring countries – to drive the establishment of projects targeting cross-border drivers of instability. The Kyrgyzstan case shows that the success of such projects requires sound planning, support from other UNCT members as well as UNHQ, and proactive efforts on the part of both the RC and the PDA, as well as high degrees of persistence.
Endnotes

Cover Image: Flickr/ Evgeni Zotov. Osh, Kyrgyzstan. 8 August 2010. Osh after riots in 2010. “I was there one and half month after riots. Most of city was in normal condition. But many buildings - cafes, shops, private houses - along main roads were burned and destroyed. It happened because marauders used trucks to carry robbed goods and could move only on enough space. Almost all the ruins I saw belonged to Uzbeks. People of burned houses lived in tents presented by UN and they were also given some food by UN. There was no any help from government.”

1. This paper is based on secondary resources (listed in the bibliography) and 14 interviews with RCs, PDAs and other RCO staff, other UNCT staff, national interlocutors of RC/UNCT Tunisia, and, UNHQ staff. The lead writer/researcher would like to sincerely thanks all those who participated in this process, either in interviews or in the course of subsequent reviews of the paper, and a special thanks are due to RC Alexander Avanessov for participating in multiple interviews, and for providing comments on the draft. The author bears sole responsibility for any mistakes or omissions in this report, and the views expressed in this report are not necessarily shared by all the individuals who interviewed or reviewed the report.

2. It should be noted that the ‘facts’ about the events of 10-15 June are highly controversial and contested. This brief summary is based on a combination of UN reports, reports by Human Rights Watch and the work of the Helsinki Committee, which was commissioned to conduct an independent enquiry, as detailed shortly.

3. Human Right Watch notes that it is important to recognise that, during this violence, many ethnic Kyrgyz, Uzbeks and Russians “saved the lives of their friends and neighbours of other ethnicities while the attacks were under way”, in “Where is the justice? Interethnic Violence in Southern Kyrgyzstan and its Aftermath.” Human Rights Watch. 2010, p.7.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.


9. First to the Jalal Abab region and then to Belarus, where he remains in exile.

10. A Finnish parliamentarian and OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Special Representative for Central Asia at the time.


12. Ibid.


18. Ibid.


20. Ibid, P.76.

21. Ibid, P.68.


25. Dungans (1.1%), Uyghurs (1.1%), Tajiks (0.9%), Kazakhs (0.7%) and Ukrainians (0.4%), amongst others. “Central Asia: Kyrgyzstan.” CIA World Factbook. 2018, www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kg.html.


28. Uzbekistan deployed troops during the crisis but they did not cross the border. This created fear about a possible invasion and may have contributed to diminishing the violence, whereas an outright invasion would have certainly increased it.


32. “Opiate flows through Northern Afghanistan and Central Asia, A Threat Assessment.” United Nations Office of Drugs and

119

33 Akiner, S. 2012, p. 9.

34 Ibid.


38 Pozun, Brian, United Nations official, comments provided on draft, March 2018.


40 Matveeva, Anna. “Religious radicalisation leading to violent extremism in Kyrgyzstan, Report on situation analysis and country context including stakeholder capacity assessment for the UN Peacebuilding Fund in Kyrgyzstan.” June 2016, p.16.


42 Now referred to as the UN-wide, Conflict and Development Analysis tool.

43 Andersson, Karin and Peter Reed. “Results, lessons learned recommendations tools, from the Peace and Development Analysis process in Kyrgyzstan.” July/August 2010.

44 Ibid.


47 Logvinenko, I. 2017, p.5.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

50 “United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy (UNRCCA)/Kyrgyzstan Case Study.” UNRCCA. April-October 2010, p.1.

51 Ibid.


54 A political officer was deployed to Bishkek from UNRCCA regional headquarters in Ashgabat in May-June 2010 to provide reporting from the field. Further reinforcement was given by another Russian-speaking political officer deployed in Bishkek from MONUSCO in July-August 2010.

55 “United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy (UNRCCA)/Kyrgyzstan Case Study.” 2010, p.1. and p.3.


57 Ibid, p.4.

58 Mr. Neal Walker was unfortunately not available for interview.


61 “Overview of the projects implemented by the UN System in Kyrgyzstan 2010-2012, Funded through the UN Peacebuilding Fund.” Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO).


63 Ibid.

64 Ibid, p.5


68 Phone interviews with Mr. Alexander Avanessov. 22 November and 14 December 2017.

69 Ibid.


71 Phone interviews with Mr. Alexander Avanessov. 22 November and 14 December 2017.

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid.

74 “Kyrgyzstan: Participatory multi-stakeholder process to develop a Peacebuilding Priority Plan and portfolio of projects for its implementation.” UN document.

75 Ibid.


77 Phone interviews with UN Officials. November and December 2017.
An alternative process would have involved gathering the UNCT members together to decide collectively on the projects that would best meet the priorities identified, then to collectively decide which agencies and how those agencies were best placed to design and implement such projects. This would have had less negative effects on both UNCT dynamics, implementation and, ultimately, the results.

Phone interviews with UN Officials. November and December 2017.


Phone interview with UN Official. December 2017.


Ibid.


Ibid.


Protsyk, O. 2017, p.5-6.

Ibid.


Ibid., page 13.

Inputs received on case study, UN Official. 15 March 2017.

“Collection and analysis of electoral data in Kyrgyzstan.” UNDP. Powerpoint presentation, ERM Tool.

Inputs received on case study, UN Official. 15 March 2017.

Phone Interviews with UN Officials. November and December 2017.

Ibid.

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Pellizzeri, Alessandra, Comments provided on draft, March 2018.

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Malawi 2011-17

Francesco Galtieri
I. INTRODUCTION

In July 2011, Malawi witnessed an outbreak of violence between police and civilians. These events occurred against the background of widespread street protests that were driven by grievances around the suppression of civil liberties and socio-economic deterioration, which triggered a government crackdown. In response to the violence, the UN Secretary-General (SG) decided to engage directly, initiating a mediation process that led to the establishment of a National Dialogue, which culminated in August 2017 in the approval of a National Peace Policy, which helped ease tensions and thereby mitigate conflict risk.

Throughout this period, the UN Resident Coordinator (RC) played a significant role in the UN’s broader efforts to defuse the crisis in Malawi and strengthen its resilience. In the immediate aftermath of the crisis, the RC supported the SG’s Envoy – and subsequently a UN Facilitator – in facilitating the National Dialogue. Subsequently, the RC played a lead role in the dialogue, and follow-on efforts to establish a peace infrastructure. The RC worked to build trust, rally diverse stakeholders, ensure all involved parties had the space and capacities to engage, make the process inclusive and constructive, and bring the dialogue effort to the regional and district levels. In accompanying this process, the RC relied primarily on the UN Development Programme (UNDP) country office. The rest of the UN Country Team (UNCT) was mainly involved in scenario-building exercises, without leveraging a review of the Common Country Assessment (CCA) and the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) to make programmes more intentionally “conflict sensitive”.

The RC’s role in Malawi is one of the more under-studied aspects of the UN’s role in conflict prevention in Malawi. As such, this case study seeks to answer the question: How did the UN Resident Coordinator and the UN Country Team contribute to mitigate conflict risk in Malawi in the years following the 2011 crisis? To do so, the case study explores the origins of the crisis, and the UN’s historical role in the country. It provides an overview of the role played by RC Richard Dictus (RC in Malawi from 2009-12) in supporting the SG Envoy and the later UN Facilitator in conflict prevention work in Malawi. It also assesses the support of the UN Department for Political Affairs (DPA), and the UNDP Country Office and Bureau for Conflict Prevention and Recovery (BCP), for the RC in prevention work in the lead-up to and during the crisis. It then analyses in detail the prevention work of Dictus’s successor, RC Mia Seppo (2013-17) in the aftermath of the crisis with a particular focus on how Seppo built on and expanded the work of the UN prior to her arrival in the country.

Through this narrative, this case study will illustrate how RCs can successfully: a) engage in supporting and playing a convening role for a national dialogue process; b) foster relationships of trust among national actors; c) leverage the right expertise from within the UN system to develop better analytical and consensus building capacities; and d) lead successful efforts in providing capacity development support to national actors, in particular civil society organisations both at the national and local levels to ensure a participatory process towards the establishment of a peace infrastructure.

II. COUNTRY CONTEXT

Causes and overview of the violence

After independence from the British in 1964, Malawi lived through more than 30 years of autocratic one-party rule under President Hastings Kamuzu Banda from the Malawi Congress Party (MCP), which centralised political power and repressed dissent. Only in 1994 did the country conduct its first multiparty elections, bringing to power Bakili Muluzi, leader of the United Democratic Front (UDF). Muluzi immediately freed political prisoners and re-established freedom of speech, and gradually began to address the country’s socio-economic challenges. In the 2004 general elections, Muluzi was replaced by Bingu wa Mutharika whose first term – benefiting from a trend of economic growth – was marked by relative stability, investment in agricultural programs, and the attainment of a higher level of food security. As a result of rapid population growth, the country developed a large – and growing – youth bulge. Combined with the impact of the global financial crisis in 2007-8, and the related rise in commodity prices, this demographic shift weighed heavily on the country’s socio-economic gains.

A worsening socio-economic situation made Mutharika’s second term, which started in 2009, less smooth. His administration responded by undoing some of Malawi’s democratic gains, including by re-centralising power to a degree and at times disregarding the rule of law. He banned public demonstrations over fuel shortages, warning citizens they should not be ‘inspired by Egypt’. The government closed Chancellor College following student protests, exerted censorship over critical newspapers, and ordered the cessation of independent radio broadcasts which they accused of propagating anti-government sentiment. The state-owned media, meanwhile, was accused of inciting violence against protest leaders.

His growing authoritarian tendencies provoked public discontent, which was compounded by rising perceptions that his government was complicit in corruption. The lack of a clear will and effort to address governance shortcomings led some international development partners and donors to suspend assistance. As a result, Mutharika had to adopt austerity measures that reduced the provision of some public services.

Against this backdrop, a series of events escalated tensions and led to the July 2011 demonstrations. After a lecturer allegedly attempted to incite students to protest against the government, protests, strikes and police violence
broke out in February 2011 at the University of Malawi. This was accompanied by deteriorating relations between the government and civil society. Police responded heavily-handedly to rallies and parades, and often engaged in public intimidation. A series of Presidential orders that were perceived to sanction violence as a response to demonstrations exacerbated tensions further. At the political level, meanwhile, Mutharika’s party was trying to marginalise Vice-President Joyce Banda. These moves created friction within the establishment and vis-à-vis the international community.

In the months preceding the violent July 2011 demonstrations, civil society leaders made several attempts to meet the President to discuss popular grievances. However, in the context of shrinking space for lawful political dissent, these efforts failed to generate any meaningful dialogue or action by the authorities. When civil society met with the President shortly before the demonstrations, the acrimonious discussion ‘went nowhere’ and ended with President Mutharika saying ‘let’s meet on the streets!’.

All of these triggers contributed to the outbreak of major demonstrations in July in Blantyre, Karonga, Dowa, Lilongwe, and other districts. On 20 July, security forces used live ammunition and tear gas to disperse thousands of protesters, killing 20 civilians, injuring 58 and arresting 275. The excessive use of force exacerbated public discontent, and fuelled a second day of civil unrest, with looting, property destruction, and violence taking place on 21 July. President Mutharika accused the opposition leaders and rights activists of seeking to stage a coup through the demonstrations, and blamed them for the casualties. He refused to acknowledge any legitimacy of the protesters’ grievances. In a speech to police officers the next day, he singled out six civil society activists by name and warned them, ‘If you go back to the streets, I will smoke you out’.

The protests were largely organized by the Human Rights Consultative Committee, which involved 80 human rights and civil society organizations and was chaired by Undule Mwakasungula. The demonstrators sought to peacefully rally and present the government with a 20-point petition, which listed their demands and grievances. The most severe problems included a lack of fuel, shortages of medicines and drugs, and high prices for basic food items. Protesters’ demands therefore did not solely focus on political rights but equally on socio-economic issues such as living standards and economic mismanagement. The protests were seen as an opportunity to hold the government accountable and express widespread dissatisfaction with its profligate spending, and its perceived disregard for the rule of law.

With the government showing little sign to acknowledge popular grievances and in the face of police brutality in response to the protests, civil society leaders issued an ultimatum, demanding that the government address the demands raised in the 20-point petition within a month, or face further street protests in the form of a vigil on 17 August. Some more militant civil society leaders threatened to meet state violence with violence of their own, declaring that ‘if they kill us, we kill them’.

In following days and weeks, the government’s and protest leaders’ rhetoric grew more inflammatory, and plans for the 17 August vigil raised fears of more violence. “The police chief in Lilongwe urged civil society leaders to cancel the event, warning that the police ‘had no capacity to run it peacefully.’ Rumors circulated that the government had hired Zimbabwean mercenaries, stoking further tensions. As Shotton has written, “Without external mediation, there was a strong feeling that the August protests were likely to end in conflict, and potentially more violent than the July demonstrations.”

At the same time, some moderates within the government and civil society tried to promote a message of appeasement to prevent further violence. Among them were many religious leaders who, beyond enjoying a widely recognised moral authority, had played a constructive role in past moments of tension around the time of elections. As reported by the local newspaper Nyasa Times in August 2011, “There was a widespread sense of shock at having witnessed, first hand or through the media, dead and wounded people, which led parts of civil society to advocate for an end to protests due to fear of retributions and violence from the government.”

The moderates were convinced that another round of mass protests would not lead to the fall of the government nor to progress in addressing the population’s grievances. Therefore, in their views, civil society had few realistic options other than to back down. On the other hand, “the hardliners within civil society insisted that trying to talk to Mutharika would have no results and that mass action in the streets was required to bring down the government or at least get the government to take civil society’s demands seriously. The militants were prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice.” The President’s reaction to this situation was: “either you go or I go, and I was democratically elected.”

III. RC-SUPPORTED PREVENTION INITIATIVES

Context: historical role and perceptions of the UNCT

UN development actors have generally been perceived positively in Malawi, and have a history of having contributed to prevention efforts. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the UNCT worked extensively on strengthening civil society capacities, in particular of the Public Affairs Committee (PAC) - the oldest and best known umbrella organisation for the major faith communities represented in the country—and other local-level organisations promoting dialogue between communities and the government. The aim was to reduce the risk of electoral violence that had been prominent in previous years, and to develop a network of individuals and organizations who could act as agents of social cohesion and peace.
However, after the 2004 elections that brought Mutharika to power and the parallel improvement in the country’s economic stability, the UNCT, and in particular UNDP, decreased its focus on strengthening civil society capacities and on the promotion of social stability and peace. In an effort to capitalise on positive economic trends, the UNCT shifted focus during this period primarily toward supporting the government in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. The UNCT’s priorities became agricultural development, the education agenda and work around prevention and treatment of HIV and AIDS. During this time, the UNCT was – and was perceived as - working very closely with the government, and investing less time and resources in senior-level engagement with civil society. This unequal distance between the actors would have implications for its ability to play an impartial convener’s role further down the line.

During this period, the UN, World Bank and other development partners helped the country achieve important gains, including in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth, human development, and social service delivery. However, they arguably paid insufficient attention to country’s fragility and governance issues, and the UN in particular suffered from a lack of institutional memory around the important prevention work it had done in earlier years. As such, these development actors were not able to strengthen the tenets of democratic governance, and they did not anticipate the autocratic turn of Mutharika’s second term. As a result of these blind-spots, in the years leading up to the 2011 crisis, foreign aid actually sustained traditional power structures and even positive aid achievements were not leveraged to mitigate conflict risk.

UN Mediation Results in National Dialogue (2011-12)

Following the violent events of July 2011, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon appointed a senior official in the UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA), João Honwana, to serve as his Envoy to that country. The Envoy had two key objectives in his mandate: “First, to help lower political tensions in the country and help prevent the repetition, on 17 August, of the violent demonstration of 20 July; and second, to explore a possible UN role in promoting constructive dialogue among Malawian stakeholders.”

President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe reportedly advised Mutharika to reject the SG’s diplomatic initiative, fearful it would invite more intrusive UN interventions in the region. The President, however, accepted a role for the UN, partly as a result of a personal effort made by Secretary-General Ban, and partly because his lead mediators of choice, the African Union (AU) or the Southern African Development Community (SADC), declined to get involved in the crisis. The fact that the UN – both in country and at headquarters – had not publicly criticised the government’s increasing authoritarianism and violations of human rights, including the police shootings, might also have helped gain the President’s consent for the UN’s mediation role.

Further, the President considered engagement with civil society as a way to improve his public image and “ease tensions with the Western donors on whom Malawi was dependent and who were becoming increasingly critical of corruption and authoritarianism.” By contrast, a continuation of the violence would have damaged the country’s international reputation.

The Envoy’s efforts led to a joint statement on 16 August 2011, in which the government and civil society agreed to participate in a UN-facilitated National Dialogue. The 20-point petition that had been tabled by the demonstrators in July served as the agenda. The Director-General of the UN Office at Nairobi (UNON), Sahle-Work Zewde, was appointed by the SG to serve as the UN Facilitator for the Dialogue.

Feeling the pressure of expectations created by the foreign presence, government officials engaged constructively in the dialogue, expressing to the UN Envoy a sense of responsibility for the deaths and injuries that had occurred in July and seemingly determined to avoid a recurrence of the violence. Serving as a “de-escalating” forum for both actors in the conflict (civil society and the government) to back down, the dialogue process created space for civil society to coordinate and raise their grievances with the government, helping to de-escalate the crisis. During and after the dialogue, tensions continued but the country was spared major violence. In April 2012, with the death of President Mutharika, the transition of power to Vice-President Joyce Banda, who had a past as a civil society activist, facilitated a further de-escalation of violence.

The RC’s role in the National Dialogue

The UN’s work on the National Dialogue was led from September 2011 to March 2012 by Sahle-Work Zewde, with substantive support from DPA’s Mediation Support Unit, and administrative and logistical support from UNDP. Zewde made 8 trips to Malawi over the course of 7 months. The RC at the time, Richard Dictus, played an important behind-the-scenes role in supporting Zewde’s work, and in ensuring continued UN engagement with the main national actors in-between her visits.

The RC grappled with several challenges in taking on this role, including a lack of resources and the asymmetry of the UN’s relationships with the government, on the one hand, and civil society, on the other. As the RC acknowledged himself, his role had required him to invest in strong relationships with the government. By contrast, he had had fewer opportunities to engage directly and on a regular basis with civil society leaders. The UN Facilitator, for her part, had been unable to establish close relationships with civil society during her intermittent visits to the country. (Ironically, later in the national dialogue process, the government complained that the UN was siding too much with civil society.) Despite these challenges, the RC managed to support other UN actors through information and analysis; facilitate preparatory
meetings between national and international actors, and among the former; mobilise resources for the mediation effort; and sustain the momentum of the National Dialogue after the UN Facilitator’s departure.

Information and Analysis
The RC, with the support of his temporary Peace and Development Advisor (PDA), Busi Ncube, provided background information and analysis to the UN Facilitator Zewde and relevant UNHQ offices, in particular DPA. Further, the PDA facilitated a “scenario building” exercise with all UNCT members to assess the implications of different scenarios for programmes and projects. This exercise was not conducted as a fully-fledged “conflict analysis,” nor did it lead to a thorough review of the UNDAF. But it did provide the UNCT with the opportunity to discuss how – particularly in the area of social service delivery – the UN could help at least partially address some popular grievances. In this way, RC Dictus helped the UN Country Team (UNCT) to improve the conflict sensitivity of its programming.

Facilitating preparatory meetings for the dialogue
Drawing on his personal relationships with senior government officials and the development community, RC Dictus facilitated several meetings among national and international actors in preparation for the dialogue. Specifically, the RC helped secure the first meeting between the President and UN Facilitator Zewde, whom the government had been somewhat reluctant to engage at the outset as it had initially deemed her too senior and high-profile for the type of “nationally-led” process it had envisaged. Immediately after the unrest, the RC facilitated a series of technical preparatory meetings among national actors from both sides to agree on the composition of the government and civil society negotiating teams, guiding principles, rules of procedure and an agenda for the talks. The RC also brought to Malawi a South African conflict resolution expert, Andries Odendaal from the University of Pretoria, who had previously worked in Malawi and knew some of the key players, to advise on process design.

Resource mobilization
The RC also played an important role in terms of resource mobilisation for the mediation process, helping fill a gap left by the fact that the UN Secretariat had not provided significant financial resources to the effort. The RC, in his capacity as UNDP Resident Representative (RR), re-organised UNDP’s project portfolio to bridge the resource gap. This was not an easy task, given that each project had already been signed with relevant government counterparts and that project money was not supposed to be used to cover logistical costs for envoys or facilitators of the Secretary-General. Beyond restructuring UNDP’s budget – which led to greater involvement of UNDP’s Governance Unit Head, Violet Korsah Baffour, in the process – RC Dictus mobilised some resources (US$ 100,000) through a UNDP crisis response fund (TRAC 3).

Sustaining momentum after the UN Facilitator’s departure
Following the conclusion of the talks, the RC helped keep the momentum of the process up at a time when the risk of it dying down seemed very real. In March 2012, as the UN Facilitator was winding down her role, some in Malawi developed the “impression that the UN was leaving the country.”33 Meanwhile, President Banda, who had assumed power just one month after the talks, required some time to understand how to build on them. Her perceived hesitation was (mis-)interpreted by civil society as a sign of disengagement. In this context, the RC managed to create a holding environment, by nurturing the dialogue with civil society in regular consultative meetings, while providing some advisory services to the government. This work kept civil society constructively engaged, which eventually helped lead to President Banda’s direct participation in the Dialogue, following her initial reluctance to be personally exposed.

The RC’s approach and role after the dialogue (2013-17)

The National Dialogue succeeded in de-escalating tensions and containing the immediate crisis, but it fell short of addressing the underlying political, social and economic drivers of the conflict.34 It thus fell to the new RC, Mia Seppo, who took up her position in April 2013, to embark on a more sustained prevention initiative. With the support of UNDP, her efforts contributed to the emergence of an infrastructure for peace through the approval of a National Peace Policy.

Context assessment and strategy
Upon her arrival in Malawi, RC Seppo invested in building strong relationships with the key national actors that had been involved in the dialogue, including government officials, civil society leaders and representatives of the international community. She also tasked her newly-arrived PDA, Rebecca Adda-Dottoh, with developing a context analysis to enable her to better understand who the main stakeholders were, what efforts had taken place prior to her arrival, and how the UN might have the most added value in building on those past efforts. Based on this assessment, the RC quickly realized that the most urgent challenge the UN would need to address would be to assist Malawi in ensuring that upcoming Presidential elections, scheduled for May 2014, would not lead to another wave of social tensions. She determined that the mid-term challenge for the UN would be to support the emergence of a national peace infrastructure.

The short-term challenge: elections
In order to address the short-term election-related challenge, the RC invested UNDP resources into training and skills-development of civil society “insider” mediators. These mediators were later deployed to each of the country’s regions to help de-escalate local tensions against the backdrop of rising election-related political polarisation. She also put in place a mediation platform and worked with the UNCT to define possible scenarios around the elections that fed into the UN contingency plan. Specific work was undertaken in partnership with UNHCR to ensure the presence of refugees...
would not further increase tensions in some districts, not least by addressing potentially inflammatory perceptions of disparities in assistance to the refugees, on the one hand, and the host communities on the other.

To help national actors develop greater awareness of the risks related to electoral violence and possible preventive actions, she promoted a visit of Malawian officials and civil society representatives to Kenya to learn from that country’s recent experience (see Kenya case study of this project for details). She also enhanced her senior advisory capacities by recruiting a Chief Technical Adviser (CTA) for the elections who managed the UNDP project, complementing her other key assets, namely the PDA and UNDP Head of the Governance Unit. Both the RC and the CTA worked very closely with UN DPA Electoral Assistance Division (EAD) that was regularly consulted and provided advice all along the process. In the RC’s own assessment, these efforts to create greater awareness among political and civil society actors combined with the investment in local mediation and community dialogue capacities helped mitigate underlying tensions and avoid violence during elections.35

When elections were nearing, the RC was concerned that the level of fragmentation of the political scene could lead to an institutional deadlock if results were contested. Therefore, she worked closely with UN DPA, which she had kept informed and involved during the electoral assistance process, to have the Under Secretary-General for political affairs directly engage with the main political leaders. The direct involvement of the USG for political affairs helped persuade the main political leaders to issue the televised Lilongwe Peace Declaration, at a signing ceremony held at a national prayer meeting convened by the PAC.36 At that signing ceremony, all parties committed to a peaceful transition of power based on the respect of the upcoming elections results. That transfer of power happened on 20 May. The strong and public commitment reflected in the Lilongwe Peace Declaration allowed the situation to remain calm even when the results were not announced for one week.

The mid-term challenge: A national peace infrastructure
In order to address the mid-term challenge of helping Malawi establish a national peace infrastructure, the RC encouraged the PAC and Malawian Government to engage in an inclusive consultative process in which “all Malawians... would feel part of the map to the future.”37 Given the respect the Malawian society had for PAC and particularly the leaders representing faith-based organisations, she chose them as the main civil society interlocutor and also the convener for the other citizens’ organisations and groups. Ms. Seppo closely supported government, opposition, and civil society representatives to develop nation-wide consultations through which inputs were collected from the wider population on the peace infrastructure’s design. In these consultations, she specifically pushed for the involvement of women at the district and national levels. Within months of her arrival, a multi-stakeholder consultation process was established, involving representatives from the government, civil society, and the opposition. Representatives from these three groupings would convene in meetings facilitated by the PDA to discuss and determine the parameters of the consultations. She also encouraged the re-convening of a Civil Society Task Force that had been instituted at the end of the national dialogue process, in 2012. The RC helped build the Task Force’s capacity, focusing on imparting knowledge and skills relevant to the participation in the consultation process for the peace infrastructure. Specifically, and on the basis of a robust capacity assessment, she organized trainings on mediation, diplomacy and facilitation as well as learning sessions on countries’ experiences with peace infrastructures processes. In organizing these trainings, the RC relied on UNDP’s regular programme funding, and drew heavily on expertise and advice from UNDP’s Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR) and its Regional Centre. These capacity building efforts helped make the participation of the civil society in the process more meaningful, constructive and less confrontational vis-à-vis the national authorities. In turn, these efforts also enhanced the government’s willingness to engage with civil society in light of the latter’s constructive engagement.

Of course, while the engagement of civil society was crucial, the RC had to balance her outreach to civil society with parallel efforts to appease a government that had initially signalled concern over what it saw as the UN’s penchant for according civil society too much of a central role in the entire dialogue process. She therefore invested significant time in cultivating a personal relationship with key government representatives, in particular with the Ministers of Justice and of Interior, and the President’s Chief Adviser, which eventually gave her direct access to President Banda at different stages of the process. The direct relationship with the President strengthened the trust in the support the UN was providing to the whole process, reassured President Banda of the impartiality of the UN’s role and gave RC Seppo more leverage when interacting with other members of the Cabinet and the international community.

The RC leveraged her wide-ranging relationships to successfully persuade all actors to place the PAC, within which civil society representatives had a prominent role, in the lead role of the national consultations for the peace infrastructure - after initial resistance from the Government and other civil society organisations that did not want to accord that role to the PAC. This required a patient, behind-the-scenes persuasion effort with senior government officials, including President Banda, who would have preferred to assume the leadership role themselves. Eventually, the government relented, accepting the PAC’s lead role, and deploying six cabinet ministers for a three-day meeting that forged a basic consensus on the way forward.

Subsequently, the PAC worked on establishing local committees, with the RC working to ensure that these would
be as diverse and representative as possible, which led, for instance, to a 30% increase in women’s participation in the process. The role of these local committees was to create a space for dialogue and information sharing about the peace infrastructure process at community level to complement and reinforce the national level efforts. The RC thus played an important role in shaping the playing field on which a nationally-owned process could unfold, with buy-in and long-term commitment from key stakeholders. The RC’s ability to build relationships of trust with key players, in a way that was perceived as non-threatening by her counterparts, proved important assets in this context, according to actors interviewed as part of this study.

Combing a low-key approach with careful use of bully pulpits, The RC’s general approach was to operate discreetly, with a premium placed on behind-the-scenes engagement of key stakeholders. This allowed national actors to remain in the lead and feel a strong sense of ownership of the process, which in RC Seppo’s view contributed to lay the foundations for greater sustainability of the effort. In many PAC-convened meetings she attended during the national consultations, she would often refrain from speaking. Instead, she would later use informal moments – coffee breaks, meals – to ask questions or advise different actors on tricky issues that she or her PDA felt would require some facilitation to overcome. However, at times, she made effective use of her bully pulpits, publicly reminding leaders across the political divide that they had a responsibility to constructively engage in dialogue. In 2015, for instance, during the celebration of the International Peace Day, she told the opposition that “[b]eing in opposition does not always mean opposing all initiatives of government “and urged the government to keep in mind that “government … is about wielding power with and not over people.”

Similarly, she took to the public her misgivings about the PAC’s reluctance to ensure adequate women’s participation in the consultation process, in order to ensure that a relevant and important part of Malawian society - women - would not be left aside of the process. In 2016, she demanded that “[w]omen must be around the table, if not leading the process in peace and security matters,” pointing to Malawi’s high levels of sexual and gender-based violence. To sensitize the PAC and the other national actors, she organised a country tour visit to Uganda, that had faced a similar problem of “gender blindness” in the peace-building process. This visit led to greater openness particularly among the religious leaders within the PAC to enhanced participation of women, as witnessed by the increased number of women involved in the subsequent PAC-convened consultations.

The National Peace Policy
Eventually, the consultations led to the development of a National Peace Policy (NPP) completed in August 2017 and launched at the end of November 2017, that enshrines the newly created infrastructure for peace. The policy provides a national framework for Malawian actors involved in conflict prevention to identify and respond to early warning signs of potential tensions and conflict, to promote peace education and collaborate. It presents the basic values that Malawians intend to found a peaceful society on, highlighting the need to embrace diversity and promote social justice and equality. Its expected impact is not only preventing violence, but also ensure “the absence of indirect structural violence embedded in social, cultural, economic, religious and political systems that perpetrate exploitation, injustice and inequality”, as mentioned during the launch of the NPP by Ms. Marjorie Chisambo Shema, Director of Cabinet Services in the Office of President and Cabinet.

Anchored within the Office of President and Cabinet, the national peace architecture had been structured around two pillars: the national-level infrastructure and the work in the districts. At the national level, the operational institution was called the Malawi Peace and Social Cohesion Commission (MPSCC), the mandate of which is “to provide a platform [for] national dialogues on social, economic, political, ethnic and religious challenges” … travers[ing] the totality of Malawian society from national to regional and to district levels.

The MPSCC has structures at regional and district levels, where all stakeholders must be represented, with a special reference in the Peace Architecture Policy given to women’s participation. These local structures have the responsibility of “engaging [people] in a collaborative manner with other stakeholders in reconciliation and transformative dialogues that foster national cohesion.” In the transition from the 2013 peace architecture to the NPP, the previous pillars evolved in the Malawi Peace Commission (MPC) as “the highest umbrella body and focal point of peace building and conflict prevention, management, resolution and transformation in Malawi” and the District Peace Committees (DPC), whose role is “to sustain peace and unity within the District, and create and facilitate spaces for dialogue between groups and communities and for the exchange of ideas on issues that may threaten peace and stability within the community.” At the time of this case study, the NPP has only been in place for a few months, which does not allow to have any elements about its impact, so far.

IV. OVERALL CONTRIBUTION OF RC AND UNCT ACTIVITIES TO PREVENTION

The UN-facilitated national dialogue provided the parties with a de-escalatory and face-saving approach that would provide a forum for key stakeholders to discuss how to address popular grievances in a non-violent manner. The dialogue, however, could only constitute the starting point of what would necessarily require a longer-term national effort to address the structural causes of the conflict, which was supported, in critical ways, by consecutive Resident Coordinators and which remains a work in progress. The Malawi case thus highlights both the difficulty and importance of linking preventive diplomacy with structural prevention initiatives.
Overall, between 2011 and 2017, consecutive RCs, through patient engagement with government and civil society actors, capacity development initiatives and the establishment of space for dialogue among the main national stakeholders, helped enhance the level of trust within the Malawian society and enable a constructive dialogue between the Government and civil society, helping to reduce conflict risk.

V. LESSONS

Developing relationships of trust with key stakeholders is an important asset for RC-led preventive action: in Malawi, the two consecutive RCs were able to successfully leverage close personal relations with senior government officials in their efforts to generate entry points for prevention initiatives. In 2011, the RC drew on these relations to foster the government’s acceptance of the head of the UN Office in Nairobi as facilitator of the political dialogue. In Malawi, balancing and maintaining equidistant impartiality in relations with different categories of stakeholders (Government, opposition, civil society), proved at times challenging for the RC and required careful, continuous and personal engagement of all players by the RC, to ensure everyone would feel equally considered and well informed.

To live up to their full preventive potential, RCs need to leverage all available assets from UN Headquarters: The case of Malawi illustrated how RCs can enhance their preventive role by drawing on and maximizing assets and capacities available to the RCO, including from UN Headquarters. In the case of Malawi, the PDA has a proven particularly useful asset in assisting the two consecutive RCs through context analysis, political advice, scenario planning, engaging the UNCT and external stakeholders. UN DPA also proved a helpful source of guidance on political issues, not least the head of its relevant regional division had served as Envoy to Malawi in the summer of 2011. At critical moments, the RC was able to draw on the political weight of the Undersecretary-General for Political Affairs to put pressure on political leaders. Support from DPA’s Electoral Assistance Division has proven crucial during elections. And UNDP HQ, including through its Bureau of Crisis Prevention and Recovery provided both critical funding and expert advice. The RC’s institutional link with UNDP allowed her to better leverage UNDP Governance programme resources to fill the lack of resources for the meditation process.

UN Envoys and RCs can play complementary roles that reinforce both their roles: The appointment, by the UN, of first an Envoy and later a Facilitator provided significant opportunities to the RC to enhance his own political role through “holding the fort” and moving the process forward in between the Envoy’s/Facilitator’s visits, and by providing entry points and facilitating relationships. To maximise the support role RCs can play in such situations, it is essential that they are kept abreast by the Envoy/Facilitator on relevant developments and not left in the “back-office,” which would risk undermining their standing in the eyes of national stakeholders. The most important elements for a successful collaboration between an Envoy and a local RC are a) is common understanding of priorities and overall strategy and b) a well-defined division of labour and roles.

Developing the capacity of civil society to participate in national dialogues and consultations is a productive peacebuilding investment: Bringing all actors into the negotiating space is not enough if they do not feel all equally equipped to meaningfully participate. In Malawi, RC Seppo effectively leveraged UNDP resources to enhance the knowledge and skills in particular of civil society members of the Public Affairs Committee (PAC), which made their participation in the process constructive, as was also eventually recognized by the government. Having a clear capacity development and outreach plan ensured also the participation of members of more peripheral communities (at regional and district level, including a relevant number of women) that otherwise would have not been involved.

The UN should become better and keeping track of its institutional memory: not much was available neither within the country nor at HQ level of the previous peace infrastructure work in Malawi, that could have benefitted all UN actors involved in the process upfront. The RCs who were there over the period covered by this case study would have appreciated some history of the previous efforts in the country; and ii. Examples on the role expected by the RC at different stages of the process in relations to the role of external UN actors.
Cover Image: Flickr/Travis Lupick. 20 July 2011. Blantyre, Malawi. The mood begins to sour at formerly-peaceful demonstrations against President Mingu wa Mutharika and the DPP-majority government.


2 MHRC (2011) 20th July 2011 Demonstrations Report

3 A public policy lecturer at Chancellor College was accused by the Inspector General of Police of inciting students to demonstrate against the government, as a result of using a Tunisian example in a civil rights class. This incident gave rise to a series of strikes, court injunctions, and the ultimate dismissal of the university lecturer and senior academic staff over a bid for academic freedom from the government. Chancellor College and several others, were closed and reopened. Similarly to the July demonstrations, protests were met with live bullets and teargas by police. Cammack, D. 2011. Background Paper 04: Malawi’s political settlement in crisis. Africa power and politics programme. London: Overseas Development Institute

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Nepal 2007-15

Sebastian von Einsiedel*
Introduction

In April 2006, after suffering ten years of civil war between a Maoist insurgency and an increasingly autocratic royal government, the people of Nepal took to the streets and forced the country’s King to hand power back to the political parties. Peace negotiations between the leaders of the newly empowered political parties and the Maoists culminated first in a ceasefire agreement in May 2006 and then in the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in November 2006. Since then, Nepal has struggled with interlocking transitions from war to peace, from autocracy to democracy, and from an exclusionary and centralised state to a more inclusive and federal one.

Although the peace process was largely domestically driven, it was accompanied by wide-ranging international involvement, including by India, the United Nations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs); significant investments by international donors; and the deployment, from 2007-11, of a Security Council-mandated civilian UN peace operation, the UN Mission in Nepal (UNMIN). UNMIN been the object of much attention by the UN-focused policy and scholarly community. By contrast, the role of the UN’s development presence in supporting the peace process has not been sufficiently examined. This case study aims to fill that gap and examine the role of the UN Resident Coordinator (RC) and the UN Country Team (UNCT) in supporting peace process implementation and in leading initiatives aimed at addressing the root causes of conflict and reducing the risk of conflict relapse.

Specifically, this study will illustrate how RCs can successfully a) reorient a UNCT’s posture towards prevention priorities and mobilize a whole-of-UN approach to prevention, including by exploiting the full potential of Common Country Assessment (CCA) and UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) processes; b) raise resources locally to strengthen their offices’ prevention capacities; c) develop field presences beyond the capital, thus strengthening their early warning, coordination and analytical abilities; and d) lead successful efforts in providing multi-disciplinary, interagency assistance to the reintegration and rehabilitation of former combatants. This case study will cover the period from 2008 (arrival of new Resident Coordinator Robert Piper) to September 2015 (adoption of a new Constitution marking the end of the peace process).

This case study is the only one of this broader research project in which the considered timeframe overlaps (from 2007-11) with the presence of a UN peace operation, namely UNMIN. We justify this deviation from the “non-mission setting” – criteria with the fact that UNMIN was a non-integrated mission and the UNCT was operating largely independently (albeit in coordination and consultation with UNMIN). We thus posit that the lessons from Nepal during that period have potential applicability for non-mission settings elsewhere.

1. Country Context

Underlying conflict risk factors

Key to understanding Nepal’s fragility are its endemic poverty and group inequality, both of which also constituted structural causes of Nepal’s civil war. Its development gains over the past six decades notwithstanding, Nepal today still finds itself in the bottom 20% of per capita GDP rankings. Nepal’s modest economic growth tended to disproportionately benefit traditionally privileged segments of the population. Indeed, the pervasive political and economic exclusion of large parts of the population based on caste, ethnicity, religion, gender, or regional provenance features prominently in all explanations of the country’s civil war. In rural areas, social injustice and inequality had long manifested itself in particular in the relationship between landlords and the peasant population, often taking the form of bonded labour and giving rise to the Maoist claim, which resonated widely, that Nepal constitutes largely a feudal society. Building a more inclusive state remains one of Nepal’s fundamental challenges to this day and is a prerequisite for long-term stability.

Discontent caused by poverty and inequality has long been exacerbated by the weakness of both Nepali state institutions and the rule of law, with limited accountability for state authorities and few legal recourse mechanisms for ordinary citizens. Moreover, since its first democratic elections in 1991, Nepal’s fledgling democracy has suffered from centralized and autocratically structured political parties, which tend to be organised around individuals rather than programs. Outside the capital, party politics has long manifested itself primarily in the form of landholding “strongmen,” who sit along state officials at the centre of corrupt “distributionary coalitions,” which control the allocation of resources and delivery of services in line with their personal and political interests, leading to the elite capture of aid and state funds. Change in Nepal remains difficult as elites remain invested in the status quo, in which the state’s role is to generate patronage networks that ensure its own survival.

Medium-term political dynamics affecting conflict risk

The period following the end of the civil war was marked by the challenge of implementing the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of November 2006, which provided an ambitious roadmap for the peace process. In return for being accorded a central role in open politics, the Maoists agreed to withdraw their People’s Liberation Army (PLA) to 28 newly erected cantonment sites (to be monitored by UNMIN), dismantle parallel state structures, and return confiscated land. PLA members were also promised subsequent partial integration into the country’s security forces, including a “democratically restructured Army.” Other key elements of the agreements included the adoption of an interim constitution, the institution of an interim parliament and an interim government, the latter two with Maoist participation. Most importantly, the CPA committed the parties to: hold
The Maoist government resigned in May 2009 after a tussle ending the 239-year-old monarchy. Shortly after the elections, Nepal was proclaimed a federal coalition government under former rebel leader Prachanda, emerging as the largest party, leading to the creation of a representative legislature in Nepal's history, with the Maoists successfully in April 2008. The elections resulted in the most ethnic unrest also forced repeated postponements of the interim parliament and government with Maoist participation were established. Around the same time, an at-times violent Madhesi uprising (“Andolan”) broke out in the Terai region (Nepal's southern flatlands bordering India). The Madhesi people, who account for roughly a fifth of Nepal's population, have experienced a long history of discrimination and exclusion from politics and state institutions. The Andolan, as well as subsequent protests, strikes and local uprisings, were triggered by Madhesi fears of being once again left out of the (re)-negotiation of Nepal's social contract. Other than leading to increasing insecurity in the Terai region, the Andolan foreshadowed a rise in identity politics that also manifested itself through growing agitation of other formerly excluded ethnic and caste groups.

Ethnic unrest also forced repeated postponements of the Constituent Assembly elections but it was eventually held successfully in April 2008. The elections resulted in the most representative legislature in Nepal's history, with the Maoists emerging as the largest party, leading to the creation of a coalition government under former rebel leader Prachanda. Shortly after the elections, Nepal was proclaimed a federal democratic republican state by the Constituent Assembly, ending the 239-year-old monarchy. The Maoist government resigned in May 2009 after a tussle over control of the Nepalese Army, the leadership of which resisted PLA integration into its ranks. The Army's positions were reinforced by India and the major political parties, both of which preferred a powerful and unaccountable military over one that might emerge neutered through the significant integration of Maoist combatants. However, the arrival, in September 2009, of a more compromising army leadership combined with the formation of a new, Maoist-led government in 2011 (the return to political power making them less reluctant to relinquish their army), paved the way for a resolution of the issue in 2012, albeit without the involvement of the UNMIN, which had departed Nepal the previous year. That resolution consisted of some 1,500 Maoist combatants being incorporated into the (otherwise un-restructured) Nepal Army, while the rest retired with cash packages. The dissolution of the Maoist Army made a return to conflict – at least in its old guise – highly unlikely.

Meanwhile, the Constituent Assembly was proving unable to agree on a new constitution – mainly because of disagreements over the federalist restructuring of the state – which were accompanied by major bandhs and protests, by groups, in particular in the far-western region, demanding greater autonomy, as well as violent clashes between political activists. When the 28 May 2012 deadline passed after multiple renewals of its term and without a new Constitution in place, the Assembly was dissolved. Elections for a new Constituent Assembly were held in 2013, in which the traditional parties emerged victorious and the Maoists lost two-thirds of their seats. That Constituent Assembly, too, was unable to meet the January 2015 deadline for the adoption of a new Constitution, the issue of federalism once again being the central bone of contention. Traditional elite groups were highly reluctant to dismantle the unitary state that had guaranteed their privileges for so long.

Amid this political deadlock, a major earthquake hit Nepal in April 2015, killing over 8,000 people and leaving much of central Nepal in ruins. The leaders of the major parties represented in the Constituent Assembly responded poorly to the disaster. Keen to regain their credibility, they hammered out a hasty deal on a new constitution, which was eventually adopted in September 2015.

However, the new constitution, which was meant to constitute the crowning achievement of the peace process, became a highly contested document mainly because it mostly failed – once again – to address concerns of the Madhesi. The Madhesi felt their demands for inclusion and representation, especially with respect to the delineation of state boundaries, had been ignored in the drafting process. Following the Constitution’s adoption, months of violent protests in the Terai ensued and clashes with the police left over 50 dead. Reportedly with the partial support of India, Madhesi political and civic groups imposed a 135-day blockade of vital supplies coming into Nepal from custom points bordering India. The adoption of the constitution thus repeated a pattern that had marred the entire peace process, in which the political parties, including
the Maoists, negotiated last-minute deals that did not take into account the interests of minority groups. The resulting Madhesi flare-up of 2015 is a testament to Nepal’s unresolved inclusion challenges.

2. RC-Led Prevention Initiatives

Context: historical role and perception of UNCT

The record and perception of UN development actors prior to the peace process was mixed. International aid, including that channeled through the UN, has long financed key aspects of Nepal’s development efforts, and has helped Nepal achieve important development gains, both in terms of GDP growth and human development. However, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the UN (and other) development actors failed to take necessary steps to enable more equitable and sustainable development. Foreign aid sustained traditional power structures and even positive aid achievements added to conflict risk. Specifically, aid was unevenly distributed in ways that benefited urban centres over rural districts, some rural districts over others, and some classes and castes within urban and rural districts over others.  

The UN development community’s inadequate attention to the exclusionary nature of the state – the root cause of Nepal’s failed development – was, among other factors, the result of: Kathmandu-centrism (which led development actors to interact primarily with representatives of high-caste elites); an apolitical outlook; and a tendency to follow a one-size-fits-all approach to development with little regard to local conditions. The UN, along with the broader donor community, shied away from promoting the types of (admittedly hugely challenging) reforms that could have sustainably addressed deeply entrenched social injustice, such as land reform.

Even after the armed conflict had broken out in 1996, aid agencies initially saw the violence primarily as a law and order challenge and struggled to understand its political dimensions. Donors followed a mistaken strategy of promoting macroeconomic reforms in the hope of addressing what they saw as the “root cause” of the conflict, namely structural poverty, ignoring exclusion as an explanation of aid ineffectiveness. They also turned a blind eye to the increasingly autocratic rule of the King, failing to understand that they were intimately associated with an ever more illegitimate state. During this period, both the leadership of the UNCT and the World Bank remained close to the King, with the latter, praising his economic policies without understanding of the political dynamics in which they were operating.

Because of these analytical gaps, the development actors’ programs allowed the lion’s share of development resources to be captured by a small elite, tainting international assistance in the eyes of many Nepalis. UN agencies’ hiring practices tended to reinforce caste and class divisions, as well as their own myopia, as they recruited heavily from traditionally elite groups, which offered the most Western-oriented candidates with the most advanced English-language skills.

After the conflict escalated in 2000, some donors and UN agencies, including the World Bank, began to recognise socio-economic disparities as a root cause, and to integrate social inclusion in their assistance plans. These small shifts in donor practice gained momentum in 2005, after King Gyanendra’s coup spurred donors to distance themselves from his regime. At this point, the development community displayed enhanced sensitivity for the need to ensure that poor and marginalised groups would benefit from external interventions. Some donors and UN agencies also slowly began to: embed development activities in broader context analyses (starting with attempts to identify the agents and beneficiaries of development programs and their links to the conflict parties); proactively promote human rights; and help push for a UN role in the peace process despite Indian resistance. However, a more fundamental repositioning of the international development presence in Nepal in line with peacebuilding priorities only took place in the wake of the peace accords.

Indeed, the signing of the CPA in 2006, which focused on state restructuring and inclusion, highlighted the need for development actors to underpin the peace process by helping to address underlying conflict drivers. The accords thus provided the impetus and the opening for UN and other development actors to fundamentally review their programming. At the same time, the peace process provided “space” for the UN’s development presence to assume a more political posture, which was expected to complement UNMIN’s activities by aligning its posture and programming with peacebuilding priorities.

RC-led Situation Analysis, Strategy, and Coordination

Embedding the UNCT’s activities in a systematic and common analysis of the root causes of Nepal’s conflict was an important step in the exercise of reorienting the UNCT towards a more conflict sensitive posture. The first step in this direction was taken through the UN’s 2007 Common Country Assessment (CCA), which identified human rights, governance and inclusion as overarching priorities.

However, the 2007 CCA initially failed to translate into a concerted shifting of the development community’s outlook towards peacebuilding. Overall, the UNCT had only limited understanding of the political dynamics in which they were operating and showed little intent to lead the UNCT in developing a common peacebuilding strategy. Hoping UNMIN would fulfil that role, they were awaiting a return to normality to continue their business-as-usual development work. Many UN agencies remained stuck in the bubble of Kathmandu, with the notable exceptions of OHCHR, UNICEF and WFP (the latter of which drew on its presence in remote regions to generate reports on political and social dynamics.
from difficult-to-reach districts around the country). The senior leadership of the UNCT “ differed widely in their post-conlict experience and readiness to adapt activities under their authority to the particular circumstances of Nepal” and struggled to deploy staff with relevant backgrounds. Although the scopes of all UN agencies were, in varying ways, relevant to addressing structural drivers of violence (e.g. ILO with respect to inequalities in the labour market; UN Women with respect to inclusion of women; FAO with respect to land reform), very few understood their work in these terms prior to the arrival of a new RC in 2008. The fact that the donor community did not share a common analysis of the peace process at various points did not help matters.

A noticeable shift occurred with the arrival, in early 2008, of a new UN Resident Coordinator, Robert Piper, who became a driving force for rallying the wider development community behind a common peacebuilding strategy and pushing the UNCT towards more conflict-sensitive programming.

In 2011, Piper and the UNCT 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 drawing up the CCA, the RC Office drew heavily on information and analysis provided by four Field and Coordination Offices (FCOs), established in 2011 (discussed in greater detail below), which ensured that the assessment was solidly based on ground realities in rural areas.

Reflecting the analysis of the 2011 CCA, and its focus on underlying conflict drivers and peace process support, the 2013-17 UNDAF was organized around priorities emerging from the peace process, most importantly inclusion. Driven by the RC’s goal to rally the UN Country Team behind a peacebuilding agenda, the development of both the CCA and the UNDAF were highly inclusive, collaborative and time-consuming processes, building on lengthy inter-agency consultations at the deputy-head-agency-level. Several RCO staff and Country Team members involved in the process and interviewed for this study highlighted the extraordinary amount of effort that went into drawing up these documents, with one long-time UN field staff stating that “it was the only UNDAF process I’ve ever seen that started from scratch, from a joint CCA, and meant to trigger new programming, rather than one starting with pre-determined agenda of adjusting UNDAF around pre-existing programmes of individual UN agencies.”

While the UNDAF process generated a common vision for the Country Team in which agencies felt they had buy-in, even those involved concede that it ultimately fell short of substantively driving UN programming, partly because of turnover of key UN personnel (first and foremost the RC himself as well as his head of office, both of whom left Nepal in 2013) as well as the difficulty of adapting agencies’ HQ-generated strategies into joint UN programming, the priorities of which were determined by a genuine needs assessment exercise.

The UNDAF did succeed, however, in grabbing the attention of Nepal’s government by “pushing uncomfortable buttons” and raising issues around the discrimination of marginalised groups, including in the Terai region. On the day the UNDAF was meant to be signed, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (which unlike other ministries had not been closely involved in the UNDAF’s development), objected to the draft document’s assertion that Nepal suffered from “structural discrimination,” complaining this would wrongly imply fault on the side of the government. As a result of this veto, the RCO had to embark on a 3-months long process of renegotiating the UNDAF’s language with the government, in the course of which at least some of the UNDAF’s effort to refocus the UN’s development work on the root causes of conflict was undone. The episode, well covered in Nepal’s national media, might have triggered some helpful public discussion around issues of discrimination, but it also illustrated the narrow wiggle room in which RCs operate in trying to make development programming conflict sensitive.

From independent evaluations of these two UNDAFs conducted in 2011 and 2015, respectively, one issue that emerged as particularly relevant to their ability to refocus the UNCT’s activities around the issue of exclusion was related to indicators and data. Indeed, the 2008-10 UNDAF was rightly criticised for basing outcome indicators (for instance on maternal or child mortality) on aggregate data and national averages rather than on data that would disaggregate by marginalized groups and gender, which is crucial in Nepal’s context. By contrast, and reflecting learning on the part of the Country Team, the 2013-17 UNDAF was singularly focused on tackling the structural causes of exclusion of specific social groups and districts identified in the 2011 CCA’s vulnerability analysis as being in greatest need for programmatic support. While the relevant evaluation praised this approach as a “ highly effective method to identify where to focus efforts,” it also noted that it was impossible to measure any progress in this area as a result of the lack of existing disaggregated data and UN agencies’ inability to compensate the gap through their own data-gathering. Meanwhile, effective targeting of vulnerable groups was further undermined by limited geographic coverage by UN agencies of remote districts.

Recognizing the importance of shaping common peacebuilding outlook not only among UNCT members but also among the wider donor community, Robert Piper led a process from late 2009 to early 2011 to formulate a “Peace and Development Strategy” (PDS), a resource-intensive process that consisted of consultations with a wide cross-section of local and international actors, involving more than 60 people from 12 major development partners. The Strategy articulated a common vision not only for UNCT members but also for bilateral and multilateral donors. (Remarkably, the World Bank, reflecting limited interest in engaging with the
UNCT, was the one significant development actor that chose not to sign the document. The Strategy detailed how these actors could “assist Nepal in the years ahead [to] realise the agenda laid out in the [CPA],” with emphasis on inclusion, good governance and state restructuring.

This process certainly served as a demonstration of the convening power of the UN and proved useful as an information-sharing tool and stock-taking exercise among development partners. That said, according to an evaluation of international development actors’ support to the overall peace process conducted by the government of Denmark, the process ultimately “failed to have a life beyond publication date.” The reasons for the short shelf-life could be partly found in the inherent difficulty of coordinating a fragmented donor-landscape that is driven by divergent interests and partly, in possible shortcomings of the process, including an overly broad set of issues and activities combined with the absence of an implementation strategy or mechanism and the failure to secure the buy-in from the Nepali government. Interviews conducted by this author confirm these shortcomings, while pointing out that getting buy-in from the government would always have been a challenge given its instability and dysfunctionality at the time. These interviews also pointed to another factor explaining the PDS’s limited traction, namely that many of the donor embassies’ key personnel involved in its development left the country after its completion, with their replacements feeling no ownership over the document.

While the PDS may not have succeeded in significantly affecting the programming of donors, it was certainly used as a basis for subsequent planning by the RC, who, as a follow-up step to the PDS developed a UN Peacebuilding Strategy which identified programming priorities for the UNCT. This then formed the basis for a second Nepal Priority Plan submission for funding through the UN Peacebuilding Fund (PBF).

Resourcing

The establishment of new financing mechanisms for peace-related UNCT activities and the raising of additional resources to strengthen the RC Office in key areas were prerequisites for the office to play an enhanced role in prevention and peacebuilding.

An important tool to promote strategic and conflict-sensitive programming across multiple UNCT members has been the UN Peace Fund for Nepal (UNPFN), a multi-donor trust fund established by UNMIN in 2007 (and in place until 2016) and meant to finance UN-led projects to deliver “tangible peace dividends [addressing] gender, human rights and social inclusion needs... with a special emphasis on the most marginalized.” Transferred to the RC Office in 2009, the fund has helpfully underpinned the UNCT’s peace process support activities. Most importantly, it served as a key tool to incentivize strategic and coordinated UNCT approaches to support peacebuilding and development. Receiving contributions from the UN’s Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) in New York (indeed, Nepal was the first country where the PBF contributed to a pooled fund) and donor countries, the UNPFN helped address gaps in the implementation of the CPA that could not be implemented or funded by other mechanisms, including a parallel fund administered by the government, the Nepal Peace Trust Fund. Throughout its lifetime, the UNPFN disbursed a total of US$26 million through eighteen projects (constituting an estimated 10-15% of overall ODA spent on peace process support).

A 2016 independent evaluation of the UNPFN praised the fund for creating convergence within the UN system and for its consistent support for projects that addressed root causes of the conflict, namely issues of inclusion of marginalised groups, especially women, Dalits, and indigenous ethnic groups (Janajatis). It found that “there are indications that UNPFN has made a strong contribution” to the prevention of conflict relapse in Nepal, in particular through its support to the reintegration of demobilised Maoist combatants (to which a full third of its total funding was dedicated and which is discussed in greater detail below), the 2013 elections and demining. It concluded that “the UNPFN maintained a continuous focus on the underlying issues which, if left unresolved, would have triggered the unravelling of the peace process.”

As part of a “Transition Support Strategy,” the RC also proved highly successful in raising funds with donors locally to strengthen its ability to play a proactive peace process support. The rationale for strengthening the RC Office’s role in supporting the peace process grew significantly from 2008 onwards as UNMIN and OHCHR were forced to dramatically reduce their presences outside Kathmandu and both missions eventually withdrew in 2011 and 2012, respectively. Raising funds from various bilateral donors through their representations in Nepal, the RC was able to set up an expanded Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator’s Office (RCHCO) in August 2010, designed to provide enhanced and integrated support on a range of peacebuilding issues.

Key elements of that expanded office, which grew from five to a total of 60 staff within 18 months, included:

a) the addition, in 2010, of a “Peace Unit” within the RC’s office (composed of a “P-4” Peacebuilding Advisor, a “P3” Programme Specialist, and Programme Analyst, with the latter two principally acting as the Secretariat to the UNPFN), which allowed the RC to step up his coordination and strategy formulation around peacebuilding priorities.

b) the creation of four “Field Coordination Offices” to provide early warning, analysis and UNCT coordination at the district-level.

Complementing the strengthened RCHCO was the establishment, in 2011, of a three-member UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA) liaison team to ensure continued
political engagement of the UN system in Nepal following UNMIN’s departure and to support the RC’s good offices.  
(Both the Field Coordination Offices and the DPA Liaison Office will be discussed in greater detail below.)

A 2016 review by the Clingendael Institute on the lessons learned from the role of the expanded RC Office during Nepal’s transition pointed to a number of prerequisites for successful resource mobilization. It singled out, in particular: a) an eager donor environment combined with close engagement of donors by the RC; and b) effective countering of potential concerns by other UNCT members that the RC’s resource mobilisation might compete with their own fundraising efforts. In this context, the RC’s credible commitment that his expanded office would carry out a service provider role that would benefit the wider country team and his framing of the “Transition Support Strategy” as a programme focused on conflict prevention were helpful in overcoming potential UNCT concerns.  

However, the RC’s fundraising success in Nepal also had a downside by creating an expensive infrastructure that was initially only conceived for the short-term, which proved overly optimistic as political turmoil delayed the adoption of a new Constitution again and again. As a result, the RCO soon found itself in a precarious financial situation, forcing it to be in constant fundraising mode, significantly diminishing its ability to conceive of and commit to more medium-term and substantive efforts, because of a lack of clarity if certain RCO capacities would still be funded 6-12 months down the line. As one interviewee put it: “I think the big lesson is that donors need to accept that such fragile/transitional contexts are often enduring and non-linear and don’t stick to timetables laid out in peace accord”.  

Specific Interventions and Initiatives

In the case of Nepal, there were numerous initiatives, projects and programmes launched by individual UN agencies aimed at addressing specific conflict drivers or advancing specific peacebuilding goals, including such signature successes as making Nepal a mine-free country within a few years of signing the peace accord. This section, however, will only look at those initiatives, in which the RC had a significant role and/or which were jointly carried out in an interagency context.

An enhanced political role for the Resident Coordinator’s Office

Against the background of UNMIN’s departure in 2011, and in what is widely seen as a major innovation, the UN DPA and the RC in Nepal piloted a model on how to ensure continuity in terms of political engagement in the context of a transition from a mission to a non-mission setting. Upon DPA’s initiative and with its funding, a DPA Liaison Office was established, collocated with the RC Office, to provide political analysis and support to the RC after the departure of UNMIN. The Liaison Office, which continued to be in place as of December 2017, consists of three analysts (one international at PS level and two national professionals). Reporting to UN Headquarters (HQ), but keeping the RC informed, the Liaison Office ensured that the DPA was kept abreast of developments in Nepal after UNMIN’s withdrawal and that UNHQ engagement and messaging on peace process-related issues would be well-informed, timely and productive. The Liaison Office also built networks and relationships with key actors across Nepali politics and society, providing a solid basis for ongoing political engagement, including by senior UN officials.

RC Piper and an independent assessment suggested that the DPA Liaison Office was a helpful asset for the RC’s efforts to engage politically and assume a more preventive posture, by ensuring that RC and UNCT activities related to peacebuilding were underpinned by political analysis. Several other members of the UN Country Team agreed that the Liaison Office had potential value but lamented that its actual value was undermined, at least in its early years, by the fact that it did not have a reporting line to the RC and was not well integrated into the work of the RCO and Country Team.  

Local-level early warning, situation analysis, and coordination

As mentioned above, to compensate for the contraction and subsequent withdrawal of UNMIN and the OHCHR mission, the RC Office established in 2010 four three-member Field Coordination Offices (FCOs), staffed with humanitarian and development coordination specialists, providing the RC Office with eyes and ears on the ground, allowing for early warning and analysis of trends in the Terai region and elsewhere. Initially headed by an international P4, by 2013 the FCOs were staffed exclusively by Nepali nationals, “as both a cost-saving and sustainability measure.” (The offices were closed in March 2017, when donor funding ran out). While the rationale for the creation of these field offices was specific to the context of a transition from a mission to a non-mission setting, one could well imagine that similar offices might prove useful (and politically feasible) in other non-mission contexts, making an assessment of their value worthwhile.

Providing ongoing situation analysis, the FCOs also fed into bi-weekly “Field Bulletins” and “Monthly Updates” published by the RC Office, that provided real-time updates on developments critical to the peace process, ensuring that development partners would be sensitized to opportunities and risks to peacebuilding. Given the political sensitivities at play, these bulletins were remarkably straightforward in pointing to issues, such as: a) emerging risks to the peace process; b) “hotspot areas” at imminent risk of identity-based conflict and violence; c) caste-based discrimination in certain districts; d) mobilization strategies of certain ethnic groups; and e) drivers of certain groups’ underrepresentation in the Nepalese Army. Some of these bulletins also provided in-depth analysis of local capacities that have helped prevent the outbreak or escalation of violence soon after instances
of major tension in volatile districts, that could potentially be bolstered by international support. The analysis provided by the field offices also helped inform the 2011 CCA by ensuring that voices from the field were heard through facilitation of discussions between staff of UN agencies and local stakeholders.

Over time, the field coordination also came to fulfil an early warning and conflict prevention function, acting as “information hubs that actively gather timely information and channel it to appropriate responders as critical situations evolve” – and occasionally acting by themselves to avert escalation. For instance, in the context of significant unrest and violent clashes in Nepal’s far-western region in the run-up to the 28 May 2012 deadline for the adoption of a Constitution, the field offices seemed to have played a critical role in preventing a volatile situation from spiralling out of control. The RCHCO, thanks to daily situational reports provided by the field offices, “was one of the only independent actors to be able to provide regular (often almost ‘real-time’) field-based and preventative analysis on events and dynamics (...) dramatically increasing awareness of escalating violent confrontation not only amongst international development partners, but also amongst Nepali political elites.”

Meanwhile, drawing on its wide networks on the ground, the field offices successfully activated human rights actors to get engaged in preventive dialogues and dispatched UN staff to hotspot locations to show their presence, signal the UN’s concern, and to engage actively with local actors. At one point in May, the field office in Dadeldhura successfully dissuaded two opposing groups from organizing major demonstrations on the same day in the same town, which, in the heated atmosphere at the time would have been a recipe for violence.

**Conflict-sensitive Programming**

A further prevention related initiative in Nepal from which interesting lessons can be derived is the RC-driven effort to push UN agencies towards more conflict-sensitive programming. At the “vision” level, as discussed above, he did so by focusing the CCA and the UNDAF towards underlying conflict drivers, in particular marginalisation. This effort, along with the RC’s emphasis on the importance of conflict sensitivity more broadly, created a conducive environment for a complementary effort at the operational level, namely the establishment in 2010, of a conflict prevention programme within UNDP that featured a dedicated five-member conflict sensitivity unit. That unit, one of the few of its kind, was tasked to support the UN Country Team in conflict sensitive programming and application of “do no harm” approaches through training, workshops, guidance, and the sharing of best practices, all aimed at programmatic agency staff at the mid- to senior management level.

The effort featured a number of innovative and good practices worth emulating: a) the strong push toward conflict sensitivity coming from the very top, i.e. the RC himself; b) dedicated effort, as part of a joint initiative with the RCO and UNICEF, to provide training on conflict sensitivity to key staff across UN agencies, where literacy on the issue tends to vary widely; and c) the extension of conflict sensitivity training to Nepali civil servants by developing a training module to be taught at Nepal’s National Administrative Staff College. Importantly, the RC’s focus on promoting conflict sensitivity also included a dedicated effort towards more inclusive hiring practices among UN agencies, to balance the predominance of staff from high-caste advantaged ethnic groups as well as periodic reviews of UN agencies’ practices of selecting local NGOs as development partners (who are the implementers of much of the UN’s development programmes) to encourage attention to their ethnic and caste composition. To foster greater workforce diversity among Nepal’s UN Country Team, the RC tried to generate baseline data on UNCT staff composition, from which to develop targets for a positive discrimination policy in recruitment. That proved difficult, however, in light of some agencies’ disingenuous claim that asking staff to reveal their ethnic identity constituted an infringement on their human rights. In 2010, the RC also initiated a UNCT-wide Joint UN Trainee Programme for Socially Excluded Groups in Nepal. The programme, which ran for several years, targeted recent university graduates among historically excluded groups and was meant to enhance their professional competencies in fields such as general administration, project management, M&E, and human resource management through 11 months full-time on-the-job training and mentorship in a UN office setting. Around 20 trainees were selected during the programme’s first year at a cost of around $5,500 per trainee. Trainees were allowed to apply and compete for UN posts after graduation from the traineeship programme.

However, interviews carried out for this study also revealed a number of inherent challenges of driving conflict sensitivity programming and explain why the initiative in Nepal, while competently implemented, “never panned out in a strategic way.” First among these challenges was the difficulty of getting managerial level buy-in to such an initiative within UN agencies. This difficulty was arguably compounded by the fact that the conflict sensitivity unit was housed within one specific agency rather than the RC Office as well as the fact that the unit was set up relatively late in the peace process, at a time when Nepali authorities, donors, and UNCT members were starting to talk about “normalisation” and reverting to a development-business business-as-usual posture.

Second, and at a deeper level, is the fact that the way the UN (and the wider development community) engages in development planning and implementation is inherently unconducive to conflict sensitivity. Indeed, conflict sensitivity, by nature, requires constant adaptation to political processes that tend to be non-linear, contested, characterized by setbacks, and different from one locality to another. By contrast, UN development planning, embedded in multi-year programmatic cycles, progress on which is measured...
in tight log-frame formats, does allow for little flexibility and adaptation. And instead of programme implementation being accompanied by ongoing context analysis, including at the local level, development planning tends to be informed by a single, “big picture” assessment undertaken at the outset of the program cycle (i.e. the CCA). While this structure still provides room for introducing conflict sensitivity in the programme design phase, it disincentivizes course correction down the road, with programme managers and donors reluctant to review, adjust and question programmes mid-way through the lens of conflict sensitivity.

Meanwhile, to do conflict sensitivity well requires additional time and resources. With donors and UN agencies always seeking to minimize costs, it would be unrealistic and inefficient to expect individual agencies to engage in context analysis, which is a function that should be, as a matter of standard practice be embedded in RC Offices.

Reintegration of ex-combatants

One of the CPA central provisions was related to the integration and rehabilitation of former Maoist Army personnel as well as the downsizing and democratization of the Nepalese Army. The UN, however, possessed very limited leverage to influence implementation of these aspects. UNMIN’s mandate was limited to monitoring weapons and armies on both sides (and it competently discharged this role, including the cantonment of 32,000 Maoist combatants and the eventual verification of about 19,600 of them). However, both India and the Nepalese Army resisted UNMIN’s discreet efforts to assist with the integration of the Maoist army as the first step of broader security sector reform. UNMIN withdrew in January 2011 with Maoist Army integration still unresolved.

While the UN found itself unable to facilitate progress at the macro-level, the UNCT was able to assist the process on the margins, in particular with respect to supporting the reintegration of Maoist Army personnel who had been “disqualified” during UNMIN’s verification process in 2007-08 because they were minors at the time of the May 2006 ceasefire or were recently recruited during that time (and, therefore, were ineligible for integration into Nepal’s security forces). When the Maoist Army, in 2010 and after a two-year negotiation process, finally agreed to release from its cantonment camps the around 4,000 “verified minors and late recruits”, the UNCT stood ready to offer support to their transition into civilian life. This was made possible thanks to a year-long planning process within the context of the UNDAF thematic groups and the setting aside of stand-by capacity, leading to the establishment of a UN Interagency Rehabilitation Programme (UNIRP). UNIRP ran from 2010-14 and was jointly managed by UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, and ILO and most of the US$12 million in programme costs were funded by the UN Peace Fund for Nepal.

The Programme, which constituted the only significant effort at ex-combatant reintegration in Nepal, included offering vocational training, education, micro-enterprise development and health-related training to the 2,234 verified minors and late recruits who enrolled in the programme. By December 2013, 71.5% of those who graduated from UNIRP education and vocational training programmes had been employed or running their own business, corresponding to 32% of those disqualified.

An independent evaluation of the UNIRP programme, carried out 21 months before its conclusion, concluded that the programme, given the political constraints, “performed satisfactorily”, and contributed to moving the fragile peace process forward by helping to resolve the issue of minor and late recruits and thus removing an important hurdle to a negotiated outcome regarding reintegration of the remaining Maoist combatants. Among the programme beneficiaries interviewed for the evaluation, 81% said they would not join any armed struggle in the future. Among the good practices it identified relevant to this case study was the UN’s delivering-as-one approach through joint planning, programming and implementation, which was exceptional to DDR-related planning, that also helped ensure extensive gender support, health training, and psycho-social support to participants. It also praised the dedicated engagement of the RC, a necessity given the high political sensitivity of the programme.

3. Overall Contribution of RC and UNCT Activities to Prevention

The Nepal case study shows the potential of RC Offices in reorienting the UNCT’s posture and activities toward peacebuilding and prevention, attuned to underlying conflict drivers. The arrival in 2008 of a new RC, Robert Piper, who invested significant energies in aligning UNCT activities behind peacebuilding priorities, mobilized the UN’s development presence towards enhanced and integrated peace process support. In doing so, he benefited from strong donor support as well as the existence of a pooled peacebuilding fund (UNPFN), which facilitated catalytic funding and UN coherence, providing a positive contrast to evaluations of many UNCT-led peacebuilding activities elsewhere perennially lamenting a fragmentation of the UN effort.

Specific activities that had a demonstrably positive effect on the peace process – the absence of which might have taken the peace process on a different path – includes the successful rehabilitation and integration of “verified minors and late recruits” among the cantoned Maoist combatants. The expansion of the RCO, and in particular the establishment of field coordination offices, allowed the Resident Coordinator to show the UN’s presence outside the capital even after UNMIN’s and the OHCHR’s departure, signalling to Nepalis that the UN had not given up on the peace process – and the country at large. The field offices also provided an important early warning and early response function, possibly mitigating the risk of wider intercommunal violence in the run-up to the
28 May 2012 constitution deadline.

The UN’s achievements notwithstanding, the UN peacebuilding efforts in Nepal ultimately only made a moderate impact in meaningfully and sustainably addressing the root causes of Nepal’s conflict. This is largely a function of the resistance of Nepali elites to changing the status quo, impeding progress toward fulfilling the CPA’s commitment to a restructured, more inclusive state capable of redressing the grievances of marginalised groups. Despite the CPA and other on-paper commitments, including a 2007 civil service law requiring 45% of posts to be reserved for women and marginalised groups, the representation of women, minorities and Dalits in state institutions remains low, especially in the highest ranks of government.\footnote{Poverty and illiteracy rates remain significantly higher among Hill and Terai Dalits than among other groups, and Dalits and Terai Janajatis continue to experience discrimination in the labour market.} Progress has stalled on the land reform mandated by the CPA.\footnote{Where exclusion is an important conflict driver, the role of development actors in addressing structural root causes is a long-term endeavour, which should guide long-term UN agency programming beyond short transition periods.} Rather than illustrating the futility of internationally-led development efforts, this state of affairs demonstrates the fact that addressing structural root causes is a long-term endeavour, which requires significant staff resources and was only possible because the RC could rely on donor support for a significantly expanded UNDAF, and the establishment of coordination processes around prevention strategies can prove helpful for the RC to align the UNCT and donors behind prevention priorities and drive conflict sensitive programming: Although RCs have no “directive authority” over UNCT members, the Nepal case shows that they still have important mobilising potential in aligning both the UNCT and the donor community behind common peacebuilding goals. In the Nepal case, the CCA, the UNDAF, and the establishment of coordination processes around the development of peacebuilding strategies for both donors and the UNCT have served as useful tools in fostering a common prevention outlook among development actors. However, to run these processes in productive ways required significant staff resources and was only possible because the RC could rely on donor support for a significantly expanded RC Office.

However, CCAs and UNDAFs cannot be the end-all, be-all in efforts to promote conflict sensitivity: CCAs and UNDAFs, with their four-year and notoriously inflexible programming cycle, while helpful to ensure conflict sensitivity at the outset of a programming cycle, are ill-suited to respond to often volatile dynamics in transition settings. The CCA will need to be complemented by ongoing context analysis which should feed into regular review and, if necessary, adjustment of programmes throughout programming cycle to ensure conflict sensitivity. Meanwhile, the UNDAF may need to be complemented by shorter-term and more flexible transition strategies, providing strategic guidance to UN Country Team members on evolving prevention and peacebuilding priorities.

Development interventions need to be embedded in risk and context analysis: The role of development actors in Nepal throughout the 1990s and early 2000s shows that to improve upstream prevention, development interventions need to be sensitive to political contexts. In fragile countries affected by pervasive exclusion, aid agencies need to be more attuned to the dangers of elite capture of aid flows, which might fuel horizontal inequalities and exacerbate conflict risk. This implies that development actors need to have access to capacities to design development interventions based on in-depth analysis of conflict risks and the political economy.

The establishment of conflict sensitivity units can prove helpful in promoting conflict sensitivity and do-no-harm approaches across agencies: The establishment of the conflict sensitivity unit in Nepal spearheaded some innovative practices and its experience allows to draw a number of lessons for similar exercises elsewhere, including: a) the advantage of setting up such units within the RCO rather than any individual agency – both in terms of cost-efficiency and ability to get buy-in from other agencies; b) the value of offering UNCT wide-trainings in conflict sensitivity; c) the need to extend such trainings to the host government and local implementing NGOs; and d) the critical importance, in settings affected by structural exclusion of ethnic groups, of proactively pursuing inclusive recruitment practices (which will likely require a policy decision at the level of the RC) and the ethnic composition of local NGOs in the selection of implementing partners. To foster the latter, the RC initiated a UNCT-wide Joint UN Trainee Programme for Socially Excluded Groups in Nepal, which helped increase the pool of qualified candidates among historically marginalized groups and could serve as a model for UNCTs elsewhere.

For the UNDAF to drive conflict sensitive programming in settings marked by exclusion, indicators need to be based on data disaggregated by different marginalized groups: Where exclusion is an important conflict driver, any development programming should be based on an in-depth analysis of the dynamics of marginalisation, as well as a detailed identification of particularly vulnerable groups. The 2011 CCA in Nepal is widely viewed as a model approach in this respect. For the UNDAF to measurably drive priority attention of UN agencies’ programming to these vulnerable groups, it is essential that outcome indicators are formulated

4. Lessons, Good Practices and Recommendations

For the RC to play an enhanced preventive role, entry points are helpful – but RC leadership is a sine qua non: The CPA, with its focus on socio-economic conflict drivers, combined with significant international (and donor) attention to Nepal, provided entry points, political space and a conducive funding environment for the RC to adopt and pursue an activist approach to peacebuilding and prevention. However, it required the arrival of a new RC, who was ready to fully exploit these opportunities, for his office and the broader UNCT to live up to their full peacebuilding and prevention potential.

The CCA, UNDAF and dedicated coordination processes around prevention strategies can be helpful tools for the RC to align the UNCT and donors behind prevention priorities and drive conflict sensitive programming: Although RCs have no “directive authority” over UNCT members, the Nepal case shows that they still have important mobilising potential in aligning both the UNCT and the donor community behind common peacebuilding goals. In the Nepal case, the CCA, the UNDAF, and the establishment of coordination processes around the development of peacebuilding strategies for both donors and the UNCT have served as useful tools in fostering a common prevention outlook among development actors. However, to run these processes in productive ways required significant staff resources and was only possible because the RC could rely on donor support for a significantly expanded RC Office.

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accordingly. This in turn requires the availability of baseline data that disaggregates according to marginalised groups and gender, which is often not readily available, calling for concerted and UNCT-wide efforts to generate such data.

**Enhanced preventive action by the RC requires dedicated resources, which, in the right conditions, can be raised locally:** The ability of the RC to engage proactively in peacebuilding and prevention was in no small degree a function of added capacity and resources. For the RC to assume leadership necessary to mobilize and align UNCT members and donors around common conflict analysis and peacebuilding in 2010-11, it required significant investments in time and human resources, which was only made possible by adding a dedicated peacebuilding team to the RC Office. The Nepal case, in this respect, illustrates the potential of the RC Office in locally mounting and leading fundraising efforts with bilateral donors stationed in-country – at least in a situation where the presence of a highly entrepreneurial RC coincides with the necessary donor interest. Meanwhile, 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.

**Staff continuity reinforces effective prevention:** The Nepal case study offers numerous examples where important prevention initiatives and strategies (e.g. the 2013-17 UNDAF or the 2011 Peace and Development Strategy) lost steam as a result of turn-over of staff both among UN agencies as well as the donor community. Meanwhile, Robert Piper attributes any successes he achieved at least partly to the fact that he was deployed to the country for five years, a continuity that allowed him to build lasting relationships and to accompany for an extended period peacebuilding and prevention efforts that tend to be long-term in nature. UN Country Team members as well as bilateral donor agencies should therefore place greater effort in fostering staff continuity and longer-term deployments in transition settings.

**Establishment of a DPA Liaison Office within RC Offices can significantly enhance their preventive role:** The establishment of a DPA Liaison Office provides 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.

Small field presences outside the capital can significantly strengthen the RCO’s conflict analysis and early warning components: While in Nepal, the rationale for the creation of these field offices was specific to the context of a transition from a mission to a non-mission setting, similar offices might no doubt prove useful (and politically feasible) in other non-mission contexts. In Nepal, these offices were ground-breaking in serving an early warning (and at times an early response) function and in providing real-time analysis of local political dynamics that informed the interventions and programming of all major development actors.

**Dedicated pooled funding mechanisms can enhance coherence and effectiveness of RC-led preventive action:** In Nepal, the existence of a pooled peacebuilding fund available to support all UN agencies has helped underpin the realignment of UNCT programming around peacebuilding priorities. Among the UNPFN’s specific practices that should be replicated elsewhere are: a) its projects tailored for vulnerable populations or geographic areas and particular attention to gender sensitivity across all projects; b) its flexible modalities for rapid mobilisation and disbursement of funds; and c) exemplary stakeholder involvement in project design, including at the community level. The Nepal case also shows that for such a fund to live up to its potential requires a dedicated Secretariat running it (in the case of Nepal, 2 full-time staff), as neither an RC nor a fund’s executive committee will have the time, technical specialization or programme management capacities to run such a fund.

**RCs and UNCTs can successfully carry out major programmes on the rehabilitation and reintegration of former combatants even in non-mission settings:** The Nepal case, where the UN Inter-Agency Rehabilitation Programme was established to support the socio-economic rehabilitation of “verified minors and late recruits” discharged by the Maoist Army from cantonment sites, shows the potential of UNCT contributions to DDR processes even in non-mission settings. The Rehabilitation Programme also serves as a model for UNCT-wide approaches to DDR in planning, programming and implementation.
Endnotes


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1 This section draws in parts on Sebastian von Einsiedel, David Malone, and Suman Pradhan (eds.), Nepal in Transition: From People's War to Fragile Peace. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012). This section analysis is indebted to the insights provided by the authors who contributed chapters to this edited volume, in particular Rajeev Chaturvedy, Jörg Frieden, Prashant Jha, David Malone, Ian Martin, Devendra Raj Panday, Suman Pradhan, Frederick Rawski, Mandira Sharma, Catina Slavu, Deepak Thapa, and Teresa Whitfield.


4 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, para. 3.5.


6 “Monthly Update – April 2012.” UN Resident Coordinator's Office. 2012, pp.1-2; See also “Monthly Update – May 2012.” UN Resident Coordinator's Office, p. 1-.

7 The Terai is the southern flatlands bordering India, inhabited in its eastern and central regions mostly by Madhesis who share a common culture and languages with people across the border in India, and in its western portion by Tharus, an indigenous group with a separate identity from Madhesi.


11 Interview with John Norris. 3 April 2017.


16 Ibid.


18 Interview with Robert Piper. 27 March 2017.


20 See for instance Jha, P. “Walk the talk: PM Bhattarai must rein in his bureaucrats, who are undermining an inclusive development agenda.” The Kathmandu Post, 22 August 2012.

23 Ibid.
27 Nepal Peacebuilding Support Strategy, Section 3a.
29 Ibid.
34 The two-year overall budget for the expanded RCHCO amounted to US$5,550,000. See UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator’s Office: “Status of the implementation of the Transition Support Strategy (TSS),” Internal UN document. June 2011, p. 3. Donors included DFID, Norway, Switzerland, and Sweden.
35 Price, Megan and Lina Titulae, “Beyond Transitions: UNDP’s role before, during and after UN Mission withdrawal.” The Clingendael Institute, Conflict Research Unit Report, The Hague, September 2013, p. 28. The 60 staff, however, included two dozen administrative and logistical support staff, such as drivers or assistants. Interview with former UN staff in Nepal. 13 October 2017.
38 Interview with former UN Staff in Nepal. 13 October 2017.
39 See for instance “Statement attributable to the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General on Nepal” of 14 May 2012, adopted in the context of rising tension in the country’s far-west in the run up to the 28 May 2012 Constitutional deadline, which was triggered by the DPA Liaison Office and helped to signal to national actors that the international community was watching events on the ground. Interview with former UN Staff in Nepal. 13 October 2017.
41 Interview with Robert Piper. 27 March 2017.
50 “Status of the implementation of the Transition Support Strategy (TSS).” UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator’s Office. Internal UN document, June 2011, p. 7.
53 Interview with UN staff in Nepal. 17 November 2017.

Interview with UN staff. 13 October 2017.


“Final Narrative Programme Report United Nations Interagency Rehabilitation Programme.”


Ibid. p.31.


Ibid. p. 19.


The issue is unhelpfully linked with land confiscated by Maoists during the conflict. As of late 2007, Maoists still occupy confiscated land in 132 of 401 VDCs surveyed. 2007 OCHA/WFP sample data.

This recommendation is borrowed from “Independent Evaluation of the UN Peace Fund for Nepal.” Environmental Resources Institute. September 2016, pp. 9, 27-30
Tunisia 2011-17

Josie Lianna Kaye*
Introduction

When broad-based protests triggered the so-called Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia in 2010, the dramatic political upheaval that followed ended 23 years of autocratic rule in Tunisia\(^1\) under Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali (1987-2011), and set in motion the dynamics of the ‘Arab Spring’ across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Protests began in response to the self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi, a 26-year old street vendor, whose fresh produce cart was confiscated by a police-woman who physically and verbally insulted him when he challenged her; Bouazizi subsequently set himself on fire in front of the local municipality building in his town of Sidi Bouzid. An expression of deep socioeconomic grievances and acute levels of frustration, Bouazizi’s death sparked political protests and civil disorder in Sidi Bouzid, which quickly spread across Tunisia. The combination of social media activity and the efforts of the Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail (UGTT) – whose members formed a “committee of the marginalized”\(^2\) and helped coordinate widespread demonstrations – quickly outpaced the ability of the regime to repress the burgeoning revolution. While many protestors were met with police violence, armed security forces and snipers using an often lethal combination of rubber bullets, live bullets, tear gas and water cannons,\(^3\) the protests eventually led to the ousting of President Ben Ali on 14 January 2011.

Tunisia proceeded to embark on an intense period of transition and transformation. In total, three interim governments followed Ben Ali’s departure prior to the first democratic elections in October 2011 for the National Constituent Assembly (NCA), Tunisia’s interim parliament, leading to the formation of a coalition government comprising the dominant Tunisian Islamic party, Ennahda, and two centre-left groups, Ettakatol and the Congrès Pour La République (referred to informally as the ‘Troika’). The NCA led the elaboration of the new constitution, passed in 2014, which protects important human rights, such as the freedom of speech and assembly. The same year in October, Tunisia also had its first democratic parliamentary elections, where the Nidaa Tounes party won 38% of the vote. The following month, in November the country also held its first democratic Presidential elections, with Beji Caid Essebsi winning with 55.68% of the vote.\(^4\) Illustrative of the vital role played by civil society in building a pluralistic democracy, in 2015 the Quartet du Dialogue Nationa\(^5\) was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. While Tunisia’s democratic transition and social transformation is far from complete, the steps taken so far have undoubtedly created a solid basis from which to entrench and further the aspirations of the revolution.

While it is now almost unfathomable to imagine that Tunisia could have taken any other path, from a regional perspective the odds were seemingly stacked against it. Six years after the ‘Arab Spring’ Tunisia is the only country out of 16 in the MENA region to have become significantly more democratic;\(^6\) three of the 16 – Libya, Yemen and Syria – experienced violent and intractable conflicts.\(^7\) The Arab Spring movement itself has cost the region US$ 614 billion in lost growth since 2011, which is equivalent to 6% of the region’s total GDP between 2011 and 2015, according to the UN.\(^8\) Considering that the Arab Spring was motivated in part by economic marginalisation and hardship, it is conceivable that such losses would further destabilise a small country like Tunisia. The civil war in Libya also had a negative impact, not only as a result of the humanitarian crisis and large number of refugees crossing the border, but also due to: the high socio-economic interlinkages between the two economies; and, the extensive macro-economic and fiscal impacts of the Libyan crisis on the Tunisian economy.\(^9\)

And, indeed, there have been multiple moments when Tunisia could have taken a dramatically different path: the troika was repeatedly accused of interference in the judiciary and of mishandling social unrest, especially following the violent suppression of protests in Siliana in November 2012;\(^10\) anti-government protests erupted in 2013 following the assassination of Chokri Belaid, a key grassroots leader, and of Mohamed Brahimi, opposition MP and Arab Nationalist; the publication of the constitutional draft in June 2013 sparked a major controversy, with accusations that Ennahda was attempting to dominate the drafting process running rife;\(^11\) disputes and divisions between Islamists and secularists have deeply marked and often polarised political debate; regional disparities, high levels of unemployment and poverty contribute to ongoing protests and social unrest; and, in 2015 the country was rattled by a series of devastating and deadly terrorist attacks.\(^12\)

What role did the UN Resident Coordinator (RC) and UN Country Team (UNCT) play in supporting Tunisia during its (ongoing) transition, and what contributions did they make to preventing Tunisia from taking the path of its regional neighbours? This case study will demonstrate the manner in which 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, which were critical for the democratic transition and therefore from the perspective of conflict prevention. The case study will, furthermore, shed light on elements of the RC’s approach that were vital when looking for entry-points, and for sustaining a strong relationship with national counterparts. What is evident from this case study is that the transition is far from over and that an RC strategy anchored in conflict prevention is just as important in 2017 as it was 2011-14.

1. Country Context

Underlying conflict risk factors

During the post-colonial period, Bourguiba (1956-86) set about putting in place the instruments of a new state and, during his first five or so years his reforms were extremely popular and his charismatic style won him many ‘fans’. He became increasingly autocratic, however, concentrating...
power in his own hands and refusing to accept any form of critique. In 1961 he opted for a form of “socialisme non-doctrinaire”, including central planning and nationalisation of land which belonged to foreigners. In 1974, he was elected “President for life”, which led to an increased level of protests and political opposition – met invariably with repression and sometimes violence. In 1983, a dramatic increase in the price of flour and bread led to popular protests and student strikes, leading to a state of emergency and, ultimately, to the end of the regime following the death of more than 150 protestors as a result of army actions.

When Ben Ali came to power in 1987, removing Bourguiba from power – ostensibly for ‘medical reasons’ – he announced the end of life-long electoral mandates, and expressed his commitment to democracy, reconciliation, free elections and economic reforms. His flirtation with democratic practices, however, was short-lived. In 1994, for example, he was “re-elected” with 99.8% of votes, and amended the constitution in order to stay in power first in 1999, then in 2004, and again in 2009. Ben Ali’s regime became increasingly repressive – particularly of religious groups and religious expression. A brutal eradication of the Islamist movement was accompanied by a hollowing of the institutions of the State, extensive corruption, torture and other human rights violations. Political participation was almost non-existent, opportunities for expression, contestation and debate extremely limited, and the media was tightly controlled.

Political discontent aside, the embrace of neo-liberal economic policies and practices in the 1970s fundamentally changed the fabric of Tunisia’s economy, and the livelihoods of Tunisians: the dismantling of import tariffs destroyed a significant part of Tunisia’s textile industry; privatisation of state communal lands widened the gap between rich and poor; and, the decline in the role of public investment impacted the poor and impoverished the middle classes, which have increasingly found that education is no longer a route to a decent, secure job. Simultaneously, Ben Ali constructed “a multi-billion dollar business empire for the elite class connected to the presidential palace”, thus drastically contributing to inequalities.

And yet, by some economic indicators, Tunisia was on the ascent just prior to the Arab spring, and a majority of Tunisians in both 2009 and 2010 believed that the national economy was improving overall. However, when pressed further, perceptions that local populations were benefiting from this economic situation were negative; Tunisians, for example, expressed high levels of dissatisfaction with basic infrastructure and services. Dissatisfaction was also a direct function of geography: coastal regions benefitted economically to the detriment of regions in the south and interior; when the economic crisis of 2008 led to rising food prices and a decline in remittances, for example, the hardest hit were evidently the most economically marginalised and least able to withstand its effects.

Medium term political dynamics affecting conflict risk

Notwithstanding the political progress made, Tunisia has faced, and continues to face significant challenges in terms of its socio-economic dynamics, the regional security situation, and on the political front. The political landscape is marked by deep political cleavages; while the division between secularists and Islamists remains one of the most prominent political divisions in the country, Ennahda itself is also divided “between those who were exiled during the Ben Ali regime and those who remained in country under authoritarian rule, as well as between moderate and more conservative”. Elements – creating additional tensions. The electoral, geographical ‘map’ is equally fractured, demonstrating “a country divided between a north that is largely pro-Essebsi and his party Nida Tounes, and a south that is in majority pro-Marzouki and favourable to the Islamist party An-Nahda.”

The Tunisian economy has shown some signs of recovering, with a growth rate of 2.4% in early 2017 as a result of a resumption of some tourist-related activities, as well as record trends in the agricultural export sectors. These positive trends, however, are yet to translate into jobs, and Tunisia’s level of unemployment remains at around 15.3%, and rises to 35.4% for youth. The Tunisian economy continues to be deeply affected by the ongoing conflict in Libya, because of the loss of job opportunities, remittances and trade. This fragile economic landscape is undermined by organised criminal networks smuggling arms, drugs and other contraband, and an expansive informal economy in otherwise legal goods, which both overlap with and feed into terrorist-related violence. These dynamics have contributed to a growing perception – and accompanying levels of frustration – amongst the local population broadly, and amongst youth in particular that the aspirations of the revolution have not been met.

The decision to bring the Islamist Ennahda party into the democratic transition is widely considered to be one of the key elements of Tunisia’s success to date. In power since 2014, the party – initially accused by some of turning a blind eye to violent extremism – has taken an increasingly proactive role in tempering and addressing Tunisia’s growing problem of radicalisation, notably through the development of a national counter-terrorism strategy. Nonetheless, Tunisia has become “a fertile zone for Islamic State [IS] recruiters”, while simultaneously facing the domestic threat of the radical Islamist group Ansar al-Sharia. According to one estimate, 4,000 Tunisians have joined IS in Libya, and another 3,000 joined in Syria and Iraq; furthermore, half of the Ansar al-Dine group – affiliated with al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) – are believed to be from Tunisia. The rise of radical Islamism in Tunisia has been fuelled by: “the release of Islamists imprisoned during Ben Ali’s rule; the presence of ultraconservative preachers influenced by Saudi Wahhabism; and dissatisfaction with the ruling coalition”, factors that are compounded by counterproductive state responses that violate human rights and exacerbate resentment.
2. RC-Supported Prevention Initiatives

Historical role and perception of UNCT

Prior to 2011, the role of the RC and UNCT in Tunisia, and the type of issues they could work on, was significantly constrained by the authoritarian environment in which they operated and the latter’s relatively modest size. The 2006 Common Country Assessment (CCA), for example, avoided directly criticising the Government while encouraging it to make the necessary reforms, framing these calls as an issue of congruence between economic and political rights:

“[W]orld experience shows that in the long term, the non-correspondence between realizations at the economic, social and cultural levels, and at the level of political rights and fundamental liberties cannot be longstanding. Therefore, Tunisia must get rid of a paradoxical evolution, where its political rights and civil liberties performances are not at the same level as its economic and social developments.”

Despite this relatively cautious language, the Tunisian government prevented the UN from making public the 2006 CCA along with a Poverty Reduction Strategy released in 2004, which drew attention to the stark inequalities underpinning Tunisia’s socio-economic landscape. The corresponding UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2007-11 focused on issues which could be considered a partial selection of the drivers of conflict, such as inequalities and quality of life and unemployment, for example. Issues related to political exclusion and human rights violations – and references to political rights and civil liberties – were evidently absent, reflecting the difficult ‘balancing act’ the UN must play of encouraging Member States to adhere to UN principles and standards, while remaining aware at all times of its position as ‘guest’ of the host country.

While no programmes explicitly centred on human rights were conducted – and OHCHR had no in-country presence – at this time, efforts were continuously made to ensure that a ‘Human Rights-Based Approach’ (HRBA) to programming was adopted, which in practice meant small environmentally-focused projects in rural areas with an emphasis on socioeconomic, rather than political, rights. While ultimately limited in impact, these initiatives provided some small building blocks for the post-revolutionary context when more explicit human rights work could be conducted, often drawing upon those individuals who had been trained in the HRBA approach. The RC at the time up until 2008, Ms. Heba El Khouly, is widely commended for her commitment to HRBA in such a complex setting, and for her willingness to take risks in the search for entry-points – a willingness which complicated her relationship with the Government and, it seems, led to her early departure from Tunisia.

Indeed, prior to the fall of Ben Ali, the UNCT’s space to constructively engage the government around issues of human rights and democratic governance remained non-existent, and the position of the RC prior to the fall of Ben Ali was repeatedly described as being “uncomfortable” and “extremely limited in possibilities.”

RC Mohamed Belhocine (described in detail in the next section) who took up his position in 2008, managed to carve out a small role for the UN as “protector” of international principles and standards by occasionally reminding the government (for instance in the 2010 CCA) of the multiple national, regional and international frameworks that Tunisia has subscribed to. But otherwise, the RC was obliged to take a ‘pragmatic’ posture of trying to do what was possible given the limitations, while attempting to look for viable entry-points to create change.

Such entry-points, however were limited: all programmes were conducted through line ministries, and opportunities to reach out to local actors and engage in meaningful actions were minimal. On sensitive political and human rights issues, the UNCT served mainly as a ‘post-box’: political figures and victims of human rights violations voiced their concerns to the UNCT, which passed them onto the UN in New York – which had significantly more freedom to take a critical posture towards the regime. Staff recount, however, being repeatedly ‘summoned’ by the regime to explain particular decisions or initiatives, and of not wanting to jeopardise development work by being too ‘outspoken’ politically. In a report Belhocine wrote on his experiences in Tunisia, he quotes a cable sent in July 2009 by the US Ambassador in Tunis as being exemplary of his experience as a UN official during this period. In that report the ambassador complained that the government had “increasingly tightened controls [making] it exceptionally difficult … to conduct business […]. All meeting requests and demarches must be conveyed by a diplomatic note. Most go unanswered.”

Accordingly, and by default, the UN’s positioned itself as a partner to the government in addressing MDG related issues of maternal health and youth employment, two key priorities for Tunisia.

RC-led situation analysis, strategy and coordination

The Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia took the RC and the UNCT – like everyone else – utterly by surprise. On 10 January 2011, the UNCT had gathered in a hotel to continue discussions of the UNDAF 2012-16, which were rather ironically focused on government objection to the inclusion of references to ‘inequality’ in the analysis, and capacity support to NGOs on issues of youth in the strategy. As the UNCT made its case to the Minister in question, the streets around the hotel were filling with protesting youth, and everyone was swiftly ordered to evacuate the building. During these first few days of turmoil, however, few imagined that these protests, a relatively common occurrence in Tunisia, could lead to the downfall of President Ben Ali.

The RC and UNCT have been criticised by some for their ‘silence’ during the revolution-related violence. Following the deaths of 21 protestors a week earlier, the High Commissioner for Human Rights at the time, Navanethem Pillay, released a
Tunisia

Once the security of UN staff had been assured and some families (voluntarily) evacuated, the immediate task of the RC was to gain a deeper understanding of the unfolding socio-political context, and to position the UNCT within this emerging landscape. It was evident that both the political and social forces were evolving rapidly: the army had taken a surprising Republican stand; CSOs and political parties – both tightly controlled under the Ben Ali regime – were mushrooming; and, expectations for what the revolution would bring were rising to unrealistic heights.42 The RC took the immediate and necessary decision of “putting the UNDAF 2012-16 in the bin”43, since it was evident that a four-year planning strategy would not be appropriate for such a rapidly changing context; a decision was taken to elaborate a ‘transition strategy’ in its place.

The ability of the RC to position the UN as a trusted and impartial actor early on in Tunisia’s transition was facilitated by the interim government’s adoption of a road map, and transparent communication44 of its intention to conduct elections, elaborate a constitution and establish three commissions on: political reform, human rights violations committed during the uprising, and corruption and embezzlement. This road map presented the RC with clear entry-points in areas where the UN has extensive expertise to draw upon. The key question for the RC, therefore, was not where to offer support but how – a question which required a sensitivity to the political context in Tunisia, and an ability to navigate it. Tunisia was in the midst of a tumultuous transition, it was being inundated with international support it had little experience of absorbing,45 and it remained highly protective of its sovereignty and suspicious of international interventions.

Against this background, the RC opted for a six-pronged approach which positioned the UN as an “honest broker”46: first, a low profile, giving credit, ownership and leadership at all times to national counterparts, while at the same time being open to a degree of risk-taking, not afraid to engage in ‘political issues’. Second, mobilization of high-quality expertise with a focus on cultural-sensitivity; of Algerian nationality, the RC himself was widely seen as someone who understood regional – and cultural – dynamics intimately. Third, equidistance between all influential political forces, reinforcing the key principle of impartiality – especially important in light of the dynamic political landscape where key national interlocutors were changing frequently. Fourth, a “modus operandi based on dialogue and consensus as instruments to achieve peace engagement”47, enabling the UN to serve as a ‘bridge’ between different political factions, as well as between the government and civil society, and other actors. Fifth, engagement with national counterparts premised on the UN as “protector” of international norms. And, sixth, the need for flexibility. These different elements of the strategy were infused into and across UN engagements as part of a “One voice” approach that RC Belhocine helped foster within the UNCT.

The UNCT’s Transition Strategy of Tunisia (TST) 2011-13, therefore, both embodied and created the basis for this approach. Based on a combination of the CCA 2010, an assessment of the situation by the UNCT post-January 2011,48 consultations with the diverse national stakeholders, the TST was used both as a ‘GPS’ for engagement with the interim authorities and as a tool to rally the UNCT around a common goal. The RC achieved a high degree of ‘unity of purpose’ by adopting, by all accounts, a highly collaborative and inclusive approach vis-à-vis the UNCT with regards to the transition strategy planning process. He built upon modalities he had established prior to the fall of the regime to catalyse cooperation towards new ends; he brought all the agencies together, “making sure that everyone had a role to play”; and, he worked closely with the interim authorities, building relationships of trust that would serve the UNCT well. A doctor by training whose prior experience was predominantly with WHO, his “distance” from UNDP (in his prior career) might have made other UNCT members more inclined to follow his lead. He delegated many of his responsibilities as head of UNDP to his deputy,49 thus enabling him to play a more proactive role as RC.

The strategy had four broad pillars: support to good governance for the success of the democratic transition; emergency preparedness and response, in light of the humanitarian crisis on the border with Libya; issues related to equity, employment and regional development, with a special focus on youth; and, lastly, environment and climate change. The approach of the RC came into play in all these pillars. In the area of elections for example, 18 experts were working with the Independent Commission on Elections, with the Prime Minister as the key entry-point. This was an extremely sensitive issue to work on at the time, and the RC took the position that all UN staff should insist upon Tunisians taking the lead. By playing a low profile, ‘behind the scenes’ role, the UN was able to provide pertinent and effective support: “when you keep a low profile”, insisted Belhocine, “you can achieve much more than when you try to wave these flags.”50 The RC, therefore, made it very clear to both the UN and to donors, that publicity around UN support to the elections would be avoided at all costs, which enabled the UN to overcome the initial resistance on the part of the election commission to accept international support.

That is not to say that the strategy came without challenges. Despite full support from DOCO and BCPR, competition between DPA and UNDP around electoral support, and
between UNHCR and OCHA with regards to humanitarian support for the Libyan crisis slowed down the initial response and created unnecessary and unhelpful tensions. The RC was also lacking analytical and explicitly political support on the ground, and was only able to secure a political advisor in 2013, relying in the meantime on expertise hired for specific initiatives – including those related to elections and the constitution, for example. The absence of an aid coordination mechanism, notwithstanding the best efforts on the part of the RC and EU partners to put one in place, also hampered international efforts to avoid duplication. And, despite an explicit Policy Committee decision that “UN assistance for the democratic transition process in Tunisia will be closely coordinated and holistic, led by the Resident Coordinator, based on the UNCT’s transition strategy and supported by all parts of the UN system”, evidently not all UN officials regarded the RC as their RC52 – leading to a situation in which the RC was too often the last to know about visits from Executive Directors, undermining his efforts towards a unified approach amongst the UNCT (the RC, after all, is primus inter pares and there is no accountability system supporting the role that is expected).

Lastly, the “hegemony of English speaking experts in all rosters” clearly became “a constraint and a discriminating factor when it comes to providing support in countries where English is neither the first nor second language.”53 The RC’s insistence in recruiting, whenever possible, Arabic speakers from the region certainly helped build credibility and overcome the concerns of the host country, even if it sometimes came at the cost of delays in the hiring process and timely provision of support.

Despite these challenges, and thanks to his patience and determination, the RC was able to effectively and consistently position the UN system “as a central, respected and credible partner whose collaboration was sought for in the area of governance and institutional reforms.”54 These engagements, it can be argued, took the form of prevention since transitions are notoriously conflict-prone and the stakes in Tunisia were extremely high. Among the most critical contributions during the 2011-14 period were: support to the elaboration of the new constitution; the elaboration of new electoral laws; strengthening of the National Constituent Assembly, and the Independent Electoral body. These efforts were complemented by: regional employment plans; support for job creation endeavours; the development of a social contract, signed by the government and two leading unions (UGTT and UTICA55) in early 2013; and, on the humanitarian front, coordinated efforts to provide support to (approximately) 350,00056 refugees on the border with Libya in 2011, and longer-term support to develop multi-sectoral contingency plans.

In the eyes of some, 2014 is often regarded as the point at which Tunisia, having completed its first ever democratic parliamentary-level elections, passed its electoral “test”57 and completed its transition. This narrative appears to undermine rather than bolster the prevention objectives of much of the UN work, objectives which rely upon a long-term rather than short-term horizon on the protracted and difficult road towards democracy, equality and justice. Indeed, rather than the end of the transition it would be more apt and appropriate from a ‘prevention’ standpoint to see 2014 as marking the mid-point of the transition: an important hurdle after which the government would face the arguably much more difficult challenges of implementing new laws in line with the new constitution, and entrenching the values of the social contract, in partnership with civil society. The localized violence shortly after but not directly-related to the elections was a potent reminder of the tensions ‘beneath the surface’, the ongoing societal divisions and the need for those in power to deliver on their promises if Tunisia’s on-going transition and transformation is to be peaceful and sustainable.58

This was the critical context in which Mounir Tabet59 assumed his position as RC in 2013. Mr. Tabet ‘inherited’ a UNCT with established collaborative working practices, and a solid track record of working with the government and civil society, based on a conflict prevention approach that had proven to be successful. He focused a significant part of his effort on UNDP’s pressing initiatives in the area of democratic governance. Since UNDP was leading much of the work in this space and since the majority of this work had been put in place under Belhacine, Tabet necessarily ensured a smooth and effective implementation in these critical areas that contribute to prevention and work in this domain during his ‘tenure’ flourished. By some accounts, however, the new RC may have benefited from embracing a more ‘political’ approach and invested greater efforts to rally UNCT members behind prevention objectives. Neither the formulation of the 2013 CCA nor of the 2015-19 UNDAF, for example, were leveraged as occasions to fundamentally reassess evolving conflict risks and threats to Tunisia’s transition - nor to align the rest of the UNCT accordingly. Given the sensitive moment in Tunisia’s transition and despite the strong efforts via UNDP to support the transition, it is possible that – from a prevention perspective – some opportunities may have been missed as a result of this more apolitical and less ‘UNCT-wide’ approach.

Some of these challenges can be attributed to a lack of capacity, which was significantly enhanced by the deployment of Giordano Segneri as Peace and Development Advisor (PDA) in 2014. The PDA provided a significant conflict prevention-related ‘boost’ to the UNCT by enhancing the capacity of the RC Office (RCO) to integrate political analysis in planning, programming, and coordination activities. He began producing political analysis on a regular basis to share with the RC and in UNCT meetings, where he often made recommendations to the UNCT to improve the political sensitivity of their work; he provided political inputs to the UNDP-led Conflict-related Development Analysis (CDA) in 2015, which placed significant attention on conflict drivers as well as Tunisia’s diverse capacities to address them; he also organized training for staff on conflict analysis, consensus techniques and problem-solving. He made himself available
to all UNCT staff to review project documents from a ‘conflict sensitivity’ perspective and made important efforts to ensure the regional dynamics of the conflicts were being taken into account.

In this spirit, and in collaboration with Mr. Tabet, the PDA was able to identify an entry-point to begin working on preventing violent extremism (PVE) through work with the National Counter Terrorism Commission (NCTC), specifically on the prevention pillar of their work in 2015 (see below for further details). As a result of this initial engagement with the NCTC, the PDA was able to submit a proposal for catalytic funds from the PDA joint programme to support work in this area. The PDA’s efforts to incorporate stronger political awareness, greater levels of conflict-sensitivity in programming, increased levels of information-sharing and inter-agency consensus-building have undoubtedly contributed to changing the culture of the UNCT and RC-led engagements. With this approach, the PDA has been able to increase levels of awareness about the inter-linkages between development programming and instability, and the ways in which programming can be harnessed to prevent conflict and create constructive change.

In January 2017, Mr. Diego Zorrilla assumed the RC position. Against the background of the new Secretary-General Antonio Guterres having made prevention an overarching UN priority, and in the wake of the twin ‘sustaining peace’ resolutions passed by both the Security Council and the General Assembly, Zorrilla built upon and, indeed, expanded the efforts of his predecessors to support the transition’s many facets from a conflict prevention perspective. Deemed a “political animal” by many of his UNCT counterparts, Zorrilla is fully aware that democratic transitions are fragile, and that “now is not the moment for the international community to look the other way.”

He dedicated the first few months of his time in Tunisia, with the support of the PDA, to understanding the fault-lines and conflict drivers. Having reached the conclusion that feelings of exclusion and hopelessness that sparked the revolution in 2010 are not only present, but more intense in light of the increasing perception of hopelessness that sparked the revolution in 2010 are not only present, but more intense in light of the increasing perception that the expectations of the revolution have not been met, he has made prevention the cornerstone of his strategy.

His approach, therefore, is focused on not only nurturing and deepening the work of Tunisia’s young democratic institutions, but also finding ways to engage the high levels of youth that feel abandoned by society, and by the revolutionary ideals they were so invested in. While the work of the UN continues to be evidently rights-based, “from a rights-based perspective there is no reason”, Zorrilla states, “to focus on youth over and above other groups in society” – it is the prevention lens that leads the UN to focus on the most vulnerable populations, along with certain disenchanted and/or marginalized youth, he believes. This focus on youth also informs Zorrilla’s engagement on PVE, which he further developed with the support of the PDA. The UNCT has produced a common assessment of the drivers of violent extremism in Tunisia and this has led to the development of a comprehensive inter-agency strategic framework, entitled ‘A UN integrated approach to the prevention of violent extremism in Tunisia’. Both the common assessment and the UNCT-wide strategic framework are the first such initiatives to be launched on PVE, putting the Tunisia UNCT well-ahead of the curve in this space.

Resourcing

Whereas traditionally, fundraising for Tunisia prior to 2011 had been challenging due to its classification as a ‘middle income country’ and the absence of eligibility for ODI, from 2011 to 2013 the UNCT was able to raise significant funds – with Japan, the European Union, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Spain being some of the most important donors. Fundraising was made significantly easier when, following the revolution, the UN System was able to openly question the social and economic data that had been officially published by the government, revealing the deep vulnerabilities and need for external assistance. During the first stage of the transition i.e. 2011-13, the UN System was able to secure around US$88 million for the four areas elaborated in the TST. Only 65% of these funds were actually spent during this period, indicating a problem of “absorption capacity” due to the limited resources of the UNCT during this period and limited ability to ‘scale up’ with enough speed and efficiency.

Nonetheless, the US$88 million represents a 219% increase in funding for the transition when compared to the funds available in 2011, but funding was variable across the four pillars of the transition strategy. Support for democratic governance increased by 271%, support for inclusive and equitable development by 433%, support for the environment by 102% but support for humanitarian crisis response by only 28%. The 5 largest projects include supporting the Constitutional Dialogue, the Electoral Process, Security Sector Reform, Transitional Justice and the National Integrity System (anti-corruption). Support to the Resident Coordinator’s Office almost doubled from 2012 to 2014, going up from US$76,312 to $139,529, and remaining close to the 2014 level thereafter. Additionally, in 2014, the UNDP-DPA Joint Programme for Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention invested in Tunisia for the first time, allocating over US$250,000 for the year. In 2017, the RC and PDA helped secure over US$ 2 million, plus the hiring of three senior consultants to work on technical aspects related to PVE. Tunisia has not yet received any funding from the Peacebuilding Support Fund.

The RCO is now in a process of almost doubling its staff. When RC Zorrilla arrived at the end of 2016, there were 3 staff in the RCO; by April 2018, there will be 6 staff (including 2 Y-UNV and 1 UN-DESA Fellow), and by June 1st there will also be a senior PVE specialist, potentially supported by a junior coordination specialist (taking the team up to 8 by the end of 2018). Whilst not all staff will be focused 100%
on peace and development issues, prevention work will be substantially strengthened by this significant staff increase.

Specific interventions and initiatives

In the case of Tunisia, there were numerous initiatives, projects and programmes launched by individual UN agencies, in particular UNDP, aimed at addressing specific conflict drivers or advancing specific prevention objectives. This section, however, will only look at those initiatives and approaches, in which the RC had a significant role and/or which were jointly carried out in an interagency context and which hold particularly valuable lessons for RCs elsewhere.

Transition Strategy for Tunisia (TST)

While RCs have formulated Transition Strategies in a number of country settings, the way in which it was used in Tunisia provides several useful insights. The rapid change in context following the revolution demonstrates clearly the constraints of using UNDAF’s in fragile and complex contexts, where planning according to a four-year cycle is not only impossible, but also unhelpful. The TST helped to capture the multiple dynamics present in the country at the time: the need for medium-term planning for the democratic transition on the one hand, for example, and the need for immediate response to the fast-evolving humanitarian crisis on the other. Due to the fact that the TST had been framed as a holistic, comprehensive and flexible approach to the post-revolution transition context, it could also be used as a tool for fundraising, successfully mobilizing US$88 million from 2011-13.

Most importantly, the TST served as a flexible reference guide for action which allowed for adaptation to new dynamics and issues as they arose. The importance of flexibility is underscored by the fact that in 2012, just one year after the revolution, at the request of the RC the UNCT agreed to undertake a strategic analysis of Tunisia’s socio-political situation, and of the “profound transitions on various levels and fronts” – the results of which informed the implementation of the (evolving) strategy. The goal was to facilitate a common understanding amongst UNCT members of key conflict drivers and their linkages with development programming. This RC-led strategic analysis represented an understanding – and indeed learning – on the part of the UNCT that the situation was in flux, and required an approach that was not ‘business as usual’. Indeed, the “CCA light” as it was called, was deemed necessary in order to facilitate a common understanding by all UN agencies. It enhanced the UNCT’s level of conflict sensitivity and “its ability to identify entry-points for supporting social cohesion and reconciliation through support to policy and political dialogue, development and social protection programmes.”

“Youth, employment and migration (YEM)”

The YEM programme, within the UN MDG Achievement Fund (MDG-F) – implemented by five UN agencies (FAO, ILO, IOM, UNIDO, and UNDP) in collaboration with national partners (the Ministries of Employment, Agriculture, Industry, Development and International Cooperation) – focused on institutional capacity-building to respond to the problem of unemployed youth and migration particularly in the poorer regions of Tunis, El Kef and Gafsa. It is estimated that over 2,200 jobs were created directly as a result of the programme, along with a fund for young entrepreneurs, supporting 20 projects and programmes in 12 regions.

While the project started in 2009, the way in which the programme was re-oriented in light of the 2011 revolution and subsequent transition demonstrates once more the importance of flexibility, tailoring to the national context, and the ability of the RC to reorient programming towards shared objectives under the TST. While job creation remained central to the programme, post-2011 programming was also used as a means to encourage democratization and decentralisation through the development of Local Committees of Regional Development, which helped ensure local representatives, NGOs and civil servants were at the heart of the decision-making process. In a context where the absence of political participation had been one of the causes of unrest, this new way of working ensured ownership for the project was transferred from the national level where it had been ‘guarded’ during the Ben Ali era, to the regional and local levels – providing an opportunity to “translate political choices into development planning” in the area of employment. This approach also enabled the UN to keep a low profile, letting local actors take the lead on programming.

The flexibility on the part of the MDG Fund was critical in this regard, as it enabled a complete review of the logical framework and the timeframe of the project to take into account the turbulent national context. Equally important were analyses conducted throughout 2011 of the social, economic and political context – including on ‘Regional planning for employment’, ‘Conditional cash transfers study’, and ‘Analysis of the potential development of the weaving sector’ – which helped ensure that engagements were tailored, and as much as possible targeting conflict drivers in some of the poorest regions.

Constitutional support

RC-led support to the elaboration of the constitution, as well as the creation and consolidation of constitutional independent bodies from 2011 to 2014 was designed to “produce a document with strong legitimacy that could lay solid foundations for a new social contract.” In this spirit, the UNCT provided direct support to the National Constituent Assembly (NCA) in conducting an inclusive national dialogue process that helped identify people’s expectations, and foster the promotion of a wide range of human rights, including gender equality, children rights, the access of youth to leadership positions, freedom of speech and assembly, the right to health and social assistance, and a
ban on torture. The UNCT gave comments at each stage of the process, providing and transmitting consolidated comments, and clearly indicating areas where the text fell short of Tunisia’s human rights commitments. When requested, the UN provided legal advice to the leadership of the NCA during and after the national dialogue, in order to better facilitate and reflect the results of the dialogue into drafts of the constitutions, switching between support to the NCA and the national dialogue as and when required in line with changing circumstances on the ground. The result is a constitution that fundamentally redefines state-citizen relations.71

This approach was premised on key elements that guided the UNCT’s engagement on the constitutional process, under the auspices of the RC. First, the UNCT would work in unison; this meant that individual agencies would not approach individual Ministers in their respective thematic areas, but that advice, support and comments would be consolidated and fed through focal points at the NCA. This approach helped reduce the burden on national counterparts, prevent waste of precious resources, and ensure coherence in response amongst agencies. Second, the UNCT would ensure that the consultation and drafting process was highly inclusive, and accompanied by the strengthening of institutional capacities and constitutional dialogue mechanisms at local and national levels – capable of ensuring inputs from civil society and citizens at all stages of the process. In this regard, the UN actively supported a series of public constitutional debates in all 24 governorates across Tunisia, including in disadvantaged regions – which brought together trade unions, CSOs, NGOs and other leading public figures. And, third, the UNCT would provide both technical support and substantive support on the content of the constitution, an element which was sensitive in light of Tunisia’s weariness of external interference – especially on human rights issues.

The last point required a solid understanding of the political context, and how engagements could be approached in a way that would be acceptable, while protecting the UN’s reputation and mandate, and simultaneously maximising support. Some more risk-averse UNCT members and colleagues in New York, were concerned that such engagements could be misconstrued as “interference”; they cautioned against the UNCT inserting itself into a conversation on the substance of the constitution, arguing the UN should limit itself to provision of technical support and coordination. The RC was able to overcome host country resistance as well as internal skeptics by framing the UN’s substantive contributions as advancing and protecting international standards and good practice, which was not perceived as interference in sovereign affairs.72 This receptiveness on the side of the government to this approach was illustrated by the fact that, following the draft of June 2013, the UNCT was able to conduct a human rights-based analysis of the draft constitution, which highlighted ongoing challenges and served as a basis upon which the RC and the UNCT could constructively engage with Tunisian authorities to ensure greater compliance with international legal obligations – in turn fostering a broader debate among different national stakeholders.73

Under the framework of the transitional justice law adopted on 15 December 2013, Tunisia established a Truth and Dignity Commission (Instance Verité et Dignité or IVD) mandated to investigate human rights abuses and corruption since 1955. UNDP, OHCHR, the ICTJ with the support of the UNCT – and led by the RC – worked closely on the establishment and procedures of the Commission, supporting it through the provision of material, expertise, accompaniment, and training of its members. The Commission was able to prepare 62,596 dossiers on the violation of human rights, corruption, and the falsification of elections, and remains on track to present its recommendations to the Government of 2018; the IVD has requested an extension of its mandate until December 2018.

Comprehensive technical support to the IVD was complemented by the provision of ‘good offices’. The issue of justice, and how to deal with crimes committed in the past is a highly politicised and divisive one. Secularists and Islamists have very different positions on the issue, which feed into ongoing political debates, exacerbating tensions and creating political conflicts. With a view to overcoming these differences – and fully supported by the RC – OHCHR provided a platform since 2013 for civil society organisations and members of the IVD to come together on a weekly basis in a non-publicised, informal forum to discuss issues related to transitional justice and to help build relationships across ‘divides’. This helped position the UN as a trusted interlocutor, willing to provide low-profile support aimed at maintaining dialogue on a key, highly sensitive issue.

In 2017, these relationships of trust – established amongst IVD members and with the UNCT – were put to the test. Six months prior to the completion of their mandate, four out of the nine commissioners suspended their activities and refused to engage in the work of the IVD; elected by Parliament with limited participation from civil society, the members of the Commission were both representatives of their own political parties with different visions of the future, who are asked to serve together on the IVD – often creating inevitable clashes of different proportions.74 The ‘abstention’ of four members for over three months had prevented the IVD from meeting as a council, and risked derailing the work on transitional justice.75 When these same members threatened to leave the IVD entirely, the remaining members turned to OHCHR for support. Dimiter Chalev, OHCHR Representative at the time, convened the IVD members at the OHCHR office and they worked throughout the night to resolve their differences, with Chalev serving as mediator. This serves as small yet illustrative example of the multitude of ways the UN used a combination of good offices and low profile engagements to resolve political conflicts and prevent them from becoming conflicts at the societal level.
“Ways of working”

While it is difficult to pinpoint precise impacts of his efforts in the realm of “ways of working”, the PDA’s efforts to incorporate stronger political awareness, greater levels of conflict sensitivity in programming, increased levels of information-sharing and inter-agency consensus-building have undoubtedly contributed to changing the culture of the UNCT and RC-led engagements. By changing the culture of the UNCT, the PDA – under the leadership of the RC – has been able to increase levels of awareness about the inter-linkages between development programming and conflict, and the ways in which programming can be harnessed to prevent conflict and create constructive change.

In this spirit, for example, in June 2017, the PDA created standard operating procedures on ‘UNCT short-term mechanism to provide assistance in response to social conflicts’ as a result of the increasing number of social protests and the risk of such protests igniting violence or conflict. Inspired by the Sustaining Peace agenda, the SOP are designed to help the RC and UNCT to build a common understanding of social conflicts, and to prompt efficient, coordinated response across the three pillars of human rights, development, and peace and security – clearly linking early warning with early action. Consequently, following the social unrest of January 2018, for example, the PDA prepared a ‘Situation analysis on the drivers of instability and priorities’, which fed into the geo-localized vulnerability mapping, and the UNCT field projects prepared by the RCO through an online App.

Albeit at the early stages, another area where “ways of working” may appear to be yielding positive results is in the area of PVE. Initiated under RC Tabet, the PVE work has since been further developed by RC Zorrilla with the support of the PDA. The UNCT has produced a common assessment of the drivers of violent extremism in Tunisia and this has led to the development of a comprehensive inter-agency programme, entitled ‘A United Nations integrated approach to the prevention of violent extremism in Tunisia’. Both the common assessment and the common programme on PVE are the first such initiatives to be launched on PVE, putting the Tunisia UNCT well-ahead of the curve in this space. Despite the rhetoric at the HQ level around ‘risk-informed development’, there is a low appreciation of risk management in the UN outside of security and humanitarian spheres; in this regard, the UNCT in Tunisia has also been pioneering, commissioning the first ever (in the UN) explicit risk assessment of PVE programming in Tunisia (commissioned in November 2016). All the recommendations of the risk assessment were taken on board, leading to a significantly more robust and conflict-sensitive programme. As a result of this holistic approach and the ability of the RC to position the UNCT in this space, US$2 million has been mobilised to support UNDP work in the PVE space, and a PVE expert, working in the RCO, will be hired in 2018 to lead and implement the programme. A mobilization strategy for the UNCT Framework (Joint Programme) will begin following the expansion of the RCO in April 2018.

3. Overall Contribution of RC- and UNCT to Prevention

While the successful and peaceful transition in Tunisia can only be attributed to Tunisians themselves, the UN was able to play a small, yet important, role in supporting that transition and preventing tensions from escalating into conflict. UN support, led by the RC, allowed for the smooth holding of the country’s first democratic elections, ensured key human rights provisions were enshrined in the new constitution, facilitated the establishment of a functioning transitional justice commission, and, reduced conflict risk as the result of socio-economic development projects (including job creation) at the local level.

Just as important as what the UN worked on was the how of the engagement. The low profile strategy, which left national counterparts in the ‘driver’s seat’ at all times, was key given the political context and the low appetite for a visible international role on sensitive issues. The impartial approach and emphasis on keeping equidistance from all counterparts was critical for fostering trust among all key players. The ability to ‘mainstream’ dialogue and consensus as key instruments in the UN modus operandi irrespective of the domain, sector or initiative in question enabled the UN to use even technical engagements as opportunities to build bridges and deeper levels of understanding between stakeholders not accustomed to working together. The position of the UN as ‘protector’ of international norms and standards enabled it to provide substantive support on sensitive political issues in a manner which furthered the ‘human rights up front’ agenda. And lastly, adopting the Transition Strategy as a key platform for engagement allowed for flexibility that ensured the UN could keep pace with the changing context, and served as an effective resource mobilisation tool.

The transition is far from complete. The year 2017 witnessed 8,000 protests and, in January 2018, violence flared in the context of protests that marked the anniversary of the revolution, in the context of which the government is accused of undermining the legacy of the Arab Spring and of insufficient progress. Corruption is perceived as having shifted from being systemic under Ben Ali, to endemic post-revolution. Police are still perceived as repressive, as demonstrated by the 2018 heavy-handed response to protests, and prisons are overcrowded. And, as the euphoria of the revolution dwindles, the reality for many Tunisians feels as bleak as it was prior to the revolution, fuelling the perception that the democratic transition has benefitted a few but not the many. In this light, RC Zorrilla’s goal is to reorient the UN’s engagement towards the reduction of conflict risk factors, which includes addressing socio-economic vulnerabilities at the local level, increasing trust in public institutions by fighting corruption, and strengthening early warning and conflict prevention. In order to implement this prevention-oriented, conflict-sensitive vision, the RCO will be expanding its capacities; this will enable it to work more concertedly both on PVE work and socio-economic conflicts, and to further support Tunisia to be a positive example of how to ‘sustain peace’.
4. Lessons, Good Practices and Recommendations

Real entry-points only exist where there is political space: The RC was extremely constrained prior to the revolution, and was not able to operate in a particularly ‘political manner’. This, of course, did not mean that the search for entry-points was futile. Far from it, the engagements led by the RC prior to 2010 provided useful building blocks for what came next, in particular with respect to local-level human rights-based programming focused on socio-economic rights in the 2000s. However, it was only when there was political space following the revolution – communicated clearly by the interim government’s ‘road map’ – that the RC was able to make meaningful contributions.

Effective RCs prioritise impartiality over neutrality: The risk-averse approach, advocated by some UN actors, to provide advice on the constitution would have led to UN-support focused on technical issues alone, missing a vital opportunity to assist Tunisian stakeholders to incorporate human rights standards into the constitutions, laying solid foundations for a new relationship between state and society. The RC was able to overcome the risk of being perceived as ‘interfering’ in internal affairs by effectively framing UN engagements as supporting international norms and standards.

Flexibility is key for RCs, UNCTs and donors alike for rapidly changing transition contexts: Engagements must be led by the contextual needs and not driven by constraints imposed by headquarters, donor planning cycles or logical frameworks. The UNDAF, with its four-year planning cycle to align with government planning processes, tends to be an ill-fitted framework for volatile and dynamic transition contexts. In order to support a preventive approach, RCs need to ensure programmes are needs-driven. In Tunisia, both the TST and the YEM programme benefitted the context due to their flexible nature. It is important to note, however, that at the end of the day, RCs and UNCTs will only have the level of flexibility that the national authorities tolerate – hence the importance of building trust and advocating to create the largest possible space for flexibility.50

A low profile is vital in politically-sensitive contexts where stakeholders may be wary of international intervention: While a high profile may be constructive in some contexts, in those situations where the political landscape is sensitive and/or where national stakeholders are weary/suspicious of international actors, a low profile helps the RC to maintain a position as a key interlocutor. This ‘behind the scenes’ approach also allows the UN to use ‘good offices’ in a strategic and fruitful manner.

High quality expertise is an ‘offer’ the UN can make to create entry-points, and the language skills of those experts matter: The ability to offer high quality expertise can create entry-points for the UN, especially on complex issues such as elections, constitutions and transitional justice – all areas where the UN has extensive expertise and is able to draw upon comparative lessons learnt. Expertise in these areas in Tunisia was vital, but it needs to be delivered in a timely manner if it is to be useful and provide the entry-points required. Having access to staff with the right language skills is vital, especially in politically-sensitive contexts. In Tunisia, the ability to – after some time and hard work – hire Arabic experts in elections and constitutions was an important part of the ability of the UN to position itself as a trusted, credible and qualified partner.

RCs must be politically savvy and unafraid to engage with and work in a political manner and support their efforts with continuous context, conflict and political analysis: ‘Being political’ does not mean working with government alone, but ensuring all engagements are grounded in a solid understanding of the political context, in the way they are designed, framed, communicated and implemented. In many context, this means relying on the support of strong PDAs able to provide timely and comprehensive analysis. ‘Being political’ also involves an ability to leverage challenges as opportunities, as evidenced by the RC-led work to use the UN’s ‘good offices’ to promote deeper understanding between political counterparts. The failure to work in a political manner could be damaging in transition and fragile contexts, and/or lead to significant missed opportunities.

RCs are able to foster coordination and cooperation amongst national counterparts when the UN ‘house’ is in order (“practice what you preach”): A large part of the UNs ‘job’ is to foster coordination: between international actors, between donors, between political actors and civil society organisations. It can only do so in a credible and legitimate manner if the UNCT itself is working in a collaborative and coordinated manner. The failure to do so creates divisions and fragmentation with the very actors the UN seeks to assist. In the Tunisia case, much of the work on the constitution and the IVD was facilitated by the cohesiveness of the UNCT.

Democratic transitions – and prevention – are long-term endeavours: Far from being complete in 2014, three years after the revolution, Tunisia was just beginning its long and difficult transformation. UN engagement strategies, tools and initiatives – and those of donors – must be tailored accordingly. This means: making funding commitments that go beyond three to five years; communicating realistic expectations to local, national and international partners; documenting as you go to build institutional memory; and, remaining engaged, discretely, long after the immediate crisis is over. As long as the structural conditions that created the conflict in the first place have not changed, the risk of conflict remains present, and efforts should remain focused on changing those structural conditions.
Endnotes

Cover Image: Photo by Christopher Furlong/Getty Images. Tunis, Tunisia. 23 January 2011: Protesters scale government buildings outside the Tunisian prime minister’s office in Tunis. Protesters from the countryside and the hamlet of Sidi Bouzid, the town where the ‘Jasmine Revolution’ started, travelled through the night to descend on the prime ministers office where they tore down razor wire barricades and met no resistance from the police or army.

* This paper is based on secondary resources and 18 interviews with RCs, PDAs and other RCO staff, other UNCT staff, national interlocutors of RC/UNCT Tunisia, and, UNHQ staff – both via phone and in the context of a brief visit to Tunis in November 2017. The lead writer/researcher would like to sincerely thanks all those who participated in this process, either in interviews or in the course of subsequent reviews of the paper, and a special thanks are due to the PDA, Giordano Segneri, and RC Diego Zorrilla for all their support for the project and, in particular, for making the trip both possible and successful.

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