

Entry Points for a New Prevention Agenda: Connecting New York, Geneva and 'At-Risk' Contexts

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1. Introduction

Countless policies and reports have called for international actors and states to prevent conflict and armed violence. At the same time, the incredible toll on lives and livelihoods caused by natural disasters has led to an increasing global focus on preparedness. Few actors disagree that a proactive approach to the risks of disaster and conflict is necessary; some have even made significant efforts to explore the conflict-disaster interface.¹ Moreover, few disagree that addressing the 'root causes' is the best solution. Most humanitarian, development, and political actors implicitly and, increasingly, explicitly acknowledge the cross-cutting nature of vulnerability; how it is shaped by various shocks (such as natural disasters or war) and stresses (violence, poor health, low economic development), and must therefore be addressed as such.

But, most resources are still spent *reacting* to crises rather than *preventing* them. Funds and organizations remain stuck in humanitarian or development silos, unable to deal with the complexity and fluid nature of the contexts that they face. Too often, immediate needs are treated as if they were "borne out of nothing".² The intersection of violence, disease, destruction, and disaster evades most international actors. Even though the causes of conflict and disaster are multi-level, multi-faceted, and interconnected, the international responses are not.

This Brief aims to stimulate discussion about the opportunities and operationalization of a new prevention agenda that connects New York, Geneva, and 'at-risk' contexts (referring to contexts that face a significant risk of escalating violent conflict and disaster). It presents a series of issues for discussion drawn from the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform's work on prevention, especially the 31 January 2013 meeting on *Gathering promising practices in the prevention field across institutions and sectors* supported by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. Overall, this Brief makes several observations.

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The Geneva Peacebuilding Platform is a joint project of four institutions:

A comprehensive prevention agenda can make an important contribution to current high-level agenda setting processes

- It is time to enlarge the 'prevention' community beyond its traditional focus on 'conflict prevention' and facilitate the transmission of best practices and development of complementary programming among the conflict prevention community. This includes organizations that work on disaster preparedness and risk reduction, armed violence reduction, public health interventions on violence prevention, urban violence management, and private sector risk mitigation strategies in fragile environments.
- A comprehensive approach to prevention can make an important contribution to the on-going discussions on the Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals, the New Deal, and the Post-Millennium Development Goal process.
- By working together, the different communities that comprise a comprehensive approach to prevention can help to incentivize organizations to take the risk that preventive action requires.

2. Interest in a more comprehensive approach

Over the last two years, the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform has convened a series of public, informal and expert gatherings on prevention that aimed to explore linkages across sectors and institutions, in order to advance a more comprehensive prevention agenda. A comprehensive prevention agenda is important because (a) the international prevention agenda originally set out in the 1992 Agenda for Peace does not reflect the reality of contemporary conflict-affected and fragile settings;³ (b) there is a large gap between progress made at the field level and the guidance and policy-making on prevention;⁴ and (c) there is strong interest across the conflict prevention, disaster risk reduction, armed violence reduction, food security, and other related communities to establish a more comprehensive prevention agenda. Such an agenda increases the space for multi-faceted and multi-dimensional support to countries that are both at-risk of violent conflict and ill-prepared to manage disaster.⁵

The international prevention agenda originally set out in the 1992 Agenda for Peace no longer reflects the reality of conflict-affected and fragile settings

Despite a recent resurgent focus on 'conflict prevention' at the policy level in the UN, there has not been systematic follow-up in or around the United Nations system.⁶ The experience of 'prevention' in New York in 2012 stands in contrast to Geneva where there is much more energy behind a more comprehensive approach. Outside of the scope of the prevention discussion at the United Nations in New York, various communities in Geneva continue to make important advances in the theory and practice of prevention and preparedness, for example: efforts that focus on violence prevention in public health, the prevention of criminal violence at the city level, improving preparedness for natural disasters, and risk mitigation in the context of large scale business investments.

In order to better understand the potential of connecting these diverse efforts, the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform conducted two informal consultations and commissioned a background study, including 13 semi-structured interviews.⁷ All those interviewed expressed interest in a more comprehensive and expansive approach to prevention and preparedness. The main findings from the consultations and interviews are summarized below.

- Conflict prevention, disaster risk reduction, food security, and armed violence reduction all require forward-thinking multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholder, and

multi-leveled approaches. The risk factors for violence and disaster are cross-cutting; responses should also be cross-cutting. This multi-faceted approach is nothing new; it has been at the core of the conflict prevention and peacebuilding agenda since it was initiated by Boutros Boutros-Ghali in 1992.⁸

- The challenge is to support approaches that build both the state's and the society's capacity to foster sustainable development and simultaneously manage the risk of disaster, violence and armed conflict. Foremost, international efforts must be grounded in the needs, capacities and realities of the communities that international institutions aim to help. National and local leadership and ownership must begin and end all interventions, with international and regional actors focused on accompanying national and local institutions at multiple levels.
- Humanitarian, development, and preventive diplomacy silos are counterproductive. Silos prevent international actors from addressing the real local context and responding to its interconnected needs. But, these silos remain. They are embedded in organizational mandates and funding streams, and they determine what donors, international organizations and civil society partners do on the ground and whom they work with. Can these institutional realities change? Can international institutions create the incentives necessary for them to respond proactively to the needs and opportunities in 'At Risk' contexts and not be constrained by narrow mandates, funding streams, or competition?
- Competition and single-issue budget lines (i.e., humanitarian, development, peacekeeping) make it difficult for organizations to find sufficient funding for multidimensional prevention and preparedness programming. To strengthen the ability of organizations to do prevention, there must be more flexible budget lines and longer-term funding cycles.
- The solution is not to create new terminology, which may simply lead to more confusion and competition, rather than coherence. Instead, use the terminology and communities of practice that exist, but help to link their field-based programming and help them to share best practices.
- Intervention in 'at-risk' contexts is inherently political. Intervening actors may be able to depoliticize conflict prevention by integrating it with the disaster risk reduction, health and violence prevention communities.
- It is important that a comprehensive prevention agenda is not monopolized by one approach, but is able to draw on the full breadth of capacities and perspectives available.

There is strong interest across institutions and sectors to establish a more comprehensive prevention agenda

Each sector tends to prioritize its own approach over others; each sector's approach is grounded in a different theory of change

3. Bridging differences, finding common ground

As with all cross-sectorial efforts, there are many barriers to closer collaboration. Each sector tends to prioritize its own approach over others, influencing the analytical frameworks it uses, the training that it provides its staff, and the targets by which it assesses its contribution. These priorities often compete for funding and the attention of decision-makers. Each sector's approach is also grounded in a different *theory of change* about how its policies and prescriptions will create the desired change at the local, national, regional and/or international level. One sector's *theory of*

change, or theory of how its intervention will lead to change in national or local institutions, may be incompatible with those of other sectors.

But, the prevention and preparedness communities share important common ground in their overall purpose and in the means that they employ to achieve this purpose. All actors involved in this consultation process believed that this common ground provided enormous potential for developing a more comprehensive and mutually reinforcing approach to prevention. The overall purpose of the various communities that focus on prevention is to help societies along the path towards sustainable development by managing and reducing the risk of violence or disaster. All of the various communities aim to do this by strengthening the capacity of communities, civil society, and governments to understand and reduce the threat of disaster and violence over the long term.

It is important not to place one approach above another, but to embrace the diversity that different perspectives offer. If different sectors are to reinforce one another, then they need to encourage donors and other decision-makers to support forward-thinking programming that focuses on building the capacity of the state and society to manage and mitigate all kinds of risk.⁹

4. Entry point for a new prevention agenda

In spite of the challenges, there are significant opportunities to develop a more coherent approach to prevention that connects New York, Geneva and 'at-risk' contexts. Several key entry points are listed below.

- **Focus on 'bottom-up coherence'**.¹⁰ The linkages between the different prevention approaches are most obvious when examined in the light of a specific at-risk context. The solution is not to create one comprehensive international strategy that integrates all potential actors under one common approach. Instead, the solution is to create opportunities and incentives for these actors to collaborate at the field level to address risk proactively and sustainably. But, if international actors are to work together with national actors on prevention, donors and other decision-makers need to establish incentives for proactive and forward-thinking responses.
- **Integrate a comprehensive prevention agenda into the implementation of the existing normative consensus and on-going agenda-setting processes.** Various normative documents and current work processes (i.e., the Post-Millennium Development Goal process, New Deal implementation, Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals, the Global Factors influencing conflict and fragility, the Geneva Declaration, the 2012 Report of the Secretary-General on Peacebuilding, and the Hyogo Framework for Action) emphasise the importance of local ownership and leadership in peacebuilding, statebuilding, (armed) violence reduction, and the reduction of disaster risk. These normative frameworks, which include significant participation of actors from at-risk contexts, provide an important opportunity for the advancement of a more comprehensive approach to prevention.
- **Develop a set of 'prevention principles'**. The broader prevention community could gain from developing a 'Hyogo Framework', referring to the common set of operational principles developed for the Disaster Risk and Reduction community.¹¹ This framework would include a set of principles that govern

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programming for the conflict and violence prevention communities and integrate an understanding of the potential relationship to disaster preparedness. Such an effort could help to update the 1992 *Agenda for Peace* and should reflect the contributions of a wide variety of perspectives and practices.

- **Strengthen our knowledge of effective cross-sectorial operations.** We still have limited knowledge of how best to help societies manage a high risk of violence and disaster. Further research and guidance are needed to create the tools and approaches that will enable effective cross-sectorial interventions.

5. Catalyzing action

Geneva-based policy communities may have a particular role to play in advancing a broader prevention agenda. Housing the humanitarian, development, mediation, peacebuilding, conflict prevention, environmental security, food security, disaster risk reduction, violence prevention and armed violence reduction communities, Geneva supports an unparalleled breadth of preventive activity. All such communities have an important role to play in helping countries prepare for disaster and address the root causes of violence and armed conflict; better coordinating these communities could serve as an impact multiplier.

There are several ways to move forward a comprehensive prevention agenda. For instance, Geneva-based prevention communities could help ensure a forward-thinking approach to at-risk contexts that is integrated into current high-level agenda setting processes, including the implementation of the New Deal, Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals, and the Post-Millennium Development Goal process.

A starting point for catalytic efforts could also be multi-stakeholder exchange and analytical work to better understand (a) what prevents preventive action within institutions and organizations, (b) how to develop strategies to strengthen incentives for preventive action, and (c) how to go about testing new implementation designs for cross-sectorial operations and 'bottom-up' coherence.

Geneva supports an unparalleled breadth of preventive activity

¹ K. Harris, D. Keen, T. Mitchell (2013) *When Disasters and Conflicts Collide: Improving the Links between Disaster Resilience and Conflict Prevention*. London: ODI. UNDP (2011) *Disaster-Conflict Interface: Comparative Experiences*. New York: UNDP-BCPR.

² Comment from Participant, *Gathering promising practices in the prevention field across institutions and sectors*, Geneva Peacebuilding Platform Event, 31 January 2013.

³ A. Wennmann (ed.) (2012) *20 Years of 'An Agenda for Peace': A New Vision for Conflict Prevention?* Paper 5. Geneva: Geneva Peacebuilding Platform.

⁴ B. Ganson and A. Wennmann (2012) *Operationalizing Conflict Prevention as Strong, Resilient Systems: Approaches, Evidence, Action Points*. Paper 3. Geneva: Geneva Peacebuilding Platform. B. Ganson and A. Wennmann (2012) *Confronting Risk, Mobilizing Action: A Framework for Conflict Prevention in the Context of Large-scale Business Investments*. Berlin: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

⁵ S. Campbell, A. Wennmann, N. White, 'Gathering promising practices in the prevention field across institutions and sectors'. Unpublished research report commissioned by the Swiss Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 20 February 2013.

⁶ See Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's focus on prevention in his *Five-Year Action Agenda* (2012). Accessible online: <http://www.un.org/sg/priorities/prevention>.

⁷ *Gathering Promising Practices in the Prevention Field Across Institutions and Sectors* (31 January 2013), Exploring Entry Points for a New Prevention Agenda Between New York, Geneva, and the Field (3 December 2012). Interviews were held mainly in Geneva from 14-29 January 2013 and included representatives from the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Bank, the Geneva Declaration, and the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

⁸ Report of the Secretary General (1992) *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peacekeeping*, New York: United Nations

⁹ This is in line with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's focus on prevention in his *Five-Year Action Agenda* (2012). Accessible online: <http://www.un.org/sg/priorities/prevention>.

¹⁰ S. Campbell, "(Dis)Integration, Incoherence and Complexity in UN Post-Conflict Interventions," *International Peacekeeping* 15, no. 4 (2008): 556-569.

¹¹ *Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters*. Accessible online: <http://www.unisdr.org/we/coordinate/hfa>.

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About the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform

The Geneva Peacebuilding Platform is an inter-agency network and knowledge hub that connects the critical mass of peacebuilding actors, resources, and expertise in Geneva and worldwide. Founded in 2008, the Platform has a mandate to facilitate interaction on peacebuilding between different institutions and sectors, and to advance new knowledge and understanding of peacebuilding issues and contexts. It also plays a creative role in building bridges between International Geneva, New York, and peacebuilding activities in the field. The Platform's network comprises more than 2,500 peacebuilding professionals and over 60 institutions working on peacebuilding or in peacebuilding contexts. <http://www.gpplatform.ch>.

The Geneva Peacebuilding Platform is a joint project of four institutions: The Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding (CCDP) of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies; the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP); Interpeace; and the Quaker United Nations Office, Geneva (QUNO).

Platform publications on the broader prevention agenda

- B. Ganson and A. Wennmann (2012) *Confronting Risk, Mobilizing Action: A Framework for Conflict Prevention in the Context of Large-scale Business Investments*. Berlin: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.
- A. Wennmann (ed.) (2012) *20 Years of 'An Agenda for Peace': A New Vision for Conflict Prevention?* Paper 5. Geneva: Geneva Peacebuilding Platform.
- B. Ganson and A. Wennmann (2012) *Operationalizing Conflict Prevention as Strong, Resilient Systems: Approaches, Evidence, Action Points*. Paper 3. Geneva: Geneva Peacebuilding Platform.
- B. Ganson (2011) *Business and Conflict Prevention: Towards a Framework for Action*. Paper 2. Geneva: Geneva Peacebuilding Platform.
- A. Eskandarpour and A. Wennmann (2011) *Strengthening Preventive Diplomacy: The Role of Private Actors*. Geneva: CCDP and Geneva Peacebuilding Platform.

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