

1

INVEST IN ENGAGEMENT WITH LOCAL POPULATIONS BEFORE YOU NEED TO ENGAGE – ESPECIALLY THOSE OFTEN LEFT OUT OF IMPORTANT POLICY DISCUSSIONS

The culture of discussion and the necessary linguistic frames may not exist. Young people and women may not be used to being asked their opinions. The way UN agencies think about these issues – reintegration, disarmament, prevention - may not map onto the way they are understood and conceptualized at the local level. Now that “Localisation” is a key focus of international humanitarian, peace, and development agendas, the international community needs to invest more in laying the groundwork before a pressing need for engagement arises. In conflict-affected spaces, this is often more challenging because of the erosion of social cohesion and civil society, population movements, and insecurity. Investing in ‘groundwork’ in these settings would promote more meaningful UN engagement, consultation, and partnership.

APPROACHES TO PREVENTION NEED TO BE HOLISTIC

The factors that contribute to conflict vulnerability are interwoven, and the fact the international community has chosen to divide up certain policy issues into silos (e.g., humanitarian, development, and peace) doesn’t change their interdependence. Issues contributing to conflict are multifaceted and cannot be removed from their wider historical, cultural and political roots. For example, the confluence of climate change, state weakness or mismanagement, displacement, and unemployment (particularly for youth in countries with youth bulges) can interact in a way that can tip states into conflict. To be successful, prevention efforts need to contextualize issues ‘in the round’ and address causes in a multifaceted way. This includes recognizing that people are impacted by certain factors differently. As [MEAC’s research](#) has found, certain factors (e.g., education, economic conditions) impact the likelihood of armed group involvement of boys, girls, women, and men to different degrees and in different ways. This reality means that prevention needs to not only be holistic but also tailored to the specific needs of different populations

2

3

PREVENTION EFFORTS NEED TO BE EVIDENCE-BASED

It is extremely difficult to say with confidence what works when it comes to prevention (so beware of bold claims!) But it is essential to ensure that prevention efforts are grounded in empirical evidence, based on sound and well-interrogated assumptions, and rigorously assessed to ensure they do no harm. This requires greater investment in action research as part of the programming process. While multi-method research is the gold standard, the international community needs to go beyond quantitative and qualitative work to include other approaches, specifically participatory research. Participatory methods help ensure faulty assumptions don’t drive research and provide the opportunity to co-design policy recommendations that resonate locally. Participatory research requires funding, time and a leap of faith to incorporate, especially given the current focus on quantitative data.

EFFECTIVE PREVENTION DOESN’T START WITH ONE-YEAR, LAST-MINUTE, AND INCONSISTENT BUDGET ALLOCATIONS

Current short-term funding cycles for humanitarian, peacebuilding, and conflict response work are not bringing about the longer-term shift needed to sustainably build peace and prevent conflict onset (or resurgence). While talk of “prevention” is everywhere, real investment in prevention activities is rare. For organizations on the ground in contexts vulnerable to conflict outbreaks, it would be hugely beneficial to be able to apply for long-term funding to holistically address factors that could lead to conflict.

4