

**CIVIL SOCIETY – UN PREVENTION PLATFORM**

# **Advancing Prevention Across UN Sectors and Institutions: Collective Pathways for Effective Prevention**

**Key Findings from the 2020 Discussion Series  
on Prevention**

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## **ABOUT THE CIVIL SOCIETY-UN PREVENTION PLATFORM**

The Civil Society-UN Prevention Platform aims to support the UN's prevention agenda by strengthening coordination and information sharing between civil society organizations (CSOs) and the UN at all levels, and through close collaboration with the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA). The Platform seeks to identify concrete and practical steps to enhance the UN and CSOs' collective capacity to carry out preventive work. This includes sharing examples of good practices, identifying areas of potential collaboration, and supporting UN efforts to bridge early warning and early action. The group considers prevention broadly as encompassing inclusive activities aimed at addressing the root causes of conflict and supporting societies in preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation, and recurrence of conflict, at both structural and operational levels. The Platform believes that the UN's work on prevention would benefit from systematic engagement with civil society and that the inclusion of diverse civil society expertise is crucial to achieving sustainable peace and development. The Civil Society-UN Prevention Platform is co-facilitated by the Quaker United Nations Office and The Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict in conjunction with the UN - DPPA, and a coordinating group of the following organizations: African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes, Center on International Cooperation – New York University, Conciliation Resources, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, Social Science Research Council, and The Network of Religious and Traditional Peacemakers. The Platform also relies on an extensive network of global expert CSOs.

## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

African Union (AU)	Peace and Development Advisors (PDAs)
Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)	Peacebuilding Commission (PBC)
Central African Republic (CAR)	Peacebuilding Fund (PBF)
Civil society organizations (CSOs)	Regional Monthly Reviews (RMRs)
Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA)	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)
Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)	Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)
Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)	United Nations (UN)
Election Monitoring, Analysis, and Mitigation (EMAM)	UN Country Team (UNCT)
European Partnership for Children and Youth in Peacebuilding (EYPB)	UN Development Programme (UNDP)
European Union (EU)	UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)
European Youth Advocacy Team (E-YAT)	UN Secretary-General (SG)
Executive Office of the Secretary-General (EOSG)	UN Security Council (UNSC)
Gender and Youth Promotion Initiative (GYPI)	West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP)
Human Rights Council (HRC)	Women, Peace, and Security (WPS)
International Development Research Centre (IDRC)	Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF)
Organization of American States (OAS)	Women's Situation Rooms (WSRs)
Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA)	World Food Programme (WFP)
	Youth, Peace and Security Agenda (YPS)

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## INTRODUCTION

The effort of the United Nations (UN) to prevent the outbreak of violence and avert conflict and crises encompasses a diverse range of arrangements, approaches, and actions.<sup>1</sup> UN Secretary-General António Guterres' vision on prevention encourages long-term commitment to sustainable development and peace, partnerships, and preventive diplomacy.

In recent decades, the global demographic shift, coupled with technological, political, social, and economic shifts, and now the COVID-19 pandemic, have exacerbated threats to peace on an unprecedented scale and challenged the capacity of the international community to prevent violence and maintain international peace. Since 2010, the number of major violent conflicts has tripled, and a growing number of lower intensity conflicts have escalated.<sup>2</sup> Conflict has been further compounded by mass migration and refugee flows (with the highest numbers of forcibly displaced peoples on record<sup>3</sup>) and the impact of climate change.

These realities have required the various actors within the UN System to become more creative in their individual and joint prevention efforts to manage risks, build resilience, and avert the outbreak of conflict, leading to a number of transformative changes on prevention in the past few decades. (See Table 1).

### Table 1: The key shifts in prevention since the early 90s:

- **From linear to comprehensive conflict prevention:** Increased focus on peace and security work in diverse geographical contexts (beyond countries with the highest fragility) changed the focus of prevention from crisis prevention toward prioritizing operational, structural, and systemic prevention in all contexts.
- **From allocated to cross-cutting programming:** Senior UN leadership have expressed a commitment to pursue a cross-pillar and whole-of-system approach to prevention.
- **From limited to expand prevention capacities:** Numerous UN initiatives have expanded prevention expertise at the headquarters, as well as the sub-regional and field levels.
- **From national support to community engagement:** Over the years, the UN has made explicit commitments to engage with civil society, providing political and operational support, and to develop and implement inclusive global policies and strategies on prevention.

Against this background, the Civil Society - UN Prevention Platform facilitated a series of discussions in 2020 that brought together Member States, UN agencies, and international and local civil society. The series titled, UN Prevention Across Sectors and Institutions: Pathways for Effective Prevention, created learning spaces to assess ongoing prevention efforts and foster candid discussions to advance prevention.

These discussions took place in the early months of the COVID-19 crisis, encouraging the participants to reflect on how the pandemic challenged ongoing prevention efforts.

This report outlines good practices, key challenges, and recommendations for each thematic area addressed during the series: 1) UN leadership on prevention; 2) the role of youth in prevention; 3) gender approaches in prevention; 4) mediation; 5) climate change; and 6) upstream prevention. The key points raised during these meetings are reflected in this report, but do not represent the opinions of the Platform or its co-facilitators.

This paper specifically underscores the importance of dialogue and engagement between civil society and the UN. While civil society convenes “frank” and often politically controversial dialogues, civil society experts meaningfully contribute to the UN prevention efforts through analysis, coordination, and information-sharing at all levels and across the system. This partnership needs to be nurtured further to respond to the growing challenges to prevention.

## WHAT IS NEEDED FOR EFFECTIVE PREVENTION?

As a result of joint learning,<sup>1</sup> the Civil Society-UN Prevention Platform identified six core priorities to drive progress on prevention:

- 1. PROACTIVE AND FORWARD-LOOKING MULTILATERAL LEADERSHIP.**
- 2. REINFORCING THE ROLE OF YOUTH.**
- 3. TRANSFORMATIVE GENDER APPROACHES.**
- 4. ADVANCING INCLUSIVE MEDIATION.**
- 5. INTEGRATING CLIMATE-SENSITIVE ANALYSIS ACROSS SECTORS AND INSTITUTIONS.**
- 6. EARLIER, INTEGRATED, CONTEXT-SPECIFIC, EVIDENCE-BASED, AND SUSTAINED EFFORTS OVER TIME.**

The following sections of this report expand on these six themes as identified by UN actors, Member States, and civil society.

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<sup>1</sup> The methodology for the discussion series included the following steps: 1) organizing inclusive consultations to identify the key thematic areas on prevention that require further inquiry; 2) forming working groups of experts to develop the concept note and questions, as well as identify the critical experts for each thematic area; 3) convening off-the-record discussions supported by the interventions of key experts; 4) Bringing together the representatives of Member States, the UN, regional organizations and civil society, the series convened 160 participants from approximately 30 countries.



# 1: PROACTIVE AND FORWARD-LOOKING MULTILATERAL LEADERSHIP IS CRITICAL FOR PREVENTION

The UN Charter<sup>4</sup> underscores the centrality of conflict prevention as a responsibility of the whole UN system. Since taking office in 2017, UN Secretary-General António Guterres continues to uphold a “strategic commitment to a culture of prevention”<sup>5</sup> ensuring that the UN does “everything that it can to help countries avert the outbreak of crises” and “save future generations from the scourge of war.”<sup>6</sup> To improve the delivery of its prevention mandate across the system, the UN has made sweeping changes to the development system, the management system, and the peace and security architecture.<sup>7</sup>

## Good Practices: Developing prevention tools and capacities

**Informed and strategic early responses are possible when cross-pillar early warning data collection is complemented by rapid channels of analysis and dissemination.** The UN system, both at the Headquarter and field levels, gathers context-specific data based on development, human rights, climate, peace, gender, and other relevant indicators, which it then analyzes to inform action. The UN’s Regional Monthly Reviews (RMRs), for example, systematize the information flow from UN Country Teams (UNCTs) to senior leadership at UN headquarters and in the Secretariat, which then informs responses to rapidly evolving situations.

**Dedicated personnel mandated to advance policy coherence promotes effective prevention.** Peace and Development Advisors (PDAs), deployed by the UNDP-DPPA Joint Programme for Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention,<sup>8</sup> for example, serve as a crucial link in providing political and development analysis while supporting national governments in preventing and responding to crises.

**Regional prevention strategies and approaches mobilize contextualized support that can prevent and stop crises from escalating.** At the headquarter level, the UN Reforms activated the DPPA single regional structure with three Assistant Secretaries-Generals working closely together to assist countries in preventing or reducing conflicts and political violence.<sup>9</sup> The AU-UN partnership provide platforms to support prevention initiatives at the regional level, such as the “Silencing the Guns” Initiative,<sup>10</sup> which promotes non-violent and inclusive prevention, management, and resolution of conflicts in Africa. The ECOWAS’ Early Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN) is an effective monitoring tool for conflict prevention and decision-making in West Africa that is designed and operationalized in strong partnership with local civil society.

**The UN leadership has recognized the significant contributions of civil society to prevention and the importance of strengthening partnerships between the UN and civil society at all levels to prevent conflict.** The UN Secretary-General has recently issued the UN Community Engagement Guidelines for Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace<sup>11</sup> to support UN field presences in developing strategies to engage

communities in sustaining peace, and to provide operational guidance on how to effectively engage with civil society.

### **Key Challenges: Where additional capacities are needed for stronger leadership on prevention**

**Resident coordinators and other UN field presences** have limitations in achieving the full potential of their roles. First, the multiple and overlapping reporting lines and existing channels of communication between national, regional and HQ level actors prevent a comprehensive exchange. Second, the offices of resident coordinators lack reliable financing or sustainable staffing, which translates to valuable time being spent on logistics and fundraising rather than on programming.

### **Recommendations: What can be done to strengthen leadership for prevention?**

**Member States should support cross-pillar cooperation by advancing prevention through their respective intergovernmental engagements.** All Member States can advance and support prevention action across their engagement in different UN spaces, including but not limited to the UN Security Council (UNSC), Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), Human Rights Council (HRC), and Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), to strengthen prevention within the scope of their mandate.

**At the operational level, the UN should develop guidelines for UNCTs on joint risk analysis that outlines how to translate findings into coherent, actionable plans aligned with existing national priorities.** The channels of communication between the UN field presences, regional offices, and at headquarters should leverage this information to facilitate the exchange of good practices and support policy frameworks that reflect local realities.

**Systematic and formalized engagement with local actors and civil society should be a priority across the UN system.** The recently launched Community Engagement Guidelines on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace<sup>12</sup> and the Civic Space Initiative<sup>13</sup>, for example, serve as tools to foster systematization of relationships, including by establishing civil society advisory boards, dedicated positions of civil society liaisons, and other relevant measures. In this, Member States and the UN leadership need to maintain the momentum by encouraging and, where relevant, championing the implementation of these initiatives.

**The deployment of additional UN personnel with a specific prevention mandate is critical.** This includes, though not limited to, increasing the number of human rights, peace and development, protection, and gender advisors in the UNCT's settings, and ensuring there is sustained funding for their positions. Member States and the donor community should mobilize long-term funding for such positions.

## 2: REINFORCING THE ROLE OF YOUTH IN PREVENTION TRANSFORMS THE NARRATIVE AND PRACTICE.

As building blocks of the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) Agenda, UNSC Resolutions 2250<sup>14</sup> (2015), 2419<sup>15</sup> (2018) and 2535<sup>16</sup> (2020) formally recognize youth as agents of change in promoting international peace and preventing violence and conflict. The 2018 YPS Progress Study<sup>17</sup> also highlights that the Agenda represents the shift from risk-based, reactionary approaches to building resilience and investing in the upside of youth in all its diversities

### **Good Practices: Amplifying innovative approach and expertise of young people**

**National and political leadership translates the rhetoric of the importance of youth leadership into concrete action.** Member States' are advancing the YPS Agenda through developing national action plans and roadmaps, launching youth ministries and youth parliaments, and holding online consultations with youth networks. For example, in 2017, Iraq's youth parliament<sup>18</sup> held its first session, contributing to building a free and democratic space.

**Meaningful participation of youth requires systemized and institutionalized mechanisms for engagement.** The African Union (AU) and European Union (EU) have built partnerships with youth through activities such as the AU-EU Youth Cooperation Hub and the annual Africa-Europe Youth Summits. Civil society is facilitating regional platforms such as the European Youth Advocacy Team (E-YAT)<sup>19</sup> to build partnerships and cooperation at the institutional level with governments and support national and grassroots level implementation of the YPS Agenda.<sup>20</sup>

**Building capacities for young actors to advance prevention has included exploring with them opportunities to benefit from the relevant UN resolutions and policy processes.** Young peacebuilders engage effectively with decision-makers on equal footing. Grassroots organizations in Liberia, for example, have worked to educate youth on the YPS Agenda to effectively connect with and contribute to international and national dialogues and initiatives.<sup>21</sup>

**Continued positive contributions of youth in response to the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>22</sup> have had a meaningful impact.** Young people have taken the responsibility to fill the gaps exposed by the pandemic by providing essential foods, services, and care for their communities and acting as credible messengers for public health and safety information.<sup>23</sup>

**Adequate and sustainable financing for youth initiatives supports the capacities of young actors to engage in peace beyond voluntarism.** The UN Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) Youth Promotion Initiative provides catalytic funding for innovative projects focused on both gender and youth empowerment in peacebuilding initiatives.<sup>24</sup> In Kyrgyzstan, the PBF funding has allowed young

peacebuilders to use innovative approaches to peacebuilding work, such as participatory video platforms.<sup>25</sup>

## **Key Challenges: Setbacks for youth leadership**

**Youth are seen as a monolithic group without understanding the array of qualities, capacities, and priorities of individual groups and actors.** In the eyes of young people, some national youth policies are shaped around what are narrowly assumed to be youth issues, such as unemployment, HIV-AIDS, and crime. The 2018 YPS Progress study<sup>26</sup> reported that the categorization of youth issues is often associated with misleading or trivialized assumptions. Such assumptions include the misconception that sports, arts or technology are the primary, and possibly only, vehicles of young people's participation and expression.

**Access to appropriate funding avenues for youth organizations continues to be a challenge at the local level.** Most youth-led organizations operate with limited funding, with 49% operating under USD 5,000 per annum. Attempts to make funding sources more age-inclusive (such as the PBF's Youth Promotion Initiative) are exemplary, but not always accessible for young peacebuilders because of its eligibility criteria, requiring youth organizations to show their operational budget of above \$300,000 per annum for the last three years.

**Civic spaces for young people are at risk, especially in the digital field.** Online exchange and communication facilitated through social media platforms are sometimes perceived by national governments as threats to the security of the state or state-led policies, resulting in increased limitations on the freedom of expression. When young people are unable to express their perspectives, grievances, and experiences on these virtual platforms, it limits access to supportive environments to initiate peacebuilding activities.

## **Recommendations: What is needed to uplift the voices of youth in prevention?**

**Member States, UN actors, and other stakeholders should identify and operationalize synergies between YPS and other UN Agendas.** For instance, each Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) is undeniably a youth SDG, and actors at all levels should embed the YPS Agenda within actions towards the 2030 Agenda.

**Exchange of strategies between Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and YPS experts is critical to strengthen the implementation of both Agendas.** Both are centered around the issue of inclusion and require a 'whole of system, whole of society' approach. Being an earlier Agenda of the UN Security Council, the WPS Agenda has already set-up an infrastructure around it that youth advocates could explore further to inform their action.

**Sustainable and adequate funding for youth initiatives at all levels is needed to drive political aspiration and policy for effective implementation and delivery.** This includes investing in capacity

development, including targeted training and platforms that strengthen youth involvement. The donor community should bolster and explore new innovative funding tools, funding streams and pooled funds to allow for the distribution of small grants to young peacebuilders at the grassroots level.

**The adoption, implementation, and sustainability of human and financial capacities to deliver on national action plans is critical to advancing the YPS Agenda and ensuring youth inclusion across the peace continuum.** This practice increases systematic collaboration and partnership in which youth are considered essential and equal actors not only by governments but by all actors that work on prevention in a specific context.

### 3: TRANSFORMATIVE GENDER APPROACHES SUPPORT PREVENTIVE ACTION ACROSS THE CONFLICT CYCLE.

Transformative gender approaches are key elements of prevention and have further proven to be so during the COVID-19 pandemic. Articulated through the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) resolutions of the UN Security Council<sup>27</sup> and the work of the feminist movement,<sup>28</sup> this transformative approach to prevention calls for a decisive contextualized action to address political, economic, and social root causes of violence embedded in power disparities. Prioritizing the role of women in peace and security efforts, while ensuring gendered analysis, can uplift prevention and sustain peace in the long term.

#### **Good Practices: Effective ways to strengthen the role of women in prevention**

**Policy shifts and practices continue supporting and uplifting opportunities for women to lead in prevention.** The UN Secretary-General works to ensure all his reports, statements, and briefings include gender analysis and sex-disaggregated data. An increase in the number of women's advisory boards<sup>29</sup> to advise on specific peace processes is another good practice. More than 130 Member States adopted electoral quota policies. In Costa Rica and Mexico, for example, such practices brought both countries closer to gender parity.<sup>30</sup>

**Systematic analysis of women's experiences at the early stages of crisis has informed programming and policy priorities at all levels for better peace outcomes.** For example, UN Women conducted research<sup>31</sup> to identify some of the COVID-19 impacts within the first months of the outbreak. West Africa Network for Peacebuilding's (WANEP) Election Monitoring, Analysis and Mitigation (EMAM) system<sup>32</sup> includes gender-specific indicators and considers gender dimensions during all levels of training.

**Providing adequate funding for local women-led organizations is a key investment in prevention.** The Women's Peace & Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) – a fund designed to increase women's participation and leadership in conflict contexts – provides flexible funding to local women's groups and civil society organizations working in conflict situations, such as a COVID-19 Rapid Response window.<sup>33</sup> The Nordic-Baltic States are similarly committed to providing flexible financing for women-led organizations and gender equality through their Women's Rights and Gender Equality Grant Scheme.<sup>34</sup>

#### **What is Transformative Gender Analysis?**

Transformative gender analysis recognizes inequalities between women and men, the implications of these inequalities, and assists in identifying the root causes of these inequalities and addressing resultant power gaps. Socially-imposed roles and restrictions placed on women hinder their ability to prevent conflicts

and build peace, and further exacerbate already high levels of gendered violence and grievances of women affected by conflict. The range of women's roles and their identities must be comprehensively represented in prevention efforts. Gender analysis is intersectional and addresses the different and overlapping factors that result in discrimination and exclusion such as ethnicity, religion, culture, age, disability, or gender identity. Supporting women and women-led organizations by understanding women's needs and experiences when creating and implementing policies, particularly through the direct inclusion of women in policy processes will further a transformative gender approach to prevention. The equal and meaningful participation of women at all levels, including in leadership positions, will help address gender inequalities and mobilize inclusive action for prevention.

**Creating safe spaces for women to connect and exchange has proven to be critical to ensuring their collective power to prevent conflict and violence.** National Peace Hut Women of Liberia<sup>35</sup> is an example of intentional safe spaces designated for women to engage in mediating local disputes, preventing gender-based violence, and negotiating and collaborating with authorities. Another example is the Women's Situation Rooms (WSRs) in Nigeria, the DRC and Cameroon, among other countries, developed to empower women to be leading forces for democratic and peaceful elections.

### **Key Challenges: Obstacles to advancing transformative gender approaches to prevention**

**The use of technology remains a gap** that affects local women peacebuilders. There are approximately 443 million "unconnected" adult women in the world and in some contexts, the number of "unconnected" adolescent girls is much higher.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, women, on a global average, have less understanding of technology, fewer digital skills, less presence on online platforms, and are less likely to own mobile or technological devices.<sup>37</sup>

Transformative gender analysis is understood and applied mostly within the WPS Agenda, with **limited efforts to integrate this analysis in other areas of work.** While gender analysis has the potential to support the identification of root causes of violence and prevent the escalation of conflict, this analysis is often ignored. As a result, securitized responses to instability are prioritized and women are often framed as victims.

### **Recommendations: Supporting the role of women in prevention**

**The systematic incorporation of gender analysis and data into prevention efforts would encourage more substantive prevention discussions and action.** UN actors could consider consulting with women prevention experts about the extent to which existing data collection incorporate the experiences of diverse women. All UN entities, as well as Member States, should take initiative to ensure that this data meaningfully informs decision-making.

**Meaningful participation of local women experts at all levels must be a priority to ensure that decision-making is inclusive of women's experiences and priorities.** This means going beyond one-time, ad-hoc consultations. Systematic and institutionalized engagement of women across all levels via women advisory groups or joint civil society-the UN working groups, can shape the direction of policy and programming.

**Predictable, accessible, sustainable and flexible funding for women's civil society organizations is essential for prevention.** This can include providing multi-year and core funding rather than project-restricted funds. Directing funding to local and national-level efforts is critical to ensuring bottom-up, grassroots and independent advocacy. One way of dispersing funding is through national embassies.



## 4: ADVANCING INCLUSIVE MEDIATION RESULTS IN BETTER PREVENTION.

Successful mediation in order to build sustainable peace requires integrating diverse societal perspectives into peace processes. Mediation actors at the UN, regional, national and local levels continue to adapt their approaches and capacities to meet the changing nature of crisis, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Effective peace processes which support mediation efforts, however, do not mean including all possible parties, but rather making informed decisions about who should be included in what spaces and how.

### Good Practices: Ensuring progress in mediation

**Approaching peace processes in a multi-track, multi-stage way has allowed diverse processes to intersect and complement each other.** A comprehensive understanding of mediation moves beyond the idea of an agreement around a table. The Special Envoy for Yemen reported that Yemeni leaders asked themselves what peace would look like. The Yemeni leaders viewed peace as a combination of political and security arrangements, including an end to fighting and a rebuilding of both the society and the economy. Peace processes, as such, must begin with inclusive conflict analysis.<sup>38</sup>

**Regional organizations and sub-regional partnerships can serve as credible actors in leading mediation efforts.** They can closely monitor ongoing situations, better understand conflict-sensitive dynamics, and contribute to the necessary conditions for dialogue and the implementation of mediation efforts. This in turn increases their credibility as mediators. The AU has worked with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in Mali to ease tensions between the government, trade unions, and civil society. The AU-ECOWAS task force also coordinates cooperation in other countries in or emerging from conflict in Africa.<sup>39</sup>

**Local-level mediation is well placed to build buy-in and local ownership for national processes and bolster resilient and sustainable peace agreements.** As national-level processes often stall, grassroots mediation provides avenues for negotiations, security arrangements, de-escalation processes, sharing resources, and opportunities to co-exist after conflict. The AU launched FemWise, a network of grassroots African women mediators working on the ground to support conflict prevention and mediation in the context of the African Peace and Security Architecture.

**Growing access to technology opens digital mediation frontiers for inclusive participation.**

DPPA's Digital Technologies and Mediation Toolkit<sup>40</sup> and the Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation<sup>41</sup> outline key challenges and opportunities. The Group of Friends of Mediation<sup>42</sup> also focuses on understanding the roles of new technologies in peace and mediation, especially as tools for enabling the inclusion of women and youth.

## Key Challenges: Hurdles to inclusive mediation

**Multi-party, multi-stage processes are inherently complicated.** It may be challenging to immediately understand different mechanisms related to each process and how they can build more resilience and sustainable peace. For example, in the case of Yemen, where some progress has been seen since 2011 with regards to a nation-wide ceasefire, the process was complicated by differences in political parties' interests and expectations.<sup>43</sup>

### What does an inclusive peace process mean?

Selecting appropriate actors for peace processes is **best determined by the capacities and perspectives of actors and the context of the process.** For instance, if national actors are unavailable for mediation due to responding to COVID-19, others such as religious leaders could step in to support community dialogues. Similarly, high level, mid-level, and grassroots leaders each have a comparative advantage in contributing to different processes and spaces. These advantages need to be identified and leveraged to sustain peace.

**Parties to conflict sometimes perceive biases and incapacity amongst civil society, including women and youth groups.** This results in the perpetual exclusion of local mediators in peace processes at local, national, and international levels. As such, the work that local mediators networks play by contributing to the 'people-centered – bottom-up' perspective is often missing in state-centric dialogue.<sup>44</sup> It is, however, important to acknowledge that civil society can also be biased and politicized. As such, it becomes even more important to include diverse perspectives to foster buy-in, reconciliation, and a holistic approach to mediation.

## Recommendations: Enhancing inclusive mediation approaches

**Member States, UN, and other mediation actors supporting processes should prioritize a a multi-track and multi-stage process to ensure the inclusion of key actors from all levels.** In this, all actors involved in peace processes should make quantifiable, time-sensitive commitments to ensure direct and meaningful participation of diverse civil society. actors also need to prioritize bringing together disjointed mediation efforts driven by external and internal actors.

**International and regional mediation actors should develop more targeted mediation strategies together with local mediators.** There has been increased recognition of the pitfalls of external "elite" designed mediation and calls for processes to be more receptive to local insights. Mediation depends on the context in which it takes place, with a variety of complex political, economic, social, and cultural processes,

which encourages context-specific analysis.

**Building capacities for dialogue and trust-building with communities during and after signing peace agreements is critical for prevention.** The UN and other external mediators should prioritize not only reaching peace agreements but also ensuring these agreements remain connected to local realities throughout their implementation. Initiatives to support peace education and local mediators' networks need to be scaled up and supported with dedicated funding.

**Mediators must take steps to address the digital gaps in mediation, particularly at the local level.** Some processes may require measures to combat the spread of disinformation, polarization of opinions, and promotion of hate speech. Member States and groups such as the Group of Friends of Mediation should work with the UN actors to draft guidelines for how national stakeholders could use online spaces for positive messaging and mobilization of supporters during peace and mediation processes.

## 5: INTEGRATING CLIMATE-SENSITIVE ANALYSIS ACROSS SECTORS AND INSTITUTIONS IS ESSENTIAL FOR CONFLICT PREVENTION.

Prevention requires the integration of climate-sensitive analysis rooted in local experiences across sectors through, but not limited to, the operationalization of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).<sup>45</sup> At the local level, civil society is best positioned to identify climate risks early. Civil society also plays a significant role in engaging policymakers with vulnerable communities most affected by the devastating impact of climate change in joint planning and action.

### Good Practices: Prioritizing climate-informed prevention

**Interagency partnerships have harnessed the new and abundant workstreams on climate security emerging throughout the UN system.** The UNDP-DPPA-UNEP Climate Security Mechanism is an interagency initiative aiming to leverage the unique capabilities of different agencies. It provides a conceptual approach and a tool for climate-related security risk assessment by designing early warning and risk prevention strategies and building up evidence to support climate security.

**Member States' leadership is critical to advance early action on climate change.** Member States formed the UN Security Council Informal Expert Group of Climate Security established to enable the Security Council to identify risks at an early stage and to act before conflicts break out or escalate.<sup>46</sup> Through the Group of Friends on Climate and Security, Member States also created a community of practice around climate security to accelerate the implementation of the Paris Agreement by raising ambition and engaging with public and private actors.<sup>47</sup> The normative developments have been visible in concrete national actions. Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Colombia, for example, have integrated approaches to peacebuilding and climate economics to mitigate continued deforestation.

**Climate security approaches are increasingly rooted in local solutions, insights, and priorities.**

Communities are acutely aware of the dynamics between climate change and security in their contexts. Communities and networks of civil society are forming solutions from the ground up. Indigenous women's groups in the Amazon, for example, partner with local groups to share best practices and solutions within their contexts and mobilize international attention.

### Key Challenges: Capacities needed to better integrate climate sensitive analyses

While the number of actors working on climate security issues has increased, there remains a **lack of coordination among climate experts**. To date, information sharing and discussions on climate security are done in an ad-hoc manner, with no dedicated forum for multi-stakeholder dialogue.

There remains varying levels of **hesitancy to elevate and discuss themes related to climate security by**

**some Member States**, often because of concerns related to securitization, sovereignty, national ownership and viewing the issue as outside of the mandate for relevant bodies. This reduces their ability to mitigate climate risks and can challenge multilateral systems working to address the impact of climate change on security, creating a gap which non-state actors may seek to fill. For example, Al-Shabaab has become a service provider, following severe droughts in Somalia in a space where the government cannot respond.<sup>48</sup>

## **Recommendations: Supporting climate sensitive approaches to prevention**

**Member States should create more flexible multi-stakeholder spaces for discussing climate security so that political sensitivities do not impede urgent action.** Multiple Member State bodies should bring stronger climate security considerations to relevant bodies, such as the Peacebuilding Commission and Security Council. In order for progress to be made on a global threat such as climate change, the dialogue needs to be more action-oriented and rooted in robust analytical data informed by local experiences.

**Discussions in political spaces should frame climate change through a positive prevention lens rather than a mitigation lens.** An evidence base for good practice in mitigating the effects of climate change at all levels need to be collected to inform a collective climate change prevention strategy.

**In advancing climate security across the UN system, leveraging the human rights framework and applying rights-based approaches to climate security is needed.** Climate security cuts across all sectors of the UN, requiring cross-pillar and inclusive methods. The UN Secretary-General's 2020 policy brief on COVID-19 and human rights<sup>49</sup> and his call to action on Human Rights illuminate how the protection of human rights can foster resilience in crises.

**National and international actors engaging in climate security issues should acknowledge the role local actors play to strengthen resilience.** Existing examples of engagement of local communities across other thematic areas should be documented and utilized to ensure meaningful and inclusive engagement of local actors in addressing the threats of climate change.

## 6: PREVENTION EFFORTS SHOULD HAPPEN EARLY, BE INTEGRATED, CONTEXT-SPECIFIC, EVIDENCE-BASED AND SUSTAINED OVER TIME.

The 2015 Report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO), the report of the Advisory Group of Experts on the 2015 peacebuilding architecture review, and the Global Study on Women Peace and Security<sup>50</sup> all argue that prevention must be prioritized to build lasting peace. Prevention must start with nuanced diagnostic examinations of complex context-specific conflict dynamics and evidence-based identification of root causes. Then, prevention strategies should be implemented to address several risk and resilience factors over the time.

### Good Practices: Understand and address the risk and resilience factors.

**Diagnostics at the core of upstream prevention programs are effective when they are based on context-specific analysis, including local knowledge.** Diagnostics should identify risk and resilience factors at local, national, and international levels. WANEP supports ECOWAS by providing verified information collected from communities and analyzed purposefully and strategically to prevent and minimize violence around elections in Cote D'Ivoire and Gambia,<sup>51</sup> for example.

**Conflict prevention strategies are effective when they are evidence-based.** Not every social injustice is a risk factor for violence. Context specific diagnostics should take risk factors that are more likely to lead to violence into account and conversely, the resilience factors that inhibit violence.

**Integrated upstream prevention strategies that address more than one risk factor are more effective.**

The World Food Programme (WFP) has found that food security is symbiotic to peace and prevention.<sup>52</sup> In Kyrgyzstan, a cross-border PBF project to irrigate the land has built cohesion between previously hostile communities, who found that over time, they were able to communicate with each other.

**Leveraging sources of resilience helps communities cope with crises and can lead to transformative change.** Communities are sources of resilience themselves. For instance, in South Sudan, local activists conducted a series of community consultations on COVID-19 to identify the key areas of concern within communities; in turn, they successfully developed locally-rooted recommendations on how to ensure prevention of the recurrence of violence and instability within those communities.<sup>53</sup>

### Key Challenges: What additional capacities are needed?.

**Funding for prevention is insufficient and short-term.** Upstream prevention is a long-term effort that aims to produce structural changes; it can take years or decades and face numerous setbacks. Funding is often too short-term, and it continues to be a challenge to generate funding for prevention.

**Donor-driven projects do not provide needed flexibility** to respond to interconnected risk factors present in specific contexts. Evidence shows that risk factors that create the potential for conflict to turn violent are multidimensional and can lead to a multitude of resulting outcomes. At the country level, a high concentration of risk factors can create violence among the most marginalized groups.<sup>54</sup> Current funding structures often do not enable joint projects to address overlapping risk factors.

**The lack of reliable data and the overwhelming complexity of issues** can cause further challenges for actors seeking to engage in evidence-based prevention. The emergence of violence cannot be traced back to one determining factor, as issues of violence are rooted in complex and overlapping causes and dynamics. The oversimplification of root causes and the lack of quality data often leads to ineffective prevention programs.

### **Recommendations: What are the next steps?**

**Sufficient, available, and sustainable funding is essential for successful prevention programming.** The inclusion of prevention priorities in national development plans may help ensure financial support for action and effective coordination among all key stakeholders. Such an approach would invite both national and international resources, particularly in the current global climate, where the UN is trying to align cooperation frameworks to the national development plans.

Effective prevention is not a simple matter of project-level fixes; **it requires the capacity to understand the underlying risk and resilience indicators of peace and efficient coordination mechanisms to address their interlinkages.** UN actors can support building this capacity by providing advice to Member States in terms of processes, ensuring technical support to address specific issues or risk factors, and providing capacity building.

## CONCLUSION: KEY FINDINGS

**To advance proactive and forward-looking multilateral leadership on prevention,** the UN and Member States should:

- Continue strengthening systematic, cross-pillar early warning data collection, analysis, and communication channels that inform action on prevention at all levels.
- Strengthen regional arrangements that provide localized support for prevention and de-escalation of violence.
- Increase dedicated personnel mandated to advance policy coherence and prevention.
- Systematize and, where possible, institutionalize community engagement at the country level through senior leadership.

**To develop transformative gender approaches to prevention,** the UN and Member States should:

- Support and uplift opportunities for women to lead in prevention at all decision-making levels and create safe spaces for women to connect, exchange and organize.
- Commit to systematic analysis of women's experiences in prevention at the early stages of crisis and create channels for this analysis to inform programming and policy priorities at all levels.
- Undertake deliberate steps to overcome a gender gap in the access to and use of technology.
- Identify and operationalize strategic synergies between the Women, Peace and Security agenda and other UN agendas.

**To ensure meaningful engagement of youth on prevention,** the UN and Member States should:

- Encourage and demonstrate by example national and institutional commitment to youth leadership, including through developing national action plans and roadmaps, and holding online consultations with youth networks.
- Create systemized and institutionalized mechanisms for meaningful participation of youth in prevention efforts, including the launch of youth ministries and youth parliaments.
- Recognize that youth are not a monolithic group and commit to understand the array of qualities, capacities, and priorities of individual groups and actors.
- Identify and operationalize strategic synergies between the Youth, Peace and Security agenda and other UN agendas.

**To advance inclusive mediation to prevent recurrence of conflict,** the UN and Member States should:

- Commit to approach peace processes in a multi-track, multi-stage way and encourage local level mediation.
- Engage regional organizations and sub-regional partnerships to lead mediation efforts where appropriate for the context.
- Explore opportunities to engage with digital mediation frontiers for positive messaging and mobilization of supporters during peace and mediation processes.
- Build capacities for dialogue and trust within communities.



**To integrate climate-sensitive analysis in preventing conflict**, the UN and Member States should:

- Develop robust analytical tools for understanding climate security resilience.
- Build a community of practice around climate security to accelerate prevention action on climate change.
- Incorporate local solutions, insights, and priorities in climate programming.
- Create more spaces for discussing and acting on opportunities that remain to prevent the further impact of climate change on peacebuilding and conflict.
- Leverage the human rights infrastructures and apply rights-based approaches to climate security.

**To develop and design effective conflict prevention strategies**, the UN and Member States should:

- Ensure that diagnostics and reliable cross-pillar data collection are at the core of upstream prevention programs; the diagnostics should highlight local, national, and (where relevant) international risk and resilience factors.
- Base data collection on academic research on violence and include local knowledge.
- Design integrated upstream prevention strategies that cut across sectors, including security, development, and human rights.
- Increase available, long-term flexible funding for prevention, which would enable joint projects to address numerous and often interconnected risk factors.
- Build capacity amongst the UN system and donors to undertake a whole of society approach to understanding the underlying drivers of violence.

## APPENDIX: THE 2020 DISCUSSION SERIES

\*\*\*The points made in this report should not be attributed to any one speaker or participant.

### **Event 1: 2020 Taking Stock of Prevention Progress Achieved and Lessons Learned**

- Held: February 19, 2020

#### Speakers:

- Michèle Griffin, Senior Policy Advisor in the office of Secretary-General Antonio Guterres
- Roselyn Akombe, Chief of Policy, Guidance and Learning in the Policy and Mediation Division, UNDP/PA
- Carmen Csernelhazi, Counsellor, Political Section, Delegation of the European Union to the UN

#### Discussants:

- Tatiana Carayannis, Director, Conflict Prevention and Peace Forum, Social Science Research Council
- Nina Tsikhistavi, Director, International Center on Conflict and Negotiation, Georgia

### **Event 2: Dialogue and Mutual Understanding: the Role of Young People in Preventing Conflict**

- Held: April 30, 2020

#### Speakers:

- Graeme Simpson, Principal Representative (NYC) and Senior Peacebuilding Adviser, Interpeace
- Marie Doucey, Associate Policy Officer, Secretariat on Youth, Peace and Security, UNFPA/PBSO
- Abel Learwellie, Director, Camp for Peace Liberia

#### Interventions:

- Laura Kkaltainen, Desk Officer, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Finland)
- Gatwal Gatkuoth, United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY)
- Cécile Mazzacurati, Secretariat on Youth, Peace and Security, UNFPA/PBSO

### **Event 3: Prevention and Implications of COVID-19: Learning from Transformative Gender**

#### Approaches

- Held: May 20, 2020

#### Speakers:

- Paivi Kannisto, Chief of Peace and Security, UN Women
- Madeleine Rees, Secretary General, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
- Queeneth Tawo, Programme Officer, Corporate Communication and Capacity Building, West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP Regional)

#### **Event 4: Strengthening Prevention Tools: Inclusive Approaches to Supporting Mediation**

- Held: June 26, 2020

##### Speakers:

- H.E. Frederic Gateretse-Ngoga, Head of Conflict Prevention and Early Warning Division, African Union
- Roxaneh Bazergan, Team Leader, Mediation Support Unit, Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs
- Katia Papagianni, Director for Policy and Mediation Support, Center for Humanitarian Dialogue
- Rasha Jarhum, Founder and Director of the Peace Track Initiative

#### **Event 5: Designing effective upstream prevention programs: Ensuring prevention is context-specific and anchored in evidence**

- Held: July 15, 2020

##### Speakers:

- Rachel Locke, Impact:Peace, University of San Diego
- Ana Glenda Tager, Alianza para la paz, Colombia
- Rebecca Richards, Strategy Development & Partnerships, WFP Rome

#### **Event 6: Advancing Prevention in the Era of Climate Change: Leveraging Climate and Conflict Sensitive Approaches**

- Held: July 29, 2020

##### Speakers:

- Catherine Wong, Climate and Security Risk Policy Specialist, United Nations Development Programme
- Lindsey Fielder Cook, Representative for Climate Change at the Quaker United Nations Office-Geneva
- Adriana Erthal Abdenur, Co-founder and Executive Director of Plataforma CIPÓ

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