

PRACTICE BRIEF: RESILIENCE AND PEACEBUILDING

USING RESILIENCE TO BUILD PEACE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The mainstream approach to peacebuilding is for the most part premised on finding solutions to fragility. As such, conflict analysis is the primary tool used to inform programmes and policies. Whilst a sound understanding of conflict dynamics, including root causes is necessary in order to develop an appropriate response, the fragility focus tends to overshadow the capacities and processes which are present, even in fragile contexts. Because even in the most challenging situations, there are individuals and communities acting to counter the effects and causes of conflict. Failure to take stock of these efforts can, and often does, undermine the effectiveness of peacebuilding interventions, warranting criticism that programmes and policies are too generic and not sufficiently context specific.

Based on Interpeace's experience with its [Frameworks for Assessing Resilience](#) programme (FAR) in Liberia, Guatemala and Timor-Leste, this brief proposes that using resilience assessments alongside conflict analyses can make peacebuilding initiatives more context-specific, more locally-owned and therefore more impactful. A resilience orientation offers an operational strategy for making peacebuilding more assertive about building peace via transformative processes as opposed to being solely a response to fragility. After explaining the specificities of the concept of resilience in relation to conflict and peace, this brief will look at the added value of using resilience to build peace.

WHAT DOES RESILIENCE MEAN IN THE CONTEXT OF PEACEBUILDING?

RESILIENCE IS TRANSFORMATIVE AND CUTS ACROSS ALL LEVELS OF SOCIETY

The causes of conflict are rarely only the result of external shocks and pressures but are also deeply entrenched in endogenous dynamics of power and exclusion. A resilience approach to peacebuilding gives particular importance to processes by which **societies collectively and peacefully transform relationships** to address the factors which enabled conflict to emerge in the first place. This transformative dimension evolves traditional interpretations of resilience where the emphasis is on bouncing back from an external shock.

Secondly, a society's resilience to violent conflict manifests at different levels and institutions of society, both horizontally - between individuals and groups, and vertically - between the population and institutions of the state. Moreover, the interrelationships between resilience capacities at different levels of society can significantly impact upon the overall peacebuilding outcome. While well-organized communities may have strong solidarity networks that allow them to cope with hardship or conflict, their strong cohesiveness can be built at the expense of other groups and of the wider social cohesion. The capacity of society as a whole to transform conflict drivers through constructive processes will be compromised if these networks are not engaged in relationships of trust with other communities and institutions of the state. It is therefore key to

engage in peacebuilding efforts that allow people to connect between different levels of social organisation and across social constituencies.

There are several examples of how disarticulations between different groups in society as well as between communities and the state can themselves be a source of conflict and violence. In Guatemala, our research found that indigenous communities are well organised and enjoy high levels of solidarity. This is an important resource that affirms their identity as a group and provides a sense of belonging. Moreover, the networks they form also contribute to their social capital, providing them with access to resources such as education and healthcare which they may not otherwise access through public institutions. Whilst this is no doubt a source of resilience for indigenous communities, it does raise the question of whether the strong bonds within the indigenous community benefits the overall social cohesion of the Guatemalan society. Through focus group discussions, it became apparent that the strengthening of bonds within indigenous groups sometimes led to entrenching mistrust in the state. The more organized, and the more autonomous they become from the state and its services, the likelihood of them engaging with and contributing to building state capacity, such as through taxes, decreases. As a result, indigenous groups become even more marginalised from the state. This is an example of how the inability to connect resilience capacities across levels – here between the community level and state level – can feed into conflict dynamics. There is thus a powerful case to be made for identifying informal leaders or intermediary institutions that can bridge the divide between the indigenous community and the state, so that the strong social cohesion within indigenous communities can be harnessed for greater peace at the society level.

Questions that need to be asked in order to avoid reinforcing the resilience of one group at the expense of another or of society at large include: What are the mechanisms for cooperation between actors on different levels? Are the policies that are being pursued on higher institutional levels in line with the coping strategies and efforts of people “on the ground”? How can cooperation be enhanced in order for efforts across groups, levels and institutions to be mutually reinforcing rather than undermining?

RESILIENCE DOES NOT AUTOMATICALLY TRANSLATE TO PEACE

The Guatemalan example highlighted above also demonstrates that resilience does not automatically translate to peace. Other examples have shown that the very same capacities that allow individuals or communities to overcome and transform conflict can be deployed to exclusionary and violent ends. In Timor-Leste, culture, religion, leadership, and law and security were identified as factors that make Timorese people and society resilient to conflict. At the same time, people also gave examples of how each of these factors have at times worked in ways which undermined peace, created tension and even produced violence. Referring to law for instance, people identified the constitution as the mother law that regulates relationships and thus maintains a certain social order. However, the law is also often co-opted and misused by those in power to pursue their own interests, eroding trust in the state and its legal institutions. There are also powerful illustrations of this in the phenomenon of youth gangs and in the sometimes sinister rather than benevolent forms of community policing. Whereas violent responses to petty crime or the phenomenon of violent youth gangs are not a contributing factor to peace, the organisational capacity and underlying solidarity which motivate communities to initiate their own system of security provision and young people to create a sense of group identity cannot be overlooked as a powerful source of resilience in the context of weak state institutions.

Recognising that **resilience is not unequivocally good but a neutral concept with the potential of bringing about both positive and negative outcomes** has important implications for the design of peacebuilding strategies. Thus, the careful analysis of which capacities have the potential to bring about peace, and which need to be mitigated should be an integral part of any resilience assessment. **Identifying negative manifestations of resilience - such as violent youth gangs – can inform peacebuilding strategies in particular ways.** Whereas a fragility-informed intervention would likely seek to stop such violent practices and dismantle these groups altogether, peacebuilding interventions informed by a resilience orientation will explore how to build on these existing capacities and solidarity networks while focusing on mitigating or eliminating the violent tactics employed.

WHAT IS THE ADDED VALUE OF APPLYING A RESILIENCE APPROACH TO PEACEBUILDING?

RESILIENCE FOSTERS NATIONAL OWNERSHIP

There is great consensus within the peacebuilding community as well as in related fields of practice that local ownership is crucial for the successful implementation of any effort to bring about sustainable processes of change towards peace and development. However, the starting point of mainstream approaches to peacebuilding interventions - conflict assessments that map the causes and drivers of conflict - may not be the most effective method of rallying this much needed national ownership. The basic idea of using a resilience assessment in complement to conflict analyses as the point of departure for designing and implementing peacebuilding strategies may be part of the solution. While awareness of the obstacles to peace cannot, and should not be overlooked, a balance needs to be struck between a focus on sources of fragility and a shared appreciation of existing capacities that can provide the way forward for a durable peace.

Solely focussing on societal fractures, institutional weaknesses and conflict drivers has the potential to create further unfavourable conditions ahead of the challenging task of advancing towards sustainable peace. Moreover, a fragility discourse, which focuses on divisive issues, is more likely to alienate policy makers, further eroding trust between governments and their populations. Conversely, a focus on what works, what brings and holds people together despite conflict, what capacities already exist and what strategies have been successfully used in the past, sets the stage for a positive and forward looking dialogue. Experience from all three pilot countries of the Interpeace's FAR programme - Liberia, Timor-Leste and Guatemala - show that engaging stakeholders in a dialogue focused on resilience can have a transformative impact and creates a space for building trust and empowering people. Throughout the programme consultations, stakeholders testified how the focus on resilience has helped them to become better aware of their existing strengths and capacities, both on the individual and societal levels and to think about creative ways of leveraging and strategically using these capacities towards peaceful ends.

RESILIENCE HAS A CONVENING POWER

Focusing on what works rather than solely on divisive issues has also proven an effective way of convening people across the conflict divide. While historical narratives may differ significantly and different views of what caused conflict to occur in the first place are often contested and highly political in post-war settings, people seem ready and willing to acknowledge their common strengths and assets as the basis for entering difficult conversations about divisive issues. The FAR programme has demonstrated that discussions focused on resilience rather than fractures can be more successful in bringing opposing parties to the table. In Guatemala, the programme managed to bring together civil society groups and representatives from the private sector to discuss socio-environmental conflicts. Prior to using a resilience approach, these groups had never before sat together to discuss the socioeconomic consequences of large-scale mining and energy production. This case illustrates how a focus on resilience helped converge these actors in a common discussion aimed at developing recommendations for how assets and capacities in the country can be strengthened in order to overcome socio-environmental conflicts. **The contributions of resilience in terms of raising the awareness of inherent strengths in combination with the potential of bringing together people from across former conflict divides holds the promise of greater shared local ownership and of peacebuilding efforts.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the Interpeace experience points to creative ways in which a resilience approach can add value to the design and implementation of peacebuilding strategies whilst also informing broader international policy debates:

- Peacebuilding practitioners engaged in the design and implementation of peacebuilding interventions, should complement the conflict analyses carried out at the outset of a programme cycle with a resilience assessment that maps out the existing capacities that exist at all levels of society, including when these have negative consequences.
- Peacebuilding actors need to pay attention to how different types of resilience capacities are expressed and utilized across different sectors and levels of society. Where disarticulations and discrepancies are found, efforts should be made to promote multi-level and multi-stakeholder dialogue to reinforce trust and social cohesion across levels. With a lack of systemic integration, ‘negative resilience’ might be strengthened.
- Peacebuilding programmes need to be designed such that expressions of negative resilience are met with strategies that aim to influence and incentivise the use of those resilience capacities towards positive ends rather than dismantle the groups from which such negative resilience emanates.

The FAR programme has demonstrated that resilience is indeed a useful addition to the peacebuilding approach with the potential to inform peacebuilding practice in ways that help prevent the onset and re-emergence of conflict and foster sustainable peace. Resilience strongly enhances the conflict prevention agenda and presents an added value to the international community. While an assessment of resilience aims at influencing action and policy towards sustainable peace at all levels in the long term, the FAR programme has demonstrated that assessing resilience is also an empowering peacebuilding exercise in and of itself as it mobilizes in-country stakeholders to take collective action towards peace. This holds great potential both in terms of prevention and cost-effectiveness and should therefore be considered by donors in all initiatives for peacebuilding, state-building, humanitarian aid and development. Apart from its inherent peacebuilding potential, the resilience approach presents the opportunity of greater collaboration among practitioners, donors and policymakers working in various fields of international development.

ABOUT FRAMEWORKS FOR ASSESSING RESILIENCE (FAR)

Frameworks for Assessing Resilience (FAR) was a two-year programme (2014-2016) that was designed by **Interpeace**, and funded by **Sida** to better understand, address and assess the key sources of fragility and resilience within conflict- or violence-prone countries. Interpeace believes that in order to transform conflict, it is necessary not only to identify its causes, but also to better understand existing sources of resilience for peacebuilding in societies so that they can be strengthened.

The FAR programme combined multi-stakeholder participatory research in the three pilot countries – Timor-Leste, Guatemala and Liberia – with an expert-practitioner dialogue at the global level. FAR compared the resilience factors identified in the three pilot countries in order to explore where they were unique to particular country contexts, and where they would also offer more generic experiences and analyses. This led to the development of a [*Guidance Note and Framework for understanding, assessing and strengthening resilience for peace*](#).

The FAR programme used a research approach that combines Interpeace’s qualitative research process with national surveys (based on random sampling). Interpeace partnered with the [*Harvard Humanitarian Initiative \(HHI\)*](#), based at Harvard University in the USA, to design and implement these national surveys.

The programme was implemented by [*Interpeace’s Regional Office for Latin America in Guatemala*](#), and by Interpeace’s partner organizations the **Platform for Dialogue and Peace (P4DP)** in Liberia, and the [*Centre of Studies for Peace and Development \(CEPAD\)*](#) in Timor-Leste.