a Model for a Whole-of-Problem Approach to Preventing Violent Conflict[*]

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Abstract

This article argues that the practice of preventing violent conflicts is not new and that there are some widely-accepted tenets that taken together constitute a basic approach to effective prevention. What is lacking are operational models which effectively incorporate most elements of this approach. This article presents and critically analyzes a model for preventing violent conflict which takes a whole-of-problem approach and a corresponding pilot project based on the model which has been operating in Guinea-Bissau since 2004. The model is found to be well designed as it incorporates the basic approach for effective prevention and a number of principles for good international engagement in fragile states. The model is also found to be a useful framework for undertaking dynamic conflict prevention, which can be understood as the ongoing proactive identification and targeting of those factors which will likely cause violent conflict no matter in which sector or level they occur. Moreover, the flexible structure of this model situates it well for wide application in other states and regions where violence is to be prevented. Weaknesses identified with the model include limitations to the range of preventive actions which it can utilize, limitations in generating political will, and dependency upon highly-experienced and knowledgeable project staff in order for it to be successfully applied in other contexts.

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Introduction

In 2006 there were 278 political conflicts occurring in the world, most of which were ongoing from previous years but nine of which were newly emerged (Conflict Barometer 2006, 2006: 6-7).[i] Only three of these nine new conflicts were waged in a nonviolent manner; the remaining six were violent conflicts (Conflict Barometer 2006, 2006: 1).

How many of these newly-emerged violent conflicts could have been prevented from occurring and how could that have been achieved?

The first part of this question cannot be answered with certainty. There is very little systematic collection of information on cases of failed and successful prevention over long periods of time in order to generate yearly averages.[ii] Rather, there is only sporadic information concerning individual cases of successful prevention. Information compiled on a large number of cases would be helpful for answering a number of basic questions related to prevention, such as: 1) how often prevention is employed, 2) who undertakes most prevention efforts, 3) how long their efforts last, 4) whether their efforts are linked to early warnings, and 5) how many of these efforts lead to successful outcomes. These statistics would be helpful in augmenting the findings from case study approaches, but perhaps more importantly, for providing compelling evidence that prevention works and for demonstrating when and how prevention has been historically effective in order to better guide future efforts.

Much more can be said, however, about the second part of the question concerning the prevention of violent conflicts. Ackerman's (2003) review of the conflict

prevention literature reminds us that the idea of conflict prevention is certainly not new and that the literature on the subject blossomed throughout the 1990's. Based on a comprehensive review of this literature, Ackerman (2003) presents well-established and widely-accepted tenets for prevention. However, her review also finds that, 'the question of how to move from the rhetoric of conflict prevention to one of institutionalized practice still remains the major concern' (Ackerman, 2003: 339). On the other hand, the UN Secretary-General's recent progress report on the prevention of armed conflicts asserts that a culture of prevention is starting to take hold within the UN and new tools and mechanisms are being developed all the time (UN, 2006). The same report, however, claims that an unacceptable gap exists between rhetoric and reality.

Like Ackerman (2003) and the Secretary-General's report, this article asserts that knowledge about preventing violent conflicts is well-established, but that new ways to prevent violent conflict based on the practical application of this knowledge are needed. Moreover, because prevention efforts can often occur in weak, fragile, or failed states – which by one definition are those states which are experiencing gaps in the areas of security, capacity, or legitimacy (Center for Global Development, n.d.)- models that account for the features of these unique environments are required. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to present an operational model for the prevention of violent conflict in fragile and weak states which has been functioning in Guinea-Bissau since 2004. It will critically examine key aspects of its design and operation in order to identify inherent strengths and weaknesses. The ultimate aim of this article, therefore, is to contribute to the second part of the question concerning the practical application of knowledge about prevention.

To achieve this aim, this article begins by developing an original analytical framework. The analytical framework is based on current best practices and lessons learned on both conflict prevention and principles for good international engagement in fragile states. Then, a model which takes a whole-of-problem approach to preventing violent conflict (the Whole-of-Problem Prevention Model) and has been operating in Guinea-Bissau since 2004 is presented.[iii] The Whole-of-Problem Prevention Model is then critically examined against the analytical framework and the final section concludes with implications for both theory and policy.

Analytical Framework

An original analytical framework built on best practices and lessons learned in conflict prevention and international engagement in fragile states is developed below.

The framework should, at the minimum, consider the causes of violent conflict because addressing these can form the basis for preventive efforts. However, when the efforts to prevent violent conflict are being taken in a fragile, weak, or failed state this context must be considered too. Therefore, the analytical framework presented here is comprised of three parts: the causes of violent conflict, best practices for conflict prevention, and best practice for intervention in fragile, weak, and failed states.

The Causes Violent Conflict

The starting point of the analytical framework is a consideration of the causes of violent conflict. To this effect, a USAID framework for conducting conflict assessment states:

…conflict is extremely complex. It doesn't occur simply because people are

unhappy or greedy or because a country happens to have the resources in place

that might sustain violence. Nor does it happen everywhere state and social

institutions are weak or perverse. It happens when causes found at multiple levels

come together and reinforce each other. It is ultimately the product of deep

grievance, political and economic competition, irresponsible political leadership,

weak and unaccountable institutions, and global and regional forces. Effective

interventions cannot, therefore, be based on activities that focus on a single

dimension of conflict, such as ethnic tension or political exclusion. Nor can they

be based at a single level, for example at the community level or the national

level, since gains in one area may be so easily undermined by setbacks in another.

It is important to think about how problems manifest themselves at all of these

levels. (USAID, 2005)

This perspective is wide enough to account for the variable sources of conflict and

the interaction effects whereby the sources of conflict are mobilized to result in the

emergence of violent conflict. Thus, the first factor to consider in the analytical

framework is whether a violence prevention model recognizes that conflict is complex

and multi-leveled and thus *takes preventive actions across several dimensions at multiple*

levels.

Best Practices of Conflict Prevention

Next, the analysis will consider best practices of conflict prevention efforts.

A broad distinction can be made between operational and structural prevention (Carnegie Commission, 1997). According to the Carnegie Commission (1997) structural prevention can be considered strategies to address the root causes of violent conflict to ensure that they do not arise or recur. As such, these preventive strategies are concerned with longer-term measures such as development and with 'deeper' preventive measures such as institution building. Whereas the Carnegie Commission (1997) considers operational prevention to be those activities which are undertaken when violence is more imminent. As such, these preventive strategies are concerned with more near-term measures such as initiating preventive diplomacy or sanctions. Structural approaches to prevention must be complemented by other actions at other levels (UN, 2006: 5). A third type of approach to prevention was put forth by the Secretary-General in a recent progress report on the prevention of armed conflict. The Secretary-General proposes that 'systemic prevention' addresses the global risk of conflict that transcend individual states (UN, 2006). Systemic measures might include, '…global initiatives to reduce the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, to tackle environmental degradation, to regulate industries that are known to fuel conflict and to advance the global development agenda…' (UN, 2006: 5). Therefore another factor for inclusion in the analytical framework is whether the violence prevention model *operates at all three levels (structural, operational, and systemic)*.

The Secretary-General's progress report on the prevention of armed conflict also asserts that there are two main aims of prevention, applicable to all approaches at all levels, which are as follows:

1. Addressing sources of tension within and between societies, States and regions.
2. Strengthening norms and institutions for peace. (UN, 2006)

Hence, the analytical framework will consider whether the violence prevention model (1) *addresses the sources of tension and (2) strengthens norms and institutions for peace*.

Who should be responsible for achieving these dual aims of prevention at the three different levels? The Carnegie Commission states that the primary responsibility for prevention rests with the leaders, governments and people closest to the situation. Likewise, the Secretary-General's progress report on the prevention of armed conflict asserts, 'first and foremost, individual sovereign Governments remain fully accountable for maintaining peace within their borders. But they are not alone. They can and must be able to rely on the support of external actors whose activities can be crucial in preventing conflict, from the United Nations and other international and regional organizations to the private sector and civil society' (UN, 2006: 6). Thus a corresponding factor the analytical framework would consider is *(1) to what extent the violence prevention model puts the primary responsibility of prevention on the local actors involved and (2) to what extent the local efforts are supported by international efforts to prevent violent conflict*.

Effective prevention could be summarized as follows: the causes of violent conflict are complex and multi-leveled and therefore to prevent violent conflict, locally-affected people and their governments, with outside support, must address these causes and build support for peaceful institutions and norms utilizing an approach that is multi-leveled. This could be considered the *basic approach to effective prevention*.

This basic approach is quite dense. It implies that much work by several actors is needed. However, the basic approach to effective prevention is vague: it does not specify who should do what, when, where and how. Within this basic approach to effective conflict prevention are a number of more precise lessons learned and best practices, which could be considered as the means and methods of operationalizing the basic approach.

As noted earlier, the conflict prevention literature is vast; much of it can be viewed from the perspective of being means and methods to operationalize the basic approach to conflict prevention outlined above. For example, Ackerman's (2003) review of the literature on conflict prevention found agreement on a number of these means and methods to 'enhance effectiveness'. Ackerman (2003: 343) states that, 'much of the discussion over enhancing the effectiveness of conflict prevention centers on how to design preventive action plans and strategies that accomplish the stated objectives and desired preventive outcome'. To this effect, 'there is agreement that effective prevention must be country context-specific, that there must be strategic coordination, and that multiple prevention measures are utilized' (Ackerman, 2003: 343). More precisely, effective prevention should be timely, multilateral, coordinated, varied, multifaceted, supported by a lead actor, based on a clear mandate, and networked with other preventive

actors (Ackerman, 2003: 343). Thus, *both the number of these means and methods utilized by the violence prevention model and the manner in which they are incorporated into it (deliberately, accidently, etc.) is another factor to include in the analytical framework.*

Another aspect of effective prevention to consider concerns the political will to intervene, and this must be added to Ackerman's list of means and methods for enhancing the effectiveness of prevention. The concept of political will in the context of prevention has not been adequately developed, yet a very rudimentary definition would be that it is the willingness to act to prevent violent conflict (Woocher, 2001). Woocher (2001), observes that a lack of political will is consistently cited as an explanation of failed prevention; in other words that there was none. Lund (2008) is critical of this explanation for failed prevention because it is both vague and it does not explain why preventive actions are sometimes taken. Likewise, Woocher (2001) argues that it is inaccurate and not useful from an operational perspective to view political will as either 'present' or 'absent' and that a more useful concept of political will would view it as something that ranges in magnitude from low to high. Moreover, Woocher's model of political will accounts for the fact that it can be generated by a variety of means. Another factor in the analytical framework is whether the prevention model *generates a sufficient amount of political will for effective prevention*.

The above discussion defined an overall basic approach to prevention. It includes a number of specific means and methods to operationalize the approach. Questions of how to identify possible locations that are at risk of erupting into violent conflict, how soon prevention should be initiated, and how to generate a set of possible response

options still need to be addressed because these are important aspects to consider in the prevention of violent conflict.

Early Warning analysis is used to identify locations at risk of becoming violent. Effective prevention requires sound early warning analysis and the development of corresponding response options which at a minimum are not destabilizing (Carment, 2003). Moreover, there is consensus that responses to early warning which are undertaken during the initial stages of the conflict (before it becomes violent) are optimal for effective prevention (Crocker, Hampson, and Aall; 2004: 102; Lund, 2003a; Schmeidl, 2001; UN, 2001).[iv] Thus, several other factors to consider in the analytical framework are whether *the country selected for prevention is based on an early warning analysis*, *the response closely follows the early warning (e.g. it is an early response), the response is based on the findings of early warning analysis, and the responses are intended to, at a minimum, not further destabilize the situation*.

Best Practices For Intervention In Fragile, Weak, And Failed States
Lastly, this framework incorporates some best practices for intervention in fragile, weak, and failed states which are relevant to prevention.

The OECD's report on principles for good international engagement in fragile states asserts that the local context needs to be taken as the starting point. More specifically, 'it is essential for international actors to understand the specific context in each country, and develop a shared view of the strategic response that is required' (OECD, 2007). Working within this approach means mixing and sequencing interventions and avoiding blue-print approaches (OECD, 2007). Three more factors to

add to the analytical framework arise from the above principles: *(1) develop a shared view of the response that is required, (2) mix and sequence interventions according to needs of the situation, and (3) use an intervention customized for the situation.*

Another principle of good international engagement in fragile states is to recognize the links between political, security, and development objectives (OECD, 2007). Moreover, it is important to avoid undermining national institution building by creating parallel institutions and therefore, 'it is important to identify functioning systems within existing local institutions, and work to strengthen these' (OECD, 2007). An obvious exception to the principle of not undermining national institutions would be that when the institutions themselves are contributing to the possible escalation of violence because they are flawed in some manner such as being corrupt or perpetuating structural violence, then it should be considered from a prevention perspective whether they need to be restructured or removed. The corresponding factors for the analytical framework are that *(1) the linkages between political, security, and development are recognized by the violence prevention effort, (2) the violence prevention effort should not undermine national institution building unless the institutions are contributing to the possible escalation of violent conflict, and (3) functioning systems should be identified and strengthened.*

Yet another principle is that international actors should act in a coordinated way and, 'this can happen even in the absence of strong government leadership. Where possible, it is important to work together on: upstream analysis; joint assessments; shared strategies; and coordination of political engagement (OECD, 2007). Therefore, another set of factors to consider is whether international actors *(1) performed joint analysis or*

assessments, (2) shared strategies, and/or (3) coordinated their political engagement

efforts .

Also according to the OECD principles, 'assistance to fragile states must be flexible enough to take advantage of windows of opportunity and respond to changing conditions on the ground' (OECD, 2007). A corresponding factor for the analytical framework is that *prevention projects should have a flexible operation plan*.

The analytical framework which considers the causes of conflict, best practices for prevention, and principles for good international engagement in fragile states is now complete. The framework can be summarized as a series of questions, as follows:

- Does the prevention model recognize that the cause of conflict is complex and multi-leveled and thus take preventive actions across several dimensions at multiple levels (e.g. local, national, regional, and international)?
- Does the prevention model operate at all three causal levels (structural, operational, and systemic)?
- Does the prevention model address the sources of tension?
- Does the prevention model strengthen norms and institutions for peace?
- To what extent does the prevention model put the primary responsibility of prevention on the local actors involved?
- To what extent are the local efforts supported?
- How many and which of the means and methods for enhancing effectiveness of prevention (timely, multilateral, coordinated, varied, multifaceted, supported by a

lead actor, based on a clear mandate, and networked) are incorporated into the prevention model? Moreover, how are they incorporated into it?

- Does the prevention model generate a sufficient amount of political will for effective prevention?

- Does the prevention model identify the location for prevention based on an early warning analysis?

- Does the prevention model initiate responses which closely follow the early warning?

- Does the prevention model base the responses on the early warning analysis?

- Does the prevention model, at a minimum, ensure that the responses do not further destabilize the situation?

- Does the prevention model develop a shared view of the response that is required?

- Does the prevention model mix and sequence interventions according to needs of the situation and use an intervention customized for the situation?

- Does the prevention model recognize the linkages between political, security, and development?

- Does the prevention model avoid undermining national institution building unless the institutions are contributing to the possible escalation of violent conflict and does it identify and support functioning systems?

- Does the prevention model undertake joint analysis or assessments, share strategies, and/or coordinate their political engagement efforts?

- Does the violence prevention model have a flexible operational plan?

The Whole-of-Problem Prevention Model

A pilot project which takes a whole-of-problem approach to prevention has been operating in the West African country of Guinea-Bissau since 2004.[v] This model for preventing violent conflict has an underlying basic concept, ten main steps, and a strategy for implementing the steps.

The Basic Concept

The Whole-of-Problem Prevention Model has an underlying basic concept of what is required to prevent violent conflict.[vi] This basic concept is closely linked to the model's ten main steps and implementation strategy.

The basic concept of the Whole-of-Problem Prevention Model is that a core group of internal and external actors will work closely on the project. This core group will perform a joint analysis of the situation which, in turn, will lead to consensus on what actions need to be taken and in which order to prevent violent conflict in the target country. Next, the core group of actors will galvanize the support of other actors in order to have them direct parts of their own work in the country towards the identified vulnerabilities. Lastly, the core group will stimulate or undertake other complementary actions that will address the vulnerabilities.

This basic concept is complemented by several general 'working assumptions' about the nature of prevention.[vii] The working assumptions are that (1) only violent conflict and other forms of violence need to be prevented – constructively managed

nonviolent conflict is an important part of functioning societies, (2) violence can be effectively prevented if the right things are done by the right actors at the right time, (3) identifying what needs to be done to effectively prevent violence requires sound analysis of all of the vulnerabilities to violence and this analysis must be ongoing as these vulnerabilities will change over time, (4) the vulnerabilities will likely be multiple and occurring at several levels and therefore neutralizing the vulnerabilities will require integrated multi-sectoral, multi-level preventive actions, (5) strengths and capacities that help to prevent the outbreak of violent conflict will be present (even in fragile states) and these need to be correctly identified and supported, and (6) no single organization alone can be effective at undertaking all of the required multi-level, multi-sectoral preventive actions – therefore collaboration, stimulation, and creating synergy with other actors are required.

Ten Main Steps

The basic concept, as laid out above, leads to the establishment of ten main steps which are necessary for operationalizing the basic concept.[viii] The ten main steps of the Whole-of-Problem Prevention Model are simply to (1) identify a potential location through an early warning exercise, (2) dispatch a multi-disciplinary team on an initial scouting trip in order to confirm country selection and begin real-time analysis of the situation, (3) obtain endorsements and partners, (4) construct a flexible operational plan, (5) build working relationships with local leaders through targeted activities, (6) continue ongoing real-time analysis of the situation, (7) facilitate a joint diagnostic and prevention action planning

process to develop a prevention action plan, (8) support the implementation of the prevention action plan, (9) address vulnerabilities to violence as they are identified, and (10) measure success and agree on an exit plan.

Implementation Strategy of the Whole-of-Problem Prevention Model
The basic concept and ten main steps of the Whole-of-Problem Prevention Model demand that an implementation strategy is articulated.[ix] The implementation strategy includes some general overarching principles and some more specific ones.

There are some general overarching principles which serve to anchor the project throughout the ever-changing and dynamic context where prevention occurs. The overarching principles are that the project will at all times act as a catalyst, have a multi-service and multi-sectoral focus, be an elicitor of solutions, support local leadership, facilitate collaboration, and be a champion to attract resources.[x]

More specifically, the need to identify a potential location through an early warning exercise (step 1) means that early warning needs to be very closely linked to early responses. In other words, the model's second step (dispatch a multi-disciplinary scouting team to the country) needs to closely follow the findings of the early warning exercise. Therefore, the model requires an institutional culture free of overly burdensome bureaucratic procedures which would constrain initial steps towards undertaking early responses. All subsequent steps in the model also need to be taken in a timely manner and, as such, this light institutional culture which affords the project maximum maneuverability needs to be ongoing.

The validity of initial early warning assumptions about the country need to be reconfirmed through more thorough and in depth field-level analysis and in accordance with the broad perspective of the model, the multi-disciplinary team requires diagnostic tools which allow for an assessment of violence, conflict, and power at multiple levels plus considers the interaction between these elements.

Dispatching a multi-disciplinary team to the country to confirm country selection also assists with the process of identifying potential partners (e.g. local leaders) and beginning an early process of relationship building with the view towards possible future collaboration. This requires transparency and building trust with local actors.

Genuinely listening to and recognizing the needs of the local population is an important starting point for gaining trust. However, like all good peacebuilding initiatives this also requires being realistic about what can be achieved and when – in other words in not over-promising when discussing project goals. Related to not over-promising is the principle of prompt follow-through. The model recognizes the frustration that can be created for local actors when verbal promises are made and then later forgotten or abandoned. Therefore, the model takes the approach that timely follow-through on promises made in order to produce immediately tangible results not only is respectful of local actors, but can help gain their trust and build hope – this is especially poignant in contexts where international actors make empty promises or only deliver 'more talk'. Building on this premise, the model recognizes that concrete actions with immediately-tangible results can also be important.

Ongoing real-time analysis (step 6) , participatory evaluation, reflecting on practice, and identifying lessons learned requires that the project includes a research and

policy component.[xi] This component is linked with and supports the project activities and advocacy (described in a subsequent section below) in a process of continuous learning.

Developing a prevention action plan (Step 7) means placing a focus on the prevention of violent conflict; not conflict per se. Therefore, both conflict analysis and an analysis of operational, structural and systemic forms of violence is required. Moreover, the existing strengths and capacities which help to prevent the outbreak of violent conflict need to be identified. In accordance with the broad perspective of the model, a wide array of participants should be included in the planning session in order to elicit a plan which encompasses a wide variety of perspectives. Moreover, the overall approach towards the planning session is to act as a 'facilitator' in order to elicit solutions from the group.

Supporting the implementation of the prevention action plan (step 8) and addressing other vulnerabilities to violence as they are identified (step 9) entails acting as a catalyst, engaging in advocacy for additional implementation resources, and working across sectors (horizontally) with actors of various levels (vertically). Acting as a catalyst, in turn, means recognizing that local actors with even small amounts of the correct type of support can be effective in preventing violence. As such, even small amounts of support can create a multiplier effect whereby the outcome of the effort is larger than the support required to initiate and sustain it. The types of support required are not always financial. Sometimes the efforts of local actors can be blocked by capacity deficits, lack of experience or knowledge, or a lack of direction. Under these circumstances, appropriate types of catalytic support would include strategic or technical advice, skills-based training sessions, professional consulting, goal-oriented dialogue,

brainstorming, strategy design sessions, feasibility studies, process-oriented evaluation, or organizational assessments.

Engaging in advocacy is an another important approach of the model during steps 8 and 9. One of the outcomes from the national action planning session is a well-designed, indigenously formulated strategy for violence prevention. International advocacy to attract resources for the implementation of the plan is important. In some instances this may take the form of supporting local spokespeople to present the plan at donors' offices overseas. However, advocacy can also be used to call international attention to the country and for this reason op-ed articles, urgent alerts, progress updates, and country reports are issued by the project. These advocacy functions can also be useful for stabilization or crisis management during any of the steps.

Moreover, addressing the vulnerabilities to violence (step 9) requires that actions are precisely targeted and rapidly delivered. The model asserts that because the context where prevention occurs can often be highly-volatile and changes towards violence can often be quickly and easily sparked, timely action to neutralize the vulnerabilities is required to prevent the eruption of violence.

Addressing the vulnerabilities to violence will also inevitably mean addressing highly-charged and possibly contentious issues such as security issues. The goal of preventing violence requires that all those factors which destabilize a country – including dissatisfied armed forces, the actions of politicians, and other specific threats to peace and security- must be addressed within the prevention effort. The implementation strategy therefore demands readiness and expertise to deal with highly-charged issues.

The project team might not always have this expertise and as such, subject matter experts are engaged by the project as necessary.

The model also accounts for the fact that any activities which it undertakes, especially those related to the highly-contentious issues, are at a higher risk of sparking increased violence. As such, special consideration is given to the decision concerning which project activities to pursue. More generally, these and all of the other possible project activities which are under consideration, are run through an informal decision-making mechanism. The model's decision-making mechanism includes consultation and consensus between project staff, consultants, and advisors plus a more rigorous system of choosing possible activities based on several pre-established criteria. The result is a list of prioritized project activities. Consistent with the philosophy of the project to collaborate with and stimulate other organizations, any activities which are beyond the scope of the project are forwarded to them with the hope that they might independently pursue them in support of the country's prevention agenda.

A final aspect of the implementation strategy involves the establishment of a small grants fund which can be used to quickly disburse relatively small amounts of money as strategically-identified needs arise. The use of a small grants fund is an important tool for prevention as it serves several valuable purposes including the funding of emergency measures required to stabilize a volatile situation, stimulating the creation of new initiatives, supporting prevention efforts that are not conducted by well-funded actors, providing bridging funds for ongoing initiatives which are at risk of closing due to funding lapses, and breaking stalled local initiatives out of impasses. Moreover, the small

grants fund provides the project with some leverage, which can be important for shifting some forces in the direction of contributing to, not detracting from, stability.

In the last section of this article an original analytical framework for violence prevention efforts was developed and in this section of this article the Whole-of-Problem Prevention Model was presented. In the following section the model is critically-examined.

Analysis and Findings

Here, the Whole-of-Problem Prevention Model is critically-examined using the framework developed earlier.

A. On the Multiple Causes of Violent Conflict

The first factor to consider from the analytical framework is whether a violence prevention model recognizes that conflict is complex and multi-leveled and thus *takes preventive actions across several dimensions at multiple levels.*

Almost immediately a number of elements from the Whole-of-Problem Prevention Model that are in accordance with best practices for identifying and addressing the causes of violent conflict become evident. For example, the early warning analysis utilized by the model for country selection, the scouting trip by a multi-disciplinary team which follows the country selection, the joint diagnostic and prevention planning session, and the regular ongoing-analysis included in the model means that the

complex and multi-dimensional causes of violent conflict are identified and monitored over time.

There are multiple causes of violent conflict which must be addressed and the Whole-of-Problem Prevention Model is, by design, intended to target the multiple causes of violent conflict. This aim is achieved, in the fist instance, by the thorough and ongoing analysis of the multiple causes of violent conflict and in the second instance by the development of a prevention action plan that targets these threats to peace. For example, the National Action Plan produced for Guinea-Bissau identifies eight key problems, their multiple causes, and numerous recommendations that span the sectors of education, governance, armed forces, the media, and more (Canadian International Institute of Applied Negotiation, 2006).

Solely relying on the implementation of a national prevention action plan as a primary method of preventing violent conflict, however, has two distinct limitations and for these reasons a prevention project should view the implementation of this plan only as a complementary activity. First, the national prevention action plan is based on the analysis conducted by the local actors. This means that it may contain an inaccurate analysis of the causes of violent conflict and the corresponding preventive actions. A flawed analysis can occur for several reasons, including the fact the local actors may not have any related experience in conducting this type of analysis or with the diagnostic tools. Local actors may also be 'too close to the situation' to undertake an honest and objective assessment (they also may be unwilling to do this for political or security reasons). Second, the national prevention action plan does not account for the changing dynamics of the situation. The national action plan produced by the prevention project in

Guinea-Bissau was created in 2006 and certain elements from it might currently be outdated. To simply pursue the implementation of the national prevention action plan as the primary prevention activity means that other causes of violent conflict may not be addressed.

The project in Guinea-Bissau was able to account for these limitations by undertaking an ongoing assessment of the vulnerabilities for violence and targeting the project actions appropriately – even if that meant deviating from the national prevention action plan. The project has therefore increased its capacity for preventing violent conflict in Guinea-Bissau by pursuing both the implementation of the national prevention action plan and by addressing the other vulnerabilities to violence. In this sense, the Whole-of-Problem Prevention Model is a vehicle for undertaking *dynamic conflict prevention*.

B. Concerning the Best Practices of Conflict Prevention

This article asserts that there is a well-established and widely-agreed upon basic approach to conflict prevention. Moreover, there is another set of well-established means and methods for enhancing the effectiveness of prevention which are based on operationalizing the basic approach.

The Whole-of-Problem Prevention Model very closely accords with the basic approach for effective prevention and utilizes many of the means and methods to operationalize the approach. For example, the Whole-of-Problem Prevention Model works at both the structural and systemic levels. The project in Guinea-Bissau has attempted to address economic inequalities through various initiatives including the

commissioning of a feasibility study on establishing small business incubator centres in the country, hosting a workshop to explore ways to bolster cashew production and sales (the country's main export), and supporting a regularly-occurring Trade Fair that brings together producers, processors, and consumers to promote local products.

On the other hand, the flexible approach employed by the model means that a shift of focus to operational prevention is possible. More than once in Guinea-Bissau the project had to shift focus to shorter-term crisis management activities in order to help create stability there. In one instance, this was related to the assassination of a high-level military leader and the project responded by issuing an 'urgent alert'. In another instance, rising tensions prior, during, and after the election resulted in the project taking an operational approach to prevention during this period.

Therefore, a major strength of the model is that it provides a framework for preventing violent conflict at all three levels either simultaneously or in parallel, as demanded by the circumstances.

Another aspect from the analytical framework to consider is whether the model generates sufficient levels of political will. As discussed below, the Whole-of-Problem Prevention Model generates some political will at both the national and international levels through a number of activities, although it is not possible from this analysis to ascertain whether a sufficient amount of political will has been generated by the project.

Generating the political will needed for initiating new international engagement in Guinea-Bissau is achieved through the advocacy component of the model. To this effect, project staff and consultants have given various briefings to different government and NGO agencies with the hope of garnering additional international support for the country.

Likewise, the project has remained closely engaged with various political actors in the country in order to increase their levels of political will.

However, the ability of the project to generate high levels of political will in Guinea-Bissau is hampered somewhat by the fact that the model is being implemented by an NGO. Arguably, greater levels of political will could be generated in some situations by actors other than NGOs. This can be viewed as an inherent weakness of the model.

A final aspect to consider is whether the prevention model identifies the location for prevention based on an early warning analysis, initiates responses which closely follow the early warning, base the responses on the early warning analysis, and at a minimum, ensures that the responses do not further destabilize the situation. These are discussed separately below.

EARLY WARNING AND EARLY RESPONSE

Guinea-Bissau was selected from a short list of candidate countries. After reviewing earlier work in this area, project leaders commissioned Dr. David Carment and a team of colleagues from the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs (NPSIA), Carleton University, Ottawa, to undertake a comparative and analytical study. The aim was to identify three countries at risk of new or renewed violent armed conflict in the next one to three years, in order to then examine the question of an appropriate intervention response.

Dr. Carment and his team began by assembling a list of 30 countries. Then, from this list of thirty, the team and project leaders selected ten which appeared to be of particular interest. None were yet at the stage of significant violent conflict, but all exhibited many of the indicators of potential serious violent conflict in the next one to

three years. Criteria established by team and project leaders by consensus in advance also focused attention on a number of particular cases. Thus a country might be short-listed because it was not already receiving significant outside help but might likely do so in the future if its situation 'unraveled' for various geo-political or economic reasons. For example, Pakistan was *not* short-listed because the United States already shows a great deal of interest in this country and the region. Turkey was excluded because of its membership in NATO and relations with the European Union. Those countries which were already in the midst of violence were also set aside. Only those countries having a potential but strong prospect of civil violence remained on the list.

After that, team and project leaders made a further selection that identified three countries which – according again to agreed criteria – seemed especially appropriate for a third-party conflict prevention response. The countries then remaining on Carleton University's 'Watch List' were: Guinea-Bissau, Guyana and Papua New Guinea (Carment and Levine, 2004).

In sum, it can be concluded that the pilot project in Guinea-Bissau was based on sound early warning analysis. The next section will explore whether the project initiated early responses based on this early warning analysis.

EARLY RESPONSE OPTION DEVELOPMENT

As described below, the project in Guinea-Bissau built on and expanded the findings from the early warning analysis in order to develop early response options.

The project began its work on the ground in Guinea-Bissau by dispatching an in-country scouting mission. The multi-disciplinary team were guided by the use of a

conflict analysis framework that was constructed from a variety of pre-existing tools, which in this case also paid specific attention to security issues and an assessment of power and its role in the country. They found that people who knew Guinea-Bissau— external actors from international organizations and donor embassies, scholars inside and outside the country, and the people interviewed in the country—were quick to specify what was needed in Guinea-Bissau to prevent violence. There was an urgent need for security sector reform, for dealing with an economic crisis and long-term development, for improving governance, and for supporting the growth of an active civil society. But most importantly, there was a need to stabilize the country. Certain politicians were exploiting discontent and mobilizing inter-ethnic hostilities. Mass violence was possible. A number of people within the country asked the project to sound an immediate alert to the international community.

While in Guinea-Bissau, the team also learned that the army had a practice of being deeply immersed in politics, with a history of coup d'etats, assassinations, full-scale internal war in 1998, and outside military involvement. People told the scouting mission that discouraging the army's involvement in politics and building a 'contre pouvoir' (a mobilized, influential civil society) to those with guns were immediate priorities.

Guinea-Bissau appeared to be on the verge of erupting, and the project's planned approach to prevention clearly could not be applied at this point in any rigid kind of way. The project leaders decided to adjust to reality on the ground. It was apparent that the project needed to be responsive and dexterous. It would need to deliver concrete

initiatives in the now clearly-defined area of most-urgent need: to contribute to stabilization of the country.

Then, the decisions concerning which specific stabilization activities to pursue were made based on the model's decisionmaking process, which as described earlier, utilizes a variety of techniques to ensure that project choices are in line with the project's goals. This consideration includes an assessment of possible outcomes and their impact on the situation.

The above discussion of the initial scouting trip to the country illustrates four important points. First, early warning analysis can be useful for initial country selection, but a deeper and richer understanding of the dynamics of the situation can be achieved through the scouting mission. Second, early responses *had to* quickly follow the early warning in this case to prevent the emergence of violence. Third, the early responses required in this case involved immediate crisis management and an immediate shift to operational prevention – this was easily achieve by the project due to its flexible operational plan and the light bureaucratic culture in which it was based. Fourth, the early responses were based on an assessment of their intended and unintended impacts on the dynamics of the situation.

In sum, the above analysis found that the Whole-of-Problem Prevention Model closely adheres to the basic approach for effective prevention and goes beyond that approach because, as will be shown below, it also accords with many of the principles for outside intervention in fragile states.

C. The Whole-of-Problem Prevention Model and Best Practices For Intervention In

Fragile, Weak, And Failed States

According to the framework developed here, international interventions in fragile states should be driven by local leadership and people. The Whole-of-Problem Prevention Model is inherently designed to identify and support local leadership and local efforts. For example, steps 3 and 5 in the model involve obtaining endorsements and partners and then working with local leaders through targeted activities. Moreover, the model's implementation strategy entails stimulating these local capacities, perhaps through providing technical or strategic advice. To this end, the project leaders in Guinea-Bissau recognized early on that the military was one of the keys to stability there and as such it took various efforts, such as providing financial support to the newly-established Military Reconciliation Commission, to support their stabilizing role.

These kind of valuable insights into the dynamics of highly-volatile environments and the choice of appropriate follow-up actions are specific to the experience-level of the project staff and consultants. The project in Guinea-Bissau has benefitted from a wealth of talent provided by knowledgeable consultants and highly-experienced project staff. An inexperienced project team faced with a similar situation may not recognize these opportunities or how to maximize them. We can thus conclude that the application and success of the Whole-of-Problem Prevention Model in other contexts will be restricted by the staffing and other types of resources that are available to it.

Also according to the analytical framework, an international engagement in a fragile state should take local context as the starting point. That is, international actors

should (1) develop a shared view of the response that is required, (2) mix and sequence interventions according to needs of the situation, and (3) use an intervention customized for the situation. The Whole-of-Problem Prevention Model clearly provides for this through steps such as facilitating a joint diagnostic and action planning session.

The project in Guinea-Bissau, however, has limitations on which interventions it can mix and sequence throughout its operation. That is, because the model is intended to be implemented by an NGO or other similar organization it can not directly undertake some preventive interventions such as sanctions, official diplomacy, or the use of force. In other words, the range of possible interventions for inclusion in the model will be limited by the capacity and nature of the implementing agency.

Another aspect of good international engagement in fragile states to consider is whether the prevention model recognizes the linkages between political, security, and development; avoids undermining national institution building; and identifies and supports functioning systems. The broad approach of the model means that it recognizes the linkages between political, security, and development. Moreover, the approach of the Whole-of-Problem Prevention Model means that vulnerabilities in these and any other sectors need to be addressed for prevention to be effective. For example, the project in Guinea-Bissau works across multiple sectors at multiple levels with several diverse groups. To this end, the project has initiated various activities in support of economic development, security sector reform, and reconciliation This has entailed working with groups such as civil society, local business leaders, youth groups, women's groups, journalists, religious leaders, and the military. In all instances, the project has built upon what already existed in the country or has helped with the creation of new initiatives

when nothing previously existed and, therefore, the project has avoided undermining existing efforts.

The final aspect of good international engagement in fragile states is that assistance should be flexible enough to take advantage of new windows of opportunity and to respond to changing conditions on the ground. The Whole-of-Problem Prevention Model achieves this via the creation of a flexible operation plan (step 4) and through the establishment of a small grants fund. As noted earlier, the model's flexible operation plan accounts for possible shifts of focus from structural to operational prevention and it capitalizes on new developments which are supportive of peace and stability. However, because helpful and harmful things can happen spontaneously the project in Guinea-Bissau takes an approach which allows it enough flexibility to capitalize on helpful events and also slow down or neutralize harmful events.

For example, at least once the project in Guinea-Bissau was able to capitalize on a helpful event because of the establishment of a small grants fund. At one point, the project convened a multi-stakeholder meeting in Bissau to consider whether a collaborative effort could be mounted that would help to advance the existing momentum toward national reconciliation and during this meeting the participants began to plan specific actions aimed at reducing the existing pre-election tensions. Members of the meeting spontaneously decided to form a new group, the Citizens' Goodwill Task Force (CGWTF), that would be the organizing body. To support this sudden and unexpected development, the project provided a small grant for the creation of the CGWTF. The CGWTF, with continued support from the project and other organizations, went on to successfully undertake a wide variety of activities aimed at preventing election violence.

Therefore the ability to neutralize harmful events and capitalize on helpful ones is an important strength of the Whole-of-Problem Prevention Model.

To summarize the analysis, the Whole-of-Problem Prevention Model fits very closely to the basic approach for effective prevention which was developed earlier in this article and it goes beyond that because it also incorporates many of the principles for good international engagement in fragile states.

Perhaps more importantly, the greatest strength of the Whole-of-Problem Prevention Model is that it can draw these various elements together into a whole and coherent approach that is specifically aimed at preventing violent conflict. While it might be argued that the approach and various elements of the Whole-of-Problem Prevention Model are already mainstreamed into some peacebuilding and development organizations' programming, the strength of this model is that it provides a primary focus on prevention. That is, while some development assistance might be altered to have a preventive effect, this model views prevention as the primary objective and then provides a framework for strategically-aligning development and other forms of assistance in support of the prevention objective.

Moreover, the model also exhibits a particular strength in that serves as a framework for undertaking dynamic conflict prevention, which can be understood as the ongoing proactive identification and targeting of those factors which will likely cause violent conflict no matter in which sector or level they occur.

The model is not without some weaknesses. It is confined by virtue of the fact that it is intended to be implemented by an NGO. This means some preventive actions such as using coercive force, undertaking official preventive diplomacy, implementing

sanctions, or influencing major actors are either limited or not at all possible. Moreover, it also places limitations on the amount of political will which can be generated. Future applications of the model will likely be constrained by the experience level of the staff and consultants involved with the effort plus the amount of other resources that are available to them.

Conclusions

The above discussion illustrated that the literature on preventing violent conflict is quite rich and some widely-accepted tenets from it constitute a basic approach for effective prevention. There are also several principles for good international engagement in fragile states that are applicable to prevention work in these contexts. Taken together, these provide a framework for analyzing the design and implementation of models which aim to prevent violent conflict in fragile states.

One such model for preventing violent conflict is the Whole-of-Problem Prevention Model currently operating in Guinea-Bissau and the above analysis found that this model shows great promise because it incorporates both the basic concept for effective prevention and many of the principles for good international engagement in fragile states. Moreover, the analysis found that the model serves as a practical framework for undertaking dynamic conflict prevention. While the model used in Guinea-Bissau is well designed and the pilot project has been successfully implemented, the model is not without some weaknesses.

Additionally, while the local context is to be the starting place for good international engagement in fragile states, the added-advantage of the Whole-of-Problem Prevention Model is that it is flexible enough that the general outline of the model can be applied in other contexts. One of the sources cited above said that blueprint approaches to preventing violent conflict are to be avoided, but the strength of this model is that it is broad enough that it can guide other efforts precisely because it is the details within the application of the model which will change from situation to situation – not the model itself.

The Whole-of-Problem Prevention Model can therefore be used to guide other prevention efforts – and, as such, policymakers could easily draw upon many elements of the approach employed by the model.

The model presented in this paper accords with the findings of other research which asserts that prevention should be understood in broad terms (Carment and Schnabel) and requires a multifaceted, multilayered, and multi-actor methodology (Carment, 2003: 421). However, future comparative research on the inherent strengths and weaknesses between different broad models of prevention could be valuable. Moreover, further research that explores the strengths and weaknesses between broad models and ones with a more narrow focus could be useful for identifying whether they are complementary and how they can be linked together into a larger prevention agenda.

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[i] This study considered latent conflicts, manifest conflicts, crises, severe crises, and war to be 'political conflicts'.

[ii] However, the Uppsala Conflict Data Program is collecting data on international conflict preventive measures for all intrastate conflicts for the period of 1993-2004.

[iii] The concept of taking a 'whole of problem' approach to prevention and the corresponding name of the prevention model presented here are based on Hoffman (2007).

[iv] While there is consensus that early preventive action is preferable, it is not clear how early it needs to be.

[v] The description of the model and the project in Guinea-Bissau is derived from several sources and unless otherwise noted it is based on Hoffman and Hoffman, 2006.

[vi] The basic concept for effective prevention which is incorporated into this model is adapted from the work of Lund, 2003b.

[vii] The basic assumptions of the model are distilled from Hoffman, pers. coms.

[viii] The ten main steps of the model are adapted from Lund, pers. coms.

[ix] The description of the model's implementation strategy is largely based on personal communications with the Project Director (Hoffman, pers.coms.) and the author's own work with the implementation of the project from its inception.

[x] The notion of acting as a catalyst is one of Lund's recommendations for operationalizing his basic concept (Lund, pers.coms.).

[xi] The project in Guinea-Bissau utilizes external consultants, as needed, to support the project director in this regard.