



On Wednesday 21th of March, the United Nations and the World Bank came together in Brussels to present their first-of-its-kind joint study on the prevention agenda. The flagship report ‘Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict’, centers on the business case behind the international community refocusing resources and investments in the area of prevention.

Although the mandates of the UN and World Bank differ, their shared commitment towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provided the perfect platform for such a collaboration. However, Alexandre Marc, Chief Specialist Fragility, Conflict and Violence of the World Bank, noted that “development has been the missing element in prevention.” Just as with the Sustainable Development Goals, this study now combines economic with social arguments and recommendations.

Building inclusive approaches for prevention

The study found that prevention requires deep and concrete changes in the way in which

national, regional, and international actors operate and cooperate. However, few incentives have existed for this to happen – that is why ‘Pathways for Peace’ highlights three core principles of prevention. First, prevention must not be seen as a trade-off between the short and long term. Instead, prevention must be sustained over the time needed to address structural issues, strengthen institutions, and provide incentives for actors to manage conflict without violence. Second, “it is of the utmost importance that prevention is inclusive” stressed Alexandre Marc. Too often, preventative action is geared towards the demands of actors that control the means of power and violence. In contrast, an inclusive approach must place understanding societal grievances at the heart of all national and international engagements. Lastly, modern conflicts arise when groups contest access to power, resources, and security, among others.

In this sense, ‘Pathways for Peace’ recommends proactive and direct action to tackle the patterns of exclusion and institutional weaknesses. Roselyn Akombe, Deputy Director of the Policy and Mediation Division of the UNDPA stressed that “Prevention cannot work without political will and getting all actors involved.”



Prevention as a cost-effective pathway for peace

As the title of the report indicates, conflict is path-dependent and once a country finds itself on a violent path, reversing the trend is extremely difficult and costly. Prevention has the power to steer countries away from negative spirals; a “shift from conflict management to inclusive prevention is desperately needed” underlined Jago Salmon, advisor on the UN/WB Partnership on Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations at the UN. That is the reason why ‘Pathways for peace’ advocates the narrative of a ‘business case for prevention’.

Even though most societies regularly implement strategies to address the potential causes of conflict and launch initiatives to prevent violence, current spending on prevention by the multilateral system amounts to a fraction of what is spent on responding to crises or on rebuilding afterwards. A scaled-up system for preventative action could save between US\$5 and \$70 billion per year, which could be reinvested in reducing poverty and improving populations’ well-being. For this to happen, a much stronger focus is needed on identifying and acting early to address the risks of violence.

“These issues are not new for people active in peacebuilding; what is new is that the UN and the World Bank are talking about it” noted Roselyn Akombe. Jago Salmon concluded the debate by underlining how “this approach makes sense and we have to now change the narrative and manage transitions better.”

For more information:

- [Full report](#)