Synthesis of Good Practices in the Context of Conflict Settings

**Global Security Programme, Pembroke College
Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford**

This synthesis summarises the good practices adopted by local communities exposed to armed conflict across three continents and shared during the Global Security Programme's cross-stakeholder fora.

The unique cross-stakeholder format facilitated exploring different perspectives on topics such as the transition from war to peace, uncertainty, and perceived and experienced insecurities.

Cross-Stakeholder Forum Methodology

Oxford's Global Security Programme (GSP),[i] in partnership with the UN System Staff College, International Alert, the Danish Refugee Council, and the UN Refugee Agency, organised a series of virtual and in-person fora in Colombia, Myanmar, and the Horn of Africa.[ii] Despite the respective regions' unique characteristics, communities across these places face similar challenges, including insecurities due to conflict-related violence, the breakdown of trust, relationships and the erosion of social fabric, weak legal economies, and the inadequate provision of basic public goods.

The fora brought together representatives from civil society, the international community, government, and academia to discuss the challenges posed by changing conflict dynamics, identify opportunities for cross-stakeholder collaboration, and share good practices to mitigate the negative impact on civilians.

I. Principles of Good Practices

Across conflict settings, "good practices" are commonly based on one or more of the following principles:

- Establishing *open communication* within and between communities is important for building trust, resulting in improved collaboration, mutual support, and prevention of violence escalation.

- Many communities prefer *bottom-up approaches* due to the lack of trust in the state. Bottom-up approaches better reflect individual communities' diverse needs and experiences and foster collaboration within them. However, these approaches need to be supported by state actors.

- A *long-term perspective* is crucial for consideration of any practices to ensure their sustainability and ability to help tackle communities' evolving needs in the future. This perspective includes the emphasis on the provision of education and opportunities for children and young adults.

II. Examples of Good Practices

- *Food support among neighbours*. Communities in conflict settings face disruption of food supplies, increasing the price of essential foods. To some extent, planting vegetables in backyard gardens of family homes, that can be shared or exchanged with neighbours, can mitigate the impact of food shortages.

- *Support with travel*. Travelling in or near a conflict zone can be difficult and dangerous due to various risks like security checkpoints, artillery shelling, and criminal activity such as sexual violence, robbery, and kidnapping by gangs, armed groups, and state forces. Help in the form of driving people or arranging travel in groups in busses or collective taxis are effective ways to deal with insecurity, maintain food and other basic supplies, and access healthcare.

- *Women's networks*. In conflict settings, survivors/victims of sexual violence often lack access to adequate healthcare, psychosocial help, or safety shelters. Informal women's networks provide support and protection for the survivors/victims that includes safe houses, counselling, and medical care.

- *Social healing programmes*. Organising sessions on the role of violence, forgiveness, and compromise by communities for those who were exposed to violence helps restore trust and build a common interest within communities. Social healing activities also bring needed attention to the social dimensions that tend to be overlooked in favour of the political dimensions of armed conflict. By incorporating storytelling and arts into the sessions, individuals are able to effectively share their experiences and gain insight into the struggles of other community members.

- *Bottom-up governance programmes*. In conflict settings where trust in the state is low, it is vital to establish platforms where diverse representatives of communities can discuss issues related to security, public goods provision, governance, and economic development directly with state representatives (police, ministers, governors, mayors, etc.). These programmes should be inclusive of all members of society, particularly those who are marginalised or vulnerable, and thus, should include representatives of women's groups, youth groups, religious leaders, clan elders, etc. Depending on the community's needs, public or closed forums can serve as effective platforms for this purpose.

- *Youth programmes*. Facilitating group meetings for young people from diverse communities can enhance cross-community communication, foster trust, and establish measures to prevent and de-escalate violence. It is important to ensure gender balance in group participation to promote gender equality, amplify the voices of women and girls, and improve their societal position in the long run.

- *Early warning systems*. Real-time conflict mapping provides valuable insights into conflict hotspots, dangerous areas, and healthcare needs during times of violence resurgence. Early warning systems accessible to the public can assist with safe travel planning, provide risk assessments for specific locations, and predict the evolution of security threat levels.

About the Conflict Platform's Network for Change

The Network for Change is the second phase of the project (Conflict Platform, http://www.conflictplatform.ox.ac.uk/) based at the University of Oxford, which started on 1 January 2017, funded by the UK Research Council's Partnership for Conflict, Crime and Security Research. The Conflict Platform seeks to enhance understanding of changing conflict dynamics along five dimensions: the actor involved in conflict, the methods used, the resources that fuel conflict, the environments where conflict takes place, and the impact it has on individuals, communities and societies. The team has developed a novel conceptualisation of armed conflicts and a tool (see UN article) to analyse changes across the five dimensions of conflict[iii]. For the project's second phase, we selected **the Horn of Africa and Myanmar** as some of the world's most protracted conflicts. In this phase, our goal is to deepen the Conflict Platform's positive impact that benefits communities affected by armed conflict. These activities include innovative cross-stakeholder fora through which local community leaders with lived experiences of conflict, practitioners, policymakers, and academics with expertise in conflict and related fields (e.g. policy, security, development) will engage with each other and the findings of our research. Creatively employing modern technologies, we will integrate written resources with innovative resources in the form of photoessays, storytelling, and web-based interactive visualisations to provide forum participants with a wide array of input formats for discussions during the fora and further knowledge exchange among the participants.

Project Partners:
- Global Security Programme (University of Oxford)
- Danish Refugee Council
- International Alert
- UN System Staff College

The Conflict Platform's Network for Change was generously funded by the Art & Humanities Research Council.

Global Security Programme: https://globalsecurity.web.ox.ac.uk

The Global Security Programme (GSP), based at Pembroke College, conducts cutting-edge research on global security in the contemporary world. Taking a genuinely interdisciplinary approach to global security research, GSP focuses on security dynamics in the context of armed conflict, cross-border violence, and the global illicit economy; transitions from war to peace, and responses to insecurity. We emphasise the connections between localised insecurities and global shifts in power and order. While grounded in Political Science and International Relations, our work also draws on insights from other social science disciplines and is in dialogue with the humanities, the arts and STEM. Our research combines various methods ranging from ethnographic approaches and visualisation techniques to quantitative methods such as GIS analysis. We place emphasis on both developing rigorous theorisations of security as well as carrying out applied research. To enhance the positive impact of our work, we have long-standing partnerships with various UN bodies as well as universities in conflict zones, and advise governments and international organisations.

---

[i] Cross-stakeholder forums were organised by GSP as part of the CONPEACE initiative and the Network for Change project, and with different partners in different places.
[ii] Different partners were involved in different countries.
[iii] Annette Idler, "Change in armed conflict: An introduction", *International Political Science Review*, 2023.