Reducing Violence in a Time of Global Uncertainty

The new Sustainable Development Goal to reduce armed violence is a welcome commitment but the prescriptive nature of its approach is problematic – there is 'no one size fits all'. Rather, focus needs to be on how violence operates in particular settings. Evidence from IDS' Addressing and Mitigating Violence programme highlights the need to pursue bespoke approaches to tackling violence. We must recognise how different types of violence interlink and reinforce each other; how transnational and local-level actors involved with violence connect and operate; and how democratic spaces, and agency, need support and consideration for the pursuit of peaceful outcomes.

With the Syrian conflict dragging into its sixth year; a linked humanitarian migrant crisis in Europe; a slowing Chinese economy raising potential for instability in China-reliant countries with conflict risks; a fragmentation of political authority and a surge in violence at Europe's borders, as seen in Libya; and new violence flaring in old conflict systems such as the Horn of Africa, Western policymakers face multiple challenges in addressing, containing and mitigating conflict and security risks overseas and at their borders.

Reducing armed violence – and that outside of traditional inter-state conflict settings – has emerged as a major area of development policy and programming over the past ten years. However, it is more recent directives that have crystallised and confirmed the centrality of violence in hindering positive development outcomes. The *World Development Report 2011* on Conflict, Security and Development gave significant impetus to the issue whilst the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have formalised practice into a global objective. Goal 16 of the SDGs is explicit in '…promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels'.

Indeed, these are the key elements which now inform a level of consensus around how to approach violence. These include creating legitimate institutions; strengthening both access to justice and security systems; extending economic opportunities and employment, especially for young people; and fostering societal resilience, both through institutions as well as by considering the sustainability of interventions.

Such best practice holds significant appeal for donors. It not only helps establish priorities; directs trends in research funding and advocacy efforts; but also offers an explanation for complex dynamics and trends to a wider public and provides conflict-affected states with a reference point when seeking support and funds.

There are, though, problems with this approach. Firstly it states the obvious – that to be less violent states and societies should be more like places that are more peaceful. However, reducing violence needs long processes of change and adjustment – not just more funding, capacity building and political attention. In addition violence, in some contexts, has become the currency of development – for example, the opportunities created by globalisation, such as violence-driven transboundary drug smuggling in West African states

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– and the bedrock of politics in Syria, South Sudan and Somalia. In such complex contexts there is no 'one size fits all' approach. Rather, far more attention is needed on how violence operates and its logic in particular settings.

Key insights into reducing violence

Evidence from IDS' four-year programme, Addressing and Mitigating Violence, confirms there is no single formula to reducing violence. Rather many pathways exist and bespoke approaches are needed. Three cross-cutting themes emerged from the analysis which can help inform current thinking:

The compound nature of violence

Violence can manifest itself in many ways, such as riots, armed robberies, terrorism, and sexual and gender-based violence. These are often treated as separate from one another. Yet, different forms of violence (such as intimate, criminal, public, political and state-sponsored) are interlinked and can reinforce one another. It is difficult and problematic to treat various forms of violence separately.

Work in Nigeria (Niger Delta), Sierra Leone, Egypt and Kenya (Marsabit County) indicates the importance of recognising that the violence which exists is not just a manifestation of criminality or a reflection of social problems but is connected to political process. Evidence from Nairobi and Mumbai illustrates that different types of urban violence are entwined, with neighbourhoods which experienced riots or post-election violence tending to have prevalent crime and gang activities. Research in South Asia also indicates that urban violence comes in the form of social violence (interpersonal), economic violence (street crime, drug-related violence and kidnapping), and political violence, all three of which are deeply interconnected and extenuate, or are extenuated by, conditions in cities. Subsequently, responses to urban violence in India, Pakistan and Nepal have tended to be militaristic rather than addressing marginalisation for instance, with limited success in preventing urban violence.

Violence reduction and post-conflict peace-building initiatives need to be interconnected, in order to address the violence issue as a whole, rather than as discreet, unrelated problems. The responsibility for addressing violence is often situated within a specific government department, unit or body that is unaccustomed to working across boundaries. For example, domestic violence is usually left to organisations that focus on women. However, in order to address domestic violence it is necessary to work with many sectors, such as justice, enforcement, health, and education with men and women. An intersectoral, multi-level governance approach is needed.

Connectivity of actors across levels and space

Actors involved in both violence and peace-building are found at all levels of politics and governance: international, transnational, national, regional and local. In order to address the multitude of actors who are involved in violence and in peace-building, there is again a need for a multi-level governance approach. However, micro-level, and transnational actors are often ignored by policymakers, and the links between 'legitimate' and unlawful actors are also often ignored – for example, state actors collude with criminal groups (gangs and organised crime) and businesses that operate outside of the law (including multinationals). It is important to include all actors who can affect ongoing violence and peace, the motivation for violence needs to be suppressed at all levels.

Analysis in the Niger Delta indicates the important role transnational actors can play in local violence. The 'protection' contracts offered to militant youth groups by the oil multinationals so that they could operate in the Delta undisturbed, helped fan the violence in the Niger Delta, whilst large direct cash payments to community leaders and community assistance/development programmes deepened it by stirring inter-ethnic tensions over community development resources. Evidence gathered in Kenya shows that transnational actors and processes have fed into Kenya's system of violence, connecting its 'internal' and 'external' stresses – Al-Shabaab has exploited already existing tensions to localise jihad within Kenya.

Findings also show that in West Africa externally designed and funded strategies to curb the flow of illicit drugs through the region are not sufficiently taking into account

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the transnational nature of the cocaine trade and the interplay of internal and external factors. Broader political, economic and governance reforms to address the root causes of insecurity are needed rather than just focusing on enhancing law enforcement, drug interdiction and judicial capacities.

However, it is also clear that individuals are active agents and agency at the local-level feeds into violence dynamics operating at wider scales. Research looking at political settlements and violence in Egypt and Marsabit County, Kenya, suggests that ordinary citizens' role in the process is often neglected by policy approaches aiming for peaceful political settlements. Citizens confer legitimacy to higher-level political settlements and have the ability to shape and break them, including by taking recourse to violence.

In Kenya it is clear that much of the violence in poor neighbourhoods is carried out by criminal organisations and linked to complex local-level political struggles. Not recognising the instrumental use of violence in local politics has meant that interventions have failed to involve influential local-level figures. Responses to violence need to consider multiple levels of governance and politics, with the role of community-level political entrepreneurs especially crucial.

Gender, vulnerability and agency

Violence is not experienced equally everywhere and by everyone – age, gender, poverty and wealth, ethnic or religious identity can result in a different experience of violence. Yet from our research, two key factors are central to the experiencing of acute levels of violence – high levels of poverty and inequality; and gender. Indeed, evidence from an informal settlement in Cape Town highlights the challenges that activists combatting gender-based violence face in trying to carve out meaningful interventions within communities struggling with endemic poverty and inequality.

Gender roles are central to the experience of violence. Studies in Egypt illustrate how women and girls restrict their mobility to avoid being exposed to violence, whilst men use violence to manage women's dissent and their engagement in the public sphere. Case

studies from urban South Asia confirm the dominant role that young men play as both the victims and perpetrators of violence, with high incidences of activity occurring within deprived/marginalised communities. Evidence from Nepal pinpoints the lack of employment opportunities as a key driver for young males to engage in violent criminal behaviour.

The ramifications of violence on citizen engagement are severe. Analysis from Egypt highlights how, after the revolution – and in particular in 2012 and 2013 – politically motivated sexual assault targeting women in protest spaces sought to deter them from political activism. This was against the backdrop of a radical Islamist discourse on women's place being at home, and, crucially, the absence of security.

Formal, accountable, responsive security mechanisms are key in preserving citizen engagement. Evidence from Cape Town detailed the importance of police responsiveness and accountability on issues of violence – across intimate, community and institutional spaces. These are critical for building relationships with citizens and in catalysing wider citizen action. In addition, policies and programmes designed to encourage citizen action against violence need to consider how activists are exposed to risks and how these can be addressed.

As we have seen with the Arab Spring the spaces which emerge for democratic, progressive movements for change can be short-lived, before elite negotiations take over. For policy, the challenge is both how to nurture such civil spaces, which keep alive the voices against violence and for political and democratic solutions; and to mobilise significant resources for movements that may not last longer than, say, 18 months. Specific considerations around what agency people at the grass roots have, how can they insist on accountability, and how and can they be supported, also need to be addressed. Such issues are key in encouraging women's participation – they have long been crucial in reclaiming space for protest and working not only against violence but for peaceful transition. New thinking around both security and violence is needed to support both national and community-wide peaceful movements.

Policy recommendations

- **There is no 'one size fits all' approach to addressing violence** – attention is needed on how violence operates and its logic in particular settings. Violence is not the opposite of peace, and may exist in spite of there being no armed conflict or war. Violence is a reality in many settings, and it is often part of state-building as well as the processes leading to broader political agreements.

- **An intersectoral, multi-level governance approach is needed to address violence** as a complex phenomenon with many interrelated threads and drivers. A multi-level governance approach is essential to understand how violence operates through the connectivity of actors, negotiations and conflict across levels and space. The influences of transnationalism and networked global capital can also work against forces seeking a more inclusive political agreement. Equally significant is that an emphasis on national political settlements and political marketplaces can overplay the role of elites and underplay the agency of local people and groups, whether to support violence or to resist or contain it.

- **Interventions to support citizen agency must recognise that citizen identities are 'multifaceted' and varied** – therefore aid and violence reduction programmes need to engage in a 'multifaceted' way. A vital question is how to nurture civil spaces, near the centre or sub-nationally, which keep alive the voices against violence and for political and democratic solutions. What agency do people at the grass roots have, how can they insist on accountability, how and can they be supported?

- **The pressures of shortened aid cycles and funder demands for results can lead to short-term 'projectised' interventions** that do not address the underlying drivers of violence. Violence reduction is a goal requiring long-term commitment and interventions. Results cannot be guaranteed. Donors must be more flexible and risk-tolerant in fragile situations – results cannot be guaranteed.

- **More money is not always the solution.** Equally important are means for delivering aid, and ensuring that assistance is provided in a conflict-sensitive way. In some contexts, pared-back intervention by international actors in the short and medium term, coupled with commitment to support violence reduction and peace-building over the long term, can have more positive outcomes for reducing violence.

- **In order for violence reduction to be effective, the basis for intervention must be local understandings of peace and security** in places where violence is happening. The optimal design of institutions is never an absolute. Rather, it changes in response to political conditions and trends, and framings of these by different stakeholders in places where violence is a way of life, and often a currency of politics.

Further reading

Lind, J.; Mutahi, P. and Oosterom, M. (2015) *Tangled Ties: Al-Shabaab and Political Volatility in Kenya*, IDS Evidence Report 130, Brighton: IDS

Luckham, R. (2015) *Whose Security? Building Inclusive and Secure Societies in an Unequal and Insecure World*, IDS Evidence Report 151, Brighton: IDS

Schultze-Kraft, M. and Hinkle, S. (2014) *Toward Effective Violence Mitigation: Transforming Political Settlements*, IDS Evidence Report 101, Brighton: IDS

Shahrokh, T. and Wheeler, J. (2014) *Agency and Citizenship in a Context of Gender-Based Violence*, IDS Evidence Report 73, Brighton: IDS

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