ADDRESSING FRAGILITY THROUGH INTEGRATED PEACEBUILDING

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I. Introduction[1]

We are living in an era of complex compounding crises, where issues inter-connect but are not predictable. Needs are far too high and too much is being asked from aid interventions with limited resources. Deepening global instability impacts the effectiveness of delivering aid in fragile states and conflict-affected regions. Policymakers navigating this complex landscape must contend with the multifaceted nature of fragility while grappling with a crisis in multilateralism that threatens coordinated action. The intricate relationships between fragility, aid effectiveness and peacebuilding efforts need examination to elicit critical insights to inform both policy and practice.[2] Binary thinking and siloed approaches make it difficult to find sustainable holistic solutions. Existing models of peacebuilding are strained by multiple crises and an increasingly polarized world order, while hard security solutions, which often perpetuate conflict, are gaining more traction.[3] At the same time, there is a crisis of legitimacy for many aid actors due to a historical tendency to frame the development agenda in terms of the Global North's priorities. Thus, there is a need to change unequal power structures between the Global South and the Global North, including in the decision-making processes.[4] The current path is unsustainable and comes with great human suffering. The Global North must give greater priority to addressing fragility, despite the difficulties, while also reforming the aid model.

[2] International Peace Institute (IPI) and Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), *Multilateralism Index 2024* (IPI/IEP: New York, Oct. 2024).

[3] Costantini, I. and O'Driscoll, D., 'Twenty years of externally promoted security assistance in Iraq: Changing approaches and their limits', *International Peacekeeping*, vol. 30, no. 5 (2023).

[4] Peace Direct, *Time to Decolonise Aid: Insights and Lessons from a Global Consultation* (Peace Direct: London, May 2021); and Yohannes, D. et al., *Regional Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding in Africa: Pathway for the New Agenda for Peace*, Institute for Security Studies (ISS) Africa Report no. 43 (ISS: Pretoria, June 2023).

SUMMARY

● The world today is facing unrelenting and interrelated environmental, ecological, demographic, socio-economic and political pressures that challenge resources at local, national, regional and global levels. Addressing these crises requires integrated approaches that respond to their compounding nature as well as new funding modalities to spur effective collaboration.

This SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security paper explores both the opportunities and processes for reforming aid provision in fragile settings. The paper advocates for an integrated peacebuilding approach that tackles multiple complex issues together in a collaborative, long-term and interlinked manner. It outlines necessary changes at the political, donor and organizational levels to make this approach a reality.

Fragile settings consist of compounding crises, where several overlapping and interconnected challenges—such as risks related to climate, socio-economic security and conflict—make populations vulnerable to acute shocks, as government weakness limits adaptive capacity. Given these dynamics, aid as a whole needs to become more effective and integrated, which means contributing to reducing the vulnerability of individuals, communities and society to political, socio-economic and environmental shocks stemming from both the local and global levels. Centring peacebuilding within aid can reduce the probability (long term) and the impact (short term) of these shocks through integrated approaches (political, conflict, socio-economic, environmental and ecological). Such integration enables space, agency and ownership for affected individuals, communities and societies.

Building on the authors' extensive experience of peacebuilding, aid and working in fragile settings, this paper lays out a path towards change, which they see as vital. The world is generally in a more dangerous place than 20 years ago, and peacebuilding is needed now more than ever. The crisis in the aid system, which fails to meet rising demands or address root causes like conflict, highlights an acute need for action. Despite increasing official development assistance (ODA), funding is insufficient, leaving over 300 million people in need and exacerbating vulnerabilities caused by climate change (section II). An integrated peacebuilding approach, embedding peacebuilding into aid programming, is essential to address fragility, promote local partnerships and tackle sociopolitical conflict drivers, ensuring cohesive and sustainable interventions (section III). The current fragmented approach perpetuates fragility, making systemic change urgent. Integrated peacebuilding offers a framework to reduce vulnerabilities and foster resilience, requiring strong political leadership and decisive action to address the root causes holistically (section IV).

II. The need to act

The aid system is in crisis. Despite increases in the total level of ODA, funding does not meet needs and there is a failure to address root causes. Consequently, humanitarian need is increasing, though it is also significantly underfunded.[5] Over 300 million people (and rising) need humanitarian assistance, while over 120 million people are forcibly displaced due to persecution, conflict, violence and human rights violations.[6] Conflict plays a considerable role in driving need: according to the Global Peace Index there were 56 active armed conflicts, and 92 countries involved in conflicts outside their borders, in 2024.[7] The number of protracted crises is increasing; these

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[5] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 'International aid rises in 2023 with increased support to Ukraine and humanitarian needs', Press release, 11 Apr. 2024; and Oxfam, 'Still too important to fail: Addressing the humanitarian financing gap in an era of escalating climate impacts', Oxfam Discussion Paper, May 2023; and IPI and IEP (note 2).

[6] United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), *Global Humanitarian Overview 2024* (OCHA: New York, 2023); and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2023* (UNHCR Global Data Service: Copenhagen, 2024).

[7] IEP, *Global Peace Index 2024: Measuring Peace in a Complex World* (IEP: Sydney, June 2024), p. 2. See also Raleigh, C. and Kishi, K., 'ACLED Conflict Index results: July 2024', Armed Conflict Location & Event Data, July 2024.

are responsible for the bulk of the demand for resources.[8] Countries that are in protracted crisis receive less ODA per person than others, despite their greater need and significantly worse levels of extreme poverty.[9] Between 2010 and 2019, 59 per cent of humanitarian assistance was allocated to countries facing chronic crises, yet funding mostly failed to address underlying vulnerabilities.[10] This demonstrates the need for change in the way aid is delivered in such spaces, in terms of both demonstrating the continuing effectiveness of interventions in fragile contexts and strengthening the role of aid in reducing fragility.

Despite conflict being a key driver, the share of ODA allocated for peacebuilding assistance is extremely low, ranging from 5 to 8 per cent. Climate adaptation funding for countries in protracted crises is also extremely low, despite the need for it. Funding trends demonstrate that there is a focus on the short term that is undermining long-term efforts to transform protracted conflict settings towards less fragile and more peaceful outcomes.[11]

The impact of climate change is making it harder to respond to crises while at the same time creating more crises. Climate change is increasing displacement and food insecurity.[12] Moreover, funding requirements for United Nations humanitarian appeals linked to extreme weather are eight times what they were 20 years ago.[13] The effects of conflict and climate change are having significant negative impacts on gross domestic product (GDP), creating more need. The global economic impact of violence—defined as 'expenditure and economic effect related to containing, preventing and dealing with the consequences of violence'—represents 13.5 per cent of global GDP.[14]

With more conflicts and greater climate impacts compounding the unmet need, we are at crisis point. The consequences of inaction are too great in terms of human suffering and global insecurity. How aid is operationalized needs to change, which requires global collaboration.

III. Towards aid effectiveness

An integrated peacebuilding approach

Creating peace is an iterative and continuous process. Integrated peacebuilding is a strategic approach that aims for a systematic transformation towards capacities for peace by incorporating peacebuilding elements across all aid programming and policy decisions regarding aid actions. This includes, but is not limited to, food security, climate adaptation, natural resource

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[8] ALNAP, *The State of the Humanitarian System* (ALNAP/ODI Global: London, 2022).

[9] Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and Development Initiatives (DI), *Leaving No Crisis Behind with Assistance for the Triple Nexus: Humanitarian, Development and Peace Funding in Crisis Contexts* (SIDA/DI: Sundbyberg, 2023).

[10] Milante, G. and Lilja, J., 'Chronic crisis financing? Fifty years of humanitarian aid and future prospects', SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security no. 2022/05, Apr. 2022.

[11] SIDA and DI (note 9).

[12] Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), 'Summary for policymakers', *Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [Core Writing Team, H. Lee and J. Romero (eds)] (IPCC: Geneva, 2023), pp. 1–34.

[13] Carty, T. and Walsh, L., 'Footing the bill: Fair finance for loss and damage in an era of escalating climate impacts', Oxfam Briefing Paper, June 2022.

[14] IEP (note 7), p. 39.

management, vocational training, employment creation, economic and business development, social security measures, governance programmes, and humanitarian/transitional aid; it also includes the private sector.[15]

'Integrated peacebuilding' means peacebuilding is designed as an integral part of development programmes, not implemented alongside them. This will include trade-offs between development interventions and peacebuilding goals. By its nature, an integrated peacebuilding approach requires a greater willingness to think and act politically within the set-up of a development aid programme.

An integrated peacebuilding approach shifts the focus from isolated thematic responses to a comprehensive, long-term, multisectoral strategy aimed at reducing societal vulnerabilities and addressing the interconnected drivers of fragility in conjunction with peacebuilding. It is important that the context is front and centre. This allows for designing clearer and longer-term interventions that incorporate local, national and regional needs, understandings and visions. This approach actively involves and empowers local and regional actors in the development of solutions. It means moving away from externally designed plans that are often disconnected from the local context—an approach often criticized as being tantamount to the hammer looking for a nail.

This rebooting of development and peacebuilding approaches can only be realized if it grows out of an effort to ensure a more balanced and equal partnership between the Global South and the Global North. At the same time, to ensure potential for success, long-term planning has to be based on a solid understanding of the relevant power structures and institutions, as well as how change will happen within the local intervention context.[16] Integrating peacebuilding in this way ensures that, in the short term, all interventions are working in a common direction (reducing drivers of fragility), while, in the longer term, it creates the common thread that enables projects to be linked up and designed to complement each other.

Partnership and collaboration—a political approach

Partnership is essential to ensure expertise feeds into such an approach and that, at a minimum, there is a shared understanding of how projects tackle the drivers of fragility. This can be done through one organization leading and bringing in others for their expertise and understanding of the work, or through developing multiple complementary projects as part of a long-term plan.[17] Over the longer term, it is important that programmes are designed to feed into, and complement, each other and that all organizations are working towards the same long-term strategic vision. Peace should not be viewed as a side effect of programming but as part of programme design. Integration requires effort; it means integration within an organization and between

[15] SIDA and DI (note 9); and Ganson, B., 'Private sector development in fragile states: A peacebuilding approach', ISS Policy Brief, 9 Dec. 2021.

[16] Levine, S. and Pain, A., *Ten Traps to Avoid If Aid Programming Is Serious About Engaging with Context: Lessons from Afghanistan* (SPARC: London, Jan. 2024).

[17] Bunse, S. and Delgado, C., 'Promoting peace through climate-resilient food security initiatives', SIPRI Research Policy Paper, Feb. 2024.

organizations. It does not mean merely coordinating activities, but requires developing activities together.[18]

For example, there is significant need for climate adaptation in fragile contexts, despite affected countries' limited contribution to global warming. However, climate adaptation measures will feed into a broader long-term plan of reducing vulnerabilities only if they also address human, social, economic, environmental and political drivers of conflict and fragility—in other words, only by taking an integrated approach. At the same time, this approach is political because it combines adaptation measures with programme activities for local conflict transformation. It will support local mediation and violence prevention measures where relevant, strengthening social cohesion at the community level as well as between citizen constituencies and the state. It will incorporate inclusive and just natural resource management that respects the interests of indigenous groups, gender and youth empowerment, and so on.[19] Such a plan would also ensure that any responses to extreme weather events would have the additional aim of reducing vulnerabilities and the drivers of fragility through a mix of peacebuilding, development and climate adaptation elements, undertaken in collaboration with various stakeholders with relevant expertise and interests, in a way that is strategic and conflict- and context-sensitive. This is especially important because of the clear evidence that when government responses to extreme weather events are seen as inadequate by those affected, the consequence is often instability and conflict, especially in fragile contexts.[20]

There is untapped potential for greater integration of peacebuilding measures into a wide range of conventional development interventions if more political approaches are applied that address both conflict factors (across ethnopolitical and geographical fault lines) and wider societal power structures rooted in the respective political economies. A food security programme could 'just' deliver aid to the most deprived or it could attempt to bring conflicting groups together for collaboration and with shared benefits. It could attempt to engage in dialogue on land-use rights, peace-supportive value chains (in the agricultural sector), or the set-up of local and regional dispute-resolution mechanisms for the use of natural resources. Similarly, employment programmes have the potential to address conflict causes if designed in a context- and conflict-sensitive manner. 'Jobs for peace', for example, can only be achieved if there is non-discriminatory and inclusive access to appropriate (decent) jobs. That often requires political dialogue on various levels to mitigate ingrained structures—for example, around gender, patronage or corruption. In turn, an integrated development and peace programme needs to be designed differently from conventional aid programmes, and must deal with trade-offs between poverty alleviation as such and greater levels of social cohesion and stability.

[18] Molesworth, T. and Vernon, P., 'The changing context for UK humanitarian and development activities in FCACs', Foreign Policy Centre Blog, 6 Dec. 2021.

[19] Krampe, F. et al., 'Climate change and peacebuilding: Sub-themes of an emerging research agenda', International Affairs, vol. 100, no. 3 (2024).

[20] Pfaff, K., 'Assessing the risk of pre-existing grievances in non-democracies: The conditional effect of natural disasters on repression', International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction, vol. 42 (2020).

Operationalizing integrated peacebuilding

The lack of investment in peacebuilding needs rectifying. An integrated peacebuilding approach can provide new impetus for sustainable development and peaceful social relations. It combines a focus both on reducing immediate violence and on societal transformation.[21] The breadth of peacebuilding (preventing or ending violent conflict, building or sustaining peace) means that there are always opportunities to integrate peacebuilding in humanitarian, development and climate adaptation programmes and projects.[22] Integrated peacebuilding is, in short, a useful and flexible instrument for building a better future for people: there is no excuse for not using it.

It is imperative that all processes begin with a thorough contextual understanding that ensures activities do not foster conflict.[23] Despite their recognized benefits, conflict analyses are all too often overlooked, and when they are done, they are often desk-based and conducted by outside experts with little understanding of the local dynamics.[24] Conflict analyses should instead be the start of local engagement, ensuring that local experiences and understandings inform the design process and that decisions are made based on context rather than what has worked elsewhere.[25] Local knowledge is essential for getting to the real drivers of conflict and identifying factors that may exacerbate conflict, as well as potential mitigators.[26]

To take an integrated approach where peacebuilding is at the centre, conflict analysis should be complemented by peace analysis. A peace analysis allows for an understanding of the opportunities for peace and enables local perspectives to once again feed into the design of programmes and projects. A thorough understanding of the variety of peace opportunities provides the basis for integration of activities in a clear longer-term strategic plan focusing on building towards peace and reducing vulnerabilities. It also ensures that all interventions integrate peacebuilding activities, providing the common thread in the plan. A peace analysis should ensure that understandings of peace are not based entirely on external visions; rather, local conceptualizations of what peace means are considered within programme design.[27]

Both conflict and peace analyses need to be better resourced and revisited throughout the lifespan of projects. Local dynamics shift constantly and programming needs to reflect this. Regular peace and conflict analyses allow for programming to adapt to the changing dynamics and to the evolution of how the relevant society envisions peace. For effective integration, there

[21] Brown, S., Mena, R. and Brown, S., 'The peace dilemma in the triple nexus: Challenges and opportunities for the humanitarian–development–peace approach', *Development in Practice*, vol. 34, no. 5 (2024).

[22] Norman, J. M. and Mikhael, D., 'Rethinking the triple-nexus: Integrating peacebuilding and resilience initiatives in conflict contexts', *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, vol. 18, no. 3 (2023).

[23] Mac Ginty, R., 'What works? Effectiveness in mediation and peacemaking: A policy brief', Durham University, 2024.

[24] Julian, R., Bliesemann de Guevara, B. and Redhead, R., 'From expert to experiential knowledge: Exploring the inclusion of local experiences in understanding violence in conflict', *Peacebuilding*, vol. 7, no. 2 (2019).

[25] Millar, G., 'For whom do local peace processes function? Maintaining control through conflict management', *Cooperation and Conflict*, vol. 52, no. 3 (2017).

[26] Weerawardhana, C., *Decolonising Peacebuilding: Managing Conflict from Northern Ireland to Sri Lanka and Beyond* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing: Newcastle upon Tyne, 2018).

[27] Firchow, P. and Mac Ginty, R., 'Measuring peace: Comparability, commensurability, and complementarity using bottom-up indicators', *International Studies Review*, vol. 19, no. 1 (2017).

should be increased efforts to undertake joint conflict and peace analyses, as well as the sharing of analyses among organizations. Operationalizing an effective, multisectoral, integrated peacebuilding approach necessitates constant learning. It especially needs to ensure that local voices articulate what works best, and what does not work, in terms of the long-term objective of enhancing capacities for peace and tackling the drivers of fragility.[28]

Integration must include the private sector, as in fragile settings private sector actions and investment have the potential to either exacerbate or alleviate conflict and to increase or decrease fragility.[29] The private sector's actions (and financial investment) should form part of the longer-term plan to tackle the drivers of fragility. However, to engage the private sector in addressing underlying socio-economic challenges, it is essential that an authoritative body provides oversight and that the international community drives the integrated approach, involving regional bodies such as the African Union and international organizations such as the UN Peacebuilding Commission.[30]

Funding

Funding plays a significant role in driving the work of aid agencies, so changes to financing practices can influence how aid is delivered. Funding should enhance cooperation not competition, as should the adoption of an integrated approach. The necessary changes in aid delivery can be achieved through funding towards integrated peacebuilding, which requires (*a*) long-term funding based on interconnected issues, with a focus on reducing vulnerabilities; (*b*) a move away from funding specific sectoral issues; and (*c*) funding schemes that require multiple agencies to work together and design complementary programming as part of a longer-term peacebuilding plan. The German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development has begun taking this approach by bringing together different organizations through funding to build resilience in the Sahel.[31] However, this is just a starting point. To successfully tackle fragility, all programming should form part of an integrated long-term plan to reduce vulnerabilities, and integration needs to include all funded organizations and ensure local partners are involved from the outset.

Taking such a strategic portfolio approach requires better integration and coordination among donor organizations. For a successful integrated approach, integration has to happen within donor organizations. If the donors themselves are siloed, their funding will lack the necessary flexibility to address compounding and interlinked issues, while also missing opportunities for integrated programming.[32]

Reducing fragility requires the financing system to adjust so that it can respond quicker and with agility. Donors need to become more flexible,

[28] Levine and Pain (note 16).

[29] Mayer, M. et al., *Business and Peace: It Takes Two to Tango*, FriEnt Working Group on Peace and Development Dossier (CDA Collaborative Learning: Berlin, 2020).

[30] Ganson (note 15).

[31] Sahel Alliance, 'Conflicts, economic crises, and the impact of climate change: Comprehensive investments from Germany bolster resilience in the Sahel region', Joint press release from UNICEF, the UN World Food Programme and GIZ, 15 July 2024.

[32] Brown, Mena and Brown (note 21).

including developing an appetite for risk and experimentation to facilitate the creation of innovative projects. Consequently, donors also have to build tolerance for failure. The design of aid delivery systems must build in the ability to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances while maintaining a focus on long-term goals.[33] At the same time, donors need to have realistic expectations from projects in fragile settings, as reducing fragility and tackling the underlying issues are very much long-term endeavours.[34]

In an integrated approach, funding has to ensure projects have local partnerships from the outset and without intermediaries.[35] However, funding that includes local partnerships should not come at the cost of the local organizations' agency and connection to their grassroots. All too often funding structures force local organizations to adapt to the thinking and practices of the donor, and this loses sight of the very value of these local organizations in the first place.[36] Donors need to trust local organizations to design projects based on their understandings and experiences. Funding needs to become simpler for local organizations, so that the local population remains their key stakeholder, and so they can focus their attention on their core tasks. In turn, accountability processes need reforming based on the workings and requirements of local organizations.[37] At the same time, to ensure the success of such partnerships, there is a need to maintain dialogue with national power-holders, forge multistakeholder alliances and lobby for coordinated action.

Aid mandates and legitimacy

Aid organizations are responding to interconnected issues within a broader system of fragility, rather than to single-issue crises. Many of the instincts, reflexes and standard operating procedures of aid organizations do not reflect such a view. To form part of a unified response that addresses political, conflict, socio-economic, environmental and ecological issues cohesively, and to reduce fragility now and in the future, aid organizations' mandates need to adapt. This does not necessarily mean that an organization's primary focus has to change. But it does require acknowledgement that issues cannot be addressed in isolation and that they need long-term engagement, which in turn will broaden the organization's remit. This would result in organizations more naturally collaborating and in the longer term may see some organizations merging to respond to compounding crises more holistically within an integrated approach.[38]

To address the diminishing legitimacy of many aid organizations and donors, there needs to be a fundamental change to the power dynamics in existing relationships with partners in fragile settings. True efforts for equal partnership with local actors in planning and implementation can help

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[33] Passarelli, D. and Justino, P., *The Demand for a Fair International Financial Architecture* (United Nations University Centre for Policy Research: New York, 2024).

[34] Paffenholz, T., Poppelreuter, P. and Ross, N., 'Toward a third local turn: Identifying and addressing obstacles to localization in peacebuilding', *Negotiation Journal*, vol. 39, no. 4 (2023).

[35] Paffenholz, Poppelreuter and Ross (note 34).

[36] Vogel, B., 'Civil society capture: Top-down interventions from below?', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, vol. 10, no. 4 (2016).

[37] Paffenholz, Poppelreuter and Ross (note 34).

[38] Slim, H., 'Saving humans is not enough. Humanitarian purpose needs to change', New Humanitarian, 9 Sep. 2024; and Molesworth and Vernon (note 18).

build legitimacy. By fostering genuine partnerships and promoting inclusive decision-making processes, aid programmes can better address the root causes of fragility and create more sustainable outcomes. Recognizing that fragility manifests differently across various contexts, policymakers and implementing agencies must tailor aid strategies to address specific local needs and dynamics. However, this requires a change in how aid organizations operate and an institutionalized change to power dynamics.

Political leadership

Strong political leadership is required to fundamentally change the way aid interventions operate in fragile settings and to implement the suggestions put forward in this paper at scale. The message for change should come from the top. Political collaboration—including between 'traditional' and 'new' peace and aid donors, and their intermediaries—is essential to ensure broader complementarity between aid interventions with the longer-term aim of tackling fragility through meeting local needs effectively. Political leadership in this context means driving a move away from a focus on short-term stability towards addressing root causes and reducing vulnerabilities over the long term. It means support for addressing conflict factors and sociopolitical power structures through aid delivery, which includes developing a strategy for building this understanding at home.

The fact that the most direct path towards aid effectiveness is to prevent the creation of fragile settings in the first place is undeniable.[39] Unfortunately, humanitarian response has become attractive to some donor governments because it is less politically challenging than addressing the underlying issues of conflict. As a result, aid is caught in a cycle of providing humanitarian assistance to meet human need, without addressing the need in the first place.[40] There needs to be a shift at the political level to work on, not just in, conflict.[41] Prevention is accepted practice in fields like public health, but in conflict settings, practices are still largely responsive rather than preventive.[42] Political leaders need to foster a willingness to invest in conflict prevention, despite the fact that, from a political perspective, absence of conflict does not provide results to show to voters. Leaders should instead persuade voters to view such an investment as building sustainable peace and improving the lives and prospects of societies.[43]

The level of change required to make inroads into reversing fragility means that it needs to be a political project first and foremost. However, given the current deficit in such political leadership, donor agencies and aid organizations need to invest independently in the changes they can make towards integrated peacebuilding, while demonstrating their success to political leaders. Efficient planning with peacebuilding at its centre can counter the focus on shorter-term stability that many donors have, through linking

[39] Yohannes et al. (note 4).

[40] SIDA and DI (note 9).

[41] Brown, G., 'It's August 2024—and our world is at a turning point. Here's what we should do now', *The Guardian*, 24 Aug. 2024.

[42] Aguirre, M. and Lewis, P., 'Conflict prevention: Taming the dogs of war', *The World Today*, 10 Nov. 2022.

[43] Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, *Preventing Deadly Conflict: Final Report* (Carnegie Corporation: New York, 1997).

programming and collaborating with other agencies as part of a longer-term plan to address fragility.[44] At a slower pace, change can become a bottom-up process.

IV. Conclusions

Given the nature and complexity of the crises faced, aid delivery needs to change if it is to be effective. This paper has suggested several changes focused on an integrated peacebuilding approach that addresses political, conflict, socio-economic, environmental and ecological issues cohesively as part of a longer-term strategic plan to reduce fragility and societal vulnerabilities. Placing peacebuilding at the centre of such an approach has the potential to simultaneously (*a*) reduce the probability and impact of the multiple shocks currently impacting fragile settings; (*b*) support the transformation of protracted conflict settings towards less fragile and more peaceful outcomes; and (*c*) provide the common thread to more easily interweave programming within a broader long-term plan to tackle the drivers of fragility.

As highlighted in this paper, a fundamental shift in operations is essential. A political drive for change would balance the current power imbalances between supply and demand for aid. It would shift funding processes, which would in turn drive organizational change and eventual mandate adaptation—all while having the additional challenge of keeping current programmes going. Through first integrating peacebuilding into existing programming, continuation is possible amid these broader changes. At the same time, aid organizations should press ahead with change independently, while pushing for more dialogue with their respective key stakeholders— donor organizations and governments, and ministerial powerbrokers—to promote the design and implementation of interventions focused on tackling the drivers of fragility.

Too much of the world is sliding into a trap that entangles ordinary people in worsening vulnerability through poor economic performance, governance that is both weak and arbitrary, the pressure of climate change and extreme weather events, and violent conflict. Integrated peacebuilding holds transformative potential to bridge the gaps across aid, creating a holistic approach that not only addresses immediate crises but also fosters sustainable resilience and conflict prevention. If a siloed approach to aid continues, it will perpetuate cycles of dependence and fragility rather than build pathways to enduring peace. To escape those cyclical traps, the first step and the precondition is political decisiveness, which in turn starts by giving greater priority to both the problems and the solutions discussed in this paper.

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[44] Molesworth and Vernon (note 18).

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