Peace Responsiveness:

Delivering on the promise of Sustaining Peace and the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus

Briefing Note

The international agenda for peace and sustainable development faces significant challenges. Today, the global number of ongoing conflicts stubbornly remains at an all-time high, millions are still displaced, conflict-induced humanitarian crises continue and none of the world's conflict-affected nations are on track to meet key Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The spectre of climate change, the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and further economic uncertainty and inequality compound the risk of conflict.

The fundamental question for humanitarian, development and peace (HDP) action has not changed: how can we help reduce conflict risks, transform conflict dynamics and bring about more resilient societies that require less assistance? **The imperative for all actors, across sectors, to contribute to peace is enshrined in key policy commitments.** *However, challenges remain primarily at the operational level. So what changes can international HDP actors make in their day-to-day operations to better contribute to conditions for sustainable, long-term peace? "Peace responsiveness" is an operational paradigm designed to address these challenges.*

> **Peace responsiveness implies transforming the capacity of actors operating in conflict-affected or fragile contexts to be conflict-sensitive and to contribute to peace outcomes through their technical programming. Peace responsiveness requires proceeding in a way that enhances collective impact, supports inclusive, gender-responsive, locally led change and strengthens societal resilience to conflict and violence.**

This briefing note unpacks this new concept and the approach that Interpeace has developed through its collaboration with various UN agencies.

The need for a new approach to peace

Implementing the SDGs first requires preventing violence and redressing existing violent conflicts. Violent conflict has surged over the past decade and has become increasingly complex and protracted and predominantly internal to communities and nations. Conflict and violence are the biggest obstacles to reaching the SDGs by 2030. SDG 16 "peace, justice and strong institutions" is a catalyst for progress on all the other SDGs, while all other SDGs can also contribute to peaceful and resilient societies.

This was recognised in the 2016 Sustaining Peace Resolutions[1] that call upon all actors to contribute to peace. At their conceptual hearts, the Sustaining Peace Resolutions as well as the Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus fundamentally acknowledge that it is not just peace actors that build or enable the conditions for peace. All actors can make important contributions by being conflict sensitive and peace responsive. To realise these changes, humanitarian and development actors require new tools, approaches, mindsets and incentives to change their practice. This is fundamentally about changing *how and who* they engage at all stages of programme design, implementation and evaluation and not necessarily about changing *what* they do within the specific technical area they are mandated to work on.

Sustainable peace and conflict prevention cannot be advanced without progress in conflict sensitivity practice – and that is not currently happening. Too often, aid continues to cause unintended harm. Even though "doing no harm" is widely accepted as a principle, conflict sensitivity is often insufficiently implemented in practice. A recent synthesis review of aid delivered in conflict-affected settings showed that *"on the aggregate, aid in conflict zones is more likely to exacerbate violence than to dampen violence"*.[2] In addition to potentially exacerbating conflict, such interventions are also less effective when they insufficiently consider societal dynamics and fail to build trust. The response to the 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa is a powerful example. The international response to the crisis was heavily criticised as too little, too late, and largely ineffective.[3] Where more inclusive and locally led responses were adopted, the effectiveness of the response surged.

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1 United Nations (Security Council). *UN Security Council Resolution 2282 (S/RES/2282)*. Security Council Report. 27 April, 2016. https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2282.pdf; United Nations (General Assembly). *UN General Assembly Resolution 70/262 (A/RES/70/262)*. United Nations. 12 May, 2016. https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_70_262. pdf

2 Zürcher, Christoph. *The Impact of Development Aid on Organised Violence: A Systematic Assessment*. New Delhi: International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie), 3ie Working Paper 37. August 2020. https://www.3ieimpact.org/ evidence-hub/publications/working-papers/impact-development-aid-organised-violence-systematic or DOI: http://doi. org/10.23846/WP0037

3 See for instance Dubois, Marc, Caitlin Wake, Scarlett Sturridge, and Christina Bennett. *The Ebola response in West Africa: Exposing the Politics and Culture of International Aid*. London, UK: HPG Working Paper (ODI). October 2015. https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/9903.pdf

The lack of progress in practice has been demonstrated by various peacebuilding architecture reviews, systematic evaluations and real-world experience. The ongoing challenge is to translate existing policy commitments into practice: how can international actors improve their day-to-day operations to better contribute to conditions for sustainable, long-term peace? "Peace responsiveness" is an operational paradigm designed to address this challenge.

Peace is not built by peacebuilders alone

Peace responsiveness' aim is for all actors operating in conflict-affected settings to contribute to more peaceful and resilient societies. It seeks to enhance the ability of actors operating in conflict-affected or fragile contexts to be conflict sensitive and to deliberately contribute to peace through their technical programming. All this in a way that enhances collective impact, supports inclusive, gender-responsive and locally led change and strengthens societal resilience to conflict and violence.


Peace responsiveness recognises that peace cannot be built or enabled by peacebuilders alone. Only through a combination of development, humanitarian, human rights and security approaches can real, cumulative impact towards sustainable peace be achieved.

Peace responsiveness can increase peace effectiveness as well as programme effectiveness. Years of hard-earned experience indicate that when aid insufficiently considers local contexts, it is less ef-

fective, not sustainable and may cause harm. A more peace-responsive aid system can therefore achieve greater impact in two interrelated dimensions. It will achieve greater *peace effectiveness* through its more deliberate programming towards sustainable peace; it will achieve greater *programme effectiveness and sustainability* through an increased contextual awareness and ability to adapt interventions to the realities, relationships and capacities on the ground.

Peace responsiveness is not concerned with changing the mandates of humanitarian and development actors. Rather, it is about different actors pursuing their own paths in line with their respective mandates, while always seeking to contribute to the common objective of more peaceful, inclusive and resilient societies.
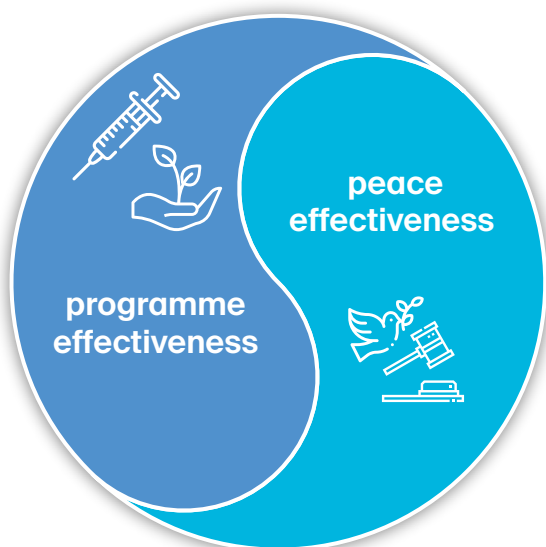
What peace means

Peace means different things to different individuals and organizations. This has implications for what is meant by "contributing to sustainable peace". Sustainable peace goes beyond negative peace, which is commonly understood as the absence of violent conflict and fear of violence. A broader and more expansive concept is positive peace. This term encompasses the attitudes, institutions and norms that create and sustain peaceful societies. It implies transforming social relationships to address issues of safety, social justice, equality, mutual trust and well-being.[4] For Interpeace, the concept of peace is inextricably linked with questions of inclusiveness, equality and, especially, gender equity. In this briefing note, peace is understood more in its positive, expansive form based on an explicit understanding that intersectional inequalities and other structural power imbalances are forms of structural violence that must be addressed to attain and sustain peaceful societies.

There are many ways to contribute to peace. Peace can be understood according to its "big-P" or "little-p" dimensions. "Big-P" peace interventions tend to directly aim for a political solution to a violent conflict and may be supported by a UN Security Council mandate. These interventions are inherently political, generally more visible and more high-profile in nature, such as support to the implementation of a peace agreement. "Little-p" peace actions are focused on transforming relationships, building capacities for peace within institutions and broader society and building trust and social cohesion – including through technical development and humanitarian interventions. Both dimensions ("big-P" and "little-p") are equally important and require each other to be long-lasting and sustainable and must always be understood in a context-specific manner. For many humanitarian and development actors there may be more scope to contribute to "little-p", rather than "big-P", although many examples exist where development and humanitarian actors have actively contributed to higher-level peace outcomes as well.

Peace responsiveness is compatible with the humanitarian principles. The core principles of neutrality, independence and impartiality in humanitarian action may seem at odds with the perceived political nature of contributing to peace, but they need not be. The understanding is growing that humanitarian principles and efforts to contribute to peace are grounded in the same values of human dignity and equality. Peace responsive approaches can help humanitarian action become conflict sensitive and therefore become more neutral and impartial. It is also clear that the current, siloed ways of working cannot feasibly persist and that the sector must find constructive ways to increase mutual reinforcement of its different pillars.

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4   Building on the work of Johan Galtung, in e.g. Galtung, Johan. *Peace by peaceful means: Peace and conflict, development and civilization.* London: Sage. 1996.

Creating real change on the ground

The key question remains: how can aid programmes not only achieve their technical outcomes but, in so doing, also enable and create opportunities for peace, for instance through contributing to social cohesion or improving state-society relations?

A peace-responsive approach puts local contexts and their peace and conflict dynamics at the core of programme design. This is achieved by embedding locally oriented participatory approaches in development and humanitarian aid design and by deliberately building on and strengthening local capacities. By placing local needs and capacities front and centre, a peace-responsive approach seeks to realise multidimensional, locally led and intersectional ways of working, which ultimately contribute to societal resilience to conflict and violence. Peace responsiveness further seeks to intentionally design approaches that align short-term challenges with long-term needs and resilience, and addresses trade-offs where they arise.

Peace-responsive approaches focus on the "how" and do not necessarily require costly programme changes. The adaptations required for programmes to more intentionally consider and contribute to peace can be small and cost effective. They can include shifts in targeting (e.g., where and with whom we work), small adaptations to programme design (e.g., maximising relationship-building between groups as part of activities), or additional complementary activities (e.g., dialogue mechanisms among communities or between communities and authorities). Practice to date shows that such small adaptations can make a significant difference in terms of both avoiding a negative impact on peace and having a positive impact on peace.

Peace responsiveness in practice:
the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) addresses resource-based conflicts in the Sudan/South Sudan border region

Between 2015 and 2017, FAO led an initiative in the contested Abyei Administrative Area between Sudan and South Sudan to improve livelihoods, reduce the risk of natural resource-based conflicts, and enhance community resilience – all at once.

In Abyei, a grazing hub where the Dinka Ngok and Misseriya communities historically shared grazing land and water, the use of natural resources was an increasing source of confrontation. Outbreaks of violence between the communities became frequent.

FAO provided community-based animal health services to both communities. While doing so, the agency saw the opportunity to work with local authorities and collaborate with the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei to address wider resource use issues, including movement and access to pastures.

In June 2016, as a direct result of this work, a community-level peace agreement over natural resource use was signed between the communities.[5] The peace agreement also established a shared market in the heart of the demilitarised zone, facilitating trade and livelihoods and leading to reduced food prices.

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5   FAO & Interpeace. *Pathways to Sustaining Peace at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.* Thematic paper, presented to PBSO, 2020.

Promoting change at all levels
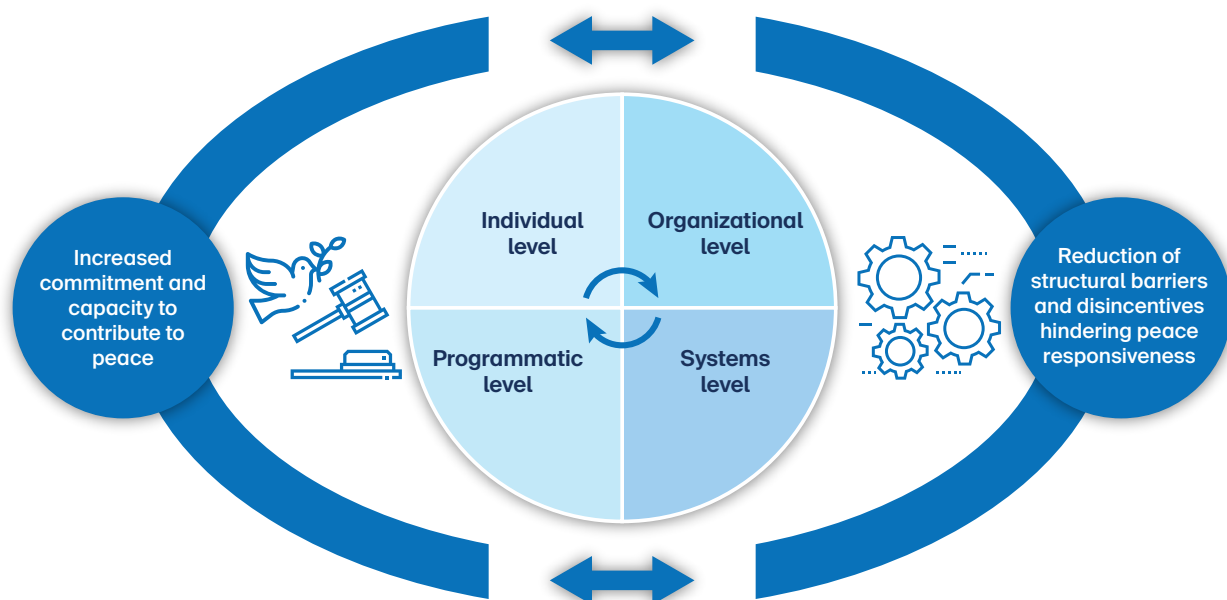
Change must be brought about at multiple levels that reinforce each other to achieve greater peace responsiveness and thereby greater programme and peace effectiveness of interventions in conflict affected contexts. These are the individual, organizational, programmatic and systems levels.

Enhancing peace responsiveness requires an increased awareness of and capacity for peace responsiveness among humanitarian and development agencies, policy actors and donors. A strong organizational commitment to peace responsiveness is as important as internal capacities to design and implement peace-responsive programmes. At the same time, strategic alliances between development, humanitarian, and peace actors are key to maximising collective impacts towards peace. Such efforts can be reinforced by more clearly articulating and testing new theories of change explaining how agencies can contribute to peace. This enhances learning and helps establish a stronger evidence base for peace responsiveness, which in turn can garner more buy-in and future funding for peace-responsive approaches. A

further unpacking of the concept of peace in specific contexts can help gain a more nuanced understanding of how various agencies may be able to contribute to peace, without overstepping their mandates or treading on their principles.

These strategies must be supported by shifts in organizational practice, learning approaches and adaptive management. Peace responsiveness hinges an organization's ability to adapt its programming and operational efforts to the realities on the ground. It requires an organizational culture – as well as policies and procedures – that facilitates learning and adaptation, an openness to learning from success as well as failure, an effective flow of information from the ground to headquarters and back, and effective feedback mechanisms between organizations and communities. Management and accountability systems must foster context-led and adaptive management and calculated risk-taking, while finding the right balance between control and trust. Human resources, procurement, and financing policies and mechanisms must support this way of working.

In addition, there is a need for a more fundamental shift in the international assistance system. Many of the obstacles that hinder progress towards more peace-responsive humanitarian and development action can be ascribed to broader structural barriers and disincentives within the aid system. These include the different funding streams, timelines and operating modalities of the various donors, agencies and programmes present on the ground; the weak systems and incentives for ensuring coordination and coherence at country level; and the low degree to which actors are held accountable for their intended and unintended socio-political contributions in local contexts. These factors impede collective impact across the HDP nexus and between different sectors. Meanwhile, a policy consensus is emerging around the aspiration to shift power to locally led social change efforts. However, practical changes in the current aid system are slow to transform the modalities of inter-national assistance more fundamentally. The current modus operandi of the international system still struggles to support and incentivise national ownership, locally led change and a genuine localisation of efforts, nor is it well enabled – or incentivised – to build on and strengthen institutional capacities in the long run.

Donors can play a critical role in enhancing peace responsiveness by further incentivising conflict sensitivity and peace responsiveness in their partners, and by reducing the fragmentation in funding mechanisms and operating cycles to enable collaboration across the humanitarian, development and peace spectrum. To effectively realise the HDP nexus *between* organizations, it is also essential to bridge the nexus *within* organizations, including within the relevant departments and ministries of donor governments.

Why Interpeace?

Interpeace is uniquely positioned to promote more peace-responsive approaches within UN agencies as well as other multi-mandated organizations. Interpeace has the dual mandate of strengthening societies' capacities to manage conflict in non-violent ways and assisting the international community (especially the United Nations) to play a more effective role in supporting peacebuilding efforts around the world. This places it squarely at the intersection of locally led peacebuilding and the working approaches of the international system.

Interpeace's commitment to enhancing peace responsiveness is carried out through several strategic areas of engagement. These include bilateral partnerships with key agencies within the humanitarian and development sphere, with a focus on enhancing their commitment and capacity for peace responsiveness, and facilitating experience sharing and joint learning between these agencies. It further involves articulating pathways for potential contributions to sustainable peace from different technical mandate areas and strengthening the evidence base for these interlinkages. This is complemented by outreach to policy actors and donors to foster their role in enhancing peace responsiveness. Finally, Interpeace engages in joint programming with key humanitarian and development actors to lead by example and show the magnified impact that can be obtained through implementing peace responsive programmes on the ground.

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