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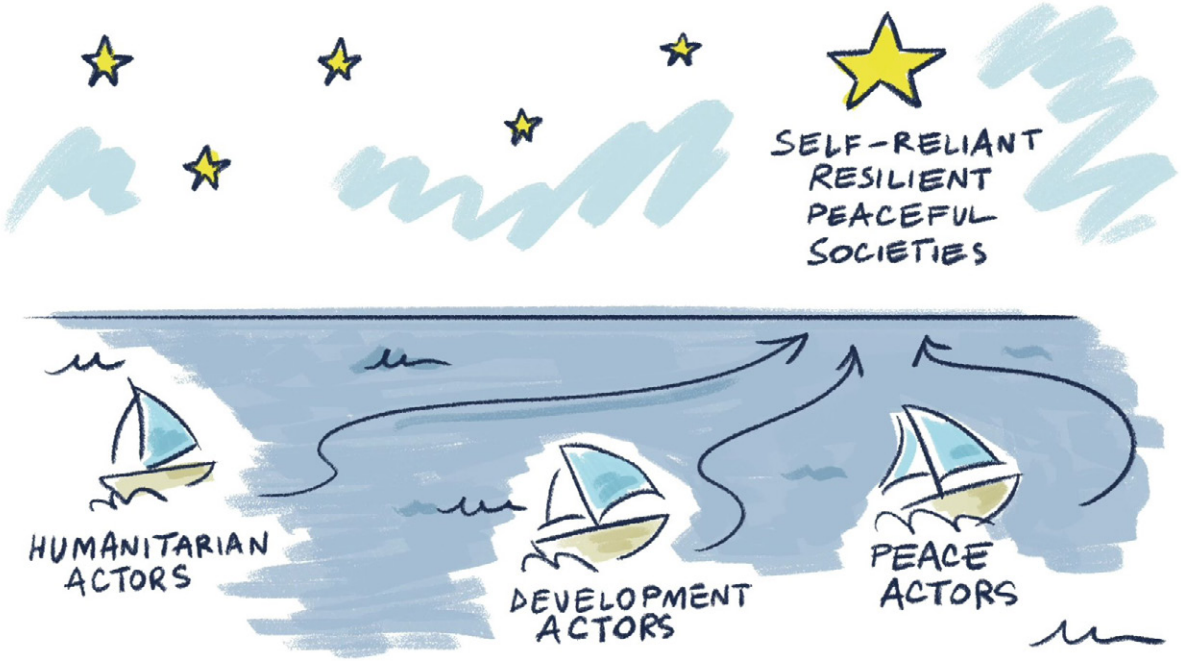

Peace Responsiveness:

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

September 2021

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About this Paper

This paper sets out the conceptual basis for peace responsiveness, an operational concept and approach to advance conflict-sensitive and peace-contributing practice in development and humanitarian action. It is meant for practitioners, researchers, policy makers and donors looking to advance the implementation of the sustaining peace policy commitments, conflict prevention approaches and the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. It has been developed by: Frauke de Weijer, Martina Zapf, Daniel Hyslop with inputs from Abiosseh Davis, Laura Frühwald, Valérie Künzler, Anne-Sofie Stockman and Anita Ernstorfer. It has also benefited from the invaluable guidance of Interpeace colleagues Scott Weber and Graeme Simpson. This report reflects the views of Interpeace staff and neither the key bilateral partners on this initiative or respective donors to the initiative.

About Interpeace

Interpeace is an international organization for peacebuilding. With over 25 years of experience, it has implemented a broad range of peacebuilding programmes in Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Europe, and Latin America.

Interpeace tailors its approach to each society and ensures that its work is locally designed and driven. Through local partners and its own local teams, it jointly develops peacebuilding programmes based on extensive consultation and research. Interpeace helps establish processes of change that promote sustainable peace, social cohesion, and resilience. The organization's work is designed to connect and promote understanding between local communities, civil society, governments, and the international community.

Interpeace also assists the international community – especially the United Nations – to play a more effective role in peacebuilding, based on Interpeace's expertise in field-based work at grassroots level. Interpeace achieves this primarily by contributing innovative thought leadership and fresh insights to contemporary peacebuilding policy. It also assists the international community through 'peace responsiveness' work, in which Interpeace provides advice and practical support to other international organizations (especially those in the security, development, and humanitarian aid sectors), enabling them to adapt their work systemically to simultaneously address conflict dynamics and strengthen peace dynamics.

Interpeace is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, and has offices around the world.

For more information about Interpeace, please visit www.interpeace.org

Executive Summary

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 paper 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.

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.

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

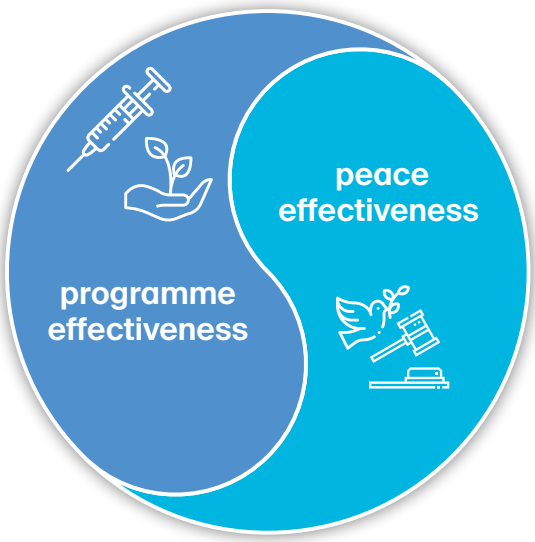
2 Zürcher, Christoph. *The Impact of Development Aid on Organised Violence: A Systematic Assessment.* New Delhi: International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie), 3ie Working Paper 37. August 2020. https://www.3ieimpact.org/evidence-hub/publications/working-papers/impact-development-aid-organised-violence-systematic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

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 effective, 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.

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.

"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.

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 multi-dimensional, 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.

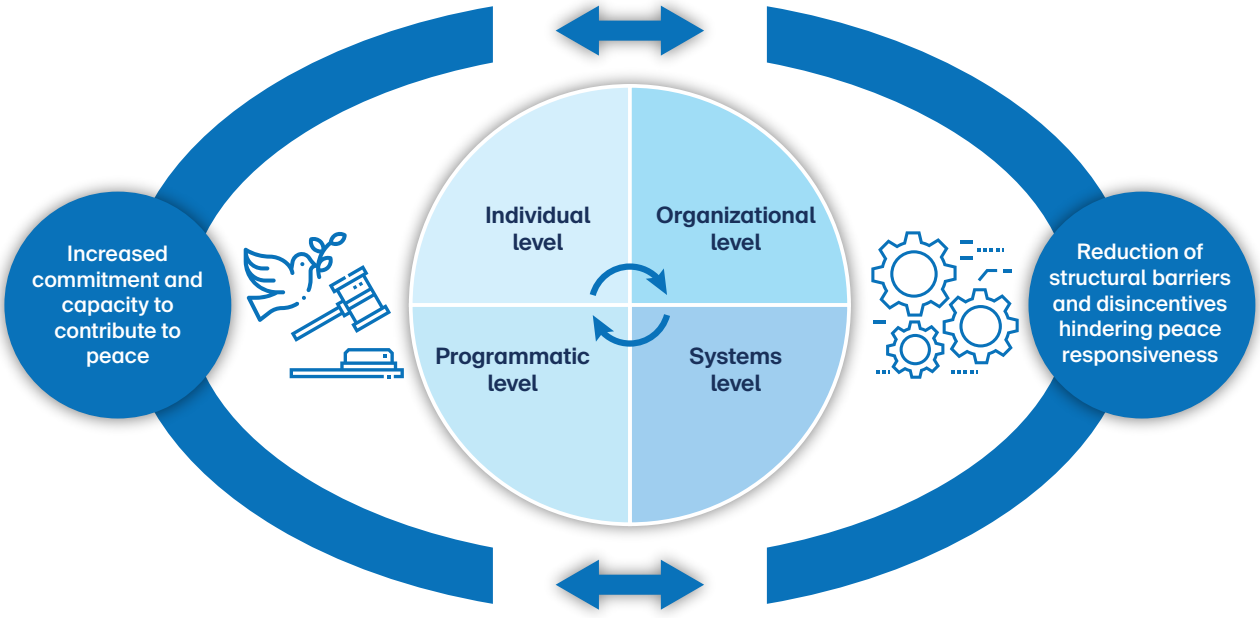
In Abyei, a grazing hub where the Dinka Ngok and Misseriya communities historically shared grazing land and water, the use of natural resources was an increasing source of confrontation. Outbreaks of violence between the communities became frequent.

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.

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.



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

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 international 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?

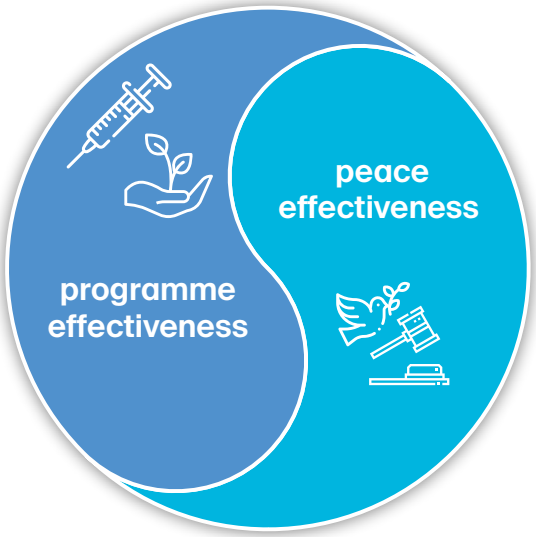
Interpeace is uniquely positioned to promote more peace-responsive approaches within UN agencies as well as other multi-mandated organizations. Interpeace has the dual mandate of strengthening societies' capacities to manage conflict in non-violent ways and assisting the international community (especially 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.

Introduction

Violent conflict has surged over the past decade and has become increasingly complex and protracted. Conflicts now rage on longer than ever before – up from 5 to 14 years on average. Further, these conflicts are more stubborn to eradicate, with peace lasting on average only seven years after a peace agreement and some 20% of conflicts recurring three or more times after a ceasefire. This has resulted in the number of deployed peacekeepers reaching an all-time high, stretching international resources for conflict management to their limits. The number of people worldwide who live in settings where conflict and violence are part of life, or always lurking around the corner, is growing. Today, 1.8 billion people live in such fragile contexts, but this figure is projected to grow to 2.3 billion by 2030. This set of people accounts for only 23% of the world's population but 76.5% of the world's extreme poor. The global economic impacts of this violence are severe – in 2020, the costs from violence and conflict alone equalled over 10% of global GDP.[6]

The humanitarian consequences of these trends are dire – the number of refugees and displaced people is higher than ever before and a record 155 million people today experience life-threatening acute hunger, almost 100 million of whom because of armed violence and conflict.[7] Over 1 billion people, or 16% of the world's population, are now living in countries experiencing a protracted humanitarian crisis.[8] Although financial contributions to humanitarian assistance have increased, the gap between needs and assistance keeps growing.[9] Conflict and violence are the biggest obstacles to reaching any of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. Without conflict redress , none of the world's 57 conflict-affected and fragile states will meet the SDGs by 2030 on hunger, health, or gender equality and women's empowerment – resulting in millions stranded in poverty and inequity.[10] Similarly, many of the structural drivers of conflict and peace are closely associated with other SDGs, including those related to (gender) inequality (SDGs 5 and 10).



6 Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP). *Global Peace Index 2020: Measuring Peace in a Complex World*. Sydney, Australia: Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP). June 2020. https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/GPI_2020_web.pdf

7 FSIN and Global Network Against Food Crises. *Global Report on Food Crises 2021*. Rome. 2021. https://www.fsinplatform.org/sites/default/files/resources/files/GRFC%202021%20050521%20med.pdf

8 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC). *Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID) 2020*. Geneva, Switzerland: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC). April 2020. https://www.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/2020-IDMC-GRID.pdf

9 Development Initiatives. *Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2020*. Bristol, UK: Development Initiatives. July 22, 2020. https://devinit.org/resources/global-humanitarian-assistance-report-2020/

10 OECD. *States of Fragility 2020*. Paris, France: OECD Publishing. (2020). DOI: https://doi.org/10.1787/ba7c22e7-en

Conflict and violence impacts men and women differently. Violence against women and girls is heightened during and after conflict and is often used as a tactic or strategy of war. Conflict increases the risk factors for sex trafficking and sexual exploitation: Forced and early marriage and intimate partner violence (IPV) are highest in conflict-affected populations.[11] Men, especially the young, make up the great majority of homicide victims and are also overrepresented in armed conflict deaths. This is particularly relevant considering that gender equality is an important predictor of peace.[12] Gender norms are often at the core of conflict dynamics, as the social and cultural values and norms behind unequal, gendered roles and power relations are instrumental in building support for and perpetuating conflict. Gender inequality and conflict and peace dynamics are therefore inextricably linked.

To achieve the SDGs, we need new approaches to addressing and transforming the causes of conflict. We need to focus on preventing conflict and addressing its structural drivers, rather than continuing to deal with its consequences. Otherwise, human suffering will remain high and precious resources will continue to be squeezed.[13] This reality has been acknowledged at the very top levels of the multilateral system and United Nations. The UN Secretary General has made conflict prevention his number one priority and has repeatedly emphasised that efforts to sustain peace are necessary not only once conflict has broken out but long beforehand to prevent conflict and address its root causes. All actors have been called upon to collectively contribute to sustaining peace to prevent the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict. It is recognised that all humanitarian, development, stabilisation and peace actors must enhance their contributions to sustainable peace and preventing violent conflict, but in accordance with their respective mandates.

Dealing with the realities of conflict and violence is not the exclusive terrain of peacebuilding organizations. It is a critical factor in all development and humanitarian action. Most humanitarian and development actors' engagements take place in settings of armed conflict or low-intensity violence. But how well equipped are they to deliver in these conditions? How well equipped are they to be truly conflict sensitive and how can these actors work more in unison with each other, to contribute collectively and cumulatively towards sustainable development and peace? For actors that do not have peace or peacebuilding at the core of their mandate, these are challenging questions. For many international practitioners in development and humanitarian fields, it is not immediately clear how their technical contributions can lay the foundations for sustainable peace. There may exist real trade-offs and perceived risks to distorting their mandates and they may not have the necessary technical knowledge, process-driven mindsets and/or capacity to engage in conflict settings.

To help address this challenge, Interpeace has been collaborating with development and humanitarian actors to enhance conflict-sensitive and peace-responsive approaches. **"Peace responsiveness" refers to the ability of actors operating in conflict-affected or fragile contexts to be conflict-sensitive and to deliberately contribute to sustaining peace through their technical programming – in a way that enhances collective impact, supports inclusive, gender-responsive, locally led change and strengthens societal resilience to conflict and violence.**

11 Populationbased research has consistently found that IPV prevalence rates in conflict settings are consistently higher than in non-conflict settings. Surveys carried out by What Works and others in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Afghanistan have found extraordinarily high rates of IPV (ranging from 39% to 73%) among conflict-affected populations. Rates of non-partner rape in conflict affected districts in DRC and South Sudan ranged from 21-33%. Murphy, Maureen et al. *What Works to prevent violence against women and girls in conflict and humanitarian crises: Synthesis Brief*. 2016. https://www.whatworks.co.za/resources/policy-briefs/item/662-what-works-to-prevent-violence-against-women-and-girls-in-conflict-and-humanitarian-crisis-synthesis-brief.

12 Hudson, Valerie et al. *Sex & World Peace*. Columbia University Press. 2014.

13 Conflict prevention has been shown to be highly cost-effective, with every 1 USD invested in prevention generating 16 USD from the averted costs of violent conflict. Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP). *Measuring Peacebuilding Cost-Effectiveness*. IEP Report 46. 2017.

A more peace responsive system will be able to achieve greater impact in **two interrelated dimensions**. It will achieve more positive impacts on peace (*peace effectiveness)* by enhancing peace-contributing outcomes on the ground through more deliberate programming towards sustainable peace. And it will enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of technical programming (*programme effectiveness)* as an increased contextual awareness and ability to adapt interventions to the realities and capacities on the ground will increase their impact. These two "types of effectiveness" can no longer be seen as independent from each other. Only by systematically addressing both will international support to humanitarian, development, and peace actions be able to reach that common goal of greater security, welfare and dignity for all while "leaving no one behind" in a sustainable way.

Peace means different things to different individuals and organizations, which has implications for what is meant by "contributing to sustainable peace". Sustainable peace goes beyond negative peace, which is defined as the absence of violent conflict or of the fear of overt violence. A broader, more ambitious concept is positive peace, which encompasses the attitudes, institutions and norms that create and sustain peaceful societies. Positive peace requires the transformation of social relationships to address issues of safety, social justice, equality, mutual trust, and well-being.[14] For Interpeace, the concept of peace is inextricably linked with questions of inclusiveness and equality, especially gender equity. In this paper, peace is understood in its positive, maximalist 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.

Interpeace has a dual mandate of both 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. Interpeace is thus placed squarely at the intersection of locally led peacebuilding and the international system's working approaches. This unique positioning creates an opportunity for Interpeace to play a meaningful and collaborative role in enhancing sustained peace impact on the ground through promoting more peace-responsive approaches by international agencies.

14 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.

Why is it important to become more peace responsive ?

Conflict sensitivity is not being adequately practised across the development and humanitarian fields. The most comprehensive evidence on development aid and its impacts on violence indicate a concerning systematic failure of conflict-sensitive practice across the international development and humanitarian sector. The first ever synthesis review of aid delivered in conflict-affected settings developed in 2017 by Zürcher showed that "*on the aggregate, aid in conflict zones is more likely to exacerbate violence than to dampen violence*".[15] A subsequent and even more comprehensive analysis by the same author[16] reviewed 32 of the highest-quality studies available from a potential list of 201 studies on aid interventions in the context of conflict. That study reinforced the findings, showing that the probability that aid has a *violence-increasing effect* in regions in conflict is higher than the probability that aid has a violence-reducing effect.

Textbox 1. Peace responsiveness in brief

Definition: Peace responsiveness refers to the ability of actors operating in conflict-affected or fragile contexts to be conflict sensitive and to deliberately contribute to sustaining inclusive peace through their technical programming - in a way that is adaptive, enhances collective impact, supports inclusive, gender-responsive, locally led change, and strengthens societal resilience to conflict and violence.

A peace responsive approach will achieve more positive impacts on peace (peace effectiveness) while also enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of technical programming (programme effectiveness).

A peace responsive approach:

- puts conflict dynamics at the forefront to ensure that technical interventions are first conflict sensitive and then positively contribute to peace.
- forges a strong contextual awareness and ability to adapt interventions to the realities and capacities on the ground, thereby increasing their impact.
- strives towards multidimensional and intersectional ways of working - both among humanitarian, development and peace actions and between sectors.
- aims to link short- and long-term needs in a deliberate way by maintaining a horizon-scanning perspective all while addressing acute needs.
- promotes a way of working whereby actors engage with each other on a complementary basis, address trade-offs in a constructive way, build meaningful partnerships and aim towards collective impact.
- ensures meaningful inclusion and empowerment of different groups in society (including women and young people) and acknowledges and aims to reduce structural power imbalances and inequalities.
- harnesses local know-how and ensures locally led processes and responses, building on existing local capacities, skills and attributes.
- prioritises resilience-enhancing responses that focus on positive, functioning capacities that enable communities and societies to build back better.

15 Zürcher, Christoph. *What Do We (Not) Know About Development Aid and Violence? A Systematic Review.* World Development, Elsevier, vol. 98(C), pages 506-522. (2017). https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0305750X17301766. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2017.05.013.

16 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. DOI : http://doi.org/10.23846/WP0037.

Almost half of the studies showed conclusive evidence that interventions had a violence-increasing effect, a quarter had no impact on the conflict dynamics at all, 16% had a heterogeneous positive/negative effect and only 21% had a positive impact on reducing violence.[17] While these studies do not find a specific type of development intervention that is especially more likely to reduce violence, the evidence for humanitarian response and especially food aid is more unequivocal – every available high-quality study on violence and humanitarian aid finds that humanitarian aid increases violence. While there are limitations to such meta-reviews, the available evidence indicates that the outcomes and impacts of international development and humanitarian action do face significant hurdles to achieving their stated aims in conflict-affected settings.

Other sources of evidence reinforce the problematic picture. The Human Accountability Report on the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability showed that the indicator measuring "reducing unintended negative effects" is among the lowest scoring of all indicators across the standard.[18] The 2020 report showed that this particular indicator did not improve over the previous three years and that there had not been any "systematic effort to address the issue".[19] A systemic evaluation of the world's largest fund for peacebuilding – the UN Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), which aims to intentionally impact the conflict and peace dynamics through its work – found that conflict sensitivity is not being systematically applied across its projects, further slowing progress. In some cases, even on PBF projects that have an intentional peace objective, evaluations have recorded unintended consequences.

The consistency and robustness of the evidence for such findings across development and humanitarian fields underpins at least two key issues; (1) the very favourable policy environment for these issues is simply not translating to reality at all, or not quickly enough, and (2) there is an urgent working need to address the operational capacity gaps and incentive barriers for development and humanitarian actors operating in conflict-affected settings to more effectively minimise negative effects and contributions to peace.

Peace responsiveness cannot be divorced from programme effectiveness – The Ebola response

Without a focus on the peace and conflict dynamics of the settings in which they engage, not only will development and humanitarian interventions potentially exacerbate conflict, but they will also be less effective and less sustainable. The Ebola outbreaks in 2014 were supposed to be a watershed learning moment for international actors working on epidemic and pandemic response in conflict-affected contexts. The international response to the crisis in 2014 was heavily criticised as "too little, too late and largely ineffective" due to being largely blind to conflict .[20] Among the primary reasons for why the initial response failed were the lack of international understanding of the local dynamics, the lack of community engagement and an insufficient understanding of how low levels of trust in authorities reduced the effectiveness of communication and healthcare response strategies. Such was the conflict insensitivity of the response various that subsequent studies showed the coercive nature of the presence led to a direct correlation between the intervention and increases in incidents of violence.[21]

17 While the initial studies were biased to the cases of Afghanistan and Iraq, which are well documented, major failures, these studies also included analysis of aid in India, the Philippines, Colombia, Liberia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, and Sudan. The subsequent studies included samples consisting of all civil war countries between 1969 and 2008, 125 non-OECD countries, 22 sub-Saharan African states and African countries with more than 1 million inhabitants between 1995 and 2012.

18 CHS Alliance. *Humanitarian Accountability Report. Are We Making Aid Work Better for People*. Geneva, Switzerland: CHS Alliance, 2020. https://www.chsalliance.org/get-support/resource/har-2020/.

19 Ibid

20 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

21 González-Torres, Ada and Esposito Elena. *Epidemics and Conflict: Evidence from the Ebola Outbreak in Western Africa*.

Perhaps more consequential, however, was the deleterious impact on broader health services which, it is now believed, had a greater impact than Ebola itself. In Liberia, twice as many people died from malaria than from Ebola, while a lack of trust in health systems led to a 67% fall in the rate of measles vaccination and 750 000 clinic visits were lost, resulting in serious impacts on maternal health. Later, when a much more ethnographically and anthropologically informed understanding of local culture was developed, more inclusive and locally led responses were eventually adopted. These gave a central role to dialogue and collaboration, and an environment was created where the local population could start to trust and collaborate with health workers and government institutions, resulting in greater effectiveness of the response.

Yet, despite this experience in 2014, the Ebola response in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2018 and 2020 was plagued with multiple conflict-sensitivity failures as well as governance and corruption failures. A 2020 operational review of the response[22] found that the failure to factor in the multitude of issues outside of public health led to significant impact on the trust in the response, leading to community attacks on international health workers and infrastructure, causing further spread of the outbreak. The response was also marred by reports of sexual abuse, violence and exploitation of women, further undermining its credibility and effectiveness.[23] The difficult lesson for international actors, especially those with more technical mandates, is that it is not possible to divorce technical knowledge and approaches from a politically informed understanding of conflict dynamics. Without the latter, technical interventions face increased odds of failure.

The challenge of Covid-19 only further underlines this. The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed the structural inequalities and fault lines in society and has placed the spotlight on the multiple and interrelated vulnerabilities of the poor, marginalised and disadvantaged. The perceived justness, fairness and effectiveness of the Covid-19 vaccination roll-out and associated ongoing emergency healthcare provision has the potential to undermine or reshape the social contracts of countries around the world. As the phenomenon of vaccine hesitancy has shown, public trust in the state is essential to ensuring successful take-up and effectiveness of public health responses, and this trust has often been eroded by historic experience among certain groups in society with health interventions that have ignored or even harmed them. Health responses that are inequitable, blind to cultural differences or politicised can trigger or reinforce dissatisfaction or resentment with political and administrative systems that do not (or are perceived not to) deliver on the needs of the people they are intended to serve. Such responses can not only result in violence and further suffering, but also be less technically effective as they ultimately depend on local trust. The effectiveness of the various humanitarian responses that the Covid-19 crisis has and will continue to trigger, potentially for years, will depend on their conflict sensitivity and peace responsiveness. Such is the scale of the needs and the resources required to meet them, the reputation of the multilateral system will ride on whether the hard-learnt lessons of the past can be quickly adapted, especially in the world's most conflict-affected settings.

Last Modified 19 December 2020. Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=3544606 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3544606

22 WHO documents 2020, leaked to The New Humanitarian by two separate WHO employees. See: Freudenthal, Emmanuel. How 'Ebola Business' Threatens Aid Operations in Congo. The New Humanitarian. 18 June 2020. https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/investigation/2020/06/18/Ebola-corruption-aid-sector

23 Insecurity Insight. *Reporting sexual violence, exploitation and abuse Lessons from the 10th Ebola outbreak in the DRC, 2018-2020*. Insecurity Insight. 21 November, 2020. https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Reporting-sexual-violence-exploitation-and-abuse-lessons-from-the-10th-Ebola-outbreak-in-the-DRC-2018-2020.pdf

The international policy environment for peace responsiveness

Anchored in the sustaining peace agenda and twin resolutions

Peace responsiveness is an operational manifestation of the policy ambition of the sustaining peace agenda. The twin resolutions on sustaining peace critically emphasise the interconnections between development, humanitarian assistance and sustainable peace. They recall the United Nations' determination to "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war" and establish a just and lasting peace all over the world. They fundamentally reorient the UN's understanding of peacebuilding toward conflict prevention, the redress of the root causes of conflict, to prevent the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict. The resolutions are a critical normative imperative for humanitarian, development, human rights, stabilisation and peace actors to enhance their contributions to sustainable peace and prevent violent conflict, in accordance with their respective mandates, before, during and after conflict.

The sustaining peace agenda also reaffirms the important role of women in peacebuilding. It notes the substantial link between women's full and meaningful involvement in efforts to prevent, resolve and rebuild from conflict and those efforts' effectiveness and long-term sustainability. It stresses the importance of women's equal participation in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security and the need to increase women's role in decision making regarding conflict prevention and resolution and peacebuilding. It equally reaffirms the important role youth can play in conflict prevention and resolution and as a key aspect of the sustainability, inclusiveness and success of peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts.[24]

Beyond reconfirming the centrality of sustaining peace as a goal, these resolutions stress the need for greater coherence across the humanitarian, development and peace sectors and for strengthening collaboration between international, national and local actors. They highlight that in situations of protracted crises – which have almost become the norm – humanitarian, development and peace actors are present at the same time, which calls for more coherent and strategic approaches.

24 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 (Security Council). *UN Security Council Resolution 2558 (S/RES/2558)*. United Nations. 21 December, 2020. https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2558(2020); 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; United Nations (General Assembly). *UN General Assembly Resolution 75/201 (A/RES/757201)*. United Nations. 28 December, 2020. https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/75/201

Also building on the Agenda for Humanity, the World Humanitarian Summit, the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and Agenda 2030

The sustaining peace agenda is not the only policy agenda emphasising the need for increased policy and operational coherence. The Agenda for Humanity, Agenda 2030 and others make similar calls for increased coherence, breaking down the divides between humanitarian, development and peace sectors to ultimately achieve greater collective impact. At the World Humanitarian Summit, international, national, and local actors engaged in conflict-affected contexts committed to *"a new way of working that meets people's immediate humanitarian needs, while at the same time reducing risk and vulnerability over multiple years through the achievement of collective outcomes".* This thinking has become embodied in the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

The humanitarian-development-peace nexus needs implementation

In 2019, the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC)issued a recommendation that the humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus[25] be developed by a comprehensive framework for more coherent, collaborative and complementary humanitarian, development and peace actions, with the aim of effectively reducing people's needs, risks and vulnerabilities, supporting prevention efforts and thus shifting away from delivering humanitarian assistance to ending need. The DAC recommended undertaking joint risk-informed, gender-sensitive conflict and peace analyses; jointly identifying collective outcomes incorporating humanitarian, development and peace actions; joined-up programming that is context-adaptable, risk-focused and flexible; and ensuring that funding mechanisms are commensurate. The recommendations further emphasise the need to prioritise prevention and invest in development while ensuring humanitarian needs are met; to put people at the centre and tackle exclusion; to strengthen national and local capacities; and to ensure that activities are conflict-sensitive to avoid unintended negative consequences and maximise positive effects.

These policy statements and recommendations are starting to be translated into operational practice, as efforts are ongoing to implement new ways of working and the HDP nexus. Yet, practice lags policy. Interpeace aims to support the institutional embedding and programmatic operationalisation of the sustaining peace agenda within the development and humanitarian system through peace responsiveness, which can be regarded as a practical means to operationalise the sustaining peace agenda and the HDP nexus. To effectively operationalise the HDP-nexus *between* organizations, it is essential to also bridge the nexus *within* organizations, including within the relevant departments and ministries of donor governments.

25 OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC). *DAC Recommendations on the Humanitarian – Development – Peace Nexus (DCD/DAC (2018)49/REV3) (DCD/DAC/M(2019)3).* Adopted on 22 February, 2019. https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-5019#dates

Challenges to operationalising the sustaining peace agenda and the HDP nexus

Different interpretations of what it means to contribute to "peace"

Conceptual and ideological barriers remain, preventing humanitarian and development actions from strengthening their linkages with peace actions. As has become clear in the discourse surrounding the HDP nexus, there remains an ongoing discussion concerning the extent of incompatibility between efforts that contribute to peace and principled humanitarian action. Much of this debate has been unhelpfully hampered by a prevailing sense of confusion around different interpretations of what a "contribution to peace" may mean or entail.

While the humanitarian and development pillars are clearly defined, the role and content of the peace pillar is much less clear to many actors. For example, whereas peacebuilders understand peacebuilding mostly as a process of ending violence, building trust, transforming relationships, reconciliation, or social cohesion, others may associate peacebuilding with geopolitically influenced elite bargains, security provision, counter-terrorism action or stabilisation initiatives. This more security-focused or elite-political interpretation of peace actions creates strong resistance, which must be overcome by a further unpacking, nuancing and deepening of the understanding of the spectrum of actions that may be covered by "contributions to peace".

The Interagency Standing Committee in late 2020 published an issue paper on the P in the HDP nexus[26]; which provides a helpful distinction between "little-p" and "big-P" approaches (see Textbox 2).

Textbox 2. What interventions contribute to peace?

Distinguishing "big P" and "little P" peace

"Big-P" interventions are more directly aimed at a political solution or securitised response to violent conflict and may be supported by a UN Security Council mandate. They are typically at the national or regional level and could involve a peace agreement. These interventions are generally more visible and higher profile in nature. United Nations Peacekeeping and Special Political Missions are common examples of "Big P" interventions.

"Little -p" actions are focused on agency, relationship transformation , building capacities for peace and for conflict prevention and management within institutions and broader society, which includes building trust and social cohesion. Activities predominately focus on strengthening relationships between social groups and between citizens and states.

"Little -p" interventions may still include a degree of working on the broader political dimensions and a re-balancing of socio-political and power dynamics, but within the scope of supporting locally driven and owned peace processes and with the aim to create an enabling environment for peace by empowering communities.

Adapted from Exploring Peace Within the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus (HDPN), IASC Results Group 4, 2020.

26 Inter-Agency Standing Committee. *Issue Paper: Exploring Peace Within the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus (HDPN).* Issue Paper, IASC Results Group 4, October 2020. https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2020-10/Issue%20paper%20-%20Exploring%20peace%20within%20the%20Humanitarian-Development-Peace%20Nexus%20%28HDPN%29.pdf.

This simple taxonomy reveals that '"little-p" approaches highlight the wealth of opportunities for development and humanitarian actors to engage with, as they tend to be less concerned with directly impacting intensely sensitive elite politics and more concerned with the social conditions of peace, including the social structures, relationships and norms underpinning violence or peace.

Clarifying the various types of contributions multilateral technical agencies can make to sustainable peace can help ease these conversations around contributions to peace as they thereby appear closer to their mandate and sphere of influence.

It must nonetheless be acknowledged that genuine dilemmas and trade-offs do exist and balanced and tailored ways forward must be sought, in a highly context-sensitive way. Thus, the vision of peace responsiveness is not to make development and humanitarian actors peacebuilders, but rather, for different actors to all pursue their own paths in line with their respective mandates towards a common objective of inclusive, peaceful and resilient societies.

The wide gap between policy and practice

Secondly, there is the operationalisation gap. Translating policy commitments into actual changes in practice on the ground is always difficult and prone to inertia. In the past, the assumption has too often been made that once a new policy is inserted into the system, the outputs of that system will change in accordance with that policy. In the case of the policy imperatives cited above, such change has not materialised. To achieve these different outcomes, the machinery itself, the organizations, systems, processes and cultures will need to change. Institutional, political and bureaucratic factors interact with each other in ways which create a machinery that is overly output focused, insufficiently geared toward transforming relationships and addressing power relations and that places too weak a focus on the quality, inclusiveness and equity of the processes by which international organizations engage in conflict-affected contexts. More transformative shifts will therefore be required to make the operationalisation of the sustaining peace agenda a reality.

At the organizational level, this requires an organizational practice and culture that facilitate context-led and adaptive programming. Peace responsiveness hinges on the ability of an organization to adapt its programming and operational efforts to the realities on the ground. It will require an organizational culture – as well as policies and procedures – that facilitate learning and adaptive management. It will also require an openness to learning from success as well as failure; an effective flow of information from the ground to headquarters and back; and open communication channels with implementing partners and communities through feedback mechanisms. Management and accountability systems will need to allow context-led and adaptive decision making and calculated risk taking, while finding the right balance between control and trust. Human resources, procurement, and financing policies and mechanisms need to support this way of working rather than becoming the reason why such approaches are not possible.

At the systems level, there is an urgent need to reduce the barriers and disincentives to collective impact and locally led change. A more fundamental shift in the international assistance system is required. 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 system. These include – inter alia – 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; weak systems of holding actors accountable for their contributions to peace; and other factors presenting barriers or disincentives to achieving collective impact. 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 very well enabled – or incentivised – to build on and strengthen institutional capacities in the long run.

On the bright side, there are positive trends visible also. The focus on the HDP nexus has drawn increased attention to changing siloed ways of working; joint analysis and joint programming are becoming more common, agencies are clarifying the contributions they can

Textbox 3. How operational practice and incentives hinder peace-responsive approaches

- **Project management instead of process orientation**: The strong focus on predefined outputs and outcomes impedes a process centred on strengthening relationships between people.
- **Competition crowds out collaboration:** Competition for resources and procurement rules stand in the way of meaningful partnerships between actors.
- **Upward rather than downward accountability:** Accountability systems are primarily geared towards fiduciary accounting, reducing space for accountability to the people served.
- **Context does not lead decision making:** Programme design and implementation is into sufficiently grounded in local realities, flexible nor adapted to context.
- **Participation by and inclusion of local actors is not meaningful:** Participation is often consultative at best and becomes a "box-ticking" exercise rather than a meaningful engagement or locally driven process.
- **Institutional politics trump a mission-driven focus:** Organizational culture and human resources policies incentivise engaging with intra-institutional dynamics rather than context dynamics.
- **Short-termism continues to rule:** Funding modalities and project cycles impede a long-term perspective, particularly in the humanitarian sphere.

make to sustainable peace and strengthening their theories of change. Further, efforts are ongoing to further unpack and demystify the concepts of peacebuilding, policy and practitioner communities are starting to connect more and dilemmas and trade-offs related to increasing coherence between these sectors are, if not yet being addressed, at least discussed openly. Finally, the increased financial scale of the UN Peacebuilding Fund is a bright spot in the UN system that is enabling more joined-up ways of working within the UN system.

Peace responsiveness aims to address these challenges, seize these opportunities and thus further the operationalisation of the sustaining peace agenda and the HDP nexus.

Unpacking peace responsiveness

What is peace responsiveness?

"Peace responsiveness" refers to 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 – in a way that is adaptive, enhances collective impact, supports inclusive, gender-responsive, locally led change, and strengthens societal resilience to conflict and violence.

Interpeace formulated the peace responsiveness[27] concept to draw attention to the imperatives created by dynamics on the ground and encapsulated in the various international policy agendas supporting scaled-up and new approaches to peace and peacebuilding. It builds on the practice of conflict sensitivity and specifically emphasises a more forward-leaning orientation of deliberately contributing to sustaining peace by applying a stronger focus on understanding and maximising the positive contributions to peace that can be made by agencies that do not have peacebuilding at the core of their mandate.

The question it asks is: How can programmes and agencies not only achieve their technical outcomes but, in so doing, also enable and create opportunities for peace, for instance through strengthening social cohesion or improving state-society relations? It is based on the notion that by deliberately addressing drivers of conflict and strengthening capacities for peace, humanitarian and development interventions can enhance the prospects of sustainable peace. These contributions to peace do not come about automatically; they require deliberate intent and planning. Unintended negative effects must be avoided, while the potential positive impacts on peace can be deliberately expanded by focusing more explicitly on existing conflict drivers or strengthening capacities for peace. This will require conscious adaptations to programme design and implementation. Many such changes are quite small and are not necessarily associated with high financial costs. They may include:

- a shift in focus (e.g., enhancing the inclusiveness of beneficiary selection)
- deeper engagement with diverse local actors (e.g. engaging a diversity of local actors in meaningful participatory processes)
- slight adaptations to project design (e.g. an increased focus on strengthening conflict management capacities)
- additional, complementary activities (e.g. establishing participatory dialogue mechanisms among communities or between communities and local authorities)

27 The term is inspired by the gender field, that recognised that the term "gender sensitivity" may lead to a passive posture of awareness rather than an active stance leading to a different way of engaging. This sparked a shift from the term "gender sensitivity" to "gender responsiveness", where "responsiveness" means identifying gender norms, roles, and inequalities and taking measures to proactively address them. This logic serves as an inspiration for the term "peace responsiveness", as it also entails a more proactive approach.

Table 1: Practical examples of peace-responsive programming in practice

Programme intervention	Potential negative impact on peace	Potential positive impact on peace
Employment and enterprise creation	Value chain and skills training programmes focus on economic sectors already dominated by people from one ethnicity, thus inadvertently increasing their dominance of the political economy, reinforcing resentment and a sense of exclusion among other groups.	Employment generation programmes take steps to ensure that work opportunities are allocated across relevant social and ethnic groups, including men and women. They target young men most at risk of being recruited into criminal groups or political violence.
Rehabilitation of irrigation infrastructure	The rehabilitation works benefit only the upstream communities, while reducing water availability in downstream communities, exacerbating pre-existing tensions and grievances between these communities.	The rehabilitation works increase the total amount of water available for women and men in both communities. The programme incorporates a process of arriving at a water use agreement, which enhances cooperation on operation and maintenance of the irrigation channel, thereby improving relations between these communities.

Conflict sensitivity is and remains foundational; adhering to conflict sensitivity is a minimum standard for all actors operating in conflict-affected settings, before considering proactively contributing to sustainable peace.

To achieve the desired overall impact towards peace, actors must enhance their synergy and complementarity across the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding sectors, as well as across technical sectors (e.g., food security, health, livelihoods, and so forth). Peace responsiveness recognises that peace is not built or enabled by peacebuilders alone. Only through a multidimensional combination of development, humanitarian, human rights and security approaches working together can real, cumulative impact towards sustainable peace be achieved. However, **the vision of peace responsiveness is not to make development and humanitarian actors peacebuilders.** Rather, the different actors all pursue their own paths in line with their respective mandate but contribute towards a common objective. As the illustration show s, this overarching objective - or the ”pole star” guiding their actions – is to move towards more self-reliant, resilient and peaceful societies.

For contributions to peace to be sustainable, they must be driven from within. A peace-responsive approach therefore must support **inclusive and locally led change.** The notion of sustainable peace has trust and trustworthiness at its core, the presence of a social contract that legitimises political authority, and a willingness, set of institutions and practices in society to resolve differences without resorting to violence. Such levels of trust – both between people and between people and authorities - must grow organically in a society and can only take root when shaped by and owned by the people making up that society. Although external actors can play a meaningful role in supporting and enabling these processes, ultimately the change must be led locally. This requires external or international actors to develop new mindsets, tools and processes that allow them to interrogate and recognise how their interventions influence the horizontal and vertical sets of relationships, including gender and intergenerational relationships in the context in which they are operating and whether these impacts are positive or negative.

Locally led change implies that processes of transformation are driven through local agency and local leadership of peacebuilding or development processes. Change that has the potential to contribute to sustaining peace requires inclusive processes that enable the emergence of legitimate, positive and constructive forms of local agency.

In many cases, especially in more direct peacebuilding work, external support may be useful or necessary to interrupt conflict dynamics, foster the emergence of such processes, or to nudge existing locally led processes in the direction of increased inclusiveness, without undermining inclusive, local ownership over the process. Ultimately, the engagement of all actors, local, national and international must be oriented towards this goal of enabling legitimate and constructive forms of local agency that contribute to peace and resilience. [28]

The concept of peace responsiveness is linked to the concept of societal resilience for peace. In practice, the aim of much intentional peacebuilding work is to make societies more resilient to violent conflict, that is, to strengthen societal capacity to prevent and mitigate violent conflict and collectively and peacefully transform the conditions and relationships that enabled conflict to emerge in the first place. Because of the intertwined relationship between development and almost all forms of social progress with conflict and violence, this transformative notion of societal resilience is an essential ingredient not only to building peace, but to sustaining development in the long run and building back better from inevitable shocks. This resilience lens aims to place equal focus on the individual, household, community and institutional capacities for peace and draws attention to the intersectional character of functioning relationships, systems and institutions that can be built upon. This approach seeks to address a key systemic bias in much internationally driven peace work toward negative peace or broken systems which are not the optimal starting point for longer-term peacebuilding approach, process and strategy.[29] It fundamentally recognises that even in relatively violent places, violence can be less common than peace, and that existing functioning relationships are often a key leverage point to address dysfunctional areas.

Resilience is endogenous to a society, shifting or evolving over time in relation to the internal and external stressors and adversities present, and thus expressing itself in different capacities and attributes at different points in time. The role of international actors is not to "build resilience", but rather to support, facilitate, accompany or enhance conflict-affected societies' capacities and attributes that support resilience.[30] In-depth participatory research by Interpeace on societal resilience has shown that resilience to violent conflict manifests differently at different levels of society, both horizontally – between individuals and groups – and vertically – between the population and institutions of the state. Forms of resilience may emerge in response to unequal power dynamics, unfair political economies or from historical discrimination, which may have complex and contradictory outcomes. For instance, while well organised communities may have strong solidarity networks that allow them to cope with hardship or conflict, their strong cohesiveness can be built at the expense of other groups and of wider social cohesion; and can foment and exacerbate distrust in the state and potentially increase marginalisation from the state and broader society. Understanding such patterns of resilience and/or fragility may be important for responding to the nature of highly unequal power relationships between individuals and groups, which is a key first step to working with communities on intentional efforts to transform conflict dynamics.

Inclusiveness is a key dimension of peace responsiveness. Neither conflict nor peace looks the same to all groups in society, as aspects of gender, age and other intersectional identities come into play in different ways. Understanding the differentiated nature of conflict and peace dynamics is crucial for developing relevant and effective strategies for building and sustaining peace. Gender, age, ethnicity, disability, geographic location, class and other layers of social stratification influence the types of vulnerabilities that individuals face before, during and after violent conflicts. The intersectionality of these lived experiences affects their sources of resilience to violent conflict, their perspectives and the potential reasons individuals may have to engage in either violence or peace-

28 Interpeace. *Local Leadership to Local Ownership – An Essential Element for Effective Peacebuilding and Conflict Prevention. Policy Note No 1.* September 2018. https://www.interpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Why_Local_ownership_matters-policy_note-21-Sept.pdf

29 A practical manifest example of this is the experience of international stabilisation approaches which have too often tried to stabilise the most violent communities, neglecting the relatively peaceful communities where such approaches would have been more effective.

30 Interpeace. *Assessing Resilience for Peace*. Guidance Note. April 2016. http://www.interpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/2016-FAR-Guidace-note-Assesing-Resilience-for-Peace-v7.pdf

building. These factors are all deeply impacted by prevailing norms in society, be they pertaining to gender, age or other group characteristics. To effectively work towards sustainable peace, these differentiated perceptions, capacities and vulnerabilities must be understood and integrated into inclusive processes. Implicit and explicit sources of marginalisation and mechanisms of exclusion must be addressed, and marginalised groups enabled to act as agents of change, which will require a challenge to and transformation of existing power relations towards more equal participation and agency. Ultimately, moving towards peaceful and resilient societies is intrinsically linked to an increase in equality, to which peace responsiveness approaches should contribute.

Gender analysis and gender-responsive programming are essential components of peace responsiveness. Conflict dynamics are inherently gendered. Analysing the gendered nature of conflict dynamics deepens understanding of conflicts themselves and lays a more comprehensive foundation for developing relevant and effective strategies to counter violence and promote peace. In a peacebuilding context, it is important to identify, understand and address these specific vulnerabilities to prevent recurrent cycles of violence, provide alternatives for peace and build societies more resilient to violent conflict. Gender also influences the resilience capacities developed and exercised by individuals and groups in the face of violent conflict. Understanding the gendered nature of these resilience capacities and how they manifest in conflict and post-conflict settings can enable peacebuilders to harness and build upon them to broaden peace agency and bring diverse actors into peacebuilding processes. Gender norms – including the relationship between masculinities, femininities and how they manifest in conflict dynamics – have a significant impact on how individuals and groups participate in, influence and shape peace processes. For gender-responsive processes to positively contribute to peacebuilding efforts, they must go beyond representation and include opportunities and strategies for peacefully challenging and transforming power relations for more equal decision making. Effectively integrating gender-responsive approaches in peacebuilding programming requires sufficient staff capacity and strong institutional frameworks to guide programmatic strategies. Here, multisectoral programming and partnerships can help facilitate tackling multisystemic and intersectional vulnerabilities and challenges to peace and gender equality.

Through **integrating peacebuilding principles and processes** into technical programming, the effectiveness of such programmes can be significantly enhanced. For strengthening social cohesion and reducing exclusion – the cornerstones of peacebuilding – the process followed can be as important as what is technically done. Too often in international development, humanitarian and peace work, the typology or mandate of a given intervention is assumed to be solely related to its outcome. Usually, the approach and process underlying the given intervention are far more consequential in determining peace impacts. For instance, an intentional peacebuilding programme aimed at direct peace impacts, such as security sector reform, done well may contribute to peace, or, done poorly, may create significant violence. Inclusive and participatory processes, through which people feel meaningfully engaged, help forge a more constructive engagement with authorities or external actors and reduce the distrust and suspicion that can often hamper implementation. They can further lead to more locally appropriate and accepted solutions, thus enhancing the sustainability and effectiveness of interventions, as the experience of the Ebola response has showed.

Textbox 4. Peacebuilding principles

- Strengthen local capacities and resilience to violence and conflict.
- Promote local ownership and locally led change.
- Focus strongly on inclusive, trust-building, participatory processes.
- Maintain a long-term perspective guided by context.
- Strive for systemic impact and connecting capacities at different levels.

Textbox 5. Peace responsiveness and the humanitarian principles

Efforts to achieve increased synergy between humanitarian action, development and peace efforts have regained global momentum and build on a decades-old discussion within the aid sector. While these discussions have evolved over time, numerous challenges remain. Differences in timeframe, purpose and *modus operandi* often stand in the way of greater coherence, alongside cultural and ideological distinctions between the sectors. Both supporters and opponents of a more synergetic system have concerns on what this call for increased coherence means in the context of an already shrinking space for neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian action. Genuine trade-offs and dilemmas do exist that warrant serious reflection and engagement. At the same time, the siloed ways of working of the past are no longer feasible and will not be able to meaningfully meet the variety and interconnectedness of human needs. One of the core dilemmas remains in the **understanding of what peace efforts entail vis-à-vis the interpretation and operationalisation of the core principles**.

Tensions arise between peace efforts and the humanitarian principles of humanity, independence, neutrality and impartiality. It is often argued that humanitarian principles require distance from the inherently political aspirations and workings of development and especially peace. Assumptions and low levels of understanding about the nature of peacebuilding work and its "big-P" connotations involving highly political interventions are a common barrier at the humanitarian-peace nexus. When humanitarians perceive the nexus as being about a call for their greater engagement in what they understand to be highly political interventions, the principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence are quickly instrumentalised to essentially shut down discussion. There are at least two issues at play here: (1) the call from actors engaged in more immediately evident "political" forms of intervention is not for humanitarians to become more directly engaged in political or securitised crisis responses, but rather how they can better avoid undermining them or exacerbating existing community conflict dynamics; (2) in all humanitarian crisis settings, especially in those where conflict is the primary cause of the crisis, the very concept of a neutral or impartial international presence is a misnomer. All interventions in a conflict context affect local dynamics, and understanding these interactions is a crucial part of being neutral and impartial. Reality has shown that no intervention – be it humanitarian, development or peace – is ever truly impartial, neutral or independent, but that there are only degrees of alignment with the idea. Jennifer Rubenstein phrases this as the responsibility of humanitarians "not to avoid all moral compromise but to deliberate which moral compromises it should grudgingly accept". Furthermore, while humanity and impartiality hold an inherent moral and ethical purpose, neutrality and independence are more pragmatic principles to safeguard the access that is necessary for the realisation of humanity and impartiality. A clear understanding and careful balance between the different values within these principles can create the required space and conducive environment for increased collaboration.

Peace responsiveness can help strengthen principled humanitarian action. It is well established that humanitarian aid runs the risk of undermining stability and the very principle of humanity if it harms community structures, social contracts and societal institutions that form the building blocks for societal resilience and sustainable peace. Humanitarian aid, even when urgently needed and respectfully delivered, may undermine people's sense of dignity, self-reliance and resilience, or put social relations under tension. The way in which the humanitarian principles are interpreted and practised can also affect the degree of localisation and result in more top-down modes of working. Peace-responsive approaches can reinforce the affirmation of local context and capacity through embedding more participatory, inclusive and context-specific understanding of peace and conflict dynamics. It is often argued that local actors cannot be neutral, independent or impartial in conflict or crisis because they form an inherent part of the conflict dynamics. Yet, local actors are often more attuned to how humanitarian interventions may affect local power and conflict dynamics, as well as local resilience capacities, and be better able to understand and tailor their responses to the needs of people on the ground. Such localised approaches embedded in more peace-responsive actions can increase proximity and presence, and ultimately engagement with people in crisis as individual human beings, rather than reducing them to an essentialist identity such as victims, patients, or migrants. For humanitarian actors, as well as development and peace actors, it is crucial to carefully navigate these different goals, values and principles in a context-specific way, but always with the broader aim of protecting the lives and dignity of victims of conflict and to provide them with assistance and ultimately ending need. The way in which the humanitarian principles are interpreted and applied in practice to a large extent determines the impact they will have on conflict dynamics and resilience capacities, and therefore on sustainable peace.

Do No Harm is the starting point, while peace responsiveness aims to also increase awareness of the longer-term impacts of humanitarian interventions. Doing No Harm is based on the now widely accepted premise that aid is not neutral and helps to ensure that, at least, programmes do not– intentionally or unintentionally – contribute to conflict. Putting this in practice requires a high level of programme sensitivity to conflict dynamics and local capacities for peace and a fundamentally different engagement, including, for example, a stronger emphasis on social structures and community-level conflict resolution capacities. Adaptations like this do not undermine, but rather enhance the core principles and are part of making humanitarian inter-

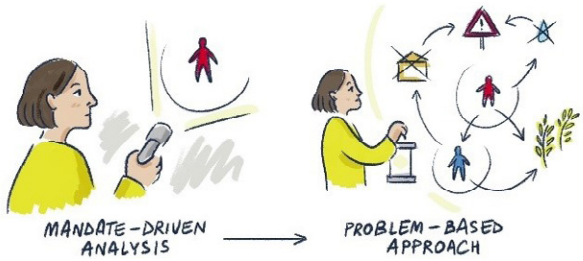
ventions more effective and sustainable, especially in the medium to long term. Such an emphasis is an important way of addressing the tension between usually more short-term-oriented Do No Harm thinking and longer-term conflict sensitivity and peace responsiveness. Too often, humanitarian action is predicated on a short-term crisis response but rarely do such responses in fact end up being short term, with the average UN-coordinated humanitarian response now lasting more than nine years.

Although humanitarian interventions must intentionally and explicitly contribute to peace, the extent of this obligation and the means to be employed will depend on context. A myriad of possibilities exists whereby humanitarian actors can more explicitly and intentionally strengthen resilience capacities, inter- and intra-group relations and other societal structures that serve as the bedrock for sustainable peace. Being peace responsive does not necessarily require actors to engage in political or even security-led processes, but rather to better complement these efforts or at least avoid undermining them (see also Textbox 2 on distinguishing between "big-P" and "little-p"). Indeed, peace responsiveness provides operational avenues and different ways for humanitarians to contribute to peace, based on a careful calibration of the key values and principles guiding their actions. Such approaches, rather than detracting from the principles, can reinforce them.

Inspired by: Dubois, Marc. *Triple Nexus – Threat or Opportunity for the Humanitarian Principles?* Centre for Humanitarian Action (CHA). May 2020. Available at: https://www.chaberlin.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/2020-05-triple-nexus-threat-or-opportunity-dubois-en-1.pdf

Contributing to sustainable peace requires a systemic approach, based on a long-term perspective and informed by a strong contextual understanding. A peace-responsive system strives for collective impact, whereby the efforts of different actors – operating in different sectors and at different levels – complement each other and address conflict drivers in an integrated and multidimensional way. A systemic approach needs to be adopted across sectors, across time, and across levels of capacities in society. While immediate needs are being addressed in the short term, maintaining a long-term perspective can ensure that seeds are sown to start addressing the more systemic causes of conflict and vulnerability, for instance through reducing inequality and strengthening accountability systems. It requires strong cooperation and collaboration between actors within the HDP nexus, based on a sound understanding of the connections and interactions between the political, social, environmental, economic and security spheres. It further requires a shift away from linear sequencing approaches (humanitarian assistance and ending the crisis first, followed by development and more long-term peacebuilding) to a more nuanced understanding of how these types of interventions intersect and can strengthen each other, particularly in settings – which is almost the norm now – where these actors are all present at the same time.

A peace responsive system requires significant changes to the way agencies currently operate, which is largely based on what could be described as a "mandate-driven analysis and approach" rather than a "problem-based and context-driven approach", which is what is required. Such mandate-based approaches tend to perpetuate the siloes in the system and hinder effective integration in the HDP nexus. Enhancing the humanitarian and development system's peace responsiveness thus also means addressing the structural barriers and disincentives that hamper the operationalisation of the commitments made to increase coherence and complementarity or stand in the way of genuine context-led, locally driven change. These include, for instance, siloed funding streams that may constrain the inclusion of more development- or peace-related aspects into humanitarian activities, or the rigid accountability systems that reduce the flexibility necessary to respond to changes in context or progressive insight on what works in practice.



Standing on the shoulders of conflict sensitivity and Do No Harm

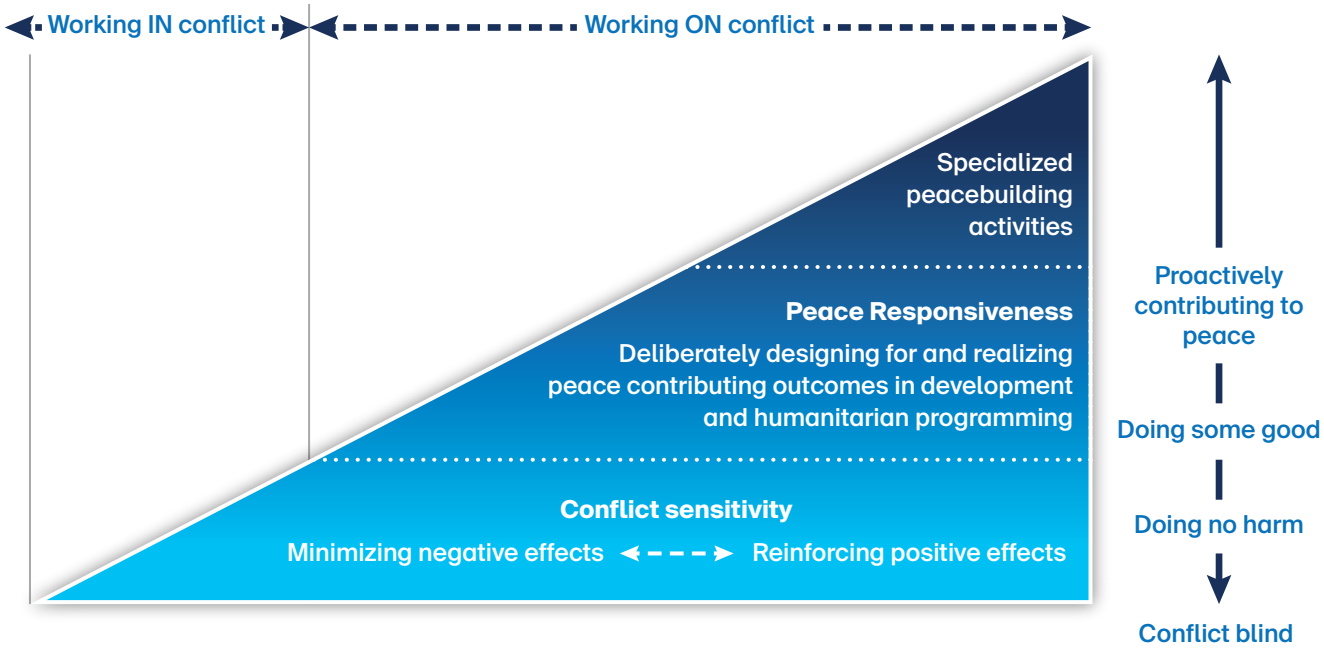
Peace responsiveness is conceptually underpinned by conflict sensitivity and Do No Harm. While the importance of conflict sensitivity has increasingly been recognised by the humanitarian and development sectors, the operational implementation of these concepts still has a long way to go. The concepts and methodology of conflict sensitivity centre around the unintended consequences that interventions may have on the (conflict) context and vice versa. However, the real-world implementation of these concepts and frameworks is often incorrectly narrow. In practice, the emphasis of many organizations and practitioners is often on managing operational and security risks to the organization and its staff. Such approaches may leave programme implementors with a false impression they have become ”conflict sensitive”, while harmful practices and negative side effects continue to occur, and practice remains conflict blind.

While the concepts and methodology of conflict sensitivity and Do No Harm have always placed equal emphasis on avoiding the fuelling of conflict drivers and the promotion of peace drivers, in practice the emphasis of many organizations and practitioners has often been on minimising the immediate risks of exacerbating conflict (as the words “do no harm” literally imply). Furthermore, the focus of many organizations is on avoiding ”negative peace” – the absence of violence – rather than on promoting ”positive peace”, broadly understood as the factors, attitudes and institutions that support the non-violent resolution of grievances in society. There tends to be a strong focus on avoiding the exacerbation of conflict or violence in the immediate or short term, but often without a wider perspective on how more structural factors may be affected by an intervention in the long term. This focus on the drivers of conflict often precludes an orientation towards the impacts an intervention may have on capacities for peace. The interventions may not be conflict blind, but they are still peace blind.

Conversely, if one is focused on both negative and positive peace, then the scope of analysis is usefully broadened to consider both the short-term and long-term drivers, social factors, political economy and institutions that drive peace. Integrating an intersectional gender and youth lens also allows one to focus more strongly on social norms affecting or underpinning conflict and peace dynamics.

Peace responsiveness explicitly seeks to draw attention to functioning systems, attitudes, norms and behaviours to identify and strengthen existing capacities for positive peace that can be leveraged towards increased societal resilience to conflict and violence. This requires an expanded contextual awareness, by explicitly focusing on the effects interventions may have on the building blocks of positive peace, on the capacities for peace, in the short and longer term. This kind of conflict sensitivity – in the broadest sense of the word – must be the minimum standard for all actors operating in conflict-affected setting.

Figure 1: The spectrum from conflict-blind to peacebuilding - via peace responsiveness



Conflict sensitivity, peace responsiveness and specialised peacebuilding activities exist along a spectrum.

Peace responsiveness starts from the premise that all actors in the humanitarian and development spheres have the potential to contribute to peace. There is a specific intentionality to it that goes beyond the commitment of minimising the negative effects and reinforcing the positive effects. In many settings there is ample scope for technical and development agencies to incorporate "little-p" activities, that is, activities focused on strengthening trust and relations between people and between citizens and the state, and reinforcing mechanisms to resolve disputes non-violently. In some settings there may also be opportunities to connect or support "big-P" approaches, for instance by aiming to increase the inclusiveness of peace processes.

The extent to which humanitarian and development actors will deliberately and intentionally contribute to peace in the design and implementation of their interventions will always be dependent on the specific circumstances, their capacities, the risks and opportunities and any trade-offs and dilemmas that may arise. However, conflict sensitivity – in its broadest sense– is never optional and interventions' potential unintended consequences for the building blocks of positive peace must always be considered.

It is also important to acknowledge the limitations of all development and humanitarian actors to effectively contribute to highly intentional peace efforts. Technical agencies have specific sectoral expertise, competencies and skills related to their mandate and cannot be expected to become specialised peacebuilding actors. Some contexts require specialised peacebuilding activities. Peacebuilding organizations are often good at "little-p" peace activities, with strong competencies and skills in facilitating inclusive dialogue, strengthening accountability mechanisms, supporting peace processes, strengthening infrastructures for peace, promoting non-violent means of addressing tensions, and so forth. Through joint programming or strategic partnerships with peacebuilding actors, some of the gaps, tensions and dilemmas around mandate, capacities and skills can be addressed.

In most cases, "Big-P" areas of peace work, such as high-level mediation, national dialogue, reconciliation and transitional justice, will remain the exclusive domain of peacebuilding and peace-making actors, with this explicit mandate and technical capacity. Nonetheless, in conflict-affected settings, technical agencies may play a critical supporting role to such work, for instance by implementing elements of peace agreements or enhancing the inclusiveness of such processes. In any case, the context – alongside the specific capacities of the agencies involved – will always be critical in determining what the most appropriate approach may be.

Textbox 5. What has been learnt from previous efforts to mainstream conflict sensitivity?

Overall, efforts to mainstream conflict sensitivity and Do No Harm have seen successes and failures. Some of the main lessons include the following:

- **Building individuals' capacity is a key pillar of enhancing conflict sensitivity.** Yet, conceptual training alone has proven insufficient; experience has shown that the training is more effective when it is directly applied in practice, in real-life situations, in the fields in which the training participants operate.
- **Guidance is important but no panacea.** Guidance has in many cases worked best when strongly tailored to the needs of the prospective users. Guidance must be coupled with ongoing capacity support, to translate it into programme design and operational practice, as these concepts seem deceptively simple but are not easy to apply in practice.
- **Strong organizational commitment to conflict sensitivity is crucial.** Normative commitments to conflict sensitivity – or broader policy agendas such as the Great Bargain or the sustaining peace agenda – provide a helpful anchor, but do not automatically translate to better practice.
- **The role of donors is key,** as their requirements for conflict sensitivity have the potential to significantly enhance conflict sensitivity, particularly at the project level. However, the accountability associated with ensuring conflict sensitivity in practice is low, as it has primarily remained at the proposal stage.
- **To increase the uptake of conflict sensitivity, language really matters.** Concepts like peacebuilding, conflict and fragility can raise red flags. In response to these sensitivities, framing can be adapted, for instance by using concepts such as social cohesion or resilience.
- **A focus on programme effectiveness can also help gain traction.** A better understanding of conflict and peace dynamics can contribute significantly to the effectiveness and sustainability of technical interventions, which could attract the attention of more technical actors operating in conflict settings.
- **Linking conflict sensitivity to risk management can be helpful,** although this would require a broader interpretation of "risk" to include not just risks to an organization's operations and staff, but also risks of potential negative impacts on conflict dynamics or social cohesion.

These efforts and this learning have strengthened conflict sensitivity at the project and operational level to some extent. Embedding conflict sensitivity at the broader organizational and systems level tends to trail behind.

Many of the obstacles that hinder progress can be ascribed to aspects of organizational culture and practice that may have received less attention or have proven more resistant to change:

- **Other institutional dynamics trump conflict sensitivity requirements.** This includes spending pressure and competition with other topics to be "mainstreamed". Overall workload pressure can create resistance to any additional considerations and may lead to a "box-ticking" culture.

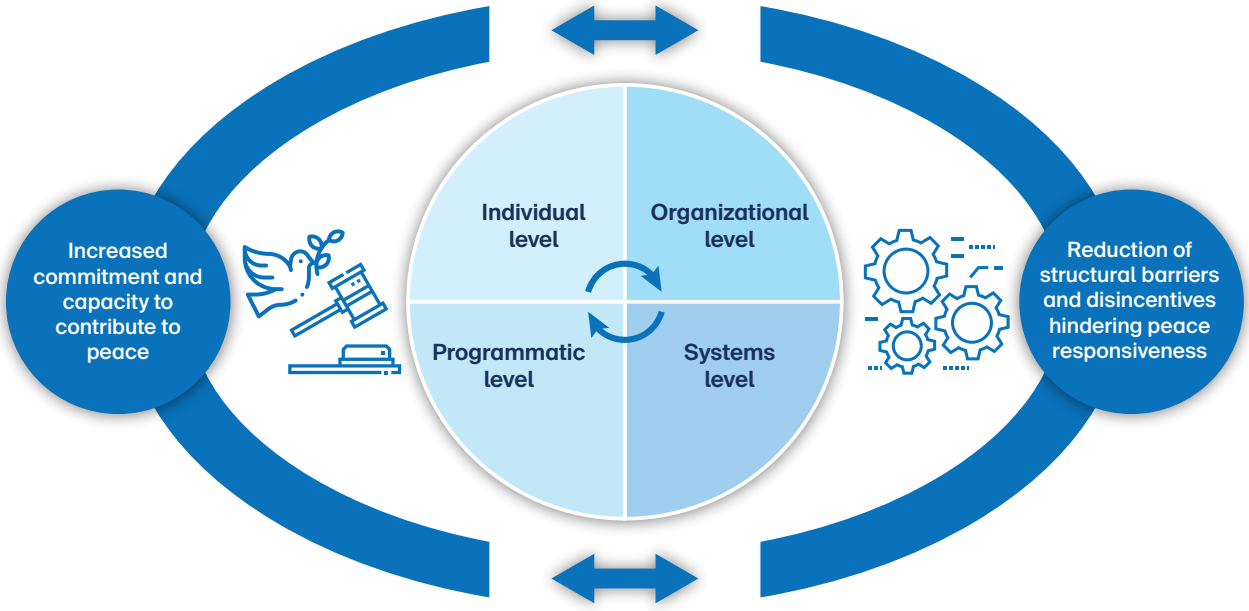
- **Context-flexible and adaptive management is not widely practised.** Existing accountability structures create mindsets insufficiently tuned to local realities and a project-management mindset. Project management staff tend to feel primarily responsible for implementing prescribed project interventions and meeting their targets. In line with John le Carre's quote that "*a desk is a dangerous place from which to view the world*", project managers can be quite disconnected from realities on the ground – particularly in conflict contexts where access can be challenging – which can lead to an insufficient ability to perceive risks or unintended consequences, and a resistance to adapt planned project interventions.
- **Active learning is hampered by hierarchical and control-oriented structures that reduce the free flow of information and sharing learning.** Risk-averse organizational cultures and a focus on showing success stands in the way of learning from failures and reduces the space to acknowledge unintended consequences and avoiding these in the future.

The overall impression that transpires from this analysis of lessons learnt is that many of the obstacles that hinder progress in these dimensions can be ascribed to broader structural barriers and disincentives within the system that have proven difficult to address. These stumbling blocks are situated primarily at the level of the institutional enabling environment, both at the organizational and inter-organizational (systems) level, whereby bureaucratic aspects and political aspects both play a role. These levels may have received less attention or have proven more resistant to deep change. Enhancing peace responsiveness will require engaging on these stumbling blocks, understanding them more deeply, and finding ways to transcend them.

How to improve peace responsiveness

Peace responsiveness requires **an increase in commitment and capacity to contribute to peace** across the development and humanitarian system, to better equip actors operating in conflict-affected settings to design and implement their programmes in a conflict-sensitive way and maximise their contributions to sustainable peace. This alone will not be sufficient, however, as the institutional environment does not currently enable the operationalisation of the sustaining peace agenda. Peace responsiveness will also require significant transformations in the way the system works, by **explicitly addressing the structural barriers and disincentives hindering peace responsiveness**, the HDP nexus and the sustaining peace agenda more broadly.

Figure 2: Multilevel approach to enhancing peace responsiveness



This requires a multilevel approach, whereby efforts at individual, programmatic, organizational and systems level go together in mutually reinforcing ways.

Strategies to enhance peace responsiveness

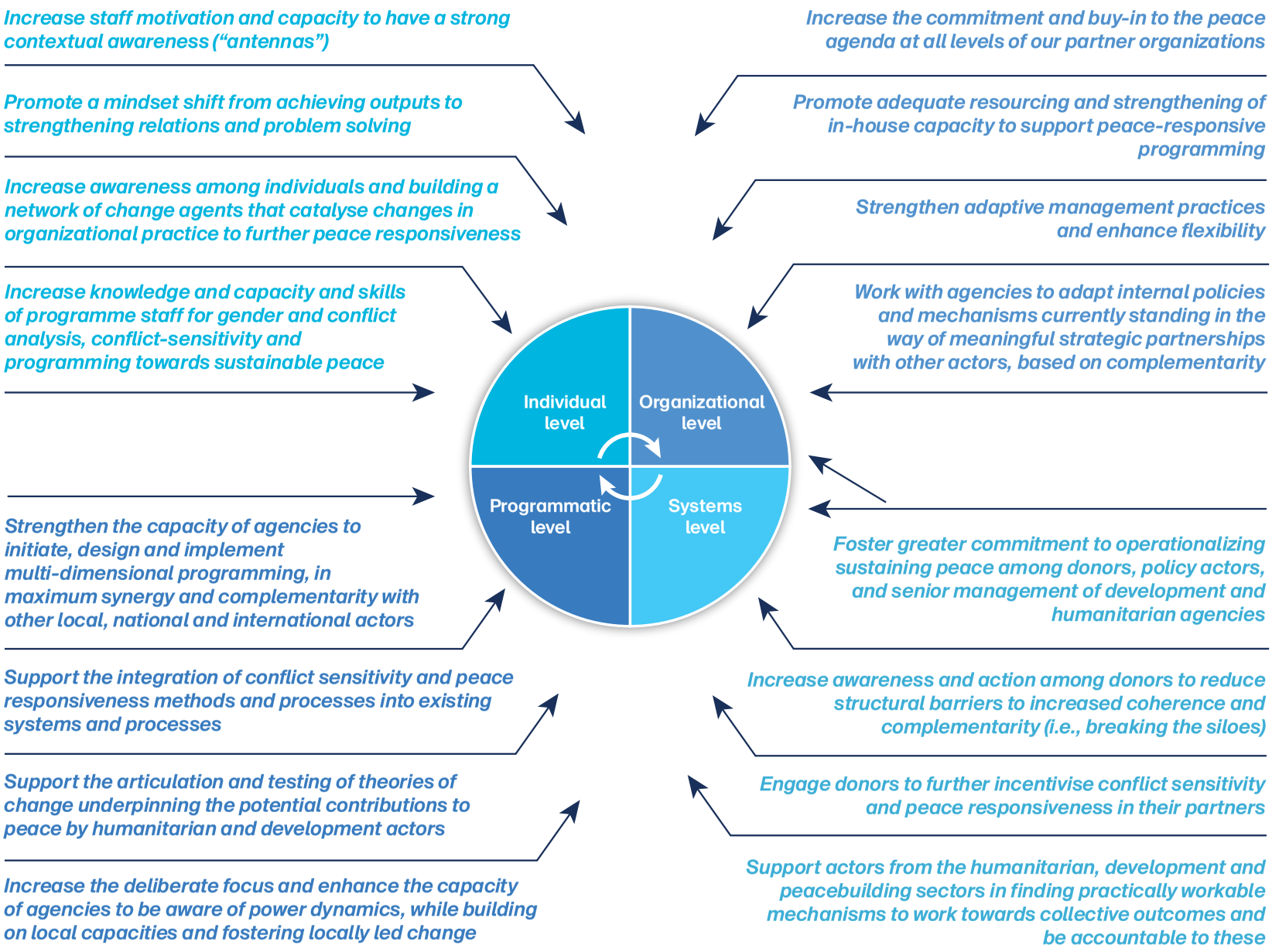
To increase the understanding of and commitment to peace responsiveness among humanitarian and development agencies, policy actors and donors, the capacity of humanitarian and development agencies to design and implement peace responsiveness programmes must change. Further, their ability to partner with peacebuilding or other local organizations will also maximise their impact. These changes are key to scaling up large development and humanitarian agencies' ability to implement conflict-sensitive and peace-responsive programmes, increase their contextual awareness and ability to adapt interventions to existing realities and capacities, thereby increasing the peace and programmatic effectiveness of their work.

Such efforts will be reinforced by more clearly articulating and testing the theories of change through which agencies can potentially 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 funding for peace-responsive approaches. A further unpacking of the concept of peace can help gain a more finetuned understanding of how different agencies may be able to contribute to peace without overstepping their respective mandates nor treading on their principles.

These strategies must be flanked by initiatives to foster an organizational practice that promotes organizational learning and adaptive management to continually optimise interventions towards sustainable impact, based on and expanding local capacities. Because change starts with individuals, it involves forging a critical mass of people with the motivation and capacity to catalyse peace responsiveness within their organizations. Donors can play a critical role in enhancing peace responsiveness by further incentivising conflict sensitivity and peace responsiveness in their partners and reducing the fragmentation in funding mechanisms and operating cycles to enable collaboration across the humanitarian, development and peace spectrum.

Such transformations will require engagement at multiple levels – individual, programmatic, organizational and systemic– in interconnected ways, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Strategies to enhance peace responsiveness



What would a more peace-responsive system look like?

What are the specific characteristics and capabilities at individual, programmatic, organizational, and systemic levels that are necessary to become more peace responsive? How would we know whether our capabilities and actions are becoming more peace responsive?

These building blocks for peace responsiveness represent a long-term vision. Some of these elements are more aspirational in nature, while some may already be partially achieved. Understanding progress in institutional and organizational capacities for peace responsiveness will require devising new ways of measuring agencies' movement towards these goals, through processes of incremental change.

At the **individual level**, increased knowledge, capacity and skills for gender-responsive peace and conflict analysis, conflict sensitivity and programming for sustainable peace by agency staff and implementing partners will remain a central pillar for enhancing peace responsiveness. Yet, knowledge alone is insufficient; individuals working close to the ground need to enhance their contextual awareness, to grow "antennas" for understanding the complex dynamics around them, including unequal power dynamics. They must be empowered to feed this awareness and learning upwards into their organizations, which will require a change in mindsets, in the incentives at play, and in the communication flows between centre and periphery (and between local implementing partners and the agency). A further important mindset change will be the general adoption of more enabling, accompanying and capacity-building roles with diverse and inclusive sets of local actors that seek to empower them to take leading roles in programme implementation. Also, at the individual level, peace and conflict advisors or other strategically positioned individuals aiming to increase peace responsiveness in the system may benefit from additional technical competencies related to effectively accompanying change processes.

At the **programmatic level**, locally informed gender-responsive peace and conflict analyses must be conducted systematically and on an ongoing basis, and programme design and implementation must be strongly based on these analyses. Experience has shown that this will require standing mechanisms to support teams' programme design. Programming must further maximise synergies with other policy and programming agendas through deep collaboration with other agencies in joint analyses and programming, as well as through the HDP nexus. Partnerships with other actors, including implementing partners, could benefit from a more strategic nature based on each other's comparative advantages and open exchanges. Power asymmetries between contracting parties and service providers must be significantly reduced to enable true collaboration that minimises the instrumentalisation of local actors and dangerous forms of risk transfer. Peace responsiveness as a mainstreaming agenda could be made to dovetail more with other mainstreaming agendas, such as gender, protection, localisation and accountability to affected populations to bring about high-quality programming in all these domains. Finally, and as a matter of high priority, the evidence base for contributions to sustainable peace must be strengthened; potential pathways for how humanitarian and development action can contribute to sustainable peace must be articulated, incorporated into results frameworks and systematically and rigorously monitored; and independent research must be conducted to verify the validity of these claims.

At the **organizational level**, a more peace-responsive system requires organizations to have an institutionalised commitment to contributing to peace at the senior leadership level, manifested through formal recognition in various corporate frameworks and demonstrated through the allocation of sufficient financial and human resources. For a given organization to genuinely serve as an enabling environment for peace-responsive approaches, it will also need to gradually evolve towards organizational culture and management systems that allow for more context-led and adaptive decision making, systematic learning systems and calculated risk taking. This will require increased flexibility in management and accountability mechanisms that are rigorous without being rigid. Furthermore, a culture of learning and a more effective flow of information from the ground to headquarters and back, will in turn require a willingness to collaborate and establish strategic partnerships with other actors. Finally, and this may be where most innovative work is required, human resources, procurement, and financing policies and mechanisms will need to support this way of working.

At the systems level, peace responsiveness ought to be measured by the ability of key actors in the system to contribute collectively to sustainable peace; whereby the whole sum of development, humanitarian and peace interventions add up to cumulative impacts on peace writ large. A system in which collaboration, complementarity and synergy between actors (local, national, international and across sectors) is maximised, based on the comparative advantage of each actor, and collective outcomes are achieved, could be said to be peace responsive. A system that can measure progress towards peace in its broadest sense, within which actors hold themselves accountable and where learning is done collectively, would be peace responsive. Peace-responsive systems would ensure responsibility and power over direction with the pace of change placed primarily with local actors, and funding and accountability mechanisms would be supportive of localisation, with accountability geared towards affected populations and local partners. Finally, a peace-responsive system is one where external actors become aware of the role they play within it and the incentives they may unwillingly create and proactively search for ways to increase overall system effectiveness, based on the premise that "systems change best when systems change themselves".

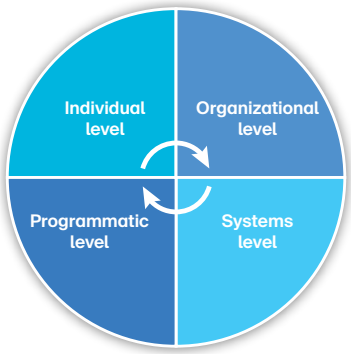
In practical terms, Interpeace works on enhancing peace responsiveness through six integrated components:

Component 1:
Institutional partnerships

We develop bilateral partnerships with UN agencies and other organizations from the humanitarian and development sector to support and accompany them in becoming more peace responsive, and thus advance the sustaining peace agenda within these organizations.

Component 3:
Supporting Change Agents

We strengthen the individual capacities of strategically positioned change agents from across the peace, development and humanitarian sphere to catalyze more peace responsive action in their organizations and the broader system.



Component 4:
Cross-organizational exchange and learning

We convene and facilitate a space for cross-organizational exchange and learning on what works to foster peace responsiveness and to collaboratively advance the agenda of sustaining peace.

Component 5:
Research and knowledge base

We promote, initiate or conduct research on how and to what extent peace responsive approaches by humanitarian and development actors may contribute to sustaining peace and enhance the effectiveness of technical programming, and what factors may hinder or foster such impact to materialize in practice.

Component 6:
Policy engagement and outreach to donors

We engage with donors, policy actors and senior leadership of humanitarian and development agencies to raise their awareness and generate their support on strengthening the enabling environment for peace responsive approaches.

Component 2:
Joint Programming

We design projects and programmes for joined implementation between Interpeace and international organizations from across the development and humanitarian sphere, to showcase the mutual benefit from such collaboration.

Contributing to sustaining peace has become everyone's business and everyone's responsibility. We believe that the only way to achieve the aspirations of the sustaining peace agenda, the HDP nexus and Agenda 2030 is by working together through a process of co-creation, co-development and a joining of hands and hearts.

We invite all those with an interest in the topic and who feel a degree of alignment with our vision and mission to connect with us, to join us, to partner with us.

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Connect with us

Contributing to sustaining peace has become everyone's business and everyone's responsibility. We believe that the only way to achieve the aspirations of the sustaining peace agenda, the HDP nexus and Agenda 2030 is by working together through a process of co-creation, co-development and a joining of hands and hearts.

We invite all those with an interest in the topic and who feel a degree of alignment with our vision and mission to connect with us, to join us, to partner with us.

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