



Violence Reduction Subsector Review & Evidence Evaluation



Alliance for
Peacebuilding

Harnessing collective action for peace



About the Peacebuilding Evaluation Consortium (PEC)

The Peacebuilding Evaluation Consortium (PEC) is a project of Alliance for Peacebuilding (AfP) in partnership with CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, Mercy Corps and Search for Common Ground (SFCG). The project is funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York (CCNY) and is field-wide effort to address the unique challenges to measuring and learning from peacebuilding programs. The PEC convenes donors, scholars, policymakers, local and international practitioners, and evaluation experts in an unprecedented open dialogue, exchange, and joint learning. It seeks to address the root causes of weak evaluation practices and disincentives for better learning by fostering field-wide change through three strategic and reinforcing initiatives: 1) Developing Methodological Rigor; 2) Improving the Culture of Evaluation and Shared Learning; and 3) Fostering the Use of Evidence to Inform Peacebuilding Policy.



Alliance for
Peacebuilding

Harnessing collective action for peace

About Alliance for Peacebuilding

The Alliance for Peacebuilding (AfP) is the institutional home for the peacebuilding community—a network of over 100 organizations working to resolve conflict and create sustainable peace in 153 countries. Our members include some of the world’s largest development organizations, most innovative academic institutions, and the most powerful peacebuilding groups—and our partners span a range of sectors, including environment, education, unarmed citizen protection, business, media, the arts, and more—all working toward the shared goal of peace. AfP amplifies the voices of peacebuilders worldwide, tackling issues too large for any one organization to address alone.

Acknowledgements

This report was written by Jessica Baumgardner-Zuzik—Director of Learning & Evaluation and Emily Myers—Herbert Scoville Peace Fellow '17. It draws upon research gathered from both publicly available peacebuilding evaluations and an open call for submissions. Multiple people graciously peer reviewed drafts of this paper. They commented and made suggestions in their personal, non-institutional capacities. The paper is enriched by their contributions, but the final content is solely our responsibility.

Abstract

With levels of global violent conflict at a 25-year peak, the need for effective and impactful peacebuilding programming could not be more pressing. The peacebuilding field has shown immense commitment to understanding, preventing, and mitigating the impact of violent conflict, but has struggled to aggregate evidence across efforts to analyze, understand, and advocate for what works to reduce violence. If the peacebuilding field identifies where its programming has directly correlated to reduced levels of violence, then it will be better able to ground program design, monitoring, and evaluation (DM&E) in evidence, and leverage evidence to advocate for the necessity and utility of the field—making the case for peace. This evidence evaluation and subsector review analyzes data from twenty-two cases. Six macro-level violence reduction Theories of Change (ToC) were developed across three approaches from an analysis of the peacebuilding cases and the strength of evidence for each was assessed.

Approach ①

Increasing Community Capacity to Resist and Mitigate Violence

Approach ②

Improving the Community-Government Relationship

Approach ③

Fostering Social Cohesion



While aspects of Approach ① and ②'s ToC are grounded in robust evidence, there is still a mixed and weak evidence base on direct causal linkages between specific peacebuilding programmatic activities and violence reduction. Approach ③ is relatively unsupported by significant evidence and remains highly anecdotal. Overall, greater research needs to be conducted within each of the approaches to provide a more solid evidence base for peacebuilding violence reduction programming.

Following this evidence evaluation and subsector review, Alliance for Peacebuilding supports eight key recommendations to improve the field of peacebuilding violence reduction programming.

- **Define the purpose:** Clearly define the purpose, vision, and scope of individual programming's monitoring and evaluation efforts.
- **Do your research:** Conduct a thorough literature review before designing programs that explores not only extant peacebuilding literature but other sectors that may have relevant findings.
- **Invest in monitoring and evaluation:** Allocate appropriate time, resources, and staff to design M&E activities during the program design phase that employ statistical evaluation techniques rooted in clearly articulated theories of change and based on thorough literature reviews.
- **Conduct a baseline:** Peacebuilding programs need to establish baselines prior to implementing programming from which change can then be measured and evaluated.
- **Start simple and expand out:** Greater research needs to be conducted to determine the statistical dependency between individual peacebuilding programmatic activities and attribution towards, and actual levels of, violence.
- **Consider the system when designing the approach:** When attempting to translate short-term, individual behavioral and attitudinal change into transformative societal change, it may be critical to take a systems approach to violence reduction programming and evaluation by thinking about the combination of ToC and activities appropriate for the context.
- **It's not all about economic incentives:** The peacebuilding field should focus its programmatic and evaluative time and resources on addressing the root causes of violence outside of solely economic factors and should incorporate activities addressing economic empowerment programming as supportive outcomes towards the larger goal of violence reduction.
- **There's a need for more research:** This subsector review serves to highlight not only the breadth of research that has already been conducted but to acknowledge the need for additional, rigorous evaluations of the causal link between peacebuilding programming and a reduction in violent conflict.
- **Violence reduction is an intrinsic condition of peacebuilding:** Violence reduction must be a component of conflict prevention and peacebuilding programming.

Contents

Abstract i

Overview of the Report iii

1 Introduction 1

Definitions and Boundaries 2

Methodology and Included Cases 3

2 Definitional and Evaluative Implications of Peacebuilding Approaches to Violence Reduction 4

3 Theories of Change & Evidence Evaluation 7

Approach 1 *Increasing Community Capacity to Resist and Mitigate Violence* 11

Approach 2 *Improving the Community-Government Relationship* 15

Approach 3 *Fostering Social Cohesion* 18

4 Conclusions and Recommendations 19

Major Conclusions by ToC 19

Major Recommendations 21

▼ Lesbos, Greece—October 25, 2015: A young child from the Middle East is carried up a hill from the beach after the crowded boat she and others were traveling in arrived on the north coast of the Greek island from Turkey.

Photo: © Joel Carrilet

Overview of the Report

This subsector review and evidence evaluation contains four sections. **Section 1** introduces the scope and necessity of the subsector review, and articulates definitions, boundaries, and the methodology for finding and selecting sources. **Section 2** examines the implications of peacebuilding programming for both the understanding and evaluation of violence reduction. **Section 3** presents, in tabular form, the central theories of change (ToC) that emerged from the subsector review. These ToC are organized by approach and presented alongside their associated indicators, common activities, and a summary of the strength of evidence for each ToC. Following the table is an in-depth analysis of the strength of evidence for each ToC, examining where peacebuilding programs have successfully measured levels of violence and presented significant evidence attributing changes in levels of violence to peacebuilding programming. **Section 4** concludes with identification of gaps in knowledge, opportunities for further study, and recommendations for where the peacebuilding field should focus evaluation efforts moving forward.



Handwritten Arabic text on the left wall, including the words "الخطاب" (The Address) and "الخطاب" (The Address).

Handwritten Arabic text on the right wall, including the words "الخطاب" (The Address) and "الخطاب" (The Address).



1 Introduction

Levels of global violent conflict are at a 25-year peak: 402 violent conflicts persist around the world and lines of warfare are bleeding more and more from the battlefield into the domestic space.¹ U.S.-supported peacebuilding programs are implemented in conflict-affected, violent, and fragile states. Fragility, conflict, and violence are each distinct concepts but are intertwined in many of the world's hotspots. Countries experiencing extremely high levels of violence are not necessarily considered to be in active conflict. For example, the countries that rank highest for rates of violent death include El Salvador, Venezuela, and Honduras. These countries suffer from high political and social instability and gang violence, even though they are not considered active conflict zones like Afghanistan and Syria. However, violence in these areas underlie U.S. domestic and national security issues, including gangs and narco trafficking.

The peacebuilding field has shown immense commitment to understanding, preventing, and mitigating the impact of violent conflict, but has struggled to aggregate evidence across efforts to analyze, understand, and advocate for what works to reduce violence. These efforts have large implications for understanding contributing factors towards fragility and violent conflict in addition to violence reduction. With violence becoming both more pervasive and more diffuse, the peacebuilding field must take stock of how it is measuring violence and what the existing evidence indicates about the field's impact to extract lessons learned and inform more effective future programming. >>

The peacebuilding field has historically taken a long-term, whole-of-society approach to violence reduction. This approach involves conducting conflict assessments to understand contextual drivers of violence, engaging with a broad range of actors to ensure inclusivity, and focusing programming to build sustainable peace, rather than simply ending immediate threats. This process has contributed to a more nuanced understanding of violence and conflict, but has not driven innovative techniques for measuring violence, a problem which is worsened by the added complexity of trying to measure successful prevention of future violent occurrences.

The peacebuilding field has articulated theories of change (ToC) reflective of the shifting conflict and violence landscape that have the potential to correlate reduced levels of violence to peacebuilding programming, but in many instances, they are not supported by significant evidence. The field has also lacked a systematic subsector review inclusive of this expanded concept of violence, new avenues for measurement of violence reduction, and the strength of evidence for peacebuilding ToC relating to violence reduction. >>

◀ Quneitra, Syria—May 05, 2013:
Bullet-riddled rooms.

Photo: © Joel Carrilet

¹ *World humanitarian data and trends 2017*. (2018). New York: United Nations.

If the peacebuilding field identifies where its programming has directly correlated to reduced levels of violence, then it will be better able to ground program design, monitoring, and evaluation (DM&E) in evidence, and leverage evidence to advocate for the necessity and utility of the field—making the case for peace. We believe that collecting impact data that assesses the causal linkages between a reduction in violence and peacebuilding programming should in no way undermine support for addressing complex structural drivers of conflict and should not be seen as mutually exclusive.

To initiate the underpinnings of this critical work, Alliance for Peacebuilding conducted a violence reduction subsector review and evidence evaluation of existing program evaluations, agency produced lessons summaries, evidence summaries, research papers, and white papers. This subsector review aims to answer three central questions:

1. How have peacebuilding approaches to violence reduction contributed to a more nuanced understanding of violence and conflict and shaped how we measure violence reduction?
2. How has the peacebuilding field conceptualized the correlation between its programming and violence reduction—what are the current typologies of theories of change?
3. Which theories of change are supported by research and evidence of impact? Which are not? Where are the gaps?

Definitions and Boundaries

This subsector review aims to understand violence reduction as it relates to conflict prevention and is thus examining evaluations of political violence and/or community violence occurring in conflict affected and/or fragile contexts.

We define **political violence** as “the use of force/violence used with a political motivation, to achieve a political goal, to assert political power over another group, or to disseminate a political message to an outside audience”.

We define **community violence** as “the use of force/violence by one group in a community to assert power over or intimidate another group within the community, or interpersonal violence which has a demonstrable effect on community cohesion”.

To ensure this focus, we considered evaluations, agency produced lessons summaries, evidence summaries, research papers, and white papers that attempt to measure, or discuss programming that attempted to measure, reductions in violence.

This programming must have occurred in conflict affected and/or fragile contexts meeting one or more of the following definitions:

- An area with sustained combat, involving organized armed forces, resulting in a minimum of 1,000 battle-related fatalities within a 12-month period (Correlates of War);
- An area with a combination of risk with insufficient capacity by the state, system and/or communities, to manage, absorb or mitigate its impact (The World Bank);
- A country among the 50 highest scoring countries for instability on the most recent Fragile States Index published by the Fund for Peace; and/or
- A country scoring at or above a 4 on the Global Conflict Risk Index (GCRI).

Methodology and Included Cases

This subsector review includes evaluations and academic papers that are both available within the public domain or were submitted as part of an open call for submissions. All included sources are henceforth referred to as “cases”.

To identify public domain violence reduction cases, the following approaches were employed:

- Google and Google Scholar searches were conducted for the following key terms: “conflict prevention measurement”, “armed violence prevention measurement”, “political violence intervention evaluation”, “armed violence intervention evaluation”, “conflict prevention evaluation”, “violence reduction evaluation”, “violence intervention evaluation”, “violence reduction”, “violence reduction impact evaluation”, and “violence intervention impact evaluation”;
- Relevant and publicly available results were read and considered; and
- Further reports and papers were identified and read based on works cited from the Google Scholar report group.

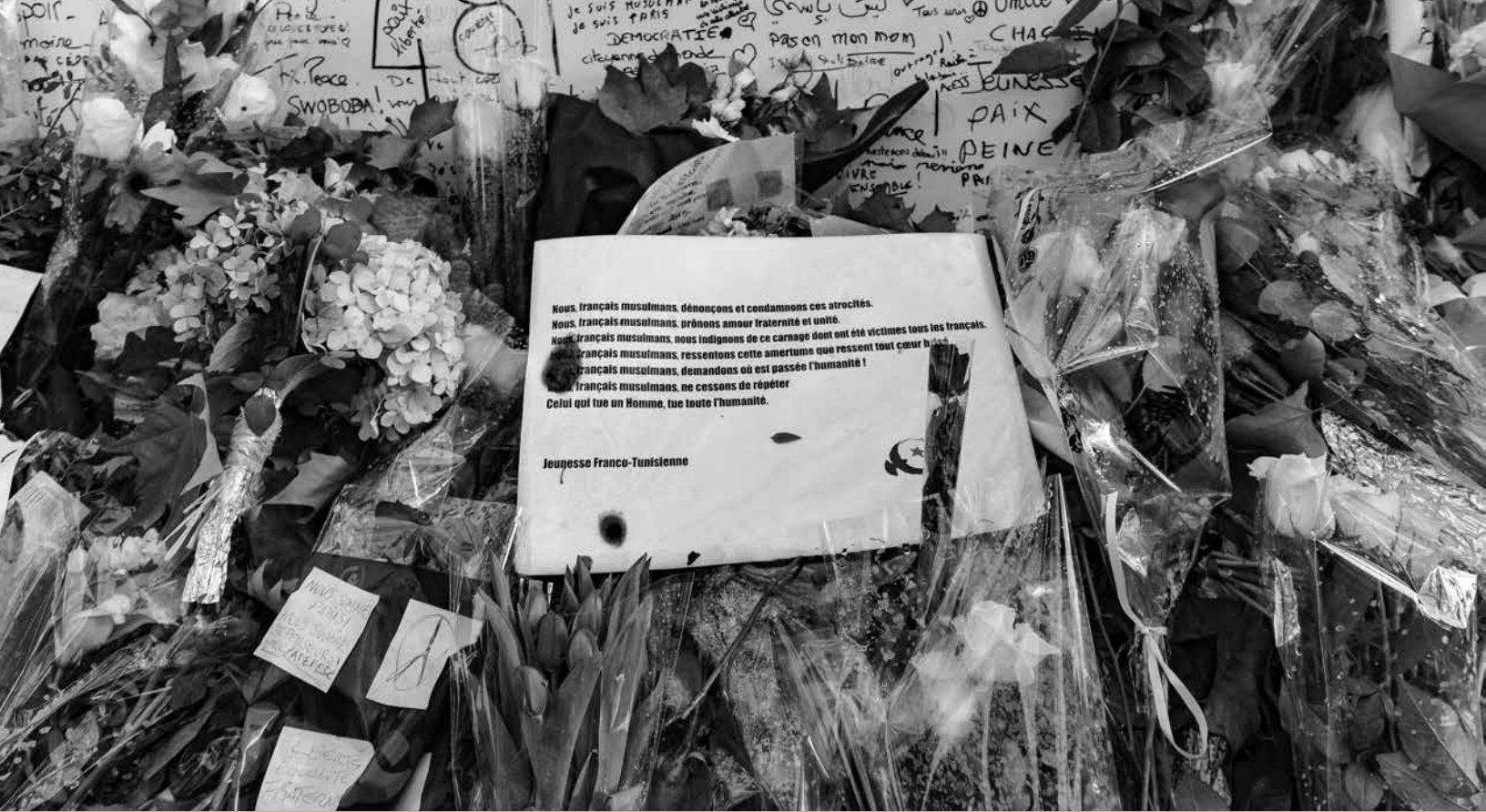
A case was eliminated if:

- It did not demonstrate a clear evaluation component;
- It did not conceptualize violence/violent conflict as outlined in section 1.2;
- It did not indicate a clear methodology.

A call for submissions was also sent out through the Alliance for Peacebuilding and Peacebuilding Evaluation Consortium (PEC) networks. The submissions were included or eliminated based on the same criteria as the public domain sources.

Twelve evaluations were sent in for consideration and seven were included in the final review. These seven were supplemented by fifteen publicly available cases. In total, twenty-two cases were included in this subsector review. Seventeen were program evaluations, some encompassing a meta review of multiple programs, one was an evidence summary, and four were academic papers. The selected cases spanned fourteen countries within five regions: Central America, the Caribbean, Middle East and North Africa (MENA), North America, and Sub-Saharan Africa. There was a slightly skewed regional concentration, with ten cases discussing programming in Sub-Saharan Africa. Notably, all considered documents, both sent in and publicly available, were published in 2009 or later. This could be due either to a proliferation of violence reduction programs in the last decade or a shift in the peacebuilding field toward a culture of evaluation.

The complexity of the relationship between violence and security today necessitates a reexamination of this framework.



▲ Paris, France—November 21, 2015: Drawings, flowers and messages paying tribute to victims of violent extremism in Paris

Photo: © Guillaume Louyot

2 Definitional and Evaluative Implications of Peacebuilding Approaches to Violence Reduction

Masuring peacebuilding’s impact on levels of violence requires a definition of violence that recognizes the multifarious ways violence interrupts peace and designates indicators of violence that account for such a definition. The cases analyzed in this review reveal peacebuilding programs have already expanded upon a broader understanding of violence as it relates to peace and security. There are multiple ToC and supporting indicators that are not limited by traditional notions of the way violence influences security. This section extrapolates how that learning should influence our definitional and evaluative framework for violence reduction.

The World Health Organization defines violence as “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation.” This definition is robust, but not all forms of violence encompassed in it have been considered relevant to global peace and stability. The primary concern of peace and security actors has been armed violence, “a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in one calendar year”, developed by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program.²

² Sarkees, Meredith Reid and Frank Wayman. (n.d.). *Resort to war, 1816-2007*. CQ Press.

Our understanding of armed violence has transformed over the last few decades to recognize that national, subnational, and ethnic conflicts threaten stability as much, if not more, than conflicts between nation states. However, the violent conflict framework still largely reflects the notion that destabilizing violence is created by distinct warring parties and perpetuated through combat violence; cementing the number of combat deaths as the primary means of enumerating violence. *The complexity of the relationship between violence and security today necessitates a reexamination of this framework.* Our current paradigm doesn't allow for gun violence in Chicago to be defined as violent conflict, nor for its acuteness to be measured, yet this violence threatens the social fabric of the city in similar ways to traditional warfare. Our current paradigm further does not reflect the reality of complex crises like Syria and Yemen, where warring parties attempt to make gains not through victory in combat, but through the deprivation and brutalization of citizens. Clearly, an expanded conception of armed violence is not enough: other forms of violence, which are becoming increasingly more commonplace, also have dire security implications.

The cases analyzed in this subsector review reveal concepts crucial to broadening our understanding of violence and violence reduction measurement beyond simply counting combat deaths. Even if an area is not embroiled in large-scale armed violence, all forms of violence are interconnected and can foment instability and fragility—the absence of war is not peace. The high levels of violence in the Northern Triangle in Central America best exemplify this problem. In recognition that all forms of violence have implications for stability, this review recommends that the World Health Organization's definition of violence is adapted for the peace and security realm as such:

The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation to the societal, political, or communal fabric of a society.

The peacebuilding field, though it has not formally articulated this holistic definition of violence, has employed new direct measures of violence, recognizing that combat deaths do not reflect the full scope of the problem of violent conflict. Major evidence of this recognition is supported by the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal 16, dedicated to the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, the provision of access to justice for all and building effective, accountable institutions at all levels. SDG 16 predominantly aims to measure direct violence, drivers of violence, good governance, and access to justice. SDG 16.1 in particular aims to measure a significant reduction in all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere. It currently assesses violence reduction through the following measures:

- 16.1.1 # of victims of intentional homicide
- 16.1.2 conflict-related deaths
- 16.1.3 proportion of population subjected to physical, psychological or sexual violence
- 16.1.4 proportion of people that feel safe walking around the area they live in

Even if an area is not embroiled in large-scale armed violence, all forms of violence are interconnected and can foment instability and fragility—the absence of war is not peace.

Additional measures within the peacebuilding field include:

- Homicide rates
- # of deaths due to violence
- # of injuries due to violence
- # of shootings
- # of security incidents
- # of incidents of inter-tribal violence
- # of disputes resulting in physical violence or threats of violence
- # of violent protests

The primary data source for collecting information on these measures has been formal institutions, like the police or hospitals. Faced with the fact that violence reduction programs are often operating in fragile and conflict-affected contexts where formal data sources may be non-existent or unreliable, the peacebuilding field has pioneered alternative data sources for direct measures of violence, including civil databases, community reporting, and self-reporting.

Peacebuilding programs have also employed indirect measures of violence, focusing on perceptions of security and the social norms surrounding violence. These include:

- Social Norms around Violence
 - › Level of support for armed groups
 - › % of people who approve of the use of violence as a solution
 - › % of people who believe violence is necessary always, sometimes, or never
 - › Likelihood of perpetrating a violent act if asked by a community leader
- Perceptions of Security
 - › % of people who perceive their communities as peaceful, safe, and secure
 - › % of people who feel safe walking alone in their community
 - › % of people who feel safe walking alone in their community at night
 - › % of residents avoiding dangerous areas because of fear
 - › % of people who indicate total freedom of movement

While these measures make some assumptions about the connections between attitudes toward violence, perceived levels of violence, and actual violence, they offer a more comprehensive picture of the scope of violent conflict as newly defined in this review. Measures of physical violence, outside of combat deaths, are necessary to reflect that violent conflict is not contained to the battlefield. However, they miss the spectrum of ways violent conflict manifests itself outside of physical violence. Building upon the WHO definition of violence, this subsector review's proposed definition of violent conflict recognizes that non-physical cues of violence are violence nonetheless. Approval of violence, willingness to commit violence, and perceptions of levels of violence threaten the security and stability of a community to the same extent as actual acts of physical violence. Indicators focused solely on incidents of physical violence miss these nuances and thus limit our ability to accurately understand the full scope of the conflict landscape.

Peacebuilding programs have also employed indirect measures of violence, focusing on perceptions of security and the social norms surrounding violence.



3 Theories of Change & Evidence Evaluation

It is vital that peacebuilders have access to comprehensive resources delineating how violence reduction can be measured, but it is equally important for the peacebuilding field to prove that its programs are driving those reductions in violence. To prove attribution, the field must understand how peacebuilding programs envision transformation from violence to non-violence, identify cases where that transformation has and has not been realized, and understand the drivers behind the outcome. What programmatic ToC has the peacebuilding field put forth and where are those ToC supported by evidence? This section presents the macro-ToC resulting from an analysis of peacebuilding cases and a subsequent analysis of the strength of evidence for each.

▲ Chios, Greece—March 19, 2016: Refugee mother with small children (standing behind her) communicating with volunteers of the Norwegian NGO *Drop in the Ocean* in the Greek Island of Chios.

Photo: © silkfactory

TABLE 1: Macro Theories of Change in Violence Reduction Programming**Approach 1** *Increasing Community Capacity to Resist and Mitigate Violence*

Theories of Change	Associated Indicators	Common Activities
Theory 1.1 If there are mechanisms for peaceful resolution of inter and intra-community conflicts, then there would be a reduction in violent behavior.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # of disputes solved • # of local leaders trained in dispute resolution • Capability of community institutions to respond to community needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • community mediation/dispute resolution training • dialogue facilitation • capacity building for local leaders/CSOs
<p><i>Evidence on the relationship between mechanisms for the peaceful resolution of conflicts and violence reduction has mainly been anecdotal. Multiple reviewed cases statistically illustrate the causal inferences between peacebuilding programmatic activities (commonly a basket of interventions rather than one direct activity), greater capacity to resolve conflicts, and the overall reduction in violence, which supports the empirical observation that when communities are capable of finding non-violent solutions to disagreements, levels of violence do decrease. However, direct casual linkages cannot be attributed solely to the introduction of mechanisms for peaceful resolution of conflicts, but instead could be resulting from a combination of activities influencing the overall decrease in levels of violence. Additional research would need to be conducted to determine the dependency between programmatic activities and attribution towards and actual levels of violence.</i></p>		
Theory 1.2 If individuals at substantial risk of contributing to violence are provided with peaceful alternatives, then they will be less likely to resort to violence and this cumulative behavior change will reduce overall levels of violence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • level of participation in counseling, job training, civic engagement projects, etc. among target population • levels of education and employment among target population • % of target population who report feeling empowered • % who report feeling optimistic about their futures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mentoring, entrepreneurship and vocational training • educational support • psychological support and counseling • extracurricular activities (art, music, sports, etc.)
<p><i>The cases reviewed indicate that changing the behavior of targeted individuals, by offering them alternatives to violence, can foster nonviolence within the broader community, but no single mechanism is uniquely sufficient to engender this change. Programs employing this ToC produced robust, statistical evidence that program activities decreased violence, particularly activities related to access to improved education and civic engagement opportunities, and activities related to vocational training and employment opportunities.</i></p>		
Theory 1.3 If communities have greater economic stability there will be less competition and therefore, less violence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of people who believe resources are shared • % of people reporting economic stability • % of people content with services in community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • individual and group income generation activities • infrastructure building • technical assistance for community economic projects

Rigorous evidence has shown that peacebuilding activities focused on greater economic stability have helped shelter livelihoods and economic activities from conflict, but measurable economic growth has not been shown as a corollary. Cases that included programs focused on increasing economic opportunity did not show significant influence on levels of, or attitudes towards violence. Additional research will need to be conducted to better understand these interdependencies.

TABLE 2: Macro Theories of Change in Violence Reduction Programming**Approach 2** *Improving the Community-Government Relationship*

Theories of Change	Associated Indicators	Common Activities
Theory 2.1 If people feel they can influence government decision-making, they will not feel compelled to use violence to change government policy or practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of people who feel that they have a voice in the government decision-making in their communities • # of citizen-government dialogues • # of actions taken by citizens or local partner civil society organization (CSOs) • % of people afraid to participate in civic activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSO capacity building • community projects • civic engagement activities/education • community institution building • peace messaging

The reviewed cases depict mixed results for this ToC. Programming intended to reduce violence, through increasing citizen's agency to change government policy, was successful in improving citizens perceptions of government and perceptions of their own agency, which led to an increase in stability. However, only some programs linked these outcomes to a measurable reduction in violence. Additional research would need to be conducted to determine the dependency between programmatic activities and attribution towards actual levels of violence.

Theory 2.2 If people perceive the government to be meeting their basic needs and providing security they will be less likely to see violence as necessary.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • perceptions of quality of governance • strength of belief government will improve core services (electricity, jobs, etc.) • level of satisfaction with governmental branches (police, judicial system, local government, federal government) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational support • Improvements to service provision • infrastructure building • community policing programs • police reform
---	--	---

The evidence underpinning this ToC is circumstantial, but the discrepancy in strength of evidence seems to originate mostly with a dearth of evaluative efforts. While evidence for this ToC is mixed, the findings support that if people perceive the government to be meeting their basic needs and providing security levels of violence will decline. It is critical that the provision of goods and services be publicly connected to the government, as effects appear strongly conditioned on improved perceptions of government legitimacy and responsiveness. However, greater research is needed to understand the causal nature of the relationship between provision of goods and services by the government, the provision of security by the government, perception of safety and security by the citizenry, and levels of violence with specific attention to whom is responsible for violent conflict.

TABLE 2: Macro Theories of Change in Violence Reduction Programming (cont.)**Approach 3** *Fostering Social Cohesion*

Theories of Change	Associated Indicators	Common Activities
Theory 3.1 If members of distinct groups interact frequently, they will build trust, be more likely to work together in non-violent ways, and be less likely to perpetrate violence against one another.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # of interactions between groups in conflict • level of cooperation between groups in conflict • likelihood of community members willing to help others • % of people who report trusting others in the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inter-group community projects • inter-group activities • community mediation/dispute resolution training • dialogue facilitation • peace messaging

Much of the evidence to support the efficacy of programs designed around this ToC is highly anecdotal and appears to be contingent on the types of activities the program employs. While further research is needed to ascertain the causal relationship between increased community social cohesion and trust on violence reduction, there is a high degree of interdependency between whether or not communities are able to work together along lines of division for income generating activities and to resolve community conflicts that violence will decline.

Theory 1.1

If there are mechanisms for peaceful resolution of inter and intra-community conflicts, then there would be a reduction in violent behavior.

Peacebuilding programs have generally been based upon the theory that providing mechanisms for peaceful resolution of community conflicts would lead to a direct reduction in levels of violence. Such mechanisms include creating peace councils and committees, training in alternative dispute and conflict resolution, strengthening local leadership capacity, developing education and outreach programs targeted to at-risk youth, and strengthening state and local institutions and infrastructure

Evidence on the relationship between mechanisms for the peaceful resolution of conflicts and violence reduction has mainly been anecdotal, however progress has been made on better understanding the causal inferences between peacebuilding programmatic activities and reduction in violence. However thus far, most research has only been able to draw conclusions on the potential relationship between program activities, and changes in outcome variables, rather than standard measures determining causation. There is strong anecdotal evidence that combining activities focused on increasing leadership capacity in dispute resolution, providing outreach and counseling services to address disputes and at-risk populations, and supporting educational campaigns targeted at reinforcing non-violent resolution techniques, have led to reduction in violence. This reduction of violence has occurred both in terms of direct measures of murder, robbery, coercion, and injury as well as indirect measures of the perceptions of safety and security.

Multiple reviewed cases statistically illustrate the causal inferences between peacebuilding programmatic activities (commonly a basket of interventions rather than one direct activity), greater capacity to resolve conflicts, and the overall reduction in violence—supporting the empirical observation that when communities are capable of finding non-violent solutions to disagreements, levels of violence do decrease.

One noteworthy case employed a large-scale education campaign on alternative dispute resolution (ADR). Results showed statistically significant³ evidence of a causal relationship between increased ADR capacity and a reduction in land disputes and property destruction. After the education campaign, disputes were resolved at higher rates, less violently, and with more satisfactory outcomes—especially longstanding land disputes. There were some unintended consequences of increased capacity in ADR, an increase in villages reporting informal judicial punishment, including witch hunts and trials by ordeal, and a sizable but weakly significant increase in various nonviolent disputes—especially youth-elder disputes in the short term. Other forms of violence, however, were not seen to be increasing. Researchers attributed this to more people engaging peacefully with more disputes and with greater non-violent capacity. Despite a reduction in land disputes and property destruction, there was little change in violent community conflict. >>

Approach 1

Increasing Community Capacity to Resist and Mitigate Violence

Theories of change found within this approach posit that individuals would be less likely to choose violent behavior if other pathways for change were available and accessible to them.

Progress has been made on better understanding the causal inferences between peacebuilding programmatic activities and reduction in violence.

³ Within this section, the use of the term “significant” always denotes a statistically proven p value ≥ 0.1 .

Approach 1

Increasing Community Capacity to Resist and Mitigate Violence

The cases reviewed also revealed that improving community conflict resolution is not sufficient to address more macro-level grievances. One case discovered that while peacebuilding programming reduced violence arising from daily conflict, deeper rooted inter-group conflicts—based on unfair governance—were still present and still threatened to become violent. Another case voiced a similar concern, stating that unless greater access to community dispute resolution was linked to a more accessible formal justice system, lower levels of violence might not be sustainable.

It is important to note that these findings are based upon cases that often offered “bundles” of programmatic activities and interventions, such as mechanisms for peaceful resolution of community conflict alongside activities in crime prevention, economic growth and livelihoods improvement, social cohesion and trust building, natural resource management, inter and intra-group dialogue, and education and media campaigns to raise awareness. Significant evidence suggests that programs focused on a combination of these activities have resulted in increased mechanisms for peaceful resolution of community conflicts alongside increased measures of community perception of security, trust, and social cohesion.

The findings presented in these cases suggest that individual capacity building and education campaigns in dispute resolution, coupled with efforts to strengthen state and local institutions and infrastructure—that provide mechanisms for peaceful resolution of inter and intra-community conflict—have the potential to reduce violence. However, direct causal linkages cannot be attributed solely to the introduction of mechanisms for peaceful resolution of conflicts, but instead could be resulting from a combination of activities influencing the overall decrease in levels of violence. Additional research would need to be conducted to determine the dependency between these activities and attribution towards, and actual levels of, violence. >>

Theory 1.2

If individuals at substantial risk of contributing to violence are provided with peaceful alternatives, then they will be less likely to resort to violence and this cumulative behavior change will reduce overall levels of violence.

Similar to ToC 1.1, research on the direct links between providing peaceful alternatives to at-risk populations and reductions in overall levels of violence is mixed and warrants further study. Peacebuilding programs targeting at-risk populations often provide activities ranging from the creation of outreach centers, workforce development, mentorships and counseling, peace councils and committees, training in alternative dispute resolution and conflict resolution, strengthening of local leadership capacity, improved education opportunities and educational alternatives, economic opportunities including income generating activities, civic engagement projects, strengthening state and local institutions and infrastructure, or some combination therein.

The cases reviewed indicate that changing the behavior of targeted individuals, by offering them alternatives to violence, can foster nonviolence within the broader community, but no single mechanism is uniquely sufficient to engender this change. Programs employing this ToC produced robust, statistical evidence that program activities decreased violence, particularly activities related to access to improved education and civic engagement opportunities, and activities related to vocational training and employment opportunities.

Two particular cases aimed at improving education and providing civic engagement opportunities to empower youth and give them hope in their capacity to influence decision-making as a means to reduce material and moral support for political violence. By combining access to improved secondary education with civic engagement opportunities, there was a significant reduction in moral and material support for political violence among students, indicating that while both treatments were effective, they were most effective when combined.

These findings signal that increasing access to education, by itself, will not always fully address the underlying drivers that could create or perpetuate support for violent responses to political oppression and other grievances. Additionally, it finds that the ways in which education affect youths' perceptions is highly dependent upon context. For countries emerging from recent conflict with few functioning institutions, investing in basic services, like education, can be a successful approach in the short term. However, in the long term, this alone will not be enough and will not address the grievances that can be driving at-risk individuals to support violence.

Significant evidence has also shown that alternatives to violence can foster nonviolence within the broader community through access to vocational training and employment opportunities. Research has shown that vocational training coupled with employment programs for high-risk individuals can shift their income generating activities away from illicit work towards more traditional employment opportunities—however not to the exclusion of all illicit work entirely. While the program had little effect on peer networks, hierarchical military relationships, aggression, social integration, or attitudes toward violence or democracy, it did show evidence that these opportunities helped deter participants from re-entering into the criminal world by facilitating their reintegration into society. Future economic incentives also seem to have been crucial in deterring interest in both illicit and mercenary activities, and by providing an alternate path away from these behaviors.

There is an important caveat to these patterns; successful outcomes necessitate an accurate analysis of why the at-risk population chooses violence, and what their grievances are, and programming that holistically addresses said grievances. Cases that showed significant and robust results commonly took a comprehensive approach, providing the target population with a range of services and means to address grievances: psychosocial support, outreach support, educational opportunities, vocational training, civic participation opportunities, family support, and mentoring. Addressing individual grievances is not enough to reduce community violence; but when programs view and address the conditions driving violent behavior as a system, there is an overall reduction in violent tendencies.

Since the findings reviewed are based upon cases that generally offered a variety of programmatic activities, direct causality cannot be attributed to the introduction of any singular activity, but instead could be resulting from a combination of activities influencing the overall decrease in levels of violence. Additional research would need to be conducted to determine the interdependency between these activities and levels of violence exogenous to the particular results. >>

Approach 1

Increasing Community Capacity to Resist and Mitigate Violence

Approach 1

Increasing Community Capacity to Resist and Mitigate Violence

Theory 1.3

If communities have greater economic stability there will be less competition and therefore, less violence.

Much of the relevant literature informing this ToC has been based upon economic and development research exploring how increased economic opportunities and improved livelihoods lead to greater development, rather than a reduction in violence. As such, evidence on the relationship between improved economic stability and violence reduction is limited and largely anecdotal.

Rigorous evidence has shown that peacebuilding activities focused on greater economic stability, including natural resource management, technical assistance for economic development projects, community financing systems, community infrastructure building, vocational training and employment programming, community savings and loan development, and inter and intra-group income generating activities have helped shelter livelihoods and economic activities from conflict, but measurable economic growth has not been shown as a corollary. This lack of evidence for economic growth potentially results from a dearth of ex-post evaluations that effectively follow interventions and/or cessation of conflicts in a sufficiently long enough time period for economic growth to occur. Additional research targeting this gap will be required to better understand the causal relationship between peacebuilding activities and economic growth.

Research has also suggested that future economic incentives have proven crucial in deterring a return to violent and illicit work, when coupled with vocational training and employment programs for high-risk individuals. Additionally, joint economic projects have been shown to help stabilize communities in conflict, or reconciling from recent conflict, and have led to increased cooperation between conflicting parties. Some research suggests that the introduction of local-level institutions, even in the short-term, can increase social cohesion within communities, but this has yet to be measured alongside reduction in levels of violence. Findings suggest that peaceful, stable, and secure communities—that exhibit increased security and freedom of movement—have more shared resources and access to shared markets and pastures, exhibit greater levels of inter-group trust, and intrinsically have better economic outcomes.

Cases that included programs focused on increasing economic opportunity did not show significant influence on levels of, or attitudes towards, violence. One plausible reason for the scant evidential support for this ToC is that increased economic activity does not inherently translate to decreased economic and resource competition. The structures, both societal and institutional, that foster skewed distribution of wealth and resources do not dissipate as the economic supply rises. This idea is supported by the fact that programs that focused on increasing *shared* resources within a community (i.e. public parks, free community art or music classes, public schools), rather than individual resources (i.e. income), were more successful at lowering levels of violence. Further, these findings beg the question of the causal relationship between economic stability and violence reduction—does improved economic stability in the form of improved livelihoods lead to a reduction in violence through sheltering these activities from the influence of conflict, or is it that the cessation or reduction of violence support a more conducive environment for economic stability? Additional research will need to be conducted to better understand these interdependencies. ●

Theory 2.1

If people feel they can influence government decision-making, they will not feel compelled to use violence to change government policy or practice.

The reviewed cases depict mixed results for this ToC. Programming intended to reduce violence, through increasing citizen's agency to change government policy, was successful in improving citizens perceptions of government and perceptions of their own agency, which led to an increase in stability. However, only some programs linked these outcomes to a measurable reduction in violence.

Research has shown that when youth are alienated from political processes, and have little influential capacity, they may be driven to support violence as a means of having their voice heard in the decision-making process. However, there is little research seeking to understand how civic engagement opportunities and improved perceptions of government legitimacy can influence levels of violence. Two cases aimed at improving education and civic engagement opportunities focused on the direct causal impact of these activities on moral and material support for political violence. These programs were based on the assumption that access to education and opportunities to engage in civic activities will create a sense of youth empowerment and provide hope, in the possibility of their ability to make a difference, and influence decision-making through nonviolent actions—leading to a reduction in both support for political violence and levels of actual violence. Findings significantly showed that by improving access to secondary education, youth participation in political violence decreased, although support for political violence increased. When combining secondary education with civic engagement opportunities, both participation in and support for violence dropped significantly.

Replicating this study in a less politically stable environment found that increased access to improved secondary education alone resulted in a significant decrease in the likelihood of morally or materially supporting political violence. Additionally, when combining the secondary education with civic engagement, there was an even more significant reduction among students already less likely to support violence—indicating that while both treatments (access to improved secondary education alone and access to improved secondary education with opportunities for civic engagement) were effective, they were most effective when combined. These findings signal that the ways in which education affect youths' perceptions is highly dependent upon context. Understanding the impact of access to opportunities for civic engagement alone and its effect on support for political violence needs further research.

A second case discovered that poor governance, and both real and perceived injustice, are key drivers of conflict and violence, but also found that civil society is vital to improving governance systems. Civil society organizations achieved this by providing critical citizen engagement opportunities, enhancing government legitimacy, and offering a means for citizens to make their government address and support their needs. The results highlight that investments in citizen-oriented governance have great capacity to yield impact as demonstrated through rising public confidence in civil society, even while perceptions of government corruption are declining and there is a worsening of public service delivery. However, evidence linking these outcomes to a reduction in violence remains anecdotal, and further research must be undertaken to ascertain causal linkages. >>

Approach 2

Improving the Community-Government Relationship

Theories of change found within this approach identify perceptions of unfair or inaccessible government structures as the principle reason for violence. It hypothesizes that an improved relationship between the community and the government will encourage peacefulness.

Findings significantly showed that by improving access to secondary education, youth participation in political violence decreased, although support for political violence increased.

Approach 2

Improving the Community-Government Relationship

The mixed findings presented in this ToC shed light on existing research gaps. The cases examined illustrated that programs were most successful in tying activities to greater peacefulness when they employed more hands-on activities, like civil society capacity building and community-government projects, rather than “hearts and minds” initiatives, like media or messaging campaigns. The cases helped establish correlation between enhancing citizens’ perception of their ability to influence government decision-making and reduction in material and moral support for violence; however, they highlighted that providing enhanced awareness about one’s ability to influence government without effective pathways can have inverse and potentially detrimental effects towards peace and stability. These results suggest that empowering citizens to have greater influence on government decision-making should be combined with activities to strengthen both government and civil societal organizations for the purpose of reducing violence and establishing the hallmarks of secure societies. >>

Theory 2.2

If people perceive the government to be meeting their basic needs and providing security they will be less likely to see violence as necessary.

The evidence underpinning this ToC is circumstantial, but the discrepancy in strength of evidence seems to originate mostly with a dearth of evaluative efforts. Peacebuilding programs aimed at improving provision of basic needs, alongside providing security, include activities related to crime prevention through environmental design (e.g. improved street lighting, graffiti removal, cleaned up public spaces), increased community policing, community and police dialogue and interactions (e.g. sporting events, and shared education and capacity building opportunities), creation of community development councils, and grants for local development projects.

Anecdotally, several case studies demonstrated that community policing programs were incredibly powerful tools for improving perceptions of governance, and that these programs occurred alongside a reduction in violence. Nonetheless, the programs did not link these two phenomena with quantitative comparison mechanisms or qualitative measures.

Two cases considered did show statistically significant causal linkages, one linking community-based crime prevention with a significant reduction in violence; and a second, connecting the provision of basic needs with a positive change in citizens’ attitudes about government’s responsiveness, leading to a reduction in material and moral support to extremist groups.

The first case addressed community-based crime prevention, utilizing a holistic approach, through the provision of basic needs, improved security, and prevention activities. The program incorporated community development committees, crime prevention through environment design, programs for at-risk youth, and community policing. Findings show a significant reduction in the expected level of crime victimization and violence, a significant increase in the expected level of citizens’ sense of security, a significant decrease in the expected level of neighborhood disorder, and a measurable increase in satisfaction with police performance. Indirectly, it further significantly strengthened democratic values, including levels of interpersonal trust and residents’ satisfaction with the functioning of democracy. An important caveat to note, since these findings are based upon a variety of programmatic activities, it is not possible to draw

Approach 2

Improving the Community-Government Relationship

conclusions about causality on any specific activity and must be taken for the program as a whole. Significant evidence suggests that a program focused on a combination of these activities—provision of basic needs, improved security, and prevention—have resulted in a reduction of violence, but ascertaining the interdependence of each activity, or its direct attribution to violence reduction, would require greater study.

A second case tested the validity of the “hearts and minds” model of counterinsurgency to analyze the question: can development programs increase citizen support for the government through the provision of public goods and services? If so, will individuals be less likely to join or support extremist groups? Results showed that the provision of goods and services significantly improved individuals’ perceptions of their economic situation, real or perceived, and improved their attitudes towards their government. Additionally, there was weakly significant evidence indicating that their perception of security improved, again real or perceived. An initial mid-term study found that there was no indication that these improvements lead to observable improvements in security as demonstrated by a reduction in violence—against individuals or against security forces. A longer-term follow-up study found that the provision of basic goods and services by the government significantly reduced the probability of violence, but this is highly dependent upon geography and context. These findings were only significant when the perpetrators of violence were embedded within the local communities. In contexts where the perpetrators of violence were coming from abroad, not beholden to local communities, and/or easily able to retreat to foreign safe havens, this provision was found to statistically increase the prevalence of violent attacks on citizenry and programs. The results of this study demonstrate that programs that are tied with the government provision of goods and services, can contribute to reducing the spread of violent conflict by increasing the legitimacy of the government and discouraging active and tacit support for extremist groups within specific contexts. However, it is critical to take into account local context, including the nature of the conflict and combatants, as there is also strong evidence to support the inverse.

While evidence for this ToC is mixed, these findings support that if people perceive the government to be meeting their basic needs and providing security, levels of violence will reduce. It is critical that the provision of goods and services be publicly connected to the government, as effects appear strongly conditioned on improved perceptions of government legitimacy and responsiveness. However, greater research is needed to understand the causal nature of the relationship between provision of goods and services by the government, the provision of security by the government, perception of safety and security by the citizenry, and levels of violence with specific attention to whom is responsible for violent conflict. ●

Approach ③

Fostering Social Cohesion

The theory of change found within this approach assumes that tension between and among communities foments violence, and peace will come when community members respect and tolerate one another.

Theory 3.1

If members of distinct groups interact frequently, they will build trust, be more likely to work together in non-violent ways, and be less likely to perpetrate violence against one another.

Much of the evidence to support the efficacy of programs designed around this ToC is highly anecdotal and appears to be contingent on the types of activities the program employs. Cases examined that focused on increased group interaction encompassed a wide range of activities, including natural resource management; negotiation and conflict resolution training; joint economic projects; technical and vocational training; inter-religious dialogue; community activities, forums, and projects; inter-community peace messaging; savings and lending committees; arts and theatre-based activities; and sporting events.

Surface-level interactions, like sports games or short-term classes, were shown to succeed in creating an initial bridge between groups in conflict but are not effective in deepening trust among communities or reducing violence in the long term. Programs that fostered sustained, meaningful interactions between groups in conflict (i.e. through facilitating community dialogues that have a clear plan for succession at the end of the program) were shown to contribute to trust and reductions in violence.

Anecdotally, cases demonstrated that when distinct groups had frequent discussions about community issues, and were given strategies to communicate productively with one another, perceptions of safety and security increased—as measured by the percentage of people who felt they could travel in their neighborhood unrestricted without fear of insecurity. Many cases showed an increase in levels of reported trust when inter-group community projects and capacity building programs for leaders (facilitating dialogue between groups) were instituted. Increase in community trust and perceptions of security were correlated with decreases in violence, however direct causality has not been demonstrated.

Finally, research has significantly shown that increased local leadership capacity, coupled with dispute resolution training and technical assistance for joint economic development projects, can result in positive changes along community perceptions of security and trust, and subsequent decreases in tensions within communities. Further studies have provided significant evidence showing that community driven reconstruction programs can alter patterns of social cooperation within communities, illustrating that development aid can have a measurable impact on improved social cohesion. While further research is needed to ascertain the causal relationship between increased community social cohesion and trust on violence reduction, there is a high degree of interdependency between whether or not communities are able to work together along lines of division for income generating activities and to resolve community conflicts that violence will decline. ●

Programs that fostered sustained, meaningful interactions between groups in conflict were shown to contribute to trust and reductions in violence.



4 Conclusions and Recommendations

Major Conclusions by ToC

ToC 1.1 If there are mechanisms for peaceful resolution of inter and intra-community conflicts, then there would be a reduction in violent behavior

Significant evidence illustrates the causal inferences between peacebuilding programmatic activities, greater capacity to resolve conflicts, and the overall reduction in violence. However, these changes can only be attributed to a combination of activities, and not to the introduction of specific mechanisms for peaceful resolution of conflicts.

ToC 1.2 If individuals at substantial risk of contributing to violence are provided with peaceful alternatives, then they will be less likely to use violence and this behavioral change will reduce overall levels of violence

The cases reviewed indicate that changing the behavior of targeted individuals, by offering them alternatives to violence, can foster nonviolence within the broader community. Programs employing this ToC produced robust, statistical evidence that specific program activities (access to improved education and civic engagement opportunities; activities related to vocational training coupled with employment opportunities) led to a reduction in material and moral support for violence, but did not reveal a sole mechanism uniquely sufficient to foster nonviolence. >>

▲ Glendale, California—August 5, 2014: A police officer discussing neighborhood crime prevention with a small group of community members.

Photo: © DnHolm

ToC 1.3 If communities have greater economic stability, then there will be less competition and therefore, less violence

Rigorous evidence has shown that peacebuilding activities focused on greater economic stability have helped shelter livelihoods and economic activities from conflict, but measurable economic growth has not been shown as a corollary. Cases that included programs focused on increasing economic opportunity did not show significant influence on levels of, or attitudes towards, violence, perhaps because increased economic activity does not inherently decrease economic and resource competition. The structures, both societal and institutional, that foster skewed distribution of wealth and resources do not dissipate as the economic supply rises.

ToC 2.1 If people feel they can influence government decision-making, then they will not feel compelled to use violence to change government policy or practice

The reviewed cases found mixed results for this ToC. Programming intended to reduce violence, through increasing citizen's agency to change government policy, was successful in improving citizens' perceptions of government and of their own agency, leading to increased stability. However, only some programs linked these outcomes to a measurable reduction in violence.

ToC 2.2 If people perceive the government to be meeting their basic needs and providing security, then they will be less likely to see violence as necessary

The evidence underpinning this ToC is circumstantial, but the discrepancy in strength of evidence seems to originate mostly from a dearth of evaluative efforts. While evidence for this ToC is mixed, the findings indicate that levels of violence decline if people perceive the government to be meeting their basic needs and providing security when the provision of goods and services is overtly attributed to the government. However, this ToC is highly dependent on local context and greater research is needed to understand the causal nature of the relationship between provision of goods and services by the government, the provision of security by the government, perception of safety and security by the citizenry, and levels of violence, with specific attention to whom is responsible for violent conflict.

ToC 3.1 If members of distinct groups interact frequently, then they will build trust, be more likely to work together in non-violent ways, and be less likely to perpetrate violence against one another

Much of the evidence to support the efficacy of programs designed around this ToC is highly anecdotal and appears to be contingent on the types of activities the program employs. While further research is needed to ascertain the causal relationship between increased community social cohesion and trust on violence reduction, there is a high degree of interdependency between lower levels of violence and the ability of communities to work together along lines of division for income generating activities and to resolve community conflicts.

While aspects of Approach 1 and 2's ToC are grounded in robust evidence, there is still a mixed and weak evidence base on direct causal linkages between specific peacebuilding programmatic activities and violence reduction. Approach 3 is relatively unsupported by significant evidence and remains highly anecdotal. Overall, greater research needs to be conducted within each of the approaches to provide a more solid evidence base for peacebuilding violence reduction programming. ●

Major Recommendations

Analysis of the evaluations leads us to several more nuanced recommendations:

Define the purpose:

Clearly define the purpose, vision, and scope of individual programming's monitoring and evaluation efforts.

Peacebuilding programs need to better define their vision and scope of monitoring and evaluation activities, because there is a clear difference between standards of practice, rigor, and methods to assess program efficacy and effectiveness, to promote institutional or organizational learning, and to prove impact and attribution. Not every peacebuilding program will be able to or necessarily should conduct impact evaluations to prove impact.⁴ However, we have to do better, and this report highlights some of the clear evidence gaps in understanding the impact of peacebuilding programs as they relate to *violence reduction* programming and should not be taken as a call to conduct impact evaluations in every context. However, the peacebuilding field needs to employ greater research initiatives to support a stronger understanding of the impact of its programming; particularly as it relates to understanding causal linkages between violence reduction and peacebuilding programming.

Do your research:

Peacebuilding programs need to employ greater evidence-based approaches for program design that couple with more commonly employed human-centered design approaches. Program design cannot be based exclusively upon organizational experience, specialty, or interest, but rather should be rooted within extensive research.

Peacebuilding programs need to conduct a thorough literature review before designing programs that explores not only extant peacebuilding literature but other sectors that may have relevant findings, including international development, economics, psychology, political science, sociology, and anthropology.

Invest in monitoring and evaluation:

Allocate appropriate time, resources, and staff to design M&E activities during the program design phase that employ statistical evaluation techniques rooted in clearly articulated theories of change and thorough literature reviews.

Peacebuilding programs need to better plan their monitoring and evaluation activities within the design phases of a program prior to implementation. Good program design sets the foundation for effective peacebuilding, and good evaluation only happens if it is planned at the very start of a program. In order to strengthen the field and create an evidence-based culture of peacebuilding programming, organizations need to continue to build the evidence-base by investing in monitoring and evaluation at the beginning of a project and employing sound statistical evaluation techniques. >>

⁴ An impact evaluation *should only be conducted* when its intended use can be distinctly identified and when it is likely to produce useful findings. Programs considering an impact evaluation must consider the availability of resources, capacity, and how the findings will be used. Programs should conduct an evaluability assessment to assay these aspects prior to undertaking an impact evaluation.

Program design cannot be based exclusively upon organizational experience, specialty, or interest, but rather should be rooted within extensive research.

Conduct a baseline:

Peacebuilding programs need to establish baselines prior to implementing programming from which change can then be measured and evaluated.

A critical aspect of effective monitoring and evaluation is to establish baselines. No matter what level of change is being evaluated, unless the starting point and pre-implementation conditions are known and documented, it will not be possible to determine whether a program has affected the context in which it operates.

Start simple and expand out:

Greater research needs to be conducted to determine the statistical dependency between individual peacebuilding programmatic activities and attribution towards, and actual levels of, violence.

Peacebuilding approaches often offer “bundles” of programmatic activities and interventions, making it difficult to establish direct causal linkages, and measure attribution of individual activities, on violence reduction. This can easily lead to a misinterpretation of results on which aspects of a program are impactful and to what degree; as well as, the potential magnifying or cooperative effects between each activity to drive impact. Additionally, it has policy ramifications towards funding bundled activities versus ascertaining the most effective peacebuilding approaches to reduce violence.

Consider the system when designing the approach:

When attempting to translate short-term, individual behavioral and attitudinal change into transformative societal change, it may be critical to take a systems approach to violence reduction programming and evaluation by thinking about the *combination* of ToC and activities appropriate for the context. Rarely does a single approach address the multiple potentially active components of behavior change at the individual level, let alone the societal level.

Current evidence demonstrates that peacebuilding programs are most successful at demonstrating impact when they take a holistic approach and utilize a wide variety of tools. Better community dispute resolution methods consistently decreased violence on the community level, but some cases showed that they would be more effective on a larger scale if they were coupled with the national justice sector and governance reform. ToC 1.2 (targeting at-risk populations to change the behavior of the larger community) produced strong results through employing a comprehensive approach. Furthermore, ToC 2.1 and 3.1 proved most impactful when they employed activities that were also used to increase community capacity to reduce violence, namely dialogue facilitation, capacity building of local leadership/CSOs, and community mediation/dispute resolution training.

It's not all about economic incentives:

The peacebuilding field should focus its programmatic and evaluative time and resources on addressing the drivers and causes of violence outside of solely economic factors and should incorporate activities addressing economic empowerment programming as supportive outcomes towards the larger goal of violence reduction.

This subsector review echoes previous consensus that economic factors are not the primary drivers behind violence and conflict and economic empowerment programming alone is insufficient to reduce violence. This is not groundbreaking news to the peacebuilding field, but seven out of the twenty-one analyzed documents still identified economic empowerment as an

element of its programmatic ToC. When the economic element was in the periphery or focused mainly on building collective resources in a community, it saw some success in reducing violence. However, increasing individual economic activity did little to reduce violence.

Continue to explore:

Generate further evidence on the link between peacebuilding programming addressing good governance and reductions in violence.

The corollaries between peacebuilding activities that aim to foster a positive community-government relationship and lower levels of violence is worthy of greater examination. While the documents examined did not definitively demonstrate a causal relationship between the two, there were indications that such a relationship exists. Firstly, the lack of empirical evidence does not seem to be caused by a flaw in the ToC, but rather a lack of mechanisms for attributing outcomes to programming. Secondly, several reviewed cases provided overwhelming evidence that negative *community* government relationships increase violence, supporting the premise of ToC 2.1 and 2.2.

There's a need for more research:

This subsector review serves to highlight not only the breadth of research that has already been conducted but to acknowledge the need for additional, rigorous evaluations of the link between peacebuilding programming and reduction in violent conflict.

While these observations may not be shocking to those embedded in peacebuilding work, the systematic nature of this subsector review is a new contribution to violence reduction and peacebuilding programming. Having the results presented in a rigorous literature review based upon current theories of change strengthens our evidence base and helps us build toward a unified framework for monitoring and evaluation of violence reduction programs. Additionally, this work should not undermine support for addressing structural causes of conflict and the promotion of the multiplicity of factors necessary to sustain peace, but it should add to the evidence base and understanding of the complexity of fragile and conflict affected states.

Violence reduction is an intrinsic condition of peacebuilding:

Violence reduction must be a component of conflict prevention and peacebuilding programming. All too often peacebuilding and conflict prevention programming focus on addressing positive peace whilst disregarding overt violence because it is not associated with large-scale armed violence or recognized war, such as in the Northern Triangle in Central America.

In these contexts, building peace inherently must encompass violence reduction. Improving individual and community capacity to manage, mitigate, resolve, and transform conflict within a context where violence remains the norm, does not support the necessary and sufficient conditions for positive peace.

The corollaries between peacebuilding activities that aim to foster a positive community-government relationship and lower levels of violence is worthy of greater examination.

Region	Document Type	Date Published	Program Approach
Central America/Caribbean	Program Evaluation	2009	Improving community security practices to reduce violent crime
Central America/Caribbean	Program Evaluation	2014	Improving community security practices to reduce violent crime
Central America/Caribbean	Program Evaluation	2014	Improving community security practices to reduce violent crime
Central America/Caribbean	Program Evaluation	2014	Improving community security practices to reduce violent crime
Central America/Caribbean	Program Evaluation	2014	Improving community security practices to reduce violent crime
Central America/Caribbean	Program Evaluation	2014	Improving community security practices to reduce violent crime
MENA	Academic Paper	2011	Improving service delivery to better community/government relationship and reduce violence
MENA	Evidence Summary	2015	Building the capacity of local CSOs to improve citizen's interactions with and perceptions of government and reduce support for armed groups
MENA	Academic Paper	2016	Research analyzing the impact of a major political transition on support for violence and perceptions of governance
MENA	Program Evaluation	2017	Implementing inter-group projects and training local leaders to facilitate dialogue and conflict management programs between diverse groups to reduce violence
MENA	Academic Paper	2017	Improving service delivery to better community/government relationship and reduce violence
North America	Program Evaluation	2009	Training and support for selected members of the community to act as "violence interrupters" to reduce gang violence, gun violence, and violent crime
Sub-Saharan Africa	Program Evaluation	2009	Supporting fundraising for and implementation of community projects to increase social cohesion and civic engagement to reduce violence
Sub-Saharan Africa	Program Evaluation	2010	Strengthening local mechanisms for conflict mitigation and implementing economic growth projects to reduce violence
Sub-Saharan Africa	Program Evaluation	2012	Peace messaging campaign to foster community/government cooperation and reduce violence
Sub-Saharan Africa	Program Evaluation	2014	Facilitating dispute resolution training and carrying out a peace messaging campaign to reduce violence
Sub-Saharan Africa	Program Evaluation	2015	Facilitating peace dialogue and implementing a community led inter-group peace messaging campaign to reduce violence
Sub-Saharan Africa	Academic Paper	2015	Providing vocational training and employment programming to increase economic stability and reduce violence
Sub-Saharan Africa	Program Evaluation	2016	Training local leaders to facilitate dialogue and conflict management programs between diverse groups to reduce violence
Sub-Saharan Africa	Program Evaluation	2016	Providing individual income generating projects, conflict prevention training and facilitating inter-group activities to reduce violence
Sub-Saharan Africa	Program Evaluation	2016	Bolstering youth's capacity and opportunity to affect positive change through increasing access to secondary schools and supporting student-led civic engagement projects to reduce political violence
Sub-Saharan Africa	Program Evaluation	2018	Bolstering youth's capacity and opportunity to affect positive change through increasing access to secondary schools and supporting student-led civic engagement projects to reduce political violence



- ▲ McAllen, Texas—September 21, 2016: A group of Central Americans remove their shoes as part of the process of being picked up by the Border Patrol for illegally crossing the Rio Grande River into the U.S. There has been a flood of mothers with children and unaccompanied minors from Central America fleeing gang violence.

Photo: © vichinterlang





Violence Reduction Sub-Sector Review & Evidence Evaluation

Published by Alliance for Peacebuilding

1800 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Suite 401, Washington, DC 20036

© Alliance for Peacebuilding, 2019