



**Pathways for peace 5th Anniversary European Consultation:
Are our concepts and theories of change for inclusion and pre-
vention still relevant for our fast-changing conflict landscape?**

Cedric de Coning and Mino Koefoed

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Visiting address: C.J. Hambros plass 2d
Address: PO box 7024 St. Olavs Plass
0130 Oslo, Norway
Internet: www.nupi.no
E-mail: post@nupi.no
Fax: [+ 47] 22 99 40 50
Tel: [+ 47] 22 99 40 00

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Introduction

March 2023 will mark the fifth anniversary of the publication of the UN-World Bank report “Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict”¹. The report urged a pivot to prevention, strengthened the business case for prevention initiatives (the cost efficiency of prevention vs responding after violent conflict), and highlighted new research on the importance of inclusion in efforts to prevent conflict and build peace. Five years later, the global landscape has changed significantly and is now grappling with a complex set of converging crises and cascading risks. Against this backdrop, it is timely to reflect on the continued relevance of the findings of the Pathways for Peace report, and the contribution it has made to how the peace and development community understands and supports peace and peacebuilding in conflict-and crisis-affected states and regions.

In the context of the report’s 5th anniversary, the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), in partnership with the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs of the United Nations and the Fragility, Conflict and Violence Group of the World Bank, arranged a virtual consultation with mostly Europe-based researchers, practitioners, and policymakers on 4th April 2023.

The consultation was part of a series of events that are reflecting on the contribution of the Pathways for Peace report. The overarching question for the consultation was whether the concepts, and theories of change, that were at the core of the Pathways for Peace report are still relevant for our fast-changing conflict landscape. The ideas of inclusion and prevention were particularly highlighted. The consultation also asked more specifically: Despite what appear to be recent fundamental shifts in the global landscape, does the research summarized in the 2018 Pathways for Peace report remain relevant as a guide for prevention and peacebuilding efforts today? Has research and the evidence base evolved over the last five years with regards to what dimensions are critical to prevention?

The consultation asked a couple of leading thinkers and doers to answer these questions, and what follows is some of the key takeaways from this conversation.

Key Takeaways

Halvord Sætre, the United Nations director in the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said that the Pathways for Peace report from 2018 was impressive in depth and quality, and effective in communicating its key messages. The business case of investing in prevention was particularly highlighted, and fit well into the contemporary development, security and peacebuilding agenda of the UN. He said the report also represented an important shift in the World Bank groups’ approach to fragility and conflict. However, current global conflict fatalities and geopolitical tensions show that we still have a long way to go. New and updated analysis is therefore crucial.

Awa Dabo, deputy head of the Peacebuilding Support Office of the United Nations’ Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, emphasized that the need for prevention, has never been more evident. Global levels of conflict and humanitarian needs have increased since 2010 and a trust deficit in multilateralism emerged as a result of global geopolitical shifts. The Pathways report identified how perceptions of exclusion and inequality feed grievances which lead to violence. Exclusion was identified as a risk factor, and the report

emphasized efforts to make institutions more inclusive, especially of women, youth, ethnic and religious minorities. Peacebuilding efforts need to consider both the short-term incentives of actors as well as long-term incentives of institutions. Inclusive institutions are crucial, national efforts essential, and we must work in inclusive partnerships at all levels. This feeds into the Secretary-General's New Agenda for Peace.² The path to peace is non-linear. The New Agenda for Peace explores the universality of preventive efforts, including preventative diplomacy and longer term institutional and structural reforms, as well as efforts to address underlying grievances. The links between peace, development and security needs to be strengthened as part of the Secretary-General's peace agenda.

Thomas Djurhuus, the head of partnerships with the Fragility, Conflict and Violence Group of the World Bank, said that the fragility, violence, and conflict agenda of the World Bank was informed by the Pathways report. Especially the strong economic rationale - one dollar invested in prevention can save sixteen-seventeen dollars in reconstruction - informed why the Bank should be engaged in prevention work. Prevention is a crucial tool for a resilient society and is an essential part of the policy toolbox on fragility, violence, and conflict. The Pathway report has had significant normative impact on many international institutions. For instance, all regional development banks now have their own policy on fragility, conflict and violence. Violence, fragility, and conflict remain a major challenge to sustainable development all over the world, hence holistic and complimentary efforts to tackle it becomes crucial. The World Bank will continue to work with institutions and civil society across the spectrum of fragility, violence, and conflict.³

Adam Day, the head of the Geneva Office of the United Nations University, said that several global shocks and shifts within the last five years have altered how we see the risks of violent conflict, requiring a review of the Pathways analysis. The first shock was the COVID-19 pandemic leading to a global economic downturn and a massive increase in global inequality, poverty and increasing the burdens carried by already vulnerable groups. It also created opportunities for violent actors to capitalize on the instability, and increased the strain on already weak government institutions.

The second shock was Russia's war on Ukraine which fundamentally changed the global conflict landscape. As a result, one can see a much higher risk today for interstate conflicts than what was the case during the Pathways report which focused more on intrastate conflicts and civil wars. The third shock is the significant increase in military spending which reversed its trajectory compared to the years building up to the Pathways report. An increase in military spending implies money is available to prevent conflict by addressing some of the inequalities that the Pathways report identified. There are today a number of potential risks for escalation that could not be foreseen in the Pathways report, including a decline in forums and spaces where prevention and sustaining peace can be discussed, and a drop in transparency and trust in discussions of military risk. The risk for cyber and nuclear confrontation has also escalated. Another trend over the last five years is the rise in the number of countries where authoritarian or right-wing populist parties are in government, and an increase in military coups, which potentially increases horizontal inequalities. Other trends are that regional and international organizations are under pressure and the increasing attention given to climate and security related threats. An increase in climate-related livelihood deterioration, conflicts and disasters are further accelerating horizontal and vertical inequality.⁴

These shifts and shocks point towards the need to move away from the paradigm of peacebuilding that emphasizes fragility, conflict, and violence. Prevention is not something that is needed only in poor, fragile and conflict-affected countries. It is something that all countries need to be concerned about and act on. We need to take a more systemic approach to address inequality, globally and locally, as it is the theme common to all the shocks mentioned. Many of our approaches to peacebuilding and prevention are not helpful because they tend to get captured and manipulated by elites. As a result, they often end up reinforcing similar trends.⁵ The Pathways analysis provides an important lens, focused on horizontal inequality, to understand how to address these challenges.

Hiba Qasas, the executive director of the Principles for Peace Foundation, pointed out that we are living in the most conflict-ridden moment in modern history. The world is more interconnected and interdependent than ever, but also the most polarized. We need to rethink our approaches and limitations, look at the peace and security ecosystem as a whole, and develop a new set of principles for peace that can guide decisionmakers and stakeholders. She identified three common threads behind failed peace processes. Not being sufficiently inclusive, not being sufficiently transformative, and not having sufficient popular legitimacy. It is not enough to stop violence to reach peace. Social services, accountable security, jobs, and opportunities are also needed. Peacebuilding processes that fail to include these socio-economic aspects often suffer from low popular legitimacy. From a community perspective there is no clearcut distinction between security, income and livelihoods, and justice. We need to move away from an approach to peace that privilege diplomacy and negotiated settlements, and towards an approach that sees peacemaking as a long-term and adaptive process that require broad inclusivity and legitimacy. We need to recalibrate how local and international actors work together based on principles of humility, mutual respect, and pluralism – inclusion as representation is not enough.⁶

Claire McAllister, from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), noted that the recognition of the effects of climate change and environmental degradation on peace and security has expanded massively over the last five years. Climate change and environmental degradation exacerbate existing tensions, and contribute to generating new insecurities or conflicts.⁷ Four pathways have been identified that shed light on how climate change, environmental degradation, peace, conflict, and security are interlinked.⁸ They are livelihoods, migration and mobility, armed actors and elite exploitation. These dynamics are not only playing themselves out in specific contexts, but also globally.

The interconnections between climate, peace and security show that we need to urgently address the root causes of climate change and environmental degradation, however it is important to also recognize that potential risks to peace and security may also arise from green transitions. These risks can play themselves out at three levels:

1. At the international level, including the geopolitical tensions that emerge from competition for control over and access to the rare earth minerals that are critical for many post-carbon technologies,
2. At the national level, where tensions due to substantial transformations of the energy economy potentially imply equally significant changes in the ways in which economic and political power relations are managed in a given society, especially in fossil fuel dependent countries.
3. At the local level, where lack of inclusivity in mitigation and adaptation programming

may become key factors in creating new instability. Climate change and environmental degradation should be factored into conflict prevention, and climate mitigation and adaptation planning and programming need to integrate prevention and peacebuilding and become more conflict-sensitive. We need to become much more holistic in our analysis, planning and implementation of both climate and peace programming.⁹

Erwin van Veen, a senior research fellow with the Clingendael Institute, argued that better prevention requires a more tailored international toolkit that is based on clearer recognition of the regional and governmental dimensions of conflict. First, there is strong evidence that inclusion leads to more durable solutions to conflict, but in practice there are clear limitations to the kinds of inclusivity that it is possible to achieve due to prevailing power structures. Changing the political reality will often require a mix of soft and hard coercive elements – the latter should not be understood as military interventions, but for instance take the form of tougher economic action and critical diplomatic advocacy on the international stage. A second issue is the growing internationalization of conflict, a trend which was already identified in the Pathways report. Better prevention requires going beyond state-focused solutions and explore more regional strategies and regional peacebuilding efforts. Thirdly, governments are often a part of the conflict equation, including both international and national actors. Infrastructures for peace, social dialogue and increasing the range of economic opportunities are vital to empower people to participate in peace processes.¹⁰

Annika Hansen, of the Center for International Peace Operations in Berlin, pointed out that peacekeeping is all about prevention, i.e. preventing a recurrence of conflict. It is however not a suitable tool to address the root causes of conflict, hence a close collaboration with other relevant actors is needed. Three challenges to effective prevention should be mentioned here. The first is the fragility and ability of states to handle multiple and converging crisis. The need to build resilience is more relevant than ever. At the same time, it seems the more fragile, the less willing states tend to be to acknowledge their shortfalls and to seek support from others. The second challenge is growing internationalization. For governments affected by conflict it is often seen as more attractive to have unconditional support to help them defeat insurgents than it is to meet demands for adherence to international human rights, rule of law or transitional justice standards. The internationalization of potential partners thus undermines the political leverage that peace operations have. The third aspect is the destructive force of disinformation and competing narratives that might trigger conflict but more often contribute to exacerbating tensions. Disinformation has a destabilizing effect on conflict dynamics by derailing political processes or polarizing societies.¹¹ Part of the preventive role of peace operations lies in building the resilience of communities to mis- and disinformation.

Gary Milante, a senior researcher at SIPRI, independent consultant, advisor to Pathways and lead economist on the WDR 2011: Conflict, Security and Development at the World Bank discussed the challenges of building the evidence base.¹² He noted that despite the salience and resonance of the Pathways report – it was followed by little actual change in behavior by donors and multilaterals and much of the agenda remains wishful thinking. Milante further noted that what is and is not peacebuilding remains poorly defined. The field would benefit from more precision in defining both peacebuilding activities, intended objectives (e.g. in a theory of change) and what constitutes “success” in both peacebuilding and prevention (a distinction without meaning that is artificially perpetuated by the UN System). He presented forthcoming research showing a significant correlation between aid invested in peacebuild-

ing in countries that avoided war relapse. Peacebuilding such as in successful post-war transitions happens over an extended period of time – decades – dispelling the myth that there is a short 3 or 5 year “post-conflict” window. This supports the theory proposed by Thania Paffenholz of “perpetual peacebuilding.”¹³

Thania Paffenholz, the executive director of Inclusive Peace made the point that it is not only in-country exclusion that cause challenges for peacebuilding. Exclusion at the international level also cause inter-state conflicts. Inclusion is super relevant for sustaining peace, but which processes should different groups now be included in? Five years ago, we were thinking about classical formal peace processes and inclusion of groups like women and youth. Today the classical track one processes are much less common. The narrow understanding of inclusion as symbolically adding a bit of youth and women has led to a lot of cosmetic inclusion, where participants not necessary feel they are genuinely participating in decision making in peace processes. Are we talking about inclusion in processes, or reaching inclusive outcomes? There is much resistance to change, such as resistance by elites who are not interested in inclusive outcomes because they would like to stay in power.

Rory Keane, the head of the United Nations Liaison Office for Peace and Security in Brussels, said that with the benefit of hindsight the notion of humility could have come through more clearly in the Pathway report. We are now at a point in history which is particularly challenging, hence the international community needs to approach the way forward with great humility, as there are no clear-cut formulae. The second point he made is that we need a greater sense of urgency, as we are facing significant global challenges that will only get worse if we are not able to address them. He also pointed out that there are some discussions taking place now, that were not in the frame at the time of the Pathways report. For example, the Post-World War II peace architecture is being reflected upon and debated in mainstream policy discussions, but was not really part of discussions five years ago. There is also a feeling within the EU, but also globally, that the inclusion dilemma remains a central part of the problem. There is a trust deficit, compounded by a challenge with disinformation. Who to include and why? In 2023, is much more geopolitically charged with interstate and regional tensions. Prevention and peacebuilding both have political and economic dimensions, and more attention needs to be paid to the economic dimension of sustaining peace, as well as the geopolitics of peace.

Concluding thoughts

All the experts recognized that we are in a significantly different world with more complex risks and more compounding dynamics than five years ago when the Pathways report was released. Nevertheless, they all agree that the Pathways report made an important contribution that laid a knowledge foundation that remains relevant today. This is particularly the case with regards to the importance of prevention and inclusion, and the business case for prevention.

However, there was also many calls for a fundamental re-think of how external actors and international organizations understand peace, and what they can do to sustain peace and help prevent conflict. Given that very little of the prevention and peacebuilding agenda recommended by Pathways has been delivered on so far, much remains to be done for the international community to deliver the targets set by the SDGs. The core question this consultation asked itself was whether our concepts and theories of change for inclusion and prevention

are still relevant for our fast-changing conflict landscape? Three ways in which we need to approach peace differently stood out.

First, the need to change the way we think about peace. Several experts argued that we need to move beyond old paradigms that are no longer useful. Hiba Qasas pointed to three common shortcomings in contemporary peace processes, namely that they are not sufficiently inclusive, that they are not transformative enough, i.e. they do not manage to transform the drivers of conflict, and lack popular legitimacy. Adam Day argued that we need to move away from the fragility, conflict, and violence paradigm because in today's context, all countries should pay attention to prevention and invest in sustaining peace domestically. Awa Dabo said that the UN Secretary-General's New Agenda for Peace will most likely make recommendations regarding the need for a universal approach to the prevention of violence. Adam Day also suggested that the UN system and other peace actors should more meaningfully work towards inclusive political settlements, rather than just approach inclusion as a guideline for participation in the process. Thania Paffenholz also made the same point when she called for a new approach to inclusion that goes beyond representation. Inclusion, or the lack of it, in adaption and mitigation measures was pointed out by Claire McAllister as a new source of tension and conflict within and between communities. Day also pointed out that the Pathways report was mostly focused on horizontal inequality, but that the focus is now increasingly on vertical inequality. This was echoed by Hiba Qasas when she emphasized the importance that the Principles for Peace place on accountable security and related principles such as dignity, solidarity, and humility.

Day, Paffenholz and van Veen also called for a rethink of the way that external actors relate to ruling elites. It was pointed out that elites often capture and manipulate these processes in their own interest, and that we need to re-think how to make progress in situations where entrenched elites refuse to give up or share power, or where international support is overly focused on the state. Recent developments in Sudan were highlighted as a case in point. Qasas, Paffenholz and others also argued that there is a need to move beyond the preoccupation and immediacy of formal diplomacy and negotiated agreements. Instead, it would be useful approach peacemaking, peace processes and sustaining peace as long-term civic transformational process, not as an outcome in and of themselves. Collectively, improving our understanding of what works and why, when it comes to prevention, inclusion, and other aspects of peacebuilding, and holding the field accountable for failures, can help to address calls for better evidence from Saetre and Milante.

Second, the need to be more holistic. This implies a whole-of-society approach when it comes to weaving together various thematic areas to help generate social transformation. It also requires mechanisms and processes that can help a wide range of actors across multiple scales to self-organize around shared visions and goals, such as the SDGs. The way international, regional, and national institutions are currently organized makes it extremely difficult to manage and coordinate interrelated social, humanitarian, development, conflict and ecological security risks across institutional mandates. The system is too fragmented, polarized, and siloed. The few coordination mechanisms that exist, such as inter-departmental task forces or inter-ministerial clusters, are under-developed and institutionally weak compared to their constituent parts. There is little accountability for whole-of-system effects, especially over the medium- to longer-term. To make governance at international, regional and national levels more fit for today's challenges, our institutions must develop the capabilities to address

systemic risk. Our systems, processes and institutions must be able to integrate information and analysis from a variety of disciplines and departments. There is a need to learn from (and then implement) governance mechanisms that are effectively building more holistic and joined up policies, and to explore the incentives that enable people to work across silos at both the policy and programmatic level. Institutions must be capable of planning, coordinating, and monitoring initiatives that are simultaneously undertaken across several institutional domains, and they need to be able to identify and act on emerging opportunities, across multiple scales and ecosystems. If we are to become more successful at preventing violence and mitigating and adapting to the negative effects of climate change and other risks, it will require committing to new structures – based more heavily on trans-disciplinary teams and inter-institutional collaboration on a scale not yet attempted.

Gary Milante shared one practical recommendation in this regard, namely introducing a “peacebuilding cluster” approach to coordinating in-country efforts among all the relevant stakeholders, similar to the way in which the humanitarian community use clusters like water and sanitation or health to coordinate themselves. Such peacebuilding clusters can be convened at country and subnational level, and meet regularly to coordinate peacebuilding activities, so that those working in the same thematic area can self-organize. Regularly sharing information on the effects that these efforts are generating – intended and unintended – will also help everyone to iteratively adapt to new developments, which can help to scale up those initiatives that show promise, and to seize or adapt those that cause harm.¹⁴ This avoids duplication, stimulates collaboration, and helps to generate a shared understanding of the larger peacebuilding project that each project and initiative is meant to be contributing towards.

Thirdly, the need to be more people-centered and participatory.¹⁵ Most of our international, regional and national institutions are locked into state-centric models that assumes that state institutions are legitimate, and have the credibility and agency to carry out their assumed roles. As a result, they become the counterparts for international, regional, and bilateral support. In reality, some state institutions have been captured by elites and these institutions, to the degree that they have agency, serve only a small percentage of the given country’s population. Significant social groups such as women, youth, rural agrarian communities, and ethnic minorities often have low if any real representation in decision-making processes and extremely few opportunities to voice their concerns. The majority of the people affected by conflict often receive very little if any support from the state. This contributes to popular discontent and lack of trust and legitimacy in state structures and governmental institutions.¹⁶

In such contexts, people often rely on traditional systems and community arrangements for their social resilience, justice, and security. These politics of exclusion and marginalization, and the grievances that emerge as a result, is very well captured in the Pathways for Peace report. However, it is difficult to identify what has changed in the international, regional, and national peacebuilding and development systems as a result. International actors (the UN, the World Bank and other IFIs, humanitarian actors, bilateral donors) need to understand that it is impossible for them to be apolitical in these contexts. Working with and through such governments generates legitimacy that helps to entrench and perpetuate the very inequalities and exclusions that the Pathways report identifies as needing to be addressed to prevent future instability and conflict. Most support is still state-centric and directly or indirectly benefit the elites responsible for maintaining these systems of exclusion and marginalization.

Without a holistic and people centered approach, international development support and peacebuilding efforts run the risk of contributing to maintaining the political economy of ruling elites rather than reducing inequality. If international and regional organizations are not able to break free from this state-centric model, because they are themselves established and governed by states, then much more support need to be channeled in new and innovative ways to civic organizations. Such social institutions and governance emerge to address the shortcomings that result from state neglect. More initiatives need to be directed at sub-national authorities, including state, provincial, country, municipality, village and community-led institutions, so that the overall efforts strengthen decentralization and local governance that is situated closer to people.

Overall, the meeting confirmed the continued relevance of the findings and recommendations of the Pathways for Peace report. The meeting also identified what needs to be done to scale-up the efforts of the peace and development community, together with the people affected by conflict, if we are going to become more effective in our efforts to act on the knowledge captured in the Pathways report, and to implement its recommendations.

Endnotes

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About the authors

Cedric de Coning is a Research Professor in the Research group on peace, conflict and development at NUPI. He has 30 years of experience in research, policy advise, training and education in the areas of conflict resolution, peacekeeping, peacebuilding and peace and conflict studies. Cedric has a Ph.D. in Applied Ethics from the Department of Philosophy of the University of Stellenbosch, and a M.A. (cum laude) in Conflict Management and Peace Studies from the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Minoo Kofoed has a PhD in Peace and Development Research from the School of Global Studies at Gothenburg University in Sweden, with a research project on political mobilisation and civil resistance among the Kurdish minority in Turkey. She works as a Senior Research Fellow at the Climate, Peace and Security Risks (CPSR) project in the Peace, Conflict and Development research group at NUPI. Before she started at NUPI, she worked as an international programme advisor for Norwegian People's Aid following up long-term civil society programmes in Myanmar, Cambodia, Iraq and Rwanda.

Photo caption: Wrestlers from Yirol, Lakes State and Bor, Jonglei State meet for a friendly competition promoting peaceful coexistence among cattle keepers. The event was organized by Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and South Sudan Wrestling Federation and took place in the city of Juba, South Sudan.



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NUPI
Norwegian Institute of International Affairs
C.J. Hambros plass 2D
PO Box 8159 Dep. NO-0033 Oslo, Norway
www.nupi.no | post@nupi.no

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