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Conflict prevention under pressure

How effective are the most
common interventions, and
are they fit for future conflicts?

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Summary

- While the number and intensity of conflicts worldwide continues to rise, funding for conflict prevention is becoming increasingly scarce. Major donors, including the US and the UK have significantly reduced their contributions to overseas development, likely leading to setbacks in humanitarian and peacebuilding efforts. These cuts have already had a negative effect on capacity for conflict prevention globally, and will likely reduce the world's ability to respond to emerging conflicts before they escalate.
- In the context of dwindling resources, governments will have to make strategic decisions about which interventions to prioritize, balancing immediate stabilization of conflict zones and long-term conflict prevention efforts.
- This research paper identifies three major trends shaping contemporary and future conflicts – the impact of climate change, the ‘geopoliticization’ of conflict and the proliferation of technological advancements. Each of these trends interacts with existing conflict dynamics, influencing both the causes of instability and the effectiveness of conflict prevention interventions.
- The paper evaluates six widely applied conflict prevention interventions – mediation, border management, resource management, multi-stakeholder processes, governance and institutional reforms and information and communication technologies – and attempts to assess how effective these interventions have been to date, and how the rapidly changing global context will affect their use in future conflicts, citing case studies from Georgia, India–Pakistan and Kenya.
- Mediation remains a cornerstone of conflict resolution, but its effectiveness is increasingly challenged by the reduction in legitimacy among traditional mediators such as the US. However, standards for formal mediation have provided training opportunities for new mediators.
- Border management is one of the most important interventions, given that border disputes are the biggest cause of conflict worldwide. However, especially during active conflict, states are more likely to harden borders than to engage in positive community-building efforts.

- Resource management and economic cooperation can reduce tensions but, to remain effective, require active monitoring and renegotiation in line with changing resource requirements and relationships. Climate change and economic pressures will likely increase the importance of resource management-related interventions.
- Multi-stakeholder processes are crucial to building lasting peace in a conflict situation, as they involve bringing together all affected parties, including minoritized groups. However, these processes can take a long time to bear fruit and do not lend themselves to short-term interventions or evaluation.
- Governance and institutional reforms are critical but face structural challenges, as they can be hindered by corruption or be perceived as a threat to a state sovereignty if seen to be imposed from the outside.
- Technological advancements present both opportunities and risks for conflict prevention. On the one hand, certain types of technologies can help build confidence and increase transparency by expanding access and allowing independent verification of peace agreements, for example. But on the other hand, the falling cost of technology has made it easier for less-wealthy parties to a conflict to access advanced weapons systems, which can prolong the fighting and disincentivize attempts at resolution. In addition, risks are exacerbated by the business models of major technology companies, which prioritize engagement-driven algorithms that amplify divisive and provocative content. Platforms profit from maximizing user attention, which has created structural incentives that can fuel polarization and make ICTs potential active amplifiers of instability in conflict situations.

01 Introduction

While conflicts have been increasing in number and intensity, the funding available for preventing them is in decline.¹ In the first quarter of 2025 alone, two major funders of overseas development aid made significant cuts. The US administration froze funding at the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), while seeking to abolish the agency altogether; and the UK cut its budget for overseas aid from 0.5 per cent of GDP to 0.3 per cent.² These cuts follow several years of reductions in spending on international development across most of the significant donor countries in Europe and North America.³ The consequences of these cuts are already being felt on the ground: in Kenya, for instance, 40,000 aid workers lost their jobs in February 2025 owing to the shutdown of USAID-funded programmes, drastically reducing the capacity of humanitarian and peacebuilding organizations to provide essential services and implement conflict prevention interventions.⁴

The retreat from international aid in developed economies has not only reduced direct funding for conflict prevention, but has also stalled or delayed initiatives within multilateral organizations such as the UN, the European Union (EU) and the African Union, where political will among member states has proven insufficient to advance meaningful conflict prevention efforts.

At the same time as funding is being reduced, democratic institutions are weakening.⁵ Elections since 2022 have benefited politicians opposed to an interventionist foreign policy, particularly in Europe where right-wing populist parties have continued to increase in popularity.⁶ An analysis of

¹ Taylor, A. (2024), 'Data shows global conflict surged in 2024', *Washington Post*, 12 December 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/12/12/conflict-war-2024-israel-gaza-ukraine>.

² UN News (2025), 'US funding pause leaves millions "in jeopardy", insist UN humanitarians', 4 February 2025, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/02/1159746>.

³ Langrand, M. (2025), 'Switzerland to slash funding for UN agencies', *Geneva Solutions*, 29 January 2025, <https://genevasolutions.news/global-news/switzerland-to-slash-funding-for-un-agencies>.

⁴ Wanga, B. (2025), 'Over 40,000 Kenyans jobless after USAID-funded health facilities shut down', *Citizen Digital*, 25 February 2025, <https://www.citizen.digital/news/over-40000-kenyans-jobless-after-usaid-funded-health-facilities-shut-down-n357126>.

⁵ University of Birmingham (2025), 'The rise of authoritarianism is misunderstood – and it matters', 13 June 2023, <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/news/2023/how-the-global-rise-of-authoritarianism-is-misunderstood-and-why-it-matters>.

⁶ Wike, R., Fagan, M. and Clancy, L. (2024), 'Global Elections in 2024: What We Learned in a Year of Political Disruption', *Pew Research Center*, 11 December 2024, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2024/12/11/global-elections-in-2024-what-we-learned-in-a-year-of-political-disruption>.

recent party manifestos from 13 OECD countries found that right-leaning parties in particular tended to support large-scale cuts to foreign aid or reorientation of that aid to issues of containment and matters of national security in place of multilateral cooperation.⁷ The case for preventive action is strong, yet states' priorities have clearly changed as domestic budgetary constraints and a volatile international environment make it more difficult to argue in favour of longer-term prevention.

This research paper aims to address the question of whether traditional conflict prevention approaches can still be effective in a period when the causes of conflict are intensifying and budgets for conflict prevention are being reduced. For the purpose of this paper, conflict prevention is understood as encompassing actions taken across all stages of the conflict life cycle: broadly speaking, efforts to prevent conflict from breaking out in the first place (early prevention); to halt its escalation when tensions are rising or conflict has broken out (crisis prevention); and to prevent its recurrence after violence has subsided (post-conflict prevention). This comprehensive understanding of conflict prevention allows us to cover interventions that are tailored to specific stages of the conflict life cycle – such as structural and operational measures, as well as pre- and post-conflict initiatives on community-building and reconciliation, institution-building and sustaining peace to prevent the resurgence of conflict. This range covers some of the most commonly used types of conflict prevention interventions that have been implemented worldwide by state actors, regional and international institutions alike. Therefore, this paper will help a wide range of conflict prevention actors to better understand how certain interventions have worked in practice, under what circumstances they have been implemented, and whether the efficiency of their interventions can be improved.

The paper is structured as follows: the methodology section below explains why the cited case studies have been selected and the rationale for focusing on the six main interventions; Chapter 3 considers the main types of conflict prevention interventions across the three case-study countries; Chapter 4 explores how future conflict trends will affect the implementation of these interventions; and finally, Chapter 5 presents recommendations on how to ensure that interventions in future are as impactful as possible.

Methodology

The objective of the project behind this paper was to provide a clearer understanding of the circumstances under which conflict prevention interventions are successful in resolving or mitigating conflict; and to assess how changes in future conflict might make such interventions more difficult.

⁷ Crawford, L., Dissanayake, R. and Käppeli, L. (2024), 'Foreign Aid in a Time of Right-Wing Populism', blog post, Center For Global Development, 24 July 2024, <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/foreign-aid-time-right-wing-populism>.

The project focuses on interventions that reduce conflict for several reasons:

- Interventions are concrete and implementable, and therefore can be assessed for their success, as there is a ‘before’ and ‘after’.
- Interventions give implementers agency.
- They can be used by states, international organizations and civil society groups.
- They provide a focus on the relevant conflict actors, in terms of both who wants to make a positive difference and who needs to be engaged.
- They can catalyse lasting change, as their action is focused on neutralizing a specific cause of conflict.
- They are one of the key investments that states can make in conflict prevention, increasing the importance of using them well, as budgets worldwide are reducing.

We assessed six categories of interventions in this study:

- Mediation;
- Border management;
- Resource management and economic cooperation;
- Multi-stakeholder processes;
- Government and institutional reforms; and
- Information and communication technologies.

These six intervention types were chosen as those most frequently used and most likely to be applied. This focus will increase the utility of this work and make it relevant for a wider range of conflict prevention actors.

To assess whether the different intervention types can be applied across contexts, it was important to select case studies across conflict typologies and different geographies. Table 1 shows the three main case studies used in this paper. These examples represent some of the most common types of conflict (inter-state; intra-state; and territorial, ethnic and resource disputes).

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Table 1. Profiles of the three case studies

Case study	Types of conflict	Conflict actors	Prevention actors	Region	Conflict duration	Time period assessed in this study
Georgia	Intra-state ethnic secessionist conflict Latent interstate conflict	Georgia; Abkhazia; South Ossetia; and Russia	EU Some local and national government action Civil society groups (local and international)	Eastern Europe	Since 1991	2008–24
India–Pakistan	Inter-state conflict	India; Pakistan; and China	State actors (US; UK; and China)	South Asia	Since 1947, the partition of British India	1999–2024
Kenya	Intra-state ethnic and community-based violence	Ethnic communities, especially in northern Kenya	State actors National and regional government Civil society groups (local & international)	East Africa	Since 1963, exacerbated around elections (1992, 1997, 2007)	2007–24

Source: Compiled by the authors.

The analysis of these three case studies covered a period of around 20 years, during which flare-ups occurred in all three conflict situations. This selection allowed us to assess how these interventions have been implemented over time and the challenges that implementers have faced at different moments. It also allowed us to assess whether some interventions work better for some conflict types than others – providing useful guidance to those seeking to determine how to intervene in a conflict.

The case-study data were collected via remote in-depth interviews with policy practitioners and experts from the three regions, and supplemented with desk research. The authors conducted 34 interviews in total across the three case studies during the period between August 2024 and January 2025:

10 for the Georgia case study; 12 for India–Pakistan; and 12 for Kenya. The interview data have been anonymized and are cited in footnotes according to the date on which the interview took place.

One of the main conceptual challenges for this project and paper was defining future conflict, in order to assess realistically how the interventions might fare in such an environment. The three causes of future conflict for this study were selected through an expert horizon scan.⁸ Three salient causes of conflict emerged from this process:

- The impact of climate change;
- The ‘geopoliticization’ of conflict; and
- The proliferation of advanced technologies.

The research presented here shows that these causes of conflict are already affecting the success or otherwise of resolution efforts in each of the three case studies.

As this paper attempts to assess how well interventions have worked in practice, it is important to discuss how ‘success’ is defined. Given the rich qualitative interview material collected for the case studies, the definition of ‘success’ varied across each. In any given situation, it could mean sustaining a dialogue format over a long period of time; resolving issues for a local community; or coming to agreement on a bigger issue in the conflict. For each intervention, we indicated which elements worked. Where ‘success’ was only partial, we identified the barriers to indicate how the situation could be tackled differently.

For each of the six intervention categories, we reviewed the conflict literature to establish a baseline of how that intervention is meant to work in theory. We then compared how that intervention has worked across the three case studies and highlight any challenges. In those cases where an intervention has worked particularly well in one case study area but not in others, the paper explains the factors that may have caused this failure.

⁸ A horizon scan survey was sent out to a group of conflict experts; 17 responses were received. These responses were then analysed by a group of 16 experts.

02 How effective are the main types of intervention?

Conflict prevention encompasses a wide range of strategies, each tailored to addressing different stages of conflict and its underlying causes. This chapter examines six types of intervention that have been widely employed in conflict prevention efforts around the world. These types represent different dimensions of conflict prevention, including both immediate crisis-response mechanisms (such as mediation and security-sector management) and longer-term structural prevention efforts (such as economic cooperation and governance reforms). Additionally, they reflect the increasing role of technology and digital tools in conflict prevention and the importance of inclusive processes.

These six interventions were also the most consistently observed across the three case studies of Georgia, India–Pakistan and Kenya. They were frequently highlighted in interviews with experts as key approaches shaping contemporary conflict prevention efforts.

This chapter explores how each intervention has been applied in different contexts, drawing insights from both successful initiatives and those that were more challenging. It aims to provide an understanding of how these intervention types can be made more effective and to identify lessons learned from each case, as well as highlighting gaps and areas for improvement in future conflict prevention.

Intervention 1: Mediation

Mediation is the most prevalent form of conflict intervention, discussed extensively in both academic and policy literature for its ability to address disputes and foster peace. It occurs when disputants accept the assistance of a third party to resolve their differences without resorting to physical force or invoking the authority of law.⁹ Between 1946 and 2015, approximately half of all civil and inter-state conflicts involved mediation, emphasizing its centrality in conflict management.¹⁰ However, its application and success are highly context-dependent, with the reality often shaped by specific dynamics, geopolitical constraints and the level of inclusivity in the process – as the three case studies each illustrate.

Mediation aims to facilitate negotiated settlements at various stages of the conflict life cycle, and to end hostilities by bridging power asymmetries and fostering dialogue between conflicting parties. Mediators – whether individuals, states or international organizations – play a critical role in this process, and their skills, neutrality and background significantly influence outcomes. Scholars such as Clayton and Dorussen argue that mediation is most effective when paired with complementary interventions like peacekeeping, which help to ensure the durability of agreements.¹¹ However, past experience warns against over-reliance on mediation as a ‘golden’ solution, as it is sometimes applied in contexts where its potential for success is limited.¹²

Studies of recent conflicts reveal an emerging paradox around mediation: while the number of willing mediators and investments in mediation preparedness has increased, the proportion of armed conflicts receiving mediation over the past 15 years has decreased.¹³ This trend is partly attributed to the rise of complex, ideologically driven conflicts, such as those involving Islamist extremist groups, which often resist traditional mediation approaches.

Inclusivity and adaptability are recurring themes in the literature on mediation as an effective conflict prevention intervention. High-level mediation – or Track I diplomacy – is often celebrated for its ability to address large-scale crises, as seen in examples like the Dayton Accords in the 1990s.¹⁴ However, mediation efforts that focus exclusively on top-level negotiations frequently fail when they do not consider the local grievances,

⁹ Bercovitch, J., Anagnoson, J. T. and Wille, D. (1991), ‘Some Conceptual Issues and Empirical Trends in the Study of Successful Mediation in International Relations’, *Journal of Peace Research*, 28(1), pp. 7–17, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343391028001003>.

¹⁰ Baumann, J. and Clayton, G. (2017), ‘Mediation in Violent Conflict’, *CSS Analyses in Security Policy*, 21(2017), <https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-b-000169653>.

¹¹ Clayton, G. and Dorussen, H. (2022), ‘The effectiveness of mediation and peacekeeping for ending conflict’, *Journal of Peace Research*, 59(2), pp. 150–65, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343321990076>.

¹² Baumann and Clayton (2017), ‘Mediation in Violent Conflict’.

¹³ In the last 15 years, two-thirds of armed conflicts did not receive mediation. See Lundgren, M. and Svensson, I. (2020), ‘The surprising decline of international mediation in armed conflicts’, *Research & Politics*, 7(2), <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053168020917243>.

¹⁴ The Dayton Accords were a peace agreement designed to end the war in Bosnia. The accords were signed in November 1995 by the presidents of Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia, following talks mediated by the US.

exclusion, corruption and repression that often drive conflict. Track II and Track III diplomacy, both of which engage local actors, civil society and community leaders, are increasingly recognized for their potential to foster trust, address structural injustices and build bottom-up legitimacy for peace processes. Rather than viewing these approaches as separate or competing, the most effective mediation strategies integrate multiple levels of engagement. Interpeace's 'Track 6' approach, for instance, underscores the need for mediation processes that link high-level power bargaining with local-level peacebuilding, ensuring that negotiated agreements are politically viable.¹⁵

The area of mediation has become increasingly fragmented, with the number of parties engaging in mediation growing (from more traditional mediators including state and multilateral to non-traditional actors, private individuals and regional powers). These emerging mediators often do not adhere to conventional ideas of neutrality. This diffusion has complicated the practice of mediation, raising questions about legitimacy, credibility and competing interests among those offering their services as mediators. At the same time, conflicts have become more protracted and multipolar, making it difficult for any single mediator or mediation effort to produce lasting outcomes. Many mediation efforts lack robust follow-up mechanisms, further undermining the sustainability of agreements. Each of the case studies demonstrates these dynamics, highlighting the interplay between high-level and grassroots mediation and revealing the importance of sustained engagement, inclusivity and context sensitivity. Future approaches must recognize the changing nature of mediation practice and move beyond rigid adherence to neutrality. They must instead focus on balancing power asymmetries, ensuring accountability and fostering legitimacy through diverse and adaptive frameworks.¹⁶

Mediation in practice: Lessons from the case studies

High-level mediation and Track II diplomacy in the India–Pakistan conflict

The conflict between India and Pakistan stems from decades-long historical, political and territorial disputes, following the 1947 partition of British India into Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan.

The issue of Kashmir, which is divided into two administrative regions – the Indian-administered territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, and the Pakistani-administered areas of Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan – is a

¹⁵ Interpeace (undated), 'Our Track 6 Approach', <https://www.interpeace.org/our-approach/track-6> (accessed 27 Mar. 2025).

¹⁶ For further details on contemporary challenges in mediation, including fragmentation, the evolving role of new mediators, and the shifting relevance of neutrality, see Whitfield, T. (ed.) (2024), *Still Time to Talk: Adaption and Innovation in Peace Mediation*, Conciliation Resources *Accord*, Issue 30, February 2024, <https://www.c-r.org/accord/still-time-to-talk>.

constant source of tension between the two countries.¹⁷ Mediation played a significant role in preventing the escalation of the 1999 Kargil Crisis, when Pakistani forces crossed the Line of Control (LoC) into Indian-administered Kashmir, triggering a two-month confrontation between the two countries. One interviewee for this paper noted the gravity of the situation: ‘there was a sense from the Pakistani side that “maybe let’s use nuclear weapons”’.¹⁸ The severity of the crisis prompted the US, the UK and China to align on the urgency of defusing it, ultimately working together to broker a ceasefire. The US and UK interventions put pressure on Pakistan, which was critical for prompting de-escalation.¹⁹ Consistent messaging from multiple actors also signalled to both India and Pakistan that there was no international appetite for continued fighting. Pakistan’s prime minister Nawaz Sharif heard the same message from London, Washington and Beijing: ‘We are not going to support you’. This reality forced Pakistan to retreat.²⁰

Another useful confidence-building measure was the Lahore ‘bus diplomacy’ of February 1999, when the Indian prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee travelled to Lahore via a newly opened bus route. There, he and Sharif discussed key issues including Kashmir. However, this effort was short-lived, as the Kargil Crisis broke out soon after. Nonetheless, the bus diplomacy episode kept dialogue channels open.²¹

Significant progress on Kashmir came through former Pakistan president Pervez Musharraf’s four-point formula.²² The formula was enacted to address continued skirmishes on the LoC in Kashmir, through implementing self-governance in the region without full independence, demilitarizing by withdrawing troops and joint supervision of the peace. Unfortunately, any real progress was derailed by the 2008 Mumbai attacks, which were claimed by Islamist groups. An interviewee noted that India has no interest in revisiting the four-point formula despite its potential, and if it did, Narendra Modi’s government would likely rebrand it rather than credit former Musharraf.²³

Nearly all interviewees emphasized the crucial role of nuclear deterrence in managing the conflict between India and Pakistan. Interviewees explain that India remains highly aware of the risks associated with Pakistan’s potential use of nuclear weapons, which acts as a deterrent and leads to greater restraint in India’s approach to serious military escalation. The presence of nuclear capabilities on both sides also influences mediation efforts, providing leverage that has, at times, facilitated successful de-escalation.

¹⁷ Pokraka, A. (2019), ‘History of Conflict in India and Pakistan’, Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, 26 November 2019, <https://armscontrolcenter.org/history-of-conflict-in-india-and-pakistan>.

¹⁸ Interview, 2 December 2024.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Interview, 6 August 2024.

²² Interview, 6 August 2024.

²³ Interview, 2 December 2024.

The identity of the actors mediating between India and Pakistan has been changing in recent years. Interviewees noted that Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have been nurturing their relationships with both India and Pakistan and these Gulf Arab countries have played a de-escalating role behind the scenes.²⁴ However, neither Saudi Arabia nor the UAE is yet powerful enough to hold influence over potential military action. This is an area in which a larger geopolitical player could possibly still play an important role. Another hinderance to successful mediation is India's long-standing resistance to foreign intervention, which it perceives as a threat to its sovereignty, and its preference for bilateral approaches that would leave potential mediators sidelined. Interviewees noted that India strongly opposes what it views as 'meddling' in its affairs, while the US is hesitant to risk upsetting Narendra Modi's government, as it courts India's support to counter China.

Several interviewees discussed the importance of the Track II diplomatic level in maintaining stability. Retired military and security policy personnel who still maintain prominent contacts and networks on either side have been involved in such dialogue efforts. These individuals are motivated by their shared interest in de-escalation and maintaining stability as they have experienced dangerously high levels of tension throughout their careers. Non-state actors have also been involved. For example, the think-tank BASIC facilitated several Track II dialogues for nuclear-risk reduction through its programme on nuclear responsibilities.²⁵ Interviewees for this paper noted that back-channel talks have often been the most effective form of dialogue, perhaps partly due to the stakes being lower and partly to the involvement of high-level officials seeking de-escalation.²⁶

EU-led ceasefire mediations in Georgia

The EU-led ceasefire mediation of the August 2008 war in Georgia and the ensuing Geneva International Dialogue are the best examples of high-level conflict mediation among the three case studies. France held the EU presidency at that time and took the lead in mediation efforts. French foreign minister Bernard Kouchner and his Finnish counterpart, Alexander Stubb (who was also the chairman of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe – OSCE), arrived in Georgia together on 9 August 2008 with a ceasefire proposal.²⁷ Georgia agreed to this proposal, and Kouchner and Stubb travelled on to Moscow where the French president Nicolas Sarkozy also joined the negotiations. Russia signed the ceasefire plan on 16 August.²⁸

²⁴ Interview, 4 December 2024.

²⁵ BASIC (2025), 'Nuclear Responsibilities', 14 March 2025, <https://basicint.org/portfolio/nuclear-responsibilities>.

²⁶ Interview, 21 November 2024.

²⁷ Pipia, S. (2014), 'European Union as a Mediator and Peace-builder in the Light of 2008 Russia-Georgia War', *International Journal of Education and Research*, 2(6), p. 343, <https://www.ijern.com/journal/june-2014/26.pdf>.

²⁸ Traynor, I., Harding, L. and Womack, H. (2008), 'Georgia and Russia declare ceasefire', *Guardian*, 16 August 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/aug/16/georgia.russia2>.

Part of the agreement was the establishment of an international dialogue on security and stability, as well as the status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This dialogue format was set up as part of the Geneva International Discussions (GID), a quarterly meeting co-chaired by the EU, the OSCE and the UN, and involving Georgia, Russia, the US, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The GID has two working groups running in parallel: one focusing on security and stability in Abkhazia and South Ossetia; and the other on the return of internally displaced persons and refugees. The GID still meets to this day, with participants continuing to affirm their commitment to the process despite the conflict remaining unresolved, and the working groups highlighting divergent views on almost every issue between the disputing parties.²⁹

A key challenge in these talks was – and is – the role of Russia. Russia insisted (and continues to insist) that it is not a formal party to the conflict between Georgia and the breakaway territories, but that it plays an important role as a ‘peacekeeper’, as Abkhazia and South Ossetia would only trust Russian peacekeeping troops.³⁰ However, in reality, Russian troops in Abkhazia and South Ossetia have played an active role in fortifying the border between the two territories and Georgia – going far beyond any standard peacekeeping responsibility and taking actions that harm the local population as well as the Georgian state. This active Russian presence makes the conflict harder to resolve.³¹ Russia benefits from maintaining latent conflict between Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as it can use the tensions to influence Georgian politics. In this sense, Russia is a party to the conflict but denies any active role. It is not trying to contribute to the resolution of the conflict but retains the power to block any meaningful discussions and progress.

As Russia perceives the EU as a rival in Georgia in terms of who has more influence over the country, the EU’s role as a co-convenor of this dialogue format is difficult.³² The EU has nonetheless enjoyed a certain level of success as a mediator – not least in getting the parties to the conflict to sign a lasting ceasefire agreement and jointly establishing the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM), which supports the management of the border conflicts.³³ Meanwhile, the GID manages to address and resolve practical aspects of the conflict. Despite these successes, the underlying conflict remains almost unchanged – except perhaps that Russian influence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia has grown and the Georgian government has become increasingly concerned about provoking another intensification in the conflict. That the GID is continuing to meet suggests there is a chance

²⁹ OSCE (2024), ‘Press communiqué of the Co-Chairs of the Geneva International Discussions’, 6 November 2024, <https://www.osce.org/chairpersonship/580165>.

³⁰ Hansen, F. S. (2024), ‘The Russian approach to peacekeeping’, *International Affairs*, 100(3), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iaae072>, p. 1032.

³¹ Allison, R. (2008), ‘Russia resurgent? Moscow’s campaign to “coerce Georgia to peace”’, *International Affairs*, 84(6), pp. 1145–71, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2346.2008.00762.x>.

³² Berg, E. and Mölder, M. (2014), ‘When “blurring” becomes the norm and secession is justified as the exception: revisiting EU and Russian discourses in the common neighbourhood’, *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 17, pp. 469–88, <https://doi.org/10.1057/jird.2014.2>.

³³ Forsberg, T. and Seppo, A. (2010), ‘The EU as a Peace-Maker in the Russo-Georgian War’, *Fifth Pan-European Conference on EU Politics*, (June), pp. 23–26.

that things might change. But without the Russian government changing its stance on the utility of Abkhazia and South Ossetia for Russian influence operations in Georgia, a full resolution to this conflict seems unlikely.

Community-driven mediation and high-level intervention in Kenya

Grassroots mediation plays a crucial role in addressing localized disputes, building trust and fostering sustainable peace. Kenya's experience demonstrates the potential of community-driven mediation, particularly in regions prone to intercommunal violence and resource-based conflicts. The Umal Accords in Mandera County are a standout example of what community-driven mediation can achieve. These accords were largely attributed to the efforts of Sheikh Mohamed Abdi Umal, a respected cleric whose neutrality and credibility were critical to fostering trust between rival clans. As one interviewee for this paper observed, 'conflict management interventions that have the support from government actors, especially the political arm, always succeed because they avoid difficult questions around power-sharing or corruption, but focus on stabilizing communities'. This success was attributed to the inclusion of trusted mediators like Sheikh Umal and broader community participation.³⁴ Agreements such as these show that the choice of mediator is of vital importance, particularly in contexts where trust deficits exist. In Kenya, trusted individuals with strong community ties and perceived neutrality have proven better positioned to build consensus and foster durable agreements.

Grassroots mediation structures, such as peace committees in Wajir and Mandera, have also been critical. The Wajir County Peacebuilding and Conflict Management Bill formalizes these committees and integrated early warning mechanisms, giving legal backing to grassroots peace structures and ensuring that community voices are reflected in policymaking.³⁵ 'Ensuring community voices are heard in policymaking' emerged as a consistent theme in the interviews conducted for this paper, with one respondent noting that this formalization not only legitimized local peace committees but also provided them with the tools to respond effectively to emerging tensions.

Women-led mediation efforts in Kenya – particularly the transformative role of Wajir's women-led interventions – underscore the potential of community-driven prevention.³⁶ One interviewee emphasized the formation of peace committees with women and elders as mediators, noting that: 'from

³⁴ Interpeace (2022), 'Voices from Mandera: Stories of hope and peace from the Mandera County in Kenya', 7 April 2022, <https://www.interpeace.org/2022/04/voices-from-mandera-stories-of-hope-and-peace-from-the-mandera-county-in-kenya>.

³⁵ UN Peacebuilding Fund (2024), *PBF June 2024 Project Progress Report*, https://mptf.undp.org/sites/default/files/documents/2024-06/00140108_project_progress_report_june_2024.pdf.

³⁶ Mogire, N. (2022), 'Women and power: Political participation in Wajir county, Kenya', International Alert, October 2022, <https://www.international-alert.org/blogs/women-and-power-political-participation-in-wajir-county-kenya>.

that moment [of the formation of the peace committees], that approach really worked'.³⁷

At the other end of the range, the Kenya National Dialogue and Reconciliation (KNDR) process offers a powerful example of successful high-level mediation. The KNDR, initiated after post-election violence in 2008, was led by former UN secretary-general Kofi Annan and supported by an international team. Annan's consistent involvement throughout the initial 41 days of mediation and beyond built public trust and minimized the risk of negotiation teams exploiting gaps. This trust ultimately led to long-term reforms, such as the adoption of the 2010 constitution.³⁸

Lessons learned in mediation interventions

It is important to be realistic. Mediation is not always welcome, does not always work and can sometimes serve to reinforce the position of certain parties to a conflict without addressing the root causes of a dispute.³⁹

Analysis of the three case studies above revealed several recurring issues.

Political interference is an inherent challenge. Political actors often act in self-interest, shaping negotiations to align with their own agendas.

Mediation must account for political motivations and manoeuvre within the constraints they impose to remain effective. Rising geopolitical tensions and increased divisions among permanent members of the UN Security Council further complicate matters. The growing role of states that have not traditionally been central to mediation efforts – such as China, the Gulf Arab states and Türkiye, alongside the increasing prominence of regional or other 'middle power' mediators – highlights the current shift in global influence.⁴⁰ Mediation requires credible and neutral actors to succeed, yet achieving this neutrality is difficult in complex geopolitical conflicts. While these new mediators can bring fresh perspectives to a conflict situation, their divergent values and ideologies can fragment mediation efforts, introduce competing initiatives and reduce international 'buy-in' to mediated agreements.⁴¹

Conflict prevention can also be hindered by an excessive focus on whether or not a party is designated as an extremist group. Instead, it should be focused on understanding the deeper causes of a conflict – often rooted in political exclusion, injustice, corruption and repression. Inclusivity is critical. When mediation efforts fail to include marginalized groups, the legitimacy and sustainability of those efforts are undermined.

³⁷ Interview, 25 October 2024.

³⁸ Office of the AU Panel of Eminent African Personalities (undated), *Back from the Brink: The 2008 Mediation Process And Reforms In Kenya*, book, https://www.kofiannanfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/backFromBrink_web.pdf.

³⁹ Whitfield (ed.) (2024), 'Still Time to Talk', p. 8.

⁴⁰ Hamed, A. and Hushcha, M. (2024), *Emerging Approaches to International Mediation in a Fragmented World*, working paper, Vienna: Austrian Forum for Peace, https://www.aspr.ac.at/fileadmin/Downloads/Publikationen/Weitere_Publikationen/Publikation_New_Actors_in_Mediation_fin.pdf.

⁴¹ Liaga, E., Johannes, D., Belay, T. and Dessu, M. (2024), *Adapting UN Mediation for Emerging Challenges and Security Threats*, policy brief, New York: New York University Center on International Cooperation, <https://cic.nyu.edu/resources/adapting-un-mediation-for-emerging-challenges-and-security-threats>.

The short-term outlook and transactional nature of many mediation efforts pose other problems. Efforts undertaken in this spirit may often focus on immediate de-escalation without addressing the deeper structural causes of conflict.

Mediation must prioritize trust-building, inclusivity and long-term engagement, rather than solely relying on transactional motivations.⁴² To ensure that mediation is both impactful and sustainable, the case studies above and other studies underscore the importance of credible mediators, approaches tailored to the situation, and the integration of grassroots and high-level initiatives.

Intervention 2: Border management

Disagreement over territory is regarded as the most common cause of conflict.⁴³ This makes border management one of the most important conflict prevention interventions available.⁴⁴ Border disputes can arise for a range of reasons – for example, when an existing settlement has collapsed due to changes in regional power balances; when borders were not sufficiently settled in the past and were imposed over ethnic boundaries; when the value of the territory itself changes, for cultural and material reasons; or when there is an underlying dispute over control of resources.

There are a range of options for managing borders, some of which address violence in the short term but do not resolve the underlying sources of conflict, whereas others support a more holistic process.

‘Borderization’ of contested territory as a cause of conflict

‘Borderization’ describes the process of establishing a physical border in territory that is contested. This practice serves to establish ‘facts’ on the ground that can be portrayed as ‘protective action’. It can also mean greater border securitization or formalization of existing border-protection structures. Borderization can be a quick response to recurring territorial challenges, as it creates the appearance of taking control. The process of securitization usually means that states can easily requisition additional funds, personnel and resources to shore up border protections. It tends to be popular domestically, as it is easy to explain how such a move could benefit citizens who may have concerns about border violence or instability. However, it tends to be counterproductive in terms of managing or resolving the underlying conflict.

The practice of borderization has been relatively widespread, although the term originated after the Russian war in Georgia in 2008. EU officials of the

⁴² Liaga, Johannes, Belay and Dessu (2024), *Adapting UN Mediation for Emerging Challenges and Security Threats*.

⁴³ Forsberg, T. (1996), ‘Explaining Territorial Disputes: From Power Politics to Normative Reasons’, *Journal of Peace Research*, 33(4), pp. 433–49, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343396033004005>.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) used it to describe Russian action to move border checkpoints and fences when retreating into South Ossetia.⁴⁵ Those movements turned a previously largely unpoliced border into a much harder demarcation that has fuelled conflict between local populations since.

Borderization has had the effect diminishing the Georgian state's influence in South Ossetia while increasing that of Russia. Over time, the border has become increasingly fortified. What initially was a fence along the boundary line became, from 2011, a more heavily fortified and monitored boundary. For Georgia, the increased severity of the border demarcations signifies Russian occupation, whereas for South Ossetia, it signifies increased independence from the Georgian state.

In practical terms, these actions have led to escalation of conflict, as it has created additional opportunities for confrontation between all sides at checkpoints. Villages like Khurvaleti, which straddle the border between South Ossetian-controlled territory and Georgia, have been arbitrarily split in two as a result. The border between Abkhazia and Georgia has also hardened over the same period. The Gali district along the border, for example, is now largely depopulated and impoverished, as the primarily Georgian population have relocated to Georgian-controlled territory.⁴⁶

In Kenya, governance, security and conflict prevention are difficult in border regions such as Garissa, Mandera and Wajir and other counties along the borders with Ethiopia and Somalia. The Kenyan state's presence in these areas is often weak. Yet pastoralist communities rely on cross-border movement and trade for their livelihoods. National-level policies and border restrictions often fail to account for the challenges faced by communities like these. For example, when grazing lands become inaccessible due to such restrictions, tensions among communities often increase, and can lead to the outbreak of conflict over resources. Boundary issues are one of the major causes of conflict in Mandera county.⁴⁷

The marginalization of border communities has contributed to feelings of neglect and alienation from the Kenyan state, pushing some individuals into alternatives such as illicit trade, smuggling and political and religious radicalization. The lack of government presence allows groups such as the Islamist al-Shabaab to exploit grievances and recruit disenfranchised individuals, particularly young people who feel economically and politically excluded.

The Kenya–Somalia border has been a key recruitment and operational area for al-Shabaab, with their activities facilitated by porous borders, weak

⁴⁵ Toal, G. and Merabishvili, G. (2019), 'Borderization theatre: geopolitical entrepreneurship on the South Ossetia boundary line, 2008–2018', *Caucasus Survey*, 7(2), pp. 110–33, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23761199.2019.1565192>.

⁴⁶ Venhovens, M. (2019), 'Hardening porousness. Borderization and abandonment among the borderland ruins of Abkhazia', International Institute for Asian Studies *The Newsletter*, Spring 2019, 82, <https://www.iias.asia/the-newsletter/article/hardening-porousness-borderization-abandonment-among-borderland-ruins>.

⁴⁷ Emase, P. (2017), *Voices of the People: Challenges to Peace in Mandera County*, Interpeace, 4 July 2027, p. 53, <https://www.interpeace.org/2017/07/voices-challenges-mandera-county>.

security coordination and unregulated movement.⁴⁸ Kenya has responded with securitization measures, such as the ongoing construction of a border wall (started in 2015) to curb the movement of militants and prevent terrorist attacks.⁴⁹ However, this approach has had unintended consequences, as it has disrupted traditional cross-border movement, separated families and affected the livelihoods of pastoralists and cross-border traders. While framed as a security measure, these measures also resemble processes of borderization.

Recognizing that borderization policies cannot resolve underlying tensions, Kenya has engaged in regional cooperation efforts and cross-border governance initiatives. Several counties in northern Kenya have begun working with development partners to implement policies on rain-fed land management and resource-sharing agreements. These efforts acknowledge that conflicts in border areas are often linked to climate-induced resource scarcity and not just security concerns.⁵⁰

The case of India and Pakistan indicates that the presence of unpredictable and violent cross-border activity poses a serious danger to the effectiveness and sustainability of conflict-prevention interventions. Border securitization around territory contested by India and Pakistan often causes continued tensions between the two parties. Border skirmishes between the two state armies largely occur on the LoC in Kashmir. Both armies maintain a heavy presence along the LoC, and thus any slight provocation can lead to violence along the border.

The ability of terrorists to operate across borders is a key source of tension between the two states. India accuses Pakistan of allowing Islamist militant groups to cross the LoC to carry out terrorist attacks within India.⁵¹ Pakistan generally rejects accusations that it fosters terrorism, and maintains that these groups act independently.⁵² The most well-known of these incidents was the 2008 Mumbai attacks by Pakistani-based militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba, in which 174 people were killed and more than 300 injured and which met with global public condemnation.⁵³ The dispute over this attack was escalated to the UN Security Council, where all members voted to blacklist the militant group's parent organization. Furthermore, Security

⁴⁸ Emase (2017), *Voices of the People*.

⁴⁹ BBC News (2019), 'Scandal over Kenya's border fence that cost \$35m for just 10km', 14 March 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-47574463>.

⁵⁰ Kenya Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources (2016), 'Kenya Strategic Investment Framework for Sustainable Land Management 2017–2027', p. 30, <https://repository.kippira.or.ke/handle/123456789/2798#:~:text=The%20Kenya%20Strategic%20Investment%20Framework%20on%20sustainable%20land,the%20country%E2%80%99s%20natural%20capital%20in%20a%20sustainable%20manner>.

⁵¹ Kathju, J. (2024), 'Cross-border terrorism still a barrier to India-Pakistan formal dialogue', *South China Morning Post*, 11 April 2024, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3258544/india-pakistan-formal-dialogue-unlikely-cross-border-terrorism-remains-sticking-point>.

⁵² Hashim, A. (2020), 'India, Pakistan repeat war of words over "cross-border terrorism"', *Al Jazeera*, 14 December 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/14/india-pakistan-repeat-war-of-words-over-cross-border>.

⁵³ Ayres, A. (2018), 'A Decade On, Will There Ever Be Justice for the Mumbai Attacks?', blog post, Council on Foreign Relations, 26 November 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/decade-will-there-ever-be-justice-mumbai-attacks>.

Council members coordinated pressure on Pakistan to take more tangible steps to eradicate terrorist activity.

The incident severely eroded trust between the two countries, and effectively halted any further bilateral cooperation – even resulting in the cancellation of the four-point formula initiative on the Kashmir crisis. Cross-border terrorism incidents also motivated India to harden its approach to militant activity it says comes from within Pakistan's borders. In 2024, the *Guardian* newspaper published a report that included allegations that the Indian intelligence services had orchestrated extrajudicial killings in Pakistan since 2020 – claims that were supported by the Pakistani intelligence agencies but denied by the Indian government.⁵⁴ In response, Indian defence minister Rajnath Singh stated that: 'if terrorists run away to Pakistan, we will enter Pakistan to kill them'.⁵⁵ This statement was condemned strongly by Pakistan's foreign ministry, which warned that Pakistan remained prepared to defend its sovereignty.⁵⁶ Hostile exchanges between high-level politicians further fuelled the perception that Indian and Pakistani citizens are at risk from one another.⁵⁷

International arbitration of border conflicts

International organizations can play an important role in providing support for efforts to resolve border disputes. Their involvement can make it easier for disputing parties to reach a deal that is domestically acceptable, if domestic constituencies are evenly split between supporting and opposing an agreement.⁵⁸ However, this only works if all parties involved have an interest in achieving a negotiated settlement.

In Georgia, the EUMM has provided an ongoing unarmed peacekeeping mission since September 2008, after the EU helped to mediate a ceasefire. The mission's role is to monitor compliance with an agreement between Georgia and Russia, and to ensure the safety of the immediate border areas. Although the EU was not able to bring a political resolution to the conflict, by recording incidents of border violence, the EUMM provides a type of 'insurance policy' against the further escalation of violence.⁵⁹ The data collected by the EUMM is used in the GID meetings, as well as those of the IPRM. The IPRM is a local dialogue mechanism that meets four times a year and brings together national and local government representatives from South Ossetia, Georgia and Russia, and Abkhazia, Georgia and Russia respectively to address practical challenges in managing the border.

⁵⁴ Ellis-Petersen, H., Hassan, A. and Baloch, S. M. (2024), 'Indian government ordered killings in Pakistan, intelligence officials claim', *Guardian*, 4 April 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/apr/04/indian-government-assassination-allegations-pakistan-intelligence-officials>.

⁵⁵ Mollan, C. (2024), 'India and Pakistan trade barbs over targeted killings', BBC News, 8 April 2024, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-68758637>.

⁵⁶ Kathju (2024), 'Cross-border terrorism still a barrier to India-Pakistan formal dialogue'.

⁵⁷ Krishnan, M. (2024), 'Will anti-Pakistan rhetoric influence India's elections?', Deutsche Welle, 22 May 2024, <https://www.dw.com/en/will-anti-pakistan-rhetoric-influence-indias-elections/a-69148750>.

⁵⁸ Simmons, B. A. (2002), 'Capacity, Commitment, and Compliance: International Institutions and Territorial Disputes', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 46(6), p. 834 and p. 846, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002200202237931>.

⁵⁹ Interview, 11 September 2024.

The IPRM is co-chaired by the EUMM and the OSCE. Its meetings have helped to ease some of the impact of territorial conflict and increasing borderization on the local community. The EUMM itself cites an example of an agreement to clear cross-border irrigation canals to benefit agriculture in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.⁶⁰

There is evidence that suggests that maintaining any kind of dialogue function in a conflict is beneficial in avoiding or managing further escalation. However, without an overall target of ending the conflict, the IPRM is vulnerable to disruption. Since its inception in 2009, the IPRM has been suspended numerous times due to breakdowns in the relationship between the involved parties, often over localized disagreements.

This example shows the limits encountered by the EU and OSCE in helping to manage the border conflict. The presence of Russia as a party to the conflict, meanwhile, serves to block both the consistent functioning of the IPRM and any hope of finding a longer-term solution.⁶¹ Moscow benefits from the ability to use the conflict to provoke instability in Tbilisi.⁶² As a result, the local populations continue to bear the brunt of the impact of the conflict, with limited means of resolving it.

Cooperation between local and national authorities on both sides of the border

Efforts to encourage and foster cooperation can serve as an important conflict prevention function that stabilizes borders in the longer run.

One example of such a project is the provision of free specialist healthcare (such as cancer treatments) in Georgian clinics for Abkhaz and South Ossetian residents, began in 2010.⁶³ The government of the Abkhaz Autonomous Republic covers the costs of diagnostics, and patients are then referred to either a local or a Georgian clinic depending on their needs. All costs for treatments are covered by the Georgian health ministry, while charitable foundations can provide additional financial assistance for travel and accommodation costs.

This scheme is widely seen as a successful confidence-building measure between Georgians and residents of the secessionist regions. Healthcare in the secessionist regions is poorer in quality than that on offer in Georgia. Being able to get treatment in Georgia is therefore beneficial for population

⁶⁰ commonspace.eu (2016), 'First Georgian-Abkhaz IPRM for four years takes place in Gali', 28 May 2016, <https://www.commonspace.eu/first-georgian-abkhaz-iprm-four-years-takes-place-gali>; Civil.ge (2016), 'Fatal Shooting at Abkhaz Administrative Border', 20 May 2016, <https://old.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=29164>; European Union External Action Service (2019), 'Trust building measures by the EU Monitoring Mission Georgia: a success story', 7 October 2019, <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/trust-building-measures-eu-monitoring-mission-georgia-success-story>.

⁶¹ Interview, 18 September 2024; interview, 1 January 2025.

⁶² German, T. (2006), 'Abkhazia and South Ossetia: Collision of Georgian and Russian Interests', *Russie. Nei. Visions* (11), p. 8,

https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/migrated_files/documents/atoms/files/germananglais.pdf.

⁶³ Bakradze, N. (2022), 'Georgia's Health Diplomacy', Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 22 June 2022, <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/georgias-health-diplomacy>.

health. The feedback from the programme is also overwhelmingly positive: those involved in running it say that it provides Georgians, Abkhazians and South Ossetians with an opportunity to encounter each other away from the negative stereotypes circulating within each society. Patients seeking treatment are often nervous before their travels, expecting to be discriminated against, but they tend to be surprised by the kind treatment they receive.⁶⁴

Despite the project's practical success, concerns remain over its long-term sustainability and over how much it changes public attitudes.⁶⁵ Every year, thousands of people participate – but, overall, they account for a low percentage of the total Abkhazian population of around 245,000. The South Ossetian population is much smaller, at around 57,000, and the South Ossetian government is increasingly hesitant about letting South Ossetians travel freely for healthcare treatment, fearing population loss.⁶⁶ Uptake in South Ossetia has been made more difficult still by the 2019 closure of the Akhagori checkpoint on the South Ossetian–Georgian border, as patients need to take more circuitous routes. At the programme's start in 2010, proportionally similar numbers of patients from both territories took advantage of it. By 2022, this had changed, with Abkhazians accounting for a majority of its patients.⁶⁷

Establishment of safe transport and trade corridors

Safe transport and trade corridors contribute to easing the burden of a hardened border on local communities. For example, in the Georgia conflict, the EUMM has a role in ensuring safe access to border crossings and allowing civilians to cross the border whenever they need. The EUMM also set up hotlines for both borders to ensure that border personnel can coordinate with one another in emergency situations. The purpose of the hotline is to avoid unintended border escalations and to ensure that if someone needs to cross the border urgently, as in a medical emergency, that this is possible. The EUMM says that the hotlines are used 'daily' and provide contact even while the IPRM is suspended.⁶⁸

Cross-border trade in Georgia and the breakaway regions is also affected by the difficult and uncertain border situation. The predominant currency in Abkhazia and South Ossetia is the Russian rouble. As the rouble's value has fallen, informal trade between Georgia, South Ossetia and Abkhazia has increased, despite difficulties at the official level. Importing consumer goods from Georgia is cheaper than importing them from Russia, which means that informal trade routes are lucrative, even accounting for bribes paid to

⁶⁴ Parulava, D. (2020), 'Georgia's medical programme for Abkhazians and South Ossetians may be at risk', OC Media, 29 July 2020, <https://oc-media.org/georgias-medical-programme-for-abkhazians-and-south-ossetians-may-be-at-risk>.

⁶⁵ Interview, 18 September 2024.

⁶⁶ Interview, 27 August 2024.

⁶⁷ Bakradze (2022), 'Georgia's Health Diplomacy'.

⁶⁸ European Union External Action Service (2019), 'Trust building measures by the EU Monitoring Mission Georgia'.

border officials.⁶⁹ High-level discussions on trade corridors have been ongoing since 2017, with limited success. A major challenge is that Georgian law does not allow for official trade with the secessionist regions, in order both to sanction them and to avoid any *de facto* recognition of their independence.⁷⁰

This is one example of how the different parties' interests do not align. Georgia does not want to provide any *de facto* recognition of Abkhazia by extending its trade agreement with the EU to the region. A new trade corridor, connecting Georgia and Russia through South Ossetia, has regional support from Armenia and Türkiye, as their economies would also benefit. But talks between Georgia and Russia only ever seem to make any progress when routes avoiding South Ossetia are blocked due to landslides in the mountains.⁷¹ Georgians are unwilling to cede customs and passport duties to Russia, and Russia is unwilling to let Georgian officials control any part of the border. Despite the economic benefit that this transport route would bring, the competing interests and high levels of distrust in the region have made it difficult to progress.⁷²

When they are operating, the IPRM provides a relatively positive forum for resolving day-to-day logistical challenges of cross-border trade in agricultural goods, for example. But this has not led to an overall resolution.⁷³

Lessons learned in border management interventions

Border disputes are a major cause of conflict. Understanding why such disputes are so difficult to manage, resolve and ultimately prevent is one of the keys to successful conflict prevention. Instead of seeking to harden borders, a more holistic approach – one that incorporates resource management, community dialogue and cooperative security frameworks – would have a greater impact.

Many of the most intractable aspects of a conflict are related to borders. Borders are also used by parties in a conflict to advance their interests. Volatile borders offer opportunities for state and non-state groups or parties to launch attacks and further destabilize a situation. Opportunistic groups will take advantage of existing border problems for their own gain. Such groups, although not necessarily conflict parties, can also exacerbate a conflict and worsen the impacts for the population living along the border. As the situation in Georgia and the secessionist regions shows, borderization can be used to perpetuate conflict, as the measures entailed can easily be sold with a narrative of domestic protection. A significant barrier to

⁶⁹ International Crisis Group (2018), *Abkhazia and South Ossetia: Time to Talk Trade*, report, Brussels: International Crisis Group, p. 8, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/caucasus/georgia/249-abkhazia-and-south-ossetia-time-talk-trade>.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 4.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 14.

⁷² de Waal, T. (2021), 'In the South Caucasus, Can New Trade Routes Help Overcome a History of Conflict?', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 8 November 2021, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2021/11/in-the-south-caucasus-can-new-trade-routes-help-overcome-a-history-of-conflict?lang=en>.

⁷³ Interview no. 3, 1 January 2025.

resolving a conflict is around enduring public narratives of who has which claims over a certain territory, and who owes whom.

Dialogue mechanisms to discuss border issues – such as those deployed in the Georgia conflict – can help to stabilize tensions and resolve day-to-day challenges. These platforms are important for reducing levels of violence and minimizing impacts on the population in border areas. But there are limits to what they can achieve while the underlying causes of conflict remain unresolved.

International involvement can also help with keeping border tensions low. However, non-compliance with international mandates is a recurring problem. The EUMM has a mandate for the entire internationally recognized Georgian territory, but it cannot go beyond the border line because Russia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia deny it access to Abkhazian- and South Ossetian-controlled territory. This situation is difficult for an international organization to manage – too much pressure on, or pushback from, Russia could risk escalation, but working within the limitations on the ground reduces the EUMM's influence and prevents it from fulfilling its mission.

Intervention 3: Resource-sharing and economic cooperation

In the 1990s, literature on conflict prevention began to advance the notion that increasing economic and resource interdependence could act as a deterrent to conflict. In this view, trade relations, mutual interests and shared resource needs between relevant parties would make them averse to pursuing any conflict that could threaten their economic stability or risk their access to vital resources.⁷⁴ This association of resource and economic interdependence with conflict prevention reflects the recognition that economic and business actors are increasingly important stakeholders in many conflicts.⁷⁵

(In this paper, resource-sharing and economic cooperation refers to facilitating cooperation in the resource and economic sectors among all relevant stakeholders, including, but not limited to: national and local governments; financial institutions; investors and private companies; intergovernmental bodies; and treaty organizations. Such cooperation aims to secure mutual benefits, and to ensure robust governance and accountability.)

In theory, this type of cooperation has two benefits. First, encouraging competing actors to agree on how to share and steward resources can

⁷⁴ Lund, M. S. (2009), 'Conflict Prevention: Theory in Pursuit of Policy and Practice', in Bercovitch, J., Kremeneyuk, V. and Zartman, I., (2009), *The SAGE Handbook of Conflict Resolution*, London: SAGE Publications, pp. 287–321, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9780857024701.n16>.

⁷⁵ Braddon, D. (2012), 'The Role of Economic Interdependence in the Origins and Resolution of Conflict', *Revue d'économie politique*, 122(2), pp. 299–319, <https://doi.org/10.3917/redp.218.0299>.

reduce tensions by clarifying entitlements, limiting uncertainty and encouraging joint responsibility. On the economic side, increasing trade relationships between competing parties can foster a culture of cooperation, making them united in addressing any challenges that could threaten their economic ties.⁷⁶ Furthermore, good resource management and trade are both needed for economic development, the generation of jobs and the securing of livelihoods. Second, such cooperation will make stakeholders increasingly averse to any conflict that would jeopardize these beneficial processes and threaten their access to resources and/or economic stability. Economic and resource cooperation helps foster the growth of mutual trust, confidence-building and effective communication between competing groups, which could carry over to other, more sensitive aspects of a conflict.⁷⁷

Where a conflict is directly related to resource or economic issues, structural prevention that focuses on addressing existing inequalities can help to tackle root causes of conflict.⁷⁸ Such interventions usually require sustained communication and negotiation, and the development of long-term policies and agreements on issues such as resource-sharing and monitoring, trade and investment and finance. This type of intervention is suited to lower-intensity phases of conflict, as it involves capacity-building, knowledge development and promoting joint agendas, which are difficult to achieve during periods of intense violence.⁷⁹

Possibilities often exist for resource-sharing and economic cooperation on both national and regional levels. However, resources can become a source of contention where there are power imbalances and a lack of safeguards. This may result in the ‘resource curse’, which describes situations where resource-rich countries are unable to benefit from their natural resources due to economic overdependence on the exploitation of those resources, weak institutions and insufficient infrastructure investment. This dynamic can also fuel conflict.⁸⁰ Governments can reach resource-sharing agreements with other states to decrease hostilities at the regional level. Yet, internal conflict becomes more likely if elites are internally using national resource wealth to enrich their own patronage networks, perpetuate inequality and maintain the status quo.

Oil-, gas- and mineral-rich countries with authoritarian governance structures are liable to fall victim to the resource curse, due to the presence of weak state institutions, insufficient spending on public goods and the existence of rent-seeking elites. Thus, interventions by external actors often

⁷⁶ Pathak, A. and Baibourtian, A. (2024), ‘The Economics of Peace: Exploring the Interplay between Economic Stability, Conflict Resolution and Global Prosperity’, UN Chronicle, 24 June 2024, <https://www.un.org/en/un-chronicle/economics-of-peace-interplay-between-stability-conflict-resolution-global-prosperity>.

⁷⁷ Igarapé Institute (2018), ‘A Typology of Conflict Prevention Approaches’, in Igarapé Institute (2018), *The Handbook of Conflict Prevention*, <https://igarape.org.br/en/the-handbook-of-conflict-prevention>.

⁷⁸ Igarapé Institute (2018), ‘A Typology of Conflict Prevention Approaches’, pp. 21–28.

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 26–29.

⁸⁰ Natural Resource Governance Institute (2015), *The Resource Curse: The Political and Economic Challenges of Natural Resource Wealth*, NRG Reader, March 2015, https://resourcegovernance.org/sites/default/files/nrgi_Resource-Curse.pdf.

fail to overcome entrenched practices.⁸¹ The resource curse is an important aspect of understanding how resource-sharing might be successful in one situation but fail at another. Sound governance – including transparency, fair distribution of profits and accountability – are integral to ensuring that resource wealth contributes broadly to public well-being and stability, and that such wealth does not instead become a cause of conflict.

However, resource-sensitive interventions can be successful at the national level, particularly when aimed at strengthening the socio-economic resilience of groups reliant on these resources.⁸² This can be achieved by supporting collective action, empowering local stakeholders and developing forums wherein these stakeholders can exercise their autonomy and engage in mutual monitoring.⁸³ To achieve this, development agencies and conflict prevention actors should include financing or technical assistance for capacity-building in their conflict prevention frameworks, ensuring that inequalities in resource access are addressed and that resource tenure is clarified.⁸⁴ At the regional level, interventions have mostly been related to diplomacy over water access, involving the development of frameworks to manage shared water resources and resolve water-related disputes, through bilateral or multilateral treaties.⁸⁵

Proponents of interventions centred on economic cooperation believe that interdependence lowers the likelihood of war, as countries would rather trade than fight – especially if they perceive that such trade would continue at high levels in the future.⁸⁶ However, this is not necessarily borne out in the real world. For example, Russia's invasions of Georgia and Ukraine have been followed by threats against other European countries, despite decades of developing closer economic ties to most of the leading economies in Europe. Economic cooperation is only successful therefore if both parties are confident that the other will not threaten their economic security. When suspicion creeps in, most highly dependent countries seek confrontation for fear that they will be threatened.⁸⁷

The success of economic intervention is also closely linked to the effectiveness of confidence-building measures. International actors who rush towards an economic cooperation intervention might achieve more by establishing the foundation for bringing conflicting parties together and investing in confidence-building. In association with the UN, trade relations as a deterrent for conflict go beyond economic exchanges and promote 'a culture of cooperation in addressing shared challenges'.⁸⁸

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ratner, B. D. et al. (2017), 'Addressing conflict through collective action in natural resource management', *International Journal of the Commons*, 11(2), <https://doi.org/10.18352/ijc.768>.

⁸³ Ratner et al. (2017), 'Addressing conflict through collective action in natural resource management'

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ United States Institute of Peace (2020), 'Water Conflict Pathways and Peacebuilding Strategies', <https://www.usip.org/publications/2020/08/water-conflict-pathways-and-peacebuilding-strategies>.

⁸⁶ Copeland, D. C. (1996), 'Economic Interdependence and War: A Theory of Trade Expectations', *International Security*, 20(4), pp. 5–41, <https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.20.4.5>.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Pathak and Baibourtian (2024), 'The Economics of Peace'.

Although resource-sharing and economic cooperation can provide a pathway for conflict resolution and de-escalation, they also pose a major risk for increasing conflict if not handled properly. Resource-based and economic cooperation between conflicting groups or states often requires the participation of third-party mediators, investors or stakeholders who have the trust of each party.⁸⁹ Organizations and experts working on conflict-prevention efforts need to consider the environment, natural resource and economic dynamics of countries, as these factors are pivotal for any level of intervention. The risks of unintentionally aggravating already existing resource-based and economic issues are too large to be overlooked.⁹⁰ Mediators need to understand the natural resource and economic dynamics of the countries involved, aligning conflict solutions with existing national efforts to improve resource-sharing and to consider the economic needs of all relevant parties.

Resource-sharing and economic cooperation in practice: Lessons from the case studies

Water management in the conflict between India and Pakistan

In this conflict, the most significant success related to resource-sharing and economic cooperation has been the Indus Water Treaty (IWT). As a result of partition in 1947, the borders of India and Pakistan fell along the Indus watershed line. India gained control of the upstream river, which regulated water flow into Pakistan.⁹¹ This created upstream–downstream power structures that led to tensions and created conflict around dam projects in Indian-administered territory. Former World Bank president Eugene Black spearheaded years of negotiation to ensure equitable water usage, leading to the IWT.⁹² The treaty was signed in 1960, and gave India control over three eastern rivers, and Pakistan control over three western rivers. Despite the treaty, Pakistan remains the more vulnerable party, as it relies almost exclusively on Indus water for its agricultural and economic security.

Within the conflict prevention field, the IWT is regarded as one of the most successful water-sharing treaties and is celebrated particularly for its built-in resolution mechanism. The mechanism requires that disputes must firstly be approached through an annual meeting between the Permanent Indus Commissioners of both countries. Disputes can then be considered by a World Bank-appointed neutral expert. If this element also fails, arbitration can be created to consider the matter. In 2007, Pakistan raised objections

⁸⁹ UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (2022), *The Implications of Climate Change for Mediation and Peace Processes*, practice note, <https://peacemaker.un.org/en/documents/implications-climate-change-mediation-and-peace-processes>.

⁹⁰ Matthew, R., Brown, O. and Jensen, D. (2009), *From conflict to peacebuilding: the role of natural resources and the environment*, policy paper, Nairobi: United Nations Environment Programme, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/649896?v=pdf>

⁹¹ Climate Diplomacy (undated), 'Water conflict and cooperation between India and Pakistan', case study, <https://climate-diplomacy.org/case-studies/water-conflict-and-cooperation-between-india-and-pakistan> (accessed 11 Feb. 2025).

⁹² World Bank (2018), 'Fact Sheet: The Indus Waters Treaty 1960 and the Role of the World Bank', 10 June 2018, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/sar/brief/fact-sheet-the-indus-waters-treaty-1960-and-the-world-bank>.

over India's hydroelectric projects. In 2009, it took two legal issues to the Permanent Court of Arbitration.⁹³ The court was successful in resolving these issues, as well as another smaller issue raised in 2014 concerning safety margins in a specific dam project, which are crucial to prevent surges and mitigate flood risks. Up until 2016, there was no major disagreement between the two parties.

However, plans for hydroelectric projects in India caused Pakistan to complain that these might contravene the IWT.⁹⁴ Both parties requested different processes to resolve the matter: Pakistan unilaterally requested a Court of Arbitration, while India asked for the appointment of a neutral expert.⁹⁵ The World Bank initially declared a pause in the processes to allow the countries to 'consider alternative ways to resolve their disagreements', and after no improvement, resumed the processes in 2022.⁹⁶ India strongly rejected the continuation of dual processes, emphasizing that the neutral expert is specified as the first arbitration step in the IWT, while Pakistan argued that the 'points of difference are outside the competence of the neutral expert'.⁹⁷ Agreeing with India's interpretation of the treaty, the World Bank neutral expert confirmed his jurisdiction and competence to address the issues, and the resolution process has since continued.⁹⁸

India has pushed for a renegotiation of the IWT and declared that no more yearly meetings between the Permanent Indus Commissioners will be held until the treaty is renegotiated.⁹⁹ Despite Pakistan's concerns over the building of hydroelectric power dams, it has not advanced any efforts to change the treaty, and has not responded to the Indian government's request for revision.¹⁰⁰ Interviewees for this paper discussed the treaty as a likely future flashpoint for conflict, as both parties to the treaty seek to secure leverage over a key resource. However, some interviewees emphasized that the fact that India and Pakistan still seek resolution to disputes within the boundaries of the IWT – opting to renegotiate it rather than abandoning it entirely – indicates a willingness on both sides to resolve disagreements peacefully.¹⁰¹

The IWT is currently the only collaborative approach to resource, climate and economic tensions between India and Pakistan. The Indian

⁹³ Saxena, P. K. (2025), 'Indus Waters Dispute: India's Strategic Victory in Neutral Expert Proceedings', Centre for Research on Strategic and Security Issues, 28 January 2025, <https://www.natstrat.org/articledetail/publications/indus-waters-dispute-india-s-strategic-victory-in-neutral-expert-proceedings-179.html>.

⁹⁴ World Bank (2018), 'Fact Sheet'.

⁹⁵ World Bank (2022), 'World Bank Resumes Processes Under the Indus Waters Treaty', press release, 6 April 2022, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/04/06/world-bank-resumes-processes-under-indus-waters-treaty>.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Saxena (2025), 'Indus Waters Dispute'.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Haidar, S. and Koshy, J. (2024), 'Indus Water Treaty: No more Indus Commission meetings till Treaty renegotiated, India tells Pakistan', *The Hindu*, 18 September 2024, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-serves-notice-to-pakistan-seeking-review-of-indus-water-treaty/article68655577.ece>.

¹⁰⁰ Hussain, A. (2024), 'Is the Indus Waters Treaty the latest India-Pakistan flashpoint?', *Al Jazeera*, 22 September 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/9/22/is-the-indus-waters-treaty-the-latest-india-pakistan-flashpoint>.

¹⁰¹ Interview, 27 November 2024.

subcontinent is prone to climate shocks including heavy rainfall, intense heat waves and droughts, which will increase in frequency and severity in the future. Environmental catastrophes often force India and Pakistan to focus inwards to deal with the effects, rather than seek out avenues for collaboration. The cross-border nature of these catastrophes, and the shared challenges that result, could be an opportunity for collaboration.¹⁰² India and Pakistan present similar concerns in forums such as the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP) and the UN General Assembly, but they do not tend to cooperate in these forums.¹⁰³ Pollution is another a common concern on both sides of the border.¹⁰⁴ An initiative to facilitate cooperation on reducing pollution could be another route for building confidence that can lead to progress on other issues.

Resource-sharing in arid and semi-arid regions of Kenya

Resource-sharing is a critical focus of conflict prevention in Kenya, particularly in arid and semi-arid regions. Interventions such as resource-sharing agreements and the construction of water pans have successfully reduced tensions in some areas, including Mandera and Tana River. As one interviewee noted, ‘shared resources create spaces for interaction and trust-building between communities, which is essential for long-term peace’. The physical convergence of groups at water pans, for example, serves to build familiarity and trust between people, several interviewees noted: ‘A water project can foster peace if intentionally designed’.

Climate change has exacerbated resource-based conflicts in Kenya, particularly among pastoral communities. Prolonged droughts force such communities to migrate in search of water and grazing land, leading to disputes with other groups. In these circumstances, interventions that integrate climate adaptation with peacebuilding have shown promise. Successful measures have included the mapping of conflict hotspots, investment in shared resources, and the introduction of climate-responsive policies like rainwater-harvesting and grazing-area management schemes. However, many of these measures require greater investment and better coordination to maximize their impact. ‘Interventions must address the root causes of conflict, such as the lack of infrastructure and equitable resource distribution’, one respondent said.

Moreover, climate-related shocks – such as prolonged droughts and floods – can intensify these conflicts and highlight the importance of livelihood diversification to prevent further conflict. Interviewees advocated for projects that shift people away from dependence on pastoralism to activities like irrigation-based farming. Such interventions not only reduce competition for scarce resources, but create economic opportunities and promote long-term stability.

The example of Kenya shows that resource-sharing interventions must evolve to account for the complex interplay of climate change, migration

¹⁰² Interview, 4 December 2024.

¹⁰³ Interview, 4 December 2024.

¹⁰⁴ Interview, 6 December 2024.

patterns and sociopolitical dynamics. As resources become scarcer, innovative and collaborative strategies will be essential to foster resilience and stability across Kenya's most vulnerable regions.

Energy cooperation between Georgia and Abkhazia

Georgia and Abkhazia jointly operate one of the world's largest hydroelectric power plants connected to the Enguri dam, a joint energy system dates back to the Soviet period.¹⁰⁵ The reservoir and part of the diversion tunnel are on the Georgian side of the border, while the power plant, some overflow basins and the remainder of the diversion tunnel are on the Abkhazian side. Abkhazians and Georgians work together in the power plant, and its power output is shared. Around 40 per cent of the power generated annually goes to Abkhazia and 60 per cent to Georgia. But the flows fluctuate seasonally: in the winter, almost 90 per cent of the energy generated in the plant goes to Abkhazia, whereas in the summer the majority goes to Georgia. The agreement on which this scheme is based dates to 1996, just after the start of the initial violent conflict between Georgia and Abkhazia that followed the break-up of the Soviet Union.

The success of the cooperation is based partly on the strength of the joint community that has emerged among the technical staff at the power plant.¹⁰⁶ An annual meeting at the start of winter brings together high-level representatives from both energy sectors at the plant to discuss questions around electricity production and consumption, as well as any technical or maintenance challenges. Employees consider this to be the only 'tricky' meeting in comparison to the smooth day-to-day operations, suggesting that daily operations at the plant have been sheltered from the overarching conflict, and that the introduction of politics through the participation of more senior representatives from the respective capitals complicates the relationship.¹⁰⁷

But the geography of the power plant also plays a large part in ensuring the smooth running of the plant. The location of the dam and the power plant mean that while Abkhazia could disconnect the power cables running to Georgia and maintain its own power supply, Georgia could cut off the flow of water from the dam and interrupt the entire power generation process. This mutual dependence makes it less likely that either party would disrupt the status quo.¹⁰⁸

Growing energy consumption on both sides of the border means that Georgia is trying to diversify its own energy production to rely less on the Enguri power plant. Reducing reliance on the plant would allow Georgia to

¹⁰⁵ Relitz, S. and Palonkorpi, M. (2010), 'Regional cooperation as an Instrument for Peace Building and Reconciliation – Best Practice and Lessons from Europe', Heinrich Böll Stiftung: Tbilisi - South Caucasus Region, 14 October 2010, <https://ge.boell.org/en/2010/10/15/regional-cooperation-instrument-peace-building-and-reconciliation-best-practice-and>.

¹⁰⁶ Nikoladze, T. (2023), "'Georgians and Abkhazians work well together when they both need it' - Inguri HPP director, VIDEO', Jamnews in English, 29 October 2023, <https://jam-news.net/how-georgians-and-abkhazians-work-together-at-inguri-hpp>.

¹⁰⁷ Interview, 1 January 2025.

¹⁰⁸ Nikoladze (2023), "'Georgians and Abkhazians work well together when they both need it' - Inguri HPP director, VIDEO'.

offer Abkhazia more of the energy produced there, thereby reducing Russia's control over Abkhazia, as Russia would no longer make up for any energy shortfalls in that territory.¹⁰⁹ While this plan could increase tensions between Georgia and Russia, it has the potential to improve relations between Georgia and Abkhazia.

Lessons learned in resource-sharing interventions

All three cases indicate notable success in resource-sharing agreements. This is in part because resource-sharing provides an opportunity for collaboration, which can build trust in the longer term. Conflict over resources is costly and disruptive to both economies and individual livelihoods. In the India–Pakistan case, we can also see the importance of integrating conflict-prevention mechanisms into cooperation agreements. The efforts of both parties to seek out resolution processes indicate a willingness to avoid conflict, and highlight something that did not appear in the literature: agreements, regardless of their initial success, require effort to remain relevant and effective as relationships and outside factors change.

In Kenya, the introduction of climate-responsive measures, which were championed by local authorities with funding from external governments such as the US and the UK, and other international institutions including the World Bank, was particularly innovative in ensuring that resource-sharing agreements considered how to enhance sustainability. Meanwhile, Georgia and Abkhazia have relied entirely on informal cooperation based on verbal agreement among their power plant staff. While this approach has worked there without disputes, it is unlikely to provide a model for future conflict resolution elsewhere. The trust among this practitioner group had been built up through their previous joint-working relationship. This supports the theory that resource-sharing agreements often require a foundation of trust to be effective. The Georgia and Abkhazia case provides an interesting conclusion that resource-sharing can be more effective when both parties are as vulnerable as each other, which happens less in water-sharing agreements such as the IWT between India and Pakistan, due to dynamics that inherently mean that the upstream party holds power over those downstream.

As competition for resources is increasing, conflict prevention actors must focus on building agreements that can stand the test of time. The case studies highlight that resource-sharing agreements require significant mediation to take shape. They tend to be more successful with the support and championing of external actors, whether they are foreign governments or international organizations. This means that, moving forward, resource-sharing agreements may also depend on the willingness of good-faith conflict prevention actors to become involved. In contrast, the involvement of actors that might use such conflicts to exploit tensions, achieve their own

¹⁰⁹ Hydro Review Content Directors (2017), 'The Future of Hydropower in the Country of Georgia', Factor This, 1 September 2017, <https://www.renewableenergyworld.com/hydro-power/the-future-of-hydropower-in-the-country-of-georgia>.

interests and engage in extractive practices poses risks to peace and stability.

Intervention 4: Multi-stakeholder processes

Conflict prevention is rarely a singular or bilateral effort. It often requires the input and involvement of a wide range of actors, stakeholders and agencies. Multi-stakeholder dialogues convene various stakeholder groups to seek solutions to conflict.¹¹⁰ In this paper, this intervention type is considered at a range of levels, from international to local. Multi-stakeholder processes differ from mediation in that they tend to pursue broader goals. They provide a formal or informal dialogue process that can help wider cooperation, communication and community-building among diverse stakeholders on critical issues.

Multi-stakeholder processes can also vary in duration and purpose. Some interventions might be a continuous fluid process to build confidence and create communication channels, while others might be more time-bound and have specific goals. The success of multi-stakeholder approaches in the context of conflict prevention is rooted in the idea that inclusive exchange creates an environment for mediation, resolution and cooperation. Inclusive conflict prevention interventions born out of multi-stakeholder processes often hold great promise for the longevity and success of these efforts. By involving a wide variety of actors, conditions that threaten stability and risk more conflict can be identified and addressed faster.

At the global level, international organizations, bodies and forums often play a large role in organizing or chairing multi-stakeholder dialogues. The UN has facilitated a range of multi-stakeholder collaboration on conflict. The 1992 agenda released by Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali highlighted four principles that informed the UN's approach to conflict prevention: preventive diplomacy; peace-making; peacekeeping; and post-conflict peacebuilding.¹¹¹ While the role of the UN in conflict prevention is undeniable and important, it was not a significant actor in the conflict prevention interventions analysed for the case studies in this paper, and is therefore only mentioned here briefly for completeness.

At the regional level, multi-stakeholder interventions usually take the form of cooperation between regional and subregional organizations with an interest in promoting peace, preventing war or maintaining stability.¹¹² These organizations tend to be willing to intervene because the states they represent are at risk from conflict spillover. Some of the regional bodies that

¹¹⁰ Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (2017), *Multi-Stakeholder Processes for Conflict Prevention & Peacebuilding: A Manual*, 1 November 2017, <https://gppac.net/resources/multi-stakeholder-processes-conflict-prevention-peacebuilding-manual>.

¹¹² Wulf, H. (2009), 'The Role of Regional Organisations in Conflict Prevention and Resolution', 14 September 2009, <https://gsdrc.org/document-library/the-role-of-regional-organisations-in-conflict-prevention-and-resolution>.

often work closely with the UN, and include conflict prevention pillars, are the African Peace and Security Architecture, the EU and NATO. Furthermore, many countries within a regional body cooperate on economic, political and resource issues, making them naturally interested in the outcome of conflict in their neighbouring countries.¹¹³ Some conflict prevention experts consider regional approaches to be most effective, as they give regional actors agency to resolve conflicts.¹¹⁴ Regional bodies can incentivize parties in a conflict to bring an end to hostilities or can bring them together in a neutral environment to cooperate on less politically charged issues that could ideally develop confidence-building measures. They might be particularly incentivized to do this by their own geographic location, or they might bring a particular cultural understanding to a conflict that outsiders may lack.

However, the literature highlights several difficulties that might impede an international or regional body's ability to respond effectively to conflicts. The two largest barriers are lack of capacity and the rise of regional powers with conflicting interests.¹¹⁵ In addition, regional or international organizations can be considered by some states as a threat to their centrality or sovereignty.¹¹⁶ Their involvement also requires a high level of trust that might not be there between parties with long histories of ethnic, territorial or ideological conflict.

Nationally, multi-stakeholder processes for conflict prevention often refer to bringing together state institutions, local bodies, civil society actors and grassroots groups to discuss conflict issues on a more localized level, and to develop agreements or initiatives to address those issues. These processes can bring together all relevant parties whose voices might otherwise be overshadowed in a larger, more bureaucratic conflict prevention intervention.¹¹⁷ Smaller forums can be used to address local causes and manifestations of conflict in a way that relates directly to the peace priorities of the communities involved.¹¹⁸ Interventions for local conflicts that do not incorporate a multi-stakeholder process risk imposing solutions that are ill-fitted or reinforce unequal and inequitable hierarchies. Conflict prevention actors can support these efforts without taking a leading role. By identifying minority stakeholders and advocating for an inclusive process, external conflict prevention actors can push for a context-specific and sustainable environment that can bring about more successful interventions.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Swanstrom, N. (2009), 'Regional Cooperation and Conflict Prevention', 5 October 2009, <https://gsdrc.org/document-library/regional-cooperation-and-conflict-prevention>.

¹¹⁵ Wulf (2009), 'The Role of Regional Organisations in Conflict Prevention and Resolution'.

¹¹⁶ Swanstrom (2009), 'Regional Cooperation and Conflict Prevention'.

¹¹⁷ Ahmad, N. et. al. (2021), *Local Peace Processes*, London: The British Academy,

<https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/conflict-stability-local-peace-processes>.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

Multi-stakeholder processes in practice: Lessons from the case studies

The failure of regional multilateral forums in the India–Pakistan conflict

Regional bodies could provide the most relevant multi-stakeholder approach for India and Pakistan, but the absence of a suitable regional framework in which this conflict could be discussed is a barrier to its resolution.¹¹⁹ The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), established in 1985, was previously the largest economic and political regional organization in which India and Pakistan were both member states and met regularly.¹²⁰ SAARC scheduled heads of state to meet at annual summits, but the last large summit scheduled for 2016 was cancelled after an attack on an Indian army camp in Kashmir. This demonstrates how border skirmishes, terrorist attacks and other violence beyond either side's control have thwarted communication efforts. Since then, SAARC has been relegated to informal annual meetings of foreign ministers.¹²¹ The forum cannot function in an environment of high tension, rendering it ineffective for conflict intervention.¹²²

Other regional organizations like the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation exclude Pakistan, and thus further limit opportunities for cooperation with India or other states.

Many interviewees for this paper highlighted a significant gap: without effective regional organizations to facilitate dialogue on non-politicized issues like climate change and trade, no neutral forum exists for India and Pakistan to build confidence and manage their engagement.

Some mentioned the growing influence of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), a regional cooperation forum dedicated to topics of mutual security and economic cooperation. As one of the only regional forums in which both India and Pakistan are member states, this forum could grow in influence and perhaps become a more attractive platform for dialogue. Despite this optimism, at the last SCO summit in May 2023, the foreign ministers of India and Pakistan clashed over Kashmir, which is an indication that regional bodies might still be slow to develop confidence-building mechanisms and effective bilateral communication, and as a result risk being caught up in conflicts between member states.¹²³

¹¹⁹ Interview, September 2024.

¹²⁰ European Union External Action Service (2021), 'South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)', 24 November 2021, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/south-asian-association-regional-cooperation-saarc_en.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Interview, September 2024.

¹²³ Centre for Preventative Action (2024), 'Conflict Between India and Pakistan | Global Conflict Tracker', updated 9 April 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/conflict-between-india-and-pakistan>.

Georgia: Local community engagement in Abkhazia

In Georgia, multi-stakeholder processes are primarily focused on building connections at the local level. This is because the OSCE, the EU and relevant governments such as Russia are already engaged in conflict-specific dialogue frameworks such as the Geneva International Discussion. Abkhazian society is characterized by a strong civil society structure. It has a small population that is connected through a strong network.¹²⁴ There are several informal education and dialogue initiatives and significant engagement between civil society and parliamentarians.¹²⁵

A good example of civil society engagement in Abkhazia is Conciliation Resources' ongoing local work. Conciliation Resources is an international non-governmental organization working to prevent conflict and has been working on a Georgian-Abkhaz civil society project since 1997, attempting to use local dialogue to find solutions for local issues that are feeding the conflict. Since 2013, this has included the development of a communal archive and an oral history project. This project includes younger people's voices to ensure they feel connected to their communities and are involved in any confidence-building measures.¹²⁶

According to interviewees, there has been much more progress on informal peacebuilding in the relationship between Georgia and Abkhazia than in that between Georgia and South Ossetia. Some programming has been sporadic, only bringing people together for one meeting. But because of the relatively small size of the community, even those meetings taken together have helped to build confidence. Informal dialogue has been consistent since the 1990s, and there is some evidence that this helped to contain some of the violence in 2008. The challenges come from the political level: the Georgian government tries to control what kind of engagement can happen, and as fundamental questions about Abkhazia's legal status have not been addressed, the conflict as such has not been resolved.¹²⁷

Comparatively there has been far less engagement with South Ossetian civil society. In part, this is because civil society has less of a presence in South Ossetia, which is far more dependent on Russia. The initial conflict between Abkhazia and Georgia in the early 1990s was also more intense than that between South Ossetia and Georgia, so early community peacebuilding programming was focused on the former.¹²⁸

Kenya: Gender-sensitive approaches and women's grassroots involvement

Local multi-stakeholder approaches have proven particularly effective in Kenya, as they provide a platform for integrating gender-sensitive frameworks advocated by local actors. These smaller-level stakeholder processes give greater voice and authority to the most marginalized groups,

¹²⁴ Interview no. 2, 1 January 2025.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Conciliation Resources (undated), 'The Georgian-Abkhaz conflict in focus', <https://www.c-r.org/programme/caucasus/georgian-abkhaz-conflict-focus>.

¹²⁷ Interview 2, 1 January 2025.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

who often bear the greatest burden of conflict. Gender inclusion is not merely an ethical imperative but a critical factor in enhancing the legitimacy and effectiveness of conflict prevention interventions, helping to foster an environment conducive to sustainable conflict prevention. One interviewee explained that ‘participation does not equal inclusion; strategies must account for the cultural and generational dynamics within women’s groups’. This underscores the need to move beyond token representation and create mechanisms that ensure active and meaningful participation for women and marginalized groups.

Historically, women’s contributions in conflict resolution have been significant, as seen in the Wajir women-led peace committees in Kenya in the 1990s.¹²⁹ However, their role remains peripheral in the current political context in Kenya, with limited active participation in higher-level mediation efforts and conflict prevention interventions due to existing power structures remaining in place. Reflecting the success of community-level programming, women are increasingly consulted at the grassroots level: one interviewee noted that ‘now, any meeting where a woman has not spoken is considered incomplete’. This highlights a cultural shift towards inclusivity. The cultural norms that previously excluded women from decision-making have shifted – with women now playing increasingly active roles in local-level mediations and community dialogues. One interviewee shared an example of women in Maasai communities collectively preventing their sons from engaging in conflict by threatening to walk naked in the streets if they went to fight.

Efforts to address gender-based violence (GBV) in Kenya have been partially integrated into broader peacebuilding initiatives, but significant gaps persist. While GBV prevention has been incorporated into early warning systems to identify risks at the community level, it is often underfunded and treated as a secondary priority. One key challenge is that GBV is frequently framed as a domestic issue rather than a broader cause of conflict, despite evidence that sexual violence is often weaponized in conflict settings, exacerbating cycles of revenge and undermining community stability. Multi-stakeholder dialogue has played an important role in challenging these narratives and ensuring that tackling GBV is recognized as integral to conflict prevention.

Persistent sidelining of GBV is rooted in a perception that it is distinct from broader conflict dynamics, and is instead often categorized as domestic violence, requiring separate tools. Such framing limits the capacity of peacebuilding approaches to address GBV effectively and ignores its potential to destabilize communities. A more effective approach would be to institutionalize GBV response mechanisms within multi-stakeholder frameworks, ensuring that peacebuilding actors (from local grassroots groups to international partners) recognize GBV as a destabilizing factor that requires coordinated intervention.

¹²⁹ Okure, A. (2009), ‘Women of Wajir’, Africa Faith and Justice Network, 26 August 2009, <https://afjn.org/women-of-wajir>.

Community input into policy development has also improved the effectiveness of interventions. For example, in Wajir county, the Peacebuilding and Conflict Management Bill involved extensive consultation with marginalized groups, including women and youth, which ensured that local priorities were reflected in the legislation.¹³⁰

Efforts to include gender-sensitive indicators in conflict monitoring have also shown promise in improving outcomes and ensuring that interventions are more responsive to community needs.¹³¹ For example, integrating gender-sensitive data into early warning systems has helped target resources and support for women and girls affected by conflict, strengthening the overall effectiveness of peacebuilding initiatives.

An important dimension of gender-related success in conflict prevention lies in addressing intergenerational gaps, enabling women from all backgrounds to contribute meaningfully to conflict prevention. Interviewees highlighted variations in women's participation between younger and older generations, emphasizing the need for tailored strategies. Younger women are increasingly using digital platforms and technology to mobilize for peacebuilding, while older generations bring invaluable experience and traditional leadership roles to the table. For example, the Wajir Women Council has been instrumental in ensuring that women's perspectives are embedded in local governance and conflict resolution processes, providing a platform that bridges generational divides and strengthens women's influence in decision-making.¹³²

Lessons learned in multi-stakeholder dialogues

In conflicts where diverse groups of actors have stakes in the resolution process, multi-stakeholder interventions can increase local ownership, legitimacy and responsiveness, thus enhancing the overall prospects for sustainable peace. Other process levels, such as regional organizations, can be successful in integrating clear communication channels, building trust over time, and coordinating various stakeholder efforts. Where there are political rivalries, institutional barriers and ongoing conflict – as with India and Pakistan – these can seriously jeopardize the working of regional dialogue mechanisms, to the extent that other regional actors are affected.

The case study research bears out the high success rates from inclusive multi-stakeholder dialogues indicated in the literature. However, as these dialogues become wider and broader, it becomes much more difficult to coordinate agreement and action, particularly in a highly politicized environment. Local-level stakeholders who are invested in the conflict have a natural incentive to reach a consensus. However, dialogues that bring

¹³⁰ UN Peacebuilding Fund (2024), *PBF June 2024 Project Progress Report*.

¹³¹ Allen, L. and Chirillo, G. (2021), *Gender-Sensitive Indicators for Early Warning of Violence and Conflict*, report, Arlington, VA: International Foundation for Electoral Systems, https://www.cepps.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/ifes_gender-sensitive_indicators_for_early_warning_of_violence_and_conflict_a_global_framework_may_2021.pdf.

¹³² REINVENT (undated), 'Going Against the Grain: Wajir Women Council of Elders', <https://reinvent-kenya.com/wajir-women-council>.

together actors with political incentives to continue a conflict or hold power over others involved, can fail because the participants in the process or dialogue are misaligned.

The inclusion of marginalized groups – specifically women – can offer greater success when trying to resolve local conflicts, as the case of Kenya shows. However, women are not widely included at higher political levels, indicating that less importance is placed by higher-level political actors on involving local voices.

Intervention 5: Governance and institutional reforms

Governance and institutional reforms are central to structural conflict prevention. However, institutional change is long term, so these reforms are often slow and face significant challenges, including resistance from entrenched elites and limited capacity.

States that are more peaceful tend to be those where decision-making is participatory, where corruption and bribery are low, and where citizens have equitable access to justice, security, livelihoods and resources.

Achieving these conditions requires long-term political and social bargaining between elites and broader society. Essentially, good governance aims to ensure that peace lasts by addressing root causes of tension.¹³³

Institution-building remains a key aspect of governance reforms for conflict prevention, but the effectiveness of institutions depends on whether they genuinely enhance public trust and deliver services equitably. Institutions that are perceived as fair and responsive help to mediate social grievances and manage disputes peacefully. Institutions that lack capacity, independence or legitimacy can exacerbate conflict.¹³⁴ Thus, conflict prevention efforts must prioritize governance structures that empower citizens, provide meaningful political participation and uphold the rule of law.

Decentralization is a governance-related intervention that can foster conflict prevention, especially in diverse or divided societies. By devolving power and resources to local levels, decentralization can empower communities, increase political participation and improve accountability by bringing governance closer to the people, making local governments more directly answerable to their constituents.¹³⁵ This localized approach is effective in reducing tensions that stem from perceptions of exclusion or neglect by

¹³³ Saito, Y. (2021), 'Is good governance a necessary precursor to peace?', blog post, UNDP, 15 January 2021, <https://www.undp.org/blog/good-governance-necessary-precursor-peace>.

¹³⁴ Mercy Corps (2019), *Good Governance: Preventing Conflict and Building Peace*, research brief, Portland, OR: Mercy Corps, <https://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/good-governance-preventing-conflict-and-building-peace>.

¹³⁵ Schrottshammer, E. and Kievelitz, U. (2006), 'Decentralisation and Conflicts: A Guideline', Eschborn: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit, <https://d-nb.info/983600694>.

central authorities. However, decentralization must be carefully managed to avoid exacerbating local power struggles or corruption.

Corruption is a significant barrier to conflict prevention. It is both a symptom of poor governance and a cause of inequality. It undermines trust in institutions, diverts resources away from critical services and entrenches power in the hands of elites. Corruption arises when weak institutions lack effective checks and balances, enabling inequitable practices that exacerbate societal divisions and increase the likelihood of instability.

Linking governance reforms to peacebuilding efforts is crucial to tackle systemic issues that cause instability. When communities perceive unfair distribution of resources or unequal access to services, they may turn to scapegoating or incitement, further inflaming tensions. To counter this, capacity-building is needed to empower citizens to hold their leaders accountable, understand government operations and engage in resource governance.

Governance and institutional reforms in practice: Lessons from the case studies

Kenya: Decentralization, security sector reform and addressing corruption

The KNDR process focused on implementing structural and governance reforms as a pathway to restoring peace in the aftermath of the 2008 post-election violence. The 2010 constitution introduced significant reforms, including decentralization, judicial independence and changes to the electoral system. Decentralization gave county governments greater control over local resources and decision-making, addressing long-standing grievances about the concentration of power.¹³⁶

Kenya's reforms extended to the security sector, although these elements yielded mixed outcomes in terms of conflict prevention. For example, a training manual was developed to establish a standard operating procedure for how police should engage the public during elections.¹³⁷ This significantly improved coordination between security forces and civil society and was widely credited with contributing to the peaceful elections in 2022.

However, systemic mistrust between security forces and communities continues. This mutual lack of confidence creates challenges in information-sharing, which is essential for effective conflict prevention and resolution. 'Without information sharing', a participant noted, 'nothing much can be achieved'. The mistrust is rooted in historical grievances and perpetuated by

¹³⁶ United Nations in Kenya (2021), 'Participatory and Accountable Governance Is Crucial for Prevention and Management of Violent Conflicts', 18 February 2021, <https://kenya.un.org/en/125251-participatory-and-accountable-governance-crucial-prevention-and-management-violent-conflicts>.

¹³⁷ Kenya National Police Service (2022), *Elections Security Management Manual for Police Commanders*, January 2022, <https://www.nationalpolice.go.ke/sites/default/files/2024-08/ELECTIONS%20SECURITY%20MANAGEMENT%20MANUAL%2020012022.pdf>.

ongoing incidents of perceived heavy-handedness by security forces and a lack of transparency in their operations.

Other efforts to foster trust have included training programmes developed in partnership with the International Peace Support Training Centre.¹³⁸ These bring together community members and security actors to address the root causes of mistrust and promote collaboration. ‘These training programmes have been transformative, with trained individuals becoming champions of peace at the local level,’ one respondent explained. Localizing recruitment of security personnel from the communities they serve has helped to inspire trust, according to many respondents. Several respondents spoke of civil society-led initiatives and civil society organizations (CSOs) that create platforms for collaboration – such as workshops that engage communities and security agencies in joint problem-solving to provide opportunities to reframe relationships and establish mutual accountability.

Corruption is a persistent and significant barrier to effective conflict prevention in Kenya. Issues such as land-grabbing, small-arms trafficking and resource mismanagement cause grievances that fuel conflict and systemic instability. Dealing with corruption as a conflict prevention strategy requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach. This includes fostering partnerships between civil society, government and international actors to build accountability mechanisms that can withstand political interference. As one respondent noted, ‘addressing corruption requires a long-term commitment from all stakeholders, alongside robust enforcement mechanisms and a cultural shift towards transparency’.

The KNDR’s emphasis on reform over immediate accountability helped to stabilize the political environment and prevent further violence.¹³⁹ Yet it also created significant gaps, particularly in addressing elite impunity. The lack of mechanisms to hold political leaders accountable for their actions has perpetuated a culture of unaccountability. The recent withdrawal of high-profile anti-corruption cases underscores the fragility of Kenya’s institutional independence.¹⁴⁰

Efforts to address corruption have included the establishment of independent commissions, such as the National Land Commission, to resolve land disputes and promote equitable resource management.¹⁴¹ However, these institutions often lack resources and the political backing to enforce their mandates, consequently they struggle to implement meaningful reforms. One interviewee emphasized the need for a multisectoral approach that combines legal enforcement with transitional

¹³⁸ National Defence University-Kenya (undated), ‘International Peace Support Training Centre’, <https://ndu.ac.ke/international-peace-support-training-centre> (accessed 28 Mar. 2025).

¹³⁹ Wanyeki, L. M. (2018), ‘African solutions for African problems or a liberal peace: the African Union (AU) and Kenya’, PhD thesis, SOAS University of London, <https://doi.org/10.25501/SOAS.00026184>.

¹⁴⁰ Reuters (2023), ‘Anti-graft watchdog recalls award for Kenya’s chief prosecutor’, 26 May 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/anti-graft-watchdog-withdraws-award-kenyas-chief-prosecutor-2023-05-26>.

¹⁴¹ National Land Commission (undated), ‘Our Mandates’, <https://landcommission.go.ke/our-mandates> (accessed 28 Mar. 2025).

justice mechanisms, linking anti-corruption efforts to broader conflict prevention strategies.

Building community capacity to hold government accountable is a critical component of effective governance and conflict prevention in Kenya. But to challenge corruption and inefficiencies, interviewees noted that communities first need to understand how government systems operate, including the budgeting process and resource allocation mechanisms. This requires targeted capacity-building initiatives that equip citizens with the knowledge and skills to engage with their leaders and demand transparency. As resources are limited, it becomes imperative to ensure these are managed inclusively and transparently, with deliberate efforts to prevent exclusion based on gender, ethnicity or other marginalization. However, Kenyan CSOs working on anti-corruption often operate with little strategic coordination and partnership between the national and county levels, preventing cohesive movement-building around corruption.¹⁴²

Despite these challenges, some promising strategies have emerged in Kenya. Community-driven initiatives, such as public monitoring of local government budgets and resource allocation, have shown potential for increasing transparency and reducing corruption. International support has also been critical in applying pressure on Kenyan elites, particularly through targeted sanctions and the suspension of development assistance during periods of political impasse.

India–Pakistan: Governance gaps and security challenges

In contrast to Kenya, governance reforms in India and Pakistan have been limited, as both countries have strong political and security institutions that are often hostile to external intervention to reform their structures. Interviewees discussed how the internal difficulties in both countries create a fragile and inhospitable environment for significant governance and security reform interventions. A closer look at the governments of each country indicates how existing governance structures can often exacerbate conflict or heighten tensions.

The military dominates Pakistan's governance model, and the civilian government relies on the military for support and political survival. The country has been in political turmoil since Prime Minister Imran Khan was ousted in 2022.¹⁴³ Khan's clashes with top military officials were a major factor leading to his removal.¹⁴⁴ The ruling Pakistan Muslim League party relies heavily on military support to remain in power and the party's policy agenda is strongly influenced by the military and its security-focused

¹⁴² Justice Sector Training, Research and Coordination Plus Program (undated), 'Summary: Conflict Prevention in Kenya: Combating Corruption through Nonviolent Action', <https://justtrac.org/conflict-prevention-in-kenya-combating-corruption-through-nonviolent-action-2> (accessed 28 Mar. 2025).

¹⁴³ Hussain, A. (2024), 'Shehbaz Sharif elected Pakistan PM for second term after controversial vote', Al Jazeera, 3 March 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/3/shehbaz-sharif-set-to-become-pakistans-new-pm-after-controversial-election>.

¹⁴⁴ Muneer, S. and Aryal, S. (2024), *Cause and Effect: The Factors that make Pakistan's Military a Political Force*, issue brief, New Delhi: Observer Research Foundation, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/cause-and-effect-the-factors-that-make-pakistans-military-a-political-force>.

priorities. The military has become adept at manipulating the Pakistani political scene, targeting and undermining groups averse to their influence, crafting favourable narratives and maintaining influence over the democratic framework. Pakistan also relies heavily on external aid, particularly from Western donors, to support its economy and manage its fiscal deficit.¹⁴⁵ Thus, Pakistan's governance structure is considerably influenced by elite capture, with policy guided by the vested interests of a few. Alongside structural and institutional constraints in the public sector, these conditions create a wide variety of challenges.

Several militant groups operate in and around Pakistan, each varying in objectives, ideology and capacity. Although Pakistan maintains that it cannot necessarily control these groups, there are reports that it lends assistance to the groups, particularly those that operate in Kashmir.¹⁴⁶ Ultimately, these groups can carry out attacks that risk drawing both Pakistan and India into wider conflict. As the military is an influential institution in Pakistan, it is important to understand its motives when evaluating the likelihood of conflict. According to one interviewee, despite its security concerns, Pakistan is often hesitant to engage in hostilities with India due to its military being overstretched. The interviewee explained that the military's priority for most of the past two decades has been maintaining stability along the border with Afghanistan.¹⁴⁷

The conflict between India and Pakistan – particularly over Kashmir – is highly politicized and often leveraged by both sides for their own gain. By capitalizing on these complexities, each side uses the perceived threat of the other to justify its actions and policies, especially during election cycles and other periods of political instability. Interviewees detailed that this contributes to heightening perceived security threats by either side, to the point where both populations believe that securing gains in Kashmir is essential for national stability. Thus, Kashmir risks becoming a means to an end, serving as a powerful tool in political rhetoric for either country.

Georgia: Institutional reforms amid geopolitical pressures

Georgia's governance reforms, supported by international actors such as the EU, have focused on improving transparency, decentralizing power and strengthening democratic institutions.¹⁴⁸ These reforms have achieved some success, although Russia's 2008 invasion and that country's lingering influence in Georgian politics and society have reversed some of the progress. While the government of Prime Minister Mikheil Saakashvili was willing to stand up to Russia – although perhaps overestimating the international support it enjoyed – Transparency International and other

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ European Foundation for South Asian Studies (2017), *Pakistan Army and Terrorism: an unholy alliance*, <https://www.efsas.org/publications/study-papers/pakistan-army-and-terrorism-an-unholy-alliance>.

¹⁴⁷ Interview, 6 December 2024.

¹⁴⁸ Broers, L. (2005), 'After the "revolution": civil society and the challenges of consolidating democracy in Georgia', *Central Asian Survey*, 24(3), pp. 333–50, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634930500310444>.

monitoring bodies expressed concerns that the government was replacing the old system of corruption with a new one favouring individuals close to them.¹⁴⁹

Lessons learned in governance and institutional reforms

Governance and institutional reforms, while essential for conflict prevention, face significant challenges that can undermine their effectiveness. One of the most pressing issues is corruption, which erodes the credibility of institutions, diverts resources away from public services and deepens public grievances. Resources intended to improve public services and foster regional equity can be mismanaged, fuelling frustration among communities.

The inherently long-term nature of governance reforms is a problem. Structural changes take time to yield tangible results, which may not seem to align with the immediate demands of conflict prevention. Nonetheless, by examining the institutions of each country, how they operate and what they expend their resources on, we can better assess the risks of conflict and identify potential opportunities for conflict de-escalation or prevention in the future.

These challenges underscore the complexity of implementing governance and institutional reforms as conflict prevention tools – and the need for robust anti-corruption measures, mechanisms to build trust and a commitment to inclusivity. Reforms must also be accompanied by long-term engagement and international support to ensure their sustainability and effectiveness.

A key lesson from the case studies is the critical importance of addressing corruption as part of governance reform. Without robust anti-corruption measures, reforms risk reinforcing existing inequalities rather than resolving them. Kenya's experience highlights the need for transparency and accountability mechanisms to accompany decentralization. CSOs play a pivotal role in monitoring resource allocation and advocating for anti-corruption measures, but both the literature and the case study analysis indicate that their efforts must be supported by stronger enforcement mechanisms.

Another important takeaway is the need to build trust between state institutions and communities. Security sector reform, as demonstrated in Kenya, can play a vital role in this regard. Training programmes, localized recruitment and community engagement initiatives have shown promise in fostering mutual understanding and reducing mistrust. However, these efforts must be sustained and scaled up to have a lasting impact. In Georgia, the absence of trust between the central government and communities in

¹⁴⁹ OECD (2022), *Anti-Corruption Reforms in Georgia: Pilot 5th Round of Monitoring Under the Istanbul Anti-Corruption Action Plan*, Paris: OECD Publishing, <https://doi.org/10.1787/d709c349-en>.

the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia continues to impede governance reforms.

These lessons underscore the importance of tailoring reforms to the specific context of each conflict, recognizing that governance is not a one-size-fits-all solution but a complex process that requires sustained effort and adaptation.

Intervention 6: Information and communication technologies

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are increasingly recognized as critical tools for conflict prevention. These technologies can assist all stakeholders in conflict to prevent violence and support affected populations.¹⁵⁰ They encompass a wide range of digital platforms, tools and communication channels, including social media, mobile applications and early warning systems. While ICTs have great potential for conflict prevention interventions, their implementation carries risks such as facilitating misinformation and disinformation, increasing digital divides among populations and weaponizing technology.

ICTs can be effective tools for bridging communication gaps between governments, civil society and local communities. They enable both horizontal information flow (citizen-to-citizen engagement) and vertical information flow (connecting local communities to authorities and decision-makers).¹⁵¹ This dual capability allows more comprehensive data collection and faster mobilization of resources. For instance, mobile-based early warning systems empower communities to report signs of violence or escalating tensions directly to authorities, enabling quicker and more precise responses. Similarly, social media platforms can be powerful tools for engagement and for disseminating peace-promoting narratives, as well as to counter misinformation and build awareness about conflict-sensitive issues.¹⁵²

However, ICTs can produce very different results depending on the context in which they are applied, as the case studies highlight.¹⁵³ The same platforms that facilitate positive engagement can be used to spread hate speech and mis- and disinformation, particularly during politically sensitive periods.¹⁵⁴ The rapid proliferation of fake news and targeted disinformation campaigns over the past decade has been shown to exacerbate tensions and

¹⁵⁰ Mancini, F. and O'Reilly, M. (2013), 'New Technology and the Prevention of Violence and Conflict', *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development*, 2(3), p. 55, <https://doi.org/10.5334/sta.cp>.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Wilton Park (2024), 'Integrating social media and technology in conflict interventions', in Wilton Park (2024), *Conflict trauma and youth: exploring approaches for recovery and conflict prevention in the Middle East and North Africa*, report, July 2024, <https://www.wiltonpark.org.uk/reports/conflict-trauma-and-youth-exploring-approaches-for-recovery-and-conflict-prevention-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa/integrating-social-media-and-technology-in-conflict-interventions>.

¹⁵³ Mancini and O'Reilly (2013), 'New Technology and the Prevention of Violence and Conflict'.

¹⁵⁴ In times of war and conflict, disinformation is often the first weapon to be deployed. See Council of Europe (undated), *Disinformation in a time of conflict*, <https://rm.coe.int/0900001680a5d3be>.

fuel violence, often undermining efforts to promote peace and stability.¹⁵⁵ These risks are exacerbated by the business models of major technology companies, which prioritize engagement-driven algorithms that amplify divisive and provocative content. Platforms profit from maximizing user attention. This imperative has created structural incentives that fuel polarization, making ICTs potential amplifiers of instability. The dual nature of ICTs – as both tools for prevention of and enablers of it – requires a nuanced understanding of their benefits and limitations.

ICTs in practice: Lessons from the case studies

Kenya: Leveraging technology for peacebuilding

While technology has been weaponized in certain contexts in Kenya, such as the spread of hate speech on social media, it has also emerged as a critical enabler of peacebuilding and conflict prevention interventions. Digital tools like SMS-based early warning systems and social media campaigns have played pivotal roles in countering misinformation and promoting unity, according to several respondents.¹⁵⁶ These initiatives highlight how technology can facilitate real-time responses to emerging threats, thereby mitigating the escalation of conflicts.

Innovative applications of technology have also contributed to addressing resource-based conflicts. For example, the use of drones to monitor cattle rustling has introduced accountability mechanisms in pastoralist areas, reducing tensions.¹⁵⁷ ‘Drones create a sense of accountability, as people realize they can no longer hide’, observed one interviewee. However, these securitized approaches must be balanced with community engagement to ensure they complement broader peacebuilding efforts rather than exacerbate tensions.

Technology played a role in organizing the 2024 protests against a proposed finance bill to advocate for government reform and accountability.¹⁵⁸ On the other hand, the rapid spread of disinformation via the same platforms underscored the persistent challenges of leveraging technology effectively in conflict prevention. As one respondent cautioned, ‘we are always behind and playing catch-up’ – which points to the need for proactive and adaptive strategies to counter such risks.

The effectiveness of technological interventions is also contingent on their integration with other conflict prevention mechanisms. Programmes that train young people in digital advocacy in Kenya, for example, have shown promise in empowering communities to monitor peace agreements and hold

¹⁵⁵ Broda, E. and Strömbäck, J. (2024), ‘Misinformation, disinformation, and fake news: lessons from an interdisciplinary, systematic literature review’, *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 48(2), pp. 139–66, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2024.2323736>.

¹⁵⁶ Barradas, R. (2011), ‘National Violence Outbreak Early Warning System in Kenya’, video, PrepareCenter, 2 March 2011, <https://preparecenter.org/resource/national-violence-outbreak-early-warning-system-in-kenya>.

¹⁵⁷ Drones, A. (2021), ‘Drones Used In Cattle Rustling: solving the problem’, Nextech, 19 May 2021, <https://nextech.online/cattle-rustling>.

¹⁵⁸ Munga, J. (2024), ‘Kenya Is at an Inflection Point. It Needs a New Path to Progress’, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, <https://carnegieendowment.org/emissary/2024/08/kenya-genz-protests-progress-tech-corruption?lang=en>.

leaders accountable.¹⁵⁹ Similarly, situation rooms and early warning systems have demonstrated their utility in conflict-prone regions, enabling faster responses to potential flashpoints.¹⁶⁰

India–Pakistan: Disinformation and cross-border tensions

In both India and Pakistan, the governments control media narratives, making it harder to access moderate, independent information. While there have not been similar efforts to those in Kenya and Georgia to use new technologies for verification or trust-building, changes in the media landscape through the increased importance of social media and 24-hour news cycles have played an important role in fuelling tension.

TV channels often compete in a privatized market by being ever more sensationalist in their programming choices and amplification of certain narratives, particularly on the topic of Pakistan and threats to India's sovereignty.¹⁶¹ In the past, there was only one TV channel in India, and as a result it did not need to compete for viewership. In Pakistan, the dominance of the military as an institution in politics has created an environment in which the independence of the media and civil society is curtailed, resulting in a media environment that promotes narratives that align with government positions.

Indian media can also spread misinformation, as in the case of portraying the 2024 removal of Bangladesh's prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, as a Pakistani plot, despite it being largely a people-powered movement.¹⁶² The media tends to frame much of its news within the binary of China and Pakistan as the two threats to India. Research in 2018 on the social media-sharing behaviours of Indian citizens also concluded that right-wing networks with nationalistic agendas are more organized and prevalent within the social media sphere, and that this facilitated the spread of false information.¹⁶³

Georgia: ICTs for monitoring and struggles with disinformation

Stakeholders have explored ICTs as a means of monitoring trade as a way to manage one aspect of the conflict in Georgia. In the negotiations between Georgia and Russia to establish a transport corridor through South Ossetia, both parties were required to sign agreements with the Swiss company SGS to provide monitoring technology for trade flows. The agreement required any cargo passing through South Ossetia to be inspected at the border and then be tagged with a tracking device so that it cannot be diverted. While Georgia and Russia were able to agree to this technical step, the transport corridor agreement has not been yet finalized because of disagreements

¹⁵⁹ See, for example, UNITAR's programme in Kenya: UNITAR (undated), 'Closing the Digital Gap for Marginalized Youth in Kenya: Betty Mwendu', <https://unitar.org/about/news-stories/stories/closing-digital-gap-marginalized-youth-kenya-betty-mwendu>.

¹⁶⁰ See for example, Peace Science Digest (2023), 'How Women's Situation Rooms Harness Gender to Prevent Political Violence', 23 January 2023, <https://warpreventioninitiative.org/peace-science-digest/how-womens-situation-rooms-harness-gender-to-prevent-political-violence>.

¹⁶¹ Interview, 2 December 2024.

¹⁶² Interview, August 2024.

¹⁶³ BBC News (2018), 'Nationalism a driving force behind fake news in India, research shows', 12 November 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-46146877>.

over who would conduct customs and border inspections.¹⁶⁴ Although the existence of a technical verification solution to let goods pass through South Ossetia is useful, it has not been sufficient in this instance to resolve the deadlock.

Georgia has struggled with the spread of mis- and disinformation on social media. Facebook is the most commonly used social media platform in the country, but the platform's fact-checking and monitoring algorithms work best in languages with larger numbers of speakers such as English or Russian. For a less widely used language like Georgian, fact-checking or flagging of false information is virtually non-existent. The Georgian government must therefore develop its own tools to combat disinformation.¹⁶⁵ This dynamic will likely worsen as Facebook has announced its intention to halt fact-checking and monitoring services altogether. Often, the rapid spread of disinformation only becomes apparent in dialogues that bring the conflict parties together, when negotiators realize that they have had an incorrect impression of the other.¹⁶⁶ Russia's track record of using disinformation as a tool of hybrid warfare to destabilize societies, particularly among its neighbours, leads to suspicions that Russian action is behind some of the disinformation being spread in Georgia to manipulate public opinion and influence political dynamics.¹⁶⁷

Lessons learned in ICT interventions

ICTs hold significant promise for conflict prevention but also have limits to their effectiveness. A major issue is the weaponization of digital platforms, particularly social media, to spread hate speech, misinformation and polarizing narratives. In Kenya, disinformation campaigns often exacerbate existing tensions during election periods, while in the conflict between India and Pakistan, similar campaigns that also encompass TV news channels are linked to heightened nationalism and ineffective diplomacy.

Accessibility and inclusivity are also barriers. Marginalized communities, particularly in rural or conflict-affected areas, often lack the infrastructure or digital literacy to engage fully with ICT tools. This digital divide undermines the potential for ICTs to foster inclusive conflict prevention.

The rapid pace of technological change often outpaces the abilities of governments, organizations and peacebuilders to address emerging threats, especially as developers are not always aware of the harms their technologies can cause. Efforts to counter mis- and disinformation, as in Georgia, are often reactive rather than proactive. Additionally, ethical concerns about privacy and data security challenge the use of ICTs for conflict prevention, as improper data handling can deepen mistrust. In contexts where trust in authorities is low, fears of surveillance, data misuse,

¹⁶⁴ Bilanishvili, G. (2018), 'The 2011 Russia-Georgia Agreement – Threats and Challenges', blog post, Rondeli Foundation, <https://gfsis.org.ge/blog/view/813>.

¹⁶⁵ Interview, 18 September 2024.

¹⁶⁶ Interview 3, 1 January 2025.

¹⁶⁷ Wilkinson, I. and Dekanosidze, T. (2022), 'Georgia must bolster resilience to information warfare', Chatham House Expert Comment, updated 24 January 2023, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2022/03/georgia-must-bolster-resilience-information-warfare>.

or targeting of vulnerable groups can deter engagement with digital peacebuilding tools and hinder the adoption of early warning systems or information-sharing platforms.

Despite these challenges, ICTs remain a powerful tool for fostering peace. Ensuring inclusivity through improved access to digital tools can empower marginalized communities, as seen with Kenya's mobile-based early warning systems. Collaborative, community-driven ICT initiatives can bridge trust gaps and enhance the credibility of digital platforms. Scaling up these tools and ensuring their alignment with local peacebuilding efforts will be critical. However, as these tools are deployed, it is essential to ensure that technological advancements do not outpace the capacity of local stakeholders to engage with them effectively.

03 Are the most common interventions fit for the future?

A horizon scan, outlined in the methodology section, identified three critical themes shaping the future of conflict prevention: climate change, the geopoliticization of conflict and technological advancements. While these are not the only factors identified as influencing the trajectory of future conflicts, they emerged as the most salient causes of conflict until 2030. Climate change is already intensifying resource scarcity, displacing populations and fuelling competition over water and land, particularly in fragile regions where governance is weak. The geopoliticization of conflicts – whereby smaller-scale conflicts get drawn into wider power struggles, such as in the case of the conflicts between the Georgian state and Abkhazia and South Ossetia – is making peace processes more difficult, as external powers exploit internal disputes for strategic gain. Technological advancements have a dual-edged potential: they could be used as tools for enhancing peacebuilding, but they can also be weaponized (particularly as digital disinformation) and thus escalate conflicts and undermine trust.

These trends will directly impact the viability of existing conflict prevention interventions and demand adaptive approaches. In particular, future strategies must move beyond reactive responses and become more anticipatory and integrated.

Climate change and resource-based conflicts

Climate change is both a driver of conflict and a complicating factor in conflict resolution. Prolonged droughts, erratic rainfall, extreme weather events and rising temperatures exacerbate resource scarcity and heighten social and economic vulnerabilities. The increasing frequency of extreme weather events has been shown to prolong civil conflict and the levels of civil unrest.¹⁶⁸ Climate change-related events can amplify existing tensions, such as those that arise over resource scarcity and unmanaged migration, particularly in regions with weak governance structures or pre-existing grievances.¹⁶⁹ The under-secretary general for peace operations at the UN has warned that environmental degradation and extreme weather challenges interfere with the UN's ability to respond to the impacts of conflict.¹⁷⁰

Continued population growth coupled with an increasing demand for food, critical minerals and water paints a bleak picture of the coming decades. By 2030, the estimated gap between water demand and supply is predicted to be 40 per cent, and climate-driven poverty is estimated to affect an additional 130 million people.¹⁷¹

Climate change poses a notable challenge to Kenya's conflict prevention efforts, particularly in arid and semi-arid regions. Prolonged droughts and erratic rainfall patterns are increasing resource scarcity, particularly of water and grazing land, exacerbating inter-clan conflicts and undermining existing peace agreements. When climate shocks intersect with economic vulnerabilities, this creates pathways for instability. For instance, the youth in pastoralist communities who lose their livelihoods due to decimated livestock levels are susceptible to recruitment by extremist groups like al-Shabaab, according to several interviewees.

For places like Kenya, this trend underscores the urgency of integrating livelihood diversification into conflict prevention strategies. Programmes that promote irrigation-based agriculture, vocational training and small-scale entrepreneurship can provide alternative economic opportunities, reducing the risk of radicalization. Interventions will also need to evolve to incorporate sustainable resource management strategies and climate-resilient infrastructure to mitigate impacts from extreme weather events and to reduce tensions among pastoralist communities. The adoption of

¹⁶⁸ Ghimire, R. and Ferreira, S. (2015), 'Floods and armed conflict', *Environment and Development Economics*, 21(1), pp. 23–52, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1355770X15000157>; Wood, R. M. and Wright, T. M. (2015), 'Responding to Catastrophe: Repression Dynamics Following Rapid-onset Natural Disasters', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 60(8), pp. 1446–72, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002715596366>.

¹⁶⁹ Koubi, V. (2019), 'Climate Change and Conflict', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 22(1), pp. 343–60, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-050317-070830>.

¹⁷⁰ UN (2023), 'With Climate Crisis Generating Growing Threats to Global Peace, Security Council Must Ramp Up Efforts, Lessen Risk of Conflicts, Speakers Stress in Open Debate', press release, <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15318.doc.htm>.

¹⁷¹ World Economic Forum (2023), *The global risks report 2023*, 18th Edition, Geneva: World Economic Forum, <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-risks-report-2023>; UNDP (undated), 'New frontiers of conflict', <https://www.undp.org/future-development/signals-spotlight-2024/new-frontiers-of-conflict>.

advanced technologies like remote-sensing and geographic information systems also offers potential for monitoring resource use and enhancing agricultural efficiency. These tools can also identify conflict hotspots and inform targeted interventions, ensuring equitable resource allocation.

Water scarcity is considered a conflict risk in Georgia. Water levels at the Enguri dam are affected by rising temperatures and the loss of freshwater sources. Without intervention, this could lead to power outages in Abkhazia or Georgia and could ignite disagreement over the way electricity outputs are split. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development recognizes this issue and has provided loans to the Georgian government to mitigate the risks – through updates to the site and river management techniques to make it more resilient to drought and other anticipated climate shocks. There are several ongoing EU-supported consultations on the health of the river basin and on ways to increase its resilience.¹⁷²

Climate change is expected to affect the Himalayan glaciers that feed the Indus basin, which has long been a source of tension between India and Pakistan.¹⁷³ Upstream water infrastructure projects have revived disputes over long-term water security, especially for downstream communities in Pakistan, one of the most water-stressed countries in the world.¹⁷⁴ Other political disagreements often result in India threatening to reduce Pakistan's water supply.¹⁷⁵ Some interviewees noted that the contentious status of the IWT – which India is seeking to renegotiate – makes it a glaring flashpoint for the outbreak of violent conflict between the two parties.¹⁷⁶

Increasing reliance on the Indus River, coupled with India's push to renegotiate the IWT, poses significant risks for future conflict. Climate shocks will continue to increase the strains on both populations. India's repeated threats to curtail Pakistan's water supply, and its recent stance of blocking the Permanent Indus Commission's meeting suggests that the opportunity for conflict intervention might be disappearing.

Geopoliticization of conflict

When localized disputes are shaped by the strategic interests of external powers, peacebuilding efforts become complicated. These dynamics include the provision of military and financial support to conflict parties by external actors, the use of proxy warfare to advance geopolitical agendas, and the

¹⁷² EU4Environment (2023), 'The EU supports consultation meeting on water issues in the Rioni and Enguri River Basin Districts in Georgia', 14 November 2023, <https://www.eu4waterdata.eu/en/blog-news/32-georgia/298-the-eu-supports-consultation-meeting-on-water-issues-in-the-rioni-and-enguri-river-basin-districts-in-georgia.html>.

¹⁷³ Climate Diplomacy (undated), 'Water conflict and cooperation between India and Pakistan'.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Al Jazeera (2019), 'India reiterates plan to stop sharing water with Pakistan', 21 February 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/2/21/india-reiterates-plan-to-stop-sharing-water-with-pakistan>.

¹⁷⁶ This was discussed extensively at the scenario exercise held at Chatham House in October 2024. Water management experts held the position that because there was a lot that states could do to manage water better domestically, it was unlikely that disagreement over water would lead to outright conflict. However, colleagues working on climate change wondered whether climate change pressures might increase water scarcity to the degree that improving water management would not be sufficient.

selective application of norms based on political alignments rather than consistent principles. Such external involvement has the capacity to make conflicts longer, more intractable and more lethal.¹⁷⁷

Since 2020, there has been a decline in internationalized intra-state conflicts, where one or both parties to an intra-state conflict receive troop support from an external state. However, the numbers remain high in comparison to previous decades, with 20 new conflicts recorded in 2023.¹⁷⁸ In addition, the weakening of international legal norms and institutions is contributing to a more unstable global context, as mechanisms for dialogue and conflict resolution are becoming less effective. UN processes increasingly find themselves mired in disagreement. Powerful states have demonstrated a tendency to selectively adhere to international agreements and treaties – or, in some cases, to disregard them altogether. This is exemplified in Global South states accusing Western states of double standards in their responses to the Russian invasion of Ukraine vs Israeli attacks in Gaza. The erosion of multilateral agreements related to arms control – such as the Open Skies treaty and several others – trade and multilateral support for peacekeeping is a case in point.¹⁷⁹ The weakening of these global mechanisms has reduced accountability when states engage in aggressive or coercive foreign policies, which makes conflict prevention more difficult.

The international norms and institutions that govern conflict prevention are also affected by the geopoliticization of conflict. As international organizations like the UN struggle to navigate the competing interests of powerful states, their ability to mediate and implement conflict prevention measures is increasingly constrained. The UN Security Council, in particular, has faced repeated criticism for its inability to adapt to changing global power dynamics.¹⁸⁰ The veto power of permanent members frequently obstructs efforts to hold states accountable for violations of international law. Without meaningful reforms, the UN's role in conflict prevention risks being further diminished, leaving a vacuum that is likely to be filled by ad hoc coalitions and unilateral interventions – or left unfilled.

Another negative impact is on the perception of neutrality in mediation and peacebuilding efforts. When external actors involved in conflict prevention are perceived as biased or self-serving, their interventions lose legitimacy. Nations that are seeking to boost their geopolitical status may assume the

¹⁷⁷ Balch-Lindsay, D., Enterline, A. J. and Joyce, K. A. (2008), 'Third-Party Intervention and the Civil War Process', *Journal of Peace Research*, 45(3), pp. 345–63, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343308088815>.

¹⁷⁸ This represented a reduction from the peak of 27 in 2020, but still higher than levels observed before 2015. This decline is partly attributed to Western disengagement from combating transnational jihadist groups, driven by shifts in global priorities and deteriorating relationships with host countries, particularly in West Africa. See Davies, S., Engstrom, G., Pettersson, T. and Oberg, M. (2024), 'Organized violence 1989–2023, and the prevalence of organized crime groups', *Journal of Peace Research*, 61(4), pp. 673–93, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00223433241262912>.

¹⁷⁹ *The Economist* (2025), 'The era of multilateral peacekeeping draws to an unhappy close', 2 January 2025, <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2025/01/02/the-era-of-multilateral-peacekeeping-draws-to-an-unhappy-close>.

¹⁸⁰ Patrick, S. (ed.) (2023), *UN Security Council Reform: What the World Thinks*, research paper, Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2023/06/un-security-council-reform-what-the-world-thinks?lang=en>.

role of a mediator while also pursuing their own foreign policy goals. In India and Pakistan, their strategic geopolitical positions make both parties of significant interest to rising middle powers, most notably Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Conflict prevention and de-escalation efforts between the two countries have often drawn in actors with varying interests. China and Russia also complicate the conflict dynamics between India and Pakistan. China has increased political, military and economic cooperation with Pakistan, while Russia has historically had a strong partnership with India, including through supplying crude oil.¹⁸¹

Russia's positioning as a peacekeeper and a security provider for Abkhazia and South Ossetia is also unlikely to serve conflict prevention in Georgia. Russia uses the role to exert influence in the Caucasus and to control domestic politics in Georgia, thus undermining any credibility it may have as a peacekeeper.

Technological advancements and the digital sphere

One of the most significant implications of technological advancements is the way they may lower the threshold for engaging in armed conflict. Emerging and disruptive technologies will make it easier for smaller actors (whether non-state groups, insurgent groups, individuals or less developed countries) to participate in conflict on a scale previously limited to well-funded and well-resourced state actors. The accessibility of these technologies can drastically amplify the capacity of smaller players to destabilize regions, which adds a new layer of complexity to conflict prevention efforts and mediation. Technologies that are commercially produced for a civilian market are already being adapted for use in war – for example, the drone use by both Ukraine and Russia.¹⁸² These developments will complicate any future arms control agreements or efforts to regulate access to weapons, as defining which technologies count has become harder. This dynamic is occurring as states prioritize investment in military capabilities in order to increase deterrence effects, over investment in diplomacy or dialogue.

Conflict mediation is adapting to the digital era. New technologies are being used to enhance peace processes and policymakers are assessing their impact on conflict. In 2019, the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue developed the Digital Mediation Toolkit to assess opportunities and risks related to the

¹⁸¹ Bajpae, C. and Toremark, L. (2024), 'India–Russia relations' Chatham House Explainer, 17 October 2024, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2024/10/india-russia-relations>.

¹⁸² Franke, U. (2025), 'Drones in Ukraine: Four lessons for the West', commentary, European Council on Foreign Relations, 10 January 2025, <https://ecfr.eu/article/drones-in-ukraine-four-lessons-for-the-west>.

use of digital technologies in mediation.¹⁸³ There are also calls for mediations to address the complex impact of social media on conflict.¹⁸⁴

Looking ahead, AI-facilitated negotiations could transform mediation efforts. Negotiations could be facilitated by digital third parties.¹⁸⁵ AI-driven tools could significantly enhance mediators' abilities to analyse vast amounts of conflict-related data, extract key positions and identify areas of compromise more efficiently.¹⁸⁶ For example, AI could process diplomatic records, public statements, and social media sentiment to detect shifts in parties' positions or predict potential points of contention. However, these advancements present ethical and security risks, including concerns over algorithmic bias, data privacy and digital manipulation, which must be carefully addressed to ensure AI strengthens, rather than undermines, peacebuilding efforts.

The dual potential of digital tools and social media platforms is evident in Kenya. Local actors have increasingly utilized cheap digital tools to spread hate speech and misinformation, which intensify tensions particularly during election periods.¹⁸⁷ Yet these same platforms are used to spread important civic information, such as voter education and peace-promoting narratives.¹⁸⁸ SMS-based early warning systems have proven effective in disseminating timely alerts to communities, helping to prevent localized violence. The establishment of 'situation rooms' for real-time monitoring and coordination has enhanced the ability to respond to crises swiftly.¹⁸⁹ One respondent explained that 'digital tools are crucial in countering misinformation and promoting unity'.

Mis- and disinformation campaigns have been used in Georgia to increase societal polarization. The Georgian government struggles with the destabilizing effect of these campaigns on social media platforms. It has in the past received USAID and UK government support to improve its capacities to detect, monitor and counter mis- and disinformation and malign influence campaigns. However, during the contentious election period in Georgia in 2024, the government itself was accused of spreading disinformation on social media channels.¹⁹⁰

Both India and Pakistan build nationalist narratives that increase religious and ethnic hatred that are often amplified on social media. India is

¹⁸³ Whitfield (2024), 'Still Time to Talk: Adaptation and innovation in peace mediation', p. 93.

¹⁸⁴ For a comprehensive analysis on how to include digital technologies in peace agreements, see Ibid., pp. 95–101.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 112.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 112.

¹⁸⁷ Madung, O. (2022), 'Kenya's already fragile elections now face a dangerous new enemy: big tech platforms', *Guardian*, 7 April 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/apr/07/kenya-elections-2022-big-tech-platforms>.

¹⁸⁸ Privacy International (2024), 'Election Technology in Kenya', explainer, 14 October 2024, <http://privacyinternational.org/explainer/5445/election-technology-kenya>.

¹⁸⁹ Godia, J. (2015), 'Women's Situation Room: Africa's unique approach to reducing electoral violence', 30 March 2015, <https://africarenewal.un.org/en/magazine/womens-situation-room-africas-unique-approach-reducing-electoral-violence>.

¹⁹⁰ Cole, E. (2024), *Disinformation in Georgia Challenges and Solutions*, Social Justice Center, p. 6, <https://socialjustice.org.ge/en/products/dezinformatsia-sakartveloshi-gamotsvevebi-da-gamosavlebi>.

witnessing a continued increase in hyper-nationalism under the ruling BJP's *Hindutva* ideology, resulting in a more assertive religious and national identity that is influencing foreign policy and driving crackdowns on minority groups. Both countries' respective religious identities have also led to an increase in hate speech and misinformation targeting Hinduism and Islam.¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ *The Economist* (2024), 'What is Hindutva, the ideology of India's ruling party?', 7 March 2024, <https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2024/03/07/what-is-hindutva-the-ideology-of-indias-ruling-party>.

04

Recommendations

Conflict is evolving rapidly, shaped by interwoven factors that extend beyond any singular cause. Given this complexity, conflict prevention efforts must be adaptable, inclusive and forward-looking. The following recommendations outline strategies for how conflict prevention actors can ensure that prevention is fit for the future.

Invest in climate-adaptive resource-sharing agreements that incorporate trigger clauses and support joint monitoring of environmental changes.

Climate sensitivity is critical for sustainable conflict prevention. These interventions must simultaneously leverage climate adaptation and energy investments as tools for peacebuilding. Current approaches fail to implement climate-sensitive peacebuilding initiatives when conditions are stable. Climate and development programmes – such as land-use planning, water management and renewable energy projects – should be designed from the outset to reduce conflict risks.

Large-scale projects in areas at risk of conflict should be deliberately structured to foster collaboration. By designing climate-related projects that necessitate cooperation (shared water sources, for example) communities can gradually familiarize themselves with one another, reducing the likelihood of violence.

Resource-sharing agreements should incorporate ‘trigger clauses’ that mandate periodic reviews, and even renegotiations based on environmental changes and other climate variables. Climate or scientific experts can be assigned to monitor a resource and trigger a joint-review process alongside the stakeholders once certain thresholds are passed. This embeds a more proactive approach to dealing with resource disputes. It also ensures that parties do not neglect rapid environmental changes.

Structural conflict prevention strategies should include participatory forecasting, which can promote joint monitoring of shared resources. Advanced satellite imagery, hotspot mapping and local data collection can help to anticipate shifts in resource environments. It is recommended to undertake this even in environments where resource disagreements are not the main driver of conflict but can have a compounding effect. By engaging local actors in climate monitoring, and storing such information in an accessible depository, more immediate action can be taken before situations deteriorate. This can include implementing rapid-response programmes to alleviate economic stresses during a period of climate shocks or mitigating the displacement and migration of people.

Depoliticize technological cooperation for conflict prevention.

The case studies show the potential of a range of technological solutions to support the verification of agreements, to provide a neutral platform for exchange or to support mediation. However, conflict parties must trust the technology for it to be useful, which could be a significant hurdle.

Advisory groups made up of scientists and peacebuilding experts can provide technical solutions to shared challenges – for example, climate adaptation technologies, cybersecurity safeguards, AI-driven early warning systems or AI-assisted conflict mediation. Such technical forums can help to improve the governance of emerging technologies and reduce the risk that they exacerbate instability and propagate concerns about privacy. By extension, regulations around AI use in mediation and ethical frameworks for technologies can be developed in neutral spaces rather than dictated by geopolitical competition.

If the scientific advisory groups include members of the conflict parties, they can serve to transform an expert group into a community that knows each other well and has a habit of working together, a practice that in the Georgian case has been seen to help establish a foundation of trust.

Reframe how successful mediation is defined and engage emerging mediation actors, both formal and informal.

Although one of the most widely used conflict prevention tools, mediation is not a neutral process by default, and the choice of mediator significantly affects the perception and effectiveness of the process.

The international community needs to widen the pool of actors involved in mediation. Mediation has historically been led by Western states and international organizations, but new mediators, including China, the Gulf Arab states and Türkiye, are playing an increasing role in international

diplomacy. Non-state actors – such as private individuals, business representatives, retired military or security officials with leverage and connections to political decision-makers – could also be considered for a role in mediation processes. More informal community-based approaches should be engaged in mediation to increase the chances of success.

States or organizations that are not well placed to act as mediators but want to support an arbitration process should focus on the inclusion of impartial mediators. This could involve backing multilateral efforts, providing technical and financial assistance to mediations, and ensuring that peace processes are not dominated by actors with vested interests in the outcome.

Mediation alone is rarely sufficient – it must be paired with other tools, including economic cooperation, governance reforms and security sector engagement, to address the deeper drivers of a conflict. Rather than treating mediation as an isolated intervention, it should be embedded within a long-term, multi-pronged conflict prevention approach.

What is considered a success in mediation should also be reframed. If mediation can help to achieve progress in one aspect of a situation, rather than a variety of goals, it can reduce tensions. Small victories can slowly change conflict dynamics.

Use programming interventions to empower civil society groups to develop informal governance structures that are resilient to sociopolitical shocks and manipulation.

Empowering civil society groups committed to addressing and dismantling unequal social hierarchies is a crucial component of successful structural conflict prevention. Civil society groups can play an important role in nation-building and redefining national identity.¹⁹² By reimagining and contesting dominant and exclusionary ideas of citizenship, civil society groups can develop alternative and inclusive ideals of nationality and belonging. For example, in the conflict in Georgia, a barrier to resolution is the conception of Georgian citizenship which sees those that are not ethnically Georgian as ‘guests’, even if their communities have a decades-long history in Georgia. When deeply embedded within their communities, civil society groups working on integration can have wider legitimacy and reach. However, financial and organizational constraints limit their work, as does targeting and repression in authoritarian contexts.

Working with civil society is a permanent cornerstone of conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts, but a more concentrated effort is needed to ensure this work can continue despite the reduction in aid spending. Civil society work needs to become more sustainable and resilient to

¹⁹² Grotenhuis, R. (2016) *Nation-Building as Necessary Effort in Fragile States*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, p. 167, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1gr7d8r.13>.

sociopolitical shocks and manipulation. If civil society work can be quickly upended by government crackdowns, funding cuts and corruption, then civil society groups are vulnerable to the system they are seeking to change.

Conflict prevention actors can provide training, funding and support for place-based grassroots governance structures that operate in parallel to formal political systems, particularly in contexts where corruption is prevalent and institutions are repressive. Governance structures can prepare communities to be resilient in the face of uncertainty on economic, political and environmental fronts. Local-level organizing allows groups to develop more collective power and influence, which can safeguard communities from government corruption, and extend the support of conflict-prevention actors more broadly.

Civil society groups can be empowered through training in consensus-building and local governance, support for the formation of local councils, the creation of structures to advocate for community needs, and the development of organizational tools for project management, budgeting and reporting.

Establishing a community framework can facilitate civil society groups to form wider partnerships and collaborate with social enterprises and sustainable investors that can interact directly with the community.

Policymakers and practitioners also need to establish clearer linkages between gender-based violence and conflict. Effective peacebuilding requires recognizing GBV not just as a personal or domestic issue but as a structural factor that can destabilize communities and escalate into broader conflicts. For example, GBV is more prevalent if violence is normalized in wider society. As such, GBV can be an important early warning signal for potential conflict.¹⁹³ By creating stronger connections between GBV and conflict prevention, peacebuilders can design interventions that address the root causes of instability holistically. For instance, incorporating GBV prevention into community-level dialogues and mediation efforts could strengthen social cohesion while mitigating violence at its source.

Ensure all parties have up-to-date information by providing in-depth stakeholder maps.

Prevention actors use detailed stakeholder maps to identify state and non-state actors and their relationships, as well as financial, economic and political networks and how these interact with one another within the conflict context. They are typically created as part of a scoping exercise at

¹⁹³ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2024), 'Recommitment, accountability and resourcing needed to end gender-based violence in conflict', 25 November 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2024/11/recommitment-accountability-and-resourcing-needed-end-gender-based-violence>.

the start of a process and then seen as a foundation for the remainder of the project.

Stakeholder maps need to be produced with greater depth and with a view to revisit the mapping that emerges. Historical grievances and relationships between stakeholders should be recorded in detail. Newer actors such as those from the domestic and international private sector, which could play an important role in implementing conflict-sensitive economic development projects, should also be included.

Stakeholder maps should be updated as projects are implemented. It has long been commonplace among donor countries to review where their money goes, to avoid fuelling local corruption.¹⁹⁴ An active stakeholder map could help to uncover links that current mapping efforts miss.

Integrate AI tools into early warning mechanisms to identify rises in disinformation and hate speech that target minority groups.

Analysis of social media spaces can provide an indication of the dominant sociopolitical narrative of different conflict contexts and can help to identify what level or type of conflict-prevention intervention may best suit the situation.

AI tools could monitor content online and alert governments, international organizations or NGOs when instances of hate speech are increasing or when certain minority groups are singled out.¹⁹⁵ AI tools may also help with monitoring and combating disinformation.

AI tools for monitoring and content moderation have been around for several years now. However, as technology companies are grappling with their role as political and conflict actors, independent tools that can be co-developed with conflict experts – such as those that would enable the inclusion of smaller language groups – are not a priority among for-profit technology companies.

Disrupt corruption in the conflict cycle.

There is a great need to actively disrupt corruption and to reduce the influence of malign actors who exploit conflict dynamics. This entails going beyond the approaches used so far in conflict prevention to try to disincentivize corruption, by supporting anti-corruption bodies, advocating for reforms and developing watchdog organizations.

¹⁹⁴ Anderson, M. B. (1999), *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace – Or War*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

¹⁹⁵ DeVance Taliaferro, J., Hedadji, F. and Duling, E. (2023), 'Web Scraping as a Data Collection Strategy: The Perils and Pitfalls', Social Science and Humanities Open, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4479267>.

Direct engagement with the states that provide infrastructure and networks for financial flows is one way to disrupt corruption. Such states may be middle-power and neighbouring countries, which either turn a blind eye or actively benefit from financial flows. Influential conflict prevention actors at the state level can coordinate diplomatic efforts to engage more directly with these facilitating states. They could offer incentives where possible that leverage these actors' other foreign policy goals.

The private sector could also be a potential partner in anti-corruption efforts, especially firms investing in conflict-affected countries. These should be made a partner in combating corruption and in embedding conflict-sensitive practices. Such a partnership would go a long way in supporting ongoing conflict prevention work undertaken by states, regional and international organizations.

In each conflict context, a forum that engages the investment and corporate community could provide a platform for discussion on how to redirect efforts and explore mutually beneficial ways to reduce complicity. The prospect of reputational risks can itself be a disruptive force in this regard.

05 Conclusion

This paper set out to address the question of whether traditional conflict prevention approaches remain effective in a context of intensifying conflict drivers and shrinking budgets.

The research found that traditional interventions had some success across the three case studies. In particular, mediation will continue to play an important role in conflict resolution, as more actors are qualified to carry out this intervention. As border disagreements are one of the biggest drivers of conflict, finding ways to resolve border disputes constructively will be essential, but difficult as international aid for local peacebuilding initiatives will undoubtedly be curtailed in the current global context.

Resource-sharing interventions might be more critical than ever. At the same time, they will require more concentrated effort to reach sustainable agreements on resource disputes, particularly in the face of increasing water shortages and decreasing arable land. As water becomes a resource in shorter supply, conflicts over access to water may escalate.

Multi-stakeholder processes are crucial for ensuring the durability of any peace agreements: without involving a diverse representative selection of the local community and other conflict-affected parties, conflicts cannot be resolved comprehensively. However, as in the case of cross-border community engagement, this type of programming is most likely to fall victim to budget cuts, particularly as this type of intervention does not tend to yield results in the short term, over sustained grant periods.

The research demonstrates the importance of institutional reform for cementing lasting peace. The case studies show the whole range of outcomes, from successful reform in Kenya to attempted but incomplete reform in Georgia and no attempts at reform in the case of India and Pakistan. Given the amount of time and investment required for successful institutional reform, this intervention is also likely to become more difficult to undertake in a resource-constrained environment. In addition, interventions tackling institutional reform can be perceived as violating a state's sovereignty. However, this research shows the importance especially of tackling corruption. If corruption cannot be addressed, then conflict cannot be resolved sustainably.

ICTs can play a role in improving verification and building confidence. However, they can also exacerbate conflict through facilitating the spread of disinformation and other harmful narratives, and by making dangerous and lethal technology more easily accessible.

Decades of conflict prevention have provided the international community with a wealth of data on how conflict can be prevented, mitigated and resolved. However, it seems that some of the biggest challenges remain, including how to ensure that efforts are sustainably funded and that conflict parties can find the political will to come together for conflict resolution. It is not necessary to reinvent conflict prevention, but prevention actors must have the time and resources to understand the local context to be able to select the most appropriate types of interventions, or to further deepen ongoing work.

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Cover image: Indian army soldiers patrol as they keep vigil ahead of Republic Day celebrations at a forward post on the Line of Control (LoC) in Keran Kupwara, Jammu and Kashmir, India, on 23 January 2025.

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