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Preventing violence, saving lives: What works for reducing homicides and conflict-related deaths?

Launch of the Global SDG Synthesis Coalition's Peace Pillar Synthesis
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Coalition**

Our Mission

Harnessing the power of
evaluation and synthesis to
accelerate the achievement
of the 2030 agenda.



The Global SDG Synthesis Coalition



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IEO Independent Evaluation Office
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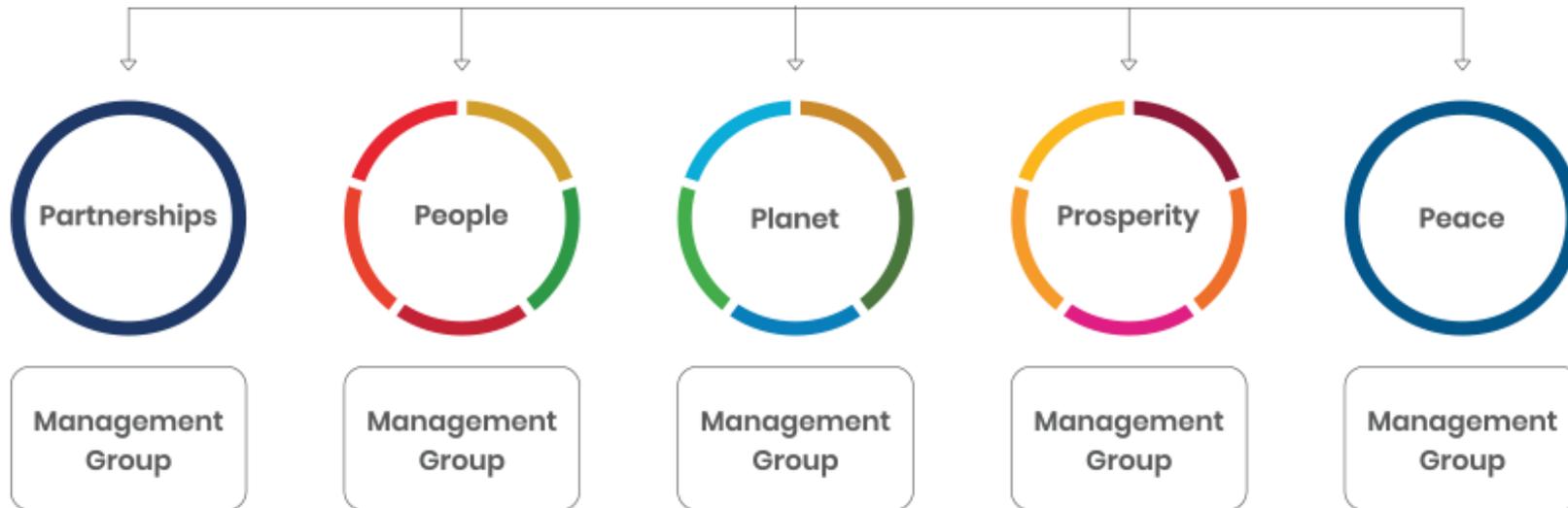
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The Global SDG Synthesis Coalition

Preventing violence, saving lives: What works for reducing homicides and conflict-related deaths?

A synthesis of evaluative evidence related to the peace pillar of the SDGs.

FINAL REPORT

16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

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Preventing violence, saving lives: What works for reducing homicides and conflict-related deaths?

A plain language brief based on the Peace Pillar synthesis of evaluations and research by the Global SDG Synthesis Coalition. The full synthesis report was authored by the American Institutes for Research.

10 key takeaways and their programming and policy implications

Evidence	Implication
Strengthening social inclusion	
Media and communication initiatives can promote peace and reduce violence, especially in crisis settings.	Media and communication initiatives appear to be more effective when implemented alongside economic efforts - such as social protection and job creation initiatives. Embedding them into wider strategies, with economic investments, may increase sustainability, as seen in Uganda, where labour market opportunities reinforced peace messaging.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In Uganda, radio messages encouraged defections from the Lord's Resistance Army, leading to fewer fatalities, especially after increases in cotton prices created job opportunities. In Nigeria, broadcasts by religious leaders shifted attitudes toward reconciliation with ex-Boko Haram fighters. 	
Community engagement, policy advocacy and local partnerships strengthened the sustainability of media and communication initiatives. Where programmes lacked strong local systems, attitude shifts were temporary.	The effectiveness and sustainability of communication initiatives are often enhanced when they involve structured engagement with communities and local organizations from the outset. Formal partnerships with community organizations, support for local leadership, and investment in digital materials can help initiatives remain relevant in the longer term.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In Albania, a United Nations Children's Fund anti-trafficking programme built digital literacy courses and Facebook channels for resources to remain available beyond the project lifespan. In Nigeria, involving religious leaders in peace broadcasts increased trust and resonance. 	
Combined interventions - such as those addressing infrastructure, governance and social cohesion - were linked to stronger peace outcomes than standalone programmes.	Evaluations to test how different components interact and contribute to peace could enable stronger lessons on the most effective combinations.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In Jordan, investments in schools, health centres and roads, alongside trust-building between host and refugee communities, improved social cohesion. In East Darfur, the combination of land dispute resolution committees and basic services reduced conflict. 	

			SDG-16 Outcomes						
			Homicides	Violent crime	Trust in police	Conflict-related deaths	Conflict-related violence	Conflict resolution	Others (specify)
SDG-16 Intervention Topic	Social Inclusion	Peace education		●	● ●			● ●	●
		Peace messaging and media		●		●	●	● ●	● ●
		Dispute resolution	●	●	●		● ●	● ●	● ●
		Social inclusion, social cohesion, and reintegration ¹			●		● ●	● ●	● ●
		Intergroup dialogue and interaction		●				● ●	● ●
		Others (specify)							

Synthesis scope



Focus on 16.1 (reduce violence) and 16.4 (crime)

Activity Category	Specific Initiatives
Social inclusion (strengthening social cohesion and conflict resolution as well as inter-group perceptions and relations)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communications• Economic inclusion• Gender/youth inclusion for conflict prevention• Reintegration of ex-combatants or other ex-offenders• Social cohesion for conflict prevention
Safe environments (ending violence and building a safe and secure environment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Border management• Democracy and peaceful elections• Early warning systems• Governance strengthening to prevent conflict, violence, or crime• Law enforcement capacity• Youth crime prevention
Peace processes and conflict prevention (supporting peace processes, oversight, and post-conflict justice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gender for peace• Governance strengthening to respond to conflict• Natural resource management• Peace agreement implementation• Security and stabilization strengthening• Social cohesion for conflict resolution• Transitional justice• Youth for peace

Synthesis questions



- 1. What works? Where?** What interventions are effective in reducing homicides and conflict-related deaths? What is the impact of these interventions on homicides and conflict-related deaths? How do these impacts differ across different contexts (e.g., low-income vs middle-income countries, acute crisis, vs. protracted crisis, vs. non-crisis LMIC contexts)?
- 2. How or why does it work?** Why are interventions to reduce conflict-related deaths and homicides effective (or not)? How do these interventions achieve their objectives (or not)? How do contextual, implementation, and design factors influence the effectiveness of these interventions?
- 3. Leave no one behind.** How do gender and marginalization affect the impact of interventions to reduce conflict-related deaths and homicides? How did interventions consider non-discrimination, equity, and equality considerations in their design and implementation?

Synthesis methods



Impact evaluations

10,096 studies identified from scholarly and institutional databases

6,785 studies excluded after screening title and abstract

3,066 studies excluded after machine learning

171 studies excluded after full-text screening and 35 studies excluded during coding

Coding and risk of bias assessment completed for 39 studies

Performance and process evaluations

3,000+ records reviewed through institutional databases and management group

Manual eligibility screening of title and abstract using inclusion criteria

448 evaluations excluded after full-text screening

438 studies included in evidence gap map

77 studies sampled for full-text analysis

75 studies included in analysis

Peace missions reduce violence at scale



Peace missions were consistently associated with reductions in civilian casualties — particularly when deployed at sufficient scale and backed by clear mandates



- **More peacekeepers → fewer civilian deaths**
- **Stronger effects with larger deployments**
- **Improved household perceptions of security**
- **Sub-Saharan Africa: +100 peacekeepers → ~3 fewer civilian casualties per month**
- **East Darfur: Land dispute reforms reduced local conflict**

Media and communication can reduce violence



Strategic communication initiatives shifted attitudes toward peace and, in some contexts, reduced violence — particularly when messages were trusted and aligned with economic realities.



- **Peace messaging changed attitudes toward reconciliation**
- **Large-scale radio campaigns reduced fatalities in active conflict**
- **Trusted messengers (e.g., religious leaders) strengthened credibility**
- **Uganda: Radio messages encouraging LRA defections reduced fatalities — strongest when labour market opportunities increased**
- **Nigeria: Religious leader broadcasts improved attitudes toward reconciliation**

Peacebuilding efforts enhanced by livelihood and employment opportunities



Linking peacebuilding with livelihood and employment support appears to enhance the effectiveness of Peacebuilding efforts, particularly for vulnerable groups.



- **Economic opportunity reinforced peace messaging and reintegration.**
- **Labour market incentives shaped conflict participation decisions.**
- **Household-level livelihood inclusion strengthened reintegration outcomes.**
- **Uganda: cotton price increases strengthened the impact of defection messaging.**
- **Rwanda and Southeast Asia: reintegration programmes were stronger when families accessed livelihoods.**

Combined interventions are linked to stronger peace outcomes



Combined interventions - such as those addressing infrastructure, governance and social cohesion - were linked to stronger peace outcomes than standalone programmes.



- Infrastructure alone was insufficient.
- Trust-building and governance reforms strengthened the impact of service delivery.
- Multi-component approaches showed stronger peace outcomes than standalone programmes.
- Jordan: infrastructure investments + trust-building improved social cohesion.
- East Darfur: land dispute resolution committees + basic services reduced conflict.

Policing reduced violence — militarised approaches increased risks



Expanding police presence and strengthening law enforcement capacity reduced violence in several contexts — but militarised policing was associated with increased abuses and crime.



Rights-based, scaled policing:

- Reduced homicides and violent crime
- Improved public safety outcomes
- Greater sustainability when accountability and legitimacy were present

Militarised policing:

- Increased human rights abuses
- In some cases, increased crime
- Weakened community trust

Institutionalising peacebuilding strengthens sustainability



Peacebuilding efforts were more sustainable when embedded in laws, policies and systemic institutional capacity — rather than implemented as standalone projects.



- Legal anchoring strengthened continuity beyond project cycles
- National strategies and policy frameworks reinforced legitimacy
- Systematic capacity-building improved implementation durability
- Multi-level partnerships enhanced institutional ownership
- **Malawi: Institutionalised paralegal services improved access to justice and reduced case backlogs**
- **Nigeria & Sudan: Government engagement strengthened legitimacy and durability of social cohesion initiatives**

Inclusion often prioritized – but evidence gaps remain



Many performance and process evaluations — and a notable subset of impact evaluations — emphasised gender and youth inclusion. However, few evaluations examined participation of other vulnerable populations.



- Gender and youth inclusion frequently featured in programme design
- Limited rigorous evidence linking inclusion directly to reductions in violence
- Minimal focus on other marginalised groups (e.g., persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities)
- Inclusion was stronger in intent than in demonstrated impact

Implication: Stronger theories of change and more rigorous mixed-method and experimental evaluations are needed to understand how inclusion reduces conflict and violence.



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Panel discussion and Q&A

What implications do the synthesis findings have for design, policy, financing and evaluation practice?



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Thank you!

- **Champion and apply the evidence**
- **Contact us if you have specific comments or suggestions for further Peace Pillar policy priorities**
- **The future for SDG synthesis: static to interactive access to evidence**
- **The Coalition as an evidence connector**

