

HIGH-IMPACT Giving Opportunities

PHILANTHROPY
THAT MAKES
A DIFFERENCE

Conflict Resolution: Facilitating Trust-Building to Prevent Violent Conflicts

FACT: *Violent conflict costs the African continent an estimated \$18 billion a year.¹*

THE PROBLEM

The number of ongoing armed conflicts worldwide increased from 19 in 2004 to 25 in 2005, a rare conflict spike with drastic consequences for people in or near conflict zones worldwide.² Of course, conflicts do not begin with violence; violence begins when other means of resolving disputes fail. Once violence breaks out, it is much more difficult to resolve conflict, as political leaders demonize their foes, become entrenched in their positions, and generally destroy any semblance of trust – a crucial ingredient in peacefully settling disputes. Bringing peace to a war-torn region is many times more difficult than taking preventive action to resolve conflict peacefully before violence begins, yet major new violent conflicts break out on a regular basis. The tools of conflict prevention need to be refined and strengthened.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play an important role in conflict prevention worldwide. Unlike governments, NGOs are free to act unofficially and with great flexibility to build trust with all parties; historically they have helped resolve countless crises. The Catholic lay community of Sant'Egidio, for example, played a key role in mediating a resolution to Mozambique's long civil war in the early 1990s.³

THE URGENCY

Poor attempts at negotiation mean opportunities to make peace are lost every day, and more people die. The negotiation and compromise needed to prevent violent conflict requires skillful communication, careful trust-building, and creative thinking about how to construct win-win solutions to conflict. Investments in the basic tools of negotiation can save lives in the future.

Mediators do not have the resources to intervene quickly in new crises. Many NGOs that promote peace are forced to limit their geographical scope or activities due to resource constraints, and they often lack the means to engage parties of a spiraling conflict before it is too late.

THE OPPORTUNITY

Efforts to prevent conflict can target underlying issues or seek to address the immediate triggers of violence, including mistrust between key leaders. Donors can help in both approaches:

- **Train disputing parties in the negotiation skills that will help make them effective at resolving disputes.** Seminars that teach negotiation can bring rivals together before issues fester and also give them the tools to find a peaceful way out of conflict.
- **Support think tanks and other organizations that engage actively with political leaders from all sides of a conflict.** Numerous secular and religious organizations devoted to conflict prevention and resolution worldwide have access to key decision makers, and make contributions to peace as mediators despite resource constraints.
- **Support the development of media that promote peaceful rather than divisive politics.** Innovative programs can reach broad audiences and contribute to climates of peaceful coexistence and dialogue by teaching journalists to avoid hate speech and present all aspects of a dispute.

Good sources of further information about conflict prevention and resolution include the following:

- The **U.S. Institute of Peace** is a congressionally-funded organization that complements its active peace-building programs with significant research (<http://www.usip.org/programs/index.html>).
- The **Alliance for Peacebuilding** is a coalition of organizations dedicated to applied conflict prevention and resolution (www.allianceforpeacebuilding.org/ourwork.htm).

1. Hillier, D., "Africa's Missing Billions: International Arms Flows and the Cost of Conflict," Oxfam Briefing Paper No. 107, for IANSA, Oxfam, and Saferworld, 2007, http://www.oxfam.org/en/files/bp107_africas_missing_billions_0710.pdf.

2. Hewitt, J., Wilkenfeld, J. and T.R. Gurr, eds., *Peace and Conflict 2008* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2007).

3. Hume, C., *Ending Mozambique's War: The Role of Mediation and Good Offices* (Washington, DC: USIP, 1994).