

# Conflict and violence



# The issue

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Armed conflict and violence are increasingly complex, dynamic and protracted. The impacts on civilians are devastating, with millions killed, injured or displaced every year. For too many people around the world, safety and security, economic and political opportunity, and just and lasting peace remain as elusive as ever.

Conflicts halt efforts to reduce poverty and reverse development gains. Resource constraints, climate shocks and other stresses make it ever-more difficult for people to cope in the world's most fragile regions.

Ensuring that people live in peaceful and just societies must be a global development priority. The UN has placed sustaining peace and preventing crises high on the political agenda. From grassroots movements to governments, everyone must play their part.

# Our approach

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ODI's work on conflict and its impact on policy and people spans more than 50 years. We engage in high-profile public debates and influence both long-standing and emerging policy agendas, from the World Humanitarian Summit to UN reform.

Through high-quality, independent research, analysis and advisory work, we support different actors to develop more coherent and comprehensive efforts to prevent conflict and crisis, mitigate their impacts, and ultimately help states and their citizens achieve long-term peace and stability.

We also aim to shed light on the different experiences of marginalised groups in conflict – including a focus on women and youth – to encourage interventions that are targeted to their particular needs, while acknowledging the crucial roles they can play in peace-building and shaping emerging political settlements.

We convene a wide global network that includes multilateral organisations, government ministries (including rising global actors, such as China and the Gulf states), businesses, foundations and NGOs, as well as academics and frontline responders. We provide rapid analysis on armed conflicts that hit the headlines, while our world-class communications raise the profile of protracted crises that rarely draw such global attention.

Our work focuses on five priority areas: responding to conflict; violence and extremism; economic development and investment in fragile states; institution-building in volatile environments; and sustaining peace.

Explore the full range of our work at [odi.org/conflict-and-violence](https://odi.org/conflict-and-violence)

# Priority areas

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- ▶ Responding to conflict
- ▶ Violence and extremism
- ▶ Economic development and investment in fragile states
- ▶ Institution-building in volatile environments
- ▶ Sustaining peace



# Responding to conflict

Grounded in field research, ODI's work on conflict response spans decades, countries, sectors and levels – from humanitarian access in Syria to private sector engagement in Yemen – covering donorship to delivery. Our work on cash transfers in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Iraq, Mozambique, Nepal and Ukraine has been particularly influential. From our research, ODI was able to establish the most accurate estimate yet of overall global expenditure on cash programming, which will enable the international community to report on its cash-related commitments under various humanitarian frameworks.

We are also a leading voice in debates on refugees and forced displacement, aiming to ensure that all those who are forcibly displaced – including the many groups that do not fall under the definition of 'refugee' contained in the 1951 Refugee Convention – receive adequate attention in policy discussions, have their voices and perspectives heard, and ultimately their needs for assistance and protection met. Our experts are actively engaged in formal and informal dialogues on the Global Compact on Refugees, a process which aims to strengthen the current international response to large movements of refugees.

While recognising the challenges that humanitarian assistance faces on the ground, such as violence against aid workers in conflict, we have also provided cutting-edge critique of the humanitarian response system itself, arguing that it must let go of some fundamental – but outdated – assumptions, structures and behaviours if it is to retain its legitimacy. As national foreign policy and domestic interests overtly influence donor aid policy, ODI is also working closely with ministries, think tanks and practitioners to understand how these interests and humanitarian values are balanced, contested and compromised.

## Find out more



Humanitarian access and local organisations in Syria



Ending the Rohingya crisis: what will it take?



Time to let go: remaking humanitarian action for the modern era



10 things you should know about cash transfers

# Violence and extremism

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Conflict is generally understood as a phenomenon with ‘root causes’ that tend to be located at the group or national level. Meanwhile, the multiple factors influencing the decision to use violence over non-violence at the individual level are often overlooked and poorly understood.

Researchers at ODI are working to move the focus from conflict to the larger phenomenon of violence, including violent extremism. We draw on a range of methods, including behavioural experiments, participant observation and social network analysis, to gain insights into how beliefs are connected to violent behaviour.

In Niger, our research examined how growing disillusionment with secular democracy, as a system that can solve the problems Nigeriens face, interacts with increasing support for Sharia law. In Uganda, we are using behavioural experiments to understand how people’s experience of conflict influences their perceptions of fairness and expectations for the future.

By looking at the complexities of decision-making, ODI aims to inform more nuanced – and, crucially, effective – conflict interventions which support individuals in making non-violent choices. Our work seeks to encourage peace-making actors to take new and different approaches to tackling violence and extremism.

## Find out more



Understanding trajectories of radicalisation in Niger



Why supporting Sharia in Niger is not an extreme position



Countering violent extremism

# Economic development and investment in fragile states

Inclusive economic development is critical to poverty alleviation and job creation and plays a key role in stabilising fragile and conflict-affected states. But delivering it is difficult and often hampered by weak institutions, poor infrastructure and minimal private investment.

ODI explores incentives for the private sector to support crisis response and invest in conflict-affected regions. Our work in Yemen and Somalia, for instance, has found that local businesses are actively cooperating with international and regional humanitarian actors to deliver assistance or facilitate access, and suggests there are areas of common ground that may help foster stronger business engagement in humanitarian response.

Our researchers are also exploring ways to harness the potential of innovative approaches to economic development, including options to lower private-sector risk – for example through blended finance and increased absorption of commercial risk by donors. We are increasingly examining the role of climate finance in fragile states, including allocation, absorption and investment decisions.

We are also assessing the financing toolkits of established development institutions, such as the World Bank and the UN, as they aim to better integrate their policy and financing approaches in fragile contexts. Recent ODI research in Colombia, Nepal, Iraq and Liberia speaks to the importance of understanding the political dynamics that underlie conflict. Joint planning structures, shared analyses and a focus on sub-national drivers of fragility are all essential to effective investment in conflict prevention.

## Find out more



Private sector engagement in complex emergencies: case studies from Yemen and southern Somalia



Five ways the World Bank can improve its operations in fragile states



Conflict, pro-poorest growth and wellbeing: a subnational analysis

[odi.org/conflict-and-violence](https://odi.org/conflict-and-violence)



# Institution-building in volatile environments

Effective institutions – across both government and society – are critical to reducing poverty and vulnerability and building a capable state. Working in some of the world's most volatile countries – from the DRC to Somalia – ODI's research demonstrates that resilient institutions are possible in fragile and conflict-affected states, and that they can also be gender-responsive.

We have spent almost a decade in South Sudan, supporting basic financial systems and processes at central and local levels of government. In Liberia, we have increased domestic resources by supporting negotiations on concessions with multinational companies and auditing existing agreements. By improving the predictability of funding in Sierra Leone, we are helping the government plan more accurately, improve internal resource delivery and reduce the need for borrowing.

Responding to the needs of partners across the world, we build close and trusted relationships with government ministries, donors and civil society to improve transparency, the delivery of public services, the management of public money and gender-sensitive budgeting.

## Find out more



Security sector reform and organisational capacity-building



Assessment of the evidence of links between gender equality, state-building and peacebuilding



Challenges and opportunities for advancing gender equality goals, women's voice and agency in fragile and conflict-affected countries



Gender-responsive budgeting in fragile and conflict-affected states – a review

# Sustaining peace

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The human suffering and financial costs arising from global crises are both untenable and unsustainable. Preventing crises and sustaining peace must – as the UN Secretary-General announced in 2017 – be a global priority.

ODI has decades of experience in understanding the drivers of conflict and crisis, and analysing how to build and sustain peace. Our work in Libya has highlighted the importance of cross-border transactions to peacebuilding as both a challenge, for example in terms of arms flows, and an opportunity, including for civil society exchanges. In South Sudan, and several countries across Asia and Southeast Asia, ODI has evaluated the role of donors in peacebuilding, and made recommendations for the design and implementation of interventions. Looking to the future, ODI is increasingly investing in understanding the relationship between different drivers of risk, such as the emerging role of climate security.

As a critical interlocutor for the UN reform process, ODI analysed the capacity of the UN system for crisis prevention and of the UN's agencies, funds and programmes to sustain peace. We are supporting the UN in delivering on this ambitious agenda, translating high-level rhetoric on sustaining peace and preventing crises into a concrete agenda for action.

## Find out more



Delivering the UN  
'sustaining peace' agenda



Why is peacebuilding so  
difficult to achieve?



South Sudan at another  
crossroads

# The Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC)

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The SLRC is an ODI-led global research consortium that focuses its empirical research on four main themes in conflict or post-conflict settings:

- What are the underlying reasons for continued livelihood instability in post-conflict recovery situations?
- Through what mechanisms do perceptions, definitions and experiences translate into behaviours that aid or hinder post-conflict recovery?
- How can more inclusive and higher-quality service delivery be achieved in fragile states while supporting evolving political settlements?
- How does power play out in everyday politics in the DRC?

Funded by UK Aid (DFID), Irish Aid and the European Commission, the SLRC was established in 2011 and has since worked with research partners in Afghanistan, Belgium, the DRC, Italy, Nepal, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Uganda and the US. SLRC's publications include a substantial body of qualitative research as well as two rounds of an individual panel survey on livelihoods and service delivery in conflict.

Find out more [securelivelihoods.org](https://securelivelihoods.org)





## South Sudan

### Research, analysis and support

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South Sudan's conflict is expanding and fragmenting. There are no obvious sources of leadership or deliverable political strategies, and both domestic and international state-building efforts have collapsed.

ODI is developing a new approach to harness the breadth of our work on South Sudan and ensure that the lessons of the last decade have been learned, and to lay the foundations for future collaboration and partnership with South Sudanese actors. The ODI South Sudan Research, Analysis and Support Facility comprises:

- A research stream to document and analyse recent international engagement in South Sudan in order to develop a better understanding of how to address the internal and external dilemmas and tensions in fragile and conflict-affected states.
- A responsive analytical services and support facility for national and international partners to provide analysis of key issues and advisory support to promising initiatives.

# ODI experts

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Find all of ODI's experts on conflict and violence at [odi.org.uk/conflict-and-violence](https://odi.org.uk/conflict-and-violence)



For more information, and to contact us, please visit:

**[odi.org/conflict-and-violence](http://odi.org/conflict-and-violence)**

ODI is a leading independent think tank on international development and humanitarian issues.

The views presented in this booklet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the view of ODI.

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Photos:

- Cover: Boys walking surrounded by buildings destroyed by the conflict, Tripoli, Lebanon. Photo: ICRC/Laura Salvinelli
- Page 4: A child plays amidst the rubble of her neighbourhood, Sanaa, Saawan, Yemen. Photo: ICRC/Saddam Alqadimi
- Page 8: A Mali refugee at Mentao camp in Burkina Faso, displaced by recent combat in the north of Mali. Photo: Pablo Tosco/Oxfam
- Page 12: UNMISS Police and Military sections conduct search operations for weapons and restricted items in Juba, South Sudan. Photo: UNMISS/Ilya Mdedev
- Page 14: During a brief cessation of hostilities, families return to Shujaiya in eastern Gaza. Photo: Iyad al Baba/Oxfam

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