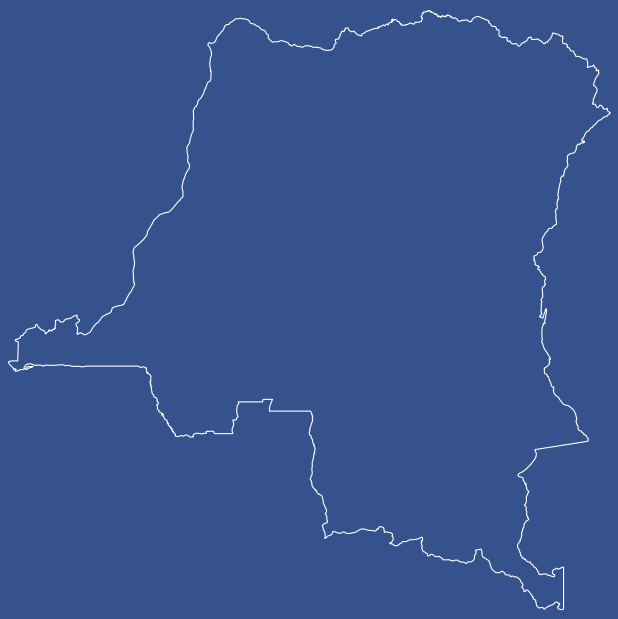
Protection Approaches

Linked up and linked in: Networking local-international early warning and early response in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo



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Authors' note

This paper and the wider three-year project is funded by the Jo Cox Memorial Grants, which supports work to empower women to prevent identity-based violence and mass atrocities. We were lucky to work with Jo during her year in Parliament – in fact we both met her for the first time at a meeting following the last paper we wrote together, that time about Syria. We enjoyed many conversations about the challenges and dynamics of modern conflict, the apparent rise in persecution of people and populations, and how to prevent mass atrocities. Throughout this project we have wished that we could tell Jo about the work we've been doing. We wished that we could have shared a draft of this paper with her – she would have had so much to add.

Jo, like us, truly believed that Britain could and should be a leader in the prevention of these crimes. Thanks to this fund, Jo is still at the heart of British efforts and contributions to the prevention of identity-based violence and mass atrocities. It is bittersweet that any changes that might come from this paper will be connected to Jo and her legacy. The pages below are dedicated to Jo.

Alexandra Buskie and Kate Ferguson

April 2021

In memory of Jo Cox, 1974 – 2016

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Contents

Executive summary

While the United Kingdom's work on conflict prevention and stabilisation in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is well resourced, none of the major strategies or policies guiding the UK's approach to prevention explicitly consider atrocity crimes or identity-based violence.[01] The characteristics and warning signs of identity-based violence do not appear to be explicitly considered in analysis, early warning, capacity building, or programming and monitoring, raising the risk that the processes that precede atrocities both within and without situations of armed conflict could be overlooked. This is not unusual, either among foreign actors in the DRC or with respect to the frameworks applied in UK missions in many states experiencing complex violence. However, the absence of a specific atrocity prevention framework as part of its strategic approach to programming significantly limits the efficacy and long-term impact of UK programming.

In the absence of a comprehensive strategy, a lightweight but powerful mechanism for implementing a tangible approach to preventing atrocities and identity-based violence would be to establish a local-first early warning system in eastern DRC. Such a system would assess the activities that are already taking place and establish how they could feed into a wider nationally coordinated system or network of systems. Clearer guidance, changes to language, and better indicators could reduce duplication and improve decision-making. Such a system would need to be developed in concert with local actors, making use of their expertise and knowledge of the local characteristics of violence in their communities and their own capacities to respond.

The need for such a mechanism was the primary finding of the research that is reported in this paper. Drawing from a mixed methodology combining a desk study with interviews with practitioners, a workshop with local partners and the breadth of experience and knowledge across our project consortium, our research looked at how risks of atrocities and identity-based violence are measured, how they are communicated, and how they are responded to.

We found that as local communities' understanding of atrocity risk readily mapped onto international frameworks for atrocities, it therefore would be relatively straightforward to develop and localise indicators on identity-based violence and atrocities. However, local engagement will be crucial in ensuring that such indicators can be monitored, and local actors will rightly be less inclined to engage with such a process if early warning does not lead to early communication and early action. In the absence of an agreed governmental strategy for responding to the risk of atrocities the UK mission to the DRC may therefore need to develop an atrocity prevention 'playbook' to give confidence to local actors that sharing information will result in benefitting from action – and to ensure that any such changes to information gathering and analysis is complemented by, and integrated across, UK government 'thinking and doing'.

This report analyses atrocity prevention work at multiple levels, from the local to the national to the international. However, our recommendations are exclusively to the British Government. This is because we believe an international donor-actor such as the UK can itself adopt policies that will considerably improve its ability to collaborate with partners operating at all levels, and we therefore intend to bring our expertise of UK policymaking to bear in the interests of supporting more effective UK-led coordination and thus more effective local, national, and international action by all stakeholders and partners.

As a major donor to DRC development, humanitarian, peacebuilding and human rights programmes (despite recent and rumoured cuts and the merger of the Department for International Development with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office) the UK is strongly placed to empower and support local early warning and prevention efforts. It is also minded to do so: the Government is preparing to implement the approach outlined in "Global Britain in a Competitive Age": its Integrated Review of foreign, defence, security and international development policies, which articulates a prevention-based approach to work in areas of conflict and highlights atrocity prevention as a priority area. The UK has repeatedly outlined a "strong commitment to do more" to strengthen the Government's approach to preventing atrocities.[02]

We therefore make a number of recommendations to improve the coherence of UK work on identity-based violence and atrocity prevention in the DRC and thus to make the UK a more effective partner for collaboration. By making the best use of existing resources, and prioritising this vital agenda, the UK can considerably bolster early warning and response capacity in the DRC.

Recommendations

We recommend that Her Majesty's Government:

- Centre the prevention of identity-based violence and mass atrocities in the country strategy, thereby moving towards intentional mainstreaming of the distinct policy challenge and focussing attention on, including a more systemised recording of, those specific dynamics of violence and risk
- Trial a new approach to local-international early warning and response systems designed around a symbiotic feedback loop of sharing information and analysis, and co-designing risk assessment tools and response strategies, that intentionally seeks to deepen relationships, cross-working, and understanding, and even lead to coordinated interventions between local and international actors
- Open up easy-access, quick release, low-level funds to support community based initiatives on prevention, early warning, and response efforts to identity-based violence that require light touch reporting
- Establish clear avenues for staff in Missions to have more direct engagement with local organisations beyond funding
- Establish a training budget for Mission staff and country teams on atrocity prevention, identity-based violence, and early warning

Such a bolstering would be timely. The United Nations are managing a gradual drawdown of the UN peace operation, MONUSCO, preparing the ground for its eventual withdrawal. The Covid-19 pandemic has already had an adverse effect on structural risk factors of social fracture, identity-based violence, and mass atrocities around the world.[03]

And the economic consequences of the pandemic increases the risk of donors making substantive cuts to aid programming in the DRC. This confluence of events requires a concentration of thinking and effort on how to mount an effective, long-term response to the additional strain placed on fractured societies. Mainstreaming the prevention of identity-based violence and mass atrocities into all activities – from health responses to diplomacy – can help maximise the impact of remaining resources to this end.

The project and methodology

This paper seeks to increase knowledge and understanding of how local civil society organisations (CSOs) and international duty bearers like the United Nations and donor states can better coordinate in the prevention of mass atrocities and identity-based violence. It interrogates if and how indicators of instability and violence in North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri provinces could be better captured, communicated, and responses coordinated between local and international actors. The research questions driving this paper seek to identify 'what works' in relation to early warning and early response activities in eastern DRC and what could be done by actors such as the UK to support others, whether local peacebuilders, donor states, multilateral actors, or international civil society, and to make their work more effective.

The paper seeks to inform a series of UK-funded and UK-led activities aimed at improving early warning activities in eastern DRC and better connecting local and international prevention actors. Beyond the DRC, this research informs Protection Approaches' own work to change how identity-based violence is understood and how it is prevented, most particularly our ongoing efforts to identify measurable indicators that when properly monitored can not only improve early warning of a rising risk of violence but also help guide effective preventative interventions. We hope that this paper will also be of interest to a range of stakeholders engaged in and committed to preventing violence and building peace inside and outside of the DRC.

This report forms part of a larger three-year consortium project called "Networking Prevention: Strengthening networks to prevent and respond to identity-based violence" that seeks to improve the ability of civil society networks to monitor, track and report incidents, to ensure that local, national, and international stakeholders are better informed and better placed to make policy decisions to respond; and that local civil society is better able to respond to violence and human rights abuses locally.[04] The work is funded by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's Jo Cox Memorial Grant, is led by Peace Direct, and connects an international consortium of partners that bring expertise spanning locally-led and multilateral change.

The project seeks to identify if and how indicators of identity-based violence and mass atrocities might be integrated into existing local early warning and early response, national mechanisms, and international risk analysis frameworks. In February 2020, Beni Peace Forum, Protection Approaches and the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), convened a three-day training workshop in Goma, DRC to improve data collection methods related to the prediction and prevention of identity-based violence including mass atrocities, in eastern DRC. Notwithstanding the difficulties of the Covid-19 pandemic, this first phase of the project sought to identify risk factors and establish new means of documentation and monitoring. New data that came out of that workshop is helping our local partners to more effectively monitor warning signs and develop evidence-based response strategies. The next stage of the project will be to work with international actors, including the UK Government, MONUSCO and other stakeholders, to develop new means of data dissemination and communication. This paper captures some of those lessons from the perspective of two authors who were closely involved in the operation of the project.

The project and this research pursue an integrated and inclusive approach to violence prevention, recognising that change comes via different levers, methodologies and contributions. While interrogating where points of conceptual and practical tension occur and how they can be overcome, the project's own methodology embraces an understanding of prevention and protection that acknowledges stakeholders will always define the shared challenge to reduce violence and build peace in their own terms, and at the same time being cognisant that the linguistic barriers between local communities and government bureaucrats can often be significant, even when communicating in a common language. Change comes when we acknowledge that we may not always agree; the strength of the project consortium is that our conclusions will sometimes be different. Thus while this paper has been informed by the expertise of all the project partners, its conclusions do not necessarily reflect their views.

This paper is neither a view from the grassroots nor from elite policy structures. Rather, it is a horizontal analysis drawing on the inputs, perspectives, and tools of both local and international prevention actors. We know that local peace actors make a significant contribution to efforts to prevent many manifestations of violence, including identity-based violence and atrocities: local actors have knowledge of and access to early warning information that can point to rising risks that could lead to atrocities and they often act as the front-line responders to threats and instances of violence. We also know that external actors, such as international NGOs, donor states or multilateral organisations can make critical contributions to the ecosystems of prevention and protection. However, the linkages, disconnects and potential for greater coordination between local peacebuilders and international actors remain undervalued and often unexplored. This paper argues against an either-or asymmetrical approach to local or global prevention work, instead presenting practical suggestions for international actors to help narrow the gaps in trust, communication, and coordination that persist between local and international prevention networks, not only in eastern DRC but in many of the world's most complex violent contexts.

The findings presented are informed by a mixed method methodology including a literature review, interviews, and policy analysis of publicly available material. The literature review included a review of over 70 sources bridging academic, policy and practice literature including on: the history of conflict dynamics and peace efforts in DRC, the evolution of atrocity prevention and the normative contributions of the 2005 principle of a collective responsibility to protect populations from mass atrocity crimes, the distinctions between (and overlaps across) various typologies of violence and their prevention, peacebuilding and development, local expertise of early warning, and early warning and response systems. A selection of the sources consulted are listed in the bibliography at the end of the paper. 11 interviews were conducted with staff from the then Department for International Development (DfID), the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), MONUSCO and analysts and experts from civil society in the UK and abroad. These interviews were undertaken on the condition of anonymity. The findings are also informed by interviews and conversations with related stakeholders that took place off record. All interviews with officials from Her Majesty's Government took place prior to the merger of the FCO and DfID although feedback on the paper and a workshopping session on the recommendations happened afterwards.

Dynamics of violence in eastern DRC

In the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo many different manifestations of violence come together, exist in parallel, and intersect. Historic, recent, and ongoing periods of conflict between armed groups have usually been accompanied by patterns of violence against civilians causing repeated forced displacement and in the context of military operations against armed groups. Violence against civilian groups has taken place in times of 'peace' and during periods when conflict between military actors has abated. In both times of 'hot conflict' and during cooler periods of military relations, patterns of violence in eastern DRC have reached thresholds of normative and legal definitions of crimes against humanity and war crimes.

According to the United Nations, there are more than 100 armed groups operating in the DRC.[05] Of those operating in eastern DRC, some like the Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda (FDLR) assume state-like structures while others are more localised and/or fragmented. Investigations by the Group of Experts appointed by the UN Security Council in 2008[06] highlighted the extent to which many of the most well-resourced armed groups are connected to and supported by regional state actors, acting either as proxy forces for those state actors' interests or facilitating illegal resource extraction from eastern DRC. Subsequent civil society investigations suggest this continues[07] to be the case. Other groups are organised in self-defence, or for political or ideological reasons. State actors and non-state groups alike have perpetrated acts of violence on a spectrum ranging from self-defence to mass atrocity crimes. MONUSCO and various civil society initiatives have attempted to map and analyse this network of actors.[08]

Occurring alongside and usually accompanying the recent history of armed conflict between various distinguishable armed groups are widespread and systematic patterns of violence and human rights abuses against vulnerable groups. Gender-based violence and in particular conflict-related sexual violence is a persistent challenge.[09] Violence against children and grave violations of their rights are high.[10] Discrimination and violence targeting people living with HIV/AIDs[11], those with disabilities, LGBTQ+ individuals[12], people with albinism[13], people who are (usually women) accused of practicing witchcraft, and other marginalised groups often goes unchecked. Robbery, extortion, murder, and other violent crimes are commonplace. Robbery is the most frequently reported crime; rape is the second.[14]

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons is a major challenge. In 2010 there were an estimated 300,000 arms and light weapons in civilian possession nationwide; by 2017 this number had risen to 946,000, of which only 216 were registered.[15]

Local, national and regional tensions surrounding the exploitation of natural resources, power and influence are common mobilisers of instability, conflict, and violence in eastern DRC – as they are everywhere in the world. Political, ethnic, tribal and other identities are activated when it is conducive to those in positions of control and influence – and, as in most places, conceptualisations of identities in eastern DRC are often more fluid, contradictory and complex than they can at first appear.

The country's fragile and wayward journey towards democratic rule has made slow progress amid high levels of corruption. The weaknesses of many state institutions, and their complicity in acts of violence and other human rights violations[16], contributes to high levels of public mistrust of local and central governance, justice and the police, and elements of the media.[17]

Against this background of instability, contestation of control between multiple armed groups, arms proliferation, impunity, high levels of corruption and weak governance, and in a country of rich natural resources, organised crime is endemic. A 2011 threat assessment by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime concluded that "conflict in Central Africa appears to have declined remarkably in recent years. The remaining instability and violence, which predominantly affects the Eastern DRC, seem to be increasingly the result of criminal acts in a context of persistent lawlessness and weak state institutions, rather than the product of war."[18] A 2015 report on the illegal exploitation of and trade in natural resources benefitting organised criminal groups found that the DRC is "increasingly faced with a large-scale smuggling operation by transnational organized crime involving the funding or support of armed groups in eastern DRC to continue facilitating illegal exploitation through destabilization and local control."[19] Again, this is common in complex violent contexts where state corruption can flourish and non-state and state proxy armed groups are well established.[20]

Like many places, eastern DRC is a complex environment where different forms of violence exist. At times these patterns of violence meet and intersect, at others violent trends might remain distinct and appear unrelated.

Understanding these dynamics through the lens of identity-based violence

This paper looks at only some dynamics of and surrounding violence that might be loosely described as being identity-based, or where individuals, groups, or places of cultural, economic or social importance, are targeted because of how the perpetrators view an aspect of their identity. It might be because of the village they live in, the job they do, their age, sex, gender, sexuality, political affiliation, nationality, health or disability, ethnicity, tribe, religion, race, or their practice of certain customs. By using this expansive and imperfect rubric, it is possible to look at different but localised manifestations of violence in eastern DRC that are often considered to be separate, if related, policy challenges by external actors but which can often be better understood as part of the same, if complex, dynamic of violence.

This rubric might include identity-based atrocities, where local geopolitical fault lines – whether of land ownership or political influence – have been activated, or where armed groups have carried out acts of collective punishment. It might include the challenges posed by violent extremism, where armed groups and their supporters are in part motivated by their conceptualisations of the other. It also includes the patterns of violence, discrimination, and structural inequality faced by women, children, LGTBQ+ communities, people living with HIV/AIDS, people with albinism, people living with disabilities, and other marginalised groups or communities, so often still excluded from peacebuilding and violence prevention activities – not only in DRC but around the world.

While violence of many forms thrives where instability, fragility and bad governance rule, the application of conflict prevention models to violent contexts where discrimination, structural injustice, inequality, and exclusionary behaviour are significant driving forces is often insufficient. The specific consideration of identity-based violence is often required to fully comprehend and tailor policy to address these drivers, but also to ensure the most marginalised or at risk are not excluded from prevention and protection work. Likewise, peacebuilding or democratisation efforts that do not engage with the 'political' challenges of marginalisation and prejudice, or do not take an intersectional lens to development will often inadvertently reinforce pre-existing biases.[21]

Identity-based atrocities are never inevitable nor is any country ever immune to identity-based violence. In complex violent contexts women, children, marginalised and minority communities, certain professions, and political dissidents become more vulnerable to discrimination and targeting. The processes and patterns that make these crimes more likely – the commonalities shared across manifestations of discrimination, marginalisation, exclusion, persecution, and group based-destruction – can be recognised and reversed.[22] By understanding those processes, those that work to address violence of all kinds, from local practitioners to multilateral bodies, can better develop strategies of prediction, prevention and protection. Preventing identity-based violence is therefore about recognising the root causes and triggers that increase risk and taking action that can help to change course.

Glossary

Term	Definition
Atrocity crimes	Atrocity crimes: the four international crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and ethnic cleansing.
Atrocity prevention	Atrocity prevention: programmes, activities and approaches designed to reduce the likelihood of atrocities occurring, through preventative and protective measures, analysis of and response to the specific drivers of atrocities, and increasing the resilience of at-risk groups.
Crimes against humanity	Crimes against humanity: acts that are part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population.
Conflict preventiontion	Programmes, activities and approaches designed to reduce incidents of violence, address drivers of violence, and support a negotiated transition to a sustainable peace.
Ethnic cleansing	Rendering an area ethnically homogeneous by using force or intimidation to remove persons of given groups from the area.
Genocide	A crime committed with the intent of destroying a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.
Identity-based violence	Any act of violence motivated by the perpetrator's conceptualisation of their victim's group's identity, for example race, gender, sexuality, disability, religion or political affiliation. This can include identity-based atrocity crimes.
Violent extremism	Support for or participation in acts of violence in support of an extreme ideology i.e. an ideology that opposes or negates broadly accepted fundamental rights and values.
War crimes	Human rights violations which transgress the customarily accepted laws of war.

Identity-based violence and atrocities

Atrocity crimes and identity-based violence have a deep and enduring impact on the fabric of societies. They are very often closely interlinked. Protection Approaches defines' identity-based violence as any act of violence motivated by the perpetrator's conceptualisation of their victim's group identity, for example race, gender, sexuality, disability, religion or political affiliation.[23] Atrocity crimes is an umbrella term for a variety of extreme forms of human rights violations that amount to the international crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and ethnic cleansing.[24]

Thus identity based violence can often amount to an atrocity either because of its scale and severity, or because of the manner in which it targets a protected group. Even when identity-based violence does not meet the threshold to be considered an atrocity, the historical pattern of rapid escalation of identity-based violence means one must always be alert to the risk that they will become so. Meanwhile while not all atrocities are identity based, there is a significant commonality between the risk factors for atrocities and the risk factors for identity-based violence[25] – notably the disempowerment and dehumanisation of a certain group by those with the ability to do harm. Consideration of identity-based violence is therefore always relevant to and often synonymous with consideration of atrocity crimes.

Atrocity crimes can be incredibly varied: they can be motivated and mobilised against the entire population of an area on the basis of its inhabitants perceived affiliation, such as in the use of barrel bombing against civilian populations in opposition-held territory in Syria, or they can target a specific victim group with a specific perceived identity, such as the campaign against the Rohingya community in Myanmar.[26] Atrocity crimes often take place during armed conflict, either as part of the strategy of a party to the conflict, such as the deliberate targeting of civilians by Gaddafi in Libya, or under the cover of a wider conflict, for example the crimes against the Yazidi in Syria.[27] One third of atrocities occur outside of situations of armed conflict, for example the atrocities committed by the governments in Venezuela or North Korea or the treatment of the Uyghur and other minorities by the Chinese government.[28]

These seemingly diverse forms of violence have common identifying processes and root causes. Perpetrators need to legitimise their enmity towards other groups, or populations that might occupy or have access to desired resources, in order to build support, develop the capacity, mobilise the resources and make plans to perpetrate violence.[29] The projection of intercommunal enmity, whether genuinely historical or recently manufactured, often stymies an international response that makes the error of assuming that such a process must therefore be intractable –or worse, legitimate. Often no attempt is made to map the network of violent actors, understand their motivations, or differentiate between the types of, and purposes to which, violence is used. Where such an analysis is made its findings are often not integrated into preventative programming.[30]

This paper is primarily concerned with the prevention of identity-based violence of all kinds but for these reasons also holds significant relevance for the prevention of atrocities, particularly those which are identity based.

The prevention of atrocities is a distinct and established field of practice from conflict prevention. Atrocity prevention and conflict prevention share many activities and are frequently mutually supportive. Preventing atrocities requires a recognition of the specific risk factors and drivers of atrocity crimes, such as marginalisation and hate against targeted groups and how these motivate decisions to turn to violence. Integrating a holistic approach to prevention that includes the root causes of atrocities therefore strengthens sustainable peace by untying the societal norms driving discrimination and exclusion.[31]

But atrocity prevention and conflict prevention are different approaches and can motivate different strategies: conflict prevention generally seeks to treat parties to conflict in a similar manner through a commitment to impartiality. Conversely, atrocity prevention aims ultimately to deter international crimes, meaning that it would be wrong to treat would-be or actual perpetrators and victims similarly.[32] Likewise, while conflict prevention seeks to deescalate all forms of tension and reduce all instances of violence, atrocity prevention acknowledges that not all violence is equal and differentiates between violence that is employed to commit an atrocity, violence that is employed in self-defence or to prevent an atrocity occurring, and violence that occurs outside of atrocity contexts, and prioritises its responses accordingly.

As an example: consider a situation of fragility in which multiple state, non-state and proxy state armed groups are in conflict. A traditional conflict prevention-based approach might look to disarm the armed groups and reduce tensions between them, while mediating peace negotiations towards a long term political solution and investing in development work to address root causes of grievance. An atrocity prevention approach would additionally look at which populations are most at risk, and which groups are using violence and to what end. Such an analysis might uncover, for instance, that some of the non-state armed groups are locally organised self-defence forces who have banded together in order to protect their communities. If these groups are disarmed they may be less able to defend those communities from atrocities, particularly if the perpetrators are state or proxy state forces whose access to arms is not easily disrupted. An atrocity prevention informed approach might therefore see the disarmament process prioritised and phased so that local self-defence forces are not disarmed until the threats to their communities are neutralised – whether by disarmament, comprehensive security sector reform of state actors, or effective border arms control to prevent proxy state forces resupplying over a porous border.

Finally, the prevention of identity-based violence can, and in circumstances such as eastern DRC should, be seen as a crucial component of atrocity prevention. Focussing efforts on reducing political and economic marginalisation, tackling real and perceived grievances, and reducing patterns of discrimination and other human rights abuses against or experienced disproportionately by certain groups often falls outside traditional conflict prevention and peacebuilding programming but is very often described as being ‘upstream’ atrocity prevention, fundamental to interrupting pathways to widespread or systematic violence.[33]

Thus while both conflict prevention and atrocity prevention have the same ultimate goal of establishing a stable and lasting peace, conflict prevention seeks to get there as directly as possible, whereas atrocity prevention seeks to get there while minimising the risks of atrocities occurring en route.

For people who face discrimination and violence in their daily lives, the differences between policy fields are only theoretical: their lived experience of the violence they see, suffer or perpetrate is rarely explicitly defined by the same terminology, concepts or intentionality as the agendas or budget lines that provide clarity for national and international governmental and civil society policy-making and grant-making. This divergence of learning and experience, but also of lexicon and understanding, has hindered the successful prevention of violence in many contexts, far beyond eastern DRC. Clumsy deployment of terms and poor implementation of interventions by external actors reinforce assumptions about particular agendas from mass atrocity prevention to governance to public health. This somewhat inevitable clash is not unique to violence prevention or peacebuilding but nevertheless presents a practical challenge.

In eastern DRC, local actors contribute, as they do everywhere, to the prevention of identity-based violence and mass atrocities on a daily basis by adopting practices and strategies to avoid escalation, employing self-protection strategies, establishing their own response systems and using transitional justice approaches to heal communities in the aftermath of violence.[34] Such work confronts the drivers of discrimination and violence, and reduces their consequences, irrespective of the theoretical framework that may be consciously applied.

Whether or not this work is consciously undertaken as ‘atrocity prevention’ or ‘identity-based violence prevention’ on the local level, work of this form – confronting prejudice and discrimination, and their most violent manifestations – is too often excluded in international donor (and some international NGO) conceptualisations of conflict prevention and peacebuilding. For that reason, it is critical to point to those structural, practical and conceptual gaps which, if bridged, could enhance contributions to the ultimate goal of preventing violence and building sustainable peace in a manner that mitigates the risk of atrocities occurring.

The challenge for those who wish to help reduce violence in contexts such as eastern DRC is to better ‘network’ prevention. It is not unusual in highly fragile contexts for many different forms of violence to exist. In the DRC, particular types of prevalent violence include: discrimination against people with disabilities, HIV/AIDS, women and girls, and certain tribes; other manifestations of identity-based violence; mass atrocity crimes; rape and sexual violence; armed conflict; violent extremism; and high levels of violent crime. While the outcomes of such violence manifest in a complex nexus, the nexus can be analysed to determine where specific treatment is required and where a holistic strategy is needed. The successful reduction of these various forms of violence therefore requires both cross-working and cross-learning and tailored interventions capable of halting and reversing specific drivers and causes of specific forms of violence.

If we accept that different manifestations of violence in complex violent contexts impact different victim groups and are made more likely by distinct, if related, processes or factors, it follows that successful prevention efforts must be capable of addressing those distinct dynamics and also be led by those most directly affected. Thus, it further follows that funds, networks, and political will must be mobilised to support delivery of work across all relevant fields of practice. These fields include but are not limited to; governance, justice, peacebuilding, conflict prevention, atrocity prevention, identity-based violence prevention, community building, the women, peace and security agenda, youth participation, climate and resource issues, refugee and migration policy, education, and public health. Many of these fields are complementary, some are overlapping, and at times they will even be contradictory – in times of COVID for example there may be a trade-off between education and public health. Effective policymaking requires that the interrelationship between these agendas be understood: to exploit synergies, reduce duplication and acknowledge and negotiate areas of friction. Such close working is needed at the local, national, or international level.

Moreover, while the closer an actor is to the violence the more moot the conceptual distinctions behind the violence will appear, the opposite is the case for policy makers, programme developers, diplomats, budget holders, and bureaucratic structures who are more dependent upon a pertinent conceptual analysis the further removed from the violence they seek to prevent they are. Therefore, better 'networking prevention' requires a sensitivity to the language that is used, how concepts are understood, where differences between agendas exist, and most crucially how this will or could translate to intended or unintended tangible differences in the prevention activities that are enacted on the ground.

While this paper has been informed by the perspectives and expertise of local actors in eastern DRC, as described in the methodology,[35] this is a document primarily for international actors concerned with the prediction and prevention of identity-based violence in the DRC and around the world. As such, it takes on the framing, language, and jargon of policy analysis, but we acknowledge that this can sometimes be an obstacle to change in itself. NGOs, academics, local communities, and policy makers can be preoccupied with terminologies, and this can both lead to tensions and sap energies. A pragmatic approach to networking prevention from local to global actors must therefore focus on what it is that needs to be prevented and what actions work, rather than what such interventions might variously be called.

The UK in the DRC and the UK's approach to mass atrocities

The future direction of UK contributions to instability, conflict, and development is in flux. The Prime Minister's Integrated Review of foreign, defence, security and international development policies has been published and contains a substantially new approach to conflict: explicitly recognising grievance and political marginalisation as drivers of modern mass violence, noting the interlinkages between mass violence and organised crime, emphasising the need to prioritise prevention and acknowledging atrocities as an area in need of further specific attention. However, with the document having been freshly published and having not been widely circulated beyond the Cabinet Office prior to publication; and with the internal architecture and policy priorities of the new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office still developing as the process of merging the former Department of International Development and Foreign and Commonwealth Office continues, this new vision has not yet translated into a clear change in policy direction.

In the midst of this flux the Government has announced its intention to substantially cut its Official Development Assistance (ODA), from over £15 billion in 2019 to £10 billion in 2021.[36] While discussions as to where these cuts will land are ongoing, it is not yet apparent that the policy priorities of the Integrated Review have been translated into spending decisions, and thus one cannot assume that work on stated objectives such as atrocity prevention, open societies and areas of conflict and fragility will be protected from cuts. Indeed, leaked emails suggest that up to 60% of funding to the DRC could be cut.[37]

At the time of writing, the UK was still the third largest donor of ODA to the DRC, providing £190 million to multilateral, INGO and private sector projects in the country in 2017-2018.[38] The UK makes considerable investment of resources in the DRC via annual contributions to the MONUSCO peacekeeping budget (£52m for 2020/21), through its role as a permanent member of the UN Security Council and a major donor through both assessed and voluntary contributions. Both diplomatic and development staff are present in the country, with a main office in Kinshasa and a small regional office in Goma. Three British personnel are deployed as part of MONUSCO; two Lieutenant Colonels and one Major. In 2019-2020, DfID budgeted £137 million for the country, with a majority of spending going to humanitarian programming, sustainable access to water, sanitation and hygiene and healthcare. DfID's Country Profile states that the focus of its portfolio is on "improving basic services and raising incomes, responding to emergencies whilst helping people cope with any future natural or man-made disasters and conflict, reducing the risk of migration."[39] DRC is a priority country for the UK's work on Human Rights, Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, Women, Peace and Security, and Modern Slavery.

The UK's overall approach to preventing mass atrocities and identity-based violence is embedded – often implicitly – within UK policies on conflict prevention, stabilisation, and civilian protection, such as the cross-governmental Building Stability Overseas Strategy (BSOS) and National Security Strategy – Strategic Defence and Security Review (NSS-SDSR), as well as through thematic priorities like Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, Promoting Freedom of Religious or Belief and Women, Peace and Security, among others. It is a strong supporter of the agenda at the United Nations and participates in discussions to share good practices for how to translate this commitment into policy and practice. The Government views atrocity prevention as a strand within its conflict prevention agenda but does acknowledge its importance. It notes that while "[a]trocities do not always occur in the context of armed conflict…the tools to prevent and respond to both atrocity situations and armed conflict are substantively alike, and often the best way to prevent atrocities can be to prevent conflict."[40]

As implementation of the new strategic framework of UK international policy begins, there will be new opportunity to draw out and more consciously connect various implicit contributions to the reduction of and responses to identity-based violence and mass atrocities with the governments new explicit commitments, both in country strategies and in the workings of Whitehall.[41] The new approach to conflict, which promises to place greater emphasis on political marginalisation and grievances as well as to better prioritise atrocity prevention, will need to be fleshed out and we hope that this paper can make contribution to that welcome process.

Networking Prevention In Eastern DRC

This section surveys the networks that currently exist between local and international actors engaged in violence prevention in eastern DRC. First, we look at where the risks lie and what indicators of vulnerabilities are important to capture. Then we present a picture of the networks and warning systems that are already in place in order to assess how risk is currently monitored, how concerns are communicated, and how local and international actors do (or do not) respond to threat levels. We use the term 'Systems' here following the framing used by Sentongo in his appraisal of early warning and response in the Great Lakes Region. Sentongo describes systems as referring to "initiatives purposefully organised and maintained to collect relevant data, analyse and assess risks, and to share that information with recommendation on possible responses to the situation."[42] We conclude with a number of recommendations.

Effective warning systems, whether of health crises, famine, natural disasters, of violence, rely upon three core principles: recognising, communicating and responding to risk and our survey considers these networks from the perspective of these three principles.

- **Recognising risk** requires knowledge of what to measure or look for. This commonly includes a checklist of imminent warning signs and triggering moments, alongside longer-length analysis of indicators and risk factors and incident reporting. Data collection requires a means of analysis and framework to determine thresholds of concern.

- **Communicating risk** requires coordinated cross-working, including but not limited to an understanding and clarity of how and when to share information with relevant actors.

- **Responding to risk** rests upon timely and effective implementation of possible measures, for short, medium, and longer term response. Responding to risk also requires ongoing communication.

As Moix notes "[g]etting ahead of mass atrocities to prevent the killing before it starts means investing earlier to strengthen the capacities of societies to find nonviolent solutions when conflicts arise and to resist the dehumanising processes that mass atrocities require."[43] As such, the inclusion of those closest to these processes is critical for successful early warning and response. Early warning refers to the collection, analysis and communication of information about developments that could potentially lead to an escalation in violence.[44] Using local knowledge is a crucial part of ensuring that an early warning and response system is successful at a community level.[45] Our research has found international actors' understanding of local knowledge is also crucial to successful early warning on the national and international levels.[46]

However, local actors have often been seen by 'outsiders' as the 'last mile' in early warning systems: from disaster preparedness to violence prevention, local populations are traditionally the final actors to be included in design and implementation.[47] While there have been efforts in recent years to enhance international early warning systems with local perspectives and information, the connection between local actors and international actors is often weak or lacking in clarity.[48] Even if the relevant message gets through, there is often a lag between identifying a threat and making a decision to respond. The failure to attract a sense of urgency, disagreements between stakeholders on how to respond, differing interpretations of the threat or a lack of clarity on who has the responsibility to take action slow or impede timely responses.[49] Ideally, early warning information should therefore include recommendations for action to those with the capacity to make timely and appropriate responses.[50]

Table 1: Summary of differences between early warning systems[51]

	Description	Example from this research in eastern DRC
First generation systems (1995 onwards)	First generation systems are centralised in structure and focused on prediction and providing analysis to inform decision-making	Donor early warning systems, such as the UK's Countries at Risk of Instability process, is focused on assessing and ranking states based on their resilience and pressures to inform the Cabinet Office's national security strategies
Second generation systems (1999 onwards)	Second generation systems are closer to the regions they cover and have field monitors. They focus on prediction and analysis but also make proposals for response	Information provided through UNJHRO monitoring is used by MONUSCO field offices to decide on priorities and mechanisms for preventive action and response to human rights violations
Third generation systems (2003 onwards)	Third generation systems are localised in structure, the monitor or their group will often play a role in providing or coordinating the response, and the focus is on using information as a response. These systems aim to prevent violence in specific localities	MONUSCO's Community Liaison Assistants play the role of monitor and also help MONUSCO triage its response

There are a number of good practices that are relevant across these different generations of early warning systems, including:[52]

- The need for strong field networks with proximity to the violence, using multiple sources of information
- The use of open-source information to facilitate collaborative and integrated responses
- The use of mixed methods to collect and analyse data
- The judicious use of technology to enable rapid information collection and sharing
- Regular reporting back to the client base
- Two-way connection between warning and response, in that alerts reach outwards but response mechanisms rarely reach in to inform decision-making[53]

Recognising risk: What to look for

Indicators of identity-based violence capture risk factors that can make atrocity crimes more likely in the future, before violence begins. The earlier they are identified, the more opportunities actors have for prevention. Risk factors are conditions that increase the susceptibility of a community to atrocities and can include behaviours, circumstances, events that could act as potential triggers or structural factors such as the risk of armed conflict or weak state institutions.[54]

This section provides a brief overview of existing frameworks of identity-based violence prevention, current horizon scanning and risk assessment processes used by the UK, and presents suggested indicators from local CSOs engaging in violence prevention in eastern DRC that could enhance international understanding as well as opening opportunities for local-international early warning activities

There are numerous frameworks available for providing guidance on the risk factors and indicators of atrocity crimes. This includes the United Nations Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes, which informs the UN's own early warning system and underpins efforts to integrate atrocity prevention into other international efforts, including the Department of Peace Operations' new Protection of Civilians Handbook, as well as USAID's Field Guide on the prevention of mass atrocities.[55] Protection Approaches' own risk analysis framework template for identity-based violence bridges both the UN's Framework and the United Nations Development Programme's framework for preventing violent extremism through inclusive development in order to capture both the societal and individual conditions that can lead to atrocities.[56]

These frameworks have in common an appreciation for the specific nature of identity-based violence and/or mass atrocities vis-a-vis conflict and a focus on the capacity, intent, motives and incentives of potential perpetrators. They also examine the existence of tensions, discrimination and exclusionary ideology against certain groups due to their perceived identity or affiliation, as well as whether there is a history of atrocities or impunity for past human rights violations. Some frameworks also capture soft indicators that assess people's perspectives on risk and their place in their society – what people believe about their safety and their relations with other groups in their community is as important as the reality.[57] When employing frameworks for atrocity prevention, it is important to remember that not all factors need to be present for atrocities to take place, although the more risk factors there are, the more likely (though not inevitable) it is that atrocities could be perpetrated.[58]

The international frameworks provide general guidance on what to look for when designing indicators to support the prevention of atrocities. However, the diversity of atrocity crimes and their risk factors makes a generic, top-down approach difficult to apply to real cases. Violence is understood and experienced in different ways by people living in communities at risk of atrocities. Risk factors need to be situated within the historical, political and cultural context of the country in question.[59] And since local actors are the most knowledgeable about the indicators of risk in their communities, it is important that a country-specific early warning system reflects local understandings about who is at risk and how.

Local perspectives are a potent source of information for filling the gaps of generic approaches. Local actors are also able to translate the international legal and policy language used in these general indicators into locally understood terms that speak to the experiences of real communities affected by identity-based violence or the risk thereof.

Local actors will often have a much more sophisticated understanding of the network of state and non-state actors active in their area, their interrelations and motivations, their capacity, and the uses to which they put violence. Local actors are therefore likely to be much better placed to identify which groups pose a high risk of committing atrocity crimes.

In February 2020, our team convened a three-day training workshop in Goma with Beni Peace Forum, who work across Beni to monitor, confront, respond to and help prevent violence and its impacts. The workshop aimed to improve data collection methods related to the prediction and prevention of identity-based violence including mass atrocities, in Eastern DRC.[60] At the same time consortium partners were also conducting other consultations and forms of out outreach. The table and data below sets out where Beni Peace Forum human rights monitors and other local actors consulted by consortium partners identified manifestations of identity-based violence and where the risks lie. The data below is not intended to be comprehensive but illustrative of the insights and projection of local expertise in designing prevention frameworks and early warning systems.

Table 2 : Manifestations of identity-based violence identified by practitioners in DRC

General indicator type	Indicators used by practitioners in DRC
Indicators signalling potential motivations to perpetrate atrocities based on new or existing land issues	Mass movement or the presence of unknown persons: including uncontrolled movement of internally displaced persons
	Theft and/or killings of cows: this is often in retaliation for the destruction of crops by the animals or used to signal threats against the owner of the animals
Indicators that capture potential intent to perpetrate atrocities against a particular group	Inciteful messages or language: hate speech to incite violence against specific communities can be transmitted through radio, flyers, via social media or in person. Rumours are also used as an indicator but it has proved to be challenging and resource-heavy for local actors to establish fact from fiction
	Intercommunity discord: disputes between communities such as unresolved land disputes can signal the possible incitement of violence. Signs include inter-community mistrust, refusal to collaborate, threats from both sides and refusal to compromise on standpoints
	Killings and revenge killings: especially repeated cases against members of a specific community. Killings of local chiefs often trigger cycles of reprisal
	Rape: Sexual violence is often used to punish rival communities
	Kidnappings: similar to murder incidents. Repeated cases of kidnappings of specific ethnicities can trigger or incite violence
Indicators suggesting preparation or capacity to perpetrate atrocities	Heightened activities of armed groups: increased recruitment, threats by armed groups, leafleting, increased movements and clashes between armed groups can sometimes predict greater outbreaks of violence
	Suspicious activities involving youth: including disappearances, influx of young people, youth groups receiving “vaccinations” against bullets or harm by traditional healers
	Cessation of movement by specific groups of people: this includes specific ethnic groups not turning up at the market, mass movement of communities leaving an area or terminating regular activities such as weekly cultural events
Indicators of potential triggers for commission of atrocities	Harvest periods: cases of people using violence in order to prevent or steal harvests of particular groups
	Presence of security actors and MONUSCO: this can be in response to anticipated violence. However, some respondents from the research have accused state security actors of committing atrocities
	Transhumance: this period of heightened movement of cattle has led to trampling of crops and competition over land. Higher levels of violence are likely to occur during this time

We also asked Beni Peace Forum which groups they thought might be most at risk to these particular manifestations of violence. As on-the-ground civil society experts and often first-responders in contexts of emerging conflict local ‘eyes and ears’ are often best placed to identify structural and physical vulnerabilities. The following list serves as an example of the breadth of vulnerabilities to discrimination and identity-based violence in North Kivu[61]: As with the table above, this list should not be considered to be exhaustive; LGBT+ communities, for example, were not identified by our partners but do suffer discrimination and higher levels of violence in the North Kivu region.[62]

Who is perceived as being at risk of identity-based violence in North Kivu?

- The Yira
- Pygmy peoples
- Hutu
- Tutsi
- Victims of sexual abuse
- Women and girls
- Children
- Members and supporters of opposition political parties
- People living in poverty
- People living with HIV/AIDS
- People living with disabilities

Looking at why the Yira people are at particular risk of identity-based violence in North Kivu, workshop participants identified the following processes that contribute to increased vulnerabilities:

- Discrimination (including economic discrimination)
- Intergroup tensions, including perceptions and widespread discourse of grievances, threats, and inequalities
- Impunity for perpetrators of violence against the group
- A history of serious violence and atrocities perpetrated against the group
- Hate speech, propaganda, and rumours
- Insecurity
- Political manipulation of grievances
- Political manipulation of elections to achieve sectarian outcomes

These indicators of what manifestations of identity-based violence persist in North Kivu, who is considered to be at risk, and where the elevated risk of some groups comes from, provide valuable – although not comprehensive – insight into local perspectives of these dynamics. And it is notable that all of these indicators fit within the standard monitoring frameworks for atrocity or identity-based violence.

At present, there is no comprehensive or even shared indicator list used across different prevention actors in eastern DRC. And indeed, it may not be desirable for all actors to use the same indicators, as a diversity of sources and perspectives will ensure that early warning systems do not reproduce existing patterns of exclusion and discrimination. However, mapping locally developed indicators into international framework templates for atrocity prevention can help all actors to have a clearer understanding of the type of violence that might occur, having implications for their ability to recognise and mitigate the processes leading to identity-based violence.

Understanding local dynamics of violence as well as common factors that exist across geographies and time is a necessary first step to implementing effective prevention and response. It is also a process that should help to catch gaps or absences that exist in international or local conceptions of where the risk comes from or is directed to, and so result in a much more complete, and jointly owned, understanding. It is therefore an essential starting point for effective partner collaboration and in developing any local-to-international early warning and early response framework.

From this starting point the framework can be further built out. Atrocity crimes carry specific risk factors that need to be integrated into existing early warning systems in order to ensure the risk of them occurring is captured. General indicators developed by international actors provide guidance on what to look for but need to be translated into a local context to have meaning to those on the front line of violence prevention. This translation should be led from the bottom-up but also need to make sense to officials responsible for monitoring and communication activities. Local actors have the best knowledge about the social, cultural, political and historical norms and processes that drive violence, and frequently have the best understanding of the motivations and capabilities of potential perpetrators, so their insight must inform the design and evolution of prevention frameworks international actors apply in countries like the DRC.

Indicators of identity-based violence, including atrocity crimes

Protection Approaches does not apply a static framework but rather adapts and builds out an indicator list for bespoke situations from a core understanding of risks and propellants of identity-based violence.This core list includes:

Society-wide conditions

- National level political or economic crisis
- Intergroup tensions or patterns of discrimination against identity groups
- Social fracture and political polarisation
- Widespread perceptions of grievance, threat, or inequality between groups
- Sense of group, community, or national insecurity
- Normalisation of hate speech, dehumanising language, and incitement to violence against identity groups including racial, religious, ethnic or cultural groups, LGBTQ+ communities, or people with disabilities
- Rising gender-based or domestic violence
- Structural inequality and/or perceptions of inequality and disparities of opportunity
- Widespread disinformation, propaganda, and fake news
- Widespread delegitimisation of expertise
- Widespread lack of trust in the media
- Widespread lack of trust in the government
- Widespread belief that the democratic process cannot lead to positive change
- Arms proliferation or easy access to arms
- Removal or of failure to uphold human rights protections
- Growth in number and legitimacy of groups who use violence or the threat of violence
- Histories of identity-based violence, mass atrocity, or political violence
- Impunity for those who commit, incite, or threaten violence

Individual risks

- Not feeling valued by those around you
- Not feeling represented by those who make decisions affecting your life
- Not feeling in control of your life or its direction
- Believing that certain groups are responsible for problems or pose a threat to your security or prosperity
- Believing that certain groups are ‘less legitimate’, ‘less human’ or deserving of punishment including violence
- Having a violent or criminal history
- Having a history of psychological ill health
- Personal networks or relationships with corrupting individuals

Communicating risk: What are the current networks in place in eastern DRC?

The processes leading to identity-based violence can be identified through analysing means, methods, patterns, capacities, and intent. This means that they can be interrupted, disrupted, and reversed. Knowing what to look for, how to analyse the information and how to report to 'raise the alarm' are crucial steps for successful early warning. However, these processes also require clear channels of communication, strong working relationships where all partners contributing to the information flow are able to trust one another, as well as the means of sustaining activities in periods of apparent lull as well as times of crisis. Early warning and information sharing is only one component of prevention but for prevention to succeed, it needs to become integrated into working methods and therefore be sustainable.

The DRC state authorities and security actors are commonly considered by local and international actors alike to be the hardest group to work with on early warning and prevention activities.[63] Mutual distrust between security actors and CSOs is rife; local and international CSOs perceive a lack of sincerity on the part of the DRC security apparatus, and many even consider them to be perpetrators of atrocities, while DRC central and often local government representatives will view CSOs as a threat because of their role in keeping government accountable and in providing parallel structures for service provision. This analysis therefore focuses on where local-international networks are already in place, what works well and where gaps might be bridged.

To some extent, these dynamics between state and civil society exist all over the world but in fragile or divided societies, when trust is low, cross-working can quickly become exceptionally challenging. In eastern DRC, this dynamic is exacerbated when government authorities are found to be perpetrators of human rights violations, and are seen to be operating with impunity. This discourages CSOs from attempting to hold government perpetrators accountable for violence, and damages CSO goodwill to work with government institutions. In extremis they may feel that doing so makes them less safe. This disconnect between DRC government and local CSO networks underlines the importance of local- international networks in complex violent contexts to compensate for the limitations of local-national networks. Such work does not diminish the importance of simultaneously investing in attempting to solve the trust deficit with state actors and building sustainable local-national networks of early warning and prevention.

Recent research by Peace Direct and RISD-DRC found that the local practitioners in eastern DRC they spoke to were much more likely to be involved in locally-led early warning systems than externally-led ones;[64] in contrast interviews we undertook with HMG and MONUSCO we found they were mostly engaging in networks that were established and cultivated by external or national actors. MONUSCO, an enormous operation with a Security Council protection of civilians mandate, has established and supporter early warning networks primarily via its Civil Affairs Section, the Joint Human Rights Office and the Stabilisation Support Unit, working together with national and local stakeholders. The UK diplomatic mission with a limited presence, has supported MONUSCO's early warning efforts but has also necessarily created its own internal means reporting, analysis, and communication.

Informal and formal locally-led networks coexisting with geographically specific networks spanning local government, civil society, and other actors are a common characteristic of community-based violence prevention in the region. National authorities and MONUSCO rely on the information fed up to them from community structures to be able to collect a moving picture of what is happening on the ground (they do also conduct field research to verify information, but community structures provide the majority of information). There are myriad of different community-level networks working at any one time in overlapping territories.

The systems being used by international actors in eastern DRC generally fall into the categories of second and third generation early warning systems [table 1] because they rely on community-level networks to collect and report information that would feed into the decision-making of the larger 'owner' of the system and some relied on these same community-level actors to act as first responders to the risks of violence, in place of or in tandem with the efforts of national and multilateral actors. The 'system owners' of these cross-cutting networks include the national, multilateral or international actors, such as the FARDC, the PNC, other DRC Government authorities, MONUSCO and a small number of INGOs.

Some local CSO networks exist on the grassroots or hyperlocal level while others, which often include INGOs and other actors, cover larger geographies. The Programme Manager of World Vision in Beni, which convenes a cross-cutting early warning network, describes the factors that have contributed to the success of their work as being "the respect of the established principles and standards. We work in collaboration with civil society, the local community, NGOs, MONUSCO and the SSU (Unité d'Appui à la Stabilisation de la MONUSCO) and Civil Affairs of MONUSCO. In this collaboration with actors, SSU provides funding and strategic support, Civil Society provides data sharing, government actors provide strategic support. We have set up the early warning mechanism through Civil Society, through community leaders and youth leaders."[65] These efforts receive funding from the UK via its Civil Society Fund.

Each system has a different structure, meaning that actors at the community level are organised in different ways: be it by setting up support structures like alert committees and local protection committees or community alert networks or simply by feeding information to individual Community Liaison Assistants or monitors for one of MONUSCO's divisions, units or offices.

Where resources permit, the community-based structures are provided with training and equipment to support their capacity to work effectively. MONUSCO's UN Joint Human Rights Office monitoring of human rights violations across DRC relies on 43 different networks, made up of 615 local NGOs, who act as the 'eyes and ears' of the Office in areas where the mission is not physically present. These individuals are mostly lawyers, journalists and human rights activists, who are provided with specialist training on human rights monitoring, indicators, personal safety and protection, and how to report alerts by contacting on-duty staff in one of 11 field offices. Many local actors have been trained and provided with a protocol for reporting incidents by phone or through mobile phone applications to enable them to share information in real time.

These efforts have been supported by important financial contributions from the UK. In addition to its annual contributions to MONUSCO the UK has since 2014 contributed additional project-based funding to the JHRO in support of the human rights monitoring, verification, human rights due diligence and addressing impunity by state and non-state actors for human rights abuses. However, this project funding was due to end at the end of the 2020/21 financial year and its continuation was being discussed at the time this paper went to print.

A respondent from the Civil Affairs section in MONUSCO in Goma lays out how they collect and record information from these local community structures in their early warning system: "The Community Liaison Assistants (CLAs) used by MONUSCO work directly with local civil society, local authorities and local communities. They receive and collect information primarily from local community members, tabulate all the data and create reports at each MONUSCO Base, and then these reports are then shared with the MONUSCO HQ in Goma."[66]

UK staff in Goma and Kinshasa frequently undertake field trips and cultivate a network of contacts across eastern DRC. Their efforts are noticed: partners reported that then DfID and FCO – both in DRC and in Whitehall – were generally very well informed about the shape and dynamics of the conflicts in the region and DfID's DRC programming has been praised in the past for its resilience in response to changing circumstances thanks in part to their connections with local partners with good local knowledge.[67]

However, it is not clear from the data collected across our consortium whether this view is shared by local practitioners. The interaction of UK staff with local actors appears to be mostly informal: local organisations are not direct implementing partners of the UK Mission in the DRC but they are often members of consortiums such those convened by Interpeace and International Alert. In addition to these avenues, UK officials in Goma and Kinshasa are regularly in touch with local organisations. As such, local perspectives are represented either indirectly, through implementing partners or other actors, or directly in an ad-hoc manner through other forums, field visits or incidental meetings that happen to include local and national civil society organisations. The inclusion of local peacebuilders appears reliant on the commitment of individual staff rather than being systematised within UK risk analysis or atrocity prevention activities. However, it is part of the job description of the political officer in Goma, for example, to have a network with CSOs. It is therefore not a reluctance on the part of HMG to engage with local networks but rather the absence of atrocity prevention frameworks in country and in central policy that has most likely led to some of this analysis being done on the initiative of the country team but not at part of any 'formal' or established process.

There is clear desire and willingness on the part of the UK Mission in the DRC to stay on top of the conflict dynamics, including supporting MONUSCO's Stabilisation Support Unit to produce conflict analysis. At the same time, some UK-local partnerships are strong and in certain areas the UK appears to take a good account of local views and expertise. However, because there is no clear system for monitoring indicators relating to mass atrocities and identity-based violence, analysing that data, or for feeding back to local actors, the subsequent chain of communication and response does not suggest that the views of local actors, nor the warning signs they are reporting, are being systematically integrated in HMG reporting or policy development. In order to be in a position to integrate the principles identified in this research to amplify local actors in the prevention of atrocities, the UK first needs to be able to be more explicit about its understanding of the indicators of atrocities in general, before being able to 'reach in' to learn from local perspectives on the issue.[68]

The UK's risk assessment systems and capabilities

Different states have different processes for monitoring, recording and communicating risks. The UK has three core types of early warning systems: day to day information gathering from Missions that is fed upwards to Whitehall to inform ongoing analysis and awareness of conflict dynamics; an annual risk analysis assessment run by the Joint Intelligence Office in the Cabinet Office called the Countries at Risk of Instability index; and a cross-government, 'deep dive' analysis that can be commissioned jointly by the FCO, DfID (as was, now FCDO) and MoD on a particular country, call the Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability (JACS).[69]

These means are separate from the in-country early warning mechanisms discussed above that the UK on occasion funds, namely through its contributions to MONUSCO, but also through programme funding – such as the projects funded by the Jo Cox Memorial Grants including this consortium, and the excellent work being done by the Auschwitz Institute for the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities, both of which offer opportunities to inform and contribute to the UK's risk assessment systems and capabilities.

The three UK systems reach in to local sources to differing degrees and inform UK decision-making with regards to how to understand and respond to the risk factors of violence – including identity-based violence – in different ways.

While both are powerful analytical tools, neither the JACS not CRI are early warning mechanisms that would be capable of capturing real-time threats and informing rapid responses. They are processes for analysing longer-term trends and establishing agreed understandings and approaches across government. 'Day to day' monitoring of violence from HMG appears to be less prescriptive and administratively heavy, but also less formalised and more reliant on who is in post at a certain time. Reporting on real-time conflict trends comes from diplomatic Missions, development offices, internal analysis, international partners, open-source information, and when the UK does fund early warning activities.[70]

Table 3: A summary of how UK early warning systems engage with local actors and risks of identity-based violence

	Information gathering and reporting from missions	Countries at Risk of Instability index	Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability
Description	Informs day to day UK analysis and the development of internal analysis products, can inform Ministerial briefings and decision-making	Annual Cabinet Office risk assessment that underpins National Security Council Strategies, informs strategic decision-making1	Jointly commissioned, sporadic analysis from FCDO and MoD to develop shared understanding of conflict dynamics in a specific country, informs strategic decision-making in country
Inclusion of local actors	Informal engagement with local partners depending on the staff in the Mission, which may be done fairly deliberately but not systematically. Formal ties could be present in some Missions due to direct funding	Information on sources is not publicly available	Guidance notes advise collecting data from a diverse range of sources, including local perspectives either directly or through research or polling
Inclusion of indicators or frameworks to support prevention of identity-based violence	Currently no framework of analysis on risks or indicators of identity-based violence or mass atrocity crimes	Assesses factors relating to state resilience and internal and external pressures. Does not appear to explicitly include atrocity risk factors	Has been very recently updated to include atrocity prevention explicitly but the corresponding update of the public guidance is not yet available and the authors have not seen what indicators are now included

Monitoring by Missions

In the day to day of operations, Missions play a key role in collecting and feeding information to London from a variety of sources in the country in which they operate. In general, information gathering from all sources was described by FCO and DfID representatives as "active, though not systematised"[71] because there are no consistent formal protocols for collecting, analysing and reporting early warning information.

Real-time information comes from a wide variety of sources on an informal basis including via:

- Implementing partners through monitoring and reviews built into the programme management of the partner programmes. These are systematic meeting points that provide an opportunity for DfID to keep updated on partners' progress and hear about the issues shaping the context in which they are working. They are also used to feed into the team's knowledge and understanding of the current movements and trends in eastern DRC

- Diplomatic forums with other donors in Goma, such as through the Peace and Security Working Group or through other donors (France, the Netherlands, USA) who have offices or regular presence in Goma

- Components of MONUSCO, such as the Joint Human Rights Office, Joint Mission Analysis Centre, military contingents and UK officers seconded to MONUSCO[72]

- Government of the DRC, including provincial governors and ministries in the east

- Civil society beyond implementing partners, including both international and national civil society organisations and actors, and specifically youth, women, and the wider population who have routinely been included in field trips

- Regional interlocutors such as the UK Special Envoy on the Great Lakes, and the UN Special Envoy on the Great Lakes

UK's formal early warning mechanisms: CRI and JACS

In addition to the operational information gathering from Missions, the two formal UK early warning products – the Countries at Risk of Instability (CRI)[73] index and the Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability (JACS) – feed into strategic decision-making. Information on the CRI's data sources is not public, but it can be assumed to take into account HMG's conflict analysis products from other government departments, which, as outlined above, have few systematic avenues for representing local voices. The JACS collects information from a wide range of sources and includes a specific requirement to engage with local perspectives: "it is important to gather first-hand views and experiences of actors directly engaged in and affected by the particular conflict, such as politicians, civil society, armed groups and communities."[74] It also acknowledges the difficulty in achieving this in challenging, conflict-affected environments, "whether for reasons of time or access"[75] and encourages officials to "consider how else to incorporate local view" in challenging circumstances, such as diaspora communities, research from national and international NGOs or multilaterals, or perception surveys and public polls.[76]

The JACS is a relatively heavy process, relying on a wide range of sources, including literature reviews, background research and analysis, interviews and data collection with international, national and local level stakeholders in country and in the UK, as well as internal, cross-government roundtable discussions. It is not undertaken frequently, and indeed, in many country cases it has not yet been done. Moreover, the JACS is not a living document and although it is recommended to be 'refreshed' every few years, it is not kept up to date with real-time developments.

While the analytical capacity available to the FCDO, MOD, and NSC, either in-house, or from its intelligence services or consultants, is impressive, as can be seen by the government's multidimensional approach to issues such as human trafficking, counterterrorism, or cybercrime, it is not clear that this analytical capacity is used to fully map and comprehend situations of complex violence which can lead to atrocities. In Bosnia in the 1990s and in Syria in the 2010s, for example, there was an absence of intent to map the networks, capabilities, power dynamics and motivations of armed groups, or to meaningfully differentiate between potential perpetrators, forces organised in self-defence, and other armed actors.[77] In the DRC some mapping has been done,[78] but it is not clear that it is utilised and integrated into prevention work.

Staff in the DRC Mission felt that the JACS provides a useful foothold for their understanding of the conflict dynamics, setting out a framework for seeing trends, patterns and systemic issues that go beyond simply knowing who did what to whom and where. This is particularly important in a context like eastern DRC, where the size, scope and nature of the conflict changes quickly and includes a plethora of actors.

Staff experience in other country postings suggested that other missions do revisit the JACS analysis periodically and discuss how the conflict dynamics are playing out or changing and how this would affect their programmes. Further investigation into the extent to which local communities are able to directly participate in JACS analysis could prove informative.

How to respond to risk?

The very act of creating an early warning and response system establishes an expectation that when information is fed into that system, the ‘owners’ will have the capacity, capabilities and confidence to respond appropriately.

Community structures are the front line in raising the alarm in the face of rising risks, particularly in remote and unstable areas or anywhere that is difficult to access. This means that it is local actors that are more likely to face risks, whether of the violence they are monitoring, or as a consequence of their reporting, becoming targets for reprisals, revenge or intimidation.

Thus if early warning is not met with early response local actors may disengage from the system, critically weakening it. Third-generation warning systems cannot work without local actors’ expertise, analysis, and intelligence and will often require those same local networks, expertise and often infrastructure to respond. Where local actors have been absent from early warning systems in the DRC, international actors have missed important warning signs of imminent atrocities. For example, MONUSCO did not receive alerts of the risk of the identity-based violence that erupted in Yumbi, a remote area in western DRC, and mounting a quick MONUSCO response was challenging as the area was not accessible by road and there were no air assets at the closest MONUSCO base.[79] A MONUSCO official believed that this experience underlined the importance of having and maintaining contact with networks of contacts for early warning and response to work, although responding in a timely way can be difficult in remote areas.

Security actors – the police, FARDC and MONUSCO – are mandated to respond to alerts and to employ civilian protection measures;[80] in negotiating the last mandate the UK and other Security Council members sought to mandate MONUSCO to improve their early warning processes in response to earlier critiques. However, local actors feel response efforts remain highly fragmented, slow or non-existent. The information gathered by the community networks is not consistently integrated into decision-making or the development of response strategies. Practitioners have told consortium partners that the DRC government has a low capacity due to insufficient resources and is known to solicit bribes before responding to alerts or will force sources to testify in court before apprehending perpetrators – raising witness protection risks. The lack of training and organisational capacity limits government actors’ knowledge of proper channels for responding to early warning information. National security actors have also failed to coordinate or collaborate with MONUSCO in response to alerts.[81]

Interviews with local prevention practitioners found that local communities are rarely the real customers of the early warning system’s output.[82] The information is fed vertically from local actors to actors working above the community level, rather than being shared horizontally between local peacebuilders who could be in a position to inform response options and even have the capacity to respond to certain types of indicators themselves if the risk factors are spotted early enough to do so safely.[83] Empowering local capacities for early warning and prevention is a proven way of reducing the risk of the escalation of violence. Local actors are more likely to be able to identify key stakeholders and local influencers, use their established relationships to bring together these key influencers for dialogue, mobilise nonviolent community action, source witnesses, and evaluate the impact of any interventions.[84]

The lack of horizontal information sharing also means that there are too many systems working in parallel and failing to share information with each other at the levels closest to those affected. As the Coordinator of local CSO Help for Intercultural Communication and Rural Self-help (ACIAR) in Bunia confirms, “MONUSCO Civil Affairs have their early warning systems in Mambasa territory, but we have our own.”[85]

The Collective Director of Jeunesse a l’Oeuvre de la Charite et du Développement, or Youth Working on Charity and Development (JOCHADEV) notes that “if we could coalesce these structures and connect them, then the response element would be much quicker and more effective. Local civil society does little in terms of early response to incidents of violence. That ends up being handled by local authorities and international actors. Local civil society should be implicated in the planning and implementation of response actions. However, there is a continued perception that local civil society cannot handle these actions.”

Challenges facing existing local-international early warning and early response systems in eastern DRC

The early warning systems most commonly used by both UK and MONUSCO officials rely heavily on data generated – and risks taken – by local actors while being seen to give little in return:[86] response capacities are low and feedback loops to those on the frontline do not appear to be effective. MONUSCO has, for example, responded to alerts with quick actions by the Force, including overflights –including with attack helicopters to deter attacks– deployment of Force to patrol areas under threat, long range patrols, deployment of Force troops for longer periods for deterrence and /or protection. These actions, of course, also can carry significant risk for the peacekeepers. However, our research and analysis indicates that very often the information that might trigger early response usually moves from the local to the international but not the other way around. Good practice on early warning systems emphasise the need for a two-way dialogue between information sharing and developing responses.

At the same time, local response capacities appear undervalued by current early warning systems in eastern DRC, which is a missed opportunity in terms of being able to plug gaps in the current response capacities of national and multilateral actors like the DRC Government and MONUSCO. It is also an area that remains underfunded by donor states like the UK, and yet hold considerable – and evidenced – potential. The UK invests in MONUSCO to undertake early warning in order to better protect the population and to better understand the dynamics of violence in east DRC but neither in these systems, nor the UK's own early warning systems, are local actors their 'main clients'. This in itself is not necessarily the problem, however, developing avenues for more direct contact with local actors – making use of their knowledge, insights and an awareness of their capacities to respond to violence in a more systematic way would provide missions with the opportunity to enrich their understanding of how identity-based violence is experienced in the local context, as well as exposing them to more local efforts.

While the Joint Human Rights Office at MONUSCO have a standard approach to early warning, there does not appear to be early warning system guidance materials shared between international partners such as the UK DRC team to facilitate collaboration, standardise procedures or share best practice on approaches to prevention; nor, to the best of our knowledge are any such documents relating to early warning of atrocity crimes and identity-based violence provided by HMG. If either indeed exist, there is an opportunity to integrate examples of best practice and/or principles of local-international working contained in this paper and elsewhere. The myriad of actors and systems can confuse both the local communities the very systems are theoretically designed to help protect, and the officials tasked with running systems and coordinating relationships. The rotation of staff within the UK civil service means that it is not unusual for new officials to arrive with relatively little handover; without a clear policy on the UK's approach to identity-based violence or mass atrocity crimes, nor guidance on or an established process for maintaining early warning outreach, there is a risk that the good practice currently being developed by the UK in Goma will be lost if not sufficiently embedded.

Responding to these challenges through collaboration

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the human-centred methodology of the systems currently in place in eastern DRC, collaboration and coordination between actors was highlighted as one of the most important components of an effective early warning and response system in DRC. As our partners at Peace Direct recently concluded, "collaboration can prove highly useful for ensuring that atrocity prevention activities are flexible and effective in the underfunded and volatile contexts where atrocity prevention takes place." [87]

Collaboration – either informally or through formal network groups and clusters – helps actors to:

- Share information, analysis and response strategies that can enable sharing lessons learned and even lead to coordinated interventions
- Contextualise their work in terms of understanding the other actors and activities that are taking place, seeing which actors are closer to the ground to be able to verify information quickly and which actors are best placed to respond to early warning indicators
- Access support or funding from new sources by building relationships and social capital through engagement in formal networks and clusters
- Share physical resources such as internet or transport services
- Build each other's capacities and support project sustainability when external support or funding has ended
- Gain entry into communities at risk they otherwise would not have access to through other actor's knowledge and local legitimacy and trust
- Navigate and mitigate security concerns while working in dangerous and volatile areas, for instance, some local actors noted that working with security actors can help to ensure their safety while in the field, while others note simply that they can warn other local CSOs of dangerous situations
- Amplify disparate efforts into a more cohesive approach, such as jointly advocating through several networks and clusters to exert pressure on decision-makers in cases where there has been no response to early warning alerts
- Create collective ownership of results
- Share the burden of work and avoiding duplication by complementing each other's strengths while using others' competencies in other areas to bolster efforts, such as allowing security actors to focus on response, advocacy CSOs to focus on their activities and community structures to conduct their local prevention efforts

More effective collaboration is not something easily achieved as it comes from building trust, establishing continuity and process, and ensuring there are the necessary resources for all parties to participate fully. It also benefits from some proven victories; local prevention CSOs and international actors need to feel that their work is paying off and so investment in a lightweight means of monitoring and evaluation, or impact diary, is needed. Collaboration could be improved by supporting a more comprehensive network for early warning in the DRC by developing a shared language by providing guidance on terminology. Networking prevention activities requires a shared understanding of the problem, which should include an understanding of how to identify and predict identity-based violence in situ as informed by those communities experiencing it. A strengthened prevention network should be built on the value of local knowledge and response capacities, reaching in for local understandings while supporting structures that improve horizontal and vertical collaboration.

While strong early warning systems require diverse data sources, they need to place a greater emphasis on the value of local actors as the frontline in early warning and response. A relationship based solely on the extraction of information without the capacity, will or interest in mounting or supporting an effective response undermines the legitimacy of the system and the trust between actors.

The UK's early warning systems – and likely those of other embassies in other complex violent contexts – would benefit from providing a greater opportunity for diplomats to engage with local actors – not only for the sharing of information about current risk factors, trends, patterns and local response efforts but also to feed into UK decision-making about how to concentrate efforts to prevent atrocities and identity-based violence.

Strengthening collaboration and engagement

As a result of these shortcomings and gaps, networking and relationships between actors can be fraught with difficulties. For local actors, effective collaboration requires a partnership based on trust and shared values; both sides must be well informed of the situation and hold a shared understanding of the issues, agree on shared objectives for working together, and have good feedback mechanisms to frame continued collaboration. These factors are rarely seen between actors in eastern DRC and result in low information sharing, increased duplication of work, and reduced response rates, making collaboration extremely difficult and hindering effective coordination and collaboration for successful atrocity prevention.[88]

The UK, MONUSCO and international CSO personnel interviewed for this research outlined a number of specific challenges to a deeper collaboration.

Capabilities First, is a fundamental capacity and systems gap on the part of international actors. Missions such as the UK and the structures within MONUSCO are not nearly as well-resourced as local CSOs commonly assume. MONUSCO has seen dramatic cuts recently, and they are likely to continue as the United Nations looks to wind down the mission, while the funding outlook for UK projects in the DRC is precarious. This mismatch of expectations can be exaggerated when external

prevention actors can be seen to 'overpromise' to local partners. As a result, even where the will to respond to early warning information is there in the UK mission, for example, the realities of current UK systems and capabilities regarding atrocity prevention and violence reduction more broadly are limiting. Without an agreed playbook for what UK officials on the ground can do when certain thresholds of risk have been reached, officials are left to improvise within their own stretched capacities. As a result, communications become ad-hoc, rely upon the initiative of individuals rather than process, and inevitably often fall through the cracks of people's busy schedules. As a result, engagement will increase during periods when violence increases or tensions are particularly high but ebb during periods of relative lull, missing the exact windows of opportunity to 'get ahead of the violence' and develop networks when it is safe to do so. Not only does this capacity gap contribute to undermining local trust in international actors, but it immediately straightjackets the concept of networking local-international prevention in DRC. However, this is a practical obstacle with a practical solution: increased coherence in programming.

Competition and mistrust. The second is a more amorphous challenge concerning the competing interests and differing working methods between local and international civil society actors. This breeds tensions and distrust in the CSO sphere and obscures the picture that international actors in missions or MONUSCO receive. Officials struggle to know which groups to trust and, working without an established risk assessment framework, this can be overwhelming for those tasked with brokering relationships or analysing civil society intelligence. This is compounded when the officials in question are junior and lack both the experience and appropriate seniority to make confident calls regarding risk. (This point speaks to a larger one on the need to prioritise local CSO engagement not only via funds to those organisations, or in developing the means to properly assess and act upon early warning data, but to appropriately resource roles within international structures, in embassies and in multilateral missions; community-relationship building is a critical professional skill and one that is looked for FCDO hiring processes but is less likely to be attuned to community-level relationship-building, which those who work at the grassroots level know is often a very different skill set to relationship-building in diplomatic or policy environments.)

Friction between INGOs and local CSOs exists, as it does in all civil society spaces, where competition in the field and the perceived inflexibility of larger INGO approaches to project management in the face of flexible and complex realities, stymie working relationships. However, this is reinforced by the inflexibility and conflicting expectations of donors funding INGO work, and more pervasive assumptions of change in the international peacebuilding and international development space. It should be said that despite its welcome contributions to numerous priority areas in DRC, the UK's primary approach to aid programme grantees run by UK Aid Direct is not exempt from this.

The Head of Antenna of Humanitarian Actions and National Solidarity at the Uvira Town Hall argues that "sometimes partners find it better to be accountable to their donor rather than to the beneficiaries. The government is not consulted. They all justify to their donors, and then we are copied and pasted. That is what is more common."

Local CSOs will often refuse to work with other local CSOs because of mistrust, jealousy, perceived or real politicisation of work, or competition for funding and visibility. Collaboration can also be financially burdensome and time-consuming in terms of the resources it takes to travel to and attend joint meetings, demanding more from underfunded CSOs than the perceived gain collaboration provides. Funding models often do not allow payment of per diems, travel costs, or the critical but often forgotten components of network building such as providing food and refreshments. As the General Secretary for Coalition des Volontaires pour la Paix et le Développement (Coalition of Volunteers for Peace and Development) notes: “there are times when there is a need for us to work together to have a better impact, there are organisations that react/work alone – thus it leads to an impact that is not as strong. The reason for this is that some organisations want higher visibility and will say ‘look, we did so and so’, they think this will help them get funding.” This issue is not only visible between CSOs but also with government actors. “It is difficult to achieve results with NGOs because they do not have mechanisms to follow up after their funding ends” a Provincial Deputy from the Djugu Constituency, Ituri Provincial Assembly, Bunia, shared.

Our research found little direct engagement between donors and local actors and did not find the kind of donor-led creative thinking around local capabilities and skills that have taken place elsewhere regarding other development agendas.[89]

Managing expectations. There is also a deep challenge of mismatched – or mismanaging – expectations. When we talk about preventing violence of any kind it is crucial to measure expectations of what can, and perhaps more importantly will, be done. Establishing early warning systems implicitly sets an expectation of response yet there is no clarity as to what, if any, response the UK can provide. UK has neither a country playbook on atrocity prevention nor a clear strategy on mass atrocities more broadly. The policy note published in 2019 set out the UK’s approach to mass atrocities for the first time but it is a narrative document, passively recording exiting efforts that fit into an atrocity prevention rubric.[90] It does not establish strategic thinking, or outline tools or resources for officials to employ. Nor is there any coordinating office or unit capable of connecting the UK mission with the UK in New York – or with any other actors that can work with the UK to respond to warning signs. None of the UK officials working in the DRC that we spoke to were aware of the UK’s approach to
mass atrocities.

MONUSCO have made conscious effort to develop clarity around its role in eastern DRC but as preparations for, and rumours around, its withdrawal commence, attention must be paid to how their systems of early warning and response, and networks of local prevention actors, can be supported, resourced, and reimagined as part of a new structure of information monitoring, risk assessment, communication, and prevention.

Conclusions & Recommendations

In his 2016 assessment of the early warning and response systems in place in the Great Lakes region, Sentongo concluded that what was needed was “a robust national and regional advocacy agenda, strengthening the capacity of [early warning and response] structures, resource mobilisation, creation of awareness, domestication of international instruments, and institutional linkages for information sharing around best practices and prevention-sensitive policies and local programmes.”[91] We support this assessment. Our recommendations build on Sentongo’s conclusion and are made with particular regard to local-international systems of warning and response. Our specific recommendations to the UK government will likely apply to other donor states in the DRC, or more broadly for foreign missions in complex violent contexts where identity-based violence and/or mass atrocities are a risk or are ongoing. Likewise, parts of our analysis of MONUSCO will likely resonate with those engaged in peacekeeping missions elsewhere in the world. We have observed that the principles of local-international warning and response are not so different in eastern DRC as they are in east London, UK, where networks of local CSOs and grassroots community actors coordinate with local authorities and central government to improve the prevention of identity-based violence, which in that instance is usually hate crime or violent extremism. Where there is trust on all sides, expectations of all parties are managed, resources are in place for all actors to fully engage, and the processes are sustainable, these informal systems yield results.

Local actors need to be the ‘first mile’ in the design and implementation of early warning and response systems, rather than being the last group of actors to be included.[92] The establishment of early warning systems set expectations for response that need to be met - not only to fulfil the promise of protection to vulnerable groups, but also to preserve the legitimacy of the system and its owner. Asking local communities to feed information upwards without reaching in to build their own local capacities, brainstorm response options inclusively, and coordinate responses undervalues the potential of local actors. A local-first approach for early warning systems would assess the activities that are already taking place and establish how they could feed into a wider nationally coordinated system or network of systems with clearer guidance, language, indicators and less duplication. Such a system would need to be developed in concert with local actors, including their expertise and knowledge of the local characteristics of violence in their communities and their own capacities to respond. The following section examines how these connections could be enhanced and the ways collaboration can be improved between actors.

Introduce identity-based violence and mass atrocity prevention into the UK's DRC country strategy

The first challenge to supporting local actors with the prevention of identity-based violence and mass atrocities is the that the UK's early warning systems themselves do not include specific indicators for identity-based violence and atrocity prevention. The UK is firmly committed to atrocity prevention and the Responsibility to Protect; it has also recently outlined its approach to preventing atrocities in a policy paper which clarifies a number of issues that were previously only implicit in the way the UK incorporates atrocity prevention into its work, including who is responsible and what activities are included. However, the paper is less clear on the 'hows' of prevention such as how identity-based violence and other indicators of atrocity risk are considered in the existing early warning, prevention and response tools. Without an atrocity prevention framework that has been developed and integrated into existing tools like the JACS, the CRI or the day-to-day reporting and analysis from Missions, it is difficult to know how aware UK civil servants are of the general indicators and risk factors of identity-based violence in their work.[93]

Understanding early warning and analysis needs is key to this shift. Missions play a central role in data collection and analysis – if they had the tools and training to be able to bring a holistic awareness and approach to identity-based violence, then the indicators and information could be collected through that lens. The perspectives of communities affected by discrimination, identity-based violence and mass atrocities, as well as local prevention and protection actors, must be central to this endeavour.

The integration of the prevention of identity-based violence and mass atrocities into the UK's DRC country strategy requires this shift to be matched by an investment in local actors. Doing so does not require a wholesale restructuring of the approach FCDO have established: the UK's investments in the DRC have a potential to support the capacity of local organisations to network prevention activities. However, a shift in approach is required to ensure these organisations are indeed supported. At present there is very little direct funding for local organisations working on the prevention of identity-based violence from the UK. Missions procure Business Cases for new projects via free competition among implementing partners, which in the example of the DRC are either multilateral or INGOs. Contact with local actors as implementers is as 'third tier partners', who report to the INGOs or multilaterals running the programmes, rather than directly to the UK. Although there is an effort to include a greater diversity of CSOs in the UK's centralised funding streams, the usually overwhelming and complex application processes that often requires specific training or specialist knowledge, the inflexible requirements to meet concerns, accountability, and the heavy reporting obligations, mean that the system is biased towards large UK-based organisations and INGOs who are fluent in the jargon and methodology of British grant-making. Even smaller UK-based NGOs are crowded out of FCDO funding opportunities by larger organisations that will usually employ staff who work only on government funding applications. UK's Aid Direct funds projects under a broad spectrum of activities contributing to the SDGs, including the prevention of identity-based violence. Recent changes to Aid Direct seek to place a greater value on the applications of local organisations but it is too early to assess to what extent this changed the reality of accessing funds for local organisations.

During the UK's Covid-19 response, the UK has said that it is working with a number of Missions overseas to set up systems that will track drivers of instability caused or exacerbated by the pandemic. These systems will "monitor the social, political and economic impacts of Covid-19 and responses to it and detect grievances and worrying trends early on to enable them to respond before they can escalate into atrocities." The creation of such a system needs to include a specific lens for capturing the risk of identity-based violence, particularly in contexts where there is a significant risk of atrocity crimes. Being able to tap into the knowledge of local actors to be able to translate generic risk factors into indicators that have meaning in the DRC context would strengthen the UK's understanding of the risks in eastern DRC and how to support efforts to mitigate them.

If Missions were able to collect and report on information related to the groups vulnerable to identity-based violence in real-time through clear indicators and reporting protocols, programme design must also have an awareness of the potential and unintended consequences of development interventions on vulnerable groups. Integrating atrocity prevention at the programme response level means that there should be a clear understanding of how initiatives can have a positive (or at the very least, not negative) impact on reducing identity-based violence, whilst working on humanitarian, health, education or other development priorities.[94]

If conflict analysis and the day-to-day conflict monitoring of Missions included a guide and a checklist of the indicators and risk factors to look for specific to identity-based violence, including this particular risk in existing processes for designing development interventions would not require any major adjustment. It is important to remember that developing effective frameworks of analysis does not rest upon static lists of risk factors but rather adapts and builds out the list for bespoke situations from a core understanding of the risks and propellants of identity-based violence.

Put local communities and prevention actors first

Amplifying local actors in prevention has the potential to bring benefits to all actors working in the DRC. Making relatively small adjustments in UK practice and processes to place a greater value on the expertise and activities of local actors would help to plug gaps in the UK's approach to atrocity prevention, as well as in the effectiveness and sustainability of efforts to prevent identity-based violence in eastern DRC. The UK invests significant time, money and personnel in the DRC and incorporating greater avenues to hear from and provide support to local actors would support the effectiveness of programming in the long term. It would also inform programming across the UK's portfolio to have an increased awareness of and sensitivity to the localised risk factors of identity-based violence.

In eastern DRC, as with any early warning architecture, networking and collaboration are essential for effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and inclusion. Practitioner's experience in the DRC demonstrates that there are significant obstacles to effective collaboration; most important, lack of trust between network actors and competition for resources. External actors, like the UK, could work to alleviate some of these difficulties through relatively small investments. Providing greater access to funding for local organisations, including the development of a more holistic approach to early warning and supporting the hand-over of MONUSCO architecture to local actors during the drawdown of the peace operation could improve the capacity of actors in the DRC to collaborate better.

Clarity on the requirements for and value of reaching in and listening to local actors directly would also support this effort. More direct engagement between Missions and local actors would help to develop a shared understanding of the indicators of identity-based violence that includes a bottom-up interpretation, while also giving Missions direct insight into locally owned and locally led capacities. In the DRC, this added dimension of understanding would support measures established to track the heightened risks of identity-based violence during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as enriching knowledge of the local prevention landscape that could help the UK prepare for the drawdown and eventual withdrawal of MONUSCO.

Missions could also work specifically to support improved networking and collaboration between actors. The drawdown of the peace operation presents an opportunity to build a more comprehensive network of systems working on early warning, with agreed indicators and protocols for response. It could also consider investigating new financing structures for prevention, such as strengthening support for national financing capacities for prevention, with longer-term programming and investment in locally-led approaches, as recommended in the UN and World Bank's Pathways for Peace report.

HMG could also explore how to directly fund the wider work of local actors. UK funding for local organisations is available from both country missions and centralised government funding streams. More funding – for both locally led projects, to develop local capacities and to encourage horizontal collaboration – would help to alleviate some of the issues relating to capacity, competition and distrust experienced by local CSOs. Funding in general for locally-led prevention activities should also incorporate an atrocity prevention lens that would ensure this agenda is not neglected. Local actors may not themselves describe their work as 'atrocity prevention', and as such, funding should be broadly focused on prevention and protection.

While this would be an obvious way to support local peacebuilding and prevention, it is not the sole avenue for including local perspectives and expertise in UK early warning, analysis and programme design and must not become so.

Establish and embed early warning and emergency communications protocols

Identifying the risks of atrocities is only half the battle. Missions also play a key role in raising the alarm to colleagues in Whitehall to devise response options. Clear alert channels are important in any volatile situation and even more so during times of political upheaval or emergency, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic. Alert channels can be relatively light touch, but communication needs to be clear, providing a 'moving picture' rather than a one-off snapshot and information needs to be received by those knowledgeable and senior enough to influence decision-making if they are to be effective.[95]

Good practice for clarifying indicators and reporting mechanisms can be seen in atrocity prevention toolkits or field guides from the US Agency for International Development (USAID), and the European Union. Both include guidance on what staff should look for in country developments and provide a directory of who, how and when to share information. The USAID field guide includes advice on how to report, through both standard reporting and special 'dissent channels' if standard channels are blocked.[96] These dissent channels exist for both USAID and the State Department, providing a direct line of communication with USAID Administrators responsible for atrocity prevention. The guide also discusses operational issues such as dealing with uncertainty and a reluctance to report bad news, advising officials to err on the side of sharing and persevere. The EU toolkit also lays out indicators of atrocities and encourages EU delegations to use explicit atrocity prevention language to spell out the risks, consequences, and responsibilities of the EU system. EU delegations are encouraged to report to the Geo-desks and the EU R2P Focal Point's office.[97]

Both examples create ownership over the responsibility to prevent atrocities – from the field staff collecting and analysing information, to the staff in headquarters receiving it. They explain the indicators and risk factors to look for and provide clear guidance on who to report to. They also both give examples of program options for responding to the threat of atrocities. A UK version would support FCDO and other government departments to have clearer ownership over their responsibility to prevent identity-based violence. A central receiving official or team with influence over advising and decision-making would be crucial. The existing UK R2P Focal Point could potentially play this role if it were properly resourced to do so. Such a system, however should also make certain departures from the mechanisms adopted by the EU in particular and instead ensure that the knowledge of local expertise is able to feed in and that local actors – both affected communities and prevention stakeholders – are integrated into the in-country processes. Likewise, it is critical that the design of any such system is made sustainable, institutionalising processes within the day-to-day working of the Mission but also within coordination with local partners, ensuring that the valuable knowledge and relationships of in-country officials is safeguarded.

Establish a seat for atrocity prevention at the UK's international policy table

Whether in the form of a central atrocity prevention team or atrocity prevention expertise of appropriate seniority within the various analysis, political, human rights or conflict directorates in the FCDO, Whitehall, currently lacks the systems or capabilities to be able to advise its Embassy in Kinshasa or Mission in Goma on indicators and analysis, convene relevant actors inside or outside of the UK government, nor even to map what tools or potential responses are at the UK's disposal. As a result it is currently impossible for the UK to maximise its contribution to its stated commitment to help protect populations from mass atrocities, and invest in their prevention.

The policies, strategies and tactics used to prevent conflict frequently complement those used to prevent atrocities and identity-based violence, but they are not one and the same.[98] To take account of these differences, we recommend that policy integrates an understanding of the processes and risk factors that make identity-based violence more likely. This atrocity-specific analysis informs early warning systems, decision-making, programme design and implementation to ensure that policies simultaneously prevent atrocities while achieving their outcomes. This could be in terms of development and peacebuilding, but also includes trade, justice and even domestic policies that touch on processes of exclusion and marginalisation at home. It means taking "an approach that focuses on injecting atrocity prevention considerations into existing policies, programs and capabilities and, when necessary, 'convening' or 'coordinating' these assets for preventive purposes."[99]

Establishing an 'atrocity prevention seat at the policy-making table' would enable the flagging of ongoing assessments of a country at risk, would provide advice on the potential or actual unintended consequences of programs and policies and would provide information about potential triggers.[100] Integrating atrocity prevention in this way can be cost-effective, even cost-neutral: by identifying a person or group of people who are responsible for viewing decision-making through the lens of atrocity prevention to keep it on the agenda duplication can be avoided and coherence increased.[101] This can be done by creating new job descriptions and positions of appropriate seniority in missions and in central government, by developing mechanisms or units capable of convening departments across government to discuss atrocity prevention issues,[102] or by developing field guides to support civil servants to recognise or report on risk factors for atrocities.[103]

In the past, all FCDO programming was required to conduct a conflict sensitivity review to examine how a programme is expected to contribute to peace and stability, or at the very least, minimise any negative impacts it may have on the conflict dynamics.[104] Conflict sensitive programming is a strong step towards ensuring that programming does not exacerbate existing tensions and trends in exclusion and marginalisation. However, the processes of discrimination that prevail in societies are often reproduced through the design of development interventions, whether through a reliance on input from elites or too limited and infrequent consultations with local groups or through a reluctance to question the prevailing narratives about who the marginalised and vulnerable are.[105] Specific programmes to consider sensitivity to gender, disability or LGBTI rights will capture some pockets of the population that may be facing the threat of identity-based violence, but many others may fall through the gaps. To ensure a holistic approach, programmes should take a more comprehensive view of what the processes of discrimination looks like in context and who is at risk because of their perceived identity.

Recommendations

The UK in DRC should:

1. Centre the prevention of identity-based violence and mass atrocities in the country strategy, thereby moving towards intentional mainstreaming of the distinct policy challenge and focussing attention on, including a more systemised recording of, those specific dynamics of violence and risk

2. Trial a new approach to local-international early warning and response systems designed around a symbiotic feedback loop of sharing information and analysis, and co-designing risk assessment tools and response strategies, that intentionally seeks to deepen relationships, cross-working, and understanding, and even lead to coordinated interventions between local and international actors

3. Open up easy-access, quick release, low-level funds to support community based initiatives on prevention, early warning, and response efforts to identity-based violence that require light touch reporting

4. Develop and integrate a framework of atrocity prevention into UK mission reporting ensuring this is designed with input from the communities affected by identity-based violence and mass atrocities as well as local prevention actors

5. Establish an emergency communications protocol similar to that adopted in 2020 by the UK Myanmar Unit[106]

6. Integrate a framework of atrocity prevention in to the next JACS update and include local perspectives in the development of indicators specific to DRC

7. Support improved networking of prevention activities in DRC in the renewal of its Peace and Stability Programme. This should include sustained engagement with local actors in the assessment and design of Business Cases supporting prevention and response activities, as well as considering how to prepare for the eventual withdrawal of MONUSCO

8. Invest in establishing diverse datasets, including perception polling, to capture indicators of risk such as trust in the DRC government, MONUSCO, or the police; exposure to hate speech; attitudes towards security and so on

9. Provide access to training to officials on the fundamentals of atrocity prevention and on early warning

Recommendations

The FCDO should:

1. Continue investing diplomatic and developmental support in the DRC, acknowledging that it is more important than ever in the context of Covid-19 and MONUSCO drawdown

2. Integrate prevention and protection as core frameworks of the Conflict, Stabilisation and Mitigation Directorate, and the Open Societies Directorate, including questions relating to 'who is vulnerable to identity-based violence and why?' and questions on local capacities for protection, how to support local protection and how to provide protection of civilians

3. Resource the director-level position of the UK's focal point on the responsibility to protect, and the working level position of focal point on atrocity prevention, to receive and advise on early warning information from the geographic departments, political directorates, and from field

4. Establish a training budget for Mission staff and Geo departments on atrocity prevention, identity-based violence, and early warning

5. Create a field guide, play book or manual on identity-based violence prevention and atrocity prevention, including principles and guidelines on collaborating with local partners to co-create and update indicators

6. Continue to look for openings and creative means to fund local CSOs directly – via Aid Direct and Aid Connect, but also via country offices

7. Create opportunities for cross-learning with other UK missions in complex violent contexts, such as Myanmar or South Sudan

8. Carefully consider the impact of funding cuts for development in the DRC particularly in the context of the need for programmes across the portfolio to adapt to the needs of the COVID-19 pandemic. Ensure the impact of such cuts on prevention and identity-based violence work is minimised

Recommendations

Her Majesty's Government should

1. Use the implementation of the Integrated Review as an opportunity to build out its approach to atrocity prevention explicitly and embedding prevention across government policy approach in the Cabinet Office and National Security Council. This should:

   a) be set out in a cross-cutting national strategy or comprehensive policy on modern atrocities

   b) integrate of indicators for atrocity prevention in internal early warning systems

   c) develop awareness of atrocity-sensitivity in decision-making and programming, such as by empowering the R2P Focal point to receive and advise on early warning information and/or by creating a stand-alone unit or comparable uplift to both the resourcing and prioritisation of atrocity prevention

   d) establish the means of central coordination across departments to ensure joined up implementation of the new commitment to atrocity prevention, including but not limited to FCDO, Trade, MoD, and Home Office. HMG plans to support rapid expansion of the mining of minerals needed for the production of batteries and fuel cells, should be informed by atrocity-sensitive analysis

2. Develop a guide to support cross-government understanding, reporting and responding to the risk of atrocity. This should provide guidance on how to develop context-specific indicators that are informed by local actors, how to recognise and report risks and how to support existing local efforts to prevent identity-based violence

3. Establish clear avenues for staff in Missions to have more direct engagement with local organisations beyond funding. This could include the development of guidelines of good practices collected by the Stabilisation, Conflict and Mitigation Directorate but should be relevant to all departments working in Missions

> Meeting the raised expectations on and of the international community that reflect our increasingly interconnected world demands an honest look at the gaps that exist between assurances made on the global stage to prevent crises and protect people and how states like the UK implement and integrate those commitments. Closing that gap without significant investment requires a greater policy coherence and enhanced collaboration with other actors. A coordination strategy can bring that coherence and enable that collaboration. A lightweight early warning system in Eastern DRC would be a straightforward and tangible implementation of such an approach.

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Footnotes

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72. The CRI is an annual assessment that ranks countries on the basis of their resilience to internal and external pressures. The CRI is owned by the Cabinet Office and informs decision-making across Government.

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Protection Approaches Linked up and linked in: Networking local-international early warning and early response in eastern DRC

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