

'STRENGTH IS FROM A UNION; WORKING TOGETHER YOU GO FAR': Understanding Collective Impact Using an Analytic Framework

By Kiely Barnard-Webster

CDA Collaborative Learning Projects (CDA)

October 2018

"The importance of the Network was to work in synergy. When you are many, you have different ideas; you can put them together and reach farther. It is one of our proverbs: Strength is from a union; working together you go far."

— Male Network member



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	3
Disclaimer	3
Executive Summary	4
What Is This Project?	6
Methodology and Approach	7
Overview of the Network	9
Five Conditions of Collective Impact	16
Main Factors That Contribute to and Challenge Collective Impact in Peacebuilding	25
Looking Forward	27
Annex 1: Focus Group Discussion Lines of Inquiry	28

Acknowledgments

Many thanks to the Network, the INGO partner (“Organization A”), external experts, and the case study team for making this case study possible. The insightful questions, creative ideas, and collaborative attitude contributed to shaping a case that accurately documents the work of the Network.

Special thanks to the two research partners engaged in this work for their thorough, sharp, and invaluable contributions. Working together has truly been an enjoyable collaboration: “Working together you go far”!

A final thanks to Humanity United for its commitment to promoting innovative approaches in peacebuilding and making the [Collective Impact in Peacebuilding Project](#), and this case study, possible. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of Humanity United.

Disclaimer

At the request of the Network and the case organization involved in this work and owing to the politically sensitive climate in the country where this work is being implemented, the case remains heavily redacted (country name and identifiers, Network identifiers, and case agency name have all been removed). We ask that those drawing lessons learned from this case refer to it as the “Boendoe” case.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Network is an informal group of 18 civil society organizations that coordinate 198 peacebuilders, development actors, and human rights activists from all provinces of the country.

Though it started as an early warning-early response network, it is experiencing a shift from pure “conflict prevention” work to longer-term peacebuilding and community development. For the most part, the individuals who participate in this network are volunteers.

The five conditions for collective impact elaborated upon in this case study are, for the most part, important to helping explain some of the Network’s successes, though not all to equal degree. For example, while *collective intention and action* has required constant navigation and monitoring, *accountability* within the Network has gotten less attention owing to significant internal trust in the Network’s leadership. In the same vein, there are also ways the Framework could be improved. Commentary is provided throughout the document with ideas for improvement.

The context in Country X has posed significant challenges to the Network’s ability to achieve peace gains beyond provincial level. But at inter-communal and provincial levels, horizontal coordination is possible and tangible achievements are clear. To some extent, there is still added value in a much larger network identity. Some mentioned the importance of knowing that a larger group is behind you, as this supports maintaining some level of morale in a working environment that is mentally and physically challenging.

The greatest challenge to the Network at present is its shifting strategic role in preventing violence and contributing to social cohesion at grassroots level. As an early warning-early response network, the group initially operated under the assumption that by accurately and credibly reporting on incidents of violence and human rights violations, the international community would take effective action. Since then, the Network has redirected its efforts as donor funds have dwindled — still unified under the vision of reducing violence — to focus on strengthening civil society organizations (identified as a “key actor” in building peace in Country X) and supporting local peacebuilders who respond to violence with minimal international support. This is not to say that, at a future moment, the opportunity will not again present itself to the Network to engage with key international governments and donors on strengthening policies to reduce violence in Country X.

Contributing factors to successful collective action at communal/provincial level include:

- **Locally driven initiatives.** The local drive of the Network, and the trust in the group’s capable local leadership, *imply long-term commitment of the group to peace*. The group awaits the opportunity — when the political context is more “open” — to engage in peacebuilding activities at national, macro level.
- **Convening diverse local peacebuilding actors.** The Network provides convening opportunities for diverse organizations and officials working at local level to respond together to violence. Often, this collective action of a diverse membership allows for strategic partner-

ships to form within the Network and creates *the opportunity for learning*. “Diversity” in this sense refers to the types of activities performed by member organizations (mediation, cooperation projects, development projects, prison monitoring, human rights advocacy, election monitoring, etc.) and categories of participant (local authorities, youth political groups, community elders, refugees, etc.). Diverse membership also highlights the numerous varieties of peacebuilding work taking place in the country, and where gaps or overlaps may exist that inhibit achievements for social cohesion.

- **Responsible technical support organization.** Interviewees mentioned that without the support of Organization A they would not have been able to exist. The value of longer-term support through *an organization, with the mind-set of not interfering in local dynamics*, seems to have enabled Network leadership to work better in a complex context in which it is already the expert.

This case study has a twofold purpose: to document the achievements of a peacebuilding network and to analyze the extent to which CDA’S Framework for Collective Action helps understand these achievements. Thus, this case also includes observations about the Framework’s application in practice:

- **Overall analysis of the Framework.** Overall, the Framework is a useful guiding document as it addresses important elements of programming. However, at the highest level, the Framework makes one assumption that needs to be explicitly addressed. A conceptual critique of the Framework, a missing element that would have helped better understand the achievements of the Network, is that it fails to ask, “Why is a group more effective than an individual person or organization when doing this work?” The Framework operates under the assumption this “why” is clear from the outset (implicitly assuming that a group is always better), when — as with this case study — it is not immediately evident.
- **The Framework does not emphasize analyzing the context to determine if other peace actors are doing similar work, thus — more importantly — missing an opportunity to support networks with conflict-sensitive approaches to peacebuilding.** Conversely in Country X, by identifying existing work on the ground and filling gaps, as an attempt to avoid competition for organizational resources (which can spur conflict at local level), the Network uses a conflict-sensitive approach to its work. This is clearly an achievement and, perhaps, a requirement for any framework meant to guide effective peacebuilding networks or consortia.
- **Though the group does not focus on shared measures, this element should remain in the Framework.** Though the Network began more than five years ago, there has been very little attention paid to concrete shared measures (which it admits), though the author’s opinion is that shared measures and a more “evaluative mind-set” may be to the benefit of the group going forward. The Network has needed to determine its future role in the country to achieve its vision of social cohesion, so in fact shared measures and discussions about anticipated change may help the group in its continued development and influence.

2. WHAT IS THIS PROJECT?

“Collective Impact in Peacebuilding —Testing a New Model” is a project identifying salient features for effective collective action in peacebuilding. In 2017, CDA produced “A Framework for Collective Impact in Peacebuilding” adapting existing resources developed by FSG.¹ The Framework reflected CDA’s lessons from 16 previously completed “cumulative impact” case studies investigating how multiple (and often disjointed) peacebuilding efforts “add up” to progress toward sustainable peace. The objective is to field- test the Framework, consolidate evidence from the field through case studies, and refine the Framework with guidance for practitioners and policy makers. This case study contributes to the evidence base for the project. The case also includes pointers throughout — or suggestions on how to refine the Framework to be a more useful document for practitioners.

Why is collective impact in peacebuilding important?

“Collective impact” holds many meanings;² in social change circles, the phrase implies shedding individual agendas in favor of a collective vision for change. The *Stanford Social Innovation Review*’s cluster of articles on the subject argues any notion of collective impact is predicated upon the idea that “fixing one point in [a system] wouldn’t make much difference unless all parts of the continuum improved at the same time.”³ For peacebuilders, who often understand conflict as a complex, interconnected system of violent and peaceful behaviors and actions, this theory is an imposing one.

Fortunately, many peacebuilding networks and consortia exist with the intention of collectively addressing complex systems of conflict. Unfortunately, very little documentation exists of the functioning of these groups. Understanding how they function is critical to more effective peacebuilding initiatives. The following case study is meant to document details about a peacebuilding network in Country X, in an effort to learn what the Network has achieved as a group and what factors enabled these achievements, and to analyze how this work does or does not validate CDA’s Framework for understanding effective collective action.

Why document this case?

Of the three cases in this collaborative learning project (CLP), this case is the only documented effort of collective action **from one network**. Lessons here have been derived from this very specific experience for collective action. The case captures work that focuses on citizens, local administration, and peace actors — all of whom are based outside the capital (at provincial, or micro, level) though that is not a unique addition to the set of cases.

1 Kania, John and Mark Kramer, “Collective Impact.” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*: 36–41, 2011. Fay Hanleybrown, John Kania, and Mark Kramer, “Channeling Change: Making Collective Impact Work.” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, January 2013. John Kania and Mark Kramer, “Embracing Emergence: How Collective Impact Addresses Complexity.” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, January 2012.

2 Edmondson, Jeff and Ben Hecht, “Defining Quality Collective Impact.” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 2014.

3 Ibid.

Who is it for?

As the case presents documented evidence of how one “successful” peacebuilding network functions, and also provides analysis of the suitability (or not) of the Framework to identify these “good practices” — this case is intended for practitioners first and foremost. Policy makers/senior-level managers, as a secondary audience, may integrate lessons into internal frameworks or agendas for collective action.

3. METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

Kiely Barnard-Webster, CDA program manager and case writer, and two local research partners — one based in Country X and one completing a master’s degree in Boston — composed the case team. Seventeen semi-structured key informant interviews were remotely conducted, and two focus groups held in Country X (for lines of inquiry, refer to Annex 1). Part-time and full-time Network members from the secretariat (general assembly and coordinating committee) participated. The team also interviewed external experts with knowledge of the country’s civil society context and staff at Organization A familiar with the Network. A total of eight local citizen reporters and 14 provincial coordinators participated in focus group discussions. In total, 39 individuals participated in conversations with the research team.

Participating Individuals					
Non-Network			Network		
External experts	Organization A staff		Provincial coordinators	Citizen reporters	Secretariat
3	3		14	8	11

This was a remote case study; the bulk of the information was gathered at a distance. One team member based in Country X led all focus group discussions in person. CDA made the decision to do a remote case study upon realizing security concerns could affect both the safety of participants and the quality of the conversations. Almost the entire Network (168 of the 198 members) operates outside the capital, across all provinces of the country. It was not advisable at the time of fieldwork to travel from the capital to the provinces — meaning those interviewed would have been transported into the capital (at minimum, two hours of travel per participant).

Members were also wary of speaking in spaces where they might be observed. While this was less of a concern in a larger city such as the capital, it nonetheless posed a challenge. For these reasons and given that almost all interviewees could be contacted via cell phone, the decision was made to conduct most of the case study interviews via Skype. Members who participated in the focus group conversations led by CDA’s research partner were transported to the capital for one day and felt comfortable in the location selected for discussion. When participants felt comfortable, conversations were recorded using Evaer software.

This case document was written based on an analysis of programmatic documents, interview notes, and focus group discussions, as well as CDA’s Framework for Collective Impact in 2016–17 and experience from 16 cumulative impact case studies investigating how multiple peacebuilding efforts “add up” to progress toward sustainable peace.

3.1 Data Risks and Constraints

Though most interviews were conducted remotely, representing one significant data risk, overall the decision for a remote case was prudent. Nonetheless, there existed several additional data constraints.

- **Transparency.** Owing to the remoteness of data collection, the case team could not meet interviewees in person. This posed a significant data risk as it could exacerbate suspicion among those participating in the case study. Due to the nature of the Network’s activities, there are high levels of suspicion regarding newcomers who are interested in learning about the group. To mitigate this, close coordination was needed with full-time Network staff as the trusted “gatekeepers” to the rest of the group. The Boston-based team members were each vetted first by Network staff. Also, several documents in the local language were circulated to participants; these introduced the project and explained conversations would remain anonymous though would be used in a final, (potentially) public, document. Each remote interview took several weeks to schedule, to allow for Network staff to explain the project to participants and gain verbal consent prior to participation. The final case was translated into the local language to increase transparency, as most members do not speak English.
- **Language.** Two members of the case team are native speakers of the local languages of Country X, and the CDA case writer is professionally fluent in one of these. Most conversations for this case were therefore conducted in the one local language shared by all on the case study team. This posed some risk to accuracy of the analysis but was mitigated in several ways. Both focus group discussions were recorded, then transcribed by the local research partner into the shared language. Several remote key informant interviews were conducted jointly, with one native speaker taking notes and contributing to analysis afterward. The entire team contributed to overall case analysis.
- **Gender representation.** No women were interviewed for the case study, though interviews were attempted. One interviewee mentioned overall representation in the Network is skewed toward men, thus interviewees made up a representative sample of the group. Two women were approached for an interview, but neither participated. Because no women were interviewed, there may be differing perspectives based on gendered interpretations of this work that have not been included. This limits the quality of the analysis.

4. OVERVIEW OF THE NETWORK

Note: *Because of the tense political context in Country X, the Network and the case team chose not to present the name of the Network in this case, as it could jeopardize the lives and work of the group.*

The Network is a group of 18 civil society organizations that coordinate among 198 peacebuilders, development actors, and human rights activists from all provinces of the country.

All those who work at community level are “citizen reporters” and, at provincial level, “provincial coordinators.” Remaining members work in the secretariat. For the most part, individuals who participate in the Network are volunteers (employed as staff in the member organizations). There are some trusted individuals from outside that have been vetted for participation in Network activities.

The Network has always been locally led but has never worked at the policy level or with national-level government actors. Rather, at present it addresses conflict prevention and social cohesion at local level, supporting different peacebuilding efforts focused on building cohesion. Preventing atrocity also remains one of the core foci for “peace” in the country, and within the Network. The group receives different types of support from Organization A, for example to distribute weekly reports to international partners and advocate on behalf of the Network’s efforts to reduce violence. The group’s initial aim was to monitor and circulate information about violence and human rights violations related to the most recent election; today, the purpose has shifted slightly. While the Network remains committed to early warning-early response (and produces regular reports about incidents of violence and human rights abuse), the group has also started focusing more on strengthening civil society as a means to build social cohesion in the long term.

Secretariat: Composed of the “steering committee,” or full- and part-time staff tasked with guiding the overall implementation of network-wide activities, and weekly reporting to Organization A and the international community. Specifically, the steering committee includes the “general assembly,” a group with elected representatives from each member organization; the “coordinating committee,” composed of representatives who serve on a voluntary basis as an oversight “board”; and a central office with paid staff focused on weekly operations.

Provincial coordinators: “Hub” for reports and analysis, also tasked with supporting citizen reporters when needed. They analyze and select information to be reported to the secretariat.

Citizen reporters: Country X citizens reporting on incidents of violence and human rights violations in the communities where they live; often first responders, when they feel equipped to immediately address violence or conflict.

4.1 Establishing the Network

The Network is a group of civil society organizations (CSOs) created in 2013 to record and report⁴ details of violence and human rights violations to citizens and the international community, at a time when information and movement was closely monitored. Initially, the Network intended to also respond to any subsequent violent conflict at local level, though not enough was known at the time about the scale of violence to know how to design an intervention at this level. CSOs in Country X have historically played an important role in shaping the quality and flow of information. Media CSOs in 2002 were ranked in the top 40% in the World Press Freedom Ranking,⁵ and civil society generally in the 1990s and 2000s was seen to be growing, and increasingly influential.⁶ Playing this important role of shaping quality and flow of information, the members — all CSO members — of the Network felt international monitors were not fully registering the severity of the impending crisis, and therefore sharing information to spur them into action was paramount.⁷ This became the Network's purpose.

“[Several years ago], we were in a phase before the elections, preparing ourselves for that, and we knew that period there would be violence, murders, and unfortunately the international observers hadn't come to realize yet this was going to happen. So, in this way the Network was created to impartially monitor the election, and monitor violence and analyze what might happen next.”

— Male Network member

a. Challenges to Establishing a Unified Group.

Though purpose had been shaped, challenges existed.

- **Early coordination challenges.** Leading up to the most recent election, tension was mounting, and many peacebuilding CSOs operated in isolation of one another. Many members of civil society were also increasingly forced to evacuate the country. Though buy-in for the Network was achieved in 2013, and the atmosphere at the beginning was friendly, there was significant tension and discomfort after a presidential coup attempt in the country. Leaders, including those within the Network, threatened by the coup started leaving the country.

“Sometimes the international community does not get out to the hard-to-reach places to observe human rights violations. Add this to the fact that there are many human rights local actors but working in different corners. That's how the original idea was launched to join our efforts — so we could be more effective. We started with observation of the most recent elections.”

— Focus Group Discussion #2

⁴ There was always the assumption that citizens in the Network would respond to violence at local level; however, it was difficult to anticipate the extent to which this would be necessary, as how much violence would occur was unknown. Thus this element of the Network was not heavily emphasized at the outset.

⁵ <https://rsf.org/en/ranking/2002>.

⁶ <https://monitor.civicus.org>.

⁷ International human rights reporting from 2012 onward conveys a tense political context transitioning to relative calm up until the most recent election. For example, political killings decreased in 2012. The National Independent Human Rights Commission operating in-country continued independent investigation of human rights abuses. Several years ago, some effort was made by government to respond to incidents of gender-based violence. Then, the next year, government suppression of political opposition groups began, as did violence led by youth factions of the ruling party. To those looking at the bigger picture, tension had always been mounting.

- **An appropriate joint process.** Finding a way to collect quality information — that spoke to the differing experiences of citizens during the crisis — was a challenge. As narrative and rhetoric at the time were government-controlled, inquiries into politically motivated violence were regularly met with suspicion.⁸ Collecting quality information (from multiple experiences) was important to the group, as its purpose was to communicate *accurate* information about violence and human rights violations.
- **Differing abilities.** In 2012, roughly 5 percent of known CSOs in Country X were able to function at full capacity, meaning with nuanced theories of change, strategic plans, sufficient levels of staff, division of roles among staff, feedback mechanisms, and transparent financial reporting.⁹ Member organizations varied in age and organizational capacity at the time of the group’s inception, which challenged initial network functioning. Staff seconded to the group were expected to know how to collect and report data in a way that aligned with the network’s methodology, *in addition to* tending to their organizations.

“I identified 40 CSO organizations that were doing really important, good work in the country but were isolated; there was no space really for them to come together to collaborate, and they wanted to! Some were working with youth in one province, others working with women in their little corner, others also working with ex-combatants but only in one province — you see? There was a lot of willingness to collaborate and to coordinate efforts. The Network offered that space.”

— Network leader

b. How the Group Addressed These Challenges

1. Perceptive and well-connected network leadership (in the form of the group’s initial coordinating committee, or steering committee) was critically important for troubleshooting challenges in a tense conflict context. This steering committee was the primary internal conflict resolution mechanism and has remained an important “backbone” structure for the group. For example, in early days leadership recognized that CSOs who were still operating — despite diminished capacity — were not seeking to isolate themselves. It would have been easy to assume organizations *were* intentionally choosing isolation, given the high frequency of misinformation and suspicion. Instead, CSOs were drawn to the idea of a collaborative partnership model. The steering committee also successfully mediated internal tensions among group members during the coup attempt.
2. The Network has continuously refined its interpretation of quality data — meaning incidents of violence and/or human rights abuses — adapting its data collection methodology as a result. For example, initially only a few rural areas were selected, and information narrowly validated. Later, scope for collecting and validating information expanded to include all provinces. Many of these decisions were made based on guidance and support from Organization A.
3. Organization A has been a committed partner of the Network since joining the group in 2013. Its partnership, among other things, has provided a significant support function: in the form of technical and resource support helping to bring member organizations up to

⁸ Opposition groups recast as “criminals,” for example. Opposition groups, too, were “radicalizing” and speaking on behalf of their own agendas. <https://www.crisisgroup.org>.

⁹ Male network interviewee, who was conducting research on this topic in 2012, as an independent consultant.

similar levels of functioning and, most critically today, using their contacts, access, and influence to distribute the regular reports among international actors. Members of the Network are eager to learn how to grow their organizations — although this has never been a stated benefit of membership. In fact, to Network founders, expectation management was important and needed very careful navigation. It was felt members should be motivated to participate for the “right” reasons — meaning personal motivation first and foremost, not solely based on expectations of individual or organizational benefit. Members needed “to feel their own responsibility in bringing about peace in their country [despite] the weight of what this would require on their own part.”¹⁰ However, though all members interviewed expressed significant commitment to the work, some claimed they initially joined in hopes the Network could “facilitate funding issues.”¹¹

4.2 The Current Network

More recently, the Network has adapted how it contributes to social cohesion. It focuses on improving CSO members’ response to incidents of violence and conflict (e.g., communal mistrust stemming from rampant illegal detention). Member organizations vary in the types of work they perform and have differing interpretations about how to achieve the group’s macro-level goal of social cohesion (“peace”).¹² All consider themselves peacebuilding organizations in some way — from conflict-prevention work and human rights monitoring, to “classic” peacebuilding approaches like dialogue and cooperation projects, to development as a way to maintain peace outcomes long term. Technical diversity has served the Network well as it provides the group with options for designing strategic approaches to peacebuilding at the micro level. On the other hand, this diversity of worldviews may also pose a challenge to the collective coherence of different efforts. Diverse expertise in peacebuilding seems to offer a strategic advantage *in a commune or province*. The strategic choice of filling gaps at the micro level and avoiding duplication has made the Network more effective in its social cohesion work.

Understanding how to fill gaps and strengthen strategic response to violence at *national, or even inter-provincial, level* remains a self-proscribed challenge for the Network. Tangible (visible) impacts of the collective group — see Section 4.3 — seem clearer when analyzing the work of citizen reporters and provincial coordinators.

“We needed to survive, so today we talk about peace, human rights, with an element of development included so we can survive to do peace and human rights. And we could do development activities, so made the decision to adapt the name to better represent us and our goal as a Network. This was more the actual slogan — to develop the community both economically but also from the point of view of constantly building them up. We made the choice based on an internal push to do so, changed a bit the vision based on what members wanted.”

— Senior male Network member

¹⁰ Conversation with Network co-founder.

¹¹ Male network member.

¹² Descriptions of the types of work organizations carry out have been kept somewhat limited to protect the identities of the organizations within the network. Organizational representatives interviewed during this case study research asked that organizations not be identifiable in the final case study.

a. Why the Current Shift from National- to Local-Level Work?

This shift could be attributed to two different things, both contextual:

1. At macro level, after the most recent election process was waylaid, there remained a general *contextual gap* linking provinces to national level to address violence — therefore, channels for coordination and dialogue still needed to be built (a much harder process) rather than improved. This remains true today and poses a challenge to any NGO, international government, or organization attempting to work on “peace” at national level.
2. Second, the Network began with a clear mandate to monitor and address violence surrounding the most recent election and *did this* to a certain extent. However, upon realizing the political bargaining needed by international and national stakeholders to actualize a change in the election process, the Network decided to shift purpose slightly, as the group no longer “rang with the context or circumstances of the moment.”¹³ The Network chose to focus less on national-level election processes and more on local-level conflict dynamics.

“There is a sort of competition within zones of intervention between organizations, and the Network got over these — we coordinate technical support on the ground and monitor this regularly, so these organizations can report, and so work can continue in these zones.”

Male Network member

“It’s about questions of complementarity and not substitution or of aligning ourselves and our activities with other activities taking place. To me it’s about listening to people and to accept to put ourselves in common with others and searching together what to do. Share ideas. If we align ourselves together it’s having something in common to do! This is personal, but that’s what I think.”

Male Network member

4.3 Network Achievements

From what can be quantified, over a period of two years, 5,597 internal reports on incidents of human rights violations and violence were issued by the Network’s citizen reporters and verified internally by Network members. The public reports disseminated by the group have been well received by some of the main stakeholders.¹⁴ For example, as of 2018, 68 percent of the international stakeholders who receive reports from the Network rated them as “highly valuable.”¹⁵ Among these stakeholders, feedback includes testimony such as that “the information collected by local networks has been praised by government representatives and the

“The head of the network told us, during the moments of the crisis, that the U.N. Security Council was able to modify a resolution because of the information provided in our reports.”

“People have written about us online and said they’ve changed their behavior because they saw their negative behavior was seen by everyone [in the world].”

Focus Group Discussion #1

¹³ Quote by a member of the Network who works at national level.

¹⁴ Email records maintained by Organization A.

¹⁵ <https://www.peacedirect.org/us/what-we-do/preventing-conflict/>. Value in this sense is interpreted as accurately portraying the reality of violence in the context, to inform international-level decisions about humanitarian response.

U.N. alike.”¹⁶ In addition, the European Parliament resolution at this time urging for resumption of inclusive talks and threatening to suspend its aid to AMISOM troops was partially informed by recommendations of the Network.

The Network’s perception of its own achievements has also provided significant richness to this case study, as a testament to the group’s valuation of how it contributes to social cohesion.¹⁷

a. Closing Gaps at Local Level

Civil society in Country X remains divided to this day. Though cohesion is possible, civil society organizations are still working to achieve complementarity. Nonetheless, the Network has introduced similarly focused, committed member organizations to one another, and provided a way to join efforts to be more effective. For instance, it has introduced members that have since helped one another by providing relevant technical expertise, or by facilitating meetings with their own networks of gatekeepers for peace — such as local authorities, police, and judicial actors. The Network knows who is doing what in each commune. When technical or relational challenges are faced by member organizations, in some cases the Network can identify potential partners nearby doing similar work who might be able to assist. “The Network has reduced conflict by reducing gaps in work — there is a sort of competition within zones of intervention between organizations, and the Network got over these — we coordinate technical support on the ground and monitor this regularly...so work can continue.”¹⁸ There is recognition among Network members that problems in different areas of the country are very different. Often, knowing whom to engage is a challenge. Facilitated introductions and internal Network information sharing about what others are doing is seen by members as an important role for the group to play.

“We found that at civil society level, other civil society organizations on the ground were doing similar work to us!”

— Male Network member

- **The Framework does not emphasize analyzing the context to determine whether other peace actors are doing similar work, thus — more importantly — missing an opportunity to support networks with conflict-sensitive approaches to peacebuilding.** By identifying existing work on the ground and filling gaps, as an attempt to avoid competition for organizational resources (which can spur conflict at local level), the Network uses a conflict-sensitive approach to its work. According to the Do No Harm framework used at CDA, it is conceivable that the Network is able to understand and mitigate potential market and substitution effects by working with local organizations. This would clearly constitute an achievement for any network and, perhaps, be a requirement for a framework meant to guide effective peacebuilding networks or consortia. Conflict sensitivity — meaning how a network can implement peacebuilding work at local level while avoiding unintended negative effects on conflict, and finding ways its work might maximize peace gains — is not mentioned in the Framework.

¹⁶ <https://www.peacedirect.org/us/what-we-do/preventing-conflict/>.

¹⁷ Because this was not an evaluation of the Network or its activities, this case was not structured as a judgment of the quality of the Network’s work according to common human rights or peacebuilding standards, nor did it use a methodology that would conform to American Evaluation Association standards for evaluation. The data collected — though robust — cannot rigorously determine whether the Network’s processes and activities have contributed to achievement of its goals.

¹⁸ Male network member.

b. Mutual Reinforcement

Cross-learning in the Network is seen as a mechanism for mutual reinforcement, and therefore a benefit that has potential to improve effectiveness of those organizations that participate. There are frequent informal exchanges at local level (commune or province) to help one another implement more effectively. The secretariat level is tasked with ensuring all Network activities are mutually reinforcing. However, the relevant information does not always trickle down,¹⁹ and some members felt a dissonance between secretariat and local levels that resulted in lower levels within the Network not always knowing what was going on across the country and what the group's common agenda was.²⁰

“After the most recent crisis, there were very few organizations or associations or networks that were neutral that could monitor incidents, human rights violations, in a neutral way — it was only this network that was present on the ground, that collected and transmitted info that was neutral, credible, and unbiased.”

— Focus Group Discussion #1

c. Neutral Reporting During Media Blackouts

In the year of the most recent election and coup attempt, the Network was able to report on a conflict that escalated much more quickly than the international community expected. The government cut off most media outlets in an effort to control the narrative of violence. Information collected by the group across different communities and provinces at this time was accurate and from the perspective of those across the country. To ensure accuracy, the Network's process for validating information included (and still includes) “a coordination team which is responsible for verifying information submitted by citizen reporters. This includes cross-checking reports with a provincial coordinator and other citizen reporters from the same commune. The provincial coordinator is able to check the information with connections in the local administration, judiciary, police and other civil society groups.”²¹ Also, those who report on events — as often as possible — report only on what they have witnessed. The role of the Network during

“There has been some progress. We can't deny there has been progress [in ameliorating the human rights situation], but the progress is not clear/neat.”

“We are not the only network out here reporting. When you report an incident, you are really aware of the terms you've used, but when that appears in the media I see what look like other people reporting the same incident because we don't use the same terms. That's what tells me we're not the only ones reporting incidents on the ground. We also aren't the only human rights network that works here — so it's hard to be precise that it's really been our activities only that contribute to impact.”

— Focus Group Discussion #1

¹⁹ To this author “mutually reinforcing” is interpreted thus: Reporting and response efforts are articulated bottom up and top down and are not duplicative of each other but, instead, complement one another to more effectively achieve social cohesion.

²⁰ One member provided several possible reasons for this dissonance: “This [could be] due to the current security context, which doesn't allow open meetings and discussions of sensitive matters, but also to the internal strategic direction and choices on how to adjust [the Network] and keep every member updated.”

²¹ Aug. 25, 2017, Weekly Report created by the Network and validated by a recent evaluation, p. 6. This reporting method was also validated in a separate evaluation of the group in the same year.

a media crisis was critical especially for independent citizens needing neutral information from sources that could be trusted. The role the Network played and could likely play in similar future events (e.g., the 2020 election) was critical to ensure that the citizenry knew what was happening and could react accordingly, and that gaps in evidence about atrocities were not prolonged by government- mandated blackouts.

Though many were willing to speak to the group's achievements, there was also a healthy dose of realism. Several members admitted it can often be a challenge to know what their direct contribution has been to peace through social cohesion. The group recognizes there are other formal and informal groups working toward social cohesion in similar ways (e.g., monitoring human rights violations, addressing tension around land/resource distribution, and mediating political issues that divide communities).

5. FIVE CONDITIONS OF COLLECTIVE IMPACT

In CDA's Framework for Collective Impact in Peacebuilding (2017) five conditions were developed, based on work done by [FSG Reimagining Social Change](#), that pave the way for collective impact. These include

(1) Collective & Emergent Understanding of the Context, (2) Collective Intention & Action, (3) Collective Learning & Adaptive Management, (4) Continuous Communication & Accountability, and (5) Sufficient Support Structures.²² The Network, through an early warning-early response approach now particularly focused on enabling civil society response at provincial level, has clear stories of its achievements. However, understanding what impact is achieved by uniting 18 organizations at a more macro level (rather than just uniting committed citizens) is somewhat unclear, although this section elaborates on the added value of protection from a group.

5.1 Collective & Emergent Understanding of the Context

The Framework presents this condition as “engaging in ongoing processes of joint conflict analysis and tracking progress.” The group does engage in ongoing analysis. However, this can often be a contentious and/or risky activity in a conflict context. *Asking why* this happened posed a more interesting question and illuminated more about the Network and its commitment to ongoing analysis.

a. Developing a Shared Goal. The initial goal was to reduce violence in Country X around the most recent election. The original purpose for the Network was to circulate information on electoral violence and human rights abuses, perpetrated by citizens and authorities, in hopes it would be addressed by the international community and local officials. The commitment of this group to long-term, broad-based reconciliation and social cohesion was strongly articulated during conversations and reinforced even more so the realization that those who still commit to this work face extreme personal risk.

Asking why members commit to this work elicited interesting responses. In case interviews, many spoke of their commitment through the lens of *citizens of Country X* who will be living in this context for many years to come. This element, a sense of responsibility to fellow citizens and the country even when others have left, seemed to incentivize many within the Network to continue working as a unified group despite the challenges.

If the Network does not try to respond to incidents of violence at local level, it is likely no one else will (as evidenced during the most recent crisis).

²² 2017 Framework, p 10. <http://cdacollaborative.org/publication/framework-collective-impact-peacebuilding/>.

And last, the group provides protection to individuals who would be doing this work regardless of whether or not the Network existed (meaning, protection is an added benefit of belonging to the group). In a debrief with CDA's local research partner it was asked, "If it's so dangerous, why don't organizations or individuals just work independently to avoid detection?" The response: "Supporting morale is important. If they work individually, morale is not strengthened. If they are targeted, they still could be targeted alone. It's extremely demoralizing — they would be alone in prison with no one to follow their case or advocate for their release, and this might make them even more demotivated. If there are others who are behind you, you know that others will run to help you and free you." The Network seems to serve two purposes: as a method of physical protection (a group to come get you out of prison) and a way to maintain some level of morale in a working environment that is extremely mentally and physically challenging. Interviewees mentioned there is a strong need for the Network to develop a concrete internal process for helping members during an emergency, although it is interesting to note that this is an area where Organization A is providing support in the form of hiring external consultants to improve existing procedures and remains available to provide financial and technical support to the Network in this respect.

- **The Framework does not integrate the Fundamental Principles for Collective Impact into the conditions for effective collective action (how is a practitioner meant to apply these principles?).** The Framework introduces a set of fundamental principles underlying collective impact in peacebuilding at the beginning of the document. Most if not all of these principles were relevant to the Network and helped explain some of the group's modus operandi (the "why" behind its work). Collective impact is defined as "the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem,"²³ and the Framework is meant to support practitioners establishing this type of intervention. However-

A regional expert who has worked with the Network since inception, and runs a similar Network in a nearby country, gave an observation: "These kinds of rapid-response networks are like research hospitals. Your goal is to find root causes of malaria and then determine how to cure it, but while you do this you're still treating one-off urgent cases admitted to the hospital. Because this network is very locally led, this is now the articulated goal of the group — to work more on prevention and act less as the fire brigade."

"Before becoming citizen reporters no one forced us. It was voluntary from the beginning — meaning, we engaged for the cause; we are engaged to protect human rights. If tomorrow we didn't have a donor or funder, that wouldn't mean that we just stop working "

"A motivation that pushes us to act in our localities — it's human nature."

"If there is something going on around you [or with your group], you push back."

"Patriotism, being a responsible citizen, motivates us ... not wanting to see our country sink into evil."

— Focus Group Discussion #1

²³ Kania and Kramer, *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 2011. P. 3.

er, if practitioners do not know *why* a network may commit to this work, then arguably they will not know how to implement a healthy, functioning collective effort. To help improve the Framework, the principles may need to be applied to the rest of the Framework. For example, one such principle — “No. 11. The incentives for participating in collective impact for peace-building must be considered” — would have been useful if integrated into Condition 1: Collective & Emergent Understanding, as this would clarify the groups’ collective understanding of *why they and others are unifying in the first place* to carry this work forward.

b. Joint Analysis & Strategy. Country X is not a large country; thus, the Network is set up to constantly monitor across all main localities. It conducted an initial conflict analysis during inception (facilitated by Organization A), but it is unclear if this original document is still being used or updated.²⁴ Instead, understanding the context is primarily reliant upon joint exchanges within communes, and sharing information across communes and provinces via a widely connected internal messaging system. Analysis for the Network has primarily meant analyzing the accuracy of incidents reported rather than strategic analysis in a programmatic sense. Although, as the Network’s approach has shifted slightly, and priority placed on greater development of the Network’s response to violence, analysis in a strategic sense has become more important. In fact, strategic analysis is the current priority for the group, in order to develop a comprehensive response strategy to guide local interventions in a more harmonized way.

To determine what types of incidents are reported, provincial-level coordinators (the “hub” for reports and analysis) and field-level reporters informally identify categories within each province. There are no uniform requirements for what categories of incidents are reported. Rather, reporters and analysts at the provincial and community levels must live in the localities where they are reporting and identify what seems most likely to be driving conflict (“That’s the only way to know what’s going on there! How else will you know?”).²⁵ It was noted by the case writer that, in the classic sense, a formal conflict analysis did not seem relevant to the work of the Network. Since all members are an active part of the local communities where they live and work, often the nature of the conflicts seemed known and lived while not formally documented.

Similarly, to this point, the idea of a formal “joint” strategy for collective action does not

“Wherever we go in the communities we can find people that have capacity to identify and analyze and can distinguish and report on a conflict and try to advocate for its end.”

— Male Network member

“[The categories] are selected at local level. At the time of recruitment of citizen reporters, we make sure they know about the types of conflicts going on, etc., and the differences between political, electoral, familial violence [they receive initial training to see these differences]. And then, at the end, they send the report to the provincial coordinator, who knows the province well and can see if the incident is well classified or not. They may do a bit of research, then will report this up to the central staff. Categorization means [for example] if there is violence and it’s an incident linked to the elections, or if it’s a familial incident, a resource-related incident, etc.”

— Male Network member

²⁴ A few participants claimed the original conflict analysis had been regularly used and updated, while most asked about the initial conflict analysis were either unaware it existed or unsure if it was still being used.

²⁵ Interview with male Network member.

entirely resonate with how the Network functions. If members adhere to the current macro-level theory of change the Network has agreed upon (see below), most member organizations have relatively free rein to determine how to achieve this (further discussed in Section 5.2).

Macro-Level Theory of Change

The group came into its own as a network during a time of media blackout. Initially it believed if it could accurately report on high levels of violence and human rights abuses taking place nationwide, the international community would respond. Though this assumption has *not* been proved false, this theory has proved challenging at times: The government had more control over the response to international pressure than envisaged. And at the time, neither international policy makers nor INGO implementers were able to significantly influence the government's actions, and in fact many — policy and INGO alike left the country during the most recent crisis.²⁶ This led the Network to shift its strategic approach and theory of change.²⁷

Social harmony, or social cohesion, is the ultimate goal (or vision) for the Network. At present, the group and its members are focused on micro-level intermediate steps to achieve this. Though “part 1” of the theory of change (influencing key international organizations to act) still holds, there is currently more momentum behind theory of change, “part 2”: If civil society is strengthened at local level to coordinate and communicate better amongst themselves, so they can more strategically and effectively address instances of violence and abuse within their own communities, this may eventually build to social cohesion “writ large.”

- **The Network does not refer to informal joint exchanges as “conflict analysis,” though this is in essence what is regularly occurring to provide valuable up-to-date information about the context. The Framework implies “conflict analysis” is a more formal engagement (e.g., is written down, with clear categories to track regularly).** This type of formal process is neither useful for understanding how the Network achieves the contributions it has made to social cohesion nor helpful in determining how the Network might improve its joint understanding of the context. A formal approach to conflict analysis would be burdensome for this group and unhelpful for its work.

“[Country X] is not large. ... We know someone in each locality, and our coordination is done that way. 2016, post-election, we were asked what our identity was, what was our vision. Vision is the same: have a peaceful society and have a consolidated peace among the population, and now what should the approach be? How do you achieve this, peace in society? We have different problems, due to political parties in society. ... The work should be about sustaining people. ... You have to help people understand what is going on, then figure out what to do to solve it.”

— Male Network member

²⁶ Based on a conversation with Organization A staff.

²⁷ Original theory of change: “If a civil society organization working at local level identifies or reports incidents and communicates this to different actors, there is great potential that these actors (government administration, or among international community) and this communication can help to stop the incidents of violence and thus build peace in the country” — Male Network founder

5.2 Collective Intention & Action

Collective intention and action is the aim to “develop a common agenda, core strategy, action plan and shared measures” in a tense or conflict-affected context. The Network is quite aligned both philosophically (on the same page) and literally (organized) in what it does. There are two general approaches for building social cohesion.

There is a “macro-level” vision and theory of change (Section 5.1). Then, though members working to achieve this have relatively free rein to determine how, there are two general approaches for building cohesion: immediate action to address conflict²⁸ and change in the longer term. For longer-term response, the group initiates a Network-wide decision-making process based on criteria for determining effective implementation (whether the organization can implement effectively, rather than strategic criteria to determine if an action will effectively change the conflict). All response happens at community level, not national level.²⁹ To note: Long-term response is admittedly an area of needed growth for the group.

a. Immediate Response. In this, the general approach is that a Network member will intervene to stop or prevent violence and abuse. Or, if not possible, local partners, e.g., local officials, will respond: “Police [or other local officials] hear our alert. The other side, the police, can work on response to the incident or also try to prevent the incident.”³⁰

This approach does work; when challenges arise, citizen reporters will help one another as they recognize fellow Network members and know they can be trusted. Without the Network, this trust and knowing whom to contact would be an issue. For example, if needing to influence a nearby official, another trusted Network member will share the official’s phone number — “We share ideas and experiences about what’s going on throughout the country and can always be equipped or informed about whatever is going on.”³¹ Members of the Network also regularly observe and share with one another what peace activities are being led on the ground so potential partners can be engaged.

“Rapid response...meaning the organizations involved in the Network [are] supposed to be increasingly mobilizing their own resources towards peacebuilding activities as a direct response to violence. We try to find a way to respond with visiteurs or with other interveners that is maybe spontaneous or at least responds directly to reducing the incidents of violence. That’s the objective. ... We also try to implicate actors and socioeconomic organizations that can intervene in a relevant way.”

— Male Network member

b. Longer-Term Response. When developing a longer-term response, multiple levels of the Network weigh in. The idea for an intervention for change will come from a member organization. To date, these ideas appear to be driven by what is taking place on the ground and responding directly rather than adhering to a longer-term strategic plan for change. To some, there is “healthy competition” during this longer-term response process, which inspires “complementarity.”³² This competition is created when the Network coordinating committee selects projects to support. While the Network seems to build healthy relation-

28 Conflict: direct violence or reported instances of human rights abuse.

29 One main reason for this was, at the time of case drafting and write-up, that the Network was not registered, so was not considered a legal entity by the government. Some members did express their desire to be more visible at the national level. Perhaps this is a future direction of the group, now that registration has been finalized.

30 Interview with male Network member.

31 Interview with male Network member.

32 Interview with male Network member.

ships between its members in this process, the group admits it is working on determining a more effective long-term response. Finding key drivers of violence and working on these in hopes of catalyzing longer-term cohesion is a logical next step for the group.

5.3 Collective Learning & Adaptive Management

Collective learning and adaptive management are the processes of “seeking regular feedback, adjusting actions accordingly, and adopting shared measures.” The Network prioritizes collective learning about the context and strategic ways to respond. Learning about the context mainly occurs at local level. Any strategic adaptation of response to violence occurs at local level and, as far as can be discerned, is minimally documented. It is unclear to what extent learning about the organization and adjusting internal processes takes place.

Sharing information and knowledge about what is going on in the context is critically important to the group — and often happens through an internal messaging system (SMS texts), while **collective learning** (about what works and what does not) is different and equally vital as it informs overall strategy and response. Learning seems to occur most frequently through informal exchanges at local level; these are often reflective in nature (looking backward, not forward — an after-action review). While not much documentation exists regarding these informal learning processes, those interviewed mentioned frequent gatherings — one per month at minimum. Discussions center on lessons for accurate collection and reporting of events, and on how to strategically, effectively respond to violence as a network. In this sense, “strategically respond” does not mean deciding how to respond *as a group* but rather determining how member organizations can each respond without leaving gaps or duplicating efforts of other members. Many see the Network as an opportunity to learn about one another’s organizations and expertise so as to more easily fill gaps, and not duplicate.

a. Formal Collective Learning. This occurs in the form of trainings, predominantly at local level. For example, how to collect sensitive information safely, or distinguish what constitutes a violation of rights: “At the beginning it was a bit difficult to distinguish a violation of the rule of law from a legal delay, for exam-

“In the provinces, for example, we only meet each month to exchange on what was done that month, and then share about the problems we’ve had in collecting data in the communities. Then we try to exchange if there’s been someone that wasn’t able to get information — we give advice about how to fix that, on strategies so they can get information.”

— Focus Group Discussion #1

“We’ll also discuss division of work — some organizations will have questions that are more technical, while others will have questions about mobilization — each in their domain where they feel strongest, and learning from one another.”

— Focus Group Discussion #2

“We identify incidents that lead to violence and respond according to the local capacities and by inviting others to intervene where we aren’t capable — this is for conflicts at local level. And analysis is asking, ‘Where might this conflict lead people?’ in a direction that is political, social, resource-based, etc. At the local level, people that have been trained and with technical experience will respond based on what they can do.”

— Male Network member

ple.”³³ This helps different members of the group feel they are on the same page regarding the Network’s expectations and objectives: “There are capacity-building workshops provided to make sure each person is understanding a situation in the same way.”³⁴

- **Though the group does not focus on shared measures, this element should remain in the Framework.** The Framework lists “develop shared measures” as an element of this condition for effective collective action. Though the Network began more than five years ago, there has been very little attention paid to concrete shared measures, though shared measures and a more “evaluative mind-set” may be to the benefit of the group going forward. The Network has needed to determine its new role in Country X to achieve its vision, so in fact shared measures and discussions about anticipated change may have helped the group in its continued development, particularly since this group is trying to catalyze something that is hard to measure: reconciliation and social cohesion.

5.4 Continuous Communication & Accountability

The Framework does not provide much detail to define accountability (e.g., accountability of what? Of whom, to whom?). Regardless, this was not a very relevant condition to the Network. Overall, most feel Network leadership is accountable to those at local level and no issues exist internally with abuse of power or control. Members trust their colleagues and feel a certain level of openness is possible. For example, many are comfortable information will not be leaked as it travels up to the coordinating committee and general assembly. Continuous communication is very relevant to the success of how the Network operates but has been touched on elsewhere.

a. Inclusivity. The Network is strict about who can enter but does not manage processes for exit. There was not much discussion about how members exit or are phased out, though many who joined at inception have maintained their commitment to the Network (only four organizations have left).³⁵ Network leadership is trusted to vet any new members interested in joining the group. This is significant, given that the riskiest scenario for members would be if those within the group shared sensitive information with externals. There are “no techniques” for vetting new members, though the general approach is to “develop a friendship” in person before sharing any sensitive information.³⁶ If members miss two consecutive high-level meetings, they are suspended.³⁷ For the most part, any member that has been allowed to join is seen as trustworthy and accountable to the group.

5.5 Sufficient Support Structures

The Framework defines sufficient support structures as “backbone support” for the Network, in the form of *staff support*. The Network operates almost entirely on the internal support of its members, including an influential, competent “backbone” steering committee. Organization A has also served as a critical partner to support the group. The Network appreciates that Organization A has — since the Network’s inception — refrained from affecting “local dynamics and challenges”³⁸ while also providing critical ideas and resources from afar; this

³³ Focus Group Discussion #1.

³⁴ Focus Group Discussion #1.

³⁵ According to discussions with several Network members, those that left did so very soon after the group started (as it became clearer what each member would need to commit).

³⁶ Focus Group Discussion #1.

³⁷ Network’s internal MOU.

³⁸ Interview with male network member.

has benefited the Network’s continued development. Many within the Network do not believe they would have lasted in the work they do without such support.

a. Backbone Support. The backbone structure of the Network is composed of a General Assembly (GA), a Coordinating Committee (CC), and an Executive Bureau (EB). The GA decides and deliberates (by a simple majority) on all matters related to the general operation of the initiative — for example, examination and approval of quarterly technical and financial reports, acceptance of new members, and sanctioning members. The CC supervises, monitors, and evaluates the implementation of various activities and projects of the initiative. The committee meets once every two weeks and is required to share the monthly activity report with the member organizations within the GA. The CC is chaired by the Network chairman. The EB is made up of staff who are in charge of the daily implementation of the activities of the initiative. It is headed by the Network coordinator and meets at least once a week. It seems (from project documents such as the original “*Member Organization – Memorandum of Understanding*”) that the structure has not changed since it was established in 2013.

b. Organization A’s Role. Organization A still assists with major organizational-capacity needs and technical-skill gaps of the group while also playing a central role in circulating regular reports produced by the members. This latter contribution cannot be understated, as Organization A uses the organization’s influence and access to the international community to circulate regular reports widely. Support can vary greatly at times, based on needs communicated by the Network’s leadership. Critical early support included building the group’s robust reporting methodology. This was important to it during the crisis, after the group realized its sudden, increased visibility during periods of government-mandated media blackouts. It felt its reporting suddenly faced mounting pressure to appear credible and unbiased. Help from Organization A led it to trust its reputation (as a neutral and credible source) was protected. Additional functions Network members mentioned as useful include connecting them with nearby early warning-early response networks nationally and regionally (e.g., in 2010 through Organization A’s connections with a regional network of Quaker groups). This helped the group feel it was inclusive and better able to join forces to accurately represent society. Organization A has also provided much-needed support for internal human resource–related issues. For example, when needing to retain key staff, Organization A helped the group brainstorm incentive structures to keep staff on board. Organization A has also provided direct funding for salaries — particularly for volunteer staff already committing full-time to helping the group.

During the first days of the emergency crisis in Country X, Organization A engaged directly with the group as it struggled internally to manage a dangerous, rapidly evolving situation (e.g., a key member of Network leadership fled overnight). The Network felt this engagement, initiated by Organization A, demonstrated the NGO’s sense of responsibility to helping the group, which was greatly appreciated during this chaotic moment in the group’s history.

Today, Organization A continues to use its contacts, access, and influence to distribute reports among international actors. It also still regularly provides moral support and international solidarity. Often, it acts as a brainstorming/sounding board for Network leadership.

c. Dynamics of “Internal” and “External” Partnerships. The Network is locally led, which has meant everything to the success of the group. The Network has driven its own process for inclusion; effects of this resonate in discussions with Network members, who trust and rely deeply on the commitment of their colleagues. The Network has also maintained a consistent presence in Country X when others have not because of sustained partnerships with other civil society groups. This has implications for the pace of its work given that it does not need to

pick up anew after each outbreak of violence. Also, there are implications for the longer term. For example, if it is ever asked to hold the government accountable for past crimes, sustained presence lends to its ability to provide an accurate account. External partnerships with international partners, mainly Organization A, have been supportive, useful relationships.

- **Overall analysis of the Framework.** The Framework is a useful guiding document as it addresses important elements of programming — such as important *preconditions* for collective action, *strategic thinking*, and how to envision effective *coordination* for a group. Some pointers have been integrated throughout as suggestions for making the Framework more useful. However, at the highest level, the Framework makes one assumption that needs to be explicitly addressed. A conceptual critique of the Framework, a missing element that would have helped a better understanding of the achievements of the Network, is that it fails to ask, “Why is a group more effective than an individual person or organization when doing this work?” The Framework operates under the assumption that this “why” is clear from the outset (implicitly assuming that a group is always better), when — as with this case study — it was not immediately evident. Yet the Network, in how it chooses to operate, enables conflict sensitivity by identifying and filling gaps — effectively easing tensions between existing civil society organizations that are “key actors” working for peace in Country X.

6. MAIN FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO AND CHALLENGE COLLECTIVE IMPACT IN PEACEBUILDING

The Network serves a critical purpose in a context rife with information blackouts and in which civil society (one of the long-standing “key” groups in Country X able to facilitate dialogue and communal cohesion) is committed to peace but in need of support. Although the journey of the Network has been met with significant challenges, the group has arguably contributed to collective impact at a communal level.

6.1 Key Factors Contributing to Collective Impact

- **Locally driven initiative.** Members expressed that strengthening of civil society organizations committed to peacebuilding is likely to have a direct impact on reducing conflict. This assumption holds some truth, given civil society is currently the strongest actor working to reduce conflict at any level, subnational to national.³⁹ ⁴⁰ The local drive of the Network, and the trust in the group’s capable local leadership, *implies long-term commitment of the group to peace*. The group awaits the opportunity — when the political context is more “open” — to engage in peacebuilding activities at national, macro level.
- **Convening diverse local peacebuilding actors.** The Network provides convening opportunities for diverse organizations and officials working at local level to respond together to violence. Often, this collective action of a diverse membership allows for strategic partnerships to form within the Network and the *opportunity for learning*. “Diversity” in this sense refers to the types of activities performed by member organizations (mediation, cooperation projects, development projects, prison monitoring, human rights advocacy, election monitoring, etc.) and categories of participant (local authorities, youth political groups, community elders, refugees, etc.). Diverse membership also highlights to members the numerous varieties of peacebuilding work taking place in Country X, and where gaps or overlaps may exist that inhibit achievements for peace. However, there are quite a variety of peacebuilding activities taking place by Network members and “many, many other

³⁹ Working in tandem with other civil society organizations since 2013 has seemed to build the confidence of the Network member organizations. Over time the Network has stumbled upon a specific definition of success: the powerful ability of a group to provide accurate information when no one else can. To the group, the definition of success is now a unified, more coordinated local civil society that feels responsible for carrying the country toward a more transparent and cohesive future. Interview with an Organization A senior-level staff member who has worked with the Network since its inception.

⁴⁰ Interview with external expert with extensive experience working on peace and reconciliation issues with European governments and Country X civil society organizations. “Low-key dialogue actions” to resolve conflict in any way “are the only initiatives that work — and local level are the only ones doing this still.” Switzerland has had some success historically regarding dialogue work. U.S. and other bilateral donors still provide some emergency humanitarian assistance, though not focused on peace.

networks in [Country X].”⁴¹ More cohesive, strategic agenda-setting may be needed to help such a diverse group achieve Peace Writ Large.

- **Responsible technical support organization.** Interviewees mentioned that without the support of Organization A (Section 5.5) they would not have been able to exist. The value of longer-term support through an *organization, with the mind-set of not interfering in local dynamics*, seems to have enabled Network leadership to work better in a complex context in which it is already the expert.

6.2 Challenges to Collective Impact

- **Contextual challenges.** The Network, as a “peacebuilding” network of CSOs in Country X, does not operate in an inviting political context. Members often fear that if they mention the Network they will be directly targeted by pro-government groups or officials. Physical risk to Network members is very real: Prior to the most recent election, a steering committee member disappeared overnight and has still not been found.
- **Shifting contribution to peace.** While the Network has maintained its vision from the outset (reducing violence in Country X), after elections the group’s approach to contributing to peace shifted. While its initial role was clear — report incidents of violence *around the election* to other citizens and the international community (in an indirect attempt to reduce violence), now the group is struggling to determine how to effectively change the conflict on its own. The group is working on determining the best way forward; however, not all strategies are open to it (such as working at national level).
- **Funding.** As international attention (and funding) has ebbed and flowed over the years, the Network has faced the challenge of maintaining a consistent stream of funding. Because very few organizations anywhere operate entirely without funding, this has affected the functioning of the Network (its ability to improve the technology it uses, provide knowledge-transfer opportunities to citizen reporters, convene Network-wide events, employ full-time staff within the secretariat, etc.).

⁴¹ Interview with external expert working with civil society in Country X until the year of intense violence.

7. LOOKING FORWARD

- 1. Network-wide strategic planning process.** At the moment, the Network relies on all member organizations to elect a representative to the secretariat (to sit on the general assembly). In this way, the secretariat has historically made strategic decisions about how the Network addresses violence at local level. The Network, however, is an extremely large (~200 people) and diverse group. A process that engages all levels of individual (secretariat down to citizen reporter) in joint analysis and planning may build on the micro-level peace gains the Network has been able to achieve. In practice, this could take the form of joint-analysis meetings led by strategic teams within the secretariat — drawing individuals from each level of the Network — to reflect on what the key drivers of conflict are in the context, and who the key actors are, and then analyze how the network (as a composite of diverse peacebuilding organizations) is working on changing this *interconnected system* of conflict, rather than urgent incidents of violence and abuse that otherwise appear disconnected from one another.
- 2. Development of internal mechanisms to address risk.** When members face existential risk (e.g., they are illegally detained), several mentioned it would encourage the group's mutual trust if a tangible process was created that outlined how the group would address these emergency situations. Also, the group does not have any articulated process to navigate members' exit, which some mentioned as corrosive to long-term trust. Given contextual risks, the Network may face future challenges to internal cohesion if it does not more clearly articulate how it will manage relationships during processes of exit.
- 3. Diversify funding streams.** The Network may be able to operate in the long term by securing funding from those across different fields, such as development and business, rather than the peacebuilding or humanitarian sector. The Network could draw different funders interested in supporting long-term initiatives in Country X rather than emergency response.

ANNEX 1:

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION LINES OF INQUIRY

1. What have you heard from others about the Network?
2. What motivated the creation of the Network? How was the Network conceived?
3. What is the structure of the Network? In your opinion, how does this enable or hinder progress towards peacebuilding?
4. Is there a lead or core group, and sub-groups, to the Network? If so, how were these identified and selected?
5. How does the Network ensure shared understanding exists (of dynamics, emerging needs) within the group? Do participants feel the Network is based on a common vision? How does the Network support participants in discussing and understanding the group's shared vision?
6. How does the Network decide what activities will be implemented, to contribute to the group's peacebuilding goals?
7. How do participating organizations ensure that the Network's strategy for achieving peace / social cohesion aligns with their own projects and activities? How does the Network ensure activities are mutually reinforcing and there are no overlaps/gaps?
8. What progress has been made so far – what peacebuilding results have been achieved by the Network?
9. How does the Network measure its progress toward achieving peace / social cohesion?
10. How does the Network know that its activities and strategy are working (prompt: are there common indicators to measure against)? How does the Network gather and learn from lessons during implementation (prompt: are there informal or formal spaces to share feedback or reflections, between Network members or from beneficiaries)?
11. How have lessons been used to adapt the actions of individuals or member organizations within the Network?
12. What types of communication systems exist with the Network? Do these enable free circulation of information? What successes and challenges have been faced?
13. Have there been reporting or other requirements for donors that have had an impact on the work of the Network? If so, in what way?

14. What other factors have enabled the successful implementation of the Network?
15. What other challenges have been met by Network participants, and how have they been overcome?
16. How has the Network managed relationships between “insiders” and “outsiders”? Have there been any indications that problems of power, privilege or control have existed within the Network? Lessons learned? Do Network members feel accountable to one another?