SPECIAL REPORT

[How] Do External Actors Support Civilian-Led Atrocity Prevention?

RIVA KANTOWITZ AND KYRA FOX

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Executive Summary

This report presents external actors' perspectives on how to most effectively support civilian-led atrocity prevention efforts. Recent studies suggest that civilians—working through civil society organizations, through less formal, local community mechanisms, or both—are not passive actors but, in fact, use a range of active strategies to prevent atrocities. External support can help or harm these efforts.

We use case studies of three external actors—the US government, the Swiss government, and the former Nexus Fund—to understand how these external actors structure their processes to support civilian-led atrocity prevention efforts. These three actors share a stated commitment to help prevent mass atrocities, including through providing support to civil society. Their differences, including the size and scope of foreign assistance, the size of bureaucracies, the configuration of key staff roles, and the degree to which they single out atrocity prevention from other goals, allowed us to explore how these factors affected their support to civilian-led atrocity prevention. From these interviews, we identify several themes that "work" in supporting civilian-led atrocity prevention efforts, according to external actors:

1. External actors should invest in long-term, trusting relationships with civilians.
2. External actors should consistently employ flexible approaches that are responsive to the changing needs of civilians on the ground.
3. External actors should use tools beyond large grants and project-focused funding.
4. External actors should have in-country staff with atrocity prevention expertise.
5. External actors should build connections between civil society focused on atrocity prevention and high-level officials in their own or the host country government.
6. External actors should play to their comparative advantage.

We put forward a framework, based on the conclusions from the research, to help external actors identify how to improve their support for civilian-led efforts in practice. The framework encourages external actors to engage with internal process questions such as, "How can we be more accountable to local communities?" and "What is our comparative advantage relative to other donors?" External actors should use this set of questions as a diagnostic tool to create holistic atrocity prevention strategies designed to support civilian-led atrocity prevention efforts.

The report's primary recommendation is that external actors commit their institutions to engaging thoughtfully with the different models and strategies presented, dedicating time and resources to studying their own systems and processes and thinking about how they may be re-imagined to support civilian-led work.

Introduction

In 2005, at the United Nations (UN) World Summit Meeting, states committed to the "…responsibility to protect their own populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity and accept[ed] a collective responsibility to encourage and help each other uphold this commitment."[1] In the face of situations like those in Syria and Yemen, it can be hard to feel optimistic that the promise of that commitment will be realized. The waning consensus around the responsibility to protect has renewed conversation within the international community about both the need to shift priorities toward preventing rather than responding to violence and the need to support civilians and civil society in order to prevent violence in their own contexts.

Civilians and civil society play an important role in atrocity prevention—a broad set of strategies aimed at preventing gross human rights violations and mass violence against civilians—because they are often able to recognize warning signs that can be deeply locally rooted. As one research participant suggested:

> If you support organizations at the most hyperlocal grassroots level—the kind of grassroots that most outside the country very rarely engage with—and you start asking them to help understand the environment, understand what the risks are and how they peak and flow, and also identify the solutions for how to overcome these challenges—that's what can lead to real prevention. In the event that that [prevention] attempt fails, you have readied entire communities of civil society who are tapped into all sectors in communities who can be really robust partners in designing what a response should look like, and who can also implement that response.

This is, in effect, the central process examined by this report, the focus of which is on understanding external actors' perspectives on how to structure their efforts to most effectively support civilian-led atrocity prevention efforts. Recent studies suggest that civilians—working through civil society organizations or less formal local community mechanisms or both—are not passive actors but in fact use a range of active strategies to prevent atrocities.[2] However, very little work has focused specifically on external support to civilian-led atrocity prevention efforts. This research seeks to address that gap.

Below, we present the research questions that guided this project, followed by a discussion of where the themes in this paper fit into ongoing conversations about donor support to local organizations writ large. We then describe our methodology and provide background on the three external actors that were examined: the United States government, the Swiss government, and the Nexus Fund (which transitioned into the Local Action Fund managed by Peace Direct). Using the findings that emerged from these interviews, we then address the central question: What are the most effective ways for external actors to structure their support to civilian-led atrocity prevention efforts? Finally, we close with a section that raises a series of central dilemmas for the field of atrocity prevention and tries to

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[1] See "Responsibility to Protect—About," UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect website, https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/about-responsibility-to-protect.shtml.

[2] See, for example, Oliver Kaplan, Resisting War: How Communities Protect Themselves (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/resisting-war/238A6E00FF35E6FF526D97C028A1297C.

articulate diagnostic questions that can help organizations put in place systems and processes that support civilian-led efforts.

Research Questions and Definitions of Key Terms

This report specifically examines the ways in which external actors support (or do not support) civilian-led efforts to prevent and respond to mass atrocities. It is part of a broader project that seeks to more fully understand the strategies, tactics, and activities that civilians and civil society use to prevent atrocities. The research questions that guided this paper are as follows:

- What kinds and amount of support have external donors been providing to civilian-led atrocity prevention and mitigation efforts? On which regions, countries, types of organizations, and types of programs/activities has external assistance been focused?

- According to external actors, what factors influence the effectiveness of their support for civilian-led atrocity prevention and mitigation efforts? How can external actors address obstacles?

- How can external assistance avoid unintentionally increasing risks for civilians?

This report refers to "civilian-led" atrocity prevention efforts as synonymous with "locally led" atrocity prevention efforts. The term "local actors" is relative—staff in New York may consider offices in another country's capital city local, whereas country offices may think of subnational or regional staff as local. For clarity, this report instead refers to civilians—individuals not affiliated with a government, military, or nonstate armed group—who can work through civil society organizations or less formal local community mechanisms or both. "Civilian-led atrocity prevention efforts," therefore, include any interventions led by civilians or civil society who are from the area, country, or region affected by the atrocity risk and are responsible for determining priorities or strategic direction. It is important to underscore that this exploration is not limited to the traditional Western vision of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), which are often built to capture donor funding; there are social organizations or less-formal mechanisms—such as labor unions, community or traditional leaders, or religious groups—that can also be effective atrocity prevention actors.

Also used is the term "external support," which refers to any actor outside of a particular national context providing some kind of support (monetary, material, diplomatic, advisory, etc.) to civilian-led efforts in that context. Different types of support to civilian-led efforts provided by external actors can include (1) direct monetary support for organizational operations and programs, (2) rhetorical or diplomatic measures that indicate support for civilian-led efforts by powerful donor governments, or (3) less formal advisory support that applies lessons from other conflict situations to civilian-led initiatives. This paper focuses on

Western donors as the "external actors" that have been most active to date in supporting civilian-led atrocity prevention, yet we are mindful that other external actors play important roles as well.

Lastly, this report refers to the relative "effectiveness" or "success" of different characteristics of external support. These reflect the informal judgments of the authors and external actors interviewed about which ways of structuring external support were most strongly associated with reductions in risk for or severity of mass atrocities. As will be discussed, measuring impact on the prevention or mitigation of atrocities is itself a major challenge.

Where Does This Work Fit Into Ongoing Research, Policy, and Practitioner Discussions?

Very little systematic research has explored external support to civilian-led atrocity prevention efforts. However, this topic relates to initiatives, applied discussions, and several areas of existing literature. These include conversations among private philanthropic and government funders about how to effectively support civilian-led efforts in general—sometimes called the "localization" agenda; descriptions of the atrocity prevention "toolbox"; and evaluations of the effectiveness of various atrocity prevention–focused donor efforts, such as those conducted by the former Nexus Fund and the US government.

How funders can promote "localization"

Many of the findings presented in this paper align with discourse in private philanthropy about how to more effectively support civil society and locally led efforts in general. These include calls for more flexibility and core support, more reasonable time frames to achieve social change goals, and a shift in focus that emphasizes building trusting relationships over project outcomes. The Peace and Security Funders Group—a network of more than 60 private donors—conducted survey research in 2017 that indicated a significant number of its members see the value in funding local organizations.[3] However, proponents of "localization" face serious challenges that have thus far impeded the wholesale reforms they seek. The prevailing, deeply ingrained funding norms are hard to shift for a variety of reasons. First, it requires the same amount of donor resources to manage a large grant than a small grant, so donors are not incentivized to pursue small grants. Second, burdensome administrative and legal requirements generally necessitate management by intermediaries, prohibiting the flow of funding directly to local

[3] Peace Direct and Peace and Security Funders Group, "Supporting Local Organizations: Challenges and Opportunities for U.S. Foundations" (Washington, DC, 2018. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/521b8763e4b03dae28cd3e72/t/5a0f3014ec212da20cbc9994/1510944800542/PD-PSFG-Report-DIGITAL.pdf.

efforts. Third, there are also deeply ingrained interests within the global funding ecosystem—for example, of international NGOs, development contractors, and at times local civil society organizations that have received significant external donor funding—in maintaining the status quo. Finally, as committed as they may be to supporting locally led efforts, international actors' human resource capacity can be limited and movement is often restricted because of security risks, posing challenges to identifying locally led efforts. These challenges have resulted in decades of discussions about the importance of "localization" with little progress in practice. Our research adds a particular focus on atrocity prevention to a growing body of literature calling for a change in the culture within the international funding, programming, and policy community.[4]

Conversations within the international donor community—particularly private philanthropy—about funding civilian-led efforts are coalescing around a movement to give agency to local people and their organizations on the principle that they know how to best prioritize and solve problems in their own contexts and "should have greater control of their own destinies."[5] This requires a paradigm shift in current funding practices, which can reflect decades of paternalism and are often prescriptive, short term, and linked to specific projects or activities.

Numerous initiatives from both the supply side (funders) and the demand side (local groups) have attempted to more effectively structure funds to support local groups.[6] In the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, which is unfolding as this project is concluding, more than 700 foundations signed a pledge to adopt changes that focus on making grants as unrestricted and flexible as possible.[7] In a recent publication focused on support to local peacebuilding efforts, one of the authors of this report argued that modalities such as participatory and trust-based grantmaking are key practices for more effectively funding civilian-led efforts, particularly in fragile and violence-affected contexts where rapidly changing realities demand what the author terms "radical flexibility."[8] In addition, an important facet of that flexibility—which ultimately changes the power

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[4] See, for example, Global Fund for Community Foundations (GFCF), "An Open Letter to International NGOs Who Are Looking to "Localise" Their Operations," GFCF website, March 5, 2020, https://globalfundcommunityfoundations.org/news/an-open-letter-to-international-ngos-who-are-looking-to-localise-their-operations/; Riva Kantowitz, "Radical Flexibility: Strategic Funding for the Age of Local Activism" (Peace Direct, Washington, DC, 2020), https://www.peaceinsight.org/reports/peacefund/; and the Trust-Based Philanthropy Project, https://trustbasedphilanthropy.org/.

[5] Jenny Hodgson and Barry Knight, "#ShiftThePower: The Rise of Community Philanthropy," *Alliance*, November 29, 2016, https://www.alliancemagazine.org/feature/shiftthepower-rise-community-philanthropy/.

[6] On the civil society side in the human rights and democracy space, efforts include (but are not limited to) a recent report by CIVICUS summarizing extensive interviews with funders and civil-society organizations about how to more effectively structure funds to support local groups as well as work by Ed Rekosh on rethinking the "human rights business model," which notes that reliance on Western-based grant funding is unsustainable and that civil society needs new approaches to funding its work. See Jennie Richmond, Matt Jackson, and Bethany Eckley, "Addressing the Resourcing Problem: Strategic Recommendations on Mechanisms to Increase Resources Going to Civil Society Groups in the Global South" (extract from the final report, CIVICUS, Johannesburg, July 2019), https://www.civicus.org/documents/addressing-the-resourcing-problem_strategic-recommendations.pdf; Edwin Rekosh, "Rethinking the Human Rights Business Model" (Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, June 2017), https://www.csis.org/analysis/rethinking-human-rights-business-model.

[7] Council on Foundations, "A Call to Action: Philanthropy's Commitment During COVID-19," March 19, 2020, https://www.cof.org/news/call-action-philanthropys-commitment-during-covid-19.

[8] Peace Direct and Kantowitz, "Radical Flexibility."

dynamics between funders and civilians/civil society—is investing in non-grant-based funding vehicles that help leverage new resources and technologies that are not bound in the old and restrictive funding constraints (i.e., community philanthropy or innovative finance approaches like outcome funds).[9]

Government donors have also been exploring ways to "localize" their foreign assistance. Although these reforms might be motivated more by interests in efficiency and promoting self-sufficiency than by a commitment to a fundamental power shift, they share the goal of providing more support directly to local actors. For example, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) launched a series of reforms over the past decade to increase the share of its funds going directly to governments, civil society, and the local private sector (discussed in more detail in the United States case study background section). Notwithstanding these initiatives, the United States and other government donors continue to provide the preponderance of their assistance to large international NGOs, multilateral organizations, and Western private sector entities, with portions sometimes going to local civil society actors via subgrants.

It is also worth noting that the way in which the monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) industry has developed in the past two decades is constructed around how external actors understand "impact," which is a major driver of funding decisions. In fact, these understandings of impact may have little correlation with both the way in which civilian-led efforts understand success and the creation of networks, movements, and processes that evolve over time and are not easily captured by externally imposed blueprints for measuring impact that tend toward easily measured outcomes. A few important efforts have started to re-think monitoring and evaluation from the perspective of civilians on the ground in conflict-affected countries, including the Everyday Peace Indicator Project.[10] This initiative works with communities to generate an understanding of peace, reconciliation, governance, and violent extremism within a specific local context. Although a discussion of the relationship or alignment between external efforts at MEL is out of the scope of this paper, it bears a brief mention because understandings of "impact" are so central to how donors allocate resources; this issue came up throughout the research.

Support to civil society as an approach to atrocity prevention?

References to civil society in atrocity prevention policy documents, programming guides, and academic scholarship are ubiquitous.[11] For example, the 2008 Albright-Cohen Genocide Prevention Task Force recommended, "Early prevention strategies should aim to strengthen civil society in high-risk states by

[9] Riva Kantowitz, "Innovative Finance to Sustain Peace: Mapping Ideas" (NYU Center on International Cooperation, New York, 2019). Innovative finance refers to any type of funding outside of traditional grants. For more on innovative finance, see https://cic.nyu.edu/publications/Innovative-Finance-to-Sustain-Peace-Mapping-Ideas.

[10] "Everyday Peace Indicators—About," EPI website, https://everydaypeaceindicators.org/about/.

[11] Support to civil society—though not necessarily to less formal civilian-led efforts—is considered an integral part of atrocity prevention policy and programming in an array of publications, including in the atrocity prevention "toolbox" by the US Genocide Prevention Task Force; in multiple UN Secretary-General reports on implementing the Responsibility to Protect; the MAPRO handbook; the USAID "Field Guide: Helping Prevent Mass Atrocities"; Alex Bellamy's widely cited report for the Stanley Foundation, "Reducing Risk, Strengthening Resilience: Toward the Structural Prevention of Atrocity Crimes" (Stanley Foundation, Muscatine, IA, 2016); and Scott Straus's seminal book, *Fundamentals of Genocide and Mass Atrocity Prevention* (Washington, DC: US Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2016).

supporting economic and legal empowerment, citizen groups, and a free and responsible media."[12] The UN Secretary-General's 2014 report on international assistance and the responsibility to protect states notes, "International actors can also address State-driven mobilization for atrocities by helping civil society groups develop the political and organizational skills to oppose the proponents of atrocity crimes, keeping international attention focused on the threat to populations, and offering to assist with efforts to punish or isolate perpetrators."[13] USAID's 2015 "Field Guide: Helping Prevent Mass Atrocities" likewise identifies strengthening civil society as an important strand of prevention. Summarizing the rationale for supporting civil society, the USAID field guide asserts that "strong civil society can be a bulwark against mass atrocities."[14]

Despite the widespread agreement that supporting civil society is essential, only limited publicly available research speaks to the way specific funders do this in practice. There are a number of reviews of various multilateral and bilateral entities' work on atrocity prevention, yet they focus more on policy coordination and the need to prioritize atrocity prevention than on any specific funding approach, process, or tool.[15] These include the 2013 findings of the Task Force on the European Union Prevention of Mass Atrocities,[16] as well as various academic efforts, including evaluating the UN's Agenda for Atrocity Prevention;[17] examining the Swiss principal of neutrality and its relationship to atrocity prevention policy and efforts;[18] and looking at "national mechanisms" for atrocity prevention, as was done in a special issue of the journal *Genocide Studies and Prevention*.[19] While the last article specifically examines "national

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[12] Madeleine K. Albright and William S. Cohen, *Preventing Genocide: A Blueprint for US Policymakers* (Washington, DC: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2008), 48. For a summary of the recommendations, see https://www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/reports-and-resources/genocide-prevention-task-force-view-and-download-the-report/summary-of-recommendations.

[13] "Fulfilling Our Collective Responsibility: International Assistance and the Responsibility to Protect, Report of the Secretary-General," UN General Assembly, 2014, para. 76, https://undocs.org/A/68/947.

[14] USAID, "Field Guide: Helping Prevent Mass Atrocities" (US Agency for International Development, Washington, DC, 2015), https://www.usaid.gov/documents/1866/field-guide-helping-prevent-mass-atrocities.

[15] See James P. Finkel, "Atrocity Prevention at the Crossroads: Assessing the President's Atrocity Prevention Board after Two Years" (Center for the Prevention of Genocide Occasional Paper no. 2, US Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2014), https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/20140904-finkel-atrocity-prevention-report.pdf; Stephen Pomper, "Atrocity Prevention under the Obama Administration: What We Learned and the Path Ahead" (US Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2018), https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/Stephen_Pomper_Report_02-2018.pdf.

[16] Task Force on the EU Prevention of Mass Atrocities, "The EU and the Prevention of Mass Atrocities: An Assessment of Strengths and Weaknesses" (Budapest Centre for the International Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities, Hungary, 2013), http://massatrocitiestaskforce.eu/Report_files/The%20EU%20and%20the%20prevention%20of%20mass%20atrocities%20-%20an%20assessment%20of%20strenghts%20and%20weaknesses.pdf.

[17] Cecilia Jacob, "Evaluating the United Nations' Agenda for Atrocity Prevention: Prospects for the International Regulation of Internal Security," *Politics and Governance* 3, no. 3 (2015), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283297453_Evaluating_the_United_Nation's_Agenda_for_Atrocity_Prevention_Prospects_for_the_International_Regulation_of_Internal_Security.

[18] Giulia Persoz, "Neutrality: A Tool or a Limit for Preventing Mass Atrocity Crimes and Genocide? The Case of Switzerland," *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 11, no. 3 (2018), https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/gsp/vol11/iss3/10/.

[19] Samantha Capicotto and Rob Scharf, "National Mechanisms for the Prevention of Atrocity Crimes," *Genocide* Studies and Prevention 11, no. 3 (2018), https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/gsp/vol11/iss3/5/.

mechanisms for the prevention of atrocity crimes," it only looks at the policy machinery within various governments and the strengths, weaknesses, successes, and failures of their various approaches. While the importance of civil society and of strengthening civilian-led mechanisms may be mentioned, the existing literature does not speak in a central way to the role of external support to civilian-led efforts or provide guidance tailored to individual donors.

Methodology

The methodology used in this project focused on three qualitative cases, as well as expert interviews outside those cases, background research, and the personal experience of the authors. The cases—the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, the United States government, and the former Nexus Fund (now the Local Action Fund)—were selected to provide a snapshot of private funding and two different government approaches to atrocity prevention. These three actors share a stated commitment to help prevent mass atrocities, including through providing support to civil society. Their differences, including the size and scope of foreign assistance, the size of bureaucracies, configurations of key staff roles, and the degree to which they single out atrocity prevention from other goals, allowed us to explore how these factors affected their support to civilian-led atrocity prevention. Various interviews with UN officials and international civil society actors were also conducted as contextual information. The total sample included 17 qualitative semistructured interviews, which were then coded and analyzed for key themes.

Limitations of this research include a relatively small number of cases and interviews per case. This report reflects the perspectives of external actors on the most effective ways to structure their support to civilian-led atrocity prevention efforts, drawing largely (though not exclusively) on the perceptions of key individuals now based in capital cities. In the cases in which we were also able to speak with those based in the countries receiving assistance, their perceptions enriched the perspective of those based in capitals. Larger samples and efforts could explore these different perspectives further. It is critical to also interview recipients of atrocity prevention assistance to better understand the impact of these efforts in their lived contexts.[20] Future research should address this question. Further, the degree to which direct comparisons across cases can be made from this research is limited because of their significant variation in key characteristics. Indeed, this report is not meant to suggest that processes in Bern are appropriate to replicate wholesale in Washington; rather, the research aims to describe approaches that have had success

[20] There is some research that examines recipient perspectives on donor support to violence prevention and peacebuilding-related funding, including a global consultation that was conducted with civilians and civil society from all over the world by one of the authors and Peace Direct in Fall 2018. Although that report likely gives a picture of the needs of local actors in general, it does not speak specifically to atrocity prevention. For more, see Kantowitz, "Radical Flexibility."

and to stimulate people in other systems and bureaucracies to think how they might appropriately adopt them.

Framing the Cases

In order to understand how assistance to atrocity prevention efforts fits into the landscape of foreign assistance, it's helpful to get a sense of the big picture.[21] According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in 2018 the US government gave approximately US$35 billion in foreign aid. The Swiss government gave approximately US$3.5 billion.[22] Nexus's budget for grants is not public but is safely estimated as having been multiple orders of magnitude less than even small government donors.

The OECD has also calculated ODA (official development assistance) allocations to and through civil society organizations (CSOs).[23] In 2016—the last year that data are available—the U.S. gave 2.9 billion in aid to or through CSOs. The Swiss gave USD 721 million in aid to or through CSOs. The sector breakdowns for these data are very general though it can be presumed that any atrocity prevention–related funding would fall within support to "government and civil society." For the United States, this sector is fourth in terms of assistance to CSOs, behind "population policies and reproductive health" and emergency response, each of which totals more than twice the expenditures in the third and fourth categories: health and government/civil society. For the Swiss, emergency response is the sector that receives the most CSO support, followed by government/civil society.

The United States engages in almost every country that experiences a high risk of mass atrocities. This may stem from congressional expectation of US presence in at-risk countries through the Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act (2018) and the likely expectation on the part of the international community and various constituencies. This being said, the US government's actual programs centered on atrocity prevention and related issues are a relatively small proportion of US foreign assistance. The Swiss, with

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[21] This section doesn't adhere to a strict comparative structure, because it wasn't possible to generate a clear understanding of different policy framings and programmatic approaches across all the cases. Some of the variables, such as the scale of programming, are easily captured; however, it wasn't possible to make conclusions—and thus comparisons—about core aspects of the US approach that differ dramatically from the Swiss and even more so from Nexus. This is, in part, related to the fact that clear theories of change did not emerge.

[22] "Net ODA," OECD iLibrary, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/net-oda/indicator/english_33346549-en?parentId=http%3A%2F%2Finstance.metastore.ingenta.com%2Fcontent%2Fthematicgrouping%2F5136f9ba-en.

[23] Development Assistance Committee (DAC), "Aid for Civil Society Organisations: Statistics Based on DAC Members' Reporting to the Creditor Reporting System Database (CRS), 2015–2016" (OECD, Paris, 2018), http://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-topics/Aid-for-Civil-Society-Organisations-2015-2016.pdf. The OECD notes that DAC members report on both core contributions made to CSOs and funds channeled *through* CSOs to implement "donor-initiated" projects.

bilateral ODA portfolios in about 86 countries, take a more targeted and strategic approach to their engagement on atrocity prevention as detailed in the following section.[24] Launched in 2012, the Nexus Fund had made 138 small grants in 36 countries as of 2017, with a focus on Myanmar, Nigeria, and the United States. We will present aspects of these institutions' work that were emphasized in interviews; they may have useful lessons about how different institutions have taken unique approaches to atrocity prevention.

Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs

The Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs' (FDFA) is known for their work on preventing atrocities which is based in the Human Security Division of the Directorate of Political Affairs.[25] Members of the team define their work as "political work; [we] support political processes on dealing with the past and prevention. We also have the international law and multilateral division and work on prevention issues within the UN." The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation sits within the FDFA and is responsible for implementing the government's international cooperation policy, including provision of development assistance.

A central tenet of the Swiss approach is to conduct a thorough assessment of country contexts to better understand where they can *add value* versus creating new processes:

> We are small and can only do things in a targeted way—what can we do that can have the biggest impact? We look thoroughly at a particular context, try to understand who is already working there . . . We map all instruments, UN, EU, international organizations, Human Rights Council, Special Rapporteur, regional level, internal, including cooperation development programs. What are the existing processes? Mediation? How can we plug into these processes and synergize? We try not to start anew. From this, we create some clear objectives—at the national level, we may try to strengthen some institutions. At the international level, we might work to support the constructive dialogue between donors and the national government and to find some leverage inside the international community. We engage with [the UN] Special Envoy [if there is one] and work to increase his or her voice through side meetings, etc.

Interviewees discussed both the advantages and challenges of being a self-described "smaller player." On the one hand, "no one expects from us to be present everywhere." On the other hand, smaller governments have more limited resources, thus they are forced to prioritize carefully, make hard decisions, and be very strategic about "try[ing] to be where it matters."

One of the Swiss efforts is developing and supporting a cohort of human security advisors (HSAs) who are subject matter experts deployed to particular contexts international network. Other aspects of the

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[24] Database of Swiss development assistance, April 16, 2020, https://www.eda.admin.ch/content/dam/deza/en/documents/aktivitaeten-projekte/oeffentliche-entwicklungshilfe-der-schweiz_EN.xlsx, extracted from Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, "Development Assistance (ODA)," Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation website, https://www.eda.admin.ch/deza/en/home/activities-projects/figures-statistics/statistische-tabellen.html.

[25] Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDA), "Preventing Atrocities," Swiss Human Security Division website, https://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/en/fdfa/foreign-policy/human-rights/peace/genocide.html.

Swiss approach, which are discussed throughout the report, include internal capacity building and founding the Global Action Against Mass Atrocity Crimes (GAAMAC), which is represented by both states and civil society organizations. As one participant explained:

> The conviction behind the initiative is that the most effective way to do prevention work is to strengthen national prevention actors. The aim behind the GAAMAC platform is to bring those actors together to learn and share best practices. [This] is the other end of R2P [responsibility to protect]—when things are really bad and the house is burning, this is the responsibility of states. Before things get so bad, what can you do? It's often very [grassroots] and broad and may even be considered "fluffy"—GAAMAC is a tool where we try to bring together the right actors to also have an international discussion about that.

The Nexus Fund (now Local Action Fund)

The Nexus Fund was founded in 2012 with the mission of supporting civilians and civil society working to prevent atrocities. It was one of the only funders in the international system whose sole focus was on civilian-led efforts. Further, its flexible approach helps shed light on the strategic advantages and disadvantages of private philanthropic funders versus bilateral government donors. It is important to note that in order to operate, Nexus itself had to seek funds from donors.

Supporting civilian-led atrocity prevention efforts was integral to Nexus's theory of change. According to one interviewee:

> Nexus was founded with a question in mind—how do we recalibrate this idea of top-down? How do we better establish partners who understand and know the shifting and changing dynamics in their communities? And how do we ensure that that wisdom and knowledge is being communicated to international analysts, and how are local actors being supported to develop solutions?

Nexus focused on deep engagement in the Myanmar, Nigeria, and US contexts.[26] Its core focus was small, flexible grants to civil society and community leaders working on atrocity prevention. Nexus worked closely with in-country advisors—long-term consultants with country expertise. The role of the in-country advisors was to identify partners and grantees, follow up to ensure the grants were being used as intended, and closely follow the shifting dynamics in-country to inform Nexus and facilitate rapid response if necessary. In-country advisors were empowered to distribute small grants as a method of rapid response.

Nexus faced a number of challenges that ultimately led to it closing its doors in 2018 and reemerging in 2019 as the Local Action Fund managed by Peace Direct. One challenge was the focus on flexible funding was perceived to preclude its ability to measure impact.[27] As a former Nexus staff member put it,

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[26] Nexus Fund chose to include the United States in their countries of focus in response to observed rising hate and division.

[27] The construct of *impact* is one that can be troubling, because it is often largely defined by donors rather than by local communities. See Simon Hearn and Anne L. Buffardi, "What Is Impact?" (A Methods Lab publication,

"If you're not tying groups to results and targets, how do you measure the impact of that? How do you articulate that in a way that's appealing to external actors?" External evaluators found that at the level of individual communities, Nexus's support had promising impacts, and civil society partners credited Nexus with improving their capacity, providing technical assistance, increasing their visibility, and providing strategic and tactical support. However, donors are often deterred by the perceived risk in flexible funding, including the inability to measure impact against specific targets. While there was some sense that Nexus had shifted its focus to elevating its public profile, it was ultimately not able to articulate to donors how supporting community-level, project-based interventions contributed to the goal of countrywide atrocity prevention. Additionally, Nexus spent several years—and overhead costs—building relationships with partners. Ultimately, Nexus's inability to prove it had a wider preventive impact proved disastrous for donor interest.

Nexus kept a low profile—a limited online presence, no publicizing of staff names, and no advocacy—in order to protect its at-risk partners. This policy was also viewed as a deterrent to funders. According to one interviewee, "We weren't able to sell our model because we weren't willing to put people at risk to do so."

Today, Nexus has been absorbed by Peace Direct's Local Action Fund with a view to continuing its efforts in a sustainable way. The Local Action Fund will preserve much of Nexus's approach, including in-country advisors and testing different models of small grantmaking, with a hope to expand the countries of focus. The Local Action Fund may also move away from funding to partnerships focused on advocacy and lesson sharing.

United States Government

"The United States Government uses foreign assistance as a critical tool to prevent, mitigate, and respond to atrocities," according to a 2019 White House report.[28] However, this background section is comparatively lengthy because the US government's work to support civilian-led atrocity prevention efforts is difficult to map or summarize. This is due to a number of factors: the sheer size, sprawling nature and, to some extent, lack of coordination of the foreign assistance bureaucracy; the fact that the United States provides foreign assistance to such a large number of countries; myriad (and often competing) political interests; and the fact that explicit policy initiatives focused on atrocity prevention are normally overshadowed by other concerns.

In 2011, President Obama issued Presidential Study Directive 10 (PSD-10), which characterized the prevention of mass atrocities as a "core" national security and policy interest for the United States. This established the Atrocities Prevention Board (APB) and encouraged senior-level officials to take up atrocity prevention as a new and concerted policy priority. It acknowledged and aimed to tackle some uncomfortable truths, such as the lack of a single entity in the US government charged with genocide and mass-atrocity prevention; the lack of capacity and tools to understand the risk of mass atrocities within

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Overseas Development Institute, London, 2016), https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/10352.pdf.

[28] "Elie Wiesel Genocide Atrocity and Prevention Report," The White House.

situations of long-term and perpetual crisis; the dominance and often obstructive activity of regional bureaus and embassies embroiled in the day-to-day multifaceted policy work of a country; the challenge of catalyzing action amid lethargic bureaucratic processes; and the way in which all of these factors can result in missed signs of rising atrocity risk.[29] The APB has been transformed under the Trump administration into the Atrocity Early Warning Task Force (AEWTF), which focuses on early warning rather than on both early warning *and* response.

The 2016 Executive Order[30] from the Obama administration that establishes the APB notes that the "Board shall conduct outreach, including regular consultations, with representatives of nongovernmental organizations with expertise in mass atrocity prevention and response and other appropriate parties," and the Elie Wiesel law[31] mandates civil society "consultation" on atrocity prevention. Other than these brief mentions, it is unclear how civilian-led atrocity prevention efforts will be supported within the APB (now AEWTF) architecture and operations. The APB was meant to catalyze coherence in policy approaches, develop and use new tools, and ensure, as many internal advocates articulate, that "we don't miss the next Rwanda." It was not intended to be a body that made or dictated funding or programming decisions. However, as one interviewee noted, "the momentum of this new mechanism . . . could have been used to also develop some new tools to assist entities that do manage foreign assistance to figure out how to help local actors address atrocity prevention, not just rhetorically say it was a good thing to do."

In practice, US government funding to civilian-led atrocity prevention efforts is managed by various entities—largely within USAID and the US Department of State—seemingly without any centralized approach. For example, the 2019 White House report refers to unspecified State Department programs, likely managed by different bureaus, that sound at least partly focused on supporting civil society: "developing early warning and response systems that enable vulnerable communities to alert appropriate authorities to impending civilian security threats; training local community members to foster peaceful coexistence and to promote reconciliation within their communities; and documenting and preserving evidence of human rights violations and abuses to bolster current and future efforts to pursue truth, justice, and accountability."[32] There are a number of different offices and agencies that engage with civil society in some way; some of them were interviewed for this research, and a clear picture of their respective roles in relation to each other did not emerge (though an explicit mapping exercise was not the objective of this project).

One noteworthy development was the appropriation of US$10,000 in fiscal year 2017 and US$5 million each in fiscal years 2018,[33] 2019, and 2020 for foreign-assistance programming focused on atrocity

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[29] For a comprehensive review of the genesis of the APB, see Pomper, "Atrocity Prevention under the Obama Administration."

[30] Executive Order 13729—A Comprehensive Approach to Atrocity Prevention and Response, Administration of Barack Obama, 2016, https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/DCPD-201600329/pdf/DCPD-201600329.pdf.

[31] Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act of 2018, PL 115-441 (115th Congress), 2019, https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-bill/1158/text.

[32] "Elie Wiesel Genocide Atrocity and Prevention Report," The White House.

[33] Fiscal year 2018 also included US$750,000 for training, with US$500,000 in funding for the State Department and US$250,000 in funding for USAID.

prevention.[34] To be sure, the total US foreign-assistance funds available for programs that are potentially related to preventing atrocities dwarfs this earmark. Nevertheless, the United States might be one of a very small number of government donors that has dedicated funds specifically for atrocity prevention as distinct from conflict prevention, human rights promotion, or humanitarian protection. Further, there are several new initiatives, including USAID's New Partnership Initiative started under the Trump administration, which initially targeted atrocity survivors in Iraq and has now been rolled out in many different regions.[35] In 2019, USAID unveiled a new International Development Acquisition and Assistance Strategy, which speaks to many of the systemic challenges of support to locally-led efforts reiterated by this research. The landmark report strives to ". . . foster more flexibility, adaptability, and creativity . . . Diversifying our partner base and integrating locally-led development into how we deliver development assistance help our partner countries become self-reliant, and will get us closer to the day when such assistance is no longer needed."[36]

Some initiatives that were considered to be particularly successful were mentioned in our interviews—for example, during the Obama administration an effort to combat hate speech and prevent atrocities in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. This involved various policy mechanisms as well as work with religious leaders and a public diplomacy campaign that included radio programming and other media elements. This mix of diplomatic and programming approaches leveraging various capacities across a vast system was considered one success. Another success was an interagency atrocity risk assessment in Burundi conducted by the APB, which led to an estimated US$11 million–$14 million more atrocity prevention-specific programming for Burundi. While this didn't go to local actors directly, it was a substantial commitment to atrocity-prevention goals.

In general, it was noted that the current architecture depends on a strong interagency process to create a cohesive strategic approach to preventing atrocities among all the different agencies involved. As one interviewee noted: "There are some better mechanisms within the [US government] system [including civil society engagement]—they work coherently when you have a strong interagency process, usually led by the White House, and those connections are being made, raising the red flag and having it coordinated—[when different parts of the system say,] 'I see a role for XYZ.' When that machinery is not working at all, stuff is still happening; it's just very siloed."

[34] Before this time, atrocities prevention–type programs were not specifically earmarked but were mostly funded through the Complex Crisis Fund and through the Conflict Stabilization Operations (CSO) Account.
[35] USAID, "New Partnerships Initiative," US Agency for International Development, Washington, DC, https://www.usaid.gov/npi.
[36] USAID, "Acquisition and Assistance Strategy," US Agency for International Development, Washington, DC, https://www.usaid.gov/work-usaid/how-to-work-with-usaid/acquisition-and-assistance-strategy.

What Works In Supporting Civilian-Led Atrocity Prevention Efforts?

The following themes are focused on processes and ways in which the organizations in this research structured their work. Although this emphasis did not guide our inquiry, a focus on processes versus the types of programs and initiatives that receive support emerged from the interviews. This is in large part because no systematic conclusions could be drawn about programmatic approaches or strategies related to which civilian-led efforts to fund; indeed, this is likely because these strategies are very contextually determined and in some cases cannot be discussed publicly. Further, it became clear that there was no consistent theory of change for supporting civilian-led efforts; thus funders face challenges in deciding whom to support in a systematic way.

1. External actors should invest in long-term, trusting relationships with civilians.

A lack of deep contextual knowledge, language and cultural barriers, and paternalistic and colonial histories can all stand in the way of effective external support to civilian-led efforts. To overcome these hurdles, interviewees agreed that external actors must invest in building trusting relationships with civilians and civil society long before actively supporting their atrocity prevention efforts. Building these relationships takes significant time, effort, openness, and credibility, and doing so requires that external actors prioritize it as a goal.

Approaches to building trusting relationships varied based on the nature of the external actor. The Nexus Fund spent years—and invested hefty overhead costs—building trusted relationships with a key set of civilians and civil society partners. “Relationships were far beyond grantor/grantee relationships,” said one interviewee. Trusted in-country advisors played a significant role, helping to manage grantee relationships, giving insight into the local context, and facilitating rapid response. According to one interviewee, “communication [with partners] was constant—phone, WhatsApp, email.”

The overhead costs to establish Nexus’s in-country presence and build trust with civilians and civil-society partners were significant. “People want you to cut your overhead costs, but the reality of doing this type of work, especially if you want to support outside of your country, is that you have to be willing to invest in hiring people who can spend time building trust and building relationships,” said one interviewee. “That was the core DNA of the success that we had—building trust, showing through action and practice that we were there to help them rather to promote ourselves or meet fancy outcomes.”

When crises erupted, these investments paid off. In-country advisors were able to provide Nexus with insights into the complex and shifting dynamics of atrocity situations. According to one interviewee, having trusting relationships with civilians and civil society meant that local people actually picked up the phone when Nexus called during a crisis, paving the way for Nexus to support civilian-led rapid response. When the Burmese government escalated its genocidal campaign against the Rohingya in August 2017, many emergency grants were routed through Nexus’s partners.

For external governments, investing time to build trust—with civil society and government interlocutors alike—was key to overcoming paternalistic histories and making good funding decisions. One Swiss

Human Security advisor noted the importance of meeting new government officials and investing hours in face-to-face interactions with civil society—having lunch and attending events. The perception was that the Swiss government's substantial knowledge of specific country contexts and its status as an independent partner made it attractive to civil society, but transparency about its roles and objectives was critical. "Switzerland has no hidden agenda," noted one interviewee. "Your main tool is your credibility."

Interviewees agreed that investing time was crucial to building trusting relationships with civilian-led efforts; the Swiss Human Security advisor (HSA) interviewed had served at her post for four years (and as an HSA for 14 years); these assignments regularly last three to five years and in some cases even longer. The US government, with its usual two-year postings of foreign service officers, is "ill-equipped for the long game," according to one interviewee—a caution also voiced by senior level US government officials.[37] In the aftermath of the Benghazi attack, the ability of US government officials to be "on the ground" in their assigned countries spending time outside the embassy walls, within the community, was severely circumscribed, preventing officials from developing deep contextual knowledge and building trusting relationships. In the absence of long-term, trusting relationships, interviewees mentioned the importance of a few key "hangover people" in contexts like Haiti, who had worked with the US government in the past and were tapped repeatedly for information in recurring crises. But these people are often elite, speak good English, and may even be separated from developments in rural or marginalized areas of their own country. Interviewees also lamented that civil society is too-often primarily seen within the US government as a vehicle to get accurate information on changing conflict dynamics, which can lead to understandable mistrust on civil society's part even when officials intend to try to mobilize concrete support. According to one interviewee, "While embassy officials may value information and insight from civil society, that doesn't usually mean they see them as ideal implementers of US-funded programs in the given country."

For external actors with the capacity to engage in deep relationships with civilians and civil society, interviewees noted the need for relationships to be reciprocal—wherein civilians are empowered to make decisions and question external actors' motivations. To foster a two-way relationship, Peace Direct's Local Action Fund (the new Nexus Fund) will try to help civilians and civil society understand the risks associated with partnership. The Local Action Fund will try to play a mentoring role, helping partners think through the sustainability of interventions and monitoring and evaluation, but ultimately deferring to partners on decisions about which interventions to pursue.

Participants noted that external actors who seek to support civilian-led atrocity prevention efforts need to accept some degree of risk. Though it is possible for external actors to engage from a distance, effective support ultimately requires direct contact and often physical presence in risky contexts.

[37] Anne Woods Patterson, "We Have to Be There," *Foreign Service Journal* (September 2019), https://www.afsa.org/we-have-be-there.

2. External actors should consistently employ flexible approaches that are responsive to the changing needs of civilians on the ground.

Interviewees agreed that in order to effectively support civilians—who are often responding to rapidly changing situations on the ground—external actors must be nimble and flexible.

The Swiss government has created an approach with built-in flexibility. For example, in one country context, part of the Swiss atrocity prevention budget goes to specific projects and programs that last no more than two years and can be renewed. Within these projects, the Swiss government does not plan every activity at the outset—the team members identify broad objectives and allow partners to do the detailed planning. According to one interviewee, "It is a mix of following your plan and being able to jump on opportunities."

The Swiss government gives its HSAs a "small action grant" to use at their discretion. One HSA explained, "I have someone popping up in my office saying that they want to try something new—it's very interesting [but it may be an untested idea]—and [they]don't want to go into the big procedure of having a one-year or two-year project. … Through this action fund, I can test activities—when it works I can continue and when it doesn't I can stop. [I can give pilot funding of] $1000, $2000–$5000, that's a lot of money [for a local organization]. [Follow-on] grants are approximately $25,000–$30,000. I don't need to get permission in the capital—if I see something, I can make decisions about it." This flexibility, coupled with trusting relationships and detailed knowledge of the context and local actors, was seen as an important strength in leveraging funding effectively.

As part of a large bureaucracy, most elements of US government foreign assistance enjoy less flexibility. There are certainly pockets of flexibility—for example, the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) at USAID can "cut checks the same day a need comes up," fund a wide range of actors, and outline strategic goals rather than specific activities with rolling strategic assessments to respond to changes on the ground. USAID's Democracy, Rights, and Governance Center has a small-grants program to flexibly support human rights actors. The State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor also manages several funding mechanisms that can be rapidly deployed. However, these flexible funds are certainly not the norm and, as such, the demand for them is high. Looking for ways to increase the amount of flexible assistance is key to effective atrocity prevention.

The Nexus Fund's approach was maximally flexible, eschewing rigid grant cycles in favor of small, flexible grants. Most of its grants had limited reporting requirements and no registration requirements. This flexibility allowed Nexus to fund "unusual suspects"—such as those outside capitals—and creative interventions that larger donors might overlook. At the same time, Nexus faced challenges in demonstrating impact, as discussed earlier.

In absorbing Nexus, Peace Direct's Local Action Fund will preserve many of these practices and introduce new ones. The Local Action Fund will have an open call for grant applications so it can be able to respond as needs arise. Grants will be at two levels—micro grants, which can range from US$50 to $5,000 and can go to individuals, and small grants, which can range from US$3,000 to $20,000. Funds will be prepositioned in countries to allow them to be rapidly dispersed when a situation escalates.

Though flexibility permits more creative interventions, Local Action Fund staff cautioned external actors against making their funding model too open, as fewer restrictions may permit grantees to pursue activities largely focused on general development goals (e.g., education, health, infrastructure) that do not meet external actors' atrocity prevention objectives. Other challenges of a flexible approach that did not emerge in our interviews include confusion among donors or funding recipients about project goals and requirements, a lack of support for flexibility from the leadership of many donor organizations, and a lack of understanding of whether more flexible approaches tend to result in more effective interventions.

3. External actors should use tools beyond large grants and project-focused funding.

Interviewees emphasized that there are a number of effective tools besides large-scale funding to support civil society. In many cases, small pots of money or in-kind supplies may be more impactful and needed.

One successful aspect of USAID's OTI model was considered to be delivering materials. As one interviewee noted, "We would sit with people and ask them what they wanted and needed, and just buy it for them. They didn't have to have procurement systems, accounting, warehouses, bid processes, supply chains, etc. This was critical to moving fast and being able to work with local groups from very isolated, marginalized, and undereducated populations."

Small pots of money were noted to be a particularly important tool. One interviewee mentioned the critical importance of Nexus's Uber account in supporting civilian-led atrocity prevention efforts in Burma (to ensure that activists had a safe ride home from meetings). According to this interviewee, "It is not always during active conflict where people need protection—it is sometimes the everyday working reality of local activists."

"Innovation funds"—small grants used to seed creative work at the local level before the ideas are developed enough to qualify for more traditional grants—are another creative tool for supporting civilian-led efforts.

External actors can additionally play an important role in quickly providing supplies and resources to civilian-led efforts. This was noted as important for the US government, which cannot typically give small, quick-turnaround grants. In one case, the US government provided sewing machines for a group of sexual- and gender-based violence survivors in Darfur. "In Côte d'Ivoire, the guy just wanted chairs to convene the community," recalled one interviewee. This interviewee also noted that in spite of the effectiveness of low-cost interventions, people in the US government can be critical of them because they do not necessarily demonstrate the large-scale impact desired by Congress and the public.

4. External actors should have in-country staff with atrocity prevention expertise.

To effectively support civilian-led atrocity prevention efforts, many interviewees agreed that external actors must circumvent traditional silos between the fields of human rights, atrocity prevention, civil society strengthening, and peacebuilding. Specifically, in-country staff in situations at risk for atrocities dedicated to supporting civil society should understand mass atrocity warning signs and the range of tools available to help prevent atrocities, in addition to being equipped to manage assistance programs and relationships with local partners.

Particularly at the embassy level, atrocity prevention subject-matter expertise was critical to ensure civilian-led atrocity prevention efforts are supported effectively. In the case of the Swiss government, HSAs fill this role, combining expertise in atrocity and conflict prevention with strong networks on the ground. Interviewees cautioned that it can be difficult to find strong HSAs who both have subject-matter expertise and are effective on the ground, and that building this cadre of specialists is an important undertaking.

In the absence of a similar functional system in which information is flowing from headquarters to senior leaders and subject-matter experts at posts, the US government at times details people from the Department of State's Conflict and Stabilization Operations to embassies or country desks. However, detailing staff from that office or subject-matter experts is not necessarily a standard practice, and these individuals can lack regional or country expertise as well as program design and management experience. On the other hand, most embassy staff members lack atrocity prevention expertise, preventing an integrated approach. There is a risk that dedicated responsibility for atrocity prevention could exacerbate silos; however, in theory atrocity prevention experts should work together with regional or country experts to integrate an atrocity prevention lens into regional or country analysis.

5. External actors should build connections between civil society focused on atrocity prevention and high-level officials in their own or the host country government.

In this same vein, interviewees noted the importance of building connections between high-level officials and civil society focused on atrocity prevention. The Swiss government runs an annual course bringing together people from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs**,** including ambassadors and working level officers, as well as civilians, and civil society on the topic of transitional justice and "dealing with the past" as a contribution to prevent recurrence of mass atrocities. At the same time, the Swiss invest in creating external networks of course alumni, civil society, parliamentary advisors, and so on in a particular country to engage on the topic of "dealing with the past and prevention of atrocities."

These courses are very popular among officials within the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "Colleagues are very keen to use this instrument; they ask for their context to be addressed," said one interviewee. "They always appreciate being exposed to other situations and peers—they see they are not alone." The inclusion of civil society alongside high-level officials in these popular courses builds relationships and a deeper understanding of contextual nuances and thus facilitates the Swiss government's capacity to design more effective policies and programmatic responses to respond to mass atrocities. The courses also strengthen civilian-led efforts by building relationships and support for civil society among high-level officials.

The design of these courses is very intentional. Each course focuses on a particular country that is of strategic concern to the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Running courses over a number of years builds connective tissue between high-level officials and civilian-led efforts focused on atrocity prevention globally. This goal is bolstered by inviting delegations—made up of key actors from a particular context—to participate in the course. Additionally, through deeper understanding and relationships, these courses can be used as a policy tool that bolsters the Swiss government's approach to supporting countries with legacies of atrocities. Over the past 10 years Colombia, the Philippines, and Zimbabwe, for example, have all been selected as a focus for the course. Lastly, the courses create internal demand for a focus on preventing the recurrence of atrocities.

6. External actors should play to their comparative advantage.

Each external actor has strengths and weaknesses, but interviewees agreed that external actors that play to their comparative advantage are generally more effective.

Although US diplomats and development professionals are present in dozens of countries around the world, US government officials' limited ability to be "on the ground" impedes their capacity to develop close, trusting relationships with local civilians and civil society. At least since the 2012 attacks on US government facilities and personnel in Benghazi, Libya, the US government has taken a step back from its on-the-ground presence in high-risk contexts. Additionally, new efforts in the US government are "always under risk of being wiped out by a new administration or bureaucracy."

Interviewees suggested that the United States government's comparative advantage lies in its combination of diplomatic influence to protect civilians and when possible, the ability of some funding mechanisms to deploy foreign assistance funds and in-kind support rapidly and flexibly without unduly burdensome requirements (a prerequisite to effective support of civilian-led efforts). The US government has myriad other tools at its disposal—for example, advocating for preventive action in various international forums, arms embargoes, asset freezes, support to peacekeeping missions, and naming and shaming/making strong diplomatic statements that indicate that governments cannot act with full impunity and without the scrutiny of the international community—that it could turn to when it is unable to support civilian-led efforts in rapid and flexible ways.

As a small government with fewer resources, the Swiss government focuses on long-term investment in a few countries. It sees its function most usefully as a "bridge-builder," independent actor, and facilitator, and generally limits its engagement to these roles.

Nexus, as a small organization with limited funding, similarly took on a narrow role, focusing on deep engagement with civilians and civil society in two countries. Free from the bureaucratic pressures faced by major donors, Nexus embraced a flexible approach that allowed it to fund "unusual suspects" and creative interventions.

A Framework for Improving External Support to Civilian-Led Efforts: Guiding Questions

In this section, we offer a framework, based on the conclusions from the research, to help various organizations and funders identify how to improve their support for civilian-led efforts in practice. These questions are meant to function as a diagnostic tool to help external actors think about how they might use some of the examples offered by this project to operationalize their support of civilian-led efforts.

1. What is our comparative advantage relative to other donors?

In addition to different tools and capacities, different actors have fundamentally different postures. Donor strategy for atrocity prevention, including support to civilian-led efforts, should be informed by donors' comparative advantage. The atrocity prevention donor community must have closer relationships with each other to enable them to better determine their respective comparative advantages.[38] Private funders, in particular, would be wise to reconsider their hesitance to engage across public/private funding lines. There are funders and donor collaboratives like the Global Equality Fund that do that effectively.[39]

As reflected by the following questions, donors must also weigh the pros and cons of different internal organizational mechanisms to address atrocity prevention, keeping in mind their comparative organizational advantage. These choices could be reflected in the development of new frameworks to help different donors make better strategic decisions about atrocity prevention efforts.

Questions to consider:

- What is our particular comparative advantage with respect to supporting civilian-led atrocity prevention efforts? How does a particular donor's comparative advantage inform the institutional structuring of policy and funding approaches? Are these aligned?

- Is there a stakeholder mapping of the key donors in any particular context? Does this analysis articulate the different mechanisms available both within and across donors specifically to support civilian-led efforts, including their pros and cons?

- Is there a way to share this information through joint coordination meetings with other stakeholders? Who is responsible for convening such meetings?

2. How can we prioritize supporting civilian-led efforts?

Support for civilian-led atrocity prevention efforts varies within and among donors. Since atrocity prevention itself is rarely prioritized in governments, officials often felt they needed to seize any opportunity available to pursue atrocity prevention goals rather than taking the time to articulate a clear theory of change for atrocity prevention that included support to civilian-led efforts. Especially in larger bureaucracies, it is rare to see support to civilian-led atrocity prevention efforts as an organization's top priority, as was the case with the Nexus Fund. Nevertheless, agreeing that supporting civilian-led atrocity prevention efforts is *at least one of multiple priorities*, and integrating it into theories of change, should lead to more consistent and effective support. The first step is to discuss candidly where this kind of support fits within overall foreign assistance and atrocity prevention priorities.

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[38] There are a number of private funding groups and networks that could provide a road map for how to do this (the Peace and Security Funders Network being the most relevant, for example, but also Ariadne, Human Rights Funders Network, etc.).

[39] See US Department of State, "Global Equality Fund," 2019, https://www.state.gov/global-equality-fund/.

Questions to consider:

- How do we build consensus around support to civilian-led efforts as a tool for atrocity prevention? Who has the authority and capability to lead this process? Who are the key stakeholders, and why do they have authority?
- What are the obstacles to making support for civilian-led efforts more central and structured effectively? How can they be addressed? Whose responsibility is it to do so?

3. How can we be more accountable to local communities?

Donor organizations tend to think about accountability first in terms of the people who contribute the funds that they disburse—that is, taxpayers for government donors, trustees and boards of directors for private funders. While this is necessary and important, to effectively and ethically support civilian-led atrocity prevention efforts donors should also think of themselves as being accountable to the local communities they seek to assist.

One way of creating approaches inclusive of communities affected by atrocities would be to incorporate more regular internal evaluations of assumptions (e.g., are those affected by the problem considered experts in solving it? If not, why not?) and regular assessment of how the international community affects a certain context. In 2020, the UN Peacebuilding Fund published a guide on "community-based monitoring and perception" (perception, in this case, being that of local actors) that serves as a reminder and helpful example of how to hold external actors accountable for their impact.[40]

Questions to consider:[41]

- How do we build consensus around and articulate the importance of being accountable to local communities?
- What are the assumptions underlying our funding?
    - Who do these resources empower? Who do they disempower? How is this assessed? (This is often part of a standard conflict-assessment exercise.)
    - Are the people directly affected by a particular issue regarded as experts in addressing it? If a grassroots issue is being addressed by an actor outside the local community, what are the assumptions behind this decision? What is the role of outside experts and external actors?

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[40] UN Peacebuilding Fund, "Strengthening PBF Project Monitoring and Implementation through Direct Feedback from Communities: Perception Surveys and Community-Based Monitoring" (PBF Guidance Note, United Nations, New York, 2020), https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/pbf_guidance_note_on_perception_surveys_cbm_-_2020.pdf.

[41] Some of these questions come from Peace Direct and Kantowitz, "Radical Flexibility," "General Recommendations: Assumptions and Power," section.

- o How might external actors exacerbate the problem or inhibit success?

- Who is assuming the risk in the interventions? What specifically are the perceived risks to the donor? To the funding recipient?

- Which capacities of civilians and civil society are perceived to require bolstering by external actors, and whom do these capacities serve?

4. How can we build in flexibility to our support for civilian-led efforts?

Because contexts that are at high risk of mass atrocities are typically volatile, external support to civilian-led efforts must have more flexibility. It would be constructive for external actors to assess the tools—particularly funding—available to them and generate a more strategic and well-understood framework for which funding authorities are the most flexible and thus more appropriate for supporting civilian-led atrocity prevention efforts. This applies to public and private donors individually and collectively.

Questions to consider:

- How do we define "flexible" funding within our institution? (e.g., providing unrestricted or emergency funds, small grants, in-kind materials, support without time frames or burdensome administrative requirements, and so on)

- Do the types of funding mechanisms available to support civilian-led efforts vary according to these qualities? If it's not possible to provide fully flexible funds, can we provide a package of varied flexibility?

- Are there types of support other than money that can be provided more flexibly?

5. How do we demonstrate impact?

Demonstrating the impact of discrete actions taken to help prevent large-scale, rare, contingent events such as mass atrocities is a perennial challenge. This challenge is even greater when the actions are, by design, flexible and adaptive to changes in the context and demands of local communities. The way the international community understands and funds social change processes, including atrocity prevention, becomes operationalized through monitoring and evaluation frameworks that are inherently focused on measurable outcomes and not necessarily processes—such as building local networks and movements or the strength of relationships over time. It is clear that those relationships—which engender open lines of communication between and among civilians, civil society, local governments, and the international community—are important to atrocity prevention efforts. Looking to civilians and civil society to develop and incorporate evaluation indicators that capture their perceptions of impact as well as the impact donors have on communities is key.

Questions to consider:

- How can we better measure network building and the development of horizontal and vertical social capital, dignity, and trust?

- How can we incorporate civilian perspectives into metrics that allow for the evaluation of community-led work and the measurement of progress related to collaborative community action toward preventing atrocities?
- How do we understand these processes as integral to impact?

6. How do we navigate silos of human rights, development, peacebuilding, and atrocity prevention?

The desire to dedicate funds to different foreign assistance goals leads naturally to the creation of separate organizational entities, processes, and specialists. "Leadership likes to know what the boundaries are," explained one interviewee. However, the artificial silos of human rights, development, democracy and governance, and civil society strengthening impede the effective integration of atrocity prevention efforts.

Many donors have dedicated policies alongside specific initiatives and funding mechanisms to support and strengthen civil society. In principle, the fact that those exist would suggest that this support extends to civilians and civil society working to help prevent atrocities. However, this research suggests that, in practice, there seem to be few explicit links between people who work on atrocity prevention and those who work on civil society strengthening. To create a comprehensive strategy, the interconnections with other areas of development, peacebuilding, and human rights work are needed.

Questions to consider:

- How does our work on helping prevent mass atrocities relate to other work streams, including but not limited to civil society strengthening; human rights promotion; conflict prevention and peacebuilding; support for women, peace, and security; and efforts to counter violent extremism and transnational organized crime?
- Should we integrate atrocity prevention into broader work streams or carve out dedicated funding and create standalone initiatives and interventions that address atrocity prevention? What is the rationale behind the selected approach and is it evidence-based?
- How can we promote more integrated strategies?

7. How should we balance our support to early prevention ("upstream") with mitigation and crisis response ("downstream")?

The relationship between upstream prevention and crisis response is not well understood and needs to be better articulated. Resources that are allocated for atrocity prevention are hard to engage for very upstream efforts, which could look like development, support to human rights, or democracy promotion. When it becomes clear that atrocity prevention resources are appropriate, there is a good chance that the situation has moved into the perennial cycle of crisis, and critical opportunities for bolstering prevention have been missed. However, research could be conducted that draws out what support to upstream atrocity prevention looks like, even when considered as human rights or education programming.

Some have argued that civil society naturally takes a more holistic approach to atrocity prevention efforts—they do not get as siloed in labels like atrocity prevention, human rights, and peacebuilding as big government bureaucracies might.[42] Donors should look to civilians and civil society to lead the design of requests for proposals and interventions; doing so may lead to more insight into how to better address the concern about silos between upstream and downstream work.

Questions to consider:

- Are there opportunities to support atrocity prevention efforts upstream?
- Would it make sense to expand the "window" of using atrocity prevention–earmarked funding to better address opportunities for prevention versus increasingly fragile situations?
- How can we let local civilians and civil society lead in the development, implementation, and assessment of programs that are more integrated at every phase of funding?

Conclusion

This report encourages donors to engage with the stated questions as a tool for creating holistic atrocity prevention strategies and designing effective support to civilian-led atrocity prevention efforts. While consideration of these questions should help donors think through their own processes, it does not let donors off the hook for consulting the communities they intend to help on how to best support them. Nevertheless, we hope that serious consideration of these questions will help donors design support that centers civilians in their atrocity prevention efforts, prioritizes flexibility, and breaks down unhelpful silos, all while demonstrating impact. Donors should reflect on their comparative advantages and design support mechanisms that play to these strengths. The donor community must also reckon with its understanding of impact. Outcomes of civilian-led atrocity prevention efforts may not align with the externally defined indicators, often applied as blueprints that inform donor-driven understandings of monitoring, evaluation, and learning. We should pivot to civilians themselves to understand the effectiveness of atrocity prevention efforts in their own contexts, and to suggest the best ways to support them.

These new approaches could be tested in conjunction with the adoption of particular strategies or policies, for example, with the implementation of the US government's Global Fragility Act. The APB may have created a nexus of decision making at a high level of the US government, but, as noted, there is still a big

[42] See, for example, Riva Kantowitz, "Publication Advancing the Nexus of Human Rights and Peacebuilding" (Development Dialogue Paper no. 27, Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, Uppsala, Sweden, 2020), https://www.daghammarskjold.se/publication/advancing-the-nexus-of-human-rights-and-peacebuilding/.

gap around connecting foreign assistance to civilian-led efforts of any kind, including the need for procurement reform. The act could look to address this. This research has clearly demonstrated the necessity of relationships, flexibility, diverse tools, dedicated subject-matter expertise (which also comes with professional networks), connections with civilians and civil society, and of playing to comparative advantages in successfully bolstering civilian-led efforts. Thus, as with the Swiss HSA system (and similar to Peace and Development Advisors focused on peacebuilding at the UN), the act might dedicate funds to having people at selected embassies who are subject-matter experts and serve longer tours, allowing them to build relationships, and so on. Further, it is clear that these roles should have discretionary funds that enable them to give a range of resources with varied flexibility.

A myriad of other opportunities are available for funders around the world to work through the questions raised here and adopt changes in their structures and approaches. This research suggests that there are effective models and strategies to address each of the guiding questions raised here, the majority of which the field has reckoned with for years. Our primary recommendation is that institutions serious about atrocity prevention commit resources to enable them to engage thoughtfully with these different models and strategies. We hope these institutions will dedicate time and energy to studying their own systems and processes, re-imagining them to support civilian-led work and then convene the appropriate mix of subject matter, procurement, legal contracting and program expertise to implement this vision.

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About the Authors

Riva Kantowitz, PhD, is an independent consultant focused on strengthening the effectiveness of donors and other international actors to support locally led social change efforts. She is currently also a Fellow at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and a Senior Advisor at the Dag Hammarskjold Foundation. Previously, she founded and led a team at the US Department of State that manages a global investment portfolio to promote human rights in conflict-affected countries.

Kyra Fox is the research assistant at the Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide, where she conducts research on strategies to prevent and mitigate contemporary mass atrocities.

THE UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM teaches that the Holocaust was preventable and that by heeding warning signs and taking early action, individuals and governments can save lives. With this knowledge, **the Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide** works to do for the victims of genocide today what the world failed to do for the Jews of Europe in the 1930s and 1940s. The mandate of the Simon-Skjodt Center is to alert the United States' national conscience, influence policy makers, and stimulate worldwide action to prevent and work to halt acts of genocide or related crimes against humanity, and advance justice and accountability. Learn more at ushmm.org/genocide-prevention.

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SIMON-SKJODT CENTER
FOR THE PREVENTION OF GENOCIDE

100 Raoul Wallenberg Place, SW Washington, DC 20024-2126 ushmm.org