Promoting SDG 16+ and the Prevention of Mass Atrocities

16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS
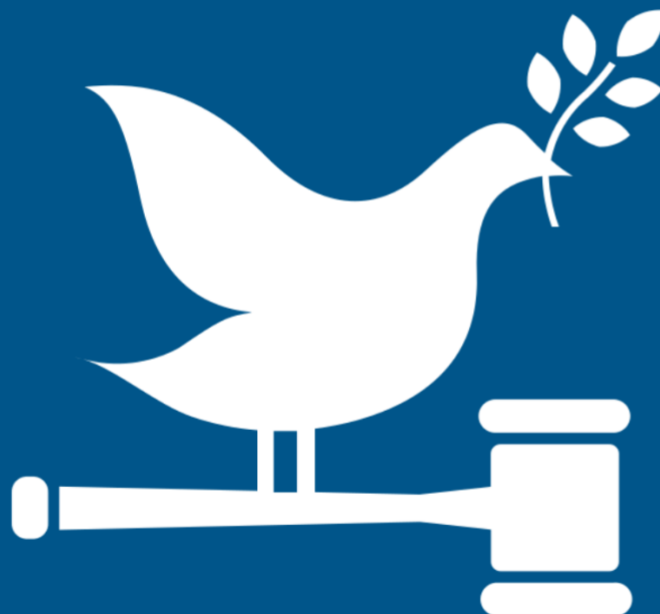
INTRODUCTION

Key Takeaways

- Upstream atrocity prevention focuses on early, cooperative, non-coercive action to reduce the underlying conditions that give rise to atrocity risk factors.

- Efforts to prevent atrocities and promote SDG 16+ share the ambition to create peaceful, just, and inclusive societies.

- SDG 16+ and atrocity prevention-related actions, tools, and strategies could have great mutually reinforcing potential.

The commission of atrocities renders development initiatives impossible, reversing critical socio-economic and political gains in most cases. Mass atrocities and the processes through which they occur in many societies across the globe, therefore, are a clear threat to the sustainable development of those countries. The dangerous, often violent, cross-border spillover effects that are all too often associated with this large-scale violence means that mass atrocities can also destabilize bordering regions, further jeopardizing development efforts in neighboring countries.

Various governments have taken strides, alone or as part of multilateral institutions, toward the prevention, mitigation, and non-recurrence of mass atrocities. Progress has been made around early warning and assessment tools for the identification of mass

atrocity risks and the design of appropriate operational preventive action. Although these advances have occurred against the backdrop of the global development agenda, they have done so largely in isolation of development programming. This is despite the international community committing to significant reductions in "all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere" (SDG 16.1), [1] as part of the agreed upon comprehensive framework of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that underpin Agenda 2030.

Of these 17 goals, SDG 16 outlines the need to "promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels."[2] In reality, this and the other SDGs are not separate, isolated goals. Rather, they are intercon-

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[1] United Nations, "Sustainable Development Goals: Goal 16: Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies".

[2] Ibid.

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nected, interdependent, and mutually rein-forcing, as encapsulated by the closely related concept of SDG 16+, which emerged in recognition that achieving SDG 16 requires progress be made across a number of these goals. This mutually dependent relationship can be seen in Figure 1 below. Reducing levels of direct violence and associated deaths is only one of the numerous direct and cross-cutting targets supporting the fulfilment of SDG 16+. These targets also seek to address enduring structural drivers of instability and exclusion.
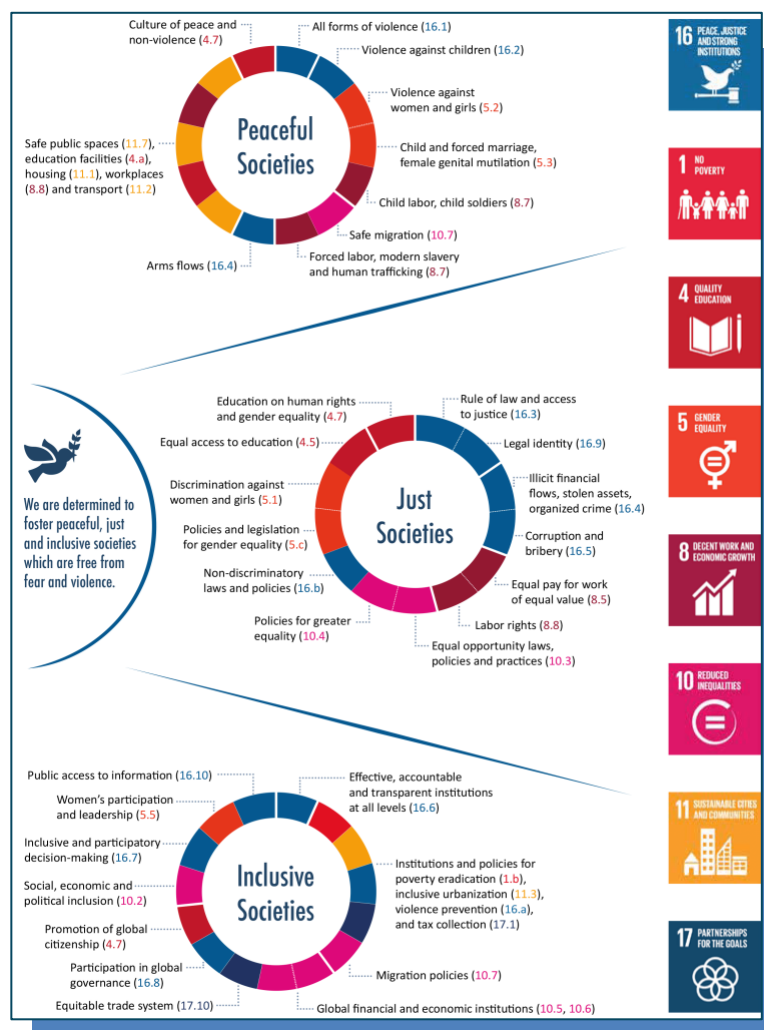

Figure 1
Source: www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/
implementing-sdg16-introduction/

In doing so, SDG16+ mirrors efforts within the atrocity prevention agenda that emphasize the need to advance structural "upstream" prevention. Focused on timely, cooperative action, upstream prevention consists of a range of strategies and efforts to address the underlying conditions that give rise to atrocity risk factors, which can be seen in Figure 2 below. By targeting historical, social, economic, and governance-related risk factors over the long-term,[3] upstream prevention not only endeavors to decrease immediate risks, such as identity based persecution against minorities, but also foster structural and institutional resilience to mass atrocities. Importantly, upstream prevention is not only concerned, therefore, with the absence of negative conditions but also with substantive, positive improvements in the life conditions of all vulnerable and marginalized groups in a given context both socio-economically and politically. Consequently,

SDG 16+ and atrocity prevention-related actions, tools, and strategies, particularly as they relate to promoting the rule of law, good governance, and security sector reform, could have great mutually reinforcing potential.

Yet, while these two agendas converge around a shared ambition to create peaceful, just, and inclusive societies, key questions remain regarding how governmental efforts to foster such societies through development cooperation can support the early prevention of mass atrocities, and vice versa. This policy brief provides an analysis of this overlap, including the challenges and advantages of designing and implementing programs at this intersection, in addition to evidence-based recommendations for policymakers to better promote both the prevention of atrocities and the goals of SDG16+.

Figure 2

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[3] James Waller, *Confronting Evil: Engaging Our Responsibility to Prevent Genocide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 151.

Mass Atrocity Prevention as a Process

Key Takeaways

> Understanding the prevention of atrocities as a process and not a single event is key to timely, preventive action.

> Early preventive action requires first identifying and then reducing the risk factors that make this type of mass identity-based violence more likely over the long-term in a given country.

> When non-coercive measures to reduce or mitigate the escalating risks of atrocities are not taken or taken too late, the risk of atrocities increases and the range of non-coercive measures available to prevent this violence narrows.

> Applying an atrocity prevention lens to SDG 16+ development programs will enable government officials from development agencies and ministries of foreign affairs to not only examine how these programs can contribute to the reduction of one or several mass atrocity risk factors, but also highlight how development programs can maintain or, in some cases, exacerbate the underlying conditions that increase the risks of atrocities.

Mass atrocities are neither inevitable nor single events. Their commission and their prevention are processes. As both an ongoing and long-term process, preventing atrocities involves engaging in early action to identify and reduce the risk factors that make this violence more likely. At its core, therefore, prevention is neither crisis response nor is a significant proportion of preventive measures coercive. Nevertheless, when the underlying conditions that give rise to atrocities go unaddressed and the risks of this large-scale identity-based violence escalate, the range of non-coercive measures available to prevent atrocities narrows considerably.

Understanding atrocity prevention through the lens of risk reduction is essential for any examination of the overlap between SDG16+ and the prevention of atrocities because it makes clear that a majority of atrocity prevention initiatives seek to address structural conditions such as improving systems of governance, reducing systemic identity-based marginalization and persecution, redressing past large-scale human rights violations, and strengthening an independent, free media and civil society sector, among other areas.

A note of caution is necessary, however. It is short-sighted to assume government policies and programming to promote SDG16+ will also automatically mitigate or prevent atrocities. Just as the conflict and atrocity prevention agendas converge, and conflict prevention programming *can* target root causes of conflict and certain atrocity risks, advancing conflict prevention in and of itself is not tantamount to atrocity prevention, nor is promoting SDG16+. Rather, mainstreaming atrocity prevention across government is necessary. Systematically applying an atrocity prevention lens, in this case, to SDG 16+ programs will not only enable a focus on how these efforts can contribute to the mitigation or reduction of one or several mass atrocity risk factors, but also illuminate how development programs can maintain or, in some cases, exacerbate the underlying conditions that increase the risks of atrocities.

An Evidence-Based Approach

The need for this study emerged from preliminary consultations the Auschwitz Institute for the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities (AIPG) held throughout 2019. These discussions took place with close governmental partners and representatives of multilateral institutions against the backdrop of the UN high-level political forum on sustainable development. Guided by the theme of achieving sustainable development by "empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality,"[4] the 2019 forum sharpened international focus on how governments could better achieve the 2030 Agenda targets for peaceful, just, and inclusive societies (SDG 16+). Doing so also served as a catalyst, encouraging innovative dialogue around the delivery of these goals. This provided the much-needed space to examine the linkages between SDG 16+ and atrocity prevention. More recently, the atrocity prevention-development nexus has once again been the focus of debate at the multinational level following the publication of this year's report by the UN Secretary-General on the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). Entitled "Development and the Responsibility to Protect: Recognizing and Addressing Embedded Risks and Drivers of Atrocity Crimes," this report urges governments to acknowledge the two agendas' interconnectivity and "leverage development programming across the spectrum of atrocity risk assessment, early warning, preparedness and response to

avoid, reduce or mitigate these risks and occurrences."[5]

In line with these recent debates, a shared understanding that the development and atrocity prevention agendas intersect underpinned the initial consultations AIPG held in 2019. Despite this consensus, the need for systematic research on this nexus emerged as a major recommendation. Participants from several government development agencies and ministries of foreign affairs emphasized the need to begin addressing this knowledge gap by analyzing the role of SDG 16+ programming in achieving atrocity crimes prevention, and vice versa, in addition to identifying specific thematic policy areas and – where possible – past or ongoing programmatic examples that exist at this intersection.

To that end, the research that informs this brief was divided into two distinct but interconnected phases. Phase I activities included a comprehensive review of relevant research on existing connections between SDG 16+ and atrocity prevention. This review was then used to establish a preliminary framework of analysis and questionnaire. Building on these activities, Phase II focused primarily on collecting data through a combination of in-person and virtual consultative interviews between 2022 and mid-2023. The research team conducted 26 multiparticipant interviews with government officials from development agencies and ministries of foreign affairs, as well as civil society representatives from the development sector, from 25 countries across Europe, North America, East Asia,

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[4] United Nations, "Sustainable Development Goals – Knowledge Platform," https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2019

[5] United Nations, "Development and the Responsibility to Protect: Recognizing and Addressing Embedded Risks and

Drivers of Atrocity Crimes," Report of the Secretary General, June 6, 2023, https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N23/162/84/PDF/N2316284.pdf?OpenElement.

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and Oceania. A total of 56 people from 24 institutions (development agencies, ministries of foreign affairs, and multilateral institutions) participated in the study. Drawing from these findings, this brief provides a series of recommendations for policymakers to design actionable and tailored strategies to design and implement programs to promote both SDG16+ and prevention priorities.

WORKING AT THE INTERSECTION OF SDG 16+ AND MASS ATROCITY PREVENTION: PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

Key Takeaways

- Broad agreement among government officials from some of the largest development-supporting countries that the goals of SDG 16+ and atrocity prevention overlap.

- Several government officials viewed their SDG 16+ programming as contributing to atrocity prevention in indirect and implicit ways.

- Few government officials could readily point to development initiatives that were sensitive to the risks and drivers of atrocities.

- Few governments have centered atrocity prevention in their foreign policies which has frustrated nuanced understandings of what atrocity prevention is, as well as a more flexible and responsive operationalization of mass atrocity prevention approaches.

There was broad-based acknowledgement among government officials from some of the largest development-supporting countries that both the goals of SDG 16+ and atrocity prevention overlap. Yet accompanying this acknowledgement was limited awareness regarding how – if at all – their SDG 16+ related development programming advanced atrocity prevention. Several discussed the "do no harm" principle that underpins their overseas development assistance (ODA). However, few could readily point to development initiatives that were sensitive to the risks and drivers of atrocities or how their development programs more generally sought to

address the vulnerabilities experienced by marginalized peoples due to identity-based exclusion, discrimination, and persecution. For many of these government officials, they viewed their SDG 16+ programs as contributing to the prevention of mass violence in both indirect and implicit ways.

This reality is in keeping with the fact that few of the governments involved in this research have actively sought to center atrocity prevention commitments, resources, and risk assessments in their respective foreign policies. Rather than focus on developing national mechanisms for prevention, which are officially recognized

bodies that include representatives from different areas of government relevant to the prevention of atrocities,[6] most have opted for a narrower approach, appointing officials to advance dialogue and understanding of the responsibility to protect (R2P) internationally, with these representatives frequently engaging in key deliberations at the multilateral level. In some instances, however, the appointed government representatives lack a sufficient degree of seniority. Often, the day-to-day tasks of the R2P portfolio are delegated to working-level foreign ministry personnel who are neither responsible for nor empowered to advance internal dialogue, coordination, or national mechanisms to support the operationalization of upstream prevention.[7] The prevention agenda may be embedded in the general policy frameworks of governments, as evidenced by these rhetorical commitments, in addition to state contributions to multilateral preventive efforts; the limited institutionalization of prevention, however, frustrates nuanced understandings and a more flexible and responsive operationalization of mass atrocity prevention approaches.

Notwithstanding these issues, there was also agreement among government representatives from development agencies and ministries of foreign affairs that there would be advantages to working more directly toward the prevention of atrocities through their SDG 16+ development activities. Working

more directly at the development-prevention nexus, however, carries numerous challenges, as most identified.

Source: https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal16

Security Council Considers Maintenance of International Peace and Security. UN Photo: Manuel Elías

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[6] Auschwitz Institute for Peace and Reconciliation (AIPR), "Integration into the State Architecture for Prevention: National Mechanisms for the Prevention of Genocide and Other Atrocity Crimes," 2018, https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/637ffc4c331dad74168d5c91/63ebe125ab1aa01f7f5e978e_2018-National-Mechanisms-Booklet-web-1.pdf

[7] For an examination of the challenges that continue to hinder the operationalization of R2P from the United Nations and beyond see Rebecca Barber, "The UN Should Increase Support for the Responsibility to Protect," Justice Security, August 17, 2023 https://www.justsecurity.org/87571/the-un-should-increase-support-for-the-responsibility-to-protect/

Challenges of Working at the Development-Prevention Nexus

Key Takeaways

- Unlike international development cooperation, the atrocity prevention agenda continues to be politicized.

- Too many still understand atrocity prevention within a crisis management framework that is predominantly coercive rather than early, cooperative, preventive action.

- Operationalizing the development-prevention nexus is *not* centered on including atrocity prevention components, simply as an add on or afterthought, in every development program.

- Operationalizing the development-prevention nexus *is* applying an atrocity prevention lens to SDG 16+ programming to examine how these activities impact different real or perceived identity groups and how they can contribute to the (ongoing) reduction of one or more risk factors for mass atrocities over the longer-term.

- Operationalizing the development-prevention nexus *is* integrating atrocity prevention assessments, strategies, and tools, such as trainings that are targeted and tailored, during the program design phase.

- SDG 16 + programs need not be labelled atrocity prevention to advance the prevention of atrocities.

One of the central challenges identified to operationalizing the intersection between SDG 16+ and prevention is the continued politicization of the atrocity prevention agenda. Despite longstanding advocacy and outreach efforts by those working in the field, it remains a challenge to shift perceptions around what atrocity prevention looks like in practice from a crisis management framework to one that focuses on early, upstream, cooperative, preventive action. Too many still understand atrocity prevention to be military intervention. This misconception of prevention as largely coercive has fostered a degree of suspicion around discussions of and action toward atrocity prevention among smaller states and, specifically, states in the Global South, many of which are recipients of development assistance. It is this reality that officials from development-supporting countries cited as part of the reasoning for which their embassy level colleagues, in particular, could hesitate and, in some cases, even resist promoting atrocity prevention out of concern that doing so could negatively affect their bilateral in-country relations with host governments.

In contrast, international development cooperation is a far less polarizing and politicized

agenda. For some government officials, however, designing and running programs that speak to both atrocity prevention and the SDGs could have a detrimental impact on development assistance, whereby security concerns could increasingly influence the provision of aid. Civil society representatives working in the development sector shared this concern regarding the "securitization" of development, noting that more direct programming at the intersection of SDG 16+ and prevention could lead to certain national security issues being pursued under the guise of bilateral development assistance. For this reason, those that work in international development are hesitant, at times, to fully embrace the atrocity prevention agenda. This hesitancy, which again points to the misconception that atrocity prevention primarily involves coercive, hard power interventions, further underscores the need for more education around what prevention and, specifically, upstream prevention entail.

Taken together, some government officials from development-supporting countries noted that labelling specific SDG 16+ development programs as "atrocity prevention" could be counterproductive, potentially frustrating their cooperation and ongoing engagement with development-recipient countries. Notwithstanding the difficulties of such a labelling process given the complex nature of atrocities and their prevention, what this and the above challenges underscore is the need for a more nuanced approach. To that end, applying an atrocity prevention lens to the design and implementation of development programming would enable development actors to begin examining existing SDG 16+ efforts through the lens of reducing the

risks against marginalized identity groups, ensuring (at the very least) that development activities neither maintain nor exacerbate one or several drivers of atrocities. Importantly, doing so is possible even for countries that may be sensitive to using the labels of atrocities and framing programs as atrocity prevention. Consequently, beginning to operationalize the development-prevention nexus more directly is not centered on including atrocity prevention components, simply as an add on or afterthought, in every development program. Rather, it entails first underscoring the importance of capturing how SDG 16+ initiatives impact different real or perceived identity groups and, as a result, how they can contribute to the (ongoing) reduction of one or more risk factors for mass atrocities over the longer-term,[8] and second, integrating atrocity prevention assessments, strategies, and tools, such as trainings that are targeted and tailored, during the design phase of SDG 16+ programming. In sum, SDG16+ initiatives need not be labelled atrocity prevention to advance the prevention agenda.

Lastly, given that few governments have worked to institutionalize atrocity prevention, most standard development reporting mechanisms do not include prevention indicators and, particularly, atrocity risk assessment frameworks to monitor and evaluate development assistance. Evaluating and measuring their impact (effective or otherwise) remains a challenge due to the inability to compile and analyze data on SDG 16+ activities and program outcomes comprehensively and systematically within a framework of atrocity risk reduction. Further, in cases where such reporting mechanisms

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[8] Kerry Whigham, "Truth Commissions and Their Contributions to Atrocity Prevention," The Auschwitz Institute for the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities (AIPG), March 2020, 7, https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/637ffc4c331dad74168d5c91/63ebe10e9754aa3de1c1c4c7_AIPG-TruthCommissionsReport-rev.pdf

are emerging,[9] government officials noted that they and their colleagues globally, in both state capitals and throughout embassies, must have access to more resources, including trainings and training materials on how to effectively monitor, evaluate, and report on programs at the development-prevention nexus. This is essential to ensure their core SDG 16+ programming both achieves expected development outcomes and advances atrocity prevention.

Although these challenges are significant, they are not insurmountable. Nor do they outweigh the advantages to operationalizing the intersection between SDG16+ and atrocity prevention that were also highlighted

Advantages of Working at the Development-prevention Nexus

Key Takeaways

Designing and implementing programs at the intersection of SDG 16+ and atrocity prevention would focus attention on:
• Long-term (upstream) prevention and specific risks factors and drivers of violence that could lead to atrocities.
• Fostering long-term investment in institution- building and capacity-building for societies that are confronted with different forms of systemic identity-based exclusion and marginalization.
• Delivering more coordinated, comprehensive, and holistic approaches to preventing atrocities and protecting the most vulnerable people.
• Better integrating peace and security, human rights, development pillars for conflict prevention, early warning and early action, and justice and accountability.
• Integrating atrocity prevention indicators into existing monitoring and evaluation impact assessments for development programming to facilitate reporting on how both existing and new SDG 16+ programs may contribute to the mitigation of one or more atrocity risk factors.
• Advancing the critical work of prevention, even when dedicated atrocity prevention funds are more limited, by drawing from additional and secured development budget allocations.

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[9] United States Agency for International Development (USAID), "Field Guide: Helping Prevent Mass Atrocities," USAID, April 2015, https://2017- 2020.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/Field_Guide_Mass_Atrocities.pdf

Underpinning the case for greater collaboration between the development and atrocity prevention agendas were the advantages of mainstreaming prevention, which were manifold for most government officials. Programmatically, greater collaboration would allow for specific development programs to work toward the mitigation and prevention of the underlying conditions that can lead to atrocities more directly over the longer-term. More specifically, designing and implementing programs with this intersection in mind would not only enable a stronger focus on long-term (upstream) prevention and, in turn, focus attention on specific risks and drivers of violence that could lead to atrocities, but could also foster long-term investment in institution-building and capacity building for societies that are confronted with different forms of systemic identity-based exclusion and marginalization. Programs with a clear atrocity prevention-SDG 16+ focus could deliver a more coordinated, comprehensive, and holistic approach to preventing atrocities and protecting the most vulnerable people. Relatedly, by allowing for a more "multidimensional" understanding of these programs and their impacts, working at this intersection could also better support the UN Secretary-General's reforms under the New Agenda for Peace. Doing so could help better integrate work on peace and security, human rights, development pillars for conflict prevention, early warning and early action, and justice and accountability.

Clearly establishing and operationalizing the link between SDG 16+ and prevention would also provide the necessary mandate for government officials to begin integrating atrocity prevention indicators into their monitoring and evaluation impact assessments for development programming. This would facilitate their ability to report on both existing and new SDG 16+ programs and how they may contribute to the mitigation of one or more atrocity risk factors.

Some government representatives also emphasized the economic benefits derived from mainstreaming atrocity prevention. [10] For some government officials, this is essential due to the relatively low budget allocated to atrocity prevention when compared to development. In addition, when compared to other sectors, funding for peacebuilding-related activities may be small; the advantage of the broader SDG 16+ framework and atrocity prevention specifically, however, is its linkages with other SDGs and, by extension, other development priorities and their associated budgets, such as SDG 4 Quality Education, SDG 5 Gender Equality, and SDG 10 Reduced Inequalities. As a result, in cases where dedicated atrocity prevention funds are more limited, the critical work of prevention can still advance when it is integrated into other development activities for which there are additional and secured budget allocations.

Building on these advantages, government representatives from development agencies and ministries of foreign affairs identified thematic policy areas where they considered SDG 16+ and atrocity prevention to potentially intersect.

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[10] This is a particularly important observation given the World Bank's assessment that "on average, for every $1 spent on prevention, up to $16 can be saved in terms of the costs of conflicts," World Bank Group Strategy for Fragility, Conflict, and Violence 2020-2025," World Bank Group, 21, https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/699521582773856417-0090022020/original/FCVStrategyDigital.pdf

Programmatic Areas of Interest at the Development-Prevention Nexus

Key Takeaways

Thematic policy and programmatic spaces identified as important for advancing SDG 16+ and atrocity prevention.

- Rule of law promotion
- Security sector reform
- Strengthening civil society
- Media engagement
- Transitional justice policies
- Climate security
- Environmental peacebuilding
- Human-rights based approach

Rule of law promotion, often in conjunction with the closely related theme of **security sector reform**, was identified most frequently as an area of programmatic importance. In consideration of how their rule of law programming may intersect with the prevention agenda, officials from development-supporting states pointed to the emerging focus on *people-centered justice* (PCJ) (also referred to as "citizen-focused justice"). The relevance of this approach stems from how it centers those who access these institutions ("justice users") rather than those who oversee them ("justice providers"). It underscores the importance of identifying and addressing the varied needs of people and communities who access key governance institutions and services, as well as barriers to

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their access. [11] Unlike traditional rule of law programming, PCJ questions conventional top-down approaches by emphasizing that promoting democratic governance and judicial structures will not inevitably generate accountable institutions and the necessary conditions where the rights of diverse groups and the equally diverse peoples who are part of these groups are protected. Identifying further best practices at this intersection could make a significant difference in the lives of numerous marginalized peoples particularly given that half of the world's population live under regimes that do not offer adequate legal protections under the rule of law principle.

Acknowledging that the complex nature of mass atrocities requires an equally comprehensive response that involves collaborative multi-stakeholder approaches, government officials from various development agencies and foreign ministries further identified

Source: International Women's Day Observed in Liberia. Unique ID UN7716979

strengthening civil society and media engagement as two thematic areas of their SDG 16+ work that can intersect with elements of atrocity prevention. With specific reference to media support, they emphasized the importance of strengthening the role and contributions of media actors in enhancing pluralistic, inclusive, and constructive public discourse in both crisis and conflict settings. In addition to focusing on the need to encourage conflict-sensitive journalism, for example, some media engagement also focuses on curbing increased victimization outside of immediate crisis contexts. Relevant programs include advancing media pedagogic approaches to counter hate speech and racism both online and offline. Such approaches are noteworthy given that armed conflicts are not a necessary precursor of mass atrocities. Atrocities can and do occur during times of relative peace and perceived stability.

The risks of atrocities occurring in a variety of country contexts, including in countries that have previously experienced such large-scale violence and other serious human rights violations, is also relevant to considerations of how SDG 16+ priorities and the prevention agenda intersect. Of the few governments that prioritize dealing with the legacy of a violent past as part of their bilateral development cooperation, some emphasized further leveraging their *transitional justice policies* to better advance the prevention agenda. Current efforts to address the effects of past violence and human rights violations link the promotion of social cohesion and more peaceful societies to the need for a range of community-based and national-level transitional justice processes and

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[11] Rebecca Duke and Linda Eriksson, "What is People-Centered Justice Programming and Why Does it Matter to You?," Chemonics: Development Works Here, February 24, 2022,

https://chemonics.com/blog/what-is-people-centered-justice-programming-and-why-does-it-matter-to-you/

mechanisms. Examples include efforts calling for strengthened institutional reforms at the state level, bolstering the capacity of sites of memory to mitigate atrocity risk, [12] and promoting peace education. Research published in 2020 by AIPG on "Truth Commissions and Their Contributions to Atrocity Prevention" indicates that certain transitional justice mechanisms can work to reduce atrocity risk factors indirectly and, even in such cases, they can have a marked impact on non-recurrence and, by extension, prevention. Mainstreaming the prevention agenda and, as a result, directly integrating an atrocity prevention lens into the design and implementation of transitional justice efforts could yield greater, longer-term reductions in various atrocity risk factors.[13]

Beyond these more conventional SDG 16+ thematic priorities, government officials also identified the emerging policy space of *climate security* and *environmental peacebuilding* approaches as areas of their development programming that could have the potential to advance the prevention agenda. They recognized the limits of continuing to design and implement programs under these themes through the narrower lens of conflict prevention, particularly given the growing challenges and effects the climate crisis is imposing on

communities that can transcend state borders. The integration of an atrocity prevention lens could more directly reduce existing vulnerabilities and identity-based victimization related to the management of and access to resources (land, water, food), for example, by emphasizing the need for robust localized governance approaches that are both inclusive and rights-based.

Calls to strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights for atrocity prevention[14] have been accompanied by targeted advocacy from those in the atrocity prevention field for the UN Human Rights Council to integrate atrocity risks into their work, most notably through the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism.[15] Human rights protections are already a core component of the monitoring mechanisms used within the atrocity prevention field to assess increasing risks for atrocities.[16] Some actors within the development field have taken deliberate steps to move human rights considerations to the forefront of their governmental strategies and approaches underpinning their development assistance. Several governments, for example, have integrated a *human rights-based approach* **(HRBA)** into their development programming in an attempt to ensure none of these initiatives have a detrimental impact on rights. Viewed as a progressive

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[12] Kerry Whigham, "Beyond Remembering: An Atrocity Prevention Toolkit for Memory Space," The Auschwitz Institute for the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities (AIPG), 2023, https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/637ffc4c331dad74168d5c91/64d644039f b29846275b456f_EN%20-%20Beyond%20Remembering%20Toolkit%20(Aug%2023)%20.pdf

[13] Whigham, *Truth Commissions*, 23.

[14] Cecilia Jacob, "Mainstreaming Atrocity Prevention: Foreign Policy and Promotion of Human Rights for Atrocity Prevention," Oxford Institute for Ethics, Law and Armed Conflict, November 2022, https://www.elac.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/ELAC-Policy-Brief_Mainstreaming-Atrocity-Prevention.pdf

[15] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (GCR2P), "UPR & R2P: Utilizing the Universal Periodic Review to Strengthen Structural Prevention of Atrocity Crimes," December 14, 2022, Event Recording, https://www.globalr2p.org/resources/upr-r2p-utilizing-the-universal-periodic-review-to-strengthen-structural-prevention-of-atrocity-crimes/#:~:text=As%20a%20unique%20mechanism%20for,t ools%20and%20policies%20for%20the

[16] United Nations, "UN Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes" (United Nations, 2014), 11, https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/about us/Doc.3_Framework%20of%20Analysis%20for%20Atrocity%20 Crimes_EN.pdf; Waller, *Confronting Evil*, 151.

pathway of socio-political change, several state representatives identified their HRBA as intersecting with both development and prevention priorities. Despite governmental efforts to ensure the protection of human rights cuts across their development policy and operations, more sophisticated analyses are needed that adopt an integrated approach (mass atrocity risk assessment, HRBA analysis, and peace and conflict analysis) when developing, implementing, and evaluating development activities. To that end, providing or supporting technical assistance and training programs for state institutions to improve their human rights policies and build their capacity to prevent human rights violations is also necessary.

Through this study, as well as both informal and formal inter-governmental fora, government stakeholders have repeatedly recognized the critical importance of development as a pathway to prevent atrocities. Various governments have also pointed to the gap between SDG 16+ related priorities and how well they are being met, stressing the needs for more investment, resources, and re-

search.[17] These programmatic areas of focus serve as an entry point for government officials across development agencies and ministries of foreign affairs to further examine their activities under each of these thematic priorities with the view to begin identifying good practices at the development-prevention nexus.[18] Rhetorical commitments to advancing SDG 16+ targets and atrocity prevention are essential. So, too, are accompanying actions, which are in shorter supply. Ultimately, to advance governmental efforts to foster peaceful, inclusive, and just societies that can also support the early prevention of mass atrocities, governments must implement practical, tailored measures to improve existing approaches. This means coupling ongoing multilateral deliberations on prevention and achieving SDG 16+ targets with action at all levels of government.

The recommendations at the end of this report include key next steps that States should take toward that end.

CONCLUSION

Preventing mass atrocities requires innovative approaches that move beyond crisis response to a focus on long-term initiatives to improve not only the overall life conditions of different identity groups, but also the quality of their lives socio-economically and politically. When viewed through the lens of

mitigating and reducing the vulnerabilities experienced by marginalized peoples all over the world, early preventative action becomes possible, and governments will be better equipped to transform their rhetorical commitments into concrete action.

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[17] "People-centred Governance in a Post-pandemic World," Co-organized by UN DESA, IDLO and the Government of Italy, Rome, Italy, 21-22 April 2022, https://www.idlo.int/sites/default/files/2022/other/documents/sdg_16_conference_report.pdf

[18] Crucially, participants did identify gender and the inclusion of a gendered-lens as a key priority that cuts across all these other thematic policy and programmatic spaces that were viewed as important for advancing SDG16+ goals and the prevention of atrocities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Couple ongoing engagement in multilateral deliberations on prevention and advancing SDG 16+ with actions at all levels of government.

Next steps to implement this recommendation:

- Consult a wide range of atrocity prevention experts to *develop a visible and tailor-made institutional prevention framework that cuts across government and has buy-in from senior officials.*

- *Encourage creativity, innovation, and strategic thinking* among ministry personnel and embassy staff, including senior officials, around the tools, training, and technical assistance they need to apply an atrocity prevention lens to their ongoing and future SDG 16+ related policies and programs.

Recommendation 2: Build and increase capacity and learning across government on atrocity prevention.

Next steps to implement this recommendation:

- *Train ministry personnel* on both foundational concepts of atrocity prevention as well as on more targeted and development-related subjects such as the operationalization of an atrocity prevention lens, along with the intersection of atrocity prevention and the rule of law, transitional justice, security sector reform, and civil society, among others.

- *Ensure training includes how to monitor and evaluate atrocity risk* and how to examine the atrocity risk sensitivity of existing development policy and programmatic approaches.

- Consult a wide range of atrocity prevention experts to *develop guidance on atrocity risk analysis and assessment, including early warning and early response.*

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Recommendation 3: Conduct an internal review of existing SDG 16+ development activities.

Next steps to implement this recommendation:

- *Map development programs in the prevention space,* as well as those that may indirectly support the prevention agenda, to examine if existing programs are sensitive to the risks and drivers of atrocities. Highlight any prevention gaps, whereby ongoing programs reinforce or exacerbate the underlying conditions that can give rise to atrocities.

- *Develop an action plan for the integration of an atrocity prevention lens* into current and future development programming to ensure these programs better support upstream prevention.

- *Conduct financial review of funds spent and funds available to advance atrocity prevention*, reporting these contributions to facilitate transparency and accountability, and to ensure development-related funding is flexible enough to respond to emerging atrocity risks and the early warning signs of atrocities.

Recommendation 4: Apply an atrocity prevention lens through the integration of a mass atrocity risk assessment when designing, supporting, monitoring, and evaluating development cooperation.

Next steps to implement this recommendation:

- *Work collaboratively across government and provide guidance*, particularly with embassy colleagues, to understand how in-country teams can center atrocity prevention commitments and resources into their work, notably in countries assessed as being at increased risk of mass atrocities.

- *Encourage support from senior officials for the application of an atrocity prevention lens* to begin capturing how SDG 16+ initiatives, in particular, are contributing to the mitigation and/or reduction of one or more atrocity risk factors.

- *Designate the application of an atrocity prevention lens as a mandatory component* of ministry personnel's' portfolios and include it as a metric of success in their evaluation criteria.

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Promoting SDG 16+ and the Prevention of Mass Atrocities

Recommendation 5: Ensure that prevention and development policy is responsive to evolving and emerging conditions and atrocity risk factors on the ground.

Next steps to implement this recommendation:

- *Increase the number of senior officials* working on atrocity prevention as part of their portfolios to indicate that atrocity prevention is a priority.

- *Empower officials working on atrocity prevention* to mainstream prevention, giving them the necessary authority to engage colleagues in other offices, departments, and even ministries to assess atrocity risks and implement policy and programmatic changes as necessary.

Recommendation 6: Increase dialogue and coordination on atrocity prevention across government.

- *Deliver atrocity prevention learning sessions* across government with various experts to increase knowledge on what atrocity prevention looks like in practical terms.

- *Create opportunities for information exchange* horizontally (cross-departmental) and vertically (between state capitals and embassies) to bridge existing knowledge gaps on roles, responsibilities, and governmental priorities as they relate to the prevention of atrocities to ensure colleagues working on prevention are well informed about what their counterparts working on development are doing, and vice versa.

Recommendation 7: For legislative bodies, increase legislative oversight of atrocity prevention commitments and resources.

Next steps to implement this recommendation:

- *Train parliamentarians and legislative staff on atrocity prevention,* including introductory trainings on atrocity prevention and other more targeted trainings, particularly on how to operationalize an atrocity prevention lens.

- *Conduct public or investigative hearings* to examine the current state of executive-level resources (staffing, financial, programmatic) dedicated to atrocity prevention, and review the flexibility of funding to evaluate the responsiveness of this funding to emerging atrocity risks.

- *Request regular updates* from executive branch personnel on how they are applying an atrocity prevention lens in their development work.