



Chair's summary

Business Engagement to Prevent Election Violence in Kenya

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Achim Wennmann¹

This document summarizes the key points noted by the Chair of the roundtable *Business Engagement to Prevent Election Violence in Kenya*. The discussion was convened by the Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding (CCDP) of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva, Switzerland, as part of a larger research project on the role of the business community as a peacebuilding actor conducted by an international research consortium (see [online project information](#)). This summary reflects the personal view of the Chair and does not necessarily reflect the views of all participants or the CCDP.

Understanding the role of business in prevention 2007-2013

- In 2007/2008, discussions on the role of business in the prevention of violence highlighted the ability of key business people to influence power holders and to work discretely behind the scenes. These engagements were based on the principles of 'low ego', patriotism and idealism, as well as relying on existing relationships between specific business people and politicians at the national level.
- An example of how business can aid in the prevention of violence was the Kenya Private Sector Alliance (KEPSA) which, as of 2003, brought together Kenyan business representatives who cared not only for their businesses, but also for Kenya as a whole.
- Business engagement in prevention prior to the elections of 2013 was also aimed at preventing future losses due to violence, but overall, the major public information campaigns to diffuse tensions in the country had relatively little impact when compared to the discrete mediation roles of business people in 2007/2008.
- Business engagement in prevention occurred within an overall economic context characterized by sectorial interests in 'closed' or 'open' access economies. In general terms, there were some sectors with an interest in maintaining an economic system in which access to opportunities and profits are regulated informally via discrete payments while other sectors had an interest in regulating the market via competition, merit and quality of service.
- The business people associated with prevention activities were more associated with an 'open' access economy and an interest in leveling the playing field within the Kenyan economy. They therefore represented a specific sub-set of Kenya's business sector.

¹ Dr. Achim Wennmann is Senior Researcher at the Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding (CCDP) of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva.
Contact: achim.wennmann@graduateinstitute.ch.

Conflict dynamics in 2017

- Conflict dynamics in 2017 will be localized which confirms the importance of micro-dynamics of conflict as an over-arching approach to identify entry-points for prevention.
- Devolution within Kenya has added a new layer of complexity to these localized conflict dynamics. Prospective governors at the local level compete over governorship positions as they are a means of accessing resources and power in closed-access economies.
- There is little confidence in the electoral management bodies, which means that – whatever the results will be – the election may not represent an outcome that the people will believe in, which in turn may prevent ‘closure’ to the perpetual state of electioneering in Kenya.
- Major systemic risks have become more acute, including environmental pressures associated to drought and other climate related effects, resource-based conflicts over land and extractive resources, population pressure especially among young people and regional risk factors such as military escalation in Somalia.

What role for business in prevention in 2017?

- Within the broader landscape of conflict risk, business on its own cannot provide a magic solution for violence prevention in Kenya in 2017. The constructive role of business in prevention will depend on identifying its roles within a multi-stakeholder coalition.
- Given the localized nature of conflict dynamics, effective prevention roles occur at the local level, yet it is at this level that business is least represented and has only few entry points. At the local level, other actors are better situated for assuming prevention roles such as religious or traditional leaders, non-governmental organizations or UN agencies.
- Business can play a direct role in mitigating violence because specific business people still maintain strong relationships with politicians and can leverage their influence for the purpose of prevention, especially at the national level. Such efforts to constructively engage with the political system will be more effective if a larger community of businesses speaks with one voice, and if discrete relationships exist across Kenya’s political spectrum.
- Business can play an indirect role in mitigating violence because of its access to capital. It can, therefore, indirectly contribute to violence prevention by financing activities of other actors who possess entry-points for localized prevention such as youth entrepreneurship activities.
- The tensions around business interests in a ‘closed’ or ‘open’ access economy persist and navigating these interests will be critical for business to be perceived as a neutral and honest broker.

Overarching reflections

- In the face of population, environmental, regional pressures and new conflict dynamics at the local level, Kenya’s political system may be reaching a tipping point in the next few years. The current economic system, marked primarily by a ‘closed’ access order, may neither be adequate to provide a sufficient degree of justice and inclusion, nor possess the necessary economic opportunities to satisfy the aspirations of the growing number of young Kenyans. Rallying for a more pronounced systems change may therefore increase, resulting in increased pressures for change on incumbent political and business elites.

- While devolution and associated political competition shapes conflict risk in 2017, it also presents an opportunity for a more systematic approach to conflict transformation. There are different tools, such as architectures for peace, which could play a role in managing localized conflicts and creating systems for managing local conflict dynamics through a multi-level approach.
- Architectures for peace could build on existing dispute resolution capacities in Kenya, including, but not limited to, those of business. Other important sources of prevention capacity are traditional conflict resolution processes that are, however, at risk of waning unless there will be a more significant effort to capture this knowledge and know-how and transfer it to future generations. Architectures for peace should especially work to reduce stereotyping, aim to depolarize political discourse, and to strengthen inclusive identity-building.
- The overall prevention task is to shift away from a mode of prevention that is dealing with symptoms and towards facilitating transformation that works on the main drivers of Kenya's conflict system. There is a role for business to play in shaping this transformation but it will be one of many actors within a multi-stakeholder coalition.
- In the short- and medium-term, there appears to be a need to strengthen exchange and understanding across institutions and sectors on mutually supporting roles in prevention. Such an exchange could evolve from developing joint analysis and understanding of Kenya's development, conflict and security situation and build confidence across sectors and institutions in a multi-stakeholder and multi-level approach to prevention.

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