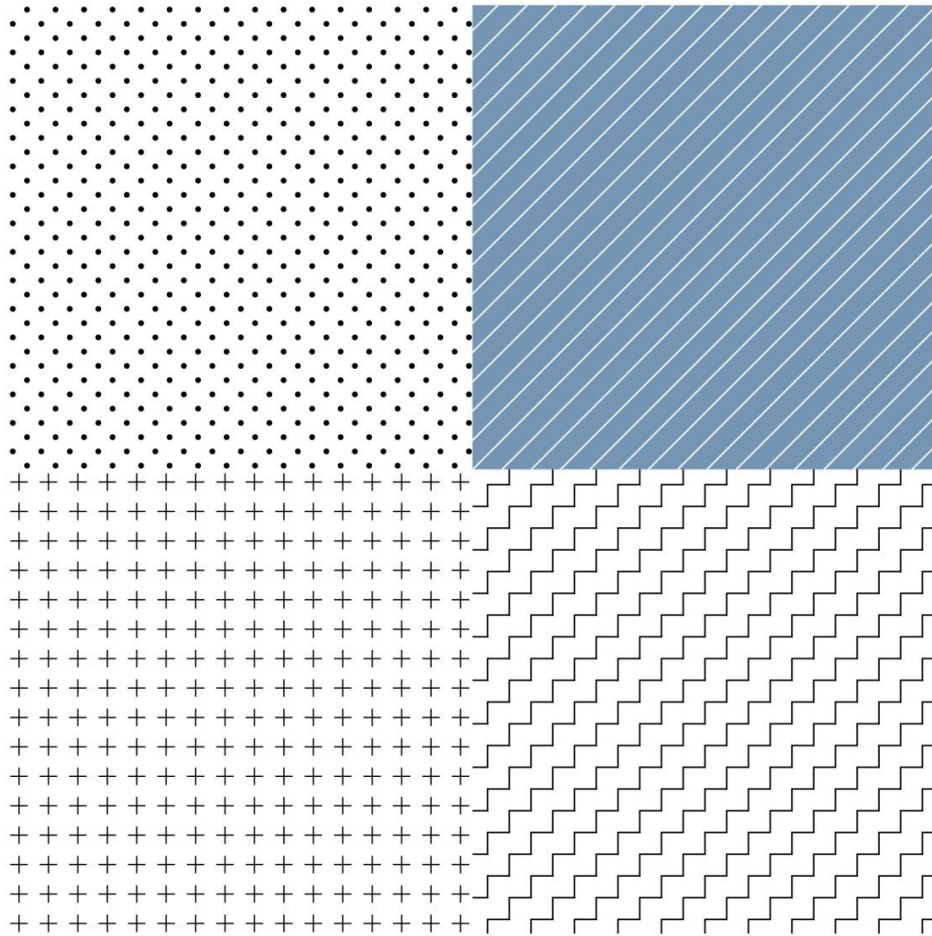


W O S C A P

ENHANCING EU PEACEBUILDING CAPABILITIES



ICTs & EU civilian peacebuilding: Reflections on good practices, opportunities and challenges

Jennifer Gaskell

London School of Economics and Political Science and Build Up

Colophon

ICTs & EU CIVILIAN PEACEBUILDING: REFLECTIONS ON GOOD PRACTICES, OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

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Deliverable 4.10: Best Practices Report: ICTs

Jennifer Gaskell

London School of Economics and Political Science and Build Up



Whole of Society Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding

This report was produced as part of the project “Whole of Society Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding”. It reflects on the challenges that the EU faces in operationalising the uses of ICTs for conflict prevention and peacebuilding. It provides some examples of how innovative forms of engagement supported by new technologies can enhance initiatives in this field, and identifies opportunities for the adoption of ICTs in the EU’s peacebuilding and conflict prevention operations. The report contributes to identifying ideas and challenges for EU peacebuilding which will require further analysis and problem-solving beyond the life of this project. Based on the research and engagement with key stakeholders, it is part of a series of reports that investigate cases of best practices and lessons learned related to several cross-cutting themes that the project focuses on.



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1. Introduction

1.1 Policy Context

The role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in peacebuilding includes the ways peacebuilding actors have used data, communication, networking and mobilisation technologies to support their peacebuilding activities (Gaskell et al. 2015). At the time of writing, during the scoping phase, we had found that little had been published in terms of the European Union's perspective on the topic of ICTs for peacebuilding despite investment in innovation, for example through the Digital Agenda for Europe. As highlighted by a participant to the WOSCAP Round Table events in Brussels in June 2016, a Commission Implementing Decision of the 2015 Annual Action Plan (AAP) under the Instruments Contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSPs) stated that:

*“In order to ensure effective participation from a wide range of stakeholders, to allow the voices of children, youth, and women to be heard in a powerful manner and to maximise the impact of the supported actions on target population, the potential of media and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for conflict prevention and peacebuilding, should be further explored across the 4 following priority areas. This relates in particular to **using media and ICTs** to promote connections and avoid divisions, to foster intercultural dialogue and share information on peace and reconciliation initiatives, to help children, youth and women raise their voices enabling them to play a role in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, to bring together different actors and to prevent and mitigate conflicts. Harnessing media and ICTs for peace should be framed as an opportunity to offset and stand in opposition to the use of communications technology to incite conflict and propagate messages of hate and destruction.”¹*

There was also a recent e-meeting of the European Parliament Development Committee in August 2016² where issues related to 'ICTs in the developing world' (agenda item 12) were discussed and a range of policy options presented. While the AAP statement above only specifies that the uses of ICTs for conflict prevention and peacebuilding should be *further explored*, and the meeting on ICTs in the developing world does not specifically address issues of conflict or peace, they evidence a growing interest from the EU on the matter. As noted previously, peacebuilding activities leveraging new technologies are gaining prominence around the world (Gaskell et al. 2015). But regardless of this concerted effort by the peacebuilding practitioner and donor communities, ICTs penetration rates, particularly those in the developing world and conflict affected areas, mean that these contexts are rapidly evolving in terms of

¹ European Commission (2015) “COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING DECISION of 27.5.2015 on the Annual Action Programme 2015 for the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace – Conflict prevention, peacebuilding and crisis preparedness component to be financed from the general budget of the European Union”, p. 4

² See Agenda item 12 for key documents at:

[http://www.emeeeting.europarl.europa.eu/committees/agenda/201608/DEVE/DEVE\(2016\)0831_1/sitt-3054131](http://www.emeeeting.europarl.europa.eu/committees/agenda/201608/DEVE/DEVE(2016)0831_1/sitt-3054131)

how people and communities communicate and organise. The ability or potential to adapt to these changes is therefore an indicator of the effectiveness, sustainability and capacity for innovation of the EU as a peacebuilding actor.

1.2 Definitions and themes

In the Scoping Paper for this project we defined ICTs as follows:

“Taking into account a rapidly changing technological landscape, we define ICTs as including the different types of hardware, software or systems that enable people to access, generate and share information. This extends traditional definitions to include technologies such as video games that provide new spaces to share information and communicate, or even unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) that provide new ways to collect information remotely, moving beyond a focus on equipment to the ways people use technologies.” (Gaskell et al. p. 4)

We then built a framework to try and describe the emerging practice of using technologies for peacebuilding by focusing on *uses* or *functions* of technology, rather than on the tools themselves, which evolve at a rapid pace. While this framework is relevant for gaining an understanding of emerging practice, it can be useful strategically to set out more specific policy intentions. In fact, the functions of technology we developed in the Scoping Study cover very similar objectives as those included in the 2015 AAP above (Gaskell et al. 2015).

In this Reflection Report, we shift the perspective to reflecting on the challenges that the EU faces in operationalising the uses of ICTs for conflict prevention and peacebuilding. First, as identified from the policy context and through engagement with key stakeholders, the report provides some examples of the recognition that innovative forms of engagement supported by new technologies can enhance peacebuilding and conflict prevention initiatives. However, ICTs rarely do so on their own, and work most effectively as a complement to broader peacebuilding processes, acting alongside or in support of other types of activities. Second, the smaller scale of existing levels of peacetech³ innovation through small NGOs, individuals or other organisations is in contrast to the larger scale at which the EU engages in peacebuilding and conflict prevention activities, in terms of funding, impacts and targets. Finally, we identify institutional barriers and opportunities for the adoption of ICTs in the EU’s peacebuilding and conflict prevention operations.

1.3 Report methodology

These themes emerge from two concrete examples, reviewed below, of good practices by small NGOs that have included ICTs in their peacebuilding activities with positive impacts: the work of Sisi ni Amani in Kenya and of Elva in Georgia. These examples were chosen for their

³ We use peacetech as an umbrella term to refer to activities or initiatives that use technology strategically to help build peace, interchangeably with ‘ICTs for peacebuilding’.

relevance to the priority areas highlighted in the 2015 AAP above, the existence of many good practices recognised in the field by practitioners and academics, and the availability of information on evaluating their work. After describing the examples and highlighting areas of good practices, we discuss issues raised through these examples with themes that emerged from key stakeholder interviews, the Community of Practice event held in Brussels on 23 June 2016 as part of the WOSCAP project and a survey of the Build Peace community on its perception of the EU as an actor in the field of ICTs and peacebuilding.

This report builds on our Scoping Study (Gaskell et al. 2015) and aims to expand on the ethical and operational challenges and opportunities set out in the paper by providing a practice-based, operational lens to the discussion of the role of ICTs for the EU's peacebuilding and conflict prevention activities.

2. Research findings: practices, challenges and opportunities for ICTs and peacebuilding

There remains a need to recognise that innovative forms of engagement through new technologies can enhance peacebuilding initiatives. The Community of Practice event organised in Brussels on 23 June 2016 entitled “EU Capabilities in Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding: Roundtable on Uses of ICTs for EU Conflict Prevention & Peacebuilding” had four speakers. Helena Puig Larrauri (Build Up) presented research done on use of ICTs within the WOSCAP project to date. Responses to this research were provided by three experts: Peter Brorsen (External Relations and Europe Director, European Institute of Peace), Miguel Varela (Coordinator of Dialogue Support Platform in Ukraine, mediatEUr), and Nicolas Rougy (Chair, European Peacebuilding Liaison Office Steering Committee). 38 people registered for the roundtable on use of ICTs, and 15 people showed up on the day. Discussions centred on the role that ICTs in peacebuilding – and EU peacebuilding more specifically – could have.

The event and our engagement with stakeholders close to EU practice highlighted several points for this review of good practices. First, very few EU stakeholders chose to participate in the event. Indeed, most participants were from NGOs, and only a handful from EU institutions. Second discussions also focused heavily around the meaning of technology for peacebuilding or ‘peacetech’. Many participants stated that technology would “never replace the critical trust building that face-to-face interaction and dialogue creates”. This has affected somewhat the framing and argument of this report. Indeed, it shows that further engagement with the EU will benefit the development of practical considerations on the role of ICTs for EU’s conflict prevention and peacebuilding capabilities. For now, we look to other actors who have more readily embraced these innovative, tech-enabled practices, through desk research, surveys and bilateral interviews conducted for this report. And instead of examining key EU focus areas in terms of ICTs and peacebuilding, we use these practices and lessons learned to gain a better understanding of the EU’s pathways to technology for peacebuilding, as it was suggested during the roundtable discussion and which we come back to in sections 3 and 4.

It is also worth noting at the outset that ICTs (or technology) for peacebuilding, or ‘peacetech’, do not refer here to peaceful technologies – or technologies designed to bring about peace. Rather our focus is on how peacebuilding actors strategically leverage new technologies as defined above in their peacebuilding activities.⁴

In the absence of clear EU policy intentions or directions, we focus the rest of this section on key elements of good practices for ICTs and peacebuilding. They have emerged from discussions at the Build Peace conference, and in our research and practitioner experiences in the implementation of many ‘peacetech’ initiatives. Two developments crystallise these thoughts, reviews and experiences: a recent report published by the British Council on a mapping exercise we conducted for ‘peacetech’ opportunities in the Syrian context (Build Up 2016), and the work of key stakeholders convened by the USAID-funded Global Development Lab in the Digital Principles⁵. The good practices presented through our

⁴ For an overview of practice globally see the scoping paper on ICTs for the WOSCAP project at: <http://www.woscap.eu/documents/131298403/131553554/Scoping+Study+-+ICT.pdf/1a5ba12d-29ef-4561-a17a-5e0616453a00>

⁵ See <http://digitalprinciples.org/>

two examples follow general peacebuilding good practices, but have specific implications with regards to new technologies. We outline these more specifically through the use of SMS to prevent election violence in Kenya by Sisi Ni Amani, and the development of a peace game, and gaming for peace activities, by Elva in Georgia.

Enhancing civic engagement and violence prevention through participation and local ownership: SMS-based programming in Kenya by Sisi ni Amani

Sisi ni Amani Kenya (SNA-K) is a Kenyan non-governmental organisation (NGO). It noted that in the 2007-2008 post-election violence text messages sent via mobile phones were instrumental in the spread of violence. In response SNA-K developed the idea of using “a combination of traditional and innovative communication and dialogue approaches in order to increase civic education and engagement, as well as to prevent violence in Kenyan communities before, during, and after Kenya’s 2013 General Election” (Shah & Brown 2014, p. 4). The initiative made strategic use of an SMS-based platform that reached over 65,000 Kenyans with civic education, civic engagement and violence prevention messages. SNA-K operated through a combination of full time staff members, volunteer and a network of community reporters and outreach workers.

Participatory, user-centred design

A participatory design means involving a wider range of stakeholders than the design team. This can apply to the programme or the technology tool design. User-centred design means putting the use of the technology tool at the forefront of the design process. In the case of SNA-K, the PeaceTXT technology platform (SMS-crowdsourcing and crowdseeding platform that allows a central database to receive and map alerts as well as send out text messages from a single source) was used to support community-driven processes around the use of text messages for civic engagement and violence prevention. This process of adaptation took three years of development from building the network to co-designing the processes involved (Shah & Brown 2014, p. 6).

First, they tested their assumptions with their local field teams through workshops. They identified what they refer to as ‘behaviour chains’ to “identify highly specific types of situations in which messages could be useful, and within these situations, identify different types of messages that should be disseminated”. They tested and refined these considerations and their in-depth conflict dynamics analysis in broader community focus groups with targeted demographic groups (young men, young women, community leaders and information spreaders among others) (Shah & Brown 2014, p. 7).

Second, in these participatory focus groups, they asked participants to co-create messages in response to the behaviour chain examples they posed at different times of the chains’ timelines. For example at the point at which the rumour was started, what message would make those who heard it more likely to question the rumour before passing it on, or stop them from passing it on, etc. Both violence prevention and civic engagement messages were created through participatory processes. The former with local community stakeholders, and the latter with inputs from the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), a newly formed institution for the 2013 elections.

As such, the processes and uses of the technology were designed through participatory methods and with a focus on those receiving the messages as individuals and communities. Messages were found to be meaningful by those who received them, and they were also translated into various local languages.

Local ownership and sustainability

As mentioned previously, SNA-K's work did not begin in 2013 around the time of the election but in 2010. The initiative invested in building a local network of partners as well as local capacity. In its report, it states that by March 2013 it "had partnered with over fifty local partner organizations and secured in-kind support from Kenya's largest mobile network operator, as well as various other funders, to build and operate an SMS platform that reached over 65,000 subscribers in more than twenty locations". Its successful partnership with the mobile operator ensured that people could sign up to the service for free from their phones. Further, SNA-K "recruited and trained local partners and staff to conduct community-based subscription outreach in each target location" (Shah & Brown 2014, p. 6).

SNA-K also invested in considerable training for its local staff, community reporters, over 130 outreach workers and local field teams and partners on monitoring, information verification, creating messages, sending and feedback.

And even though this can be seen as a grassroots or community-based movement, SNA-K collaborated closely with the National Steering Committee on Peacebuilding and Conflict Management (NSC), the government body in charge of early warning and response. For instance, when they verified that people were arming in a slum area of Nairobi, SNA-K reported this to the NSC who alerted the police (Shah & Brown 2014, p. 9).

The creation of this infrastructure (network, approach and processes) lives beyond the phase of election violence monitoring. Indeed, SNA-K is currently still involved in civic engagement programmes as well as using their approach to mitigate land-based conflict at the grassroots and community levels.⁶

Context and conflict sensitivity (do no harm)

With the starting point of their initiative being the recognition of the role text messages had played in previous instances of violence, SNA-K put conflict sensitivity (do no harm) at the heart of its activities. It conducted a "broad conflict dynamics analysis as well as in-depth conflict hot spots analysis" by mapping out local "strategies that led to peace and/or violence using the metaphor of a soccer game during community focus groups" (Shah & Brown 2014, p. 7). Their choice of technology tool and methodology was in direct response to this conflict analysis – as such, the technology was absolutely relevant for the context of election violence monitoring and civic engagement in Kenya.

Acutely aware of the dual role of technology (Brown 2014), SNA-K also attempted to mitigate for unintended consequences by including a vetting stage in the process. Indeed, once the field team identified an issue of concern, they needed to verify the information and evaluate whether an SMS was required. If this is the case, the field team member would

⁶ See <http://www.sisiniamani.org/what-we-do/programs/mitigating-land-conflict/>

propose a message based on pre-designed templates. The message would then be “tested with community members representing different sides of the conflict and vetted to ensure that it could not be interpreted as partisan or alarmist” (Shah & Brown 2014, p. 9). This ensured that SNA-K’s activities did not contribute to increasing violence and uncertainty in an already volatile context, making ‘doing no harm’ a priority.

Impact

The question of the impact of the work of SNA-K is harder to gauge. The NGO conducted a survey evaluation that showed that 97% of subscribers surveyed felt the messages had made a positive contribution. 40% believe the messages promoted peace and effectively calmed people down; 6% say the messages prevented violence or its escalation; 7% concluded that the messages provided civic education and information on voting. The reach and pace of the response provided by the SNA-K team was only possible through the use of ICTs, and thus shows that innovative forms of engagement through these technologies have the potential to enhance peacebuilding activities. However, as described throughout the example, it is clear that the platform was only successfully implemented as part of the wider infrastructure created for the project, which will foster sustainable activity beyond election violence monitoring, as highlighted earlier.

Fostering intercultural youth dialogue through online gaming for peace and conflict prevention in Georgia: Elva’s PeacePark

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgia has experienced violent conflict over the two regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia that are internationally recognised to be part of Georgia, but whose status was challenged through armed force in 2008 when Russia assisted breakaway movements in both regions. Official talks were set up in Geneva following the outbreak of conflict in 2008 to try to improve relations between Georgia, Russia, and the regional governments in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia. However, no agreement has been reached as talks continue. So, as an alternative route to building peace, many organisations have been involved in more grassroots level peacebuilding.

Overcoming physical and political barriers through ICTs

According to Heather Yundt, a Canadian journalist based in Tbilisi, such cross-community dialogues are very hard to undertake when there is almost no free movement between ethnic Georgians and the administrative regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia whose borders are manned by Russian troops (Yundt 2015)⁷. And so Elva: Community Engagement (Elva) undertook to leverage web technologies to overcome this barrier to contact, dialogue and communication.

In close collaboration with local games designer, it developed an online game called PeacePark where players are challenged “to restore peace in a communal park by understanding visitors’ interests and making wise decisions” (Elva website). Since its launch in 2015, the game had over 10,000 downloads. This project was developed as part of Elva’s

⁷ <https://www.insightonconflict.org/blog/2015/09/gaming-for-peace-in-georgia/>

“Promoting Inter-Ethnic Engagement Amongst Youth in Conflict Divides” programme, jointly funded by the EU and the UNDP under the wider Confidence Building Early Response Mechanism (COBERM) fund. It also involved the organisation of ‘Play2Talk’ sessions as pioneered in the Middle East by Games for Peace.

Local ownership: empowering local innovation for peace

In order to develop PeacePark, Elva, an NGO based in Tbilisi, Georgia, worked in collaboration with local games production company Storm Bringer Studios together with local and international experts. In a news item on the PeacePark website, the Elva team writes:

“At Elva we strongly believe in the active involvement of local communities within all aspects of our work. During the development of Peace Park, we actively involved the local gaming community to help us design the levels of Peace Park. Not only was the involvement of actual gamers a lot of fun, it also resulted in the creation of some of the most playable levels and eye-catching artwork in the game!” (PeacePark website)

That the game was developed in Georgia by a local production studio is testament to that commitment.

Learning and adapting from other contexts

For the second part of their activities under this programme, Elva engaged with and adapted the work of Games for Peace in the Middle East. Games for Peace had pioneered the structured use of the online game Minecraft for peacebuilding by bringing together groups of Israeli and Palestinian youths to interact and collaborate through Minecraft. Elva invited Games for Peace founders Uri Mishol and Dudi Peles to train local youth on the use of Minecraft with people from different backgrounds. Elva then organised different sessions with groups of young people from both sides of the conflict divide in Georgia, as well as two ‘Play for Peace’ weekend (similarly using Minecraft) were organised involving over 100 individuals in the region.

3. EU capabilities for action: a reflection

3.1 Practice gaps and opportunities

In evaluating EU capabilities for action in using ICTs for peacebuilding and conflict prevention, many stakeholders who contributed to this research highlighted the need to separate the EU's own projects from the projects it funds, as they found them to be qualitatively different. We agree in part, although would argue that they are connected and need to be evaluated jointly for this broad, holistic reflection that a Whole of Society approach demands. Without direct EU engagement in this research, it seems difficult to establish clear lessons, although several interviewees who are intimately familiar with the workings of the EU have put forward some arguments that can be helpful in this evaluation. First, the EU's peacebuilding sections are undergoing extensive structural changes which may have made their engagement with this research more difficult as the "EEAS (EU External Action Services) is reshaping everything, merging several former units with CSDP (Common Security and Defence Policy) units".⁸ Notwithstanding, several stakeholders noted two characteristics of the organisation that would hamper its adoption of new technologies: its risk-averse nature and its size. These they argued, represented major impediments to the EU acting as an innovator.⁹ Indeed, low in-house capacity across EU staff in terms of new technologies was seen as a barrier to the adoption of new technologies in their own work – because technologies were perceived as risky or dangerous. Then as one interviewee noted: "The EU is large, there are so many people... and technology is evolving so fast – so the time it takes to train people makes it difficult to keep up with the pace of technological development". This is why all those interviewed agreed that the most immediate potential for the EU and ICTs was in funding other organisations to implement tech-enabled projects. And indeed, 64.5% of those we surveyed in the Build Peace Community (N=31) stated that they would approach the EU as a donor for their tech-enabled projects.

Fostering innovation – funding and targets

Local ownership of peacebuilding processes and activities has long been recognised as central to impactful programming. Empowering local innovators in peacebuilding is therefore important for our reflection on EU practice for several reasons. First, the practicalities of innovation often require many iterations and adaptations. This was the case with the work of Sisi ni Amani who spent three years developing and adapting their approaches to local requirements and context. However, several interviewees stated that current EU funding requirements were not conducive to innovation for two main reasons: grants given were larger and not accessible to smaller, more nimble (innovative) organisations; budgets and process requirements are 'extremely inflexible'. Both these reasons were mentioned by interviewees as a barrier to incremental, iterative software development for example. We would add that for the same reasons, participatory and/or user-centred design seems harder to achieve under these

⁸ All the quotes presented in the rest of this section are taken from key stakeholder interviews, where participants chose to remain anonymous for the purpose of this research.

⁹ During the interviews, the term 'innovation' was used to represent the process of introducing new technologies, ICTs in particular, in existing peacebuilding and conflict prevention work.

conditions. This represents a major challenge for the EU's ability to be innovative in its peacebuilding and conflict prevention activities. Of course it is mitigated by its ability to support projects that use technologies through these larger grants – as it did with PeacePark indirectly under the COBERM funding and managed by UNDP Georgia. One interviewee noted that in terms of infrastructure, the EU is in a very advantageous position with a large field presence and capacity for local engagement. As such they asserted it would not have to be too costly for the EU to find local innovators and engage with them.

Survey respondents and interviewees highlighted another difficulty with the way the EU currently funds peacebuilding programmes or projects in relation to its capability for innovation, in their approach to impact targets. One of those interviewed stated that “we need to realise that a lot of the work the EU does or tries to do requires high impact and needs to be measurable. They need this political component. By contrast, a lot of the ‘peacotech’ initiatives are very grassroots/community level – we are missing the link with impact. It is not clear for the EU: you can measure and map a lot of development work – how many schools, how many vaccinations. But when you look at trust building, or relationships – it is really hard to make technologies that can create impact” to the level expected by the EU. 10,000 people downloaded PeacePark for example, but it is unclear whether this will have any effect on the situation in the region more broadly. Furthermore, as in the case of Northern Ireland, some EU funding for peacebuilding requires a mid-term evaluation. If targets are found not to have been met, the project is pulled. Smaller organisations would find it very hard to cope with those requirements that leave little room for manoeuvre. Funding smaller organisation for ‘peacotech’ presents a further challenge for the EU, according to one interviewee, in terms of ownership of the technology. This presents the dual challenge of sustainability and continued access to the technology or data from the project by the EU beyond initial funding.

Long term strategic approach for peacebuilding and conflict prevention

These challenges could be counterbalanced by adopting a long term strategic approach that focused on learning and knowledge sharing and bridging the gap between grassroots and political processes. The following quotes from interviews encapsulate this discussion:

“Yes [the EU] can be a driver for innovation. But the innovation has to have continuity in the process of change. The danger is that the innovation is being stimulated but not as a strategy for changes in societies to the extent that the risk of violent conflict is mitigated or addressed. It needs to be thought about in terms of the ultimate changes that the EU is seeking to support in those countries. It needs to link innovations to these ideas and plans. But the EU is very compartmentalized – these ideas become very quickly disaggregated into silos/sectors of focus. It loses cohesion and continuity towards change. So if innovation and programming get stuck within a sector – that’s where you limit the kinds of impact you can have on change.”

“It is not interesting to just give money to tech companies. But rather using technology strategically in a way that allows local buy-in – to convince certain types of change are going to be more supported and embraced.”

There are, however, obstacles to such strategic approaches in the way the EU has structured its peacebuilding work. As one insider describes, EEAS sets out policy direction, while DEVCO holds the purse. And then member states either support or go against EU interventions. Such coordination efforts greatly hamper the strategic value of individual interventions.

Institutional learning and knowledge sharing

One area that could support this strategic perspective and identified by those engaged in this research was the need for and the opportunity to develop knowledge sharing through the use of ICTs. An enormous gap was identified in terms of practical lessons learnt in geographical contexts and by issue-area for future programming. One interviewee who had worked on a tech enabled project funded by the EU stated that EU representatives were not interested in sharing the results of their work across the organisation. This meant that they were not able to use the technologies and processes developed as part of this project in other contexts. This can be seen as an opportunity as it would allow both various peacebuilding organisations to better understand where and how they could contribute to EU's peacebuilding and conflict prevention activities, and it would also enhance the EU's existing focus on creating synergies between past and current projects by making this information more widely available.

Between grassroots and political processes

Another opportunity identified by many respondents is the ability of the EU to bridge the gap between grassroots and political processes. In one interview, someone stated that ICTs could be used to gather evidence from a wider range of stakeholders to “bring the voices of the people to the political process”. This is being piloted in the field by other actors. For example Interpeace, an international NGO involved in nationwide consultative processes, for many years has been piloting the uses of ICTs to make that process more effective and far-reaching.

This, however, raises the question of the tensions between the EU as a political actor and as a peacebuilding donor. As one insider noted, this presents a ‘difficult balance’. Indeed, in interviews we collected examples of both where the implementer of a technology project felt the strong distinction between the EU's direct work, seen as quite political, and the work funded by the EU, which was never influenced by political considerations or restricted in light of the political ramifications of the project. In another case, however, community perceptions of impediments to peace were being collected at the same time as a reconciliation commission was established in the country. The EU supported both, but upon the establishment of the commission, it tried to divert funding from the consultation to the commission.

3.2 ICTs for peacebuilding seen through a Whole of Society Approach

This report has shown that beyond the nascent interest of the EU in the role of ICTs for peacebuilding and conflict prevention, such practices are already being implemented in ways that match EU aspirations. While the operational and ethical challenges highlighted in our Scoping Study remain (Gaskell et al. 2015), examples can be found of organisations implementing ‘peacetech’ projects in a responsible, effective and impactful way. These were

drawn from wider conversations in the 'peacotech' community and illustrated through the work of Sisi ni Amani SMS-based programmes on election violence prevention and civic education in Kenya, and Elva's innovative uses of online games for peace in Georgia.

The Whole of Society approach, which has guided the overall direction of this research, has both normative and operational dimensions. It means that peacebuilding and conflict prevention processes *should* be inclusive of a wide range of actors – and deals with the *practicalities* of making that happen in a coherent and effective way. This report shows that 'peacotech' has the potential not only to be an additional tool in the EU's – and other actors' – peacebuilding and conflict prevention toolkits, but it can also enhance the capability to adopt a Whole of Society approach. Indeed, both examples presented highlight the potential to reach a far greater number of people in a more responsive manner, as well as the ability to overcome physical and political challenges to peace through the uses of ICTs. This can have significant effects on the inclusion of a much wider range of voices, including marginalised and youth groups. This is also emphasised by the processes that are recommended to implement 'peacotech' initiatives: participatory, user-centred design, local ownership and sustainability, through infrastructure or by fostering local innovation, conflict sensitivity (doing no harm) and learning and adaptation from other contexts. All these were shown in our examples to greatly enhance the impact of the peacebuilding and conflict prevention activities. Finally, one key potential highlighted by several interviewees is the opportunity to connect different initiatives for continuity and knowledge sharing, thus providing better practical coordination and overall strategic coherence. In their uses for peacebuilding, ICTs influence many different local (horizontal) processes through various cultural pathways. As such they go some way to building a dynamic form of transnational and local social capital that can contribute to a more inclusive, sustainable peace. In addition, from a Whole of Society approach, ICTs present both challenges and opportunities for EU peacebuilding and conflict prevention practice: the opportunity to bridge the (vertical) gap between grassroots/community and political processes; and the challenge of undertaking coherent implementation at the political and grassroots levels.

In our Scoping Paper, we outlined that other organisations like the UN, or USAID had taken on more of a leadership role in 'peacotech' practice. Both for example actively engaged in the Build Peace community, with the UNDP hosting the 2015 conference in Cyprus. The UNDP (2013) also published the first acknowledgement of the role of ICTs for peacebuilding in 2013, and USAID invested in the development of the Digital Principles.¹⁰ In addition USAID invested extensively in infrastructure designed to foster innovation with the development of its Exchange platform and Global Development Lab.¹¹ And much of their practices have contributed to the lessons learned which we have drawn upon for this Report, including the failures and pitfalls discussed at conferences and among practitioners that have formed the basis of the good practices presented here. But from a Whole of Society approach, our findings show that the EU is a rather unique peacebuilding actor, involved across a wide range of contexts and from 'bottom to top', at grassroots and political levels. As such, it could leverage the demonstrable potentials of ICTs to connect a wide range of local and external capabilities towards whole, inclusive peace. These considerations should inform the institutional place and policy direction the EU will set for its ICTs peacebuilding and conflict prevention capabilities.

¹⁰ See <http://digitalprinciples.org/>

¹¹ See <https://www.usaid.gov/globaldevlab> for more information

4. Recommendations

Our reflection on EU capabilities leads us to make the following recommendations:

- The EU (more specifically the offices and units responsible for peacebuilding and conflict prevention as well as country delegations) needs to engage with the 'peacetech' community to better understand the value of the uses of ICTs in peacebuilding and conflict prevention to translate technological opportunities into a thematic perspective that the EU can take in following its institutional organisation.
- This compartmentalisation should not occur to the detriment of strategic programming.
- ICTs can help strategic programming through more efficient and effective knowledge sharing (although this would require significant investment from the EU).
- From a Whole of Society approach, ICTs present both challenges and opportunities for EU peacebuilding and conflict prevention practice: the opportunity to bridge the gap between grassroots/community and political processes; and the challenge of undertaking coherent implementation at the political and grassroots levels.
- These considerations should inform the institutional place and policy direction the EU will set for its ICTs peacebuilding and conflict prevention capabilities.

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