



Towards full spectrum conflict prevention: the international peace and prosperity project in Guinea-Bissau

Evan Hoffman

To cite this article: Evan Hoffman (2013) Towards full spectrum conflict prevention: the international peace and prosperity project in Guinea-Bissau, *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal*, 19:1, 75-86, DOI: [10.1080/11926422.2012.709055](https://doi.org/10.1080/11926422.2012.709055)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/11926422.2012.709055>



Published online: 19 Oct 2012.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 256



View related articles [↗](#)

Towards full spectrum conflict prevention: the international peace and prosperity project in Guinea-Bissau

Evan Hoffman*

The Canadian International Institute of Applied Negotiation (CIAN), Ottawa, Canada

Keywords: conflict prevention; failed states; early warning

Introduction

The problem of fragile, failing and failed states remains a critical issue, and the question of preventing political violence is especially acute for these countries. Many of them often face serious challenges in such areas as security, human rights and economic development; and often they present pictures of anarchy or full-scale open violence.

It is also now widely recognized that “prevention” is normally far more cost-effective than peacekeeping or rebuilding states in the aftermath of war. And yet, despite this heightened interest, the international community still struggles with some key concepts, including the definition of a fragile state and the design and delivery of appropriate, effective interventions in these environments. For example, some of the key questions currently being explored include:

- What factors distinguish a fragile state from a failed state?
- Is there enough empirical evidence to support the claim that failed states are security threats?¹ More specifically, are there different types of failed states that each represent different types of specific threats?
- What roles can outsiders have in failed states and how effective can an outside-driven approach be? What tools can be used by outside interveners?
- How do you implement a program in a failed state when there is little or no infrastructural support?
- How can multilateral approaches be strengthened? What weaknesses do they have and how can those be overcome?
- How can you measure and ultimately prove success in preventing violence?

Related to this uncertainty about failed states are other questions regarding early warning and early response. For example, there are questions regarding how early a warning must be, what is

***Evan Hoffman** holds a Ph.D. in political science from the University of Canterbury, New Zealand. Presently, he is the executive director of the Canadian International Institute of Applied Negotiation (CIAN) in Ottawa, Canada. Email: ehoffman@ciian.org
The Canadian International Institute of Applied Negotiation, 97 Tom’s Rd., RR2, Dacre, Ontario, K0J 1N0, Canada.

the most promising form of response to a warning, and who should be responsible for warning and for response?

New ways need to be found to engage with fragile states in order to prevent political violence in them and in order to enhance stability. This was the primary concern of the Reducing Political Violence Action Group (RPVAG) established in 2003.²

With the financial support and strong commitment of Mr Milt Lauenstein, a retired American business executive greatly interested in international peace and security, the international group of experts known as the RPVAG was formed to identify practical actions to prevent political violence. It quickly proceeded with the task of exploring the most promising ways of reducing and preventing political violence.

At that time, Dr Michael Lund, a member of the RPVAG, summarized the international context in the following terms:³

- (1) Recent deadly, intra-state conflicts create human, development, and security consequences.
- (2) Prospects of further failed states and intra-state conflicts continue.
- (3) Learning has occurred in understanding conflicts and addressing them in regard to:
 - causes of conflicts – plentiful research studies of civil conflicts, failed states;
 - various outside influences and domestic conditions proven effective in heading off likely escalation to violence or return to violence.
- (4) Government donors, multilaterals, and NGOs are not only doing early warning and conflict assessments but also taking preventive actions in specific cases.
- (5) These multiple efforts, however, are not focused sufficiently in threatened places at their most vulnerable but opportune times. Thus the efforts fail to concentrate an adequate range of incentives and disincentives for reversing the critical forces that escalate conflicts and for aiding the existing capacities for peaceful management of emerging disputes.
- (6) There is increasing recognition of the wider international impacts of failed states and civil conflicts, the ways preventive action serves national interests, and there is growing advocacy for an international strategic approach.
- (7) Nevertheless, an alert-action gap (or findings-follow-through gap) as well as a knowledge-action gap still exist. Actions are driven by sectoral and organizational mandates and thus different timetables, not by specific country analyses and detailed attention to conflict dynamics.
- (8) And no one organization is acting as a significant catalytic force to stimulate and galvanize timely and coherent preventive action.

The RPVAG then set out a “basic concept” for interventions aimed at tackling political violence in fragile states. It agreed to focus on reducing political violence in a selected country by:

- Reviewing the best available research on conflict and its sources and stages, with particular emphasis on interventions and what is need to make them effective.
- Establishing a core group of internal and external actors to work together closely on the project.
- Carrying out – in this core group – a joint analysis of the situation, to determine the greatest threats to security.
- Agreeing on measures to be undertaken, such as conciliation efforts at various political and other levels.

- Considering how such measures might help to address immediate violence and conflict issues as well as the underlying sources of discord that might be addressed over time.
- Galvanizing a coalition of actors and supporting groups who could be encouraged to direct parts of their own activities in the country towards addressing the identified threats.
- Using mainly non-official channels for this work, but with selective involvement of Governmental as well as Non-governmental actors; and encouraging all these actors to develop policies, incentives and disincentives that will be supportive of stability and peace.
- Stimulating appropriate and complementary actions aimed at addressing the kind of escalating tensions that can very often lead towards serious violence.

Dr Lund also listed a number of criteria for selecting a country for a prevention pilot project. There should be:

- Potential for extensive, state-destabilizing violence or political disintegration that invites eventual violence.
- Growing perception of potential crises, with possibly some signs of violence, but not yet significant levels of violence, or political polarization and confrontation (“unstable peace”).
- Existence of fledgling civil society organizations and forums to work with. (These typically cross-cut major cleavages. They are open to or seeking assistance, even though they cannot undertake violence prevention on their own).

Based on Dr Lund’s analysis as well as other members’ concerns about issues such as the failure of the international community to mobilize effectively to undertake early responses based on early warnings, the RPVAG initiated the International Peace and Prosperity Project (IPPP) that aimed to link early response to early warning in order to demonstrate that the international community is capable of undertaking effective preventive efforts.

From April 2004 until September 2009 the Canadian International Institute of Applied Negotiation (CIAN) – an Ottawa-based NGO dedicated to the prevention and resolution of violent conflict at local, national and international levels – led the IPPP with funding and support provided through the Alliance for Peacebuilding in Washington, DC.

Guinea-Bissau, located in West Africa, was selected as the site of the pilot project, having been chosen from a list of 30 candidate countries based on the work of Dr David Carment and colleagues at the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs (NPSIA), Carleton University, Ottawa.⁴

Dr Carment and his team were tasked with identifying three countries at risk of violent armed conflict in the next three years in order for an appropriate intervention to be developed (Carment et al. 2004). Utilizing open source information and their own unique methodology they came up with the following three countries (in alphabetical order): (1) Guinea Bissau; (2) Guyana; and (3) Papua New Guinea.

Of these three countries, Guinea-Bissau was selected because of four main reasons, as follows:

- First, early information from contacts familiar with the country indicated that there was a small group of civil society actors in Guinea-Bissau who would likely be receptive to a new project.
- Second, there was a significant absence of many other external actors in Guinea-Bissau. Even though Guinea-Bissau did have some local NGOs and a few in-country international NGOs, the relative lack of interest by other actors made it appear to be a “forgotten” country.

- Third, Guinea-Bissau was attractive because of its close physical proximity to Europe and North America. This meant less time and money spent on travel, so that available funds could be directed to prevention work in the country.
- Fourth, Guinea-Bissau was in a stage of “potential crisis”, with some signs of minor violence, but as yet no major violence. It was, in other words, in a state of “unstable peace”.

Guinea-Bissau is a small country of about 1.5 million people on the West Coast of Africa and it is a former Portuguese colony that achieved independence in 1974. It has since been plagued by coups, political instability, war, and underdevelopment. It remains one of the poorest countries in the world. It is currently ranked 176th out of 187 countries on the UN’s Human Development Index (see United Nations Development Programme, nd) and it is the eighteenth country on the 2011 Failed States Index (see Foreign Policy 2011).

This poverty persists despite the country having many natural resources available, especially perhaps most notably in the fishing industry and in the potential oil and natural gas reserves that lay off its coast. Currently, however, Guinea-Bissau’s economy is largely built around the export of cashew nuts. Guinea-Bissau’s full potential growth has not been realized yet largely due to chronic and severe political instability, lack of international interest and investments, and, more recently, the presence of drug traffickers that take advantage of the country’s numerous small islands and inlets which they use to transit cocaine into the European market.

The mission of the IPPP in Guinea-Bissau was to prevent violence by working towards peace and prosperity using a rigorous conflict analysis of specific conditions and capacities on the ground; by playing a value-added, catalytic role in assisting Guinea-Bissau citizens and international actors to implement concrete and synergistic actions through dialogue and focused actions; by providing a small grants program to stimulate security and development initiatives; and by undertaking global advocacy to mobilize international resources.

To achieve its mission in Guinea-Bissau, the IPPP had four phases:

- Phase I (October 2004–July 2005), crisis management/stabilization.
- Phase II (August 2005–September 2006), action planning and implementation.
- Phase III (October 2006–August 2008), follow-up and support.
- Phase IV (September 2008–August 2009), capacity-based violence prevention.

Phase I, crisis management and stabilization

Phase I of the IPPP plans initially called for the convening of a national conference to explore the sources of the country’s instability, to identify potential ways to remedy these problems, and more generally to build a collaborative and highly-coordinated conflict prevention response effort among the stakeholders in the country. This approach was based upon a rigorous literature review of best practices for conflict prevention which found that the tools for effective conflict prevention are already well-developed and that what is often lacking, however, is the will to intervene and the effective coordination of efforts to ensure that all the possible sources of violent conflict have been addressed. This same review found that often too little is done too late and in order to remedy this shortcoming, effective conflict prevention efforts must be initiated early.

These plans, however, had to be quickly abandoned since during the IPPP’s first mission to Guinea-Bissau several sources told the IPPP team that a new coup was imminent – perhaps even occurring within the next few days – and that the IPPP could play a very useful role by sounding an alert to the international community. Weighing out the potential risks of being “alarmist”

versus having the potential to actually thwart what appeared to be imminent violence before it began, and after further cross-checking this information, the IPPP eventually decided to issue a formal alert.⁵ This would prove to be one of many times that the IPPP would utilize its small but continually growing network to help mobilize resources and outside support for Guinea-Bissau during key periods when tensions in the country were rising.

So, circumstances would force the IPPP to put aside its longer-term preventive strategy for the rest of 2005 and instead it focused on “operational conflict prevention” activities aimed at creating immediate stability.⁶ For example, the rest of Phase I concentrated on activities to prevent potential violence that could have occurred due to a volatile presidential election which was to be held in July, 2005. Part of these efforts included triggering the formation of the Citizens’ Goodwill Task Force (CGWTF).

More specifically, early in April 2005, the IPPP convened a multi-stakeholder meeting in Bissau to consider whether a collaborative effort could be mounted that would help to advance the existing momentum toward national reconciliation. Members of the meeting decided to form a new group called the Citizens’ Goodwill Task Force (CGWTF). To support this sudden and unexpected development, the IPPP provided a small grant for the creation of the CGWTF.

The CGWTF went on to undertake a number of diverse activities – with additional IPPP support and funding – to help ensure that any potential violence related to the July 2005 presidential elections would be prevented.⁷ Some of the CGWTF activities included developing a code of conduct for the presidential candidates to follow (all but one presidential candidate eventually signed the code of conduct), acting as unofficial observers at polling stations, and undertaking a media campaign to urge the supporters of the losing party to refrain from using violence to contest the election results. The post-election report of the European Union election monitors went on to mention the work of the CGWTF and it noted the helpful role the CGWTF played during the elections.

At this time the IPPP also set its “test of success” as follows: “we are looking towards a situation where Guinea-Bissau can reach a stage such that political conflict can be raised and resolved nonviolently”.

Phase II, action planning and implementation

Phase II of the intervention started with the facilitation of a multi-issue, multi-stakeholder action planning session in Bissau. The session was held to produce a “National Plan of Action for Peace and Prosperity in Guinea-Bissau”.

From 15–19 February 2006, 20 senior representatives from key sectors in Guinea-Bissau participated in a dynamic, creative, and thoughtful workshop to develop a National Action Plan for Peace and Prosperity in Guinea-Bissau. The National Action Planning Session was facilitated by a six-person team of experts, funded by the IPPP. The Session was held under the auspices of a Process Design Committee drawn from Bissau.

The event was very successful. The participants developed a National Action Plan that identified specific actions that can be taken immediately and be completed soon, or that begin over the next 12–18 months to address some of the key issues that would advance the development of peace and prosperity in Guinea-Bissau.⁸

The IPPP completed Phase II by undertaking several activities to support the implementation of the National Action Plan. More specifically, the IPPP helped to establish a Local Implementation Committee plus a local implementation coordinator was hired with IPPP funding. The implementation coordinator was tasked with building support so that some of the high-priority activities from the National Action Plan could be launched.

In a way, however, the National Action Plan suffered from its own success. That is, some outside observers commented that the plan was so diverse and covered so many areas of need that required urgent attention that it was much too large for any one project to even try to implement more than perhaps one or even two of the activities. The IPPP being aware of this obstacle from the outset, however, tried to build additional outside support for the plan and it faced a number of obstacles including the fact that the other actors that could have played a supportive role were already locked into their own programming cycles and could not alter their activities to retrofit them into the plan. Additionally, the IPPP did not have at the time the convening power to attract support from some of the major international players whose involvement would be critical to the plan's implementation.⁹ In retrospect, the IPPP chalked this up as another important lesson learned: while the literature might suggest that holding a planning session such as this very early on in order to coordinate efforts is preferable, the reality is that a number of large obstacles including a lack of convening power, getting sufficient "buy-in" to the plan and then gaining follow-up support during the implementation stage is a lot more difficult to do than it sounds.

Nevertheless, the national action planning session was still successful because it achieved a number of other important results, including:

- A comprehensive, multi-thematic conflict analysis was produced using a participatory approach. To the best of our knowledge no one else at that time had ever undertaken such a comprehensive conflict analysis nor using a participatory approach.
- The workshop participants increased their capacity to facilitate small working groups and to conduct their own conflict analyses.
- The workshop participants gained a deeper understanding of the causes of conflict and thus there was an important self-awareness function created by conducting the national action planning session. Moreover, the workshop created a safe place for some of these contentious issues to surface and be spoken about in a more or less free manner.

Also during Phase II, the IPPP's small grant fund was utilized as a strategic preventative tool. Simply put, a small grants fund is a device that can be used to quickly disburse relatively small amounts of money as strategically-identified needs arise.

The use of a small grants fund was an important tool for preventing nonviolent conflicts from escalating into violent ones because it served several valuable purposes including the funding of emergency measures required to stabilize volatile situations, stimulating the creation of new initiatives to help promote stability, supporting prevention efforts that are not conducted by well-funded actors, providing bridging funds for ongoing initiatives which are at risk of closing due to funding lapses, and breaking stalled local initiatives out of impasses.¹⁰

For example, during 2005 the IPPP funded a wide range of activities including providing nearly \$6000 USD to support the work of local "Peace Soldiers" and to hold women's reconciliation meetings, \$1000 to improve the military barracks in order to improve morale among the soldiers, and a \$6000 grant to support the printing and dissemination of an electoral code of conduct to encourage an issue-based and peaceful presidential campaign. Other notable items funded in following years included \$10,000 for the production of a National Security Strategy Paper that needed to be completed prior to a November 2006 Donor Conference, \$15,000 for the "Estados Gerais" national dialogue process, and \$10,000 for a workshop on reporting in conflict situations for journalists. The IPPP would continue to utilize a small grant fund for the rest of the project cycle, eventually awarding over \$130,000 USD in grants.¹¹

Phase III, follow-up and support

Phase III of the project focused on the completion and continuation of some activities from earlier phases, including continued lobbying and awareness raising, continued development of lessons learned, and continued technical support for the implementation of some activities from the National Action Plan.

Additionally, Phase III included new activities such as undertaking political mediation, making a larger contribution to the reconciliation movement within Guinea-Bissau, providing new support for ongoing and planned Security Sector Reform (SSR) activities, and placing an increased focus on economic activities.

In terms of the IPPP's efforts to initiate political mediation, it began with a direct invitation from President Vieira and other senior government officials.¹² During a meeting with the President, where he outlined his vision for national reconciliation in Guinea-Bissau (his view was that reconciliation should be approached in measured steps, and that the process should be custom-designed for Guinea-Bissau), he also invited the IPPP to start a new dialogue between himself and the former Prime Minister that would also involve leaders from the other political parties since he recognized that dialogue at this level – which currently was not occurring – would be very important to the success of the current national dialogue process and broader reconciliation. Moreover, he also agreed to install a “process coordinator” position in his office to integrate all of these various dialogues so that there would be clarity and efficiency. In consequent meetings, the IPPP also gained the support of the armed forces to launch a new mediation process.

The IPPP then went on to seek the support of others including Canada's Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force (START) and the UN Mission to Guinea-Bissau. Despite having a clear mandate to initiate mediation and apparent support from the parties the talks never occurred. There was a growing sense of urgency that these talks needed to begin immediately and so the IPPP directed all of its available resources to this task.

However, while many actors recognized the need for elite-level talks (and a few of them even stated this publically) there was a real resistance that the IPPP faced in getting people to commit to coming to the table. They were, understandably, quite consumed with their own everyday affairs, yet the project team also sensed that there was a much deeper reluctance to initiate these talks because it would be like opening Pandora's Box. That is, many of these actors had long and sometimes very adversarial relationships and it was much easier to say that the mediation was needed and then carry on with business as usual than to actually have to dig into the past and open old wounds.

Because of this the IPPP faced a number of stalling tactics such as receiving very slow or no replies to follow-up messages and meeting invitations, receiving noncommittal responses, changing agreed-upon meeting dates at the last minute, and whatnot. Faced with such resistance, the IPPP could do little more than encourage them to start the talks, repeat the message that it was important for the future of the country to do-so, and reassure them that the IPPP would do everything within its power to ensure that process would be a safe and constructive one.

Closely related to the political mediation component of the IPPP's work during this phase, there was also an increased focus on supporting reconciliation within Guinea-Bissau. For example, the IPPP provided funding support to the Military Reconciliation Commission so they could extend their activities beyond the capital and on 15–16 March 2007 the IPPP designed and facilitated a two-day informal dialogue on national reconciliation which was convened by ECOWAS. Later on, from 8–9 June 2007, the IPPP and ECOWAS convened another two-day dialogue to discuss the proposed terms of reference of the New National Commission on Reconciliation. Plans for launching a national reconciliation process, much like the need and plans for holding new elite-level mediation sessions, suffered in very general terms from the same dynamic

of fear of looking into the past too deeply with one important distinction. While there was literally no process underway for holding elite-level mediated talks, there was an abundance of different plans for national reconciliation all in varying stages of development. The situation screamed for improved coordination and to this effect the IPPP tried to capitalize on the spirit of reconciliation that was in the air by proposing to convene a meeting of key representatives to share their observations, to discuss the importance of reconciliation to long-term stability and prosperity and to seek advice on how a “year of reconciliation and renewal” may be launched in Guinea-Bissau.¹³

However, in-line with the IPPP’s view that a multi-sectoral approach to conflict prevention is necessary there was also an increased focus on bolstering economic activities during this phase as well. Previously, the IPPP had hired a consultant from Intermediate Technology Consultants in the United Kingdom to assess the feasibility of “small business incubators” and in this phase it also supported a workshop to identify issues and solutions related to bolstering cashew production and sales which was held on 11–12 December 2006; it supported a new regularly-occurring trade fair that brought together producers, processors, and consumers to promote local products; it supported a new project developed by the Chamber of Agriculture, Commerce, and Industry which helped small, medium, and large businesses to improve their performance via several activities (e.g., legal assistance, training, and consulting); and lastly, the IPPP provided financial assistance to the Chamber of Commerce for the development of a Labor Roster in order to list, promote, and develop a local labor force.

Moreover, this phase of the project also saw the IPPP undertake efforts to support the press in Guinea-Bissau. For example, on 8–10 March 2007 the IPPP in collaboration with Search for Common Ground designed and facilitated a three-day workshop with over 20 journalists on the topic of “Reporting in Conflict Settings”. Workshop participants were introduced to a variety of tools for conflict analysis and neutral reporting. The IPPP also commissioned Reseau Liberte, a Canadian organization specializing in the development of an independent press in new democracies, to deliver a training workshop on investigative journalism in Bissau from 13–17 November 2007.

Phase IV, capacity-based violence prevention

Phase IV, which was the final phase of the project, focused on capacity-based violence prevention.¹⁴ Based on lessons from earlier phases of the project, the need for increasing the core-capacities of the country to prevent violence became evident. Accordingly, this phase of the project identified specific capacities that are necessary for preventing violence, utilized a local advisory group (LAG) to monitor them on a monthly basis, and then strove to build those capacities through a combination of catalytic actions, direct service delivery, and international advocacy.

To this end, in September 2008 the IPPP’s LAG was formed and the first meeting was convened in October 2008. During this meeting the LAG identified the specific capacities that Guinea-Bissau requires to prevent political violence. One of these capacities was the ability to manage conflicts nonviolently and to this end the IPPP focused on mediation skills training. For example, in October 2008 the IPPP facilitated a four-day mediation training workshop for several community leaders and civil society representatives in Guinea-Bissau and in February, 2009 the IPPP facilitated a second four-day mediation training workshop with the same participants in order to further assist them to develop and refine their mediation skills. Efforts were also made to further institutionalize these skills and to help professionalize the newly-trained mediators. For example, CIAN and the CGWTF approached the British embassy for funding to create a new community mediation center in Bissau which would provide free mediation services.

During this same period, the IPPP launched a new monthly publication, *The Bissau Monitor*, which would identify the vulnerabilities to violence across different sectors and any corresponding efforts that would help to address these vulnerabilities.¹⁵ In this manner, important peace-building gaps could be identified. The IPPP circulated this report widely to other NGOs, embassy staff, military and government officials in Guinea-Bissau, and UN officials.¹⁶

2009 was a particularly turbulent year for Guinea-Bissau, however, which saw the Head of the Armed Forces killed in a bomb attack and then hours later – in an apparent act of retaliation– the violent murder of the country’s president. The IPPP was shocked and despite some earlier warning signs of rising tensions – in one example there was a discharge of a firearm near the Head of Armed Forces that was later explained as being accidental – no one on the outside really saw these events coming. The IPPP team who had come to know and work with both men quite closely over the years were saddened by these losses and offered condolences to their families.

These horrific events somehow, while having the potential to create large and destabilizing ripples in an already fragile political situation, were surprisingly, in the end, not very destabilizing at all. That is, no further violence broke out and there was a strange sense that everyone just wanted to move on as quickly as possible and put these assassinations behind them. Indeed, some even quietly remarked that this was perhaps a helpful “purging” of two figures that had personal animosity between them and so it could even be framed by some as a positive development for the overall stability of the country since new actors could move in to occupy those positions.¹⁷ There were very few calls for a formal investigation into these events and to this day the perpetrators of these crimes and their true motives are still not known.¹⁸

As 2009 began to draw to a close and the IPPP considered how it would need to adjust its programming to account for these new developments it was decided that the best course of action would be to implement the project’s exit plan earlier than originally planned and end the project’s activities in the field. By September, 2009 all of the IPPP efforts in Guinea-Bissau had come to an end.

Conclusions

After over five years of focusing on nothing but trying to prevent political violence in a fragile state what, if anything, can be learned from the experiences of the IPPP in Guinea-Bissau? The good news is a lot.

While the IPPP was never able to reach the ambitious and robust goal of success it had set for itself during the first phase of the project (“we are looking towards a situation where Guinea-Bissau can reach a stage such that political conflict can be raised and resolved nonviolently”) there were many small successes along the way that need to be recognized, celebrated, and that others can learn from.

The IPPP had identified 12 key lessons from its work in Guinea-Bissau, which are as follows:

- (1) *Scouting trip.* Early in the project a multi-disciplinary team was dispatched to the country to conduct a holistic analysis of the needs and opportunities. This was a key to confirming whether an intervention should be undertaken and how it should proceed. This is a good time to begin to build working relationships with those already on the ground and to begin to explore possible areas of collaboration.
- (2) *A solid/flexible approach.* We found it helpful to have an approach which is solidly-based but flexible. Helpful and harmful things can happen spontaneously. It is vital to leave room for this in the “approach”, so as to adjust to changing conditions

- quickly and flexibly. We need to be able to capitalize on helpful events and to slow down or neutralize harmful events. Being able to respond quickly to the ever-changing events on the ground also required institutional readiness and because the IPPP was housed in a small NGO it wasn't faced with operating in an overly-bureaucratic environment. This meant people and funds could be mobilized quickly and efficiently as the need arose.
- (3) *Focus on violence.* Our focus was on "violence", not "conflict". Violence prevention planning, action and success-measurement is strongly facilitated by focusing on overt and structural violence, not conflict resolution per se. Building the capacity of the local actors to manage conflict nonviolently became a key focus of our approach.
 - (4) *Security.* It was critical to address the security challenge directly. The goal of preventing violence required that all those factors that destabilize a country – including dissatisfied armed forces, the actions of politicians, and other specific threats to peace and security such as the presence of drug traffickers - must be addressed within the violence prevention effort. National military forces in particular can be a source of support for prevention, and should not necessarily be regarded as a "spoiler". Encouraging the military to stay out of politics and support civil government can be vital.
 - (5) *Building trust and meeting local needs.* Building trusting relationships with local people is vitally important to understanding the history, sources and dynamics of violence of the country, and also to gaining access to key actors. Real needs must be met if the potential for violence is to be reduced. The project must remain responsive to local needs throughout.
 - (6) *Local project leadership.* Engaging local leaders in project direction was essential to the IPPP's efforts. The performance of local leaders in Guinea-Bissau is consistent with the belief that reliable, capable people can be found in virtually any country and with the right mix of access to resources, technical support and other resources they can be empowered to do amazing things.
 - (7) *Involvement.* To prevent violence, the efforts of many actors and institutions is needed. It is helpful when all receive credit for whatever success is achieved. It can be very difficult in practice, however, to effectively coordinate efforts for the goal of preventing violent conflict.
 - (8) *Integrated efforts.* Bringing interested parties together in integrated efforts helps ensure good results. These parties should be drawn from key sectors, and supported to work together collaboratively.
 - (9) *The catalyst.* The project team served as a "catalyst", working across key sectors – and also vertically within sectors – to mobilize resources and initiate actions. This helped encourage complementarity of effort among those with particular service mandates.
 - (10) *Project leadership.* A talented, experienced and dedicated project leader does not need much organizational support to be effective. A multi-disciplinary team can share the project direction to ensure effective decision-making, communications and coordination. A local office may or may not be needed – sometimes it may even be counterproductive.
 - (11) *Small grants.* Relatively small amounts of money disbursed quickly as a strategically-identified need arises can accomplish a great deal.
 - (12) *Timing.* We found that the timing of all activities – and at all levels – is crucial for success. That is, there is a need to undertake full spectrum conflict prevention activities in order to be effective. (Canadian International Institute of Applied Negotiation (CIAN) 2006)

Clearly, there are many valuable lessons to be gleaned from the IPPP's work and others aiming to prevent violent conflict will hopefully find inspiration and valuable insights from this work.

Acknowledgements

This article is based upon the author's first-hand experience with the IPPP from 2004–2008 during which period he was engaged as an analyst and policy advisor and in 2009 as the project manager, plus the numerous project documents posted on the CIAN website here: www.cian.org/projects1.shtml.

Notes

1. Stewart (2006) notes that there is actually very little empirical evidence to support the claim that failed states are security threats.
2. The RPVAG was composed of Eileen Babbitt, assistant professor of International Politics and director of the International and Conflict Resolution Program at Fletcher, who is also an associate of the Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School; R. Brian Ferguson, professor of cultural anthropology at Rutgers University, Newark; Mari Fitzduff, professor of conflict studies and director of UNU/INCORE (International Conflict Research); Karen Colvard, senior program officer at the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation; Ben Hoffman, president of the Canadian International Institute of Applied Negotiation (CIAN); Michael S. Lund, senior specialist for conflict and peace-building at Management Systems International (MSI); Ellen L. Lutz, an attorney with over two decades of experience as a non-governmental human rights advocate; Rama Mani, senior research associate, Centre for International Studies (University of Oxford); Jack Snyder, who is the Robert and Renee Belfer Professor of International Relations in the Political Science Department at the Institute of War and Peace Studies at Columbia University; and benefactor Milton Lauenstein. William A. Stuebner, former president of the Alliance for International Conflict Prevention and Resolution, later joined the RPVAG.
3. This overview was originally outlined in Lund (2003).
4. See (Carment et al. 2004) for the risk assessment that identified Guinea-Bissau.
5. See *Mission possible: A Ripe opportunity to avert violent conflict and achieve sustainable peace in Guinea-Bissau*, which is available online here: http://www.cian.org/mission_possible.doc.
6. However, the IPPP would return to its plans to hold a national planning session in early 2006.
7. For more info on the CGWTF see Hoffman (2009c).
8. The National Action Plan can be accessed online here: <http://www.cian.org/nationalactionplan.doc>.
9. The UN Special Representative of the Secretary General and a political affairs officer did attend the opening session and provide some welcoming remarks, however, UN involvement with developing the plan and assisting in its implementation effectively ended after that despite repeated attempts by the IPPP to gain additional UN support for these efforts.
10. For more info on small grants funds see *The Utility of a small grants fund as a tool for preventing violent conflict* (Hoffman 2009b).
11. For a full list of activities that the IPPP funded see Appendix C in Woodrow and Murphy (2008).
12. For example, the Minister of the Economy was one person with whom the IPPP had built a strong working relationship with and his support proved to be critical to the project's efforts.
13. See *Reconciliation and renewal in Guinea-Bissau* (Canadian International Institute of Applied Negotiation (CIAN), nd).
14. The four types of core capacities to prevent political violence include: (1) structures: there must be structures that embody the rule of law; (2) mechanisms and processes: the struggle for power within the country is channeled into nonviolent mechanisms and processes; (3) skills: individuals within the country are equipped with non-adversarial skills and the ability to express and resolve conflict non-violently; and (4) values: the country de-values violence and values peace (sources: adapted from Hoffman 2003, 2007, 2009a).
15. The June 2009 edition of the *Bissau Monitor* is available online here: <http://www.cian.org/assets/forms/Bissau%20Monitor%20-%20June%202009.pdf>.
16. The IPPP received some very positive feedback about *The Bissau Monitor* since no one else at that time was undertaking any systematic monthly monitoring of the changing conflict dynamics and sharing these insights with the wider community.
17. The president once told the IPPP project manager that his fate was very closely tied to the general's and that if he died the general would be next (see Hoffman 2009).

18. Another theory was that the murders were related to drug trafficking and that the traffickers were behind them.

References

- Canadian International Institute of Applied Negotiation (CIAN), 2006. *Preventing political violence: Towards a model for catalytic action*. Ottawa: Canadian International Institute of Applied Negotiation (CIAN).
- Canadian International Institute of Applied Negotiation (CIAN), 2009. *The Bissau monitor*. Available from: <http://www.cian.org/assets/forms/Bissau%20Monitor%20-%20June%202009.pdf> [Accessed 15 March 2012].
- Canadian International Institute of Applied Negotiation (CIAN), nd. *Mission possible: A Ripe opportunity to avert violent conflict and achieve sustainable peace in Guinea-Bissau*. [Online] Available from: http://www.cian.org/mission_possible.doc [Accessed 26 February 2012].
- Canadian International Institute of Applied Negotiation (CIAN), nd. *National action plan for peace and prosperity in Guinea-Bissau: A consensus document facilitated by The International Peace and Prosperity Project*. Available from: <http://www.cian.org/nationalactionplan.doc> [Accessed 15 January 2012].
- Canadian International Institute of Applied Negotiation (CIAN), nd. *Reconciliation and renewal in Guinea-Bissau*. Available from: <http://www.cian.org/reconciliation%20and%20renewal.doc> [Accessed 15 January 2012].
- Carment, D., Levine, C., Grenon, J., Godbold, S., Lord, J., and Nordeste, B., 2004. *CIFP country risk assessment: Medium term "watch list"*. Ottawa: Carleton University.
- Foreign Policy, 2011. *The failed states index 2011*. Available from: http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/06/17/2011_failed_states_index_interactive_map_and_rankings [Accessed 15 May 2012].
- Hoffman, B., 2003. *1+1=3: New math for human relations*. Eganville: Concorde.
- Hoffman, B., 2007. *The peace guerilla handbook*. Eganville: Concorde.
- Hoffman, B., 2009. *Peace Guerilla: Unarmed and in harm's way, my obsession with ending violence*. Ottawa: Canadian International Institute of Applied Negotiation.
- Hoffman, E., 2009a. *Multiple approaches for measuring successful conflict prevention: With examples from Guinea-Bissau*. Unpublished paper. Ottawa: The Canadian International Institute of Applied Negotiation (CIAN).
- Hoffman, E., 2009b. *The utility of a small grants fund as a tool for preventing violent conflict*. Available from: <http://www.cian.org/assets/newsletters/CIAN-Newsletter-Summer2009.pdf> [Accessed 17 January 2012].
- Hoffman, E., 2009c. Perspective 4: Preventing election violence in Guinea-Bissau: The role of the citizens' goodwill task force. In: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), ed. *Elections and conflict prevention: A guide to analysis, planning and programming*. New York: UNDP, 40–41. Available from: http://web.undp.org/oslocentre/docs09/UNDP_Elections_Conflict_2009.pdf [Accessed 17 January 2012].
- Lund, M., 2003. *Following through on the promise and performance of conflict prevention: Toward an Action plan. Discussion Paper*. Unpublished paper. The Reducing Political Violence Action Group (RPVAG).
- Stewart, P., 2006. *Weak states and global threats: Assessing evidence of "spillovers"*. Washington: Centre for Global Development. Available from: http://www.cgdev.org/files/5539_file_WP_73.pdf [Accessed 18 January 2012].
- United Nations Development Programme, nd. *Guinea-Bissau country profile: Human development indicators*. Available from: <http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/GNB.html> [Accessed 12 March 2012].
- Woodrow, P. and Murphy, P., 2008. *International Peace and Prosperity Project: Guinea-Bissau: Project review*. Cambridge: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects. Available from: <http://www.cian.org/assets/forms/projectreview.pdf> [Accessed 18 January 2012].