à propos

Digital Technologies:
Game Changer for Peace?

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editorial

Mobile applications, social media, video conferencing tools, online games … Digital technologies are omnipresent. This is not going to stop anytime soon, given the COVID-19 pandemic, which led us to increase our usage of online tools and has changed our relationship to the virtual world.

Over the last decade, digital technologies have shown their potential in easing the work of peacebuilding professionals. While they can be used to raise awareness of peaceful causes, connect people, and foster exchanges, their downsides are by no means insignificant. Hate speech, disinformation, and polarization in conflict settings tend to exacerbate division and violence.

Two weeks after the UN world data forum, the KOFF members share their views and look back on their experience with digital technologies, as game-changers for peace.

Digital technologies: fueling conflict but catalyzing peace

Taking a picture from the car, Mossul, January 2020.Creative Commons

The concept of infodemics is not new, but it came back to the fore with the COVID-19 pandemic, where widespread mis- and dis-information campaigns posed challenges for international and national actors responding to the pandemic. Likewise, in some conflict contexts, misinformation and disinformation have increased social tensions and fueled hostility against already-marginalized groups.

Over the last decade, digital technologies have been changing the landscape of conflicts. With increasing internet penetration, access to smart devices, multiplicity, and proliferation of social media platforms, the information environment in which conflicts take place and where peacebuilding actors operate is constantly shifting. Peacebuilders and mediators, therefore, need to better understand the role of digital technologies, both how it fuels conflict and how it can be utilized to catalyze peace. First off, it is important to recognize that digital technologies pose many challenges for peacebuilding and mediation. The malicious use of technology especially to propagate unsubstantiated rumors or spread hate speech against certain communities can undermine ongoing peace efforts. Such misuse of social media exacerbates polarization and silos people with similar views in echo-chambers creating further division in conflict settings.

But the impact of digital technology is not all negative. Mediation has traditionally focused

on human interaction, where 'handshakes' manifest trust and agreement. While this will remain the case, there are undeniable opportunities for digital technologies to support the work of mediators. For instance, through enabling real-time communication breaking physical and virtual barriers, digital platforms enable mediators to hybridize consultation mechanisms to reach a larger number and broader range of stakeholders. This helps to include interlocutors or certain groups that may not otherwise be represented (such as civil society groups and minorities).

Technological applications can also help boost mediation teams' capabilities for analysis. While modern-day citizen journalism via social media generate large amounts of information, digital tools help mediators make sense of this information in support of conflict analysis. Also, tapping into social media analysis in conflict contexts offers huge opportunities for early warning, prevention, and overall preparedness.

Through a conscious, informed, and savy engagement, social media allow mediators to communicate more effectively by reaching a large number of people, by narrating their own version of events, bypassing censorship, making arguments for peace, and by countering misinformation. With that, social media becomes a novel space for mediators to contribute to shaping narratives about peacemaking and to strategically communicate with their target audiences.

On the negative side, social media threatens to undermine the confidential space of peace talks and lower the threshold for parties to share information that might not be intended for public consumption. Additionally, some applications of artificial intelligence-supported solution relevant for mediation raise ethical questions on the contours and limits of AI in mediation, such as intersubjective bias, digital inequalities and marginalization, and the role of the private technology sector in conflict resolution.

Entrenching technological tools at the service of mediators will be a gradual undertaking. Digital literacy among peacebuilding practitioners seems to be improving, but not at a rate that enables them to apply solutions independently. As the misuse of technology in conflict has been much clearer than the opportunities it may provide, there is still skepticism towards integrating tech solutions in mediation processes. A dialogue between peacebuilders and technology experts is necessary for a nuanced understanding of what technology can offer peacebuilders from the grassroots level upwards.

Having said so, the peacemaking community is increasingly realizing that it needs to tap into this potential. To that end, the United Nations and the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue launched a toolkit on digital technologies and mediation, which aims to consider the application of various technologies and their potential relevance for mediators.

swisspeace has also been part of the policy discussions on the technology and mediation nexus, with a focus on the potential and challenges posed by social media to mediators. In 2018, swisspeace co-founded the CyberMediation Initiative together with the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs along with the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, and Diplo Foundation The initiative aimed to better understand the relationship between digital technologies and mediation in its different applications and dimensions. It has now morphed into the CyberMediation Network; a larger, more entrenched effort to help improve the practice of mediation and conflict prevention, mitigation, and resolution

through policy discussions on the opportunities, risks, and applications of digital tools, including the role of social media, in conflict contexts.

We observe a positive shift towards increased research on the impact of digital technology on peacemaking, as well as spaces for discussions among policymakers, practitioners, researchers, and digital experts to enable mediators to capitalize on the potential of digital technologies. Peace mediation will and should not be guided by technological solutions, but technology can support human-led peace efforts in increasingly complex, multi-layered conflict landscapes. This is what we believe the conversation should focus on.

For further information on the CyberMediation Network, please contact cybermediationnetwork@gmail.com.
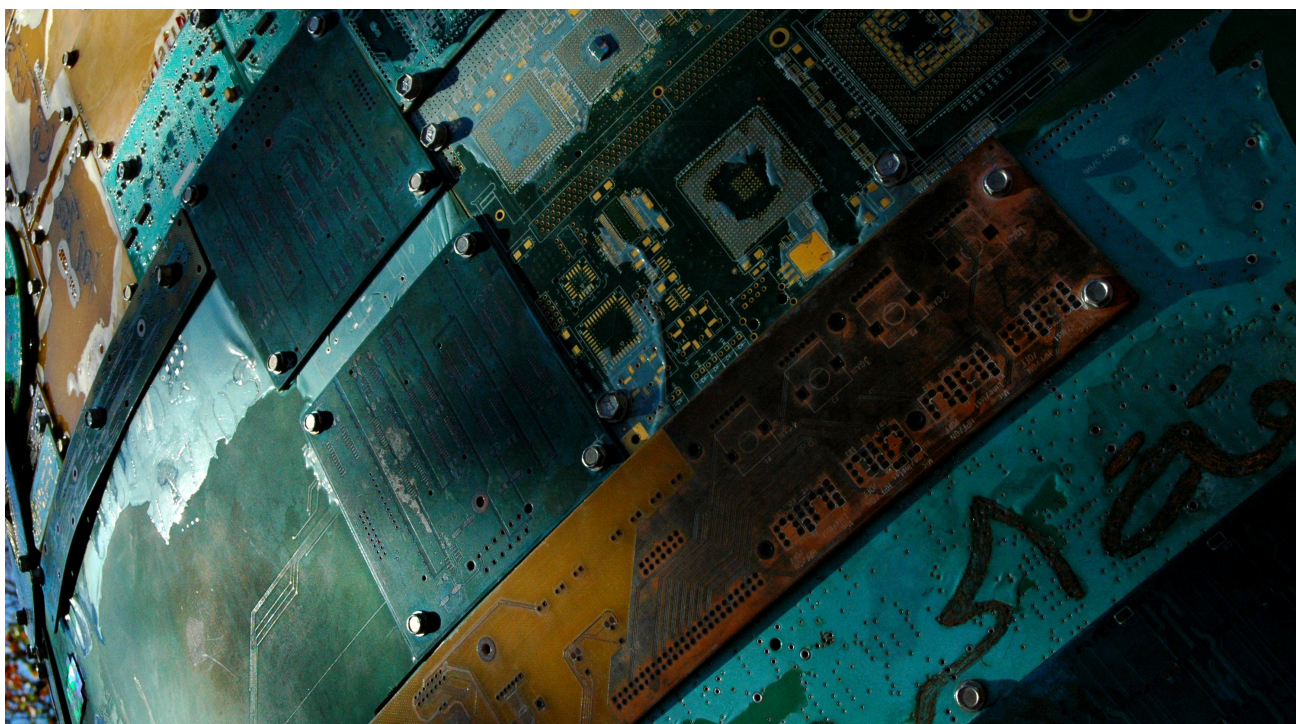
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links
- swisspeace
- Digital toolkit of the United Nations and the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue

reports

Ensuring good governance in a digitalized security sector

Digital DNA, Palo Alto, art in public spaces, 2005.Ceative Commons

The digitalization of the security sector has been a focal point for the work of DCAF – the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance — for over five years. DCAF is an international foundation under Swiss law and its mission is to promote good governance in the security sector. The digitalization of the security sector raises many challenges but presents several opportunities for good governance. For example, digital work processes can increase the efficiency of security actors. Digitalized records can potentially increase the transparency of their work and oversight actors, such as national parliaments, may find it easier to hold security sectors accountable as a result. With the use of digital tools, certain security actors might also be able to improve their exchange with the public, communicating messages about security more clearly and possibly being more responsive to the public's security needs. However, the use of information and communication technologies in the security sector raises many challenges for accountability and the rule of law. For example: who can be held accountable if both decision-making and security tasks are carried out by artificial intelligence? How can oversight actors follow, understand, and evaluate fully-automated work processes? The digitalization of security also poses a danger that technologies, such as surveillance technologies, are used in a way that increasingly encroaches on the privacy of citizens. All of these issues require further research and DCAF will continue to work on the digitalization of the security sector, within the frame of promoting good governance, and will launch several publications on the subject matter in the coming months.

DCAF has also provided operational support on the ground. The organization has been supporting key security sector ministries, such as ministries of interior (MoI) and ministries of defense (MoD), to ensure that when they commence digitalization, they have the appropriate security mechanisms in place to protect digital work processes from attacks. In 2018, DCAF started a three-year regional project in the Western Balkans, supported by the United Kingdom's Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office, entitled "Enhancing Cybersecurity Governance in the Western Balkans". As part of this project, DCAF has organized trainings for Computer Emergency Response Teams (CERTs) from MoIs and MoDs

as well as for national CERTs. The CERTs were thus provided with the opportunity to increase their regional and international network, build trust with their colleagues, and join international associations of CERTs. Trust between CERTs is necessary to ensure effective communication on sensitive issues such as attack response – sharing details on attacks and how to analyze or mitigate them improves the CERTs' capacities. To promote sustainable change within CERTs, DCAF has also worked with a select number of CERTs to review their internal structure and management. How can the team's mandate, human resource policies, or training plans be improved to make sure that the team can work effectively and can attract and retain staff with the right expertise? In the coming years, DCAF intends to continue assisting key target groups in their efforts to protect their digital work processes from cyberattacks, foster relevant capacities, and increase their respective regional and international networks.

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links
- DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governances
- DCAF's project on Cybersecurity Governance

reports
Using traditional media to deal with the "infodemic"

Radio listener in Niamey, Niger, April 2020. Ollivier Girard / Fondation Hirondelle

With the Covid-19 pandemic comes an "infodemic": disinformation and rumors spread widely via social media networks. In more fragile countries, traditional media types, in particular radio, play a significant role in tackling this dissemination of disinformation. The strategies implemented by Fondation Hirondelle include content production and innovative research on the ground.

Since March 2020, Fondation Hirondelle, a Swiss organization that has been providing information to populations facing crises since 1995, has been developing a solution in 17 countries in Africa and Asia specifically to help the media and the public deal with the novel coronavirus crisis. The activities implemented are intended to provide reliable, accurate, and useful information on the virus and its wider impact with the help of teams of local journalists supported by Fondation Hirondelle. They also aim to offer editorial, financial, and technical support to local media to help them broadcast high-quality programs throughout the crisis. The objective is to combat disinformation and misinformation relating to the pandemic and its many consequences, and this relies heavily on the analysis of disinformation and the specific information needs of populations.

In Burkina Faso, the University of Sheffield and the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique et Technologique du Burkina Faso (National Center of Scientific and Technological Research of Burkina Faso), in partnership with Fondation Hirondelle, launched a research project in June with the support of the charitable organization Elrha. The researchers, Dr. Emma Heywood of the University of Sheffield and Dr. Lassané Yaméogo of the National Center of Scientific and Technological Research of Burkina Faso, are working with displaced persons in refugee camps and host communities to gain a better understanding of their concerns, find out what rumors and incorrect information relating to Covid-19 they are exposed to, and where this misinformation is coming from.

The findings of their interviews and analyses are then sent to Studio Yafa, a multimedia information program set up by Fondation Hirondelle in 2019, which has a team of Burkinabe

journalists and a network of local media partners. The Studio Yafa journalists are then able to address the disinformation that is circulating and therefore better respond to the information needs of displaced persons and the population as a whole.

"Providing accurate, regular, and timely information on life-impacting issues such as Covid-19 is vital for everyone, but especially for vulnerable groups such as displaced persons," explains Dr. Emma Heywood. *"Radio is often their main source of information. Working with a reliable Burkinabe radio source and through active collaboration, we hope not only to raise awareness among these people of best practices relating to the Covid-19 crisis, but also to ensure that the voices of these communities are heard. "*

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links
- Fondation Hirondelle
- Analyzing the impact of radio to counter COVID-related misinformation in Burkina Faso

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reports

Using positive messages to combat the climate of uncertainty

ACSIAM launches its campaign "express your emotions and support each others", March 2020. Acisam

In El Salvador, the crisis set in motion by the coronavirus has highlighted the authoritarian leadership style of President Nayib Bukele. He was one of the first Latin American heads of state to declare a state of national emergency and impose strict measures to contain the pandemic as early as March 11. He took to Twitter to ruthlessly order the military and police force to arrest anyone who violated the home-based quarantine without a valid reason. This resulted in upward of 4,000 people being temporarily locked up for up to 30 days in so-called quarantine centers, which were provisionally set up in sports facilities and assembly halls.

Yet the government's information policy was confusing, with the President's daily press conferences adding more to overall uncertainty than to the dissemination of reliable information on the pandemic. The effects of this were major civilian uncertainty, panic, and fear, but also anger at the violation of civil rights. The contradictory flood of information in the media and on social media platforms only added to this dynamic.

Grassroots organization ACISAM, a partner organization of terre des hommes schweiz, responded quickly to this climate of fear with an online campaign on dealing with feelings. As an organization specialized in preventing violence, ACISAM reacted to the lockdown within just a few days. After all, the cramped situations during quarantine carry a high risk of escalating violence, especially in a context already characterized by this kind of atmosphere. It disseminated practical information via village radios and social media: How do I deal with tense situations at home? What methods can I use to relax and how can I cope with stress? How do we talk about our emotions so that we do not take them out in the form of violence toward one another? In the Covid-19 crisis, ACISAM is therefore drawing on its experiences with trauma work in the period following the civil war in the 90s. Even back then, the organization developed innovative approaches to providing people with psychological support for them to overcome traumatic experiences from the war. In the uncertain times of the pandemic, they put their expertise in promoting mental health and violence prevention to good use in creative online campaigns.

With simple messages and positive imagery, they offer an antithesis in a communications landscape shaped by fear and sensationalist reporting. The campaign focuses on calling individuals to deal with their feelings openly, thus mitigating psychological stress and the risks of domestic violence in the extreme situation of lockdown. Messages on active listening and communication skills are to help families learn to better cope with the extraordinary situation. The topic of gender roles regarding care work in the pandemic are also addressed with depictions of role models.

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Development Policy and Prevention of Violence

links
- Terre des hommes Switzerland
- BBC article about repression in El Salvador

Rumor Control & Hate Speech in South Sudan

Bentiu IDP site on fire, April 2014. Nonviolent Peaceforce

In April 2014 I was standing in the ruins of what had been the Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) office in a town called Bentiu in South Sudan. The latest civil war was only five months old, the fighting still fierce, escalating in fact and the struggle for territorial control meant that strategic locations like Bentiu were changing hands every few weeks. The destruction of the town's infrastructure was profound. This included the compound where our team had lived and worked for years. The building had sustained heavy shelling damage, there had been fire inside and anything of value was looted. As I took it in my eyes rested on writing on the walls that had not been there before. All along the damaged walls were messages of hate. "Death will come to all Nuer scum" signed with a name and age, *Chol, age 16. Next to a message that read "God hates Dinka like rats" signed with a name and age, *James, age 17" And so it went. Messages written in local languages and in English, in schoolboy style, messages left to each other from the generation that was supposed to be leading South Sudan into a peaceful future.

As we know now, this was just the beginning of a war that South Sudan is still, today six years later, trying to end. It was also early signs of a campaign of hate speech that would serve as fuel to the violence rolling out across the country. Those handwritten messages, although horrific did not have much of an audience. What came later was the widespread use of radio and social media, used to instruct people to take up violence, to spread false information to trigger escalations, and to whittle down groups into increasingly smaller and more entrenched identities. It soon became clear that the spread of hate speech was becoming nearly as dangerous as the proliferation of weapons. NP's violence reduction

program needed to take this aspect into account to tackle the overall issue in an impactful way. To this end, we drew upon rumor control, one of the tools of unarmed civilian protection (UCP).

NP originally developed rumor control work in South Sudan because the level of technology was so low, communities were reacting to strictly limited information. In villages with no phone or internet access, groups would displace from their homes, abandoning their crops, separating from loved ones based on rumors that they had no access to verify. Utilizing NP's capacity to move between villages and to draw upon widespread, nonpartisan relationships, it became increasingly possible to bring information and more importantly to bring credible messengers together. In the context of the war, while these micro-local rumors continued to be a challenge, there was a surge in the use of digital technology in conjunction with the hardening of messaging. We adapted by supporting local protection groups to access technology to x-check and counter message, to raise awareness about the impact of social media, both good and bad, and the prevalence of false news. While chasing down hate speech traveling at the speed of light has been interesting and, in many cases, impactful, the one thing that remains consistently true is that there is nothing more important than human relationships. Trust, credible messengers, and consistent contact are essential to breaking down rumors and hate, whether sitting under a mango tree, broadcasting on radio waves, or going viral on the internet.

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links
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reports
An app for peaceful local development

Young people communicating via the online platform. Brücke · Le pont

Young people in Northeast Brazil are committing themselves to peaceful coexistence in their region with the help of a specifically developed app, *Nestante*, through which they can share problems and creative solutions.

Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, Brazil was struggling with an extremely tense political,

social, and economic situation. Those living in rural areas, such as the state of Piauí, have been overlooked by public policy for years and have poor access to education and health care. Jobs in the formal sector are scarce and income is low. With a lack of prospects, many young people fall into a life of crime and drug addiction.

To counteract this trend, Brücke · Le pont is committing itself to providing vocational training and promoting labor-market integration, as well as to improving the framework conditions for decent work.

Social communication as an opportunity

Working together with its partner organization Instituto Comradio, Brücke · Le pont is supporting a project in Piauí to train disadvantaged young people in social communication. The focus is on offering young people career prospects in the emerging communications sector while at the same time raising their awareness of social, political, and environmental issues. This education should allow them to play an active role in their community and commit themselves to local development and peaceful coexistence.

An app honored by the UN

The project survives on the networking of young people with like-minded people. In 2018, the Instituto Comradio developed the Nestante app for this purpose. Young people can use this app to publish messages, photos, short update videos, or problems from their communities. The information can be filtered by place and topic, meaning young people with the same concerns or from the same region can talk, develop solutions together, and share good practices. The platform is managed by voluntary project alumni, who check and approve the uploaded material. They also use the information as a basis for reports and interviews that they broadcast to society through local media. In 2019, Nestante was awarded an Innovation Prize by the United Nations Development Program in Brazil.

Focus on human communication

The app is widely used and, for Jessé Barbosa, President of Instituto Comradio, is an important source of information on the needs of the young people in the region and on what is happening in their communities. For him, technology is a means to an end: "Even though we use the Internet as the tool, the focus is on human communication. The project requires the active participation of young people – after all, the change we want to foster is implemented in real and not virtual life. The Internet is useful, but not indispensable."

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links
- Brücke · Le pont: Project Comradio
- Instituto Comradio: Nestante

Innovative processes and existing platforms

Artem Podrez/Pexels

In the necessary work of digital peacebuilding, innovation isn't confined to building new tools and products, but also includes the directive to use existing tools in new ways, reaching more and different audiences and creating new opportunities for collaboration and connection. In the example this article shares, the digital tools are video conferencing and a learning management system, both long-existing and currently ubiquitous. The process, however, is Virtual Exchange, where global education and digital peacebuilding meet to use ICTs to create opportunities for large-scale online dialogue and collaboration.

Over the past five years, the Sharing Perspectives Foundation (SPF) has innovatively used virtual exchange as an inclusive pedagogical approach to engage 10,000 participants from more than hundred countries in what has amounted to thousands of facilitated sessions in sustained online dialogue processes. When participants sign up for one of SPF's open online courses i.e. 'European Refuge(es),' 'Youth, Peace, and Security,' 'The Big Climate Movement,' etc., they are arranged into small, intentionally diverse groups where they spend 5-10 weeks meeting weekly for two hour online facilitated dialogue sessions, engaging with expert content on the topic, and completing individual reflective and collaborative assignments. While students and young people are incentivized to sign up by the topical and educational value of the courses, the pedagogy of facilitating a group process through deep exchange leaves them with more: essential 21st-century skills such as cross-cultural communication and understanding, critical thinking, curiosity, and digital competencies.

The impact is a reduction of stereotypes and polarization as people gain a more open and empathic attitude towards others by learning to connect and communicate in a constructive and effective way. The means for arriving there is a new model of virtual exchange, and the digital tools are shaped to serve this process.

- *"The most important thing that I learned through my participation in this virtual exchange is that no person, place, county, race, etc. has one single story."* Male, 26, Italy
- *"I would definitely recommend others to take part in Virtual Exchange so they can break the stereotypes they see in the media and come connect with their fellows. The best part is that it was really diverse which has enriched conversation, it was like a conversation with the world."* Female, 23, Algeria

The needs for capacity building, new modes of collaboration, and facilitating sensitive conversations online are far-reaching. This is an area of peacebuilding practice that isn't reliant on the latest technical innovations; the tools already exist. And as this example demonstrates, these digital tools can offer new possibilities for the process: scale, accessibility, diversity, reach, and more. How might you put existing platforms to use for your strategic objectives? What would 'going virtual' enable for you?

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links
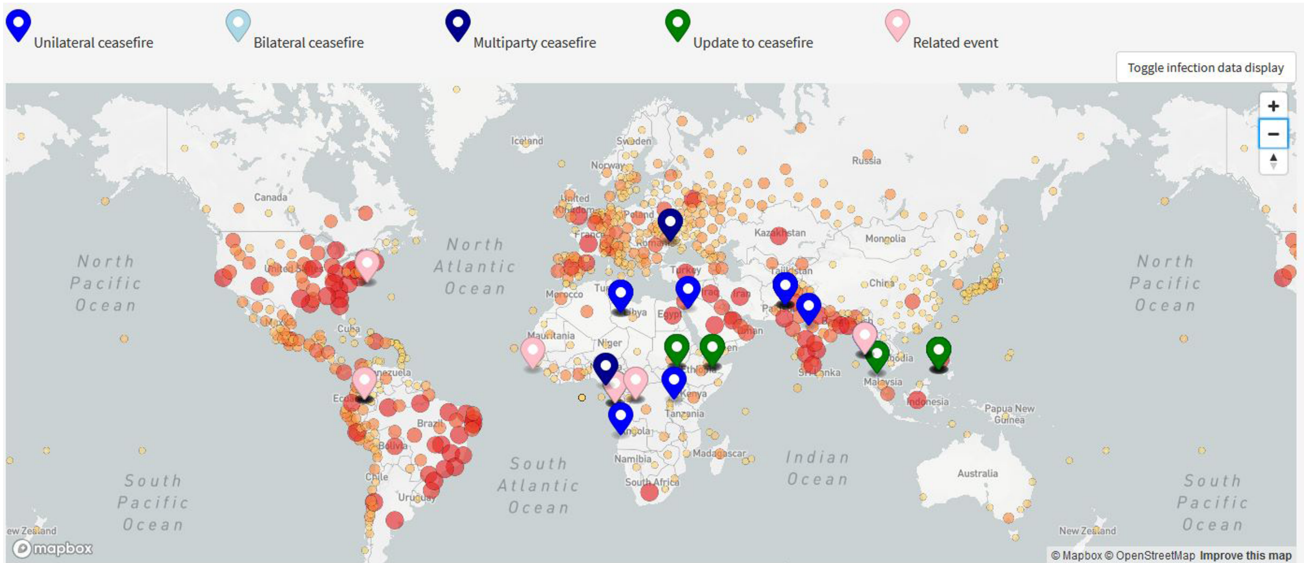- Sharing Perspectives Foundation

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reports

A virtual tool for effective

peace process support

mediatEUr and Conciliation Resources's digital tracking tool.Conciliation resources

During the global outbreak of COVID-19, adaption, and creativity in the virtual sphere has become essential for peacebuilding professionals. Building upon work done by the University of Edinburgh's Political Settlements Research Program in PeaceTech, mediatEUr, and Conciliation Resources have contributed their research skills to an innovative consortium. The latter has developed a publicly available digital tracking tool to examine the consequences of the pandemic on peace processes and armed conflict across the world.

This pioneering virtual tool entitled 'Ceasefires in a time of COVID-19' bears witness to the evolving and multi-faceted developments that have come as a response to the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres'continued call for a global ceasefire. The tracking tool allows users to easily navigate through an interactive timeline and map that monitors the progress of ceasefires alongside live data on infection rates by country. A search tool also permits users to dive more deeply into the details of each ceasefire and their respective texts, comparatively analyze the data through various criteria, consult relevant sources and connect back to past ceasefire agreements stored on the University of Edinburgh's PA-X database.

So far, research has shown that COVID-19 has not led to a sustained global cessation of conflict despite an initial surge in ceasefire announcements in nearly all continents. In many contexts, the pandemic is used as a justification for both peace and increased violence depending on the odds at hand. For example, fighting persisted in Yemen despite an agreed bilateral ceasefire, and Libya witnessed a sharp acceleration of violence. The data demonstrates the stark challenges of reaching sustained ceasefires in complex conflicts that generate enough momentum to move towards a negotiated peace agreement.

The virtual tracking tool thus functions as a reliable and rich public resource of information on ceasefires that enables experts working on peace process support and beyond to track the cessation of hostilities in real-time, accurately identify where their support can be best-placed and maintain a critical bird's-eye view of the interplay between ceasefire

developments and the evolution of the pandemic.

The digital tool has been developed by the University of Edinburgh's Political Settlements Research Program, MediatEUr (European Forum for International Mediation and Dialogue), The Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), ETH Zurich, Conciliation Resources, and the United States Institute of Peace (USIP). Further research inputs have been received by the Mediation Support Unit in the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs.

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links

- Conciliation Resources
- mediatEUr and Conciliation Resources's digital tracking tool
- United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' call for a global ceasefire

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reports

Social media and polarization

Social media is a new digital conflict driver that has exacerbated behaviors and dynamics that lead to polarization; it is also an entry point for intervention.

Polarization is a flowing, dynamic process that is inextricably mingled with conflict escalation, by which a self-reinforcing and autocatalytic spiral cooperates to separate ideologies or identity groups into increasingly distanced adversaries. As a process, it is best defined by its dynamics.

As a conflict escalates, stereotypes and vilifications emerge about the other side. Former neutral, moderating, or mediating individuals and institutions are silenced or pulled out of their central placements. Accordingly, important lines of communication and interaction that are normal to peaceful relationships are cut off, and trust diminishes. Less communication leads to less information and biased expectations about the other group increase. Because parties have fewer ties to individuals from the other group, they may feel freer to employ more severe actions or rhetoric against that group. Groups assume more rigid and radical positions that are further reinforced by in-group homogeneity and cohesiveness. Like a forceful river, people and structures are swept from their adjacent positions on the bank and pulled toward poles. Polarization is a human dynamic, happening offline long before finding new roots online.

However, the social media stream is cutting new pathways into the landscape, forming new tributaries and currents into this river. Namely, it offers two key affordances that increase polarization: (1) profiling and algorithms drive engagement; (2) nudges foster compulsion and dependency on engagement. Targeted messaging and advertising tailors political and cultural messages, usually to increase the support or cohesion of a group. Algorithms reinforce worldviews by putting like-minded content and people at the forefront and preferences content that creates more engagement. The attention-for-profit motive incentivizes this emotionally heightened content that generates outrage or dedication; persuasive tech design creates an addiction to participating in the process of polarization by engaging with that content. Furthermore, social media affordances enable new polarizing dynamics and abuses: Computational propaganda, conflict diffusion, conditions of contact, hate speech, surveillance, recruitment, and more.

The current monetization model of social media makes it unlikely that these affordances will go away any time soon, so what can we do to work within them? Use profiling and nudging to increase connection. Projects like The Commons in the USA and Maskani in Kenya show that these affordances can also allow for new access points for conflict engagement. In both examples, people are made aware of the river and its pull, and are given ideas and incentives to reverse the flow of polarization within their own networks towards more connection, more trust, constructive conversation, and inclusion online. Depolarization is also a human dynamic, and through projects like these, it is beginning to find new pathways online.

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reports

Why we should keep on building peace online

Passengers in the Philippines check social media on their smartphones while riding a mini passenger bus.
Danilo Pinzon Jr./Alamy

In these physically distanced times, we have been pushed online. For many, the pandemic has seen virtual life eclipse engagements IRL (*in real life*). We socialize, share information and connect online. Social media usage has soared according to Facebook.

As a leading global peacebuilding organization, with operations in over 25 countries, International Alert is increasingly aware of its responsibility to understand the role and impact of social media where the NGO is active and how digital technologies shape peace and conflict dynamics globally.

Prior to the pandemic, we asked participants in our 2018 Peace Perceptions Poll what enabled them to have more political agency. Social media and technology consistently

topped the list. This finding was conspicuous in its juxtaposition to the narrative that social media undermines political systems by enabling disinformation and hate speech and driving polarization. The recently released documentary, *The Social Dilemma,* neatly crystalizes this narrative.

In a new paper, *Realizing the potential of social media as a tool for building peace*, we explore the viability and limitations of utilizing social media in peacebuilding by investigating its current use in efforts to transform conflict. We draw perspectives from peacebuilders working in Lebanon, Nigeria and Philippines. While the limitations are evident, partly due to the significant role of social media in shaping and driving conflict, we suggest that it contributes to peacebuilding in three ways:

1. Social media can offer vital perspectives on conflict contexts and inform intervention design. It is a critical data source for actor and conversation mapping around conflict issues.

Peacebuilders gather data on conflict dynamics and trends. For instance, practitioners in Nigeria use social media to map actors and monitor the conversational themes linked to specific hashtags. In Lebanon, peacebuilders are researching social media narratives around refugee–host community tensions, whilst exploring the impact of social media on intercommunity conflict.

2. Social media can help amplify peaceful voices while shaping the public and political discourse, including countering fake news and threat narratives.

To combat hate speech, PeaceTech Lab works in close partnership with local peacebuilders and technology experts to identify and monitor hate lexicon on social media. They explain inflammatory language while offering alternative words and phrases that can be used to combat hate speech.

3. Social media can be used to create new spaces for people to connect, coordinate, and mobilize around peace. It can be a tool for increasing traditional dialogue.

In our Philippines program, peacebuilders use Facebook groups to informally connect and convene those with shared conflict experiences. These dialogue groups complement offline training. Aware that dialogue conducted solely online is not entirely effective, the program also uses social media as an entry point for recruiting people into in-person activities.

In actuality, social media remains peripheral in peacebuilding programs. We must explore its role in driving conflicts further and more proactively consider its potential to build peace.

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Peacebuilding Advisory Unit Director

links

in depth

Animated storytelling: a digital communication tool for peacebuilding

Image from the video "Breaking the silence of violence".Terre des hommes schweiz

The COVID-19 pandemic has transformed our working realities and the use of digital technologies in peacebuilding activities has increased a lot. It has been an opportunity to explore new digital communication methods and how we use them. Terre des hommes schweiz explores how video animations can contribute to sensitization work in peacebuilding by focusing on storytelling approaches.

Storytelling is the art of sharing stories and connecting with others. It has been a powerful tool to communicate the way we think and feel since human history. With the development of new technologies, it has become digital. An advantage of this era is that storytelling can now include new features like animation. The animation is now an accessible method to bring our stories to life through the power of visualization. Animated storytelling can be a creative approach to engage with people from different backgrounds and bring them

together. Furthermore, they allow people to resonate with our work through visually engaging and powerful material.

In its peacebuilding programs, terre des hommes schweiz puts emphasis on specific support to individuals and communities that need to cope with traumatic events, rebuild broken trust, and prevent emotional grievances from deepening. In its strategies for a culture of peace, the organization stresses the importance of psychosocial support for rebuilding social cohesion. Psychosocial support is a key approach in addressing gender-based violence and is integrated into interventions that provide "one-stop shops" integrating medical, legal, and psychological services.

Communication and sensitization on mental health issues however pose many challenges, as they remain taboo in many contexts. Adopting a storytelling approach combined with visual communication tools can be a powerful method to create emotional resonance with the audience and to encourage subtle and intangible change processes. Our findings revealed that stories have the ability to form a common thread and to infuse empathy, and that visual communication helps to convey the interconnectedness of layers of existence, of the participants' inner and outer experience. Visual storytelling creates a compelling narrative, providing the audience with a deep and emotional understanding of the processes described. It transcends rational argumentation and touches the emotional dimensions of human existence.

Visually appealing tools such as animated storytelling have enormous potential to support peacebuilding initiatives, especially when working with psychosocial support.

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links
- Terre des hommes's story "Breaking the silence of violence"
- Terre des hommes schweiz

news

New podcast by KOFF, DCAF and Paxion

KOFF, in collaboration with DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance and Paxion, released a new podcast as part of the Geneva Peace Week. This podcast, called "Connecting the dots: integrated approaches to migration, peace & security," brings together local and international perspectives from different areas (research, psychosocial support, exemplary initiatives) to discuss the relevance of the peace-migration nexus for peace policy and practice. What are the linkages between security, peace and migration? How do security approaches in migration governance affect peace(building)? By focusing on the relevance of security sector governance as a sub-aspect of migration governance, they jointly explore what characterizes the security needed in situations of displacement and examine its relevance to peace. This podcast also present and apply two recent publications concerning the nexus: The "Toolbox – addressing migration in peace policy and practice" by KOFF/swisspeace, and the policy paper "The security sector governance-migration nexus: strengthening SSG for the benefits of migrants and migration governance" commissioned by DCAF.

links

- Listen to the podcast

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news

Dealing with the Past (virtual course, 4 half-days)

Documents of the Guatemalan National Police discovered in 2005, Guatemala. Archivo Histórico de la Policía Nacional AHPN

Learn how societies emerging from violence and conflict deal with the past and prepare for the future. Apply for the Dealing with the Past (virtual course, 4 half-days), offered by swisspeace in cooperation with the University of Basel.

- understand different approaches to dealing with the past.
- get familiar with the most important notions, concepts, and mechanisms relevant to transitional justice and dealing with the past (truth commissions, archives, reparation programs, guarantees of non-recurrence, etc.).
- learn how dealing with the past processes have been designed and implemented in different contexts.
- learn about the complexities, challenges, and politics inherent in dealing with the past processes and the design of mechanisms and interventions.
- exchange experience and become part of a community of practice.

Date: November 2020 – August 2021
Application deadline: 30 November 2020

links
  - Apply now!

calendar

Events

KOFF MEMBER NEWS SITE

Upcoming events organized by KOFF member organizations can be found on our KOFF MEMBER NEWS SITE.

KOFF

Die Schweizer Plattform für Friedensförderung
La plateforme suisse de promotion de la paix
La piattaforma svizzera per la promozione della pace
The Swiss platform for peacebuilding

KOFF is a dialogue and exchange platform facilitated by swisspeace. It is jointly supported by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) and the following Swiss NGOs which are members of the platform:

ae-Centre
Alliance Sud
APRED
artasfoundation
Baha'i
Brücke · Le pont
Caritas Switzerland
Caux – Initiatives of Change
Coexistences
Foundation
cfd
DCAF
Eirene Suisse
Fondation Hirondelle
Grains of Peace
Green Cross Switzerland
Group for a Switzerland without an Army

HEKS
HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation
IAMANEH Schweiz
Interpeace
Lucerne Initiative for Peace and Security (LIPS)
medico international schweiz
MIR Switzerland
mission 21
miva – transporte l'aide
Peace Brigades International Switzerland
Peace Nexus Foundation
Peace Watch Switzerland
PeaceWomen Across the Globe
Quaker United Nations Office

Schweizerischer Katholischer Frauenbund
Solidar Suisse
SOS Children's Villages
Stiftung für Integrale Friedensförderung
Swiss Academy for Development
Swiss Catholic Lenten Fund
Swiss Peace Council
Swiss Red Cross
Swiss Refugee Council
SWISSAID
Terre des Femmes Switzerland
terre des hommes schweiz
Women for Peace Switzerland