About International Alert

International Alert helps people find peaceful solutions to conflict.

We are one of the world’s leading peacebuilding organisations, with nearly 30 years of experience laying the foundations for peace.

We work with local people around the world to help them build peace, and we advise governments, organisations and companies on how to support peace.

We focus on issues that influence peace, including governance, economics, gender relations, social development, climate change, and the role of businesses and international organisations in high-risk places.

www.international-alert.org

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International Alert’s Strategic Perspective 2015–2019
OUR VALUES AND PERSPECTIVE

International Alert is an independent, international peacebuilding organisation. Based in London and managed by an international Board of Trustees, at the time of writing we have almost thirty years’ experience of peacebuilding and work in 25 countries and territories around the world. Over the years, we have defined our three-part mission as follows:

- to work with people in conflict-affected and -threatened areas to make a positive difference for peace;
- to improve the substance and implementation of international policies relevant to peacebuilding; and
- to strengthen the peacebuilding sector.

Alert is a values-led organisation. Everybody has a right to live a life of dignity. To this end, our core values are that everybody should get fair treatment; there should be equity in access to the necessary resources of life and common goods; everybody should have the opportunity to be included in decisions about the communities and societies in which we live, both by being heard and by having their interests looked after; and everybody should behave with mutual respect.

Our organisation is made up of people who have the urge to make a difference in today’s world, so that the lived reality is more in line with our values than is the case today, and who accompany that urge with the insight to act.

We have the practice of outlining a Strategic Perspective for the organisation every five years. Its function is to describe and explain the kind of organisation that Alert wishes to be. This Strategic Perspective covers the period from the start of 2015 to the end of 2019. In it, we outline how we understand some salient features of the world scene that have an impact on our work, the broad outline of our response to the challenges entailed there, the pathways to peace where our efforts are primarily focused, the way we plan to work and the kind of organisation we would like to be. It will be a living document that we will revisit and revise as necessary to reflect how our work needs to develop given potential changes in external realities.
UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD

In what follows, we advance a view of how the world is today. We look at what makes for conflict, why conflicts escalate violently, where peace opportunities lie and how they can be embraced. To this end, here we describe things with broad brush-strokes in order to present a global ‘big picture’. However, our daily work is based on the knowledge of the local details that make up this big picture.

Expanding the zone of peace

Peace is the big, under-reported good news story of the two and half decades since the Cold War ended. There are fewer wars now than in the 1980s. There have been more peace agreements and an increasing proportion of them last longer. These gains are real but fragile. Alert is part of the story, along with many others. Over the next 20 years, we need to ensure that these gains are not lost or outweighed by new challenges and threats to peace and security.

There were approximately 30 armed conflicts in 2010 compared to 50 in 1990. After a spike in 1992/3, the annual number fell quite consistently from the mid-1990s until around 2010. The zone of peace was expanding. Not only did diplomatic activity produce more peace agreements, but peacebuilding led to a growing number of self-sustaining peace processes. This was the result of the work of many governments and organisations of all kinds, with Alert playing a small but important part in that global improvement.

The expansion of the zone of peace was real but always fragile. There was still a tragic amount of backsliding into conflict, of wars that returned. And around 2010, the expansion came to a

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standstill. From 30 that year, the number of wars spiked to 37 in 2011, falling back to 32 in 2012 and 33 in 2013. So while it is not yet clear or inevitable that this global improvement has been reversed, we do know that the positive trend has stopped.

In many cases peace agreements and the accompanying international apparatus to support their implementation have suppressed the violence but not addressed the main causes of conflict. Accordingly, the risk of a re-eruption remains. One of the best indicators of where there is risk of future violent conflict is simply identifying where there was recently violent conflict.

To go from a peace agreement to actually building peace almost always needs sustained international support, which is proving harder to come by these days. Global spending on peacekeeping is around US$10 billion each year and on peacebuilding it is around US$4 billion. This is tiny compared to global military spending, which stands at over US$1.5 trillion, and a lot smaller than spending on international development aid, which is around US$120 billion. But austerity in public spending makes spending decisions at the margin much more sensitive than they were previously.

Furthermore, the open, armed conflicts whose diminishing numbers have given grounds for optimism are only one kind of violent conflict. An authoritative estimate is that 1.5 billion people – a little over 20% of the world’s population – live in countries under the threat of large-scale, organised violence, whether perpetrated by terrorists, state forces or – mostly – by criminal gangs. In other words, the violent conflicts that are addressed by formal peace agreements and United Nations peacekeeping operations are only part of the conflict picture.

Despite these reservations, the overall picture of the last 20 years is one of positive improvement. The challenge is to keep it so in the face of rising pressures and new threats.
Rising threats to security

The world is now on the brink of a perilous phase in its history. Despite the expansion of the zone of peace from the mid-1990s until almost 2010, the potential for violence was always visible. In the second decade of the 21st century, war by terror has hit new heights of horror in the Middle East, where what seemed to many like a new democratic wave of change now seems but the prelude to a period of instability and insecurity. And conflict in Ukraine over the country’s economic and political course has become the trigger for decisively ending the already fading era of cooperation between the US and Europe on the one side and Russia on the other.

Based on recent experience, it is clear that challenges to the established order in different places around the world will arise in the name of diverse causes – democracy, regional and national autonomy, faith and cultural identity, or securing the basic conditions of life. Some of these challenges will have international repercussions, due to big powers’ economic and security interests. Many conflicts will be chaotic, multi-sided, not necessarily openly political and, in many cases, a confusing (for an outsider) amalgam of crime, politics and business.

Each will be different from the others but they will have three things in common:

• they will contest how, by whom and for what ends power is held and used;
• whether they escalate will depend on whether systemic vulnerabilities have eroded society’s capacity to manage conflicts peacefully; and
• if they escalate, ordinary people will suffer.

Politics, faith, identity and rights are the foreground factors. These are the things people fight for. If we now go through the background factors – the long-term systemic issues that increase conflict risk – it is not because we regard the foreground as less important. Far from it: in our work, much of what we do is precisely about finding ways to address these issues and how people feel about them without resorting to violence, even though the issues may have been at the heart of a violent conflict. But in order to understand and explain how we anticipate our work unfolding over the next five years, to develop our strategic view of where we should direct our efforts we need to focus on the long-term background issues.

We see three big, linked strategic issues here. They are:

• how people use natural resources;
• how people treat each other and organise their societies; and
• how people treat nature.

People, cities and resources

Humanity is a resource-hungry species. The world’s population passed the 1 billion mark in 1810, doubled in the next hundred years, and by 2010 was about 7 billion. The projection for 2030 is 9 billion. But the issue here is not pure numbers – it is resources.

When the global total reached one billion, just 3% – 30 million people – lived in cities. Today the world is 50% urbanised – that is 3.5 billion people live in cities. Current projections put the percentage in 2030 at between 60 and 70% – over 5 billion. While the world’s population increases by 100 million a year, the number of people living in cities goes up by 125 million.

Urbanisation per se is by no means bad. Cities have many problems, but their emergence and growth is strongly and directly associated with growing literacy, a deepening culture, increased cooperation and social mobilisation for progress on political rights. However, growing urbanisation is also
associated with increased output: economically, urban concentration is much more efficiently productive than rural decentralisation, which means increased consumption of natural resources.

Bar the occasional short-term spike in oil prices, natural resources got steadily cheaper throughout the 20th century. Both the rich world’s growing economic wellbeing and successful cases of economic development, such as South Korea and more recently China, were made possible in part by that downward trend in the price of the basics.

Prices declined because of greater efficiency in both the extraction and use of resources. Technological innovation is a part of the story; the West’s boundless determination to extract is also part of it. What needed to be done in order to keep the oil flowing and the mines working – whether by co-opting elites or through naked coercion – was always done.

Today, things are different. For a variety of reasons, prices are on an upward curve. Already in the 21st century, the price declines of the 20th century have been wiped out. Expert research forecasts a continuing increase in demand, and thus rising prices and competition between the major consumers, until 2030 at least. That also means increasing difficulties of supply and sharpening competition for access to key natural resources.

**Inequality**

Extreme poverty is conventionally defined as living on less than US$1.25 a day (in 2005 prices). According to the World Bank, 1.22 billion people were living below that line in 2010, down from 1.9 billion in 1990 – a major improvement, especially since the world’s total population increased in the meantime. But 2.6 billion people live on less than US$2 a day and a total of 3.5 billion – half the world’s population – on less than US$3 a day. These are hardly lavish incomes.

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Thus, while natural resources are consumed in abundance, half the world has very little. The problem is not just economic inequality but the unequal opportunities and access to what should be common goods, such as education, health services, clean water and safety, which flow from the economic facts. Further, the problem is not just inequality in all its dimensions, but the fact that today’s information and communications technologies make relative wealth, status and prestige highly visible to those at or near the bottom of the pile. This is where the seeds of resentment lie that create fertile grounds for conflict entrepreneurs of all kinds.

Countries where inequality is sharpest are often countries where inequality both fuels and is fuelled by the root and branch corruption of the governing system. Inequality is not a natural accident; it is a system of wealth and privilege that has been constructed, is actively defended and has been getting consistently stronger for the last 40 years.

Climate change and nature

For the past 20 years there has been a consensus that global policy on climate change should aim to keep the increase in average global temperature to less than 2°C above pre-industrial temperatures. Today, the 2°C world seems a fading dream and even if the world economy is decarbonised at an impossible rate, the consequences of previous greenhouse gas emissions will keep unfolding for decades to come. The consequent changes in our natural environment will have social, economic and, in many places, political effects.

As increasing numbers of experts have argued, and is now authoritatively recognised, the interaction of the changing climate with other features of the socio-economic and political landscape offers new challenges to human security. Climate change is bringing more slow-onset pressures such as droughts, shifts in the timing of the monsoon in parts of south and southeast Asia, and hotter summers and wetter winters in temperate zones. There will also be an increasing frequency and severity of sudden shocks – the extreme weather events such as hurricanes, typhoons and cyclones.

These will put pressure on four strategic systems that are essential for the way we live:

- water supply;
- and therefore also food security;
- energy supply; and
- natural resource supply chains.

These systems are also under pressure from other human-impelled changes in nature, such as the loss of biodiversity and the effects of different kinds of pollution. These changes combine to create many unknowns in the natural environment; in the long-term, economic progress is pushing up against the planetary boundaries of sustainability. It is not that life will become impossible, though some habitats will become functionally uninhabitable. Rather, these four strategic systems will become more vulnerable, more costly and more complex. We know this to be true because it is already happening.
Beyond zone of uncertainty (high risk)
In zone of uncertainty (increasing risk)
Below boundary (safe)
Boundary not yet quantified

FACING UP TO THE CHALLENGES

There is much more to say about the world today and, indeed, about each of the three issues – resources, inequality and the environment – touched on above. Here, we are primarily interested in what effects changes in these areas will have on Alert’s work.

The short conclusion is that we foresee an increasing need for peacebuilding expertise in more difficult conditions. The analysis outlined above suggests that human progress is at risk of being undermined by a combination of many changes coming at once – some willed and some forced upon society – and the consequent stress.

It is hard to manage stressful change without adequate institutions and systems for doing so, which are lacking or deficient in many countries. The combined impact of interacting demographic, economic and natural changes, moreover, will occur at every level, from the village and the street to the global system. And deficiencies in resilience are likewise to be found at every level.

Local, national and international arrangements and institutions that have functioned reasonably well to date now face challenges they were not designed nor equipped to face. Furthermore, this is happening against the background of political change and instability in both countries and the global balance of power alike.

None of these problems is in principle insuperable. Even if the underlying trends of growing urbanisation, growing inequality and increasing global temperatures persist, the challenges they throw up can be met.

However, at the same time as these economic, social and natural problems mount, there is increasing pressure in many places against exactly those organisations and agencies that want to describe the problems and do something about them. The space for civil society is getting narrower in many countries, especially where the problems are sharpest. This inhibits open debate, which in turn constrains the flow of new ideas and creativity for generating new solutions.
OUR ROLE

Alert has a well-established expertise both in working in conflict countries and in designing policy initiatives at the international level. We have an extensive network of partner organisations. We have experience and capacity in dialogue, capacity-building, strategic accompaniment of partner organisations, research and advocacy, and targeted outreach. Looking at the world today and the unfolding trends, where do we focus now?

Strategic implications

The headline strategic implications of the analysis advanced in extremely telegraphic terms above are, firstly, that the highest insecurity is where risks cluster. For example, where the impact of climate change on water supply and food interacts with the aftermath of violent conflict, poor governance and huge inequality. The interests and positions of the conflict parties do not always reflect these risks. As indicated above, they are instead articulated in terms of politics, faith and identity. When outside interests are present, such as when natural resources are abundantly available or strategic reasons make an area particularly important to one or other of the big powers, the external powers very often become the focus of antagonism and their interests are a complicating factor.

Understanding how these risk clusters work, i.e. how the different elements of risk interact with each other, is fundamental to conflict analysis and to understanding what can be done to build peace in any particular context. The capacity to respond to challenges is necessary but not enough and relying on crisis response is truly inadequate. It is essential to meet emerging problems upstream.

In this age of growing long-term risk, the international community as a whole needs to be better at risk management. It is a truism of public health that prevention is better than cure. And it is a truism of international politics that preventing wars is cheaper than helping to end them and supporting recovery. But we live in a political culture of immediacy that often makes it hard to get a hearing for the case that it is worthwhile to spend taxpayers’ money to prevent wars that, to be strictly honest, might not happen.

In order to be able to meet problems upstream, there need to be strong advocates for the case for conflict risk management. This argument must be heard both in policy circles and in the public realm. Thus, Alert has a responsibility not only to be able to contribute practically to risk management in conflict-affected and threatened countries, but also to be able to make the case for long-term conflict risk management, and to do so among governments and inter-governmental organisations and in general public discussion.

Even when it is possible to focus attention on the long-range issues and prepare to work to prevent worse problems from emerging, there are difficulties. Not least among them, the range of possible tasks is very wide and demanding, and no single actor, whether a state, inter-governmental organisation or non-governmental organisation (NGO), should try to do it all. Furthermore, Alert was founded and has its headquarters in a country that has its own problems, as the 2011 riots reminded everybody; it has never been either possible or appropriate to approach conflicts anywhere as if it is possible to bring ready-made solutions to them from a place that knows all the answers.
It is necessary to have a sense of the scale of the issues that need to be tackled and to work in partnership with others, with each actor prioritising and focusing on what it does well. As well as project partners, Alert works in extended networks of cooperation with like-minded actors – national and international NGOs, governments, inter-governmental organisations, universities and research institutions, and the private sector. Cooperation and partnership are essential components of how we work. Second, the multiplicity of tasks, the long-term perspective surrounding them and the multiple players involved in addressing them means that assessing the impact of any one organisation’s work is in itself a demanding task. Yet to make the case for the work being supported, clear illustrations and explanations of impact are required.

The preceding paragraphs sketch out the thinking behind Alert’s three mission goals – working in conflict countries, in policy circles and to strengthen the peacebuilding sector – and two of our continuing, fundamental organisational priorities – to work in partnership with others and to keep improving the monitoring and evaluation of our work. We will now look at how we aim to bring about change.

Theory of change

Alert has no single theory about how change happens in all the conflict-affected and -threatened countries where we work. We have long understood the importance of bringing a context-specific approach to our work. At the same time, experience has also told us that there are general lessons to learn, principles to apply, ethical codes to comply with and best practices to implement. While every conflict is unique, there are always similarities with others. The whole is unique, but the parts may be quite familiar. As a result, Alert has an approach rather than a crisp theory that we try to apply across the board.

Societies go through different kinds of change, driven to a lesser or greater extent by a change strategy. Peacebuilding is one type of social change strategy. At Alert we have a vision of peace and a general approach to peacebuilding that we express in our Programming Framework.2

Our vision of peace is that it is a situation in which people can pursue conflicts without violence and harm to themselves or others. In other words, it is not conflict that is the problem, but violence. Indeed, conflict is often a necessary condition for making social progress, and the ability to manage conflicts peacefully is an important means by which we do so.

Peace is recognisable not exclusively or even primarily by evidence that people are resolving conflicts and differences peacefully, but also by the presence of a number of ‘peace factors’. These are the conditions that encourage people to handle conflicts peacefully and prevent serious problems from emerging, as well as offering many other shared goods. We have encapsulated these thoughts in five peace factors that we use to inform our programming. They draw on the idea of human security and ‘positive peace’ (a peace that is more than just the absence of violence). They express both what we aim for and how we assess whether a society is indeed moving in a peaceful direction. The peace factors tell us to look at:

- whether power is organised and leadership is used for the common good, and what degree of voice and accountability ordinary citizens have;
- how safe and secure people are, i.e. the degree of human security;
- whether ordinary citizens have access to a reasonable degree of prosperity;
- whether ordinary citizens have access to a fair system of justice based on laws that meet the common interest; and
- how well and fairly people’s wellbeing is looked after.

2 Available at http://www.international-alert.org/resources/publications/programming-framework
Running through these five peace factors are our values of equity, fairness, inclusion and respect for human dignity, and with that the importance of human relationships that are fulfilling and functional for peace. These lead to the view that conflicts can and should be resolved peacefully as much as is humanly possible, i.e. that every effort should be bent to that end. And where and when that proves impossible, every effort must be devoted to returning to a situation in which violence does not threaten every person’s safety and wellbeing, and in which conflicts can be handled by dialogue, discussion, the law and settlement.

These peace factors are all about the long term. Our analysis – indeed, beyond the specifics of the analysis, the very mode of analysis; the way in which we think about the world – leads to placing particular emphasis on long-term developments. While political leaders’ decisions are required to make these unfold positively, to sustain or protect them, they do not come about at the flick of a leader’s switch. Similarly, while peace is most likely and strongest when many individuals gear their actions toward peacebuilding, the effects of activism are not necessarily either quick or linear. Rather, change is indirect, incremental and cumulatively transformative.

This accords with what we know from the history of how social and economic progress has happened and continues, and how political and legal rights have been recognised, are applied and become entrenched. The process for achieving this change is focused on institutions – both formal and informal. These are the arrangements that are made to meet the needs of society and that become mechanisms of social order; they include institutions that are part of the state as well as ones that are not, and they include formal organisations as well as networks and group relationships. They can be conservative or the motors of social change. They are to be found in every walk of life.

We focus on the world of formal and informal institutions because this is where it is possible to get at the issues that influence what drives leaders’ choices and that can help state authority to become more citizen-based and accountable. And here equally it is possible to address the factors that drive choices that people make in their efforts to secure a life of dignity. How institutions at all levels – government, international politics, community relations and service provision – operate defines whether people have viable livelihoods, security and can get a hearing when grievances arise. How institutions work therefore influences whether ordinary people feel they have little or no alternative to violence as a means to protect and advance their interests or, by contrast, whether avenues of peaceful resolution are available to them – ones in which they can have confidence.

**How we work**

Guided by this general approach to peacebuilding strategy, Alert develops theories of change for each environment in which we work and each activity that we undertake.

Our analysis takes us from the contextual needs if peace is to be consolidated, to the openings for particular actors to make a difference if they are so minded and resourced to do so, to identifying specific partners and actions. In some contexts and at some times, this involves identifying champions with whom we can make coalitions. At other times, in other places, it involves convening a forum for discussion and exchange of perspectives and ideas, to find common ground and see whether any cooperation is possible. Or it involves helping people understand what their opportunities for a more peaceful future and a better life could be, and helping them to take them up. This includes working in ways that allow people to open their emotions in the process of changing how they relate to issues and differences that could potentially create disputes and escalate them.
We work with individuals to change institutions so as to influence the environment, including not least the institutional environment, which is itself key for development and peace.

Our approach to this work is deliberately generalist. We always want to know how the activities we are able to get involved in with partners fit into an overall picture of managing conflict risk and building peace in each of the countries where we work. That requires generalist knowledge even though, in a specific place, we may occupy a much narrower niche. Thus, while our work in a given country may emphasise only two or three dimensions of the conflict issues – for example, local cross-border trade, mutual misunderstandings and community security – our analysis of the issues goes much further. Without this, our work could not be strategic.

Over the years, Alert has become proficient at working in a variety of different situations. While our emphasis is always on the long term, that does not preclude us from working in crisis situations. It simply means that while others focus on the short-term needs for resolving the crisis with as little harm done as possible, Alert is persistently looking to the future, asking what needs to be started now to make for a more peaceful future. Often, while others ask how to resolve the crisis, we ask how to resolve it in a way that makes future crises less likely. We are, therefore, active not only in the wake of peace agreements, but also during violent conflicts, and in the period when there has been no open violence but the risk is there and we are among those trying to mitigate it.

For us to do this we have five main methods:

- **Dialogue** is at the heart of much of what we do. Dialogue is more than an exchange of views and feelings; it is or can be a way to build a better understanding of what unites and what divides, and how to co-exist and even thrive together despite the differences. It is at the heart of the idea of conflict-sensitivity that runs through almost all our work – helping people shape how they and their institutions behave so as to avoid conflicts escalating and encourage peacebuilding. Dialogue is the foundation on which practical, shared action can be built and through which a degree of trust can grow, even in the seemingly least propitious of circumstances.

- **Research** has many functions for us. At its core, research ensures that our work is based on a solid understanding of the issues. It is often published as a contribution to a wider community’s discussion and understanding, both in a country at risk of conflict but also on broader, global issues for a wide readership. We conduct country-specific and issue-specific research as well as tackling broad, general problems of peacebuilding and development. Most of our published work is policy analysis, some is scholarly research.

- **Capacity-building** is a basic activity undertaken by many peacebuilding and development agencies. For us, the most important parts of capacity-building are not to do with hardware and management systems but, rather, are about providing training in peacebuilding and conflict-sensitivity. Organisations and agencies that are very capable in other fields often turn to us with this need. Alert brings to capacity-building the ability to draw on international comparisons to deepen an organisation or community’s insights into the dilemmas it faces and possible ways forward.

- **Accompaniment** is the term we give to the next phase beyond capacity-building, when we work for an extended period with an organisation or community, providing a neutral space for it to first come together, and then accompanying it through its establishment and growth. The details of accompaniment activities are shaped by the needs of the organisation and its local environment. Over time, accompaniment becomes more and more of an equal relationship and a strategic partnership.
Targeted outreach takes our analysis of a policy issue or of a specific country context to those constituencies that need to understand it and that have an appetite to act upon it.

We work both on the ground and in the international arena, as both a practical hands-on NGO and as a source of expert, evidence-based policy advice. Our particular niche is not merely to operate at both levels but to connect and mediate between them. In all this work, we place great emphasis on partnerships and networking. In most of our programme countries, we have small teams (under 20) but can nonetheless have a significant impact because our emphasis on working in partnerships produces a multiplier effect.
Alert’s focus over the next five years will be on seven interlinked pathways to peace. These are based on our understanding of the international achievement of expanding the zone of peace since the end of the Cold War, the fragility of that achievement plus the new challenges to human security that are now unfolding. It will also draw on our experience of peacebuilding over almost 30 years – and therefore the capacity and expertise we now have.

These pathways are not the conventionally-defined, cross-cutting themes of peacebuilding. Rather, they are the issue areas through which we anticipate the defining long-term developments influencing peace prospects will unfold in multiple countries where we can usefully have an impact. They are the areas of definitive stressful change in the coming period and therefore need to be approached with sensitivity to their conflict risks and peace opportunities. They are the areas where we will focus the bulk of our effort over the coming years.

They are:

1. Relations within and between communities
2. Natural resource management
3. Crime, violence and instability
4. The impact of climate change
5. Gender
6. Citizenship and the state
7. The political economy
RELATIONS WITHIN AND BETWEEN COMMUNITIES

Whether as a prelude to or product of violent conflict, distrust and hatred between different groups blocks peaceful progress. This is where our understanding of the granular details, which combine to constitute the big trends on which our global analysis focuses, come to the fore. The lines of division within and between communities take different forms – primarily identity, faith and allegiance – and their salience varies depending on the place, time and kind of community in question. External developments, such as conflict in the region and the consequent arrival of refugees, may put sudden pressure on what have hitherto been tolerably good relations, exacerbating every flaw in them. When it is possible for actually or potentially hostile groups to get together and identify at least some elements of shared interest and act on them, the prospects for peace can be strengthened – even while the violence continues.

- **Our role**
  We work with community members to help understand how they are connected and divided, aiming to improve mutual confidence and thus, overall, strengthen their confidence in the idea that their voices matter for peace.

- **To date**
  Alert has worked with local communities in many countries. We have mixed taking our lead from local partners who identify what issues they find most important with introducing them to modes and techniques of work with which they are not familiar. Working all the time in close cooperation with local partner organisations, in Rwanda we work on microfinance and reconciliation in villages; in Lebanon, Nepal and the Philippines on community security; and in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Guinea and Liberia on how communities can get their voice heard in a national peace process.

- **Next steps**
  We now plan to extend this work. We will both assess openings more consistently across all our country programmes and emphasise the transfer of knowledge and experience between our country teams. We will also link this work to the other six pathways, all of which provide openings for cooperation, and thus for work on relations within and between communities.
NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Our analysis shows that how natural resources are exploited is a major determinant of international conflict risk. Where economically exploitable natural resources are available, international investors will always be interested. Their presence can be positive, but is often experienced by local populations as a profound negative. If national governments cannot manage their natural resources, they will be pushed around by big powers and corporations. And if populations cannot properly participate in managing resources, they will be pushed around by whoever controls the state’s levers of power. This is not only an issue of the management of extractive industries – though that is of very high priority. It is also about access to land and water, not just for people living in rural areas but also in cities, where that access is just as important though the issues and disputes that arise around it take a different shape.

- **Our role**
  We link different stakeholders – companies, national and local authorities, communities and NGOs – to promote a better understanding of the risks and opportunities associated with natural resource wealth, and thus promote conflict-sensitive policies and practices.

- **To date**
  Alert has worked with a number of large transnational extractive companies to help them develop and adopt conflict-sensitive business practices. We have also worked on national and global policy issues with corporations, governments, other NGOs and the UN system, bringing diverse stakeholders together in several countries to deepen mutual understanding and improve the conflict-sensitivity of their behaviour.

- **Next steps**
  We now plan to do more simultaneously at the local community and national government levels and with big companies to bring them into better contact with each other. While Alert cannot broker these relationships, we can convene and help guide their encounters, both to avoid common pitfalls and so that international investment becomes a genuine plus for local development. This entails, among other things, developing a stronger voice with some of the major international companies.
We are not alone in becoming increasingly aware, on the one hand, of how crime, violence and the wider social and political instability they can produce threaten peace processes and, on the other hand, of how they diminish human security, even where there has been no open armed conflict. Achievements in expanding the zone of peace since the end of the Cold War face significant risk from the intersection of crime and politics in many countries. In some places, these issues are associated with fast-paced urbanisation, in others with the marginalisation of remote rural areas, and in some with both. This is an area of violent conflict that can no longer be packed away out of sight as simply a matter for better policing; it is one of the determining factors in development and human security. Our programming is increasingly addressing this aspect of the social reality.

**Our role**
Through research, we open up the questions of how the field of peacebuilding should pay attention to the issue of crime and violence, and how those primarily concerned about keeping the social peace should pay attention to the broader field of peacebuilding. As this work develops, our research findings will shape projects and activities.

**To date**
Alert published a major report in 2014 on crime as a peacebuilding issue, outlining the interlinkages and potential lines of approach, and convened a series of consultations on how to address the issues. We have conducted research and pilot projects in a variety of locations, including Mali, Pakistan and the Philippines.

**Next steps**
We now plan to operationalise the insights and recommendations our research has produced and to mainstream work on crime, violence and instability across the organisation. In doing so, we will develop a practical understanding of how peacebuilding and initiatives in this field can be integral to each other.
THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE

The consequences of the past two centuries of carbon emission and other drivers of climate change will be with humanity for a long time to come, even if we do manage to change our economic ways. It is not the only environmental challenge humanity faces, but it is the fundamental one, as it will have an impact on the very basis of how we live – on the supply of water, food, energy and natural resources. Adaptation is crucial and it must be conflict-sensitive, which means building resilience. Growing resilience to climate change is a social process that has other value as well – for example, for handling conflict peacefully and responding to international economic downturns without exacerbating social inequality.

■ Our role
We bring together different groups, including academics, government officials and activists, to share insights and deepen understanding of the linkages between climate change and insecurity. Our evidence-based advocacy contributes to consolidating a much-needed shift in thinking among governments towards recognising the links and acting on them to enhance human security.

■ To date
Alert has become an important source of knowledge and understanding about the implications of climate change for human security, producing analysis of international policy challenges and opportunities, and research on the local security effects of climate change in a number of locales. Some of this research is now being published in peer-reviewed scholarly journals. Our advocacy on climate change has reached the G7 governments.

■ Next steps
We now plan to extend the focus and reach of our research and policy analysis while maintaining its quality, and find ways to link it to the practical work of our country programmes so that they can be part of the effort to develop conflict-sensitive climate policies and climate-proof peacebuilding programmes.
To get to grips with these issues, communities, organisations, individuals and societies as a whole need to get to grips with gender. How we grow as people – as women and as men – has a critical effect on what sort of societies we can build and, especially, how we handle conflict. The dominance of competitive, aggressive and violent models of masculinity is part of what puts the social peace at risk. It does so at the local level and on a world scale, as videoed examples of horrifying actions can easily remind us. Like everything else, gender is not the sole determinant, but ignoring it is not an option.

**Our role**

We help people and institutions understand that gender is part of what shapes attitudes and behaviour around peace and conflict issues. We also participate in designing and implementing activities that enhance peace prospects by influencing the behaviour of those who are – or could be – key peacebuilding actors.

**To date**

Alert was one of the leading forces in getting gender onto the international peacebuilding agenda some 15 years ago. More recently, we have grown increasingly uneasy with the tendency to put it in a box marked ‘greater women’s participation’. While essential, this is not enough. This discomfort led us to prepare a major report published in 2014 that explored evidence of peacebuilding groups taking a wider, deeper and more creative approach to gender issues, addressing fundamental attitudes about identity in conflict-affected environments.

**Next steps**

We now plan to both ensure the widest possible dissemination and discussion of our findings, and translate those insights and recommendations into operational terms. During the coming period we will first pilot and test programming approaches exploring the gender dimensions of violence and conflict, and then attempt to establish long-term programming that addresses those issues in practical ways.
CITIZENSHIP AND THE STATE

The strength of institutions, especially local ones, both formal and informal, determines the quality of responses to the key conflict risks of today and the near future. These are the social and political resources that make it possible to manage conflicts, whatever their sources. The state is also indispensable. It is true, long-term stability cannot be imposed; it has to grow. But it has to grow both to the top and at the top. There has to be space for civil society, but it is not in that space alone that the issues are settled. What matters is the relationship among citizens and between citizens and authority in forming, building and occupying the state in a way that replaces arbitrary rule with accountable authority.

Our role
We help citizens to develop, and become habituated to, collaboration on problems that affect their lives, and through this better equip them to engage with state authorities on those issues while also working with government agencies so they will be more likely to listen to the voices of their citizens.

To date
Alert has worked in a way that is informed by this strategic view of how states are built and, through citizen dialogues, training and accompaniment programmes, has helped strengthen the civil society space and the openness of state authorities to civil society organisations.

Next steps
We now plan to extend and deepen this work. We will increase the scale of our activities. We will look at the intersection of politics and criminal trafficking and the so-called ‘hard’ security issues that arise in policing. And we will find ways to confront – more directly, though not more provocatively, than we have in the past – the temptation that political elites feel to close down civil society space when problems threaten political, economic or social progress.
THE POLITICAL ECONOMY

Changes happen through the interaction of all of the above. All are both influencing and influenced by the way that power is shaped, held and wielded in society. Power in all its dimensions – from economic through political to cultural – and at all levels – from the state to the local community – is important here. For peace to strengthen and become self-sustaining, the whole development trajectory must be conflict-sensitive. Thus, to build peace we must both understand and act on the political economy of the places where we work.

Our role
By understanding how politics and economic power intersect, we tease out opportunities for creating incentives for peaceful change among power holders, and seek to identify and avoid risks of counter-productive reactions.

To date
We have addressed the issue in policy analysis and research reports, while systematically exploring it over an extended period in two specific countries – the Philippines and Uganda. And although we, like many others, consistently refer to the importance of conflict countries’ political economy, we have found few ways and opportunities in which we can work programmatically on it. Our work on peace and the economy has primarily focussed on extractive industries, cross-border trade, and opportunities for securing livelihoods and reconciliation through small businesses.

Next steps
We now plan to initiate a major report on developing the economy to meet the needs of peace. Like previous work on climate and security, on gender, on conflict-sensitivity and on crime, violence and instability, we will use this as the basis for new programming during the next five years. The outlines of this work are as yet unclear.
Above we have set out a challenging programme of work, prioritising seven pathways to peace. These are the issue areas in which decisive progress towards or regress from peace will occur and issue areas that we can influence.

By 2020, when the next five-year Strategic Perspective will be introduced, we plan to be a somewhat larger organisation as measured by the number of countries we work in, the number of issue areas we cover, the number of activities we mount, the number of partners, our staff numbers and our financial turnover. We plan to achieve this growth while enhancing the quality and impact of our work. To do this we will also need to improve our outreach and strengthen our fundraising. The details of these plans and targets will be expressed in our business plan.

We will continue to undertake practical work on the ground and policy work in the international arena and to occupy our particular niche of linking the two levels and mediating their contact. We will continue to work through partnerships and with strong, extended networks of cooperation. We will continue to work in, on and through formal and informal institutions and we will continue to be at work in a wide range of situations – where violence looms, where it has exploded, and where the major violence has ended but problems persist.

We will also continue to base our work both on our detailed knowledge of the places where we work and the issues we address, and on our underlying values of equity, fairness, social inclusion and respect for human dignity.

These commitments are based on what we have learned since we were founded nearly 30 years ago. That experience is what equips us and our partners to face the sharp challenges that peace faces in the coming 30.