January - March 2020

Dear Friends of Conflict Dynamics,

COVID-19 – What won’t change with our work, and what will

**Keeping people at the center.** People are at the center of everything Conflict Dynamics does. We remain true to our founding mission to serve people affected by conflict and crisis. From local clan disputes to transitional governance arrangements to the COVID-19 pandemic, we continue to work with people where we can be most helpful, not just where the international media spotlight happens to fall. The people who make up our CDI family live and work in Somalia, Sudan, Kenya, Nigeria, the United States, and Europe. We are taking every precaution to keep our staff (and the people we work to assist) healthy and safe at home.

**Trusted working relationships.** Trust is earned, not granted. We build trust when we meet people where they are, not where it’s convenient for us to be. We are determined to stay the course that has built that trust. After over a decade of work in both Somalia and the Sudan, we remain committed to providing tools and guidance to develop processes to overcome challenges. This guidance will generate plans to address the new obstacles COVID-19 presents to our work, and it will build confidence and trust in each other’s ideas.

**Versatility.** We work in complex political environments with multiple parties and in remote field locations. Each context has taught CDI staff to be comfortable engaging actors in a wide array of settings from the frontline to the conference room. From academia to program design, negotiation to crisis management, we are as comfortable in Darfur as we are in Geneva. This familiarity and nimbleness will allow us to continue our work while navigating the uncertainty of the pandemic.

**Our mission remains the same, our approach adapts**

**Communication and engagement.** Disputes and wars don’t always abate during even the most universal threats to humankind, so our work can’t stop either. While we can’t meet in person, our staff is finding other ways of engaging, including virtual convening and shuttle dialogues. The tenacity and creativity of our staff and partners is energizing as we work to adjust to the new normal. We will continue to work with and strengthen the role of national peace practitioners who have the most access to people in their contexts, as we have always done.

**Cooperation to address exploitation.** We know that the COVID-19 pandemic and national and international responses can be exploited for purposes of exclusion and gaining power or resources. Conversely, it can mobilize people to set aside their differences, investigate the roots of the inequality and exclusion COVID-19 amplifies, and tackle a common threat. We are orientating ourselves towards the opportunities, while preparing to mitigate the potential negatives.

**Expansion and resilience.** As people are mobilized around the common objective to address the COVID-19 pandemic, we can offer guidance on inclusivity and participation to aid parties to conflict in resolving their differences and minimizing effects of the pandemic. Despite global lockdowns and travel restrictions, life goes on and we remain committed to ensuring that political accommodation and humanitarian engagement remain a priority.

A heartfelt thanks to our staff, partners, and all of the peace and humanitarian practitioners who are continuing their vital work. And, as always, thank you for your support and interest in our work. I wish you good health and resilience.

Gerard Mc Hugh
Founder and President
Visiting Partners in Somalia

MOGADISHU - Arlan, CDI’s COO, left the cold and snow of Cambridge to travel to our offices in Nairobi and Mogadishu, taking time to meet with our partners and discuss what our collaborations will look like in 2020.

Discussing Lessons for the Future

NAIROBI - Mohamed, Director of CDI’s Political Dialogue Platform, meeting with former Prime Minister of Somalia Omar Abdirashid Sharmarke, former President of Puntland Abdiweli A. Gaas, and current Puntland President Said A. Deni.

Building Stronger Connections

MOGADISHU - Members of the Somali Team participated in a joint session with our partner, SOYDEN, to solidify the workplan for 2020 activities.

Presenting at the United Nations

NEW YORK - Arlan presented CDI to the United Nations Economic and Social Council’s Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations.

Where In The World Is Conflict Dynamics’ Office?

In order to keep our staff and their families safe during the COVID-19 pandemic, Conflict Dynamics has closed its offices in Cambridge, US; Nairobi, Kenya; Mogadishu, Somalia; and Khartoum, Sudan. See where our staff are working from in the meantime!

What is Happening on the Ground?

Developing Options That Work for all of Sudan
In the first quarter of 2020, CDI’s Sudan Team has focused on supporting the peace process by developing options for and helping Sudanese actors think through the next steps after the peace talks conclude. The current peace process has taken the form of a number of different negotiations between the Transitional Government of Sudan and various armed groups.

Since the negotiations were conducted through separate tracks, one of the biggest challenges will be ensuring that the agreements do not conflict with each other. There is a strong need for a comprehensive plan on how to reconcile the different agreements and for how they will work in coordination with other transition processes including a constitution-building process and elections process. CDI recently released a presentation Options for Transition Period Processes; Linkages and Sequencing of Political Dialogue Processes in the Sudan that shares ideas for how the transitional dialogue processes – including the peace talks – can be sequenced and linked effectively. The team will be using the presentation to engage Sudanese actors in discussions online on the topic, adapting to travel restrictions and new ways of working. The presentation is the first in a series of products CDI will be releasing in the coming months.

Public Participation at the Local and National Level in Somalia

CDI’s Somali Team spent time during the first quarter of 2020 reflecting on their work and planning for the future. The Addressing Root Causes Team undertook a comprehensive program review involving focus group discussions, key informant interviews, household surveys, and interviews with District Peace Committee members that reached hundreds of people throughout Somalia. Feedback from this process will guide the team in their planning for the next two years, ensuring that all activities are informed by need and that we are all on the right track.

In Baidoa, the Political Dialogue Platform Team collaborated with SONSA (Somalia Non-State Actors) to discuss inclusive engagement in the upcoming 2020/2021 elections. Sixty people from South West State participated in the workshop, representing civil society, academia, traditional elders, women, youth, and marginalized groups. Participants brought their unique perspectives on issues such as the electoral law, its gaps, how it can be implemented during the elections, and what lessons can be learnt from the 2016/2017 electoral process. Participants developed plans for how non-state actors can engage in national elections and shared a communique with state and federal leaders and the media.

"There should be only one fight in our world today, our shared battle against COVID-19"

CDI’s Children in Armed Conflict Accountability Initiative has seen throughout its 16 years of experience that children suffer disproportionately from the effects of armed conflict, and during the fight against the current pandemic it has been no different. Although the response has been different around the world, many children find themselves out of school and unable to access the services and help they need. In conflict-affected areas, children often have more to fear than the pandemic itself. CDI fully supports United Nations Secretary General António Guterres in his call for an immediate global ceasefire, in all situations of armed conflict, so we can all focus on staying healthy and defeating this virus. As governments around the world design responses to keep their citizens safe, it is important to consult all groups, including youth, to ensure no one is adversely affected in the fight against COVID-19.
Frontlines of Conflict to Frontlines of Crisis

Those on the frontlines of the coronavirus outbreak are encountering many of the same challenges as humanitarian practitioners do delivering assistance in the midst of armed conflict. Whether struggling with travel restrictions, lack of resources, or navigating the last mile to remote areas of need, there is a lot we can learn from national practitioners who have been addressing these problems in their own contexts all over the world. As many of us in the humanitarian sector explore how to pivot our programming and service delivery to address the urgent and global threat of COVID-19, it is helpful to bring the tools of the trade with us. We recommend our Negotiating Humanitarian Access: Guidance for Humanitarian Negotiators access brief for tips on how to effectively negotiate for improved humanitarian conditions, which is relevant in areas affected by conflict or a crisis such as a pandemic. Do you have humanitarian resources which would be helpful to humanitarian practitioners operating in this new COVID-19 affected environment? Share them on Twitter tagging @cdint with the hashtag #CDICOVIDResources and we will circulate it!

Employee Spotlight

Elizabeth Wright
Senior Program Officer, Sudan Program

Meet Elizabeth Wright, Senior Program Officer for the Sudan Program. Elizabeth is based in our Cambridge Office, but you will often find her in Nairobi and Khartoum! As one of the longest serving members of the Conflict Dynamics family, Elizabeth has been with the organization since 2012. Beginning as a Research Assistant on peacebuilding, she went on to work on the South Sudan Political Accommodation Program, including on projects such as women and political accommodation and governance in Jonglei State. Elizabeth later supported all of our peacebuilding teams as a Research Officer, composing case studies, technical papers, and our Analysis, Design, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Guide. She has been a full-time member of the Sudan Team since 2018. One of her favorite things about working at CDI is her fellow colleagues – who bring such diverse experiences, are incredibly passionate about their work, and inspire her every day.

Originally from California, Elizabeth’s interest in peacebuilding and conflict resolution has led her all over the world. As a student, she studied abroad in Argentina, where she learned about “the disappeared” (los desaparecidos), victims of the country’s “Dirty War” (1976-1983), and volunteered with Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. This group, formed by mothers of young political actors who were kidnapped and killed by the military dictatorship, started protesting the government’s brutal actions in 1977 at their own peril. Their example spurred Elizabeth’s passion for pursuing justice amid mass atrocities and political conflict. Despite focusing on Latin America, the Middle East, and Eastern Africa over the years, Elizabeth’s interest in different elements of governance in transition and post-transition contexts has remained constant.

Following the Sudanese Revolution last year and the start of its transition period, Elizabeth and the Sudan Team are playing an important part in supporting peaceful political processes. In her role, Elizabeth is helping to develop options and assist different groups in thinking through how to collaborate for inclusive peace, transition, and constitution processes. Despite the fact that youth and women led and sustained the movement that brought down former President al-Bashir, they have played a very minimal role in the transition government so far. This is one of the biggest challenges, and the team is working with these groups and with the government to ensure women and youth will be included in a bigger role. Through this work, Elizabeth hopes that CDI can continue to support the Sudanese people throughout the transition to achieve a more inclusive society where everyone’s voice can be heard.

What are We Reading at Conflict Dynamics?
CDI’s Sudan Team is proud to unveil their recently published presentation, *Options for Transition Period Processes: Linkages and Sequencing of Political Dialogue Processes in the Sudan*. The purpose of this briefing is to share options for linked dialogue processes that will help realize the objectives of the transition period in the Sudan and to catalyze much-needed debate on the details of sequencing and linkages. Available in English and Arabic. We would love to hear your thoughts!

**COVID-19**: A Looming humanitarian disaster for Somali East Africa provides an eye-opening look at the unique challenges COVID-19 presents to Somalia. It is written by the Executive Director of our partner Rift Valley Institute, Mark Bradbury, and colleagues from the Institute for Development Studies at the University of Nairobi, the Rako Research and Communication Centre in Hargeisa, and the Danish Institute for International Studies.

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Who would have thought that our Somali Team would miss waiting in line for baggage claim?

Stay connected for news on our activities in 2020!