

MAPPING PATHWAYS FOR PEACE THROUGH THE COMPOSITION OF OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

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WORKING PAPER

August 2023

Executive summary

This working paper shares some empirical findings from comprehensive research into the composition of official development assistance (ODA) in peace and conflict settings across aid recipient countries in the period 1990–2020. Mapping the changing composition of ODA against peace and conflict patterns in recipient countries over time can enhance the understanding of how this composition relates to pathways from conflict to peace in practice.

Specifically, ODA is broken down into humanitarian, development and peacebuilding aid and mapped for all countries. A ternary graph is introduced to track the composition of the total ODA envelope at the country level in different time periods.

Findings

- While development assistance is found to dominate across all types of country contexts, and the humanitarian share tends to be larger during conflict, peacebuilding assistance varies by conditions in countries.
- Post-conflict countries that avoid conflict relapse turn out to receive significantly higher shares of peacebuilding aid compared to post-conflict countries that relapse.
- The ternary graph can be used as a tool to strategically assess the composition and levels of ODA in individual countries.
- The findings point to the potential of a more effective future deployment of ODA for the advancement of peace and stability.

What can tracking official development assistance (ODA) tell us about pathways for peace? The United Nations–World Bank report, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict* stressed the value of shifting from managing or responding to crisis to more preventive approaches. The report highlighted the role of ODA for the prevention of violent conflict.¹

ODA is government assistance that aims to further the development and welfare of developing countries. ODA can, in turn, be broken down into humanitarian, development and peacebuilding (HDP) assistance. Mapping the composition of ODA against peace and conflict patterns in recipient countries can enhance the understanding of how this composition relates to pathways to peace in practice. This could, in turn, inform a more strategic and effective future deployment of ODA for the advancement of peace and stability.

With this departure point, this working paper shares some empirical findings from comprehensive research led by the authors. The research initiative examines the composition of ODA in peace and conflict settings across all aid recipient countries in the period 1990–2020, using Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) coded data.²

1. Official development assistance composition

The research initially examined the HDP composition of ODA across all recipient countries during the 1990–2020 period. The main results are presented in table 1. The countries have been divided into three main categories: countries that did not experience conflict in the period studied; countries in conflict; and post-conflict countries. The post-conflict countries are further divided into those that kept the peace (no relapse) and those that fell back into large-scale organized violence (relapse).

Development assistance dominated ODA in all types of country settings during the period, ranging from an average share of 75% of ODA during conflict to 89% when there is no conflict (see table 1). The humanitarian aid component of ODA is highest during active conflict (14%), while the share of development aid is markedly lower (75%) in conflict. The average share of peacebuilding assistance is 9% for no conflict countries and 11% for countries experiencing conflict. In post-conflict countries, higher shares of peacebuilding assistance are associated with no conflict relapse; post-conflict countries that did not relapse into conflict had 14% of their country allocable ODA committed to peacebuilding aid compared to countries that did relapse, which had only 8%.

Table 1. Average composition of official development assistance (ODA) by country category, 1990–2020

Country category	Humanitarian (H) component of aid (%)	Development (D) component of aid (%)	Peacebuilding (P) component of aid (%)
No conflict	2	89	9
Conflict	14	75	11
Post-conflict with relapse	6	86	8
Post-conflict with no relapse	5	81	14

Sources: Lilja, J., Milante, G. et al, Unpublished research, forthcoming.

Notes: The period covered is 1990–2020. The data used is Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) data on gross disbursed country allocable aid. ODA classification: Humanitarian (H) = all 700 series codes in OECD CRS statistics; Peacebuilding (P) = CRS codes used in the OECD 2018 States of Fragility Report; Development (D) = everything else. Country year classification based on state-based conflict country status by year according to Uppsala Conflict Data Programme (UCDP).

2. Mapping pathways to peace

A Ternary graph is used to track the HDP composition of aid over time at the individual country level (see figure 1). The Ternary graph allows the three dimensions—HDP—to be plotted into a two-dimensional figure. Each corner of the triangle represents 100% of a particular aid type, e.g. 100% humanitarian assistance in the top left corner, 100% development assistance in the top right corner. The composition of aid in a given period for a given country is represented by the position of a circle inside the Ternary triangle. The sizes of the green circles represent total per capita aid for a given period. The blue inner circle represents the peacebuilding share, and the red circle represents the humanitarian share. The time periods are defined and separated by major events. The aid trajectory of a country can thus be mapped over several decades.

Liberia is here used as an example to demonstrate the relationship between ODA composition and a pathway to peace at the country level. Figure 2 empirically illustrates the trajectory of Liberia's ODA composition from conflict to sustained peace, which is consistent with the global data results. Over the 30-year time period, Liberia experienced marked changes in its aid composition owing to different types of crises.

The arrows on the graph indicate the chronological trajectory between different periods in Liberia's history, ranging from the pre-war period, to the war, and various post war phases. The focus here is on the peacebuilding share of total ODA (blue). As the graph shows, throughout the 1990s, most of Liberia's ODA consisted of humanitarian and development aid. During the 2000–2003 civil war period, an increase in humanitarian aid was accompanied by an increased share of peacebuilding aid, although peacebuilding and ODA per capita remained small. Elections and rebuilding followed the war, and the total ODA envelope thus increased in 2004–2006. While humanitarian aid was high during the period, peacebuilding aid also increased to 27% of ODA, equivalent to \$22.45 per capita. A considerable time after the war, the 2007–13 and 2016–20 periods still experienced a considerable peacebuilding inflow. This was temporarily interrupted by a humanitarian aid spike in response to the Ebola outbreak in 2014–15. This shows that the route towards peace is not linear or fast but rather is represented by a jagged upward movement towards development (D) as seen in the Ternary graph.

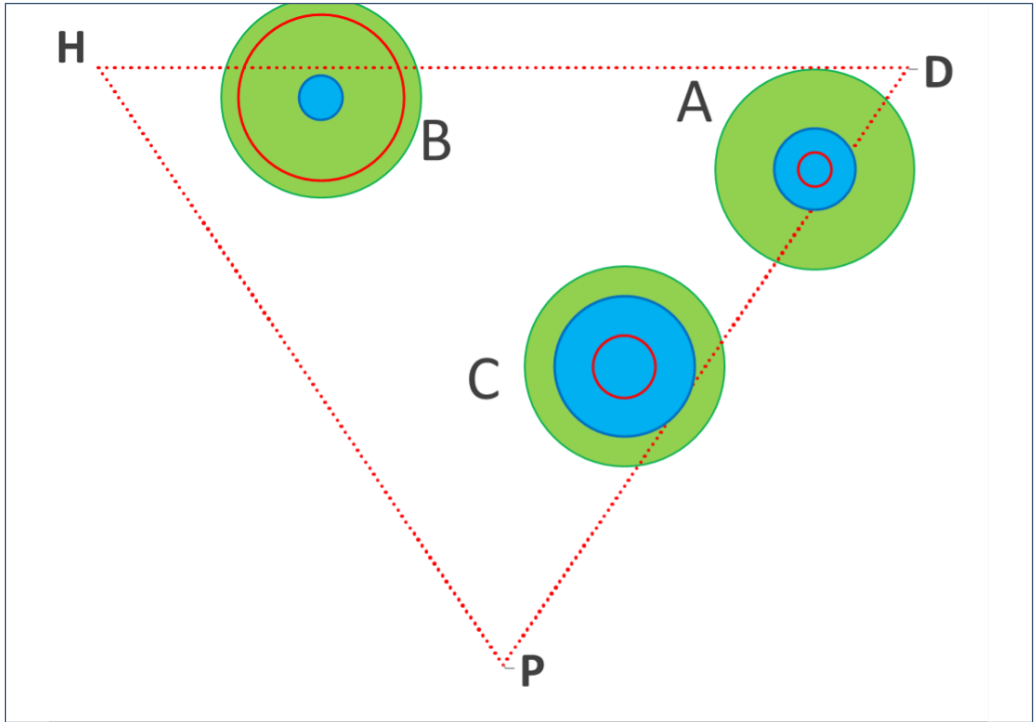


Figure 1. Ternary graph showing official development assistance (ODA) composition
 D = Development aid, H = Humanitarian aid, P = Peacebuilding aid.

Notes: Green circles represent total per capita aid for the period. Red circles represent the share of humanitarian aid. Blue circles represent the share of peacebuilding aid.

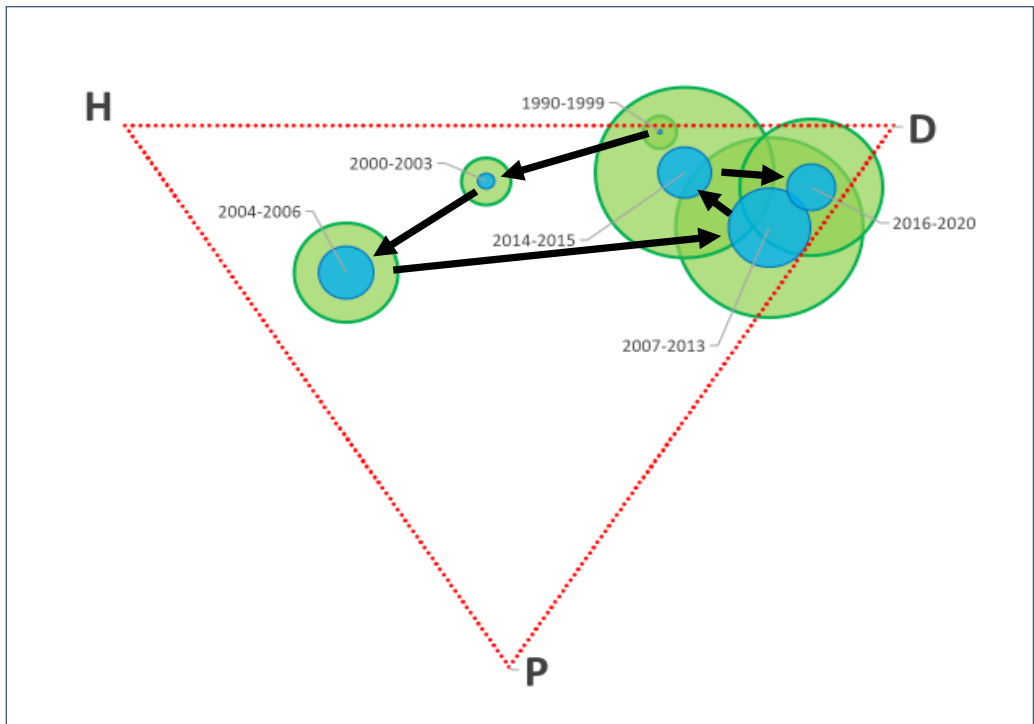


Figure 2. Ternary graph: Liberia official development assistance (ODA) composition trajectory, 1990–2020

D = Development aid, H = Humanitarian aid, P = Peacebuilding aid.

Notes: Green circles represent total per capita aid for the period. Blue circles represent the share of peacebuilding aid.

Source: Lilja, J., Milante, G. et al., Unpublished research manuscript, forthcoming.

3. Findings and discussion

The mapping of ODA disaggregated into humanitarian, development and peacebuilding assistance yields two main findings:

First, the Ternary graph, which tracks the composition of ODA over time, can be used as a tool to strategically analyse ODA allocations and shifts in ODA composition. While the development component of ODA can be seen to dominate in conflict and post-conflict settings, it is paralleled by considerable shares of humanitarian and peacebuilding aid. The humanitarian aid component is larger during conflict while the long-term development aid share decreases as expected. Peacebuilding assistance is also present across all types of country situations, but its share of total ODA varies.

Second, post-conflict countries that avoid conflict relapse receive significantly higher shares of peacebuilding aid than countries that relapse. Countries that receive higher peacebuilding shares tend to do so for extended periods of time, typically several decades. Also, countries that do not experience any conflict during the period receive higher peacebuilding aid shares vis-à-vis post-conflict countries that have relapsed. The data highlights countries across all continents with significant shares of peacebuilding assistance that have avoided conflict relapse through deliberate efforts to build and consolidate peace.

The preliminary evidence presented here suggests that the strategic deployment of scarce ODA may be vital to peace and stability. The shift from high levels of humanitarian assistance to increased peacebuilding support may be particularly critical for preventing relapse into conflict. There is thus potential for reducing human and economic costs and for enhancing ODA effectiveness, given that the majority of ODA is currently directed to fragile and conflict-affected states.³ A better understanding of the composition of aid could also be used to improve coherence between HDP instruments more broadly. While coherence is often referenced and is also included as an OECD evaluation criterion for aid,⁴ its implementation at country level is still not common practice.⁵

A lingering constraint to this type of research is that peacebuilding aid still lacks a straightforward, commonly agreed definition. Despite the limitations, the OECD Creditor Reporting System (CRS) peacebuilding codes offer the best available data. While the data alone cannot prove that investments in peacebuilding contributed directly to peace, it is possible that the peacebuilding share of ODA reflects a commitment to peace by national authorities and international donors, which could be explored in future research.

4. Recommendations

Based on these findings, the following recommendations can be made to donors and their development partners.

First, be more strategic and deliberate in regard to the country ODA composition. The Ternary graph can help in this endeavour. Strategic attention could be given to the composition breakdown between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding aid, to levels of aid, and to shifts from one type of composition to another. As countries move away from high shares and levels of humanitarian assistance, an increased focus on peacebuilding capacity can support the transition to stable long-term development. Coherence between HDP assistance in protracted crises and transition processes remains important. This aligns with the *Pathways for Peace* report recommendations to bring different instruments to bear in more effective and complementary ways.

Second, invest in peacebuilding. At a minimum, a peacebuilding share of ODA that is significantly less than the average for no conflict countries could serve as a warning flag of the commitment to peace of both donors and development partner countries. A renewed focus on peacebuilding would entail revisiting the current OECD CRS codes or at least introducing peace markers that could be added to more accurately track peacebuilding activities delivered across different ODA instruments. For example, an education project or a humanitarian intervention may not have peace promotion as its primary objective but could have it as a secondary aim which is not currently captured in donor reporting.

Notes

¹ United Nations and World Bank, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict* (World Bank: Washington, DC, 2018).

² Lilja, J. and Milante, G. et al, Unpublished research, forthcoming.

³ Corral, P. et al., *Fragility and Conflict: On the Frontlines of the Fight against Poverty* (World Bank: Washington, DC, 2020).

⁴ Coherence is the extent to which an intervention fits with other interventions at the country level—as an evaluation criterion for ODA, alongside relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Applying Evaluation Criteria Thoughtfully* (OECD Publishing: Paris, 2021).

⁵ *The Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus Interim Progress Review* (OECD Publishing: Paris, 2022); and Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 'Exploring peace within the humanitarian-development-peace nexus (HDPN)', Issue paper, 2020.

Abbreviations

CRS	Creditor Reporting System
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
HDP	Humanitarian, development and peacebuilding
ODA	Official development assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
UCDP	Uppsala Conflict Data Programme

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