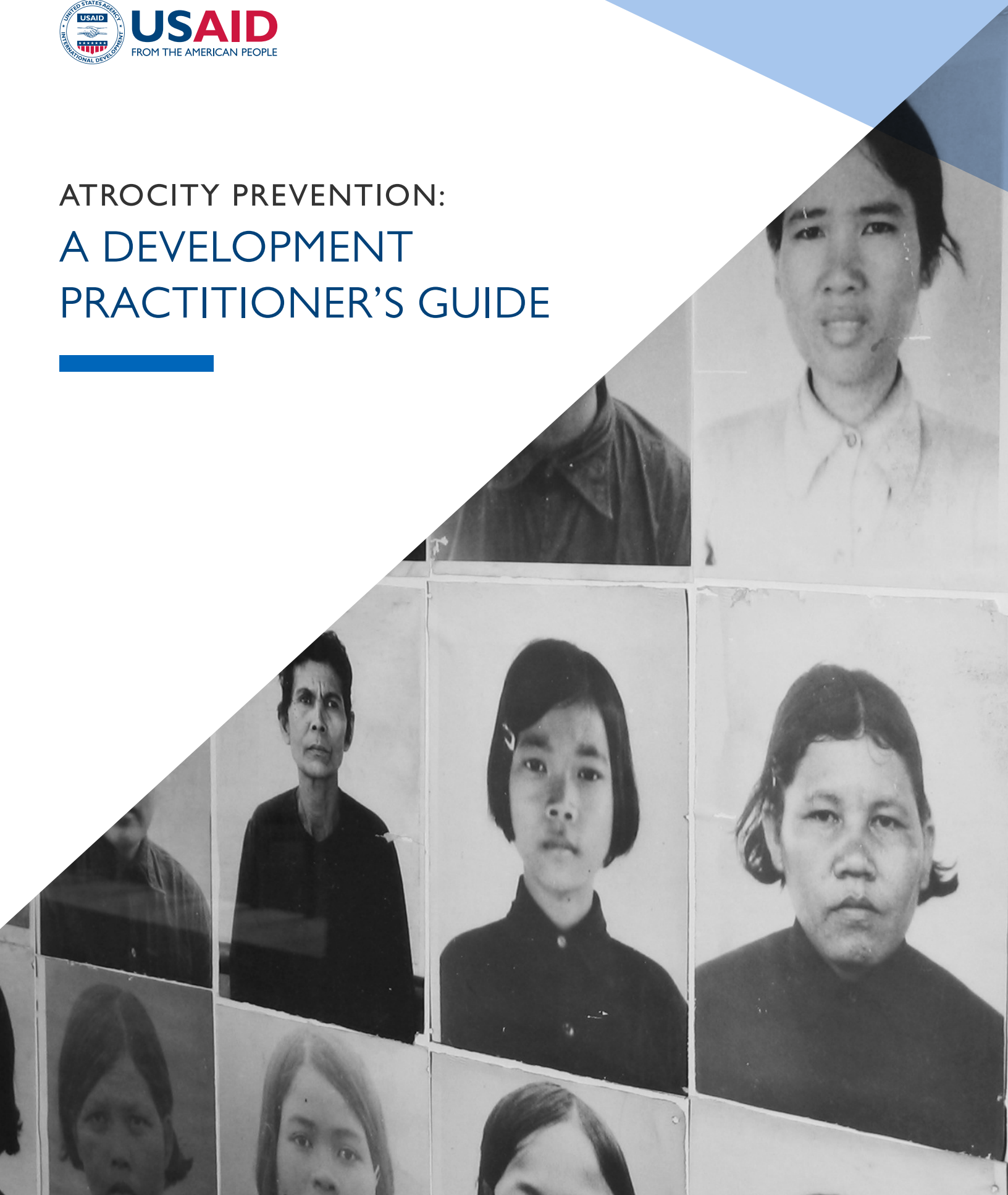
USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

ATROCITY PREVENTION:
A DEVELOPMENT PRACTITIONER'S GUIDE



Acknowledgments

This updated guide is a product of USAID's Atrocity Prevention (AP) core team as well as atrocity and conflict prevention experts across the Agency. It builds on the work of USAID atrocity prevention teams active since the early 2010s. We are deeply indebted to Lawrence Woocher of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (previously with USAID) for writing the original 2015 *Atrocity Prevention Field Guide*. Mark Goldenbaum was also instrumental to that effort. For the 2024 *Practitioners Guide*, the USAID AP core team—Leah Werchick, Kim Hart, Christina Sheetz, Yehuda Magid, and Michelle Linder—led the update of this technical product, with guidance provided by Mr. Woocher, and ensured the finalization and dissemination of the document. Important contributions were also made by the following individuals: Lyla Schwartz, Daniel Abrahams, Tazreen Hussain, Amy Malessa, Adam Kaplan, Cecilia Turner, Teresa Cannady, Mike McCullough, Josh Machleder, Neetha Tangirala, Ann Marie McKenzie, and Katy Lin of Harvard College.

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COVER IMAGE: Images from Cambodia's Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum. Photo by Karen Murphy (FLICKR: NANTOYARA).

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Letter from the Directors

Since the 2018 passage of the Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act, millions of innocent civilians have continued to live through the horrors of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and ethnic cleansing. The psychological impacts of mass atrocities have devastating and lasting effects on development outcomes for generations to come. Preventing mass atrocities is core to our development mission "to save lives, reduce poverty, strengthen democratic governance and help people progress beyond assistance." Large-scale, systematic attacks against civilians shock our collective conscience and we must give our staff and partners the tools to preempt mass atrocities.

As USAID staff, we have a central role to play in preventing mass atrocities. The 2018 Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act and the 2022 United States Strategy to Anticipate, Prevent, and Respond to Atrocities ("Strategy") cemented the USG's commitment to averting mass acts of violence. In the Strategy, the President reaffirmed that preventing mass atrocities is an enduring moral duty of the United States and is paramount to national and global security. With a workforce of more than 10,000, two-thirds of whom work overseas, USAID has deep relationships and partnerships around the world, enabling us to see many of the warning signs of mass atrocities firsthand. USAID is crucial to the Strategy as we are on the front lines of these crises and can turn policies into action. It is imperative that our staff have the policies and tools to understand and act when they see the risk factors.

Safeguarding human rights, promoting peace, and protecting fundamental freedoms are essential components of USAID's core vision and programming. Therefore, as directors of the Justice, Rights, and Security Office and the Center for Conflict and Violence Prevention, we are pleased to jointly introduce a new version of *Atrocity Prevention: A Development Practitioners Guide*. This updated guide is meant to provide our staff with the tools to help prevent, respond to, and support the long road to recovery from mass atrocities. It utilizes learning from past and present conflict and atrocity prevention programming to present good practices in early warning systems, reconciliation, and transitional justice, as well as economic recovery. It also includes guidance on the role of social media as both a contributor to, and mitigator of, hate speech and information manipulation that drive atrocities.

We look forward to continuing to support our colleagues in USAID Missions in using this guide.

Donald Chisholm
Director
Center for Conflict and Violence Prevention
Bureau for Conflict Prevention and Stabilization
United States Agency for International Development

Miranda Jolicoeur
Director
Office of Justice, Rights, and Security
Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance
United States Agency for International Development

Acronyms and Abbreviations

APTF	Atrocity Prevention Task Force
ARAF	Atrocity Risk Assessment Framework
BHA	Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance
CAR	Central African Republic
CEPPS	Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening
CPS	Bureau for Conflict Prevention and Stabilization
CRSV	Conflict Related Sexual Violence
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CVP	Center for Violence and Conflict Prevention
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
DRG	Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance
ERMS	Economic Recovery and Market Systems
FSN	Foreign Service National
FY	Fiscal Year
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
ICGLR	International Conference on the Great Lakes Region
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
NAP	National Action Plan
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
NHRI	National Human Rights Institution
NSC	National Security Council
OTI	Office of Transition Initiatives
PRC	People's Republic of China
PSD	Presidential Study Directive
R2P	Responsibility to Protect
RoL	Rule of Law
TJ	Transitional Justice
ToC	Theory of Change
UN	United Nations
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USG	United States government
VSLA	Village Savings and Loans Association
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
YRA	Youth Resilience Activity

Executive Summary

This guide is designed to provide USAID staff of all hiring types with practical information on a range of issues related to preventing and responding to mass atrocities. Personnel at USAID Missions around the world are well placed to note early warning signs of violence against civilians, to generate development responses to mitigate it, and to share concerns with embassy colleagues, as appropriate, as part of a whole-of-government effort. While conflict prevention through the analysis of drivers (explored in more detail on p. 9) can also guide the development response to atrocities, there are a number of distinctions between conflict prevention and atrocity prevention—particularly the focus on perpetrators, and how development tools, in conjunction with diplomatic efforts, could be used to help dissuade them.

USAID's commitment to helping prevent mass atrocities reflects the Agency's mission and core values. It is also part of the comprehensive U.S. government (USG) policy on mass atrocity prevention as articulated in the United States Strategy to Anticipate, Prevent, and Respond to Atrocities (SAPRA), published in July 2022.

Mass Atrocities: Key Concepts

- "Mass atrocities" or "atrocities," neither of which is defined under international law, refer to large scale and deliberate attacks on civilians, and include acts falling within the definition of "genocide" as defined in international law and under U.S. domestic statute.
- Mass atrocities vary in context, perpetrators, targeted groups, means, and motives.
- Mass atrocities are distinct from other types of violence.
- Mass atrocities and armed conflict are distinct but often overlapping: most, but not all, atrocities take place in a context of armed conflict. Actions to prevent the outbreak of armed conflict should be a major part of an atrocity prevention strategy.
- Mass atrocities are always human rights violations, but not all human rights violations are mass atrocities. Atrocity crimes refer to genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and ethnic cleansing.
- Conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) is a warning sign of impending atrocities and may constitute an atrocity itself, but not all CRSV is a mass atrocity crime.

How to Use This Guide

If you have only a few minutes . . .

- Read the Executive Summary.
- Scan the table of program options (Annex A).

If you have about one hour . . .

- Read the Executive Summary.
- Read Chapter II, which introduces and discusses key concepts, and Chapter IV, which provides guidance on reporting atrocity-related information.
- Skim the other chapters and the table of program options (Annex A).

If you have more than an hour . . .

- Read the Executive Summary.
- Read each chapter, paying special attention to chapters that most closely match the context where you work (i.e., prevention, response, or recovery phase).

- Study the program options in Annex A that match the context where you work and/or the type of programs that you manage.

If atrocity prevention is a Development Objective of your Mission's strategy and/or an explicit part of your job . . .

- Read the Executive Summary.
- Read each chapter, paying special attention to chapters that most closely match the context where you work.
- Study the program options in Annex A that match the context where you work and/or the type of programs that you manage.
- Contact USAID's Atrocity Prevention Team (apcore@usaid.gov) or the Bureau for Conflict Prevention and Stabilization (CPS) point of contact for atrocity prevention to discuss any questions you may have and what additional support you could use from Washington (e.g., TDY support, training, specialized assessment, assistance seeking contingency funds, designing programs to address atrocity risks).[1]

Fliers ask the whereabouts of those who disappeared during Guatemala s civil war.

PHOTO CREDIT: LUIS GUILLERMO PINEDA RODAS (GUILLERMOGG)/FLICKR

1 As of 2024, the primary point of contact on atrocity prevention in USAID/Washington is Leah Werchick, Senior Policy Advisor on AP/CVE, Bureau for Conflict Prevention and Stabilization: lwerchick@usaid.gov and apcore@usaid.gov.

U.S. Government Policy and USAID's Role in Preventing Mass Atrocities

- Through Executive Order 13729—A Comprehensive Approach to Atrocity Prevention and Response, the 2018 Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act, and the 2022 United States Strategy to Anticipate, Prevent, and Respond to Atrocities, the USG has made the prevention of mass atrocities and genocide a significant priority, declaring it "a core national security interest and a core moral responsibility of the United States."
- Mass atrocities are antithetical to development. Neglecting the risks of atrocities imperils USAID's investments across the range of development objectives.
- Development assistance programs can help reduce the risks of mass atrocities and can help populations respond when atrocities are ongoing or have already occurred. Successful development—broadly conceived—helps inoculate countries against mass atrocities.

USAID Can Help Address Mass Atrocities in Four Main Ways

I. RECOGNIZE AND COMMUNICATE: INFORMATION AND ANALYSIS ON MASS ATROCITIES

- Mass atrocities never occur without warning. To support more effective preventive action, USAID staff should contribute to reporting and analysis of risk factors, warning signs, and incidents and trends that may signal a heightened risk of atrocities.
- Scholars and practitioners have identified a list of common mass atrocity risk factors and warning signs, though there may be additional, context-specific risks. In general, observers should watch for developments that represent a change in the baseline of a particular context, and/or shift the calculus or capabilities of potential perpetrators.
- USAID staff should report atrocity-related information through standard channels. Dedicated channels for "dissent" are available in cases where standard channels are blocked.

II. PREVENT: MITIGATING RISKS AND BOLSTERING RESILIENCE

- Atrocity prevention is a goal to which numerous types of programs can contribute, not a discrete set or sector of development programs.
- One or more of four broad approaches are usually applicable to help prevent mass atrocities: (1) preventing armed conflict outbreak; (2) promoting human rights, rule of law (the principle of accountability to the law by all persons, institutions, and the state), and democratic governance; (3) strengthening civil society and independent media, especially their ability to call attention to risk factors and warning signs; and (4) building the capacity and legitimacy of weak states.
- Increasingly, evidence points to a connection between climate change and atrocities, namely through increased economic and social vulnerabilities of already-marginalized groups. However, given the complex interplay of climate change with other systems, it is a challenging link to establish definitively.
- It is critical to assess the particular context, manage potential unintended negative consequences of USAID actions, and closely coordinate with other USG and non-USG actors.

III. RESPOND: LIMIT THE CONSEQUENCES OF ATROCITIES

- Even when deliberate attacks on civilians are occurring or escalating, USAID programs can help halt the violence and minimize harm among victims.
- Four broad approaches in the response phase are: (1) supporting the mitigation or resolution of armed conflict; (2) providing and improving protection and support services for targeted groups in survivor-centered and trauma-informed ways; (3) dissuading potential perpetrators, including through legal accountability; and (4) monitoring,

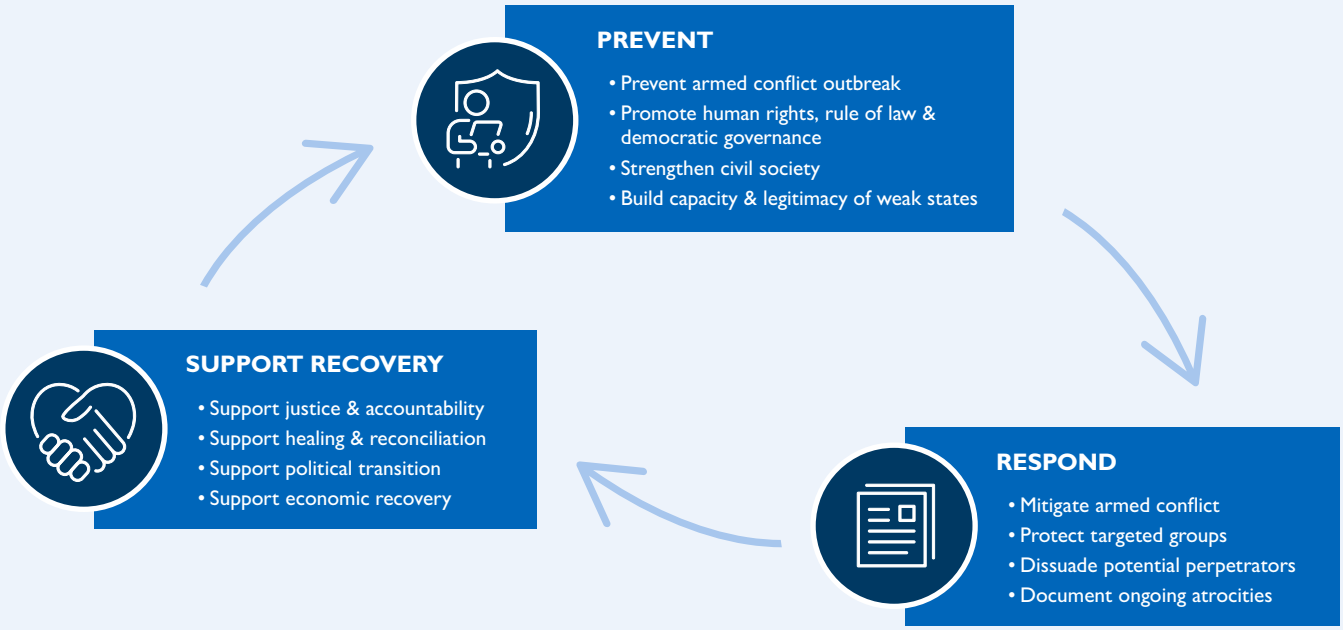
documenting, and supporting advocacy to increase information about ongoing atrocities and to debunk atrocity-related disinformation.

- Response efforts should recognize the differences in priorities that sometimes exist between humanitarian assistance and development programs and between short-term response imperatives and long-term development priorities. Developing humanitarian programming that focuses on resilience can build a bridge to development programming. An early focus on development initiatives during the humanitarian response phase can help to bring about long-term solutions.

IV. SUPPORT RECOVERY: DEALING WITH THE AFTERMATH OF MASS ATROCITIES

- In the aftermath of mass atrocities, USAID programs should aim to mitigate the risk of harm by offering comprehensive mental health and psychological support services. This support should be tailored to the specific context and integrated across programming. An opportunity could be to incorporate mental health and psychosocial support into justice and accountability mechanisms, as well as reconciliation efforts. By including mental health elements, these programs can significantly enhance development outcomes and address the traumatic experiences endured by communities.
- Because mass atrocities are often cyclical, most of the preventive approaches discussed above are likely to be relevant to post-atrocity contexts.
- Four approaches are especially relevant for the recovery phase: (1) supporting justice and accountability; (2) supporting psychological well-being, recovery, and reconciliation; (3) supporting political transition; and (4) supporting economic recovery, including through strengthened resilience to socioeconomic shocks like climate change. All four approaches should be informed by USAID guidance on conflict-sensitive[2] and mental-health-informed[3] programming.

Figure 1: Strategic approaches to addressing mass atrocities



2 USAID, Responsible Development: A Note on Conflict Sensitivity, 2020.

3 USAID, *Disrupting the Cycle of Violence: Using Trauma-informed Approaches to Build Lasting Peace*, 2021.

01. Introduction

Why This Guide?

USAID's commitment to helping prevent mass atrocities reflects the Agency's mission and core values. It is also part of the comprehensive U.S. government policy on mass atrocity prevention, which President Obama announced in 2012. "Preventing mass atrocities and genocide," he declared, "is a core national security interest and a core moral responsibility of the United States."[4] The USG's bipartisan commitment was ratified in the 2018 Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocity Prevention Act, signed by President Trump, as well as the United States Strategy to Anticipate, Prevent, and Respond to Atrocities (2022), instituted under President Biden. USAID plays a critical role in translating this policy commitment into specific actions on the ground in countries across the globe.

Atrocity Prevention: A Development Practitioners Guide is designed to provide staff with practical guidance on a range of issues related to preventing and responding to mass atrocities. This guide unpacks critical issues for USAID officers—especially those working in high-risk environments—and provides relevant background, guidance on good practices, and illustrative programming examples. It also identifies other resources and offices within USAID and beyond, where personnel at headquarters and USAID Missions can seek support and more information.

The guidance presented in this publication is set on a foundation established by many years of research and experience gleaned by scholars and practitioners in the fields of conflict prevention, human rights, humanitarian protection, and transitional justice. Readers who are steeped in USAID's policies and technical resources on these subjects will find much in this document quite familiar, since the Agency's role in helping prevent mass atrocities is neither wholly new nor completely distinct. However, this document brings together the best thinking from across a range of tools and approaches, complemented by discussion of issues that require specialized thinking from an atrocity prevention perspective.

4 See Presidential Study Directive on Mass Atrocities. See also Remarks by the President at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, April 23, 2012.

02. Mass Atrocities: Key Concepts

KEY POINTS

- Mass atrocities are large-scale and deliberate attacks on civilians.
- Mass atrocities vary in context, perpetrators, targeted groups, means, and motives.
  - » Mass atrocities and armed conflict are distinct, but often overlap: most, but not all, atrocities take place in a context of armed conflict. Actions to prevent the outbreak of armed conflict should be a major part of an atrocity prevention strategy.
  - » Mass atrocities are always human rights violations, but not all human rights violations are mass atrocities. Atrocity crimes refer to genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and ethnic cleansing.
  - » Conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) is a warning sign of atrocities and may constitute an atrocity itself, but not all CRSV is a mass atrocity crime.

What Are Mass Atrocities?

Mass atrocities are large-scale *and* deliberate attacks on civilians. The USG defines "large-scale" using a numerical threshold of 500 deaths or 1,000 instances of severe bodily harm (torture, dismemberment, etc.) in a calendar year. In determining whether attacks are deliberate, the USG considers whether violence and human rights violations are planned and systematic (i.e. methodical, planned, and organized in advance). These characteristics distinguish mass atrocities from small-scale or sporadic violence; from violence and rights abuses that are not systematic; from accidental civilian casualties during war; and from attacks on combatants. The definition is also meant to differentiate mass atrocities from the types of human rights violations that are very common around the world and focus instead on the most extreme forms. Mass atrocities are—thankfully—relatively rare.

A Croatian home shows the aftermath of ethnic cleansing.

PHOTO CREDIT: MODZZAK/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Table 1: Distinguishing mass atrocities from other kinds of violence

Mass atrocities are:	In contrast to:
Large-scale	Isolated, small-scale (e.g., individual "hate crimes")
Deliberate	Accidental (e.g., "collateral damage"), spontaneous riots
Attacks on civilians	Attacks on combatants (e.g., battle between armed groups)

"Mass atrocities" is not a legal concept, but there is a strong basis for preventing mass atrocities in international law.[5] Though not all mass atrocities necessarily fall within them, the legal categories most often associated with mass atrocities are genocide, crimes against humanity, and certain war crimes.[6] Together, these are sometimes referred to colloquially as "atrocity crimes."[7] While it does not have an international legal framework, ethnic cleansing is also considered an atrocity crime.

"Atrocities" and "mass atrocities"—explicitly non-legal terms—have become the main reference terms in U.S. interagency discussions, in part, to avoid the impression that specific legal criteria must be met before taking action. USAID and the USG can and should work on atrocity prevention, response, and recovery at any time and should not wait to do so until legal thresholds are met, because those legal analyses can take significant amounts of time.

Varieties of Mass Atrocities

Mass atrocities are neither new nor confined to the past. They are not isolated to one region of the world, one type of regime, or wartime situations. When most people think about "genocide" or "mass atrocities," they think of the Nazi extermination of millions of Jews and other groups across Europe in the 1930s and 1940s, or the mass killing of more than 800,000 Tutsis and Hutu moderates in Rwanda in 1994. But most cases of mass atrocities differ significantly from these two archetypes, even as they amount to large-scale and deliberate attacks on civilians. Consider just four cases:

- ***Burma:*** In the decades leading up to the targeted killing of Burma's Rohingya population, the Muslim Rohingya suffered grave human rights abuses at the hands of the Government of Burma, were wrongly identified as "Bengali," and faced systematic restrictions when seeking employment and educational opportunities. Over the course of 2016 and 2017, in what the State Department subsequently concluded was a campaign of genocide, ethnic cleansing, and war crimes, violence against the Rohingya was "extreme, large-scale, and widespread. The scope and scale of the military's operations indicate they were well-planned and coordinated."[8] Though estimates vary, the United Nations (UN) reports that more than 10,000 members of the Rohingya community were killed by the Government of Burma's military forces and local vigilantes from the majority Buddhist population, and hundreds of thousands of Rohingya were forced to flee their homes.[9] This type of deliberate government attack against a population because of their ethnic and religious identity is fairly common among historical cases of mass atrocities.

Woman and child in Tat Kone Church of Christ IDP camp in Myitkyina, Myanmar.

PHOTO CREDIT: USAID/BURMA

- ***Uyghurs (China):*** Since 2017, nearly one-tenth of the predominantly Muslim Uyghur population in the northwestern province of Xinjiang in the People's Republic of China (PRC) have been imprisoned in forced re-education camps. Other ethnic and religious minorities in Xinjiang have been targeted as well. The PRC government has subjected those who are not detained to invasive surveillance, forced labor, involuntary

5 At the UN World Summit in 2005, governments acknowledged that each individual state has the responsibility to protect (R2P) its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. Additionally, the international community also has the responsibility to use appropriate means to do that, including, in specific and defined circumstances, to take collective action through the Security Council.

6 The international legal definition of genocide is in the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court contains definitions of crimes against humanity and war crimes; note that the United States has not ratified and is not a State Party to that statute. Crimes against humanity were originally defined in the charter that established the Nuremberg tribunal in 1945.

7 For example, the State Department's Office of Global Criminal Justice describes its role as advising "the Secretary of State and other elements of the United States government on the prevention of, and response to, atrocity crimes."

8 U.S. Department of State, Genocide, Crimes Against Humanity and Ethnic Cleansing of Rohingya in Burma, 2022.

9 United Nations, "Six Years On, Still No Justice for Myanmar's Rohingya," 2023.

sterilizations, and restrictions on their religious and cultural practices. The PRC has also destroyed thousands of mosques and attacked other aspects of Uyghur culture, such as language, music, and literature. Several foreign governments, including the United States, have designated the PRC's actions as genocide and crimes against humanity. Like most mass atrocities, those in northwestern China are the result of state policies and actions. But unlike most historical cases, they have taken place in the absence of an armed conflict.

- ***Iraq and Syria/The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL):*** The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) operated as a nonstate armed group in Iraq and Syria, controlling large swaths of territory from 2014 until 2019. Minority religious and ethnic groups, including the Shabak, Shia Muslims, Turkmen, and Christians, faced ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity at the hands of ISIL, while the Yezidi minority group faced genocide. ISIL deliberately destroyed homes, communities, schools, and places of worship, and forcibly displaced over 6 million people in Iraq. ISIL engaged in the deliberate killing of civilians, and regularly committed acts of sexual violence including sexual slavery of Yezidi women and girls. Upon the retaking of territories formerly held by ISIL, mass graves of civilians have been exhumed. In 2016, the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. House of Representatives declared the actions of ISIL constituted genocide and crimes against humanity. Unlike many historical examples of mass atrocities, which can take place over months and years, the most acute phase of the Yezidi genocide happened in an extremely condensed time frame of just two weeks.
- ***Tigray, Ethiopia:*** From 2020 to 2022, conflict in northern Ethiopia resulted in more than 2 million Ethiopians being forced to flee their homes, at least 2.3 million people in need of assistance, and estimates of over 500,000 deaths. The International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia has documented 49 mass killings of Tigrayan civilians by Ethiopian and Eritrean forces, and the State Department determined that all warring parties have committed atrocities, including war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing. The fact that these atrocities stemmed from long-standing ethno-political tensions is common among historical cases of atrocities.

Meeting with community elders in Hawzien in Tigray, Ethiopia.

PHOTO CREDIT: ROBERT SAUERS, USAID/ETHIOPIA

These and other historical cases show variation across the types mass atrocities that can happen in multiple respects:

- ***Context:*** Mass atrocities can occur during armed conflicts (this is more common historically, as in Ethiopia) and in the absence of armed conflict (less common historically, as in China).
- ***Perpetrators:*** States or their agents can be perpetrators, as can nonstate organizations such as rebel groups, violent extremist organizations, or informal militias. Though state-perpetrated mass atrocities have been the more common type historically—about twice as frequent as nonstate perpetrators throughout the 1990s and early 2000s—recent world events have highlighted the role of nonstate actors. Even when atrocities are committed by nonstate actors, they often include the active or passive support of the state. However, there are examples, like in Iraq, Syria, and the Sahel, of nonstate actors who commit atrocities without the support of the state. Perpetrators frequently broadcast their intentions, preceding attacks with escalating dehumanizing rhetoric and other forms of "othering" that paint target groups as an existential threat, thereby justifying the violence that follows.
- ***Targeted groups:*** In some cases, groups are targeted based on national, religious, racial, ethnic, or other group affiliation. In others, they may be targeted for their political views or perceived association with armed actors.

Often, these kinds of perceived group identification will coincide. Targeting based on sex is also a common phenomenon—e.g., forcibly sterilizing women as a way to reduce birth rates of a given community, or targeted attacks on men and boys of "fighting" age.

- ***Means:*** The means and methods of attacking civilians can include systematic forced labor and displacement, as in China; burning of homes and villages, as in Burma; shelling, aerial bombardment, and use of chemical weapons, as in Syria; widespread use of sexual violence against women and girls as a deliberate tactic, as in Iraq; and widespread use of small arms and light weapons, as in Ethiopia.
- ***Motives:*** Motives are diverse, even within a single episode of mass atrocities, across individuals/groups, and over time. Some prominent historical perpetrators were motivated by extremist ideologies and visions of a radical transformation of society (e.g., Nazi Germany or Khmer Rouge). In most contemporary cases, perpetrators appear to have been motivated by a "strategic logic," notably a desire to acquire or retain political power (e.g., Darfur, Sri Lanka, and Syria). Frequently, perpetrators frame their motives within the language of stability and as actions against "terrorists" and other threats to state security. Motives are grounded in the history and context of specific countries. The propensity to see political competition in existential terms, for example, tends to be greater in countries with a history of mass atrocities and genocide, feeding cycles of retaliatory violence.

It should be noted that analysis of past cases may not fully capture future patterns of mass atrocities. Changing global dynamics, new ideologies, and new technologies could produce large-scale and deliberate attacks on civilians that do not resemble *any past case*. The diversity in the nature of mass atrocities—across cases and over time—is one challenge to understanding them fully and designing action to prevent them.

Box 1: Mass Atrocity Situations Change over Time: Illustration from Syria

In 2011, atrocities in Syria were initially one-sided (government-perpetrated) attacks on civilian protesters, committed before there was an organized armed rebellion. As the situation evolved, some groups opposing the government took up arms and the crisis attracted armed groups from across the region, aligned state actors, and their proxies. Government-perpetrated atrocities continued into the period of major armed conflict. In recent years, the Syrian government—backed by Russia and Iran—has continued to deliberately target civilian infrastructure, use the threat of detention as a deterrent to legitimate political opposition, and committed extrajudicial killings and acts of sexual violence. According to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, more than 100,000 civilians have been disappeared by the Syrian government.[10]

Wounded civilians arrive at a hospital in Aleppo during the Syrian civil war.

PHOTO CREDIT: VOICE OF AMERICA) WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Some anti-government armed groups and militias have also committed atrocities during this period. Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham, the opposition Syrian National Army, ISIL, and the Syrian Democratic Forces in northeast Syria have all committed war crimes and crimes against humanity through arbitrary detention, torture, enforced disappearance, and extrajudicial killings in areas under their control.

Thus, what began as a situation of one-sided, government-perpetrated attacks on civilians in a non-armed conflict context became a complex armed conflict in which multiple conflicting parties—governments and nonstate—have committed atrocities against civilians, even while "the Syrian government remains responsible for the majority of the civilian casualties."[11]

10 United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Ongoing Mass Atrocities and Current Risks to Civilians in Syria. Policy Update, 2023.

11 Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, Chair of Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, Statement to the UN Human Rights Council, September 16, 2014.

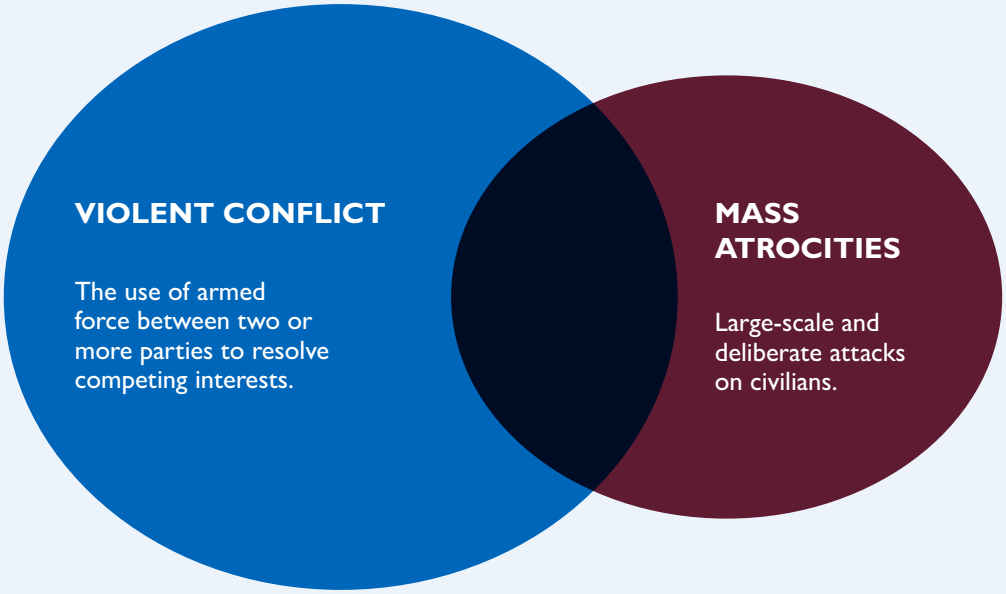
How Do Mass Atrocities Relate to Armed Conflict?

Development professionals often ask about the relationship between mass atrocities and violent conflict. After all, some might say, wars are brutal and civilians inevitably suffer horribly in conflict situations. Is a focus on mass atrocities really necessary—or helpful—given that we already have tools for assessing and programming in conflict environments?

Analysis of the relationship between violent conflict, mass atrocities, and strategies aimed at their prevention reveals a few key insights:

- ***Mass atrocities and violent conflict overlap but are distinct.*** Conceptually, mass atrocities are generally understood as large-scale and deliberate attacks on civilians. Violent conflict, by contrast, is the use of armed force between two or more parties to resolve competing interests. Empirically, most instances of mass atrocities have occurred during a violent conflict, yet most violent conflicts have not included mass atrocities, and mass atrocities have taken place in the absence of armed conflict. Normatively, the international community seeks to prevent *any and all* instances of mass atrocities, whereas armed conflict can be justifiable in certain circumstances (e.g., self-defense).

Figure 2: Relationship between violent conflict and mass atrocities



- ***Strategies and tools to prevent violent conflict and those to prevent mass atrocities also overlap significantly, but not entirely.*** Since most atrocities occur in conflict situations, preventing the outbreak of violent conflict should be a major element of an atrocity prevention strategy. Overlap in the strategies and tools used to prevent violent conflict versus those used to prevent mass atrocities is generally very high for "upstream" prevention strategies that aim to strengthen societal resilience against future threats of violence. Where violence appears more imminent, there may be more divergence in preventive measures used. For example, atrocity prevention strategies might use tools that are rarely associated with conflict prevention, such as physical protection for vulnerable groups or support for high-level criminal prosecution.
- ***Atrocity prevention strategies should always be informed by analysis of conflict dynamics*** and the potential for external action to exacerbate conflict (e.g., by being perceived as favoring one group over another).

Box 2: Research Findings on the Relationship between Violent Conflict and Mass Atrocities

- Since 1945, two-thirds of episodes of mass killing (defined in the study as a minimum of 5,000 civilians killed intentionally) occurred within the context of an armed conflict. Between 1980 and 2010, that figure was 85 percent.[12] However, in the second half of the 2010s and the first years of the 2020s, more atrocities were occurring outside of situations of mass conflict.[13]
- "Episodes of [political] instability that include large-scale, violent conflict between the state and an organized challenger are *more than 16 times as likely* to produce mass-killing events [defined in the study as a minimum of 1,000 intentional noncombatant deaths caused by state agents] as episodes that only involve an adverse regime change."[14]

The variation across cases, the evolution within cases, and the considerable overlap with violent conflict should not obscure the clarity of the core concept of mass atrocities. Whatever their exact form, large-scale and deliberate campaigns of violence against civilians are mass atrocities. The global community has unequivocally rejected mass atrocities, yet they continue to occur. The next chapter addresses the U.S. Government's policy response to this challenge and USAID's role in it.

Ixil people carry their loved ones' remains after an exhumation in Guatemala.

PHOTO CREDIT: CAFCA ARCHIVE - TROCAIRE/FLICKR

12 Alex Bellamy, *Mass Atrocities and Armed Conflict: Links, Distinctions, and Implications for the Responsibility to Prevent*, Policy Analysis Brief, The Stanley Foundation, 2011, p. 2.

13 Jones, Michael and Ferguson, Kate. "Between War and Peace: Preventing Mass Atrocities Outside Armed Conflict," RUSI Newsbrief 41, no. 4 (May 2021).

14 Jay Ulfelder and Benjamin Valentino, *Assessing Risks of State-Sponsored Mass Killing*, Political Instability Task Force, 2008. Emphasis added.

03. U.S. Government Policy and USAID's Role in Preventing Mass Atrocities

KEY POINTS

- Through the 2011 Presidential Study Directive on Mass Atrocities (PSD–10), the Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act of 2018, and the 2022 U.S. Strategy to Anticipate, Prevent, and Respond to Mass Atrocities, the USG has made the prevention of mass atrocities and genocide a priority, declaring it "a core national security interest and a core moral responsibility of the United States."[15]
- Mass atrocities are antithetical to development. Neglecting the risks of atrocities imperils USAID's investments across the range of development objectives.
- Development assistance programs can help reduce the risks of mass atrocities. Successful development—broadly conceived—helps inoculate countries against mass atrocities.
- Development assistance alone will not prevent atrocities. Diplomacy, sanctions, various forms of accountability, and other tools are also critical, which is why interagency/ whole-of-country-team collaboration is especially important in this realm.

Policy Priority, with a High-Level Interagency Body

For decades, USAID has worked in countries experiencing violent conflict, provided support for human rights, and delivered lifesaving assistance to populations affected by complex emergencies. The U.S. government more broadly has long been a vocal advocate for human rights around the world, and it has been a party to the Genocide Convention since 1988. It has routinely included language on human rights in its National Security Strategy and has supported the "responsibility to protect" since this principle was adopted at the 2005 United Nations (UN) World Summit.

Yet, until 2011, the USG had not developed a specific, government-wide policy on the prevention of the most extreme forms of human rights violations—mass atrocities and genocide. That year, President Obama issued a Presidential Study Directive on Mass Atrocities (PSD–10). The Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act of 2018 built upon this Directive. The Act's purpose is: "To help prevent acts of genocide and other atrocity crimes, which threaten national and international security, by enhancing United States Government capacities to prevent, mitigate, and respond to such crises."[16]

- The Elie Wiesel Act states that U.S. policy is to "regard the prevention of atrocities as in its national interest." This explicit statement of priority frames the debate on specific country cases, in particular, by making clear that threats of mass atrocities are sufficient to justify USG interest and action, even in the apparent absence of other national interests.
- The Act also states that the U.S. government's efforts at atrocity prevention and response through interagency coordination are critically important, and recommends a body such as the Atrocities Prevention Board or its successor agency (currently known as the Atrocity Prevention Task Force [APTF]) "monitor developments that heighten the risk of atrocities; . . . facilitate the development and implementation of policies to enhance the capacity of the United States to prevent and respond to atrocities worldwide; [and] provide the President and

15 Presidential Study Directive on Mass Atrocities (PSD–10), 2011.

16 Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act of 2018.

Congress with recommendations to improve policies, programs, resources, and tools related to atrocity prevention and response," among other responsibilities. See Box 4 for more information on the APTF structure and process.

Box 3: Why Preventing Mass Atrocities Is a USG Priority

"Preventing mass atrocities and genocide is a core national security interest and a core moral responsibility of the United States. Our security is affected when masses of civilians are slaughtered, refugees flow across borders, and murderers wreak havoc on regional stability and livelihoods. America's reputation suffers, and our ability to bring about change is constrained, when we are perceived as idle in the face of mass atrocities and genocide. Unfortunately, history has taught us that our pursuit of a world where states do not systematically slaughter civilians will not come to fruition without concerted and coordinated effort."

—Excerpt from PSD-10, which established the Atrocities Prevention Board

An altar at the Ntrama church in Rwanda shows part of the aftermath of genocidal attacks that killed 5,000 people who sought refuge there.

PHOTO CREDIT: SCOTT CHACON (SCHACON) /FLICKR

Box 4: Fast Facts: USAID and the Atrocity Prevention Task Force (APTF)

- The APTF meets regularly and holds ad hoc meetings to respond to crises. APTF meetings are chaired by the National Security Council (NSC). The State Department's Bureau for Conflict and Stabilization Operations serves as the APTF secretariat.
- Participating departments/agencies reflect a broad range of capabilities within the USG, namely, the Departments of State, Defense, Treasury, Justice, and Homeland Security; USAID; and the Central Intelligence Agency, among others. Within the State Department alone, the following Operating Units play an active role: Conflict and Stabilization Operations; Democracy, Rights, and Labor; Global Criminal Justice; Global Women's Issues; International Narcotics and Law Enforcement; and others.
- When the APTF engages in-depth on a particular country or region, meetings may be co-convened by the regional directorate at the NSC to ensure coordination with country-focused or regional interagency processes.

How USAID's Work Relates to Mass Atrocities

MASS ATROCITIES AS A THREAT TO DEVELOPMENT

Across the world today, USAID and development practitioners face complex crises that "imperil development progress, undermine democracy, and threaten stability."[17] Mass atrocities like war, which has been called "development in reverse,"[18] destroy human and physical capital, cause mass displacement and humanitarian emergencies, exacerbate gender inequality and that of marginalized groups, and disrupt productive social and economic activity across all domains. Concretely, mass atrocities negate specific development gains—in economic growth, health, infrastructure, etc.—and impede long-term development prospects. Thus, mass atrocities represent the antithesis of development.

Box 5: The Toll of Mass Atrocities: Illustrative Data

- Tens of millions of civilians lost their lives in the last century in episodes of mass killings.[19]
- Several of the worst refugee crises in the past decades were triggered by mass atrocities—the Rwandan genocide in 1994, mass atrocities in Syria since 2011, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022.[20]
- The Ukrainian economy lost over 30 percent of GDP in the year following Russia's invasion. According to the Ministry of Finance, the decline in economic activity is the largest the country has experienced since 1991, when it became independent.[21]

Even more than armed conflicts generally, large-scale and systematic campaigns of violence against a country's own civilians have profound and long-lasting impacts on all aspects of societies. Experiencing the widespread, deliberate targeting of civilians is uniquely traumatizing to individuals and societies and can lead to cycles of violence and atrocities being committed out of a desire for retribution or revenge, as seen in Sudan, South Sudan, and the Democratic

17 *USAID Policy Framework: Driving Progress Beyond Programs*, 2023, pg. iv.

18 Paul Collier, *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy* (World Bank Publications, 2003).

19 Benjamin A. Valentino, *Final Solutions: Mass Killing and Genocide in the 20th Century* (Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 1.

20 BBC News, "UN Says Syria Refugee Crisis Worst Since Rwanda," July 16, 2013.

21 Mark Volynski, "The Road to Recovery: Ukraine's Economic Challenges and Opportunities," Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2023.

Republic of the Congo (DRC). The challenge of reintegrating former combatants, to cite one aspect, is all the more difficult when those former combatants have killed and maimed their own neighbors, not just opposing soldiers. Numerous USAID officials have reported that societal impacts resulting from mass atrocities continue to affect a country's development prospects decades and generations later.

A Mayan altar sits outside the Supreme Court of Justice in Guatemala.

PHOTO CREDIT: ELENA HERMOSA/TRÓCAIRE

DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE AND RISKS OF MASS ATROCITIES

After devastating conflicts in the 1990s—particularly the 1994 genocide in Rwanda—the development and humanitarian communities were forced to face a painful reality: despite good intentions, "poorly designed international assistance can inadvertently create or exacerbate social cleavages, thereby contributing to the development of atrocity crimes."[22] As summarized by Peter Uvin regarding the case of Rwanda, "The process of development and the international aid given to promote it interacted with the forces of exclusion, inequality, pauperization, racism, and oppression that laid the groundwork for the 1994 genocide."[23] This realization led practitioners to commit to be guided by the "Do No Harm" principle, as manifested in the growth of conflict-sensitivity guidelines, peace and conflict impact assessments, and human rights safeguards.

While misguided development assistance can increase the risk of mass atrocities, there is a more encouraging side of the connection between development and mass atrocities: mass atrocities are extremely unlikely to occur in countries that have legitimate and effective governments, respect for human rights and democracy, healthy economies with broad-based growth, and strong civil societies. Successful, inclusive, and people-centered development—broadly conceived—helps inoculate countries against mass atrocities. It is true that mass atrocities have been committed in all parts of the world, including in highly industrialized and relatively wealthy countries. But in general, countries with poor development indicators, such as high infant mortality rates, weak and unaccountable governments, and poor integration into the global economic system, are more likely to experience mass atrocities.[24]

22 Ban Ki-Moon, *Fulfilling Our Collective Responsibility: International Assistance and the Responsibility to Protect*; Report of the UN Secretary-General, July 11, 2014, para. 17.

23 Peter Uvin, *Aiding Violence: The Development Enterprise in Rwanda* (Kumarian Press, 1998), p. 3

24 "Methodology: Risk Factor Sources," Early Warning Project, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Much of USAID's work in promoting traditional development goals can contribute to reducing the risks of mass atrocities. However, considering the Agency's work through an "atrocity prevention lens" can help focus attention on the most critical issues. Specifically, USAID can address mass atrocities in four main ways:

1. ***Recognize and communicate*** the risks of mass atrocities, to inform both the Agency's own programs and broader USG action.
2. ***Help prevent*** mass atrocities by mitigating risks and bolstering resilience to shocks that could lead to mass atrocities through context-driven, adaptive development programming.
3. ***Respond*** to escalating atrocity situations with lifesaving humanitarian assistance as well as programs to help halt spiraling violence.
4. ***Support recovery*** from mass violence through programs focused on promoting survivor-centered justice and accountability, rebuilding social cohesion, and supporting political transition and economic recovery.

It should be acknowledged that this division of types of USAID actions to prevent atrocities risks oversimplifying what is an overlapping, interconnected set of Agency responsibilities in complex and constantly changing environments. Countries do not proceed predictably or linearly from prevention to response to recovery, and the lines between these domains are inherently blurry. Nevertheless, discussing the distinctions can help elucidate USAID's role. The next four sections address each of these areas, providing guidance and options for Mission staff.

A grave for an unknown individual at the Kiambaa churchyard marks the remnants of post-election violence in Kenya.

PHOTO CREDIT: JOSE MIGUEL CALATAYUD (JOSEMCALATAYUD)/FLICKR

04. Recognize and Communicate: Information and Analysis on Mass Atrocities

KEY POINTS

- To support more effective preventive action, USAID staff should contribute to reporting and analysis of risk factors,warning signs, and incidents and trends that may signal a heightened risk of atrocities.
- Scholars and practitioners have identified several mass atrocity risk factors and warning signs (see Box 8). In general, observers should watch for developments that shift the calculus or capabilities of potential perpetrators.
- USAID staff should report atrocity-related information through standard channels. Dedicated channels for "dissent" are available in cases where standard channels are blocked (see p. 26).

Introduction

The prevention of mass atrocities requires taking action before atrocities begin. This, in turn, requires some ability to identify where and when civilians are at risk of mass atrocities and to diagnose both specific issues and drivers of this risk. The interagency review triggered by the Presidential Study Directive on Mass Atrocities found that more frequent and more timely reporting on incidents and trends related to atrocities would support more effective preventive and mitigating action. This imperative is reflected in the focus on prevention in the United States Strategy to Anticipate, Prevent, and Respond to Atrocities, which states that preventing atrocities is possible if we—collectively—act early enough.

The Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland stands as a reminder of the possible outcome when mass atrocities go unchecked.

PHOTO CREDIT: CATHERINE BULINSKI (KASIA/ FLICKR) /FLICKR

USAID has important roles to play—both responsive and proactive—in recognizing and communicating about potential or ongoing atrocities. Because of its field presence, programs, and extensive interactions with local actors and partners, USAID often has on-the-ground insights and updated contextual information that other USG actors may lack. Relevant information could be picked up by one of USAID's nearly 2,000 Foreign Service Officers (FSOs), several thousand Foreign Service Nationals (FSNs), or many international and local partners. USAID's network of staff and partners often extends into the periphery of countries and into communities where the USG has little visibility. All USAID staff should, therefore, consider what they will do if they receive information or observe events that cause concern about actual or potential atrocities.

In countries at high risk of mass atrocities, or in countries where USAID staff are concerned about the potential for outbreaks of large-scale violence against civilians, the Atrocity Risk Assessment Framework (ARAF) may be a useful analytic tool. Designed with the input of civil society, the ARAF is meant to be accessible, including for non-specialists. USAID has a range of options when applying the ARAF, including using USAID experts to conduct the assessment, employing external consultants, integrating lines of inquiry from the ARAF into other assessments, and/or encouraging implementing partners to use the ARAF or its lines of inquiry as part of program assessments and context monitoring.

Box 6: Overview of State Department/USAID Guidance on Assessing Mass Atrocity Issues[25]

An atrocity risk assessment should be anchored in four sets of questions:

- Which, if any, **key actors** currently have or might plausibly develop the motive and means to carry out atrocities? Which, if any, key actors (domestic or international) have or could play protective or peacebuilding roles?
- Which, if any, groups of civilians or other populations are currently being **targeted** or might plausibly be targeted for atrocities?
- What are the **risk factors**, if any, that could set the preconditions for atrocities? What are the **resilience factors**, if any, that could mitigate that risk?
- What are the potential **accelerants and triggers** that could open windows of atrocity risk?

USAID undertakes a variety of assessment activities to inform its development and humanitarian programming. When the Agency engages in assessments—particularly those focusing on conflict, humanitarian protection needs, gender and social inclusion, and democracy, human rights, and governance—in countries at high risk of or experiencing ongoing atrocities, these inquiries should strive to understand the issues that could drive atrocities and how they might be counteracted. The framework of analysis developed by the UN Office of the Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect can also be useful, especially as a framework for joint assessments with non-USG actors.[26]

Guidelines for Reporting

Part of USAID's prioritization of preventing mass atrocities means taking responsibility for ensuring that relevant information is not neglected or blocked. This is deceptively challenging. USAID's reporting role is secondary to its role in managing and monitoring the implementation of development and humanitarian assistance activities. Collecting and reporting certain kinds of information—or simply being perceived as doing so—has the potential to make it harder to operate and manage program activities. The guidance presented here, based on input from numerous field officers, seeks to balance these interests.

All USAID staff, regardless of sector, have a critical role to play in atrocity prevention, monitoring, and reporting. Agency personnel in countries that have been identified as most at risk for atrocities, including by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's Early Warning Project, should proactively plan for how they will gather information about and report on atrocity risks, and may consider including a requirement for a more structured or formal early warning system, which can be designed with technical support from the AP core team, as part of their development assistance portfolio.

WHAT SHOULD USAID MISSION STAFF BE REPORTING?

- "Atrocity-related information," as described in Box 7**:** In short, this refers to information on atrocities that have occurred, signs of imminent atrocities, and evidence that USAID programs are increasing the risk of atrocities. Possible warning signs of future atrocities also merit reporting (see Box 8 for a review of risk factors and warning signs), and the earlier these are identified, the more likely it is that USAID's development tools can work to address them.
- Many USAID staff work in countries with chronic, high levels of violence. Reporting every incident of violence against civilians would be infeasible and probably unhelpful. Staff working in these types of contexts should always report information that would have serious consequences for USAID's development and humanitarian assistance activities. They should apply two additional filters to focus their reporting of atrocity-related information:

25 U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Atrocity Risk Assessment Framework," 2022.

26 United Nations, *Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes*, 2014.

1. Signs of deviation from the baseline or what's "normal" in the country, particularly as they relate to atrocity risk factors and warning signs; and
2. Incidents, media content, or trends that other USG staff are unlikely to know about.[27]

Box 7: Atrocity-Related Information

- Primary types:
  - » Incidents of deliberate attacks on civilians, including extrajudicial killing, rape, forced displacement, withholding basic means of life, and other major human rights violations
  - » Credible reports of organization, preparation, or mobilization for mass violence; for example arming militias, stockpiling weapons, inciting violence against civilians, forcing separation of groups, or suspending peacetime laws
  - » Uptick in hate speech and/or disinformation in traditional, broadcast, or digital media, particularly if directed against a single group
  - » Evidence that USAID programs are exacerbating conflicts or human rights abuses
- Additional types: See Box 8 for a review of other risk factors and warning signs.

HOW SHOULD ATROCITY-RELATED INFORMATION BE REPORTED?

- Use standard reporting channels:
  a. Pass it to your USAID supervisor and Mission Director and discuss it with them.
  b. Pass it to the political or human rights officer at post.
  c. Request permission from your USAID supervisor to share it with the desk officer, the Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance, and/or Center for Conflict and Violence Prevention country or regional backstop (who represent USAID on the interagency Atrocity Prevention Task Force).
  d. Share it with apcore@usaid.gov, who can, if appropriate, initiate a group discussion across Bureaus including CPS, DRG, BHA, the Regional Bureau, and the Mission to have an initial analytical and stock-taking discussion.
  e. If a relevant information sharing forum (e.g. a Human Rights Working Group) exists at the Embassy, bring it to that group.
  f. If a USAID or State country task force has been established, follow the reporting guidance provided by the task force.
- If the standard channels are blocked, consider:
  a. USAID's Direct Channel (directchannel@usaid.gov), a direct line of dissent to the Administrator, is open to all USAID staff.
  b. The State Department's Dissent Channel, a direct line of dissent to the State Department's Director of Policy Planning, with protection against retaliation, is open only to U.S. direct-hire employees of State and USAID. More information is available in "11 Foreign Affairs Manual 243.3 (Use of Dissent Channel)."[28]

27 USAID staff may not be aware of whether information is likely to be known by other parts of the USG. In that case, USAID officers are encouraged to err on the side of sharing information (see the "Operational Issues" subsection on "Dealing with uncertainty").

28 When connected to a State or USAID computer network, you can also find information on the Dissent Channel.

Operational Challenges

Box 8: Risk Factors and Warning Signs of Mass Atrocities

The diversity and complexity of mass atrocities means that no simple checklist of warning signs can usefully be applied to all countries. Nevertheless, analysis of historical cases suggests the following (non-exhaustive) list of factors and signs that are associated with a higher risk of mass atrocities.

Risk factors: Risk factors tend to be slow-to-change characteristics that make states vulnerable to mass atrocities, including:

- Early warning signs: Early warning signs are events that indicate the risk of mass atrocities is increasing. They generally focus on events that change the calculus or capabilities of potential perpetrators (or reveal changes in these factors), including:
  - » Signs that threat perceptions are becoming more dire and/or linked to a group of civilians (e.g., publicly calling all members of a group "enemies");
  - » Signs that extreme or exclusionary ideologies are gaining support (e.g., increase in public discourse that dehumanizes members of a group);
  - » Signs of intensifying "zero-sum" political conflict, especially when political affiliation aligns with other identities;
  - » Evidence that impunity for human rights abuses is increasing; and
  - » Evidence of the government's inability or unwillingness to stop attacks on civilians.

More than risk factors, specific warning signs depend on the context—e.g., whether or not there is an ongoing armed conflict.

- Armed conflict context:
  - » Shift in battlefield dynamics leading to increased perception of threat;
  - » Failure of initial attempts to quash an insurgency or resolve the conflict; and
  - » Increase in sexual violence perpetrated by armed groups, including security forces.
- Non-war context:
  - » Change in ruling regime that empowers more radical or authoritarian leaders (e.g., a coup);
  - » Failed attempt to overthrow regime;
  - » Widespread stockpiling of weapons;
  - » Increase in speech that reflects heightened perception among elites that a group poses a grave threat; and
  - » Sudden increase in various forms of gender-based violence.

Late warning signs: Even the most highly coordinated, large-scale campaigns of violence are ultimately a collection of individual and small-scale attacks. Late warning signs are the initial, smaller-scale deliberate attacks on civilians or evidence of organization, mobilization or preparation to commit mass violence:

- Small- and medium-scale attacks on civilians
- Evidence of organization/preparation/mobilization for mass violence:
  - » Training and arming of militias;
  - » Incitement (including via "hate speech");
  - » Forced separation of groups; and
  - » Suspension of peacetime laws or imposition of newly restrictive laws or policies.

- ***Dealing with uncertainty.*** In virtually any scenario a USAID officer might face, there will be significant uncertainties concerning potential or ongoing mass atrocities. USAID staff should not wait for certainty or perfect clarity before sharing potentially relevant information. Nor should USAID staff go out of their way to try to verify specific reports that are generally credible or to refute social media posts, traditional media reports (including traditional, broadcast, or digital media reports), or widespread information from messaging apps (including WhatsApp, Messenger, etc.) that incite disinformation. Others are likely to be in better positions to debunk, verify, interpret, and make sense of this information, so USAID staff should err on the side of sharing.
- ***Reluctance to report or receive "bad news."*** Interviews with numerous USAID field officers indicate that a culture pervading the Agency and U.S. embassies and Missions abroad frowns on reporting information that conflicts with dominant narratives (e.g., the country is on the right path, the government is a strong partner, our programs are working). This is compounded by perceptions that attention from Washington can be more burdensome than helpful. USAID staffers who choose to report atrocity-related information should be prepared to persevere in light of these institutional and political challenges to reporting, and they should know that there is a team of atrocity prevention specialists at USAID/Washington who can support them.

Supporters hold up a portrait of presidential candidate Raila Odinga before the 2007 Kenyan general election.

PHOTO CREDIT: DEMOSH/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

- ***The imperative of protecting sources.*** When reporting atrocity-related information—especially if it might become public—USAID staff should take extreme care not to put any individuals or groups at risk by potentially exposing them as contacts of the U.S. government. As a rule, sources should be anonymized. In some cases, citing "a trusted USAID contact," for example, could be sufficient protection, but in other cases this description might still enable someone (e.g., an oppressive government, if it were to obtain the information) to trace the report back to one or two groups or individuals (particularly if linked to a specific location). USAID personnel should consider marking atrocity-related materials as Sensitive But Unclassified if they contain sensitive information.
- ***The role of implementing partners and FSNs.*** When considering the reporting of atrocity-related information, it is important to recall the different roles that members of the "USAID team" play. In particular, information sharing from non-USG actors is always voluntary, unless it is specifically required by their contract or cooperative agreement. If an Agency partner is going to be specifically directed to collect or share certain kinds of information, USAID's communication with the partner must follow the terms of the award and should be sensitive to the realities of the local context. Humanitarian organizations in particular may be reluctant to report on atrocity-related information if doing so could be perceived as a violation of the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality, and independence. In addition, USAID personnel should remember that their FSN colleagues are citizens of the country that may be experiencing atrocities or identity-based conflict. In a highly polarized conflict situation, USAID field officers must be sensitive to the ways FSNs' identities and place within the society may affect their access to information and assessment of the conflict. Often, FSNs are the most critical actors within USAID for identifying atrocity risks and warning signs because of their expertise in the context, and they have an essential role to play in the Agency's work to prevent atrocities.

05. Prevent: Mitigating Risks and Bolstering Resilience

KEY POINTS

- Atrocity prevention is a goal to which numerous types of programs can contribute, not a discrete set or sector of development programs.
- One or more of four broad approaches are usually applicable to help prevent mass atrocities: (1) preventing the outbreak of armed conflict; (2) promoting human rights, the rule of law, and democratic governance; (3) strengthening civil society and independent media, especially their ability to call attention to escalating vitriol and othering in public discourse; and (4) building the capacity and legitimacy of weak states.
- It is critical to assess the particular context, manage potential unintended negative consequences, and coordinate with other USG and non-USG actors.

Introduction

Where risks of mass atrocities are apparent, but before large-scale violence has broken out, USAID programs have the potential to contribute to the prevention of atrocities. There is clear consensus that prevention is where the USG as a whole, and USAID in particular, can have the most impact. One of the many reasons to favor prevention is that it dovetails with the Agency's mission statement (i.e., promoting and demonstrating democratic values abroad, and advancing a free, peaceful, and prosperous world), the USG's increasing focus on fragile and conflict-affected states, and the "elevation" of human rights in U.S. foreign policy.[29] Yet, it is not always self-evident how our development assistance resources can be used most effectively to prevent mass atrocities. "Atrocity prevention" is not a development sector or a discrete set of program options, but rather a goal to which many different types of programs can contribute.

Since most Agency programs take several months (at least) from inception to implementation, and the impact of these activities takes time to manifest itself fully, USAID is particularly important for so-called "upstream" prevention. This means identifying and seeking to mitigate factors associated with a high risk of mass atrocities, such as the presence of armed conflict or state-led discrimination, and/or supporting country or community resilience to shocks that could lead to large-scale and deliberate violence against civilians.

As with all development programs—and especially those in fragile or conflict-affected states—the local context should be the starting point. The particular risk factors and potential scenarios in a given context should inform the design of prevention programs, especially since mass atrocities can arise in different contexts, result from different drivers, and take many forms. As the Albright-Cohen Genocide Prevention Task Force wrote, "Ultimately, there is no single model or checklist appropriate for every environment"—what is needed are "tailored, context-specific approaches."[30]

USAID staff can apply the principles of Do No Harm and conflict sensitivity to better ensure that existing development programs take drivers of conflict and violence into account, adapt to the changing context, and are inclusive of

29 U.S. Department of State, "Putting Human Rights at the Center of U.S. Foreign Policy," press statement, February 24, 2021

30 Madeleine K. Albright and William S. Cohen, *Preventing Genocide: A Blueprint for U.S. Policymakers*, 2008, p. 41. The Genocide Prevention Task Force, co-chaired by former Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright and former Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen, was jointly convened by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the American Academy of Diplomacy, and the United States Institute of Peace. Its final report, released in December 2008, offered practical recommendations on how to prevent genocide and mass atrocities.

marginalized and vulnerable groups. CVP's note on Responsible Development is an excellent place to learn more about conflict sensitivity and how it applies to USAID's development programming. The Agency has also assembled a compendium of scholarly articles on atrocity prevention and the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), which can be accessed here: Scholarly Articles on Atrocity Prevention.

Strategic Approaches

Since most appropriate prevention strategies will depend on the particular context, one or more of the following broad approaches should be applicable in virtually all cases:

- ***Prevent the outbreak of armed conflict:*** As discussed, violent conflict is the strongest risk factor for mass atrocities. Therefore, efforts to prevent violent conflict should be a major part of an atrocity prevention strategy, especially in countries at high risk of conflict.[31] USAID supports various programs to help prevent the outbreak of major armed conflict, from people-to-people dialogue, to community early warning–early response systems, to economic projects with incentives for inter-group cooperation, to programs advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. It is less important to try to determine whether such activities should be called "conflict prevention" or "atrocity prevention" programs (or something else) than it is to choose and design programs that address the particular conflict dynamics.[32]
- ***Promote human rights, the rule of law, and democratic governance:*** Democratic, rule-bound, rights-respecting governments are less likely to commit or allow large-scale attacks on civilians. Programs in support of human rights, the rule of law, and democracy can include, for example, support for human rights defenders in autocratic environments, technical assistance to emerging democratic governments to combat impunity, and support to national human rights institutions as well as justice systems and institutions. From an atrocity prevention perspective, however, it is important to be aware of potential unintended consequences of democratization efforts—e.g., if they cause autocrats to perceive a grave threat from a particular civilian group. These risks underscore the need for good assessment and tailoring of an assistance portfolio to the specific risks and opportunities. Political Economy Analysis can be particularly useful in atrocity prevention efforts.
- ***Strengthen civil society:*** In addition to its importance in virtually all aspects of development, strong civil society can be a bulwark against mass atrocities. USAID's support for civil society—to journalists, women's organizations and women-led organizations, or lawyers associations, among others—could be tailored to address atrocity risks in some cases. For example, training lawyers in specialized methods for investigating atrocity crimes, providing media and digital literacy training and debunking mechanisms to mitigate the impact of atrocity inciting disinformation, or supporting grassroots campaigns that counter messages of hate and the dehumanization of vulnerable groups. In other cases, support to civil society might be designed to build resilience against future shocks more generally. It is important to recognize that USG support to these actors can put them at increased risk, particularly if they work on atrocity-related issues, and steps should be taken to identify, mitigate, and respond appropriately) to risks, which can include arrests, physical and digital attacks, transnational repression, and more.
- ***Build the effectiveness and legitimacy of weak state institutions:*** Fragile states are more likely to experience political crises and conflicts that are virtually always precursors of mass atrocities. Nearly 80 percent of USAID Missions are located in conflict-affected or fragile states. At the same time, states are the duty bearers of human rights and are responsible for protecting the population. Key institutions including the justice system, security

31 For USG audiences, the Center for Conflict and Violence Prevention (CVP) has developed a range of tools that serve as useful resources for analyzing fragility as well as risk of future conflict and instability, all of which can inform country-level assessments. For additional information, contact CVP at: cvpfieldpartnershipmailinglist@usaid.gov. In addition, cleared direct-hire USG personnel can consult a classified National Intelligence Estimate, "Global Risk of Mass Atrocities and Prospects for International Response," which was prepared in response to the Presidential Study Directive on Mass Atrocities.

32 Each strategic approach discussed subsequently—promoting human rights, the rule of law, and democratic governance; strengthening civil society; and building the effectiveness and legitimacy of weak state institutions—can also contribute to the prevention of armed conflict outbreak. Thus, they could have direct and indirect effects on the risk of mass atrocities.

forces, ombudsmen, and more, are essential to preventing atrocities and providing oversight and accountability. Greater state capacity alone will not automatically reduce atrocity risks. In particular, USAID should avoid building the capacity or effectiveness of highly discriminatory government institutions, recognizing that in both conflict and corruption-ridden contexts, working with such institutions may be necessary. Given these challenges, empowering effective civil society advocates may prove a useful counterbalance. Working with host governments to build the legitimacy of state institutions should generally be a coequal goal with improving state effectiveness. This point applies especially to the security and justice sectors, which can be bulwarks against mass atrocities when they are effective, equitable, and legitimate, but instruments of atrocities when they are corrupted.

Program Options

Follow the links below for descriptions of program types, associated theories of change, examples where USAID has supported these types of programs, and considerations for the context in which a program type is most suitable and for effective program design and implementation.

- Support Local Early Warning–Early Response Systems
- Engage Youth
- Support for Independent Media
- Mitigate Risks from Disinformation and Hate Speech
- Support to National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs)
- Support to Regional and National Structures for Prevention of Mass Atrocities/Genocide
- Support to Political Processes (e.g., elections, constitutional referenda)
- Support to Local Peace Committees
- Support for Local Protection Strategies/Capacities
- Enhance Communications Capabilities of At-Risk Groups
- Promote the Rule of Law and Access to Justice
- Support Monitoring of Human Rights/Documentation of Atrocities
- Peace Messaging
- Social Cohesion Programs
- Engaging Women and Girls in Peacebuilding and Political Processes

Considerations

- ***Start with a "good enough" assessment.*** Seeking to understand the context before designing programs is a principle of all good development practice. It is especially critical to the effectiveness of programs aiming to help prevent mass atrocities—a complex phenomenon that is subject to wide variation across contexts. A thorough atrocity risk assessment using the State/USAID ARAF or a conflict assessment using USAID's Violence and Conflict Assessment methodology, supplemented by the State/USAID guidance on assessing atrocities and USAID's gender analysis framework, is ideal. Note that these tools are frameworks for analytic thinking, not highly prescriptive operational methodologies, and some can be used to rapidly assess dynamics. They should also be updated as dynamics change, which helps identify concerning deviations. The core point is to ask some key questions and be explicit about critical assumptions before selecting and designing programs.

- ***Programs should support overall strategy.*** The results of an assessment should be used to craft a realistic core strategic approach to addressing atrocity risk factors and warning signs. Programs and specific activities, each of which might have its own theory of change, should be selected to help advance the overall strategy.[33] For example, if the government is weak and unable to protect populations from nonstate groups, a strategy might focus on building state capacity and strengthening local communities' self-protection capacities. If, by contrast, the major threat to civilians is from abusive government security forces, a strategy might focus on mitigating local conflict dynamics to prevent the outbreak of armed conflict.
- ***Manage risks of unintended harm.*** One should not assume that just because a program is designed to address atrocity risks that it is not subject to potential unintended negative consequences. Program designers and managers should make a point to ask how a program might go wrong and how these risks could be mitigated, if not completely eliminated (see Annex B for a list of resources on Do No Harm that can support this type of analysis). Some degree of risk and uncertainty is inherent to complex contexts, but that should not necessarily lead to inaction. Awareness, frequent reassessment, adaptation, and prudent management of risks is the proper posture.
- ***Coordinate with other USG agencies and non-USG actors.*** USAID is always one of many actors and frequently not the largest or most influential. To contribute to a goal as ambitious and multifaceted as preventing mass atrocities, coordination is especially important. The Atrocity Prevention Task Force provides a mechanism for coordinating whole-of-USG action. Formal international donor coordination mechanisms may or may not exist, depending on the country. In either case, USAID can usually increase its impact by coordinating with other development actors like State Department's Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor and the U.S. Institute of Peace in efforts to prevent atrocities.[34] Where a UN or other multilateral peacekeeping operation is deployed, it is also important to communicate regularly with these other operational actors, especially if they have a mandate to protect civilians.

33 For more on theories of change, see *Theories and Indicators of Change: Concepts and Primers for Conflict Management and Mitigation*.

34 Most major bilateral donors have signaled a commitment to preventing mass atrocities—e.g., by joining the International Atrocity Prevention Working Group (IAPWG), or the Group of Friends of the "responsibility to protect" (R2P), designating a focal point on R2P within their government, and/or participating in the biannual IAPWG meetings.

06. Respond: Limit Consequences of Atrocities

KEY POINTS

- Even in situations when deliberate attacks on civilians are occurring or escalating, USAID programs can help halt the violence and minimize harm among victims.
- Four broad approaches in the response phase are: (1) supporting mitigation or resolution of armed conflict; (2) supporting and improving protection for targeted groups; (3) dissuading potential perpetrators; and (4) monitoring, documenting, and advocating about ongoing atrocities and debunking atrocity-related disinformation.
- Response efforts should recognize the different mandates of humanitarian assistance and development programs and between short-term response imperatives and long-term development priorities. Focusing on building resiliency while responding to urgent needs can help bridge the divide between these aims.

Introduction

Mass atrocities are not all-or-nothing phenomena. Even the most highly coordinated, large-scale campaigns of violence are ultimately a collection of individual and small-scale attacks. Most episodes of mass atrocities play out over a period of months or years, during which time the perpetrators' goals and tactics may change. Even as deliberate attacks on civilians are occurring or escalating, outside actors may have options to help halt the violence and minimize harm among victims. USAID's robust capabilities for responding to humanitarian needs during disasters are important in this context. The Agency also has contingency funds and mechanisms to support urgent programs outside of the humanitarian domain that could help minimize, if not completely prevent, atrocities. In some cases, it is also possible to adapt or modify ongoing programs to respond to atrocities.

Strategic Approaches

USAID could take any of four broad approaches in responding to ongoing atrocity situations:

- ***Support the mitigation or resolution of armed conflict:*** If atrocities are being committed in the context of an armed conflict, programs designed to de-escalate or bring the conflict to a negotiated resolution should help limit the extent of atrocities. A range of conflict mitigation programming might be available, though USAID's options in Missions tend to be constrained in situations of active violent conflict.
- ***Support and improve protection for targeted groups:*** Providing direct support to the populations that are subjected to attack can limit the negative effects of large-scale attacks on civilians and, in the best circumstances, deter future attacks. This can take the form of humanitarian assistance, support for community self-protection, advocacy and legal action to ensure nondiscrimination and full access to services, and may include emergency assistance such as relocation and evacuation support or legal/security/psychosocial assistance. This approach does not necessarily rely on changing the dynamics of the conflict or atrocities, but it can save many lives that would otherwise be lost. Such support should be tailored to the unique needs of the targeted populations and to people's differing needs and experiences based on factors such as age, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, or disability. Conflict and fragile settings experience an increase in all forms of gender-based violence (GBV), including intimate partner violence; sexual violence; sexual exploitation and abuse; and child, early, and forced marriage/

unions. Women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals are disproportionately affected by GBV due to their unequal status in society. Protection efforts should include access to comprehensive GBV response services and survivor-centered, trauma-informed efforts for justice and accountability.[35]

- ***Dissuade potential perpetrators:*** Individuals who might be mobilized to commit atrocities can be open to influence by USAID programs, even as atrocities are ongoing. For example, broad public dissemination of messages of peace and tolerance that leverage well-understood, broadly resonant societal values, cash-for-work programs, and community-level social cohesion programs have been used in attempts to dissuade potential perpetrators of atrocities. These kinds of activities are most relevant when atrocities are being committed by newly mobilized or relatively informal groups, as opposed to formal security services. Legal interventions can also dissuade potential perpetrators, if they see others being held accountable for their actions. Support to social movements and advocacy efforts are examples of ways that USAID can support efforts to demonstrate broad support for nonviolence and social accountability. Supporting efforts to monitor and document ongoing atrocities could help deter potential perpetrators based on fear of criminal accountability or simply the psychological effect of feeling watched.
- ***Document atrocities and mitigate further risks from hate speech and disinformation:*** Even if human rights monitoring and documentation fail to deter perpetrators in the midst of the crisis, establishing a pattern of systematic or widespread atrocities (and how they violate relevant domestic and international laws and commitments) can spur useful policy action and international awareness and pressure, increase public understanding of the crimes that are taking place, and form a critical foundation for subsequent transitional justice efforts. Media and social media are increasingly being used to disseminate dehumanizing and inciting hate speech and disinformation. Mitigating further risks of this content requires early and robust engagement by media forensic specialists, investigative journalists, and public communications experts.

Program Options

- Support for Local Protection Strategies/Capacities
- Enhance Awareness of Rights of At-Risk Groups/Civil Society Advocacy
- Promote the Rule of Law and Access to Justice
- Support Monitoring of Human Rights/Documentation of Atrocities
- Peace Messaging
- Social Cohesion Programs
- Engaging Women and Girls in Peacebuilding and Political Processes
- Help to Fill Information Vacuums during Crises
- Provision of Emergency Humanitarian Assistance
- Humanitarian Protection Programs

Considerations

- ***The relationship between humanitarian assistance and development programs.*** Humanitarian assistance is grounded in principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence. Adherence to these principles is generally seen as critical to ensuring access to populations in need. Development programs—particularly in a context of escalating violence against civilians—might be perceived as more political or even partial among

35 Erin Farrell Rosenberg, *Gender and Genocide in the 21st Century: How Understanding Gender Can Improve Genocide Prevention and Response*, New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 2021.

conflicting parties. When USAID supports both kinds of activities simultaneously in a given location, it can create challenges for both humanitarian and other development partners to achieve their objectives. There is no simple fix, but it is important to acknowledge the issues and discuss them in an ongoing fashion. Hosting dialogues between USAID-supported development and humanitarian partners can lead to learning about linkages and objectives, and promote the nexus approach.

- ***The relationship between short-term response programs and long-term development priorities.*** At times, USAID may use its foreign assistance tools to respond to atrocities, but lack the funds to enable long-term follow-on activities. From a traditional development perspective, this kind of short-term engagement would raise questions about sustainability. For example, if USAID supports short-term human rights documentation and advocacy (inclusive of marginalized populations like Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, and the LGBTQI+ population) when risks are high but cannot finance a follow-on human rights program, opportunities to identify longer-term human rights dynamics and future changes in those risk factors and warning signs may be missed.[36] Thus, the USG priority on preventing mass atrocities implies that the standards for evaluating foreign assistance programs designed as short-term atrocity prevention or response tools should be different from standard development programs. At the same time, USAID has pioneered an approach that focuses on building resilience to recurrent crises even while responding to urgent needs.[37] Adopting a resilience perspective can help manage the inherent tensions between short- and long-term imperatives and between humanitarian and development programming.
- ***Accessing contingency funds.*** Mounting a robust response to a situation of escalating atrocities may require substantial additional program funds or the reprogramming of previously designed programs. With support from Congress, USAID has created several funds to help Missions respond to unforeseen contingencies. These include the Complex Crises Fund, the Human Rights Grants Program, and the Elections and Political Processes Fund, among others. Each fund has its own specific purpose, selection criteria, and process for considering applications. Missions can find more information via the links in Annex B or through their Washington counterparts. Atrocity prevention technical experts can also support Missions with technical assistance to develop atrocity prevention strategies and plans, and by recommending potential program pivots, if helpful.

A soldier with the M23 rebel movement stands watch on Bunagana Hill in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in July 2012.

PHOTO CREDIT: AL JAZEERA

36 Also problematic is the possibility that short-term response activities could help mitigate atrocities, but have substantial negative impacts on a country's development—e.g., by entrenching corrupt political leaders in the interest of short-term stability. This possibility underscores the importance of analyzing potential unintended harm at all stages, even if difficult judgment calls cannot be avoided.

37 For more information on USAID's approach to resilience, see the *2022 Resilience Policy Revision*.

07. Support Recovery: Dealing with the Aftermath of Mass Atrocities

KEY POINTS

- In the aftermath of mass atrocities, USAID programs should aim to both reduce the risk of recurrence and improve overall development prospects by addressing the unique challenges of these contexts.
- Because mass atrocities are often cyclical, most of the preventive approaches discussed in Section V are likely to be relevant to post-atrocity contexts.
- Four approaches are especially relevant for the recovery phase: (1) supporting justice and accountability; (2) supporting healing and reconciliation; (3) supporting political transition; and (4) supporting economic recovery.

Introduction

It is frequently observed that political violence and human rights crises are more cyclical than linear. Too often, episodes of mass violence sow the seeds for their recurrence, and the best predictor of whether a country will experience an atrocity is whether it has had a recent atrocity. As a result, efforts to support societies' recovery from mass atrocities can contribute to preventing future instances of mass atrocities. Short of recurring mass violence, countries with a history of systematic atrocities tend to struggle in achieving the full range of development goals. There are also intrinsic reasons to provide assistance to countries that are trying to deal with traumatic histories from previous conflicts and/or mass atrocity events. Truth, justice, accountability, and reconciliation are worth pursuing in their own rights.

Strategic Approaches

Most, if not all, of the preventive approaches discussed in Section V are relevant to countries recovering from mass atrocities. In addition, three broad approaches are most relevant to the recovery phase after an episode of mass atrocities:

- ***Support justice and accountability:*** Over the last forty years, a diverse set of tools has emerged to address the legacy of mass human rights violations, severe repression, and civil war. These include truth telling, memorialization, prosecutions, reparations, and institutional reform, often as part of rule of law and transitional justice initiatives.[38] USAID has actively supported these activities in numerous countries with a recent history of violent conflict and atrocities, ranging from community-led transitional justice efforts, to legal accountability, to institutional reform, to reparative development projects to help rebuild atrocity-affected communities. Land and property rights can be particularly challenging in contexts where ethnic cleansing or sustained attacks on communities undermine victims' abilities to return "home," and USAID can play a role in supporting refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and victims in their efforts to access their land and property rights. The particular needs of vulnerable populations (including Indigenous populations, who may not have access to legal documents such as property deeds; persons with disabilities; and LGBTQI+ individuals)

38 Activities to promote justice and accountability are often perceived to be highly sensitive and sometimes in tension—at least in the near term—with stability and reconciliation. At the same time, justice and accountability are pillars of sustainable peace over the long term, especially in the aftermath of mass atrocities. This leads to challenges for development partners related to the timing and sequencing of support for various priorities after a mass atrocity, and speaks to the critical importance of understanding the local context.

- ***Support healing and reconciliation:*** In the aftermath of mass atrocities, healing is needed at the individual, community, and national levels. USAID supports services for individuals who have been victims of violence and rights abuses, including sexual violence, and those who experience trauma after witnessing atrocities. Community- and national-level efforts toward reconciliation typically involve various kinds of dialogue and progressively building cooperation among previously conflicting parties and identity groups. Needs in terms of healing and support may vary depending on individuals' experience of atrocities, but may include things like medical care, psychosocial support, support for community reentry, and more. For instance, women who experience sexual violence in a culture where this is traditionally viewed as a source of shame for the survivor of violence or her family may require distinct forms of support. It is critical that these approaches are inclusive of survivors and their communities.
- ***Support political transition and/or institutional reform:*** Mass atrocity episodes sometimes end with a major political transition—e.g., the change in a regime, as in Rwanda, or a negotiated agreement between conflicting parties, as in Bosnia. USAID programs can support these political transitions in a variety of ways, such as assisting transitional governing bodies, providing technical assistance to elections, or supporting the reintegration of former combatants. USAID programs can also support institutional reform where particular institutions were implicated in atrocities, including by supporting civilian oversight of the security sector, improving local governance, standing up new bodies such as special benches of judges or courts, and reforming national institutions.
- ***Support economic recovery:*** As described above, mass atrocities often have substantial economic costs for the targeted communities and groups, and the country as a whole. In addition to the basic needs to generate income, purchase food and household supplies, and attempt to recover property and land losses, employment, the reconvening of trade, and other economic opportunities offer a valuable social, psychological, and symbolic demonstration that some elements of society are returning to "normal" and moving in a positive direction. If economic gains were a motivator of the violent conflict and mass atrocities, economic recovery that is broader-reaching, sustainable, and aims to mitigate a "winner takes all" configuration can help prevent a return to violence and future atrocities.

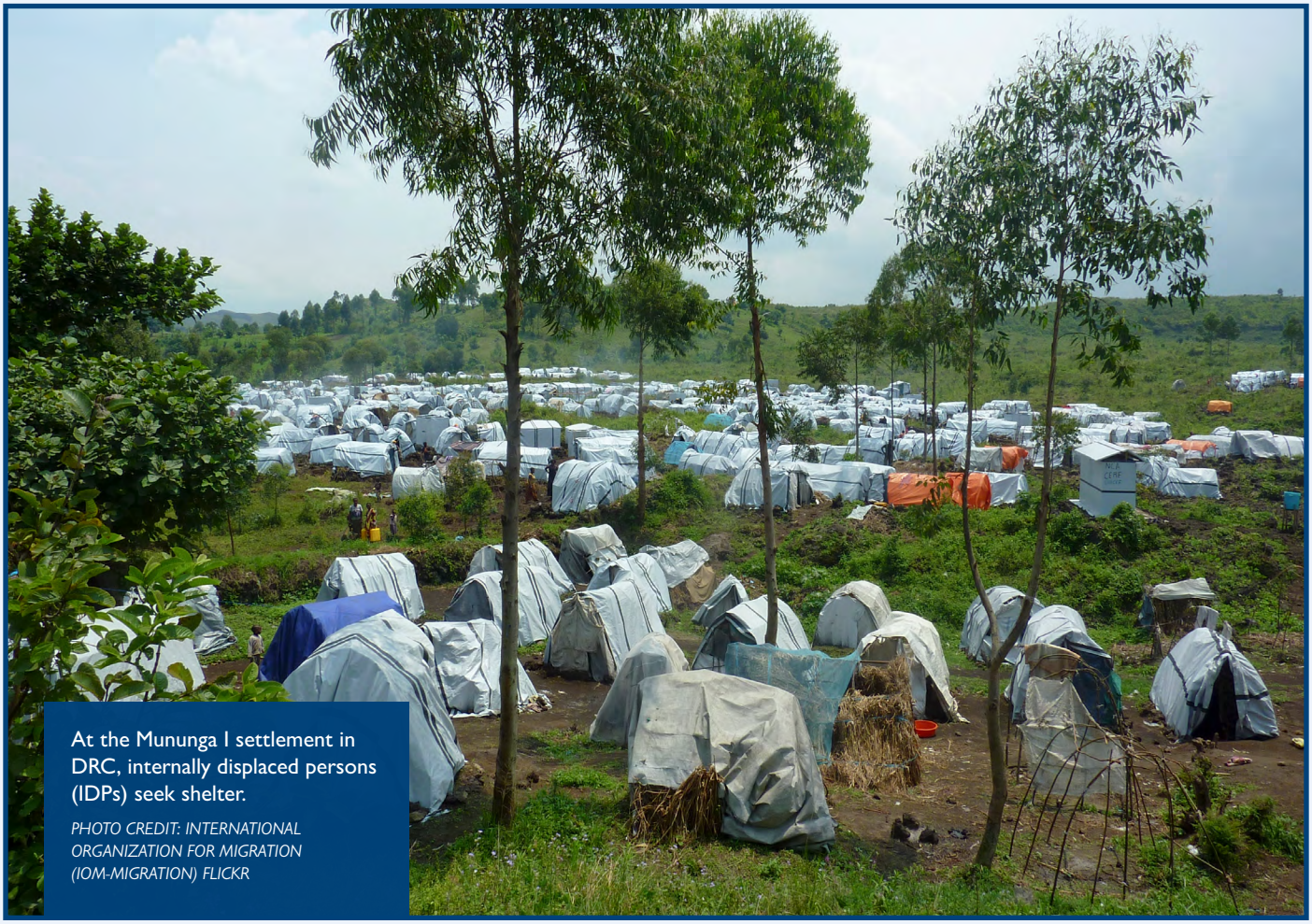
Program Options

- Social Cohesion Programs
- Engaging Women and Girls in Peacebuilding and Political Processes
- Support to Transitional Justice Processes
- Trauma Healing
- Support for Reintegration of Former Combatants
- Economic Recovery Programs
- Promote the Rule of Law and Access to Justice

Considerations

- ***Assess whether USAID can have the greatest impact at the local community level, the national level, supporting regional or international processes, or some combination thereof.*** When governments responsible for mass atrocities remain in power, USAID and the USG can face challenging decisions about whether and how to support national-level initiatives to deal with the past. In these cases, the Agency may find it useful to support local-level activities (e.g., social cohesion programming, community-led memorialization efforts) in hopes that they have direct impact at the community level and/or regional or international processes (e.g., commissions of inquiry). In other cases, high-profile national processes (e.g., national dialogue, truth and reconciliation commissions, war crimes prosecutions) merit support because of their broad reverberations across the country.

- ***Look for opportunities to link community-level, national, and regional/international processes.*** Successful recovery after mass atrocities is more likely if transitional justice and reconciliation processes take place at multiple levels. Given this interdependence, USAID should take a comprehensive view of recovery, even if it is supporting activities with a specific focus. For example, USAID can often play a useful role by supporting community-level discussion about national or international transitional justice initiatives, and helping ensure that the results of these discussions are considered in formal processes.
- ***Avoid sharp fluctuations in levels of assistance.*** The immediate post-conflict period often draws a huge influx of foreign assistance, only for the amount of support to fall dramatically a relatively short time later, and then perhaps spike again if there is another crisis. Dealing with the aftermath of mass atrocities is necessarily a long-term process and should be driven by local people. In providing support, USAID should consider the risks of overwhelming post-atrocity contexts with money- and donor-driven programs for only a short time, rather than investing in locally led efforts over the long-term.



At the Mununga I settlement in DRC, internally displaced persons (IDPs) seek shelter.

PHOTO CREDIT: INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION (IOM-MIGRATION) FLICKR

Annex A: Table of Programming Options

NOTES ON THE TABLE:

- "ToC" refers to "theory of change." For more information on theories of change, see *Theories and Indicators of Change: Concepts and Primers for Conflict Management and Mitigation*.
- "Context" refers to considerations for matching the type of program to a suitable context, i.e., which contextual factors make this type of program more or less likely to be effective.
- "Design" refers to insights about how the type of program can be designed and implemented most effectively.

CONTENTS

Prevention	Support Local Early Warning—Early Response Systems	Potential contingency funds and/or mechanisms: Complex Crises Fund, OTI SWIFT, JRS APS, JRS Rapid Response (JRS-RRA), Human Rights Grants Program (HRGP), CVP Programming for Prevention and Peacebuilding (P4P2)
Description	In several countries and regions, systems are being developed to collect information on potential signs of violence and violations of human rights and channel this to local or regional actors who can engage in timely preventive or responsive action. The emphasis on local networks as primary actors—for reporting, analysis, and response—distinguishes these programs from more vertically organized early warning systems that focus on collecting information for external actors and rely on response by a centralized formal authority.	
ToC	If information and analysis about potential violence and/or violations of human rights are more effectively shared with local prevention and response actors, community members will be better equipped to take protective actions. **- OR -** If local actors are able to gather, analyze, and share information on potential violence and are equipped with skills and resources to respond effectively and early, then communities can better prevent and mitigate violence while building resiliency.	
Example	**Nigeria:** Through the Tolerance program, USAID uses a community-based approach to draw on the expertise of religious and traditional leaders, women and youth groups, government officials, and civil society to develop an early warning system, protocols, and reference materials to improve responses to outbreaks and threats of violence. USAID supports councils of religious, private sector, and civil society leaders working to address violence in their respective regions and advocate for government improvements in conflict management and mitigation efforts. (Tolerance Program Factsheet, April 2013) Sectoral activities in agriculture and health can serve as early warning systems because IPs have field staff (e.g., community health workers) who often pick up on subtle changes in community dynamics.	
Context	• More likely to have positive impact where local conflict dynamics contribute significantly to the risk of mass atrocities. • More likely to have positive impact where local civil society networks are strong and have at least some capacity to respond to warnings of possible atrocities. • Challenging in environments where military tactics are extremely fast (such as aerial bombardments), reducing the amount of time available for warning.	

Prevention	Support Local Early Warning—Early Response Systems	Potential contingency funds and/or mechanisms: Complex Crises Fund, OTI SWIFT, JRS APS, JRS Rapid Response (JRS-RRA), Human Rights Grants Program (HRGP), CVP Programming for Prevention and Peacebuilding (P4P2)
Design	• Technology such as Ushahidi-style platforms can be useful, but matching the technology to the local context is paramount. The focus should be on the most user-friendly platform, if a technology platform is needed, informed by discussions with potential end users. • Verification of warnings is challenging in any context. Early warning systems often struggle with too much unverified information or not enough information because verification takes so long. A verification process and plan should be developed early and piloted before a system is fully rolled out. • Response needs and capacities should be considered on the front end to avoid an overemphasis on generating warning signals without an effective response. This may require significant efforts to build trust between those doing the early warning and those responsible for responding, because there may be tensions among these groups (for example, between human rights defenders and security forces). • Building warning-response systems upon existing networks of local actors is usually most effective. • USAID may need to supply secure communications equipment and training to ensure that the network can effectively communicate and share its warnings. • Ensuring the participation of women and marginalized communities in designing and implementing early warning–early response systems is important. For more information on gender-responsive early warning, see the United Nations' Gender-Responsive Early Warning Guide. • Communities' analysis and response needs and strategies will differ across contexts and should be guided by communities themselves. • Some early warning initiatives have focused on tracking hate speech or incitement. For more information, see "Hate Speech as Early Warning Monitoring, Intervention, and Mitigation," in *Preventing Atrocities: Five Key Primers*. In the same volume, see also "Case Study: EWS in Eastern DRC."	

Prevention	Engage Youth	Potential contingency funds and/or mechanisms: Complex Crises Fund, OTI SWIFT, CSM STAND, JRS APS, CVP P4P2
Description	According to findings from USAID's partner, Search for Common Ground, one in four young people ages 15 to 29 is directly affected by conflict and violence in their community. Young men are the most common perpetrators of atrocities, yet young men and women are also frequently drivers of peaceful, constructive change. USAID has supported various types of programs focused on engaging youth to reduce the chance that they will commit violent acts and/or to empower them as agents of positive change. These programs include job training and employment, constructive political participation, conflict resolution and community dialogue, and tolerance training. In line with USAID's new Youth in Development Policy released in 2022, programming should embrace a Positive Youth Development approach—drawn from best practices in youth-specific programs—focusing on four key domains: • **Assets:** Youth have the necessary resources and skills to achieve desired outcomes. Programming should incorporate skills development through direct implementation or coordination with other initiatives. • **Agency:** Youth can employ their assets and aspirations to act on their own decisions. This requires that programs engage with families, adults, leaders, and institutions and work to strengthen policies to reduce obstacles that prevent youth from participating in decision-making processes and applying their assets. • **Contribution:** Youth are encouraged, recognized, and able to be involved and lead through various channels as a source of change. Meaningful participation requires dedicated time and funding to ensure that youth mobilize, lead, and contribute to program design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. • **Enabling Environment:** Youth are surrounded by an enabling environment that maximizes their assets, and have an enabling agency, access to services and opportunities, and the ability to avoid risks while promoting their health and their social and emotional competence to thrive. Developing high-quality, safe spaces; building relationships; and addressing norms, expectations, perceptions, and access to youth-responsive and integrated services help build enabling environments. USAID programs should work to expand young people's role in activities that advance the five pillars of UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace, and Security: • Participation; • Partnership; • Protection; • Prevention; and • Disengagement and reintegration.	
ToC	If youth have greater capacity, opportunities, and support to meaningfully participate in civic and political spaces, then they will play a constructive role in society and help reduce the risk of mass violence.	

Prevention	Engage Youth	Potential contingency funds and/or mechanisms: Complex Crises Fund, OTI SWIFT, CSM STAND, JRS APS, CVP P4P2
Example	• **Colombia:** The Youth Resilience Activity (YRA) works with youth ages 10 to 29 across 30 municipalities in Colombia, including disengaged child soldiers, former offenders, migrants, survivors and/or those at risk of intrafamily violence or gender-based violence (GBV), as well as those who are in vulnerable socioeconomic conditions or at risk of recruitment and utilization. In line with the principles of Positive Youth Development, YRA also engages with the youth's families, community, service providers, and others who influence their development. YRA focuses on improving healthy relationships, creating youth-centric protective environments, enhancing economic empowerment opportunities, and strategic communications for increasing social cohesion. For more information, check out the YRA site. *Interventions that aim to empower youth often include community mapping comments, which can be harnessed as a means to identify divisions and strengthen connections at the local level.*	
Context	• More likely to have an impact where informal militias, gangs, or similar groups are the likely perpetrators of atrocities. Less likely to have an impact where official security services are the likely perpetrators. • More likely to have an impact where mass atrocities would require mobilization of a large group of individuals who are not already engaged in violence. This will usually mean situations without an ongoing civil war. • Youth empowerment programs have special relevance in countries with large "youth bulges" and where significant political transitions are anticipated in the near-to-medium term (e.g., emerging democracies).	
Design	• Program activities should be tailored to an assessment of what is driving or might drive youth toward violence, e.g., lack of opportunity, lack of political voice, lack of dispute resolution skills, and/or ideology. For information on engaging youth in advancing peace and security, see The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace, and Security. • Young women's distinct experiences and capacities should also be considered and capitalized on, and efforts to address young men's grievances should be careful not to further marginalize young women—e.g., job creation programs tailored only to young men that may limit young women's economic opportunities and reinforce norms used to justify inequality in this area. • To be credible locally, specific activities need to be driven by local partners.	

Prevention	Support for Independent Media	Potential contingency funds and/or mechanisms: Complex Crises Fund, OTI SWIFT, CSM Stand
Description	Freedom of the press and freedom of expression are critical components of any atrocity prevention strategy: Often, perpetrator groups/governments try to limit or co-opt these freedoms, and on the flip side, independent media can be key groups who are exposing atrocities, documenting crimes, and elevating stories that push for accountability. USAID supports independent media–strengthening programs in more than 31 countries with an annual budget of approximately $40 million. These activities include financial support for reporting, content production, and broadcast capabilities, such as community radios.	
ToC	If strong and independent media exist in a country, the public will be more informed and better able to hold the government accountable, which will reduce potential perpetrators' ability to mobilize masses to attack civilians and a government's ability to commit atrocities without triggering a strong response. **- OR -** If diverse populations, including minority groups and women, have a voice and presence in all aspects of media, it is less likely to be used as a tool to instigate violence against a select part of the population.	
Example	**Ukraine:** USAID supports The Reckoning Project, which trains on-the-ground investigative journalists to collect witness testimonies from sites of human rights violations, war crimes, and atrocities. The project's journalism focuses on individuals' stories and testimonies, highlighting the human impact with reporting methods that preserve the integrity of the statements for use in courts to counter impunity.	
Context	• Most appropriate in countries where there is some degree of space for independent media to operate, report free of interference or reprisal (e.g., no restrictive laws on ownership, criminalization of libel, or political/oligarchic control of all outlets).	
Design	• Design should account for how individuals actually consume information (i.e., is internet penetration common outside the capital, are newspapers read by populations outside of political elites, does the power supply limit consumption of electronic broadcasts?). • As poor-quality reporting (e.g., one-sided or using discriminatory language against women and minority groups) can exacerbate tensions, support for journalist training should focus on ethics and conflict sensitivity where possible. • USAID may be able to link journalists to partners on its other atrocity-related programs, such as human rights or rule of law programs, which can provide source material for journalists. • Increasing the voices of diverse groups within media may reduce the likelihood of it being used as a tool against a select part of the population. • Risk prevention, mitigation, and response should be high priorities in the design of any media program in an atrocity prevention context, because journalists are often arrested, threatened, or killed as part of atrocities.	

Prevention, Response	Mitigate Risks from Disinformation and Hate Speech	Potential contingency funds and/or mechanisms: Complex Crises Fund, OTI SWIFT, CVP P4P2, DRG Mechanisms
Description	Research indicates that narratives promulgated through both traditional broadcast and digital platforms have very specific impacts in conflict- and violence-affected environments, particularly in leveraging, shifting, and reinforcing intragroup and intergroup perceptions. Disinformation and hate speech are not new, but they thrive in today's complex information ecosystems, where fragmented networks create multiple, parallel facts, narratives, and realities, emotionally provocative content is quickly amplified, and thoughtful content moderation is difficult to scale. These networks can organically contribute to—and are often used intentionally to promulgate—narratives of exclusion or deprivation, and can amplify perceptions of threat and vulnerability, increase the emotional salience of conflict, and influence offline interactions. Upticks in extreme, polarized narratives and hate speech have been shown to reduce intergroup interactions and social cohesion, isolate already marginalized identity groups, and even contribute to offline violence, from interpersonal violence to mass violence and atrocities. Nonstate armed groups, criminal networks, and other malicious actors have been strengthened by the tactical exploitation of digital platforms, and strategic deployment of narratives and misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech to disrupt or consolidate control, finance and operate illicit and violent activities, and recruit members. Given the newness of digital media vis-à-vis traditional media, a variety of approaches may be considered, including not but not limited to: • Hiring a third party research firm to monitor disinformation and hate speech in the media that may trigger or contribute to atrocities. • This and similar actions must be balanced with the right to free expression. Please consult with GC/RLO for any questions or concerns related to programming in this space. • Supporting investigative journalism or digital forensics on the mechanics, networks, pathways, and topics used to spread disinformation and hate speech. • Targeting media literacy training to locally empowered conflict mitigators (e.g., community and religious leaders, student groups, popular figures). • Providing emergency assistance to independent media outlets or fact-checkers trying to push out reporting in the midst of new and immediate security and/or operational challenges. • Funding public information campaigns to raise awareness and take action on emerging trends and evidence related to violence or mass atrocities. • Employing social and behavior change communication (SBCC) approaches to build resilience against disinformation and hate speech through media content that promotes shared values. • Using targeted and tangible assistance at a local level to demonstrate communities' ability to resist the "othering" and division that disinformation and hate speech promulgate.	

Prevention, Response	Mitigate Risks from Disinformation and Hate Speech	Potential contingency funds and/or mechanisms: Complex Crises Fund, OTI SWIFT, CVP P4P2, DRG Mechanisms
ToC	If USAID supports investigative journalism or digital forensics, then networks and pathways used to spread disinformation and hate speech may be disrupted. **-OR-** If USAID funds public information campaigns to raise awareness on trends and evidence related to mass atrocities, communities may be better equipped to protect themselves.	
Example	In Iraq, five women activists established a new platform to expand inclusive media coverage. The platform is committed to increasing coverage of community-based issues and shared interests, and ensuring that women have the chance to voice their perspectives and priorities in a local media landscape that is still largely dominated by men. USAID/Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) delivered IT equipment and provided a series of in-depth training sessions for the budding media moguls on media management, content creation, news analysis, and marketing. By supporting this platform, OTI aims to help counter the disinformation and divisive rhetoric that affect communities.	
Context	The interventions listed above can be tested in any environment where there are risks from disinformation and hate speech. Interventions should be co-designed with local partners who understand the political, cultural, and social context, and tailored to the capacity and resources of those partners. Examples include environments where: • Conditions in society make people feel a greater need for in-grouping; • There is an emergence of high-profile political figures who encourage their followers to indulge their desire for identity-affirming misinformation; or • There has been a shift to increased social media usage.	

Prevention, Response	Mitigate Risks from Disinformation and Hate Speech	Potential contingency funds and/or mechanisms: Complex Crises Fund, OTI SWIFT, CVP P4P2, DRG Mechanisms
Design	• Media monitoring is not a comprehensive exercise—it is bound by time and sample. Reports should be analyzed by someone with local knowledge and taken as indicative at best. • Identify a specific target audience(s) to tailor your approach and develop a well-considered ToC that articulates how change will happen in an incremental fashion. • Attitude and/or behavior change usually requires a sustained effort across many communication channels and messages with content that has been researched and tested for its resonance. • Focus efforts to build or improve digital and media literacy in at-risk communities and work through credible community stakeholders or influencers. Do both a pre- and post-assessment. • Manage expectations when providing emergency assistance or operational support to media outlets and, if their needs appear long-term, consider funding business strategies that involve multiple revenue streams. • Avoid direct, factual counternarratives that can amplify the original piece of disinformation or hate speech and cause those swayed by it to dig in further. • Consider that disinformation and hate speech narratives will shift as the context changes, new exploitative opportunities emerge, and they are challenged. • Share information to help technology companies enforce their terms of service related to violence, graphic content, hate speech, information integrity, and coordinated inauthentic behavior. • Ensure that efforts to identify and address hate speech do not inadvertently restrict free expression; authoritarian governments have used prohibitions on hate speech to target and crack down on legitimate dissent and speech.	

Prevention	Support to National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs)	Potential contingency funds and/or mechanisms: Complex Crises Fund, Human Rights Grants Program, JRS-RRA, JRS APS, ACES IDIQ, ACES APS
Description	National human rights institutions (NHRIs) are state bodies with a constitutional and/or legislative mandate to protect and promote human rights. They are part of the state apparatus and are funded by the state. However, they operate and function independently from the government. At their best, they can link government and civil society by playing roles in human rights education, complaint handling, and making recommendations on law reform. For more information, check out UNHCR's page on NHRIs.	
ToC	If an NHRI is effective in identifying, reporting on, and recommending actions to respond to human rights violations, then it will increase public attention to human rights issues and government action to protect people from human rights violations before abuses approach the level of mass atrocities.	
Example	**Burundi:** With support from the Human Rights Grants Program, USAID supported the National Human Rights Commission in Burundi, specifically funding positions that can do independent reporting and investigate alleged incidents of human rights abuses.	
Context	• While NHRIs should be independent, some do experience interference from political or state actors. It is important to analyze the independence and credibility of NHRIs when considering how best to engage. The Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions' rating method for scoring NHRIs against the Paris Principles can be a good place to start, though local, contextual analysis is critical. • It is helpful to engage NHRIs "upstream" and build relationships and collaboration in prevention contexts. In response phases, USAID can and has provided surge support, even to NHRIs that the Agency has not partnered with previously , but this can be challenging.	
Design	• Because NHRIs are state-funded, program designers should engage colleagues in their respective acquisition and assistance, legal, and program offices to determine programing modalities that would allow for direct support versus those that would allow only for technical assistance. In most instances, USAID support to NHRIs is through technical assistance, including training, support to consultants, etc. • The credibility and independence of a particular NHRI should be carefully assessed. Assistance could be useful even to weak institutions, depending on the local context. • USAID support could help link NHRIs to existing early warning systems, including those designed for conflict, to strengthen national- or subnational-level warning of atrocities. (See "The Role of National Human Rights Institutions and Paralegals in Atrocity Prevention" in *Preventing Atrocities: Five Key Primers*.	

Prevention	Support to Regional and National Structures for Prevention of Mass Atrocities/Genocide	Potential contingency funds and/or mechanisms: Complex Crises Fund, Human Rights Grants Program
Description	Several countries—including Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, and Zambia—have established national committees dedicated to the prevention of genocide and mass atrocities. Where credible, they could be useful partners and provide a national platform for engaging government and civil society in advancing atrocity prevention efforts. In addition, more than 40 states have a designated national focal point on the "responsibility to protect" (R2P). These officials work to promote R2P and improve their governments' efforts to prevent mass atrocities at home and abroad; they meet periodically as a Global Network of R2P Focal Points.	
ToC	If regions and countries develop credible bureaucratic structures for atrocity prevention, then negative trends will be more likely to be recognized and addressed by national or local mechanisms.	
Example	USAID may support regional or national structures for the prevention of mass atrocities, such as the Latin American Network for Genocide and Mass Atrocity Prevention and the Genocide Prevention Committee of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), which spurred creation of national committees in ICGLR member states.	
Context	• Generally more suitable for "upstream" prevention contexts. • Generally less suitable for cases in which the state is the most likely perpetrator of mass atrocities.	
Design	Support to strengthen regional or national capacities on conflict prevention, human rights, or related issues could help mitigate atrocity risks even where these capacities are not specifically or explicitly focused on mass atrocities.	

Prevention, Recovery	Support to Political Processes (e.g., elections, constitutional referenda)	Potential contingency funds and/or mechanisms: Complex Crises Fund, Elections and Political Processes fund, Democratic Elections and Political Processes Leader with Associate (LWA) Rapid and Flexible Response (RFR) mechanism
Description	Elections can be a trigger for atrocities or contribute to atrocity risks, particularly when zero-sum politics play out, including when political identity is aligned with ethnic or other identity. USAID promotes elections that are transparent, inclusive, genuinely competitive, peaceful, and trusted by voters and those elected. To achieve this, the Agency supports elections and political processes around the world through a wide range of programming, including strengthening election management bodies and political parties, supporting electoral reform and election observation, enhancing voter education, promoting a more resilient information environment, mitigating electoral violence, and bolstering electoral justice. USAID's electoral assistance programming emphasizes addressing barriers to the political and electoral participation of women, youth, and other marginalized populations.	
ToC	If political processes are perceived as inclusive and credible, then they will reduce potential motives or flashpoints for atrocities related to political power and make it harder to mobilize large groups for violence in the context of elections.	
Example	• **Honduras:** During the 2021 national electoral cycle, USAID supported a local faith-based organization, Cáritas, to pilot an early warning and prevention system for political violence and conflict. Cáritas identified patterns of political violence in the pre-electoral period, key challenges in the management of the electoral process and the specific uncertainties and risks of those challenges ahead of the elections, and conditions that could increase or decrease the risks of violence on election day. Cáritas sent its report to various government agencies and, in the post-electoral stage, continued working to strengthen the system, particularly focusing on monitoring political violence and social conflict. • **Kenya:** During the 2022 national electoral cycle, USAID supported a consortium of local faith-based society organizations (FBOs) representing a variety of different faiths to support national cohesion and peaceful coexistence programming, specifically community-led advocacy, messaging, and outreach through religious services and other faith-based platforms. Faith leaders also used these platforms to spread messages about countering gender-based violence and other human rights violations around elections.	

Prevention, Recovery	Support to Political Processes (e.g., elections, constitutional referenda)	Potential contingency funds and/or mechanisms: Complex Crises Fund, Elections and Political Processes fund, Democratic Elections and Political Processes Leader with Associate (LWA) Rapid and Flexible Response (RFR) mechanism
Context	• Generally relevant only to countries that are in the midst of political transition or those with an upcoming election or referendum. • Most likely to have a positive impact where perceived political exclusion is a driver of potential atrocities or where the previous political system/constitution strongly favored one group over others. • If an autocratic regime perceives that the political process could threaten its grip on power, there may be a higher risk that the regime could resort to committing atrocities. USAID should take this into account when determining whether and how to support the political process.	
Design	• Even purely technical activities can reduce the risk of atrocities—e.g., if they increase the credibility of elections and perceptions thereof. • Collaborate actively with USAID/Washington and interagency actors. • Be flexible and innovative with approaches, partners, and mechanisms. Internal mechanisms should be in place that allow for context monitoring and rapid adaptation. Consider utilizing local partners for these efforts because they have expertise in cultural nuances and best approaches for the given context/communities. • Plan early (well before the elections) for support that will be needed in the post-election period to ensure continuity of operations. • Ensure that support fosters inclusive processes, e.g., supporting leadership and participation of women and youth within political parties, ensuring that voter registration and education efforts reach diverse populations, and working to make voting accessible to all. Potential interventions could also include peace pledges, fact-checking, election violence monitoring, and conflict ambassadors. • USAID's Elections and Political Processes team manages a rapid response mechanism, the Democratic Elections and Political Processes fund, which can support efforts to mitigate electoral violence. • For more information, see: » USAID Electoral Security Framework • For more information on mitigating gender-based political and electoral violence, see: » IFES Violence Against Women in Elections: A Framework for Assessment, Monitoring, and Response » NDI Votes Without Violence toolkit » CEPPS/IFES Violence Against Women in Elections Online	

Prevention	Support to Local Peace Committees	Potential contingency funds and/or mechanisms: Complex Crises Fund, OTI SWIFT
Description	According to Infrastructures for Peace, there is no standard definition or model for I4P. Most definitions however include reference to a dynamic set or network of skills, capacities, resources, tools and institutions that help build constructive social relationships and enhance the resilience of societies against relapse into violence. Peace infrastructures can take various organizational forms, as they are shaped by local culture, institutional traditions and needs of a particular context. Common examples of structures for peace include: local peace committees; national peace platforms; government departments or ministries of peace that support and develop strategies for peacebuilding; conflict analysis and early warning and response systems; development of conflict management skills including through inside mediators; as well as policies and initiatives promoting a shared culture of peace.	
ToC	If local structures/mechanisms for peace are strengthened, they will be more effective at recognizing and responding to early signs of violence and the risk of mass atrocities will be reduced.	
Example	**Kenya:** USAID's Rift Valley Local Empowerment for Peace program strengthened the capacity of local actors and institutions in targeted counties to develop and advance sustainable peace, reconciliation, and norms of nonviolence based on justice, accountability, and equality. Focusing primarily on expanding and deepening inclusive peace networks that foster dialogue and reconciliation, the program used local and village peace committees to increase knowledge and amplify peace messages.	
Context	• More likely to have a positive impact where local conflict dynamics contribute significantly to the risk of mass atrocities. • Most effective during transitional periods. • Most effective when they complement national peace processes/mechanisms.	
Design	• According to UNDP, "External support organizations that seek to pursue their own agendas, or impose rather than provide support, may do more harm than good" (An Architecture for Building Peace at the Local Level, p. 18). • Specific kinds of support might include: (1) facilitation or mediation from outside the local community, where it is needed; (2) orientation and training regarding roles/responsibilities and peacebuilding skills; and (3) connections to national peacebuilding processes. • Women can often play a unique role in fostering peace at the community level, in some cases based on their traditional roles as mediators, or because they are viewed as more neutral, less threatening, or less politicized actors. • These types of interventions take time and develop at unique rates. A key design consideration is building in enough time to enable local actors to drive the process without being influenced by donor benchmarks or other external/artificial pressures.	

Prevention, Recovery	Support for Local Protection Strategies/ Capacities	Potential contingency funds and/or mechanisms: Complex Crises Fund, OTI SWIFT
Description	Local protection efforts seek to improve communities' ability to cope with violent attacks. Remote, isolated communities in particular are highly vulnerable to violence, which has led to programs focusing on communications capabilities. Improved intra- and inter-community communications capabilities can serve as a local protection strategy.	
ToC	If local communities are supported in developing strategies and building capacities for protecting themselves from potential violence, they will be better able to prevent and mitigate the consequences of any attacks. **- OR -** If vulnerable groups can access and share timely and accurate information, they will be better able to avoid attacks and develop protection strategies.	
Example	**Central African Republic (CAR):** Community Resilience in Central Africa (CRCA) was USAID's response to the difficult conditions created by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and other armed groups operating in southeastern CAR and northeastern DRC. CRCA continued USAID's previous work through the Secured, Empowered, Connected Communities (SECC) activity, using both high-frequency radios and community mobilization to create an early warning network against the LRA and other security threats. Through 2022, CRCA also connected communities across the region using FM radios to share information, and assisted communities in recovery through mental health support to address traumatic events as well as community-based reintegration activities. CAR Development Programming Fact Sheet	
Context	Most suitable for contexts in which local communities are relatively cohesive and atrocity threats emanate from "outsiders" or discrete armed actors (e.g., areas affected by the LRA in CAR), and when vulnerable populations have relatively poor capacity to communicate among themselves and/or with other actors that could help prevent atrocities or provide direct protection.	

Prevention, Recovery	Support for Local Protection Strategies/ Capacities	Potential contingency funds and/or mechanisms: Complex Crises Fund, OTI SWIFT
Design	• Protection strategies may take a variety of forms based on context, resources, and community capacities. **Communities should lead in defining the level of risk and approach to protection that are best suited to them.** USAID should be clear and transparent with locals about what kinds of activities might fall outside of its acceptable parameters, and communicate the importance of including all segments of the population in decision-making. • Communications capacities and needs will vary across contexts. Tools like radios or cell phones may need to be supplemented with megaphones, bicycle brigades, or other low-tech options in particularly remote or underdeveloped areas. In contexts with higher internet and mobile phone penetration, the Information Security Coalition suite of tools for improving "digital hygiene" and social media skills, or digital and encrypted messaging applications such as WhatsApp, Telegram, Signal, or Viber might be useful. Gender differences in access to and control over communications tools should be taken into consideration when designing such programs. • Note that in some instances, providing communications infrastructure may inadvertently put communities at greater risk or turn them into targets because of the tools received. • Because this kind of program injects resources directly into a local community (typically in the form of small grants), it is especially important to be aware of potential unintended consequences.	

Prevention, Recovery	Enhance Awareness of Rights of At-Risk Groups/Civil Society Advocacy	Potential contingency funds and/or mechanisms: Complex Crises Fund, OTI SWIFT, CVP P4P2
Description	Promoting the inclusion of marginalized groups in the prevention of atrocities can function as a protection mechanism. Awareness of their legal rights under national and international law is critical for at-risk groups; strategic litigation and similar practices are often part of awareness-raising and advocacy.	
ToC	If marginalized groups are more aware of their rights under national and international law, they can better participate in preventing human rights violations and, potentially, atrocities against them.	
Example	**Tanzania:** USAID's Data Driven Advocacy (DDA) activity in Tanzania aimed to advance the capacity of Tanzanian civil society organizations (CSOs) to generate and use data for human rights advocacy. By doing so, CSOs can work to reform human rights policy at the national level. This activity established a group of stakeholders at the local and international levels to build local coalitions, gather and document human rights issues, and engage in constructive advocacy with the Government of Tanzania (GoT) on important national issues. This activity built on experience from previous locally informed Indigenous rights activities to improve accountability for human rights violations in Ngorongoro and Loliondo.	
Context	The Maasai community has lived in Loliondo and Ngorongoro districts (in the Arusha region) for decades, having been relocated to the region by the British colonial regime in 1958. The Maasai were given the right to occupy the land through the Ngorongoro Conservation Act after the British forcefully evicted them from the Serengeti to establish Serengeti National Park. However, even after the passage of the Act, the Maasai have faced forcible eviction at several points in the post-colonial period. Every eviction attempt has been characterized by mass violations of human rights, including disappearances, destruction of Maasai bomas (family compounds), loss of properties, rape, displacement, and the denial of social services to these communities both as part of the eviction process and after the displacements. The context of a conflicting legal framework, a weak rule of law, and the dramatic closure in Tanzania's democratic space necessitated a cautious approach to determining USAID's role in supporting local organizations.	

Prevention, Recovery	Enhance Awareness of Rights of At-Risk Groups/Civil Society Advocacy	Potential contingency funds and/or mechanisms: Complex Crises Fund, OTI SWIFT, CVP P4P2
Design	• When working with at-risk communities, establish appropriate protection strategies. These will differ depending on the context, amount of resources, etc., but may include contingency funds or early warning systems. • Ensure the use of Do No Harm principles, making sure the activity and its implementation do not put the group at further risk. This is especially important when there is a significant power imbalance between groups, such as an at-risk community and local and national governments. As part of ensuring Do No Harm, consulting marginalized/at-risk groups is an important part of design to identify possible risks. • In cases where CSOs are trained to engage with the legal system, they should be consulted about the level of risk and exposure they are willing to accept. • Supporting Community Evidence-Based Advocacy: USAID supported community members in documenting evidence of their legal right to live on the land. As a result of this support, the community prepared and used the evidence in the reports to engage the GoT on how to conserve wildlife and livelihoods, and respect the rule of law. • Supporting Strategic Litigation: USAID supported the collection of evidence for use by the East African Court of Justice by providing both technical and financial support to groups such as the Pan African Lawyers Union.	

Prevention, Response, Recovery	Promote the Rule of Law and Access to Justice	Potential contingency funds and/or mechanisms: Complex Crises Fund, OTI SWIFT
Description	"The rule of law is a society's 'operating system,'" which should apply to everyone equally, providing order and protecting citizens in an accountable and transparent manner (USAID Rule of Law Policy, 2023). The rule of law (RoL) includes five essential elements: order and security, legitimacy, checks and balances, fairness, and effective application. USAID RoL programs work with our partners to promote justice, protect rights, and provide security. These partners include, but are not limited to, ministries of justice, judiciaries, attorneys general, public defense and legal aid, investigators, civilian police, independent governmental institutions, professional associations, schools and universities, traditional authorities, legislative bodies, civil society, private sector associations, and citizens. Perceptions of injustice, exclusion, and insecurity weaken the rule of law and drive instability and violent extremism; however, promoting the rule of law serves to constrain power, ensure abuses are investigated, and deter misdeeds. USAID takes a people-centered justice (PCJ) approach to programming, seeking to ensure that justice systems and institutions meet the everyday justice needs and wants of everyday people. It places the person affected by the law—regardless of whether the issue is civil, criminal, or administrative—at the core of the policies, processes, and practices that constitute justice systems and services.	
ToC	If the rule of law prevails, the state will be restrained from committing atrocities even during a crisis. **- OR -** If citizens have access to justice that meets their specific needs, they can pursue their rights and obtain remedies for abuses before those abuses reach a massive scale.	
Example	**Colombia:** The Inclusive Justice Activity facilitates justice service access for citizens living in rural and violence-affected areas. It strengthens investigations, prosecutions, and reparations for high-impact crimes, and expands access to quality justice through community and state-led dispute resolution. The activity also increases trust in the Colombian justice system by helping to reduce impunity, improve access to justice services, and increase respect for rule of law. This activity works in 76 municipalities with Colombian actors like the Ministry of Justice, municipal governments, and other justice sector institutions, including transitional justice actors established by the 2016 Peace Accord, like Truth Commission, the Unit for the Search of Missing Persons, and the Special Jurisdiction for Peace.	

Prevention, Response, Recovery	Promote the Rule of Law and Access to Justice	Potential contingency funds and/or mechanisms: Complex Crises Fund, OTI SWIFT
Context	• USAID Rule of Law assistance can and should reach far beyond engaging ministries of justice, judicial self-governance bodies, courts, prosecutors, the legal profession, and other formal justice institutions to also encompass support for nonstate justice systems and actors, including community justice advocates, and customary justice mechanisms. • USAID Rule of Law assistance eschews a "one-size-fits-all" approach in favor of politically smart and adaptive approaches that first seek to understand local realities, and then tailor rule of law assistance accordingly. Activities are rooted in experimentation, iteration, and adaptation, using mechanisms that are appropriate to our partner countries, their legal traditions and culture, and the needs of local justice system users. • In response to ongoing atrocities, access to justice activities could serve the immediate needs of targeted or vulnerable groups and raise costs on perpetrators, particularly through the use of people-centered justice approaches.	
Design	• Program design should be informed by an assessment using USAID's Rule of Law strategic framework. • USAID focuses on "the whole of the picture: the *systems* that support and manage, the *services* that define, and the *society* that engages, demands, and benefits from the rule of law" (Rule of Law Policy, p. 15). • Because justice, trust, accountability, and inclusion bolster both the rule of law and peace, USAID takes a "holistic and people-centered" approach that provides "a structure for examining the links among all forms of violence, identifying the common features that motivate them, and designing deliberate, evidence-based development assistance interventions to prevent or deter them as well as address the complex needs of the individuals, populations, and communities that are affected by them" (Rule of Law Policy, p. 28). • USAID is going beyond improving the independence, accountability, transparency, and efficiency of justice institutions to "transform these institutions, the services they provide, and their operating systems to address contemporary challenges, adapt to the digital age, and interact with the public in a problem-solving manner that is more *data-driven, user-friendly, solution-focused, and prevention-oriented*—in other words, more people-centered" (Rule of Law Policy, p. 18). • Fostering transparency in justice sector processes and institutions "can bring solutions, at least partial ones, even when underlying social and political issues remain unresolved" (Rule of Law Strategic Framework, p. 27). • On justice sector interventions, see "Justice Sector Interventions in Atrocity Prevention," in *Preventing Atrocities: Five Key Primers*.	

Prevention, Recovery	Support Monitoring of Human Rights/ Documentation of Atrocities	Potential contingency funds and/or mechanisms: Complex Crises Fund, Human Rights Grants Program, OTI SWIFT, JRS APS, JRS-RRA
Description	Human rights monitoring, fact-finding, and documentation describe investigations and ongoing tracking of violations of specific human rights, and can be conducted by the UN, regional human rights experts, national human rights institutions, NGOs, journalists, and even justice sector actors. In some cases, formal "commissions of inquiry" are mandated by political bodies such as the UN. Documentation efforts can be undertaken in support of formal accountability processes and/or for other purposes, such as to establish a definitive record. For more on this subject, see "The Role of Secure Human Rights Documentation in Atrocity Prevention," in *Preventing Atrocities: Five Key Primers*. Monitoring and documentation efforts should pay special attention to groups who are at unique risk of atrocities because of their marginalized status, which can include religious and ethnic minorities, LGBTQI+ populations, Indigenous groups, and more.	
ToC	If human rights violations are being actively monitored and reported, then the calculation of potential perpetrators will change (simply by force of feeling watched and/or by supporting accountability), making them less likely to commit grave abuses. **- OR -** If atrocities are documented in a rigorous and timely fashion, there is a greater chance that perpetrators will be held to account, which will in turn strengthen deterrence. **- OR -** If atrocities are documented in a victim-centered and thorough way and communicated through truth-telling efforts and/or transitional justice, then populations will be better able to recover from atrocities, which in turn will prevent recurrence.	
Example	**Ethiopia:** It is estimated that the large-scale conflict in northern Ethiopia in 2020–2022, primarily in the Tigray region, resulted in over 500,000 deaths and millions of displaced people. In 2021, when access to conflict-affected areas was extremely restricted, USAID identified a lack of real-time documentation and reporting on the conflict by local Ethiopian organizations. Through rapid response activities, the Agency funded a leading local NGO to document, analyze the materials it documented, and more effectively communicate its findings to the public and the government. This workstream was later expanded upon through a larger bilateral award. In 2023, USAID also began funding the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to conduct human rights monitoring in the north of the country to assess compliance with the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement.	

Prevention, Recovery	Support Monitoring of Human Rights/ Documentation of Atrocities	Potential contingency funds and/or mechanisms: Complex Crises Fund, Human Rights Grants Program, OTI SWIFT, JRS APS, JRS-RRA
Context	• Can have more impact when potential perpetrators value reputations and/or where mechanisms for criminal accountability already exist. • More likely to be effective when investigators can access the territory where abuses are alleged. But could still be usefully done without access (e.g., Syria and Democratic People's Republic of Korea commissions of inquiry).	
Design	• Some monitoring groups (especially local NGOs) might need material/financial support and/or specific technical expertise (e.g., forensics) to carry out investigations. • In cases where formal investigations have been mandated and stood up, assistance might focus on linking this process with civil society—e.g., publicizing results. • Specific activities will differ depending on whether the information is intended for use to establish broad patterns, in which case representative sampling surveys may be sufficient, or to support individual criminal accountability, in which case evidence of specific incidents would be necessary. • Monitoring and documentation of sexual violence requires careful planning and execution, consistent with specific, internationally recognized principles, methodologies, and best practices. A useful reference is the International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict. • Safekeeping of information from any monitoring or fact-finding effort is critical.	

Prevention, Recovery	Peace Messaging	Potential contingency funds and/or mechanisms: Complex Crises Fund, Human Rights Grants Program, OTI SWIFT
Description	Public communications, such as radio broadcasts, short messaging service (SMS) blasts, and even bullhorns, can be used to disseminate messages designed to persuade people to reject violence and/or counter hate speech.	
ToC	If credible peace messages reach persons who might commit atrocities, their attitudes will change, making them less likely to attack civilians. **- OR -** If credible peace messages reach community members with influence on persons who might commit atrocities or the community writ large, it will exert social pressure and make potential perpetrators less likely to attack civilians.	
Example	**Central African Republic:** Part of USAID's response to the escalating violence in late 2013 was support for new programs that sought to strengthen local leaders' messaging on peace, tolerance, and nonviolence. Peace messaging efforts were to be crafted and led by locals, embedded into broader peace initiatives, and conducted in a way that would strengthen the role of community peace leaders. These activities were funded from the Complex Crises Fund.	
Context	• More likely to have an impact where informal militias, gangs, or similar groups are the likely perpetrators of atrocities. Less likely to have an impact where official security services are the likely perpetrators. • More likely to have an impact where mass atrocities would require mobilization of a large group of individuals who are not already engaged in violence. This will usually mean situations without an ongoing civil war. • Information environments are dynamic and complex, especially so with the proliferation of digital media. Programming in these spaces needs to listen while it disseminates peace-focused narratives. The tone and approach of USAID's and our partners' efforts will need to iterate based on this analysis.	
Design	• Peace messaging programs are most effective when they: (1) reach influential messengers; (2) use messages that are specifically tailored to the local context; (3) employ communication channels that reach key audiences; (4) are grounded and tested for resonance with well understood and deeply held social and cultural values; and (5) create and sustain an ongoing narrative over time. Messengers do not have to be viewed as elite or powerful to be influential. Women and youth may be powerful messengers of peace, in part because they may not be viewed as holding power and having vested interests in outcomes. • To be most credible—and limit the potential to do harm—messages should be crafted (or at least validated) by locals.	

Prevention, Response, Recovery	Social Cohesion Programs	Potential contingency funds and/or mechanisms: Complex Crises Fund, OTI SWIFT, Reconciliation Fund Program
Description	Social cohesion refers to behavior and attitudes within a community that reflects a propensity of community members to cooperate, including "a sense of shared purpose and trust among members of a given group or locality and the willingness of those group members to engage and cooperate with each other to survive and prosper. Development programs seek to promote social cohesion in multiple ways, such as dialogue, community-driven development, skills training, social activities (e.g., sports, dance, theater) and social behavior change (SBC).	
ToC	If the attitudes and behavior of communities promote trust and cooperation, the likelihood that they will target each other with violence will be reduced.	
Example	• **Kosovo:** Since 2019, USAID's Reconciliation Fund Program (RfP) has supported the Kosovo Youth Dialogue Activity, which has offered one of only a few opportunities for Kosovo-Albanian and Kosovo-Serb youth to engage. One of the program's activities is a one-week residential exchange programs that bring together youth leaders from the different communities to learn about the past, build positive connections, develop negotiation skills, and collaborate on future reconciliation and peacebuilding projects through mediums such as video production, photography, storytelling, theater, and visits to historical and cultural sites in Kosovo. • **Burundi:** From 2020 to 2023, USAID's RfP supported the Turi Kumwe ("We are together") activity, which worked to address long-standing ethnic divisions between Tutsis and Hutus in Burundi by strengthening the capacity of young men and women to engage in inter-group dialogue, build trust and social cohesion, and empower community members to become champions for peace. The project worked to enhance dialogue and trust among Burundian youth through a series of local multi-stakeholder dialogues, intergenerational dialogues, intercommunal exchanges, radio shows, soft skills training for at-risk youth, and by promoting financial and livelihood opportunities through Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs), business plan trainings, microloans, and start-up funding.	
Context	• More likely to be effective if conducted in a pre-crisis context. • More likely to have an impact where assistance creates incentives for long-term exposure, dialogue, and cooperation (i.e., "one-offs" are likely to have little impact).	
Design	• Intergroup social cohesion—i.e., propensity to cooperate across group lines, as distinct from cooperating across individuals—is especially relevant to the risk of atrocities. However, experience suggests that promoting intergroup social cohesion is more challenging and some past efforts have had negative effects. • Theory suggests that programs are more likely to succeed to the extent that they: (1) increase participation and ownership, (2) enhance community capacity for collective action, and (3) illustrate that participation in collective action can lead to results.	

Prevention, Response, Recovery	Engaging Women and Girls in Peacebuilding and Political Processes	Potential contingency funds and/or mechanisms: Complex Crises Fund, Global Women's Leadership Fund, OTI SWIFT
Description	In accordance with UN Security Council resolution 1325, the USG has adopted a National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace, and Security. USAID is investing in gender equality and women's empowerment in crisis and conflict-affected countries to promote the rights and well-being of women and girls and to foster peaceful, resilient communities that can cope with adversity and pursue development gains. Examples of programming approaches in this area include assistance to women's groups, network building, care to victims of gender-based violence, and skills training. (See USAID's Women, Peace, and Security implementation plan here).	
ToC	If women are engaged fully in peacebuilding and political processes, they help to expand the scope of agreements and improve the prospects for durable peace by raising issues that might otherwise be neglected, such as accountability for past abuses, support for survivors of violence, and social and economic inequalities that contribute to fragility.	
Example	**Libya:** USAID sponsored training to help Libyan women gain positions in post-Gaddafi political institutions. Funded by the Agency's Global Women's Leadership Fund and implemented through the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS), the program included a leadership academy and follow-on support to help women secure internships in government offices where they could influence Libya's political transition.	
Context	• Especially relevant to situations in which formal political or peace processes could play a major role in mitigating the risks of mass atrocities. • Especially relevant to situations where sexual and gender-based violence have been highly prevalent or used systematically against a certain population. • In addition to the possibility of programs focused on engaging women and girls, gender considerations should be integrated into all programs.	
Design	• A gender analysis—required for all new projects/activities—is an important foundation for this kind of program. • Engaging women and girls is important in all phases. The most appropriate program activities will differ by phase and other contextual factors. For example, in a prevention phase, empowering women and ensuring their participation may be most valuable. Addressing the distinct needs and priorities of women and men during relief and recovery efforts, by contrast, might mean a focus on services for survivors of sexual violence and support for women's voices in developing transitional justice processes. • Including women in peace processes requires consistent diplomatic support as well as programming such as logistical, strategic, and skill-building support for participants; therefore coordination with the State Department and other interagency actors is critical.	

Response	Help to Fill Information Vacuums during Crises	Potential contingency funds and/or mechanisms: Complex Crises Fund, OTI SWIFT, DRG HRGP
Description	The absence of information during a crisis or conflict can fuel rumors and fear-induced attacks, limit people's ability to reach lifesaving humanitarian assistance, and reduce the extent of local participation in violence mitigation efforts. USAID has supported programs to improve basic information access by, for example, distributing wind-up radios, rebuilding community radio stations, and disseminating information on emergency relief operations.	
ToC	If people have increased access to information during a crisis, they will be less fearful and, in turn, less likely to attack other civilians. **- OR -** If people have information about emergency relief operations, the positive impact of this assistance will be increased, thereby saving lives that might otherwise be lost as a result of the crisis.	
Example	**Central African Republic:** With funds from the Human Rights Grants Program, USAID supported a program that aimed to ease the humanitarian situation by providing affected populations with information that could protect their lives and livelihoods, and provide citizens with information and civic education to prepare for a return to constitutional order, effective government, and civil peace. Activities included rebuilding community radio stations that were affected by the violence, sustaining a network of community-based correspondents who share information from around the country, and supporting an information coordination center in Bangui that produces a variety of information products and content.	
Context	Most relevant to situations in which communities that are at risk of being attacked and/or are vulnerable to being mobilized to commit atrocities are isolated and lack information.	
Design	• While addressing urgent needs as expeditiously as possible, programs should, as is feasible, seek to build a foundation for sustainable improvements in the information environment. • Having assets such as radio transmitters can make partners targets for opportunistic violence. Appropriate risk management and security protocols should be followed.	

Response	Provision of Emergency Humanitarian Assistance	Potential contingency funds and/or mechanisms: International Disaster Assistance funds, Title II funds
Description	USAID is the largest donor of humanitarian assistance and supports partners in delivering aid to meet urgent humanitarian needs in response to disasters caused by natural hazards as well as complex emergencies. USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) is the lead federal coordinator of USG emergency response. This assistance typically includes lifesaving goods and services including water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH); food; shelter; and protection and health services.	
ToC	If populations affected by large-scale and deliberate attacks on civilians have their immediate needs met, it will reduce the consequences of atrocities.	
Example	**Syria:** Since the start of the crisis, USAID has provided nearly $8.7 billion in funding to help those suffering inside Syria, as well as refugees and host communities in the neighboring countries. Programs have focused on food, health, WASH, and protection. Humanitarian assistance is being delivered through the United Nations, international and nongovernmental organizations, and local Syrian organizations. For more, see: Syria | Food Assistance | U.S. Agency for International Development.	
Context	• A Declaration of Humanitarian Need is required for all humanitarian response programming, originating from BHA, including food and non-food emergency assistance, as well as food assistance for refugees. • Most critical in cases with large populations displaced by violent attacks.	
Design	• Sensitivity to potential unintended harm is critically important, especially in conflict environments. • Adherence to humanitarian principles is critical to maintaining access and credibility, yet can be challenging when certain conflict parties deliberately attack civilian populations. • Ensure that humanitarian assistance takes individuals' distinct needs into account based on age, sex, disability, etc. • IDP/refugee camps could become targets of attacks and/or perceived as safe havens for perpetrators of atrocities.	

Response	Humanitarian Protection Programs	Potential contingency funds and/or mechanisms: International Disaster Assistance funds
Description	USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) defines protection as activities that minimize risks for and address effects of harm, exploitation, and abuse among disaster-affected populations. Protection should be mainstreamed in all humanitarian assistance activities. It also is a distinct sector of humanitarian programming. The sub-sectors for protection programming are: child protection, prevention and response to GBV, psychosocial support, and protection coordination, advocacy, and information.	
ToC	If, in a disaster setting, USAID can help minimize risks by mitigating threats, reducing vulnerabilities, and alleviating the effects of harm, exploitation, and abuse, it will reduce the consequences of atrocities (and possibly decrease the likelihood of escalation).	
Example	**Ukraine:** Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, BHA deployed protection advisors to Rzeszów, Poland, as part of USAID's Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART). The protection advisors guided the DART to support a system-wide scale-up of protection services and coordination, including social work and psychosocial services, as well as safe spaces and transit for vulnerable groups such as children, LGBTQI+ people, older people, persons with disabilities, and women. With BHA's significant investment in protection funding, humanitarian actors strengthened Ukraine's existing capacity in emergency social work for children, GBV response and prevention interventions, trafficking risk mitigation and response efforts, and safety planning for those most at risk of protection violations. Additionally, BHA partners established and worked through community safe spaces, counseling service providers, peer support groups, and professionally staffed hotlines across Ukraine. For more information, see the 2022 Protection Sector Update.	
Context	• Most critical in cases with large populations displaced by violent attacks.	
Design	• BHA's Emergency Application Guidelines for Partners outlines specific requirements for the design of humanitarian protection programs. • Adherence to humanitarian principles is critical to maintaining access and credibility, yet can be challenging when certain conflict parties deliberately attack civilian populations. • IDP/refugee camps could become targets of attacks and/or perceived as safe havens for perpetrators of atrocities. • The USG's Safe from the Start Initiative is a commitment to prevent and respond to gender-based violence in all phases of its emergency humanitarian response. In 2022, USAID and the U.S. Department of State jointly launched the second phase, Safe from the Start: ReVisioned. • See the International Committee of the Red Cross's Professional Standards for Protection Work. These include, for example: "Protection actors must seek to engage in dialogue with persons at risk and ensure their participation in activities directly affecting them."	

Recovery	Support to Transitional Justice Processes	Potential contingency funds and/or mechanisms: Complex Crises Fund, OTI SWIFT
Description	Transitional justice (TJ) refers to "the full range of processes and mechanisms (judicial and non-judicial) associated with a society's attempt to come to terms with a legacy of large-scale past abuses, in order to ensure accountability, serve justice and achieve reconciliation" (*Report of the UN Secretary General on Rule of Law and Transitional Justice*, 2006). The goals of transitional justice include truth, justice, reconciliation, and guarantees of non-recurrence. While transitional justice primarily takes place after some kind of transition (from conflict to peace, change in a country's government, etc.), steps can be taken to prepare for transitional justice and work toward its goals even in pre- and non-transition contexts. For more information on this subject, see "The Role of Transitional Justice in Atrocity Prevention" in *Preventing Atrocities: Five Key Primers*.	
ToC	If societies acknowledge and address the legacy of past atrocities through a combination of accountability efforts, reparations, truth seeking, and institutional reform, then the risk that atrocities will recur will decline. This collapses several more specific ToCs that could be central to different TJ efforts, for example: • If perpetrators are held criminally accountable for atrocities committed, then future potential perpetrators will be deterred. • If communities see individuals being held to account, then they will be less likely to turn to collective retribution against another group. • If people are more aware of how atrocities took place through truth-telling efforts, then they may be more likely to identify similar risk factors in the future.	
Example	• **Cambodia:** USAID has supported the Documentation Center of Cambodia to compile evidence on Khmer Rouge atrocities, provided direct support to the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia to pursue criminal accountability, and supported services for victims of torture and violence. • **Guatemala:** USAID provided support for exhumations of conflict victims' remains, psychosocial services to survivors and their families, and investigation and prosecution of human rights abuses.	
Context	USAID support for TJ usually relies on the existence of some kind of transition or break from the past conflict or regime. TJ processes are inherently political and are typically time bound, both in what they seek to address and how long the processes or mechanisms continue; however, the goals of TJ are long term and require decades of effort. As a development agency, USAID can support both aspects of TJ.	

Recovery	Support to Transitional Justice Processes	Potential contingency funds and/or mechanisms: Complex Crises Fund, OTI SWIFT
Design	• A wide array of activities—from prosecutions to truth seeking, from memorialization to national dialogue—could fall under the TJ rubric. The best approaches tend to be those that respond to local voices and demands. • Consider using USAID's tool on Community Participation in Transitional Justice, the Agency's guide on Combating Impunity: Transitional Justice and Anti-Corruption, and its guide on Delivering Justice Before and After Transitions. • Men and women experience conflict differently, so transitional justice efforts must account for the distinct needs, interests, and experiences of all people. Ensuring women's active participation in the design and implementation of transitional justice mechanisms will help ensure they address the full range of experiences during the conflict. For more information, see the United Nations publication *A Window of Opportunity: Making Transitional Justice Work for Women*.	

Recovery	Psychological Support to traumatic Events	Potential contingency funds and/or mechanisms: Complex Crises Fund, OTI SWIFT, Women, Peace, and Security
Description	Addressing trauma and psychological well-being is a crucial aspect of processing atrocities and traumatic experiences or events. Mental health and psychological support can include emotional regulation, coping strategies, externalization of emotions and thoughts, processing, and addressing the symptoms within communities and populations after experiencing atrocities. Mental health development can be integrated into various aspects and levels of care, whether individual, peer-to-peer, familial, or within community group settings. Types of Trauma: • I**ndividual trauma:** This refers to the internal wounds caused by overwhelming events, a series of events, or enduring conditions. Depending on the perceived threat level, the autonomic nervous system may respond with heightened stimulation and activity (the fight or flight response) or by shutting down (the freeze response). When someone lacks the means to fully process the experience, their autonomic nervous system compartmentalizes the associated energy and information, holding it unconsciously in their body and mind until it is addressed and healed. • **Intergenerational trauma:** This occurs when one or more ancestors pass down unresolved trauma they experienced before or during pregnancy. Sensations, emotions, and reactions encoded in their bodies are transmitted to subsequent generations either epigenetically or through family dynamics. • **Collective trauma:** This describes the widespread impact of a catastrophic event or process that disrupts the structures supporting a community or society's way of life. Such events can interrupt normal activities, destroy or block access to resources, and lead to fragmentation, isolation, disorientation, dehumanization, and even death. Natural disasters and wars exemplify collective traumas. • **Historical trauma:** This type of trauma can be collective and intergenerational, focusing specifically on intentional harm and oppression directed at a group of people based on characteristics such as race, religion, or national, social, or sexual identity. The aim is to subjugate them for gain. Examples include slavery and colonization, which are also collective traumas. • **Systemic trauma:** This encompasses the unaddressed impacts of individual, intergenerational, collective, and historical trauma, as well as ongoing trauma perpetuated by harmful present-day system structures and relational dynamics.	
ToC	If individuals who have been traumatized by violence are given opportunities and support toward reconciliation and strengthened mental health, then their desire for revenge will be reduced.	

Recovery	Psychological Support to traumatic Events	Potential contingency funds and/or mechanisms: Complex Crises Fund, OTI SWIFT, Women, Peace, and Security
Example	**Somalia:** USAID/East Africa has supported "trauma activities focused on increasing individuals' understanding of cycles of violence and trauma, including giving them a context and language for articulating their grief and anger, with the aim of creating empathy among both perpetrators and victims, which would lead to forgiveness among the relevant parties" (*PEACE II Program Final Evaluation Report*, February 2013, p. 4).	
Context	Most appropriate to situations of intercommunal violence and where there is concern about retributive cycles of atrocities.	
Design	• Addressing trauma and mental health symptoms after atrocities is an ongoing process of engagement and development. Programming must be responsive to the symptoms, environments, and the affected communities and populations. Given the vulnerability of individuals and communities, it is essential to prioritize safeguarding principles while also ensuring that psychological care is accessible and inclusive for all populations. • When creating programs, specific considerations should be taken into account because different contexts and situations may require adaptive implementation and a spectrum of care, recognizing that different groups and individuals will experience circumstances differently. These programs should be culturally applicable and reflect the traditions, cultures, and attitudes of the people they aim to assist. • People's mental health and psychological needs may vary based on factors such as age, gender identity, sexual orientation, exposure to conflict, involvement, and ethnicity, among others. • There are instances where individuals can relate to others' feelings, and gathering to reflect upon these experiences can reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness. However, when facilitating group programming, it is crucial to raise awareness beforehand, ensuring that participants understand the possible emotional experiences, providing alternatives and referral mechanisms, and emphasizing how investing in their mental health care can foster hopefulness and future orientation while validating their experiences. • Another important consideration is retraumatization, which can occur when individuals share their experiences and may feel as if they are experiencing the atrocity again. To prevent further harm, mental health providers should assess the severity and types of support that may be needed.	

Recovery	Support for Reintegration of Former Combatants	Potential contingency funds and/or mechanisms: Complex Crises Fund, OTI SWIFT
Description	Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) are accepted as critical ingredients in a successful transition from war to peace. USAID is most directly involved in helping reintegrate former fighters into communities, typically through a mix of skills training, employment/livelihood opportunities, and social reintegration programs.	
ToC	If former combatants are supported in becoming productive members of communities, they are less likely to return to the use of violence.	
Example	**Senegal:** USAID, through its Aliwili II activity, supports the Government of Senegal (GoS) in implementing reintegration efforts targeting former Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC) combatants. On June 23, 2022, the GoS and the Diakaye faction of the MFDC signed an agreement to lay down their weapons in return for socioeconomic support and a clear path to integration into "normal" society. In December 2023, the GoS approved the issuance of birth certificates to more than 14,000 people as part of the disarmament agreement, further demonstrating that it remains committed to a durable peace. *"Evidence increasingly demonstrates that dignified, sustainable livelihoods combined with freedom and security are most successful in reintegrating former combatants.*	
Context	• Most relevant following the end of an armed conflict and when large numbers of former combatants are being demobilized (as opposed to integrated into or maintained within formal security services). • Reintegration programs are more likely to succeed when they build on and are coordinated with disarmament and demobilization initiatives.	
Design	• It is important to focus on the needs of both former combatants and the communities to which they are returning. Providing benefits (e.g., training) only to former combatants can alienate other community members. • DDR programs often neglect women's distinct needs, and do not recognize the variety of roles they may play in conflict, including but not limited to roles as combatants. Activities should be tailored to recognize the distinct forms of support that women may prefer/require. • For more information on community-focused reintegration programs, click here.	

Recovery	Economic Recovery Programs	Potential contingency funds and/or mechanisms: International Disaster Assistance funds, Complex Crises Fund, OTI SWIFT
Description	To help communities resume economic activity and rebuild livelihoods, USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) supports economic recovery and market systems (ERMS) in disaster-affected communities. In fiscal year (FY) 2023, BHA provided $119 million to support economic recovery activities throughout Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as worldwide and regional interventions. "ERMS interventions strengthen key market systems and help populations restore livelihoods and purchasing power at the household, local, and regional levels." For more information, see USAID's Economic Recovery and Market Systems webpage. In addition to BHA, OTI routinely supports economic recovery activities in the context of political transitions and USAID Missions in countries emerging from crisis or conflict often support economic growth programs.	
ToC	If communities are able to resume economic activity and rebuild livelihoods, it will mitigate the consequences of mass atrocities. **- OR -** If economic recovery programs promote equitably shared economic gains, they will reduce economic motives that could drive future atrocities, thereby reducing the chance of recurrence.	
Example	**Syria:** "With USAID/BHA support, six nongovernmental organization (NGO) partners conducted ERMS activities across Syria to improve livelihoods and strengthen affected populations' self reliance during FY 2022. "One USAID/BHA NGO partner established more than 40 village savings and loan association (VSLA) groups across Syria, which enable community members to regularly contribute small amounts of money to a collective savings account used to support community members' business investments and provide financial safety-net during difficult times. As a result of the project, 750 people, one-half of whom were women, participated in VSLA groups, disbursing nearly 370 loans and supporting charitable community projects with their contributions. Furthermore, a separate USAID/BHA NGO partner established VSLA groups and provided business management or job-related training and cash transfers to support entrepreneurs across Syria. Nearly 70 percent of program participants lived in adequate housing after the program compared to 34 percent prior to the support, and 65 percent of participants secured regular employment after completing the program, compared to 8 percent of participants prior to starting the program." For more information, see the FY 2022 ERMS Sector Update. *Inclusive, conflict- sensitive economic growth and livelihoods activities are also key to recovery.*	

Recovery	Economic Recovery Programs	Potential contingency funds and/or mechanisms: International Disaster Assistance funds, Complex Crises Fund, OTI SWIFT
Context	• Likely to be most acutely needed in least-developed countries, where individuals and communities have less ability to cope with the economic consequences of mass atrocities. • Most needed where the conflict/crisis had severe effects on the economy, including disruption of basic livelihoods, markets and trade, and widespread destruction of critical infrastructure. • Where economic motives were highly salient in recent atrocities, economic recovery programs that address potential economic drivers of violence should be considered. • Because climate change typically undermines livelihoods and decreases security, building environmental resilience should be included where appropriate.	
Design	• Economic recovery programs should be informed by an understanding of local market-systems—e.g., through a timely analysis using the Emergency Market Mapping and Analysis Toolkit. • The Minimum Economic Recovery Standards "articulate the minimum level of technical and other assistance to be provided in promoting the recovery of economies and livelihoods affected by crisis."	

Annex B: Additional Resources

Assessment Frameworks and Early Warning

USG:

- USAID *Violence and Conflict Assessment: Analytical Framework* | *VCA Analytical Framework Overview*
- Department of State, *U.S. Atrocity Risk Assessment Framework*
- Contact AP Core Group: apcore@usaid.gov

NON-USG:

- United Nations, *Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes*
- U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, Center for the Prevention of Genocide, Early Warning Project
- UN Women, *Gender-Responsive Early Warning: Overview and How-to Guide*

"Do No Harm" and Conflict Sensitivity Integration

- Conflict-Sensitive Approaches to Development
  - » Responsible Development: A Note on Conflict Sensitivity
- How To Guide to Conflict Sensitivity
  - » Conflict Integration Guide
- Conflict Sensitive Implementation Guide
  - » Conflict Sensitive Implementation Guidance
- Conflict Sensitivity and Human Rights
  - » Ensuring Conflict Sensitivity in Promoting the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- Conflict Sensitivity and Integration
  - » Conflict Sensitivity—Alliance for Peacebuilding
- Dividers and Connectors
  - » Do No Harm—CDA Collaborative Learning
- Practical guidance for monitoring
  - » Discussion Note—Complexity-Aware Monitoring

Training

USG:

- USAID University, Atrocity Prevention Course
- USAID also periodically, and on Mission request, offers a course on atrocity prevention that consists of three half-day sessions.
- Foreign Service Institute, PP230—Preventing Genocide and Other Mass Atrocities

NON-USG:

- Auschwitz Institute for Peace and Reconciliation, Global Raphael Lemkin Seminar for Genocide Prevention

Contingency Funds

- CPS/CVP, Complex Crises Fund: cpsfunds@usaid.gov
- CPS/CVP, Reconciliation Fund: cpsfunds@usaid.gov
- Human Rights Grants Program | Contact Christina Sheetz (csheetz@usaid.gov)
- DRG/EPP, Elections and Political Processes Fund: eppfund@usaid.gov
- BHA, International Disaster Assistance
- Gender Equity and Equality Action Fund

USAID/Washington Point of Contact on Atrocity Prevention

- Atrocity Prevention Core Group: apcore@usaid.gov