The Global South AI Peacebuilding Gap

Harnessing Artificial Intelligence for Prevention, Peace, and Resilience

Policy Paper

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International Fund for Peace (IF4Peace)

ABOUT INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR PEACE

Pioneering a New Generation of Peacebuilding

The International Fund for Peace is a Washington, DC-based nonprofit initiative working to advance a world built on sustainable peace by helping countries establish national peace infrastructures to manage conflict risks and sustain growth without violence.

Our Vision

Within a generation, we envision a world where a majority of nations possess the people, policies, and institutions necessary to resolve complex differences through peaceful processes rather than conflict.

Why Is IF4Peace Unique?

IF4Peace is being established to help countries build the policies, people, institutions, partnerships, financing, and information systems needed to prevent violence and sustain peace. We take a systems approach, not a project approach, to scale actions at the national level.

Our work is designed to complement existing peacebuilding and diplomatic efforts by connecting local knowledge to national policy and by utilizing responsible technology to develop practical actions aimed at peaceful resolution of differences. Grounded in the Global South and responsive to risks worldwide, IF4Peace aims to help make peace a standing national capacity, not only a crisis response.

Why This Policy Paper, Why Now?

This policy paper is published at a time when the risks AI may pose to humanity have moved to the center of global debate, even as the race to develop more powerful systems gathers pace. IF4Peace offers it as a field-building effort to draw attention to a less explored dimension of that debate: whether fragility, conflict and violence (FCV)-affected settings in the Global South are equipped to manage AI-related risks while also benefiting from its potential for prevention and peacebuilding.

We aim to encourage further discussion, research, and investment in responsible AI for Peace and help ensure that countries facing some of the greatest risks of conflict are not left behind in the AI era.

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Executive Summary

Artificial intelligence (AI) is redefining warfare as the world witnesses the highest number of state-based armed conflicts since World War II. Destabilizing uses of AI are outpacing capacity for prevention and peacebuilding. These include AI-enabled targeting, autonomous weapons, cyber operations, and generative AI that makes disinformation and manipulation cheaper to scale.

AI is increasingly used to detect risks, enhance early warning and humanitarian coordination, improve information resilience, and widen public participation. Its preventive value depends on institutions with the authority, resources, and local trust to translate insights into timely action.

This capacity remains highly uneven as countries and corporations race to advance frontier AI. Even well-resourced countries struggle to govern these rapidly evolving systems. In fragility, conflict, and violence (FCV)-affected settings in the Global South, institutional weakness, political grievances, and limited resources compound these challenges. This paper identifies five connected gaps: data and visibility; language and context; participation, ownership, and power; institutions and early action; and capability, infrastructure, and investment.

These gaps create a double disadvantage: societies facing substantial conflict risks are exposed to AI-enabled harms while being less able to use AI for prevention, resilience, and development. This is the Global South AI Peacebuilding Gap. FCV can deepen the gap by weakening institutions, infrastructure, and public trust. AI adoption without adequate safeguards can, in turn, intensify exclusion, amplify grievances, and place further pressure on those institutions.

The cases examined in this paper illustrate opportunities to track population movements, forecast conflict risks, understand public concerns, and support deliberation. They also show why technical capability alone is insufficient. Forecasting accuracy is not the end goal. Warnings must be connected to mandates, resources, response protocols, and local delivery capacity. Wider participation must give people meaningful influence over decisions. These applications need timely evaluation to establish their efficacy and utility at scale.

Governments, technology companies, funders, and development and peacebuilding institutions should build an AI for Peace ecosystem grounded in the public good, local ownership, conflict sensitivity, and human oversight. Priorities must include addressing the five gaps together, connecting locally informed tools with the institutions, skills, and sustained financing needed to use them responsibly, and strengthening the voice of FCV-affected societies in AI governance. Progress should be judged by whether institutions act earlier, people are better protected, and local actors have greater control over how AI is used.

The paper argues that the foundations of AI-enabled peacebuilding also support beneficial AI adoption more broadly. Institutions, infrastructure, public trust, and local capacity influence whether AI can deliver gains in health, education, agriculture, public services, and economic opportunity. Investing in AI for Peace can strengthen these foundations, make prevention a lasting national capacity, and help create the conditions for wider AI-for-Good benefits. The enduring test is whether societies most exposed to conflict can shape the AI transition and act before violence narrows their choices.

Introduction

The ongoing discourse surrounding the risks associated with artificial intelligence (AI) predominantly emphasizes the catastrophic consequences arising from an escalating competition among leading AI companies to create artificial general intelligence (AGI). [1] This competition occurs during a period when the global landscape is already grappling with conflict management challenges. State-based armed conflicts have reached their peak since World War II, and the capabilities of AI are becoming increasingly advanced, widespread, and integral to decision-making processes that influence warfare, security, information dissemination, and public affairs. [2] [3] These two trends are converging more frequently but remain misaligned, and the organizations tasked with conflict prevention and management have not adapted accordingly. [4]

The disparity in progress is becoming increasingly evident. While military applications of AI are evolving swiftly, investments in AI for Peace initiatives remain limited and disjointed. Essentially, advancements in AI-driven warfare outpace those aimed at fostering peace through AI. [5] Consequently, there exists a dual challenge: managing the risks posed by powerful frontier AI and its escalating application in warfare and other detrimental scenarios while simultaneously developing the capacity to leverage AI for prevention, resilience, and peacebuilding purposes.

This capacity development is uneven across different contexts. AI introduces governance, security, and institutional hurdles in nations regardless of their economic standing; even well-resourced countries continue to navigate how to regulate AI effectively, comprehend its risks, and utilize it responsibly. [6] However, nations face these challenges from varied starting points. The emerging global AI landscape is marked by significant disparities in data availability, spoken languages, infrastructural development, technical abilities, and decision-making authority. [7]

Moreover, the introduction of AI does not occur in isolation. In numerous regions affected by fragility, conflict, or violence, it is being implemented where trust is fragile; institutions are under strain; and political grievances persist unresolved. [8] Hence, poorly designed or managed AI can pose greater risks in such environments where local organizations might possess limited resources to develop or assess effective applications of "AI for Good." [9]

This paper refers to this structural disparity as the Global South AI Peacebuilding Gap—a growing divide between susceptibility to threats facilitated by AI and the capability to employ this technology responsibly for violence prevention and peace promotion. The term “Global South” is used cautiously, as it does not suggest a uniform level of development or a shared experience regarding conflict, nor are Global South nations synonymous with FCV-affected settings. [10] This analysis primarily targets countries within the Global South where obstacles related to access to AI intersect with issues like conflict dynamics, displacement crises, institutional fragility, or political marginalization.

This paper uses “fragility, conflict, and violence (FCV)-affected settings” as an umbrella term for contexts experiencing armed conflict, significant levels of violence, institutional fragility, or combinations of these conditions. The terminology reflects the World Bank's updated FCV

framework while recognizing that fragility exists on a spectrum and that conflict and fragility are related but distinct. [11]

Addressing the AI peacebuilding gap in FCV-affected settings requires more than just enhancing safety protocols or access to technology alone; effective peacebuilding raises standards beyond typical technology adoption metrics. A system may operate correctly from a technical perspective, but it may not serve as an peacebuilding mechanism if it lacks community trust, excludes affected populations or provides information that institutions cannot act on promptly. [12]

Current decisions regarding governance frameworks for AI deployment, including investment strategies and infrastructure development, will significantly influence whether regions facing conflicts primarily encounter new technological vulnerabilities or also gain advantages from integrating AI into violence prevention efforts.

This paper leverages recent research findings along with case studies to explore factors contributing to this gap while proposing actionable recommendations for governments, technology companies, development agencies, funders, and peacebuilding organizations. Although its main emphasis is on FCV-affected settings in the Global South, it draws on relevant lessons from better-resourced countries where they can be adapted to local contexts, while many of its recommendations also have relevance for parts of the Global North.

Background: The Significance of AI in Contemporary Peace and Conflict Dynamics

A New Era of Security Challenges

AI has emerged as a critical factor in military, political, and economic domains. Nations and corporations are engaged in an intense competition to develop and implement increasingly sophisticated AI systems. This urgency often leads to a disregard for necessary safeguards and governance frameworks. The competitive landscape may compel entities to deploy these technologies hastily, viewing any delay as a potential loss of strategic edge. [13]

The implications for military operations are particularly significant. Recent conflicts illustrate the rapid transition of AI capabilities from theoretical applications to active combat scenarios. For example, in Ukraine, the integration of AI-driven autonomous navigation has significantly boosted drone engagement success rates, escalating from approximately 10-20% to between 70-80% in certain instances. Experts credit this improved precision to AI's role in enhancing target recognition and intelligence analysis. [14] In Gaza, similarly advanced machine-learning systems have been employed for target generation and assessment: the Israeli military's "Lavender" system evaluates individuals based on their suspected links to armed factions, while "The Gospel" analyzes surveillance data to compile lists of structural targets. [15] During the 2026 Iran War, the U.S. military utilized the AI-enhanced Maven Smart System to execute over 1,000 strikes within just 24 hours—a nearly tenfold increase compared to previous targeting capacities. [16]

The ramifications extend beyond traditional battlefields; even without direct integration into nuclear command systems, AI’s application in military operations can elevate escalation risks. Enhanced

threat detection and decision-making shorten the time available for information verification or reconsideration of responses, thereby amplifying the chances of miscalculation during a crisis. Furthermore, AI-generated recommendations can steer decision-makers toward action even when the rationale behind these suggestions is opaque. [17]

AI is already part of the conflict landscape

AI's influence is pervasive across various conflict-related dimensions—not just on battlegrounds but also within humanitarian efforts and monitoring initiatives. While it holds potential benefits for facilitating mediation and coordination during crises, it equally poses risks through enhanced surveillance capabilities and information manipulation tactics. [18]

Cyber risk is another pressure point. AI can change the speed, scale, and cost of cyber-attacks, while many countries still lack adequate systems to manage advanced AI risks. In FCV-affected settings, limited infrastructure and cybersecurity capacity, along with dependence on external technology providers, can make digital disruptions harder to absorb. [19]

Moreover, non-state actors may exploit these tools; leveraging AI-driven recommendation systems can facilitate targeted propaganda campaigns aimed at vulnerable populations—making recruitment efforts not only broader but also more precisely directed. [20]

Transforming Peacebuilding Efforts Through AI

Globally, countries are formulating policies on artificial intelligence with an eye toward maximizing their socio-economic benefits. [21] It is essential that discussions surrounding peacebuilding and conflict prevention are integrated into this dialogue. Governments should evaluate how AI could enhance their abilities to foresee tensions proactively, foster dialogue among conflicting parties, and avert violence.

The potential benefits are substantial. Conventional conflict monitoring can struggle to identify emerging risks early enough for preventive action. AI can analyze large volumes of diverse data more rapidly, potentially supporting earlier interventions and better adaptive strategies. [22] A comprehensive analysis reveals four primary areas where such technological advancements could be transformative: early warning systems; fostering digital dialogue alongside civic engagement; crisis mapping paired with humanitarian response; and mitigating online polarization. [23]

AI tools can significantly improve conflict forecasting by scrutinizing various data sources for signals indicating rising tensions or heightened violence risk—enabling institutions to identify impending threats sooner while allowing additional time for preventive measures. [24]

Moreover, these tools assist mediators by helping map options while processing vast datasets, thereby enhancing engagement with larger populations during peace negotiations through efficient listening methods alongside translation services. [25]

AI can also improve humanitarian response by analyzing changing needs and displacement patterns faster, helping stakeholders anticipate population movements, allocate resources, and position assistance where it is most needed. [26]

AI can also strengthen information resilience by identifying emerging patterns of polarization and other harmful narratives or coordinated manipulations that may threaten stability. [27]

However, technology alone cannot prevent conflict. A warning is useful only if it is trusted, understood, and acted upon. [28] Similarly, consultation matters only if public opinions influence decisions. AI's value, therefore, depends on the institutions, relationships, and human judgment around it. [29]

Why FCV-affected Settings in the Global South Are Particularly Vulnerable

The term "Global South" does not refer to a uniform technological landscape. There are significant variations among countries in terms of income, infrastructure, governance, and readiness for artificial intelligence (AI). A crucial distinction exists between high-capacity and low-capacity digital environments, where weak systems often intersect with conflict, fragility, or political exclusion.

Five key gaps illustrate how existing inequalities in AI access and governance become more critical in FCV-affected settings.

Gap 1: Data and Visibility

AI relies heavily on quality data; however, individuals living in conflict zones are among the most difficult to accurately document. Official statistics and digital records may underrepresent displaced communities, remote populations, minorities, and those with limited internet access.

These data gaps typically mirror existing social inequalities. Migrants and internally displaced people often do not appear in census data, while incomplete or biased information can lead to discriminatory outcomes. Furthermore, what may seem like routine data collection in humanitarian contexts poses serious privacy and protection risks if disclosed. [30]

Digital inequality can skew the perspectives of AI systems. If most data is derived from connected groups, marginalized individuals are likely to be overlooked by AI assessments designed to flag grievances or instability, thus failing to reach those at greatest risk. [31]

Gap 2: Language and Context

Many advanced AI systems are trained on datasets that primarily reflect the languages and contexts of wealthier nations. In regions where local languages or cultural nuances are underrepresented, this discrepancy holds significant implications.

Reliable local data is essential for utilizing responsible AI technologies but is particularly challenging to obtain in resource-limited areas with inadequate connectivity and infrastructure. [32] These issues are not exclusive to the Global South; AI systems may struggle wherever languages are underrepresented. However, the problem can be more pronounced where local languages have a limited presence in the datasets and systems used to develop AI. [33]

Contextual understanding presents an even greater challenge. The dynamics of conflict involve historical narratives, identities, grievances, and nuanced language—elements that many AI systems may misinterpret. Terms that seem neutral in one setting could convey vastly different meanings elsewhere. Therefore, transferring systems across diverse contexts without a foundational understanding of their cultural and political landscapes can result in misinterpretations or harmful outcomes. [34]

In peacebuilding efforts, it is crucial that local context is integrated into the system from the outset rather than as an afterthought.

Gap 3: Participation, Ownership, and Power

The "access to AI technologies" divide mirrors broader power imbalances. A few countries and corporations still control large models, computing resources, and the economic benefits.

This disparity extends into governance structures as well. Of seven non-UN international AI governance initiatives examined, 118 countries participated in none, primarily in the Global South. Only seven countries participated comprehensively, all from the Global North. [35]

This imbalance manifests as a form of digital colonialism: while parts of the Global South contribute labor and supply data and resources necessary for technology development elsewhere, they capture only a limited share of economic value and technological control. [36]

The participation gap also affects individual projects involving AI systems; local civil society organizations along with affected communities frequently find themselves sidelined from decisions regarding priorities or design choices surrounding these technologies. Projects deployed in the Global South may therefore reflect perspectives shaped largely by external institutions rather than local input. [37]

Advocates for participatory approaches argue for engaging affected communities alongside relevant civil society actors from the inception stage itself. One approach is to bring together representative groups of local organizations and institutions so that those directly impacted have influence over shaping priorities related to programs or technology use. [38] This level of involvement is vital for establishing legitimacy and trust within peacebuilding.

Gap 4: Institutions and the Early-Warning-to-Action Problem

AI's promise to prevent conflicts often hinges on its potential for earlier detection of threats. However, increased warnings do not necessarily equate to better prevention. Systems driven by AI may produce signals varying widely in significance and reliability. The challenge is not simply to detect risk but to distinguish actionable alerts from irrelevant noise. [39]

Turning warnings into action is challenging even where early-warning systems are well-developed. The challenge can be greater in FCV-affected settings, where institutional authority, financing, coordination, and access may be constrained. [40]

Even a reliable warning has limited value if institutions lack authority, political backing, resources, or response protocols to act on it. An AI system may detect rising tensions, hate speech,

displacement, or food insecurity without a corresponding capacity to respond. The real test is, therefore, whether signals can be translated into action.

Gap 5: Capability, Infrastructure, and Investment

Effective deployment of AI requires more than sophisticated models. It needs reliable electricity and connectivity, computational resources, robust cybersecurity, skilled staff, sound governance frameworks, and adequate long-term finance. These foundations are highly unequal and can be particularly difficult to build and sustain in resource-starved countries. [41]

Cybersecurity adds another layer of vulnerability. AI can increase the scale and sophistication of threats such as deepfakes, adaptive malware, and phishing, while limited cybersecurity capacity, regulatory gaps, and dependence on foreign technology providers can make these risks harder to manage. [42] The consequences extend beyond peacebuilding. Limited AI capacity can also constrain the ability of communities to benefit from advances in health, education, agriculture, public services, and economic opportunity.

Investment levels show a striking disparity. Global corporate investment in AI reached $581.7 billion in 2025. By contrast, civilian peacebuilding and conflict prevention receive only about $1 billion annually in official development assistance. While these figures measure different categories of investment and are not directly comparable, they illustrate the vastly different financial environments in which commercial AI development and peacebuilding operate. [43] [44]

Why Fragility, Conflict, and Violence Change the AI Equation?

The challenge of AI in peacebuilding extends beyond its ability to forecast violence or aid mediation efforts. It also involves determining whether the integration of AI diminishes or exacerbates the structural factors that render societies susceptible to violence.

This is why FCV-affected settings require particular focus within the broader context of the Global South's AI divide. The five identified gaps do not function independently from the pre-existing conditions that contribute to societal fragility. Weak institutions, economic marginalization, displacement, low levels of trust, and inadequate public services can hinder a society's ability to manage AI effectively and reap its benefits, simultaneously diminishing its resilience against technological, informational, or security disruptions. [45] This may result in a feedback loop where fragility exacerbates the AI divide while this divide complicates efforts to mitigate fragility.

Economic disruption can intensify existing exclusion

Economic exclusion represents one significant pathway. AI-driven automation has the potential to transform labor markets and concentrate wealth among highly skilled individuals and firms that control data and computing resources. [46] The economic gains from AI accrue disproportionately to high-income nations and well-paying job sectors. [47] This situation can be especially destabilizing for countries reliant on labor-intensive industries. If workers and communities are unprepared for these shifts, economic exclusion may exacerbate existing grievances and mistrust.

In FCV-affected settings, the consequences can extend beyond employment. Lost livelihoods and widening inequalities can place additional pressure on already weak public institutions, reduce trust in government, and deepen perceptions of exclusion. [48] Economic insecurity can also interact with displacement and population movements, particularly where jobs, housing, and public services are already under pressure.

AI does not create these tensions, but rapid technological change can add further disruptions in environments where institutions have limited capacity to manage the transition.

FCV can limit the development gains from AI

FCV can also limit who benefits from AI-enabled development. Conflict undermines institutions and disrupts infrastructure and services, making investment more challenging. [49] In such settings, the potential benefits of AI in health care, education, agriculture, public services, and economic opportunities may be harder to realize or may fail to reach those who need them most. [50]

Conversely, development initiatives that expand opportunities, strengthen institutions, enhance public services, and foster social cohesion can alleviate some pressures associated with FCV. While AI might play a role in achieving these objectives, technology alone cannot ensure peace; its impact relies on its ability to reinforce institutions, expand inclusivity, and empower communities to navigate risks more effectively. [51]

Peace and security are therefore integral to the AI for Good agenda. They are both conditions for its success and objectives that responsible AI-enabled development can help advance. Peacebuilding and beneficial AI adoption depend partly on the same foundations: stable and functioning institutions, reliable infrastructure, public trust, and local capacity.

AI can amplify the exploitation of existing grievances

AI can also interact with existing political and social grievances. Violent non-state actors can use recommendation algorithms, behavioral profiling, and generative content to identify and reach people who feel excluded, angry, or isolated. [52] AI can make such outreach more personalized, persistent, and scalable, while synthetic content and automated amplification can intensify narratives of grievance or belonging. [53]

The important point for FCV-affected settings is that while AI itself does not create grievances, it can heighten risks where grievances already exist. These may be in the form of economic exclusion, political marginalization, identity tensions, or community distrust. AI-enabled systems can provide new ways to identify, target, and amplify these vulnerabilities. This makes social cohesion and trusted information environments vital for resilience against adverse effects stemming from AI technologies.

The relationship runs both ways. Fragility can widen the AI gap by weakening the institutions, infrastructure, and skills needed to use and govern AI effectively. Conversely, inequitable or poorly managed adoption of AI could worsen patterns of economic exclusion, distrust, and other factors perpetuating fragility. [54]

This is why FCV-affected settings cannot simply be treated as another part of the wider Global South AI divide. The same AI gaps can carry greater consequences where institutions are weaker, grievances are already present, and the capacity to absorb disruption is limited. Bridging the AI peacebuilding gap is therefore not only about expanding access to technology. It is about ensuring that AI strengthens, rather than weakens, the foundations for peaceful and inclusive development.

The Policy Challenge: Prevent Misuse and Exclusion

Most discussions about AI in FCV-affected settings focus on harm in the form of misinformation, surveillance, bias, cyber insecurity, or weaponization. Those risks are real. But they are only half of the problem.

The other is exclusion. If responsible institutions in FCV-affected societies lack compute power, trustworthy models, local language tools, technical expertise, and finance, the benefits of AI will remain concentrated in places that already have the strongest capacity. Societies facing some of the greatest conflict risks could therefore be more vulnerable to harmful AI while being less able to use it for prevention, resilience, and development.

The challenge is compounded when these two problems interact with existing FCV conditions. Unequal or poorly governed AI adoption can add pressure to societies already dealing with economic exclusion, weak institutions, displacement, low trust, or political grievances. At the same time, those conditions make it harder to govern AI effectively and capture its benefits.

Closing this gap matters beyond peacebuilding. AI for Peace should be seen as part of the wider AI for Good agenda. AI can improve health care, education, agriculture, public services, and economic opportunities, helping address some of the conditions that can contribute to instability and violence. But realizing these benefits becomes harder where conflict, insecurity, and institutional instability persist. Investing in AI for prevention, peace, and resilience can therefore help create the conditions in which the wider promise of AI for Good can take root.

Progress should be judged not simply by whether countries gain access to AI, but by whether it enables institutions to act earlier, protects people from harm, broadens meaningful participation, and gives local actors greater control over how the technology is used.

The seven cases in the annex also show that countries are not starting from scratch. Local researchers, technologists, peacebuilders, and institutions already possess important skills and knowledge. The challenge is to connect and strengthen this capacity, fill critical gaps, and organize resources around locally defined needs. Digital connectivity creates new possibilities for doing so, but it cannot substitute for the institutions, infrastructure, and trust needed to turn technical capability into effective peacebuilding.

What Needs to Change

Closing the gap will require an AI for Peace ecosystem that brings together governance, institutional capacity, technology, investment, and local participation.

Governments and multilateral institutions

1. Make AI governance conflict-sensitive

Before high-impact AI is applied in policing, humanitarian assistance, public benefits, identity systems, surveillance, and political information settings, governments should assess not only its technical risks but also how it could interact with existing sources of fragility.

AI governance in FCV-affected settings should therefore consider political exclusion, social cohesion, human rights, institutional trust, and conflict dynamics alongside privacy, cybersecurity, and technical safety. Governments should also assess who benefits from AI-driven productivity gains, who bears the costs of automation, and whether economic disruption could deepen existing inequalities or grievances.

This means treating AI readiness partly as a social and institutional transition, not simply a technology challenge. Workers affected by technological change need credible pathways for reskilling, retraining, and transition into new economic opportunities.

India, for example, is backing up its national AI ambitions with large-scale skilling and reskilling initiatives, including AI training aimed at workers, students, and the informal economy through programs such as the Institute for Human Flourishing announced on September 23, 2026. [55] [56]

2. Connect early warning to funded early action

If a tech system operates in a silo without official institutional backing, the community often hesitates or ignores the alert, proving that institutional authority is the vital link between a prediction and a life-saving action. False alarms or incorrect data can erode confidence, making it harder to encourage timely action. Human oversight and validation of AI-driven alerts are necessary to maintain trust. [57]

AI-enabled early-warning systems should be funded together with the institutional capacity and response mechanisms needed to act on the risks they identify. Each system should define who receives and verifies alerts, who has authority to respond, what resources can be mobilized, how local actors are involved, and how the effectiveness of the response will be assessed.

3. Give FCV-affected settings a stronger voice in AI governance

Global South countries, particularly those affected by conflict and fragility, should have a role in shaping AI rules, not just implement standards that are set elsewhere.

Regional organizations can step up and help smaller and lower-income states pool expertise, build shared infrastructure, and strengthen their negotiating power in global AI governance processes.

Creating special funding vehicles for regional data centers, localized foundational models, and open-source computing resources can reduce reliance on foreign tech giants. [58]

AI companies and technology platforms

4. Scale investment in local languages and conflict contexts

Technology companies should expand investment in low-resource languages, locally representative data, and testing that reflects real political and social contexts. There is also a commercial incentive to do so. As AI adoption expands across the Global South, systems that perform well in local languages and contexts will be better positioned to gain users, institutional trust, and market access.

Existing efforts remain uneven, and performance gaps persist across many underrepresented languages and settings. Local universities, civil society groups, technologists, and peacebuilders should be involved early in defining problems, building datasets, testing systems, and identifying risks, and not just after deployment. [59]

5. Test systems for conflict risks

Red-teaming in FCV-affected settings should not just involve generic safety. It should test for risks such as political manipulation, hate speech, extremist use, language and demographic bias, surveillance, privacy failure, exposure of sensitive civilian data, and misuse by authoritarian or violent actors.

Context-specific testing is already possible. Multilingual red-teaming initiatives in Singapore have tested AI systems across local languages and culturally specific risks, identifying safety gaps that standard English-language testing can miss. [60]

6. Expand responsible access to AI for Peace

Technology companies can treat compute, safety tools, technical support, and model access for credible peacebuilding organizations as a public-good investment, especially where there is little commercial incentive to build these tools. Such support could form part of companies' growing philanthropic commitments while also contributing to longer-term market development by building local skills, institutional familiarity, and responsible demand for AI.

It should be designed and managed with direct involvement from technical, safety, and policy experts who understand both the systems being provided and the risks of deploying them in FCV-affected settings.

Funders and development institutions

7. Address the AI for Peace investment imbalance

Funding for peaceful applications of AI remains small compared to investment in frontier and military AI. At the same time, peacebuilding finance is often short-term and project-based, even though rebuilding trust, strengthening institutions and addressing the underlying drivers of conflict require sustained engagement.

Development banks, philanthropies, governments, and technology companies should therefore create dedicated, multi-year funding for AI-enabled early warning and early action, mediation, local

language tools, information resilience, social-cohesion monitoring, humanitarian coordination, and community-led innovation.

Technology companies are already beginning to invest in economic opportunities and societal resilience as AI advances. Extending this approach to peace and stability would recognize that the long-term social benefits of AI depend partly on the resilience of the societies in which it is deployed. [61]

Funding decisions should also account for the wider relationship between AI adoption and fragility. Investment in AI for Peace should not be limited to conflict prediction or mediation tools. It should also support applications that strengthen information resilience, social cohesion, institutional capacity, and the ability of communities to manage economic and technological disruption.

8. Fund capability, not just pilots

Short pilots can create dependency when consultants leave, and local institutions cannot maintain the systems they introduce. Funding should therefore extend beyond individual projects to infrastructure, cybersecurity, staff, training, data capacity, governance, and long-term ownership.

The goal should be to turn these investments into lasting national capacity, strengthening the institutions, systems, and local capabilities needed both to manage AI-related disruption and to use AI responsibly to anticipate risks, respond earlier, and sustain peace over time.

9. Make local ownership a funding requirement

Projects should ensure that affected communities and local and national organizations help define the problem, have a say in how data is governed, influence deployment, and assess results. A project is not locally led because a local organization uses technology developed elsewhere.

Local participation also needs an institutional pathway that brings together a broad and representative group of local organizations and institutions so that different community perspectives can inform priorities, program design, and decisions about how technology is used.

Peacebuilding organizations and local actors

10. Use AI to support human judgment, not replace it

AI can enhance analysis, listening, and decision support. Peacebuilding is still built on trust, relationships, political judgment, empathy, and a sense of belonging. Decisions with real-world consequences should remain in the hands of human beings. Expert advisors are important, but they cannot substitute for informed judgment by those making decisions.

The need for leaders to keep learning is not entirely new. Meles Zenawi continued postgraduate study while serving as Ethiopia’s prime minister. [62] In the AI era, leaders similarly need to understand emerging technologies to make informed decisions about their use.

11. Treat community data as sensitive

Peacebuilders may hold information about political views, conflict actors, grievances, and vulnerable people. They should gather only what is needed, be firm on consent and ownership, and ask if the same data can be misused if political conditions change.

AI can make sensitive information easier to analyze and use in ways that were not anticipated when it was collected. Communities should therefore have a meaningful say in how their data is used, shared, retained, and eventually deleted.

12. Build evidence on what actually works

Accuracy and speed are not enough. Local and international peacebuilding organizations should ask whether AI helps them see risk earlier, act sooner, include more people, make better choices, build trust, reduce exclusion, and, eventually, prevent violence.

Evaluation should also examine who benefits, who may be excluded, and whether AI adoption creates unintended economic, political, or social pressures that could worsen existing vulnerabilities. This is particularly important in FCV-affected settings, where relatively small disruptions can intensify existing grievances and institutional weaknesses.

Failures and unintended consequences should also be documented to build evidence across projects.

Conclusion: The Opportunity

AI is already changing FCV-affected settings. And the real question is who gets to shape that change and to what ends.

Technology can accelerate warfare, manipulation, surveillance, economic exclusion, and cyber insecurity. It can also help peacebuilders understand complex environments, listen to more people, anticipate crises, and support earlier action. Which path dominates will depend less on the technology itself than on the systems around it. Who controls the tools, whose languages and experiences they reflect, whether institutions can act on what they reveal, whether communities trust them, and whether investment reaches the places where prevention is needed most.

FCV-affected settings should not be treated only as places where AI risk needs to be contained. They should have a role in shaping how AI is developed, governed, and used and determining how its benefits are shared. This matters beyond peacebuilding. Where conflict weakens institutions, infrastructure, public services, and trust, the wider promise of AI for Good can also be harder to realize. AI for Peace should therefore be seen as part of creating the conditions in which AI-enabled development can reach the communities that need it most.

The opportunity is to ensure that AI does not reproduce the inequalities and vulnerabilities that make peace harder to sustain. Instead, it should strengthen the ability of societies to identify risks earlier, address grievances, widen participation, and respond before crises escalate. Doing so requires more than access to technology. Countries need the governance capabilities, institutions, and local ownership to decide how these tools are used and to act on what they reveal.

The next step is to move from individual tools and pilots toward a more coherent AI for Peace ecosystem. Governments, multilateral institutions, technology companies, funders, and peacebuilding organizations should begin aligning investment, governance, technical capacity, and local participation around it. They should also build evidence on whether AI helps institutions act

earlier, reduces exclusion, and strengthens resilience, while identifying unintended effects that could deepen existing vulnerabilities.

This approach is also central to the work of the International Fund for Peace, which seeks to help countries build and own the governance capabilities needed to anticipate risks, respond earlier, and strengthen peace over the long term. AI for Peace should become part of that broader national capacity, defined by the countries and communities it is intended to serve.

The AI peacebuilding gap is not based on the assumption that wealthy countries have solved the challenges of AI. They have not. The concern is that countries already managing conflict, institutional pressures, and resource constraints may have less room to absorb another major technological disruption, even as AI could offer them valuable new tools for prevention and peacebuilding. Closing that gap means ensuring that the societies most vulnerable to conflict are not also the least able to shape, govern, and benefit from the AI transition.

Annex: Seven Cases That Show the Gap in Practice

The seven cases show how AI is starting to be used at different stages of prevention and peacebuilding — from filling data gaps and predicting risks to understanding public concerns, supporting deliberation and spotting emerging polarization. They also reveal a common lesson: technology alone rarely does the job. It depends on data quality and understanding of local context, human judgment, institutional capacity, and whether insights can be translated into action.

Case 1. Data and Visibility

Horn of Africa: Seeing population shifts when conventional data is scarce

Context: The borderlands of Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia are filled with conflict, climate shocks, displacement, and persistent migration. Conventional surveys can be incomplete or out of date. [63]

The challenge: When data is weak, communities can be invisible to forecasting systems just when governments and aid agencies need to know how people are going to move. A machine-learning model used satellite imagery to track built structures across 56 towns and cities as a proxy for population change. [64]

What happened: It identified structures with more than 99.9 percent accuracy and predicted population changes up to three months ahead with up to 74 percent accuracy. It linked movement to conflict, climate, and economic pressures. The work is informing a $330 million regional resilience project funded by the World Bank and a displacement-risk forecasting model for Ethiopia. [65]

Policy lesson: Better data is most useful when it leads to earlier action. AI can help fill information gaps and anticipate population movements, giving governments and development partners more time for resilience planning and timely action. [66]

Case 2. Language and Context

Ethiopia: Local-language moderation still missed conflict context

Context: Facebook was a major source of political information and inflammatory content during the Tigray conflict of 2020-2022 in a highly polarized environment. [67]

The challenge: Amharic and Oromo classifiers and local-language reviewers were in place. But understanding the words was not the same as understanding how a statement could function in a situation of conflict.

What happened: In a 2022 incident, automated systems flagged an Amharic post from the Tigray Regional State's Communication Affairs Bureau. Two Amharic-speaking reviewers found no violation. After the post was referred to a specialist crisis team, it was found to violate the Violence and Incitement policy and was removed. Other studies raised concerns regarding insufficient investment in local-language moderation in Ethiopia.

Policy lesson: Local-language capability alone may not be enough in conflict settings. In this case, Amharic-speaking reviewers did not identify a violation that became apparent after specialist

conflict review. Effective moderation, therefore, requires not only language expertise but also mechanisms to bring conflict-specific context into difficult decisions and escalate high-risk content for specialist review. [68]

Case 3. Participation and Ownership

Colombia: Using AI to listen at scale in a divided society

Context: Colombia continues to navigate the implementation of 2016 peace agreement alongside armed violence, political polarization, and demands for greater public participation.

The opportunity: UNDP Colombia worked with the AI platform 'Citibeats' to analyze opinions, concerns, and proposals expressed through digital and face-to-face spaces. The approach was designed to identify emerging public priorities while emphasizing privacy and inclusive participation. [69]

What happened: Analysis of more than 2.1 million documents showed that Peace and Justice, Governance and Social Inclusion were among the dominant issues of public concern. The system helped identify conversations around implementation of the peace agreement, violence and insecurity, social unrest, and the concerns of women and young people.

Policy lesson: AI can expand the scale of public listening by analyzing large volumes of citizen views while also incorporating inputs from face-to-face engagement. In Colombia, this helped identify changing priorities and concerns across different groups. The case shows how AI can complement, rather than replace, direct engagement by helping institutions make sense of public input at a scale that would otherwise be difficult to process. [70]

Case 4. Institutions and Early Action

Eastern DRC: Linking conflict forecasts to financing

Context: North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri are facing ongoing armed conflict, displacement, and humanitarian crises. Traditional data often show deterioration only after the window for prevention has closed. [71]

The opportunity: A machine learning model using thousands of variables, including conflict history, economic pressure, and perceptions of politics, armed groups, and mining, was created to forecast changes in conflict levels. The model reached up to 87 percent predictive accuracy at a 150-day horizon. [72]

What happened: The model is informing the World Bank's Risk and Resilience Assessment for the DRC and its Stabilization and Recovery in Eastern DRC Project (STAR-Est). The project includes a risk-financing mechanism that would trigger disbursements in response to observed or forecast conflict levels. [73]

Policy lesson: Better forecasts don't automatically produce early action. Their value depends on whether institutions are able to use them in real-world decisions. This case shows that the institutional capacity to respond is as important as the ability to predict risk. [74]

Case 5. Capability and Investment

Sri Lanka: AI-assisted monitoring of online hate speech and disinformation

Context: Sri Lanka's history of communal violence and post-war tensions has made online hate speech and disinformation a concern for social cohesion. Harmful narratives have particularly affected minorities and vulnerable groups. [75]

The challenge: Automated detection alone cannot determine how online language may interact with local political, religious, and communal tensions. [76] Effective monitoring requires technology alongside people who understand the context.

What happened: A $3 million initiative was funded by the UN Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund. It was implemented by UNDP and UNICEF with government and civil society partners, using AI-assisted monitoring supported by human review and local capacity building. Between 2021 and 2024, monitoring led to 3,932 harmful posts, comments, and videos being reported, of which 2,291 were removed through trusted-partner channels. The program also helped develop a voluntary Code of Practice for social media platforms through more than 15 stakeholder consultations. [77]

Policy lesson: Investment in AI for peace should build local capability, not simply deploy technology. Sri Lanka's experience shows the value of pairing new analytical tools with local monitoring, civil society actors, and institutions. Building these capabilities over time can make technology part of a more sustainable system for identifying and responding to emerging risks. [78]

Case 6. Participation and Deliberation

Finland: Using AI to support a national citizens' assembly

Context: Finland uses citizens' assemblies to involve citizens in complex political decision-making. But making sense of large numbers of questions, ideas, and recommendations is time-consuming and can delay meaningful outcomes. [79]

The opportunity: In Finland's 2025 Citizens' Assembly on Energy, researchers used a large language model at three stages of the deliberative process to develop questions for experts, help participants formulate proposals, and synthesize the assembly's recommendations.

What happened: The AI had limitations when it came to generating questions for experts but was useful in supporting co-creation and synthesizing participants' proposals. It reduced some of the workload for facilitators and participants while leaving deliberation and decision-making with people.

Policy lesson: AI can add value to deliberative processes only if it complements rather than replaces human participation. Finland's experience shows that AI needs to be embedded in an institutional process, with defined tasks and human oversight. [80]

The model could have relevance for peace processes in the Global South. During Colombia's 2012–2016 peace negotiations, for example, thousands of citizen proposals were submitted through public consultations, illustrating the scale of input that AI-assisted tools could now help organize and synthesize while leaving interpretation and decision-making with people. [81]

Case 7. Polarization and Prevention

Europe: Using AI to identify risks of polarization and radicalization

Context: Polarization, extremism, hate speech, and disinformation are threats to democracy and social cohesion across Europe, with young people particularly exposed. Understanding when polarization may develop into radicalization is important to identify opportunities for early intervention. [82]

The opportunity: The EU-funded DEEP DIALOGUE project brings together surveys, social media analysis, qualitative research, and predictive modeling to understand how polarization develops and when it may lead to radicalization. The $3.9 million project is coordinated by Lund University in Sweden and involves partners across Europe as well as Canada and Ukraine. [83]

What is being developed: The project will develop an AI-enabled Early Warning Dashboard and a Polarization & Disinformation Barometer to provide indicators for educators, journalists, youth organizations, and policymakers. The project will test four types of dialogue intervention, using online, offline, and hybrid formats, through randomized controlled trials involving more than 600 young people.

Policy lesson: AI can help identify signs of polarization and radicalization earlier, but detection is only part of prevention. DEEP DIALOGUE is a notable initiative for developing early-warning tools alongside interventions designed to respond to the risks they identify. Its results could provide useful evidence on whether combining AI-enabled monitoring with human dialogue can strengthen prevention and social resilience. [84]

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