Chapter IV

New ICTs for Conflict Prevention and Management

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Abstract

This chapter introduces the impact of new information and communication technologies (nICTs), specifically the Internet, on national and international conflict prevention and management. This analysis provides case studies of the use and examples of the prospective use of nICTs to counteract conflict as it undermines social and economic structures and hinders regional development. This study reviews the specific application of nICT-related initiatives at the different phases of the conflict cycle: from addressing the root causes of conflict as a tool for prevention and management, through the reconciliation and reconstruction phase. The author intends this analysis to illustrate and contribute to the discussion of how the social and development-related application of nICTs can compliment existing conflict prevention and management reduction strategies.
Introduction

According to the United Nation’s Development Program’s Human Development Report the greater part of countries with limited human development, 22 of 32, have experienced violent conflict since 1990 (2005, pp. 149-179). Conflict undermines social and economic structures: public healthcare, education systems, employment, and so forth. Regional development is also one of its victims.

This chapter outlines the uses of new Information and Communication Technologies (nICTs) for the prevention and management of active and latent national and international conflicts. It will demonstrate the application and potential of nICTs to complement activities that are already being carried out in the field to address the root causes of conflict, its prevention and management, as well as the fomentation of reconstruction and reconciliation.

Some of the uses given within the structure of this analysis are the creation of a medium of coherent manifestation, the establishment of a basis for transparent governance, and the development of generic platforms of common interest. Case studies illustrate the actual and prospective use of nICTs in the different phases of the conflict cycle.

The term nICTs is used to designate the Internet individually and/or its conversion with other types of information communication technologies like community radios, television, mobile telephony, and so forth. In this case, however, for the most part, the Internet will be the focus. Nevertheless, later in the chapter, mobile telephony, another very important nICT, will be considered.

Background

Differences of opinion are commonplace and conflict is natural; neither of them is necessarily negative. The crux of the issue is finding and applying methods to prevent and manage these conflicts in a peaceful manner.

Today’s intra and inter state conflicts\(^1\) are difficult to analyze, thus difficult to solve. Since the end of the Cold War, the nature of global conflicts has significantly changed\(^2\). The ethnopolitical, structural, and social factors that cause and transform conflict constitute a complex, ever-changing web. The weakening and/or disintegration of state authority, the existence of third parties that benefit from strife and the many cases in which civilians are the target of violence are constants within this framework. As indicated by Timothy Shaw, “Prospects for regional development recede as conflicts both escalate and proliferate and ‘off-budget’ incomes and expenditures become priorities for regimes and leaders alike” (2003, p.7).

Society’s evolution has expanded the variety of sources and scenarios of conflict and simultaneously increased the number of tools available to deal with them. New information and communication technologies are among these. To date, non-military studies about the impact of nICTs on conflict situations have been few\(^3\). This possibility results from the Internet which evolved from ARPANET, a military command and control center dating back to the 1960s (Sequeira Bolaño, 2001).
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