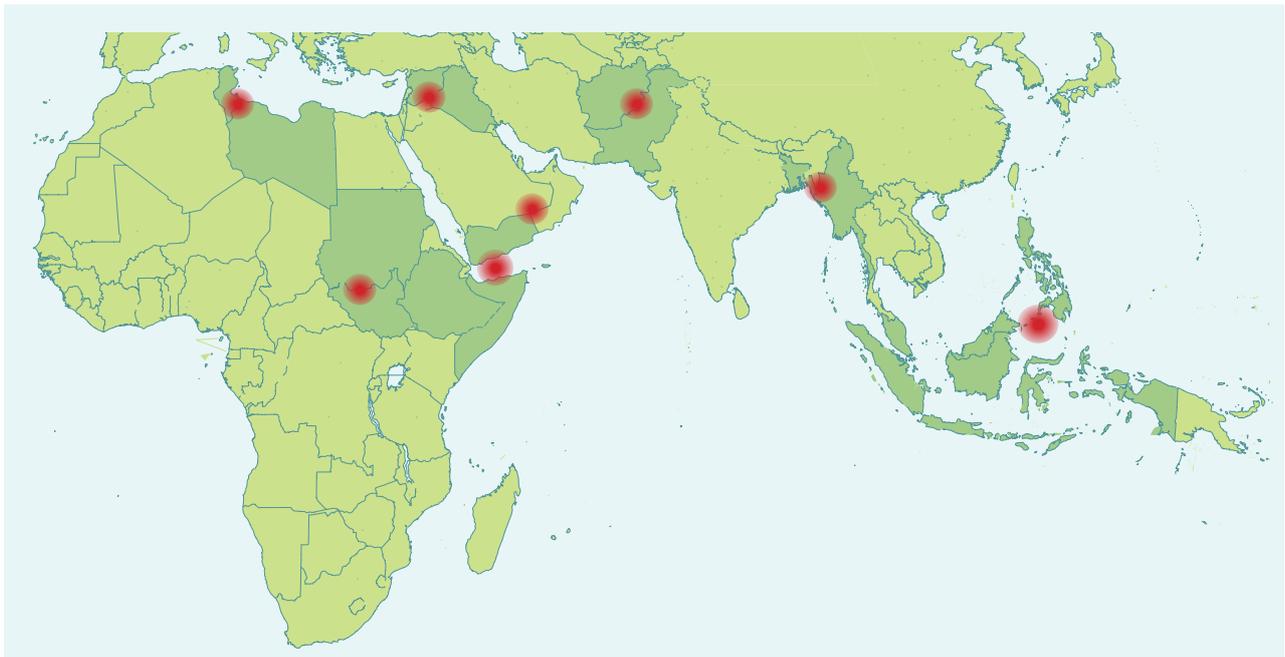


UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT IN BORDER REGIONS

In Asia, the Middle East and Africa, conflict and instability endure in contested border regions where local tensions connect with regional and global dynamics. The Asia Foundation, the Rift Valley Institute and the Carnegie Middle East Center are working together to better understand the causes and impacts of conflict in these border areas and their international dimensions, support more effective policymaking and development programming, and build the capacity of their local partners to leverage research to advocate for peaceful change.



Violence and insecurity affect millions across Asia, the Middle East and Africa and seriously constrain development. Subnational conflict has affected half of the countries in Asia over the past twenty years. Meanwhile in the Middle East and North Africa, Syria, Yemen and Libya are currently caught in civil wars, and other nations teeter on the brink of economic or political collapse. Protracted conflict affects the Horn of Africa, as in Sudan, South Sudan and Somalia. In these areas, center-periphery tensions, local rivalries, and transnational dynamics feed each other in ways that are difficult to disentangle, creating intricate regional security complexes.

These regions are connected by historic land and sea trade routes running from the Horn of Africa through the Middle East and North Africa, up to Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Along these routes move legal and illegal goods, refugees and insurgents, as well as ideas and ideologies. Given these connections, local conflicts resonate globally. Government policies and programs, private investment, and international security arrangements affect the lives of people in unintended places and in unintended ways. Local communities must navigate changing circumstances to sustain their livelihoods and ensure their security.

Attempts by national governments and international actors to prevent and manage conflict require a better understanding of the interconnections between local, regional and international dynamics. While the global dimension of many local conflicts is typically acknowledged, there has been relatively little cross-country research collaboration. Policies and programs often retain a single-country focus that limits their effectiveness.

With the establishment of the X-Border Local Research Network, The Asia Foundation, the Carnegie Middle East Center, the Rift Valley Institute and their local research partners are working together to improve our understanding of political, economic and social dynamics in the conflict-affected borderlands of Asia, the Middle East and the Horn of Africa, and the flows of people, goods and ideas that connect them. This five-year program, initiated in 2018, produces research to inform more effective policymaking and programming. It builds, maintains and expands local research networks in some of the most remote and difficult conflict-affected regions. Finally, it supports improvements in local research methods and capacity.

RESEARCH

The partnership between organizations with a long-standing and respected presence in their respective regions offers a rare opportunity to produce policy-relevant research on conflict-affected borderlands, at the intersection of subnational and transnational dynamics.

Research focuses around three strategic themes: **Borderland governance and alternative orders** explores center-periphery relationships, hybrid forms of governance and the alternative institutions and strategies that borderland communities rely upon to protect themselves against violence and abuse; **Borderland economies** looks into economic transitions, markets and trade and how they interact with changes in the social, political and security environment; and, **flows of people, goods and ideas** focuses on migration, diaspora networks and other channels through which borderland regions are connected with each other and with the rest of the world.

Research on these themes involves in-depth analysis of specific border areas, comparative studies and joint research where network members partner to explore the routes, movements and dynamics connecting conflict-affected borderlands. On a yearly basis, the Rift Valley Institute, The Asia Foundation and the Carnegie Middle East Center engage in joint analysis of collective research findings to identify lessons relevant to policy-making and development programming in the three regions and beyond.

NETWORKS

Local researchers and research institutions often have unique access to conflict-affected areas where a deep knowledge of the local context, languages and customs, and the trust and legitimacy earned through shared hardship, are necessary conditions to effective research. However, local resources are often underutilized and underdeveloped, with limited long-term investments in their capacity and little efforts to build genuine involvement in research design and analysis.

The Asia Foundation, the Carnegie Middle East Center and the Rift Valley Institute have developed extensive research networks in their respective regions. This project enables them to strengthen and expand these networks, using fresh research to test new partnerships and identify capacity-building needs. The project also links these networks together through regular training opportunities and seminars, contributing to the development of a cross-regional research community with a shared interest in conflict-affected borderlands and transnational conflict.

METHODS

Important knowledge gaps exist in nearly all of the project's research areas. Quantitative data on the incidence and impacts of conflict is often missing, inaccessible or inaccurate. The views of the people living in those regions are insufficiently represented. Available data rarely captures the distinct ways in which women and men are affected by conflict and violence or adapt to shifts in local and transnational dynamics.

The X-Border Local Research Network seeks to address these gaps by encouraging gender-sensitive research, elevating standards for qualitative fieldwork in complex environments, and improving local capacity for survey work and quantitative research methods. This is achieved through mentoring, regional and cross-regional technical exchanges and knowledge and learning events. Where there is opportunity and demand, the project also supports the development of violence monitoring systems, an area where The Asia Foundation has considerable technical expertise.

All network members are committed to integrating a balanced perspective on gender through all research and capacity-building activities and enforcing ethical research principles that respect the dignity and ownership of research participants over the data that they contribute to producing.

The Asia Foundation is a nonprofit international development organization committed to improving lives across a dynamic and developing Asia. The foundation has over 60 years' experience and offices across 18 countries in the region.

The Rift Valley Institute is an independent nonprofit organization working in Eastern and Central Africa. The Institute aims to advance useful knowledge of the region and its diverse communities, bringing better understanding of local realities to bear on social and political action.

The Carnegie Middle East Center is an independent policy research institute and part of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. The Center provides in-depth analysis of the political, socioeconomic, and security issues facing the Middle East and North Africa.

The X-Border Local Research Network is a component of the United Kingdom Department for International Development's Cross-Border Conflict – Evidence, Policy and Trends (XCEPT) program.