Strategies for **Prevention**

Taking prevention more seriously will help ensure that there are fewer wars and less consequential disasters to cope with in the first place. There is a clear financial incentive for doing so. In the 1960s, natural disasters caused some $52 billion in damage; in the 1990s, the cost has already reached $479 billion. The costs of armed conflicts are equally sobering. The Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict estimates that the cost to the international community of the seven major wars in the 1990s, not including Kosovo, was $199 billion. This was *in addition* to the costs to the countries actually at war. The Carnegie researchers argued that most of these costs could have been saved if greater attention had been paid to prevention.

More effective prevention strategies would save not only tens of billions of dollars, but hundreds of thousands of lives as well. Funds currently spent on intervention and relief could be devoted to enhancing equitable and sustainable development instead, which would further reduce the risks of war and disaster.

Building a culture of prevention is not easy, however. While the costs of prevention have to be paid in the present, its benefits lie in the distant future. Moreover, the benefits are not tangible; they are the wars and disasters that do *not* happen. So we should not be surprised that preventive policies receive support that is more often rhetorical than substantive.

This is not all. History tells us that single-cause explanations of either war or natural disasters are invariably too simplistic. This means that no simple, all-embracing solutions are possible either. To address complex causes we need complex, interdisciplinary solutions. The fundamental point is that implementing prevention strategies—for wars or disasters—requires cooperation across a broad range of different agencies and departments.

Unfortunately, international and national bureaucracies have yet to eradicate the institutional barriers to building the cross-sector cooperation that is a prerequisite of successful prevention. For example, in national Governments as well as international agencies, departments that are responsible for security policy tend to have little knowledge of development and governance policies, while those responsible for the latter rarely think of them in security terms. Overcoming the barriers posed by organizational division requires dedicated leadership and a strong commitment to creating "horizontal" interdisciplinary policy networks that include our partners in international civil society.