



## Post-Conflict Peacebuilding: Connecting Research and Policy

January 25, 2008

### Summary Report

Introduction- A group of scholars and practitioners working in the field of post-conflict peacebuilding were invited to discuss how scholars can present new empirical research in such a way as to make it relevant and accessible for policy and practice on post-conflict peacebuilding. A major theme was how to address the challenge of communication between academics and policymakers.

The Translation Problem- academics frequently do not know how to communicate effectively with policymakers, while policymakers find it hard to access the types of information and knowledge from academia that they would find most useful in a timely manner.

- This session opened with the advice and comments from one scholar-turned-practitioner whose views from both worlds provided the context for the discussion that followed.
- Academia and the policy world are separate, but it is important to realize that academia is not the exclusive source of knowledge; the policy world produces its own forms of knowledge as well, through experience, lessons learned, and the internal study of best practices.
- There are multiple audiences who interpret words differently. For example, the elegant academic phrase “structural conflict prevention” may be ill-received by governments that could see it as a veiled threat to their sovereignty, or the different meanings “democratization” has for different policy makers.
- Discussion about multiple audiences was lively, with some participants advocating that scholars write two versions of their papers to be attentive to academic and policy audiences, providing simple, accessible pieces for desk officers to “cut and paste” into their reports as a way to be immediately relevant, while others argued that scholars may be more influential with some governments by writing Op-Eds or placing articles in prominent, non-academic news outlets.
- One participant questioned whether any of these approaches would be useful for changing policy, or whether it would be more likely to influence the margins of already existing programs, while being unable to address larger structural critiques. One response was that there are critical moments when policies take shape, and are open to influence by new ideas which may shift their direction substantially. Timing is everything.

### What Kind of Expertise?

- The first set of working memos presented focused on the importance of local knowledge and context, and how they have been largely ignored in peacebuilding. These scholars raised issues such as sending in foreigners with few language skills, focusing on national-level conflicts to the exclusion of local violence, or using scholarly or technocratic experts who lack local knowledge to gather information instead of local operators who are familiar with a who's who of a conflict.
- Participants discussed local ownership in peacebuilding; it was desirable, but difficult to implement. Participants agreed that local knowledge was incredibly important, but again,
- difficult to obtain and disseminate; collaborative research with local scholars should be established whenever possible.
- Scholars can take a long time to do fieldwork and come up with their answers, but policymakers need answers very quickly, so there is often a disjuncture between the timelines of the scholars and the needs of the policy makers.

### The Political Transition

- Several working memos were introduced, ranging in topic from participatory constitution-making to political party development to political uncertainty. The danger of transition processes dragging on too long, the possible presence of violent or extremist groups, as well as the question of which parties can legitimately participate in the transition processes, were raised in the papers.
- Discussion of how specific donors shape transitional processes and democratization in different ways; donor countries tend to promote their own models of legislatures and party systems, whether or not they fit the recipient country; the ongoing shift from using grantees to contractors to implement programs also affects the types of programming, processes, and participation.
- The question of language for different audiences, as well as taboo words and topics, "that which we cannot say" arose, and the question of tailoring one's work to a specific policy audience came up again; to have relevance to policymakers, academics may have to tailor their work, but there is a danger of scholars watering down their work, or of scholars losing control of how their work is used.
- It may be better for scholars to describe what good policies would look like or do, than to try to make concrete policy recommendations.

### Reconciliation and Reintegration

- The final working memos of the day were presented on individual reconciliation in Rwanda and the challenges of reintegrating young mothers in Uganda. In Rwanda the reconciliation process has been forcefully defined by the government as national unity, leaving no space for individual definitions. In Uganda, committers of violence have been framed exclusively as men, leaving women framed as simple victims, although many played multiple roles in the rebel armies. In both cases, there is a need to contextualize and disaggregate the people affected by conflict.
- The possibility of research being used to support or undermine larger policy agendas in a way that is beyond the author's control; for example, the characterization of women as complex victims who took part in atrocities could be used to undermine the achievement of broader gender goals.

- Participants discussed the likelihood that policymakers will not be interested in an area or issue until it is in crisis, although some policymakers are trying to take more preventative action, knowing, in principle that it is less costly than acting once it is a crisis.

#### General Discussion: Connecting Research and Policy

- The workshop concluded with a wide-ranging discussion. Some of the main issues raised were:
- The problem of labels, such as portraying a conflict as between the “heroes and bad guys” or the definitions that the international community uses to define success but that scholars know hide complex situations.
- The conflict scholars face between maintaining their academic integrity or altering their work to make it more acceptable to policymakers, between keeping their work within the confines of academia or releasing it into the policy sphere where they can no longer control how it is used.
- The framing and timing of research for maximum impact on policies while they are still fluid enough to be influenced.
- The importance of high-quality executive summaries so that policymakers can clearly and quickly see the implications and relevance of scholars’ research.
- Extensive language and local context training, while considered a solution to many of the problems raised throughout the day, as unlikely, given the other professional demands on both academics and policymakers.
- The merits of various vehicles for influencing policymakers, such as Op-Eds, conversations over coffee with desk officers, policy memos, blogs.
- The importance of collaborative research projects with scholars from the Global South.

## **Participant List**

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## Workshop Agenda

Friday, January 25, 2008

- 9:00 – 9:15      Introduction  
Susan Woodward, The Graduate Center, CUNY
- 9:15 – 10:30      The Translation Problem  
*How I Learned to Write a “Note Verbale”*  
By Musifiky Mwanasali, UNMIS, Khartoum
- 10:30 – 11:15      What Kind of Expertise?  
*Exercising Foreign Authority in Contexts of Linguistic & Cultural Differences*  
By Andrew Gilbert, University of Chicago  
  
*International Peace Building Failures in “Post-Conflict” Environments*  
By Séverine Autesserre, Barnard College, Columbia University  
  
*Peacebuilding as Statebuilding – Implications for the UN*  
By Ole Jacob Sending, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs
- 11:30 – 1:00      The Political Transition  
*Weighing the Benefits and Drawbacks of Participatory Constitution Making*  
By Devra C. Moehler, Cornell University  
  
*Rebel Movements and Post-Conflict Governance in Africa*  
By Devon Curtis, University of Cambridge  
  
*Political Party Development: A New Peacebuilding Priority*  
By Jeroen de Zeeuw, University of Warwick  
  
*Political Uncertainty and Sustainable Peace*  
By Fernando A. Chinchilla, Université de Montréal
- 2:00 – 3:00      Reconciliation and Reintegration  
*On Bringing in Ordinary People: Policy Suggestions from Post-Genocide Rwanda*  
By Susan M. Thomson, Dalhousie University  
  
*Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration: The Case of Mothers in Northern Uganda*  
By Erin Baines, University of British Columbia
- 3:00 – 4:30      General Discussion: connecting research and policy

