



Bonn Symposium 2009

Sustainable Development
in Times of Crises
Opposition or Opportunity?



Workshop D

Building Sustainable Peace: Development Contributions to Peacebuilding

Organised by: Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC)
Chair: Andrea Warnecke (BICC)
Report: **Yannick Poullié**, Heinrich-Heine-University Düsseldorf

The workshop sought to identify and assess the specific expertise and capacities of development actors in the context of UN peacebuilding missions. It discussed present approaches to further pool and coordinate these efforts among donors and to enhance the participation of local actors in order to establish a framework for sustainable peace.

Key questions were:

- What is the specific contribution of development actors to international peacebuilding/peacekeeping missions (approaches, fields of expertise)?
- Which steps can/should be taken to balance the relationships between internal and external actors and to safeguard the buy-in of affected populations?
- How do development actors seek to synchronize and/or pool their resources, both internally and externally?

Dr **Matthias Ries** (German Development Service, DED) argued that the problems development agencies are facing in conflict areas would be mitigated if the distinction between “conflict sensitivity” and “peacebuilding” would be made clearer. Elaborating on this distinction he accentuated the difference between “working in” and “working on” conflict. The aim of development projects “working in” conflict is to avoid negative aspects of conflicts on development programs and, vice versa, of development programs on conflicts. Working on conflict, however, refers to programs with an explicit conflict reduction/ peacebuilding agenda. Peace service specialists “working on” conflicts are trained in networking or monitoring and also in providing peace education. Peacebuilding is currently done e.g. in Afghanistan, Palestine, Israel and Bolivia. Mr. Ries stressed that what is needed for peacebuilding activities to succeed is a general understanding of the conflict, its dynamics, key drivers and factors.

Tobias Pietz (Center for International Peace Operations, ZIF) focused on local ownership in peacebuilding processes. He defined local ownership as taking over responsibility by locals in the conflict areas. In order to illustrate this issue he presented the cases of the establishment of election administrations in Kosovo and Liberia. Summarizing his experiences he pointed out that the crucial question on the way to local ownership was whether a top-down or a bottom-up approach is used. In a top-down approach external experts would be involved in the process in order to make sure it is done correctly, while a bottom-up approach would make local people do so themselves. Regarding

local ownership Mr Pietz identified three dilemmas: intrusiveness, dependency and transition. First, if intrusive action is taken it might alienate the local population, while a lack of intrusive action might mean to fail to do enough for success. Second, the dilemma of dependency simply means that committing oneself for a long time might create dependencies in the local population which may be hard to overcome. Third, local ownership should relate to local tradition and should not just be built from scratch. He concluded by saying that besides these dilemmas the term of “local ownership” always remained questionable as long as peacebuilding operations in the respective countries were conducted by international governments, NGOs and other external actors. Replying to a question from the audience relating to the lack of clear definition concerning the term “local ownership” by using the terms “local”, “subnational” and “regional” interchangeably, Mr Pietz admitted that the long elaborate academic definition did not meet the realities of practitioners. Therefore they tended to create their own definitions. Nevertheless a general definition was needed in order to be able to systematically collect information.

Dr **Jörn Grävingholt** (German Development Institute, DIE) dismissed the term “local ownership” because he said it lacked a clear definition. He then presented the term “political settlement” as an alternative approach. He pointed out that peacebuilding projects are currently facing similar challenges like political settlement approaches by trying to overcome violent conflict while simultaneously helping innocent people involuntarily affected by the conflict. However, the political settlement approach focuses on elite interaction. Local legitimate elites are a good partner for development actors to reach a political settlement because you “can’t have a settlement without legitimacy”. This is a self-evident quality of elite interaction but it entails the risk of concluding short-term peace without a stable long-term perspective. Moreover, political agreements are the result of power struggles and thus often are discriminatory. Dr Grävingholt stressed, however, that inclusive processes should be encouraged nevertheless and that the international community should “not build states whatever it takes”.

In the discussion the panellists did not fully agree on which approach development actors should take, but they did agree on some basic ideas. While Mr **Ries** highlighted the necessity for locals to show the will to solve their conflicts, Mr **Grävingholt** said “local ownership” was “more of a conceptual tool” that “should not be overestimated” and that was unable to do any good without involving people on the ground. The conflict sensitive stance as demanded by Mr Ries was taken up by Mr Pietz. He talked about the need to overcome imbalances in relationships, between different local factions as well as between locals and the international community, e.g. donors who have to make their particular interests clear. To put it in a nutshell: honest interaction is necessary.

Cécile Molinier (UNDP), speaking from the audience, called on development actors to learn to listen to local people who have knowledge but often lack the opportunity to express themselves. She also supported Mr Pietz’s appeal to provide assistance not only during the harshest times of crisis but also in the periods of early recovery and development which often lack sufficient funding. She added that most post-conflict societies that went through peacebuilding processes did not profit from the peace dividend as much as they should have because of corruption and other problems.

Several questions in the discussion referred to the case of Afghanistan. Following on the issue of defining the locals, the case of the Taliban was mentioned who were neither included in peacebuilding nor in political settlement processes. Mr Grävingholt replied that addressing the Taliban “cannot be done on a desk” meaning that such groups can only be contacted via experts on the field rather than in international diplomatic meetings. Dr Bernhard Stahl (University of Düsseldorf) said he was not surprised that local elites did not comply with the peace process in Afghanistan. From their point of view the international community often acted as an enforcer rather than as a moderator of the peace set-

tlement. Mr Grävingsholt agreed while pointing out the importance for any political agreement to be very cautious. He said that, again, short-term and long-term perspectives had to be included in order to offer some kind of “social contract” to the local parties. If this was not done, he stated, it would be no surprise if elites did not comply.

In his concluding statement, Mr Ries argued in support of accepting the differences between external and local actors while demanding that all national actors need to be involved in the peacebuilding process. In contrast, Mr Grävingsholt stressed the need for a stable political order for which only the relevant actors should be taken on board while admitting the problem of assessing the actors “relevance”. Finally, the workshop ended with an overall consensus that a mere top-down approach did not work and that perhaps a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches was needed.

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