

Challenges for Development-oriented Peace Work: Old and New Ways Forward

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Outlining the challenges arising in development-oriented peace work in the coming years is a challenge in itself, for this is a broad field, covering topics from reform processes in the United Nations and the European Union, to climate change, the increasing scarcity of natural resources, the role of new donors such as China, India and Brazil, the debate about coherence, state-building, “good enough governance” and “hybrid institutions”, and the current political upheavals in the Middle East and North Africa, whose complexities are still difficult to fathom. This first part of the Essay Series to mark the 10th anniversary of FriEnt sets all these issues aside and focuses on one key question: which “building blocks” will define this field of action in future?

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Building Block 1: Expanding the debates and clarifying “structural prevention”

Conflict, Security, and Development – this is the title of this year’s *World Development Report* (WDR) published by the World Bank a few days ago. It thus sends out an important political signal, for WDR 2011 is the first of these reports to focus specifically on the challenges facing development (cooperation) in situations of violence. It summarises key findings from research and practice: the importance of building trust between state institutions and citizens during processes of reconstruction and reform, the generational timeframes of these processes, and the need to be aware of resurgent dynamics of violence and to develop creative and sometimes risky approaches, to name just a few.

At the same time, there is virtually no other publication from the development policy arena which reflects the discursive convergence between foreign, security and development policy as strongly as this report. It is already apparent that with its trenchant demand for more “citizen security, justice and jobs”, the report is likely to become the new star in the security and development debate. It emphatically demonstrates to development policy-makers and practitioners that physical security (police, army), a well-functioning justice system and income-generating measures are essential to prevent and deal with many different manifestations of violence.

As important as these aspects are, it is obvious to anyone working at the interface between peace and development that this is also one of the weaknesses of the report – and of the debates, conducted over recent years, about the options for action by development actors. For despite a growing awareness of the complexity of crisis and post-conflict situations, despite the broad understanding of “human security” in the development policy context, and despite the efforts to address the “structural causes” of violent conflict, there has been a

narrowing and outward shift of the debate about the fields of action of development-oriented peace work in recent years.

What, precisely, is meant by this “narrowing and outward shift”? In essence, it means that the majority of development actors are focused on the Millennium Development Goals and the Paris Agenda, but rarely discuss peace and “do no harm”. A small minority is engaged in dialogue with foreign and security policy-makers about fragility, governance, security sector and judicial reform, but they rarely touch on the linkage between health, education or rural development and peacebuilding in their dialogue with other development actors.

Parallel discourses and demarcations between sectors and policy areas are by no means uncommon. There is no doubt that this is due, not least, to limited capacities, but it is also a question of priorities. The debates about Afghanistan, whole-of-government strategies, broader security and civil-military cooperation have absorbed so many resources at governmental and civil society level that very little room was left for thinking about alternative approaches or for solidifying the somewhat vague notion of “structural prevention” and sector-specific mainstreaming. If it is assumed, however, that a lack of, or inequitable access to, economic resources, political participation or education is often the cause of violent conflict, it is clear that “classic” development policy sectors offer great potential for preventive or peacebuilding activities based on appropriate peace- and conflict-sensitive planning.

Actors engaged in development-oriented peace work must in future expand and clarify the discourse and practice in two directions: on the one hand, it is important to resume the internal dialogue and, together with colleagues working in the “classic” sectors, expand the potentials into practical action, and on the other, they must continue the interdisciplinary dialogue on peace and development that spans numerous policy fields. The crucial question, in this context, is whether this external dialogue will focus on “citizen security, justice and jobs”, with development-oriented peace work (by state actors) being closely associated with judicial and security sector reform and quick impact economic measures in future, or whether a more comprehensive understanding of justice and security – defined as freedom from want and freedom from fear – can be established.

Building Block 2: Questioning paradigms, developing strategies

Since the mid 1990s, development-oriented peace work has focused on two main aspects. Alongside “structural prevention”, which has already been mentioned, it has been – and is still – about promoting and building the capacities of institutions and mechanisms which facilitate non-violent conflict resolution. Democracy-building, human rights protection and reconciliation are now firmly established in development cooperation. An equally well-established but less obvious space is occupied by the “theories of change” associated with these approaches: reconciliation through dialogue and encounter, a liberal, market-oriented democracy, justice and the rule of law, civil society as a bridge-builder or driver of democratic reform processes, “all-partiality” and mediation – all these pillars of sustainable peacebuilding are based, not least, on our own experiences of peaceful transformation after the Second World War.

But despite the warnings about blueprints, and although context-specific strategy development is regarded as having central importance, the majority of external actors resort to tried and tested approaches, often as a result of their own self-imposed time pressure. These approaches include truth commissions and tribunals, for example. But surely, people’s concepts of justice and truth-finding may well vary in the highly disparate contexts of Cambodia, DR Congo and Colombia, for example? And which steps must be taken by civil society in order to act as a bridge-builder in a deeply divided, hierarchically structured society? Does dialogue genuinely lead to reconciliation? Doesn’t it sometimes deepen the rifts

between sections of society because inequality and marginalisation continue to exist? And just how credibly can we promote peace and the universality of human rights in places like Afghanistan, Bosnia or Palestine? This is not a plea for relativisation of values or a withdrawal from politically sensitive fields of action. On the contrary: ultimately, peace is intimately linked with values – and depending on the context, it therefore runs an even greater risk of being devalued.

If development-oriented peace work is to remain credible in future and support reform processes on a sustainable basis, it must face up to the challenge of questioning its own paradigms after 15 years of research and practice. It is time to pause, take stock, and find new ways forward in our strategic development.

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