



THE FLETCHER SCHOOL
TUFTS UNIVERSITY

**The Nexus:
Corruption, Conflict & Peacebuilding Colloquium**

***Thought Piece: Peacebuilding and Corruption:
How they may collide?***

Fighting corruption has become an increasingly important topic for governments of the industrialized donor nations and the institutions whose membership they dominate. The World Bank and US government are at the forefront of this agenda, though most of the European nations have subsequently added it to their foreign aid policies in recent years.

Despite the increasing attention placed on this issue by the international community, very little exchange occurs between those working on conflict/peacebuilding and those engaged in fighting corruption. The de-facto pillars operate simultaneously and often in overlapping sectors yet without co-ordination or purposeful mitigation of possible consequences (positive or negative) each may have on the other.

The Institute for Human Security within the Fletcher School at Tufts University hosted a select group of thinkers and policy makers to discuss the critical questions related to the nexus of conflict, corruption and peacebuilding on April 13, 2007. The *purpose* of the event was threefold:

- 1.) Finalize a map of existing research and activity related to the nexus;
- 2.) Exchange views and ascertain thinking about gaps and emerging questions; and
- 3.) Determine the questions of significance for a research agenda and attendant activities moving forward

In preparation for the colloquium, each participant was asked to draft a short *Thought Piece* on a specific aspect of the agenda in order to fuel the discussion. These pieces were intended to be 'food for thought' and not academic, formal publications;¹ nor were they intended to be made public. However after much discussion regarding the paucity of existing literature it was felt, where authors permitted, that there was value in making them available. For further information on the Colloquium, contact Professor Cheyanne

¹ Further information on the agenda and the parameters provided on the Thought Pieces may be found on the Colloquium website.

THE NEXUS: CORRUPTION, CONFLICT & PEACEBUILDING
THOUGHT PIECE

CHEYANNE CHURCH

Corruption & Peacebuilding: How They May Collide?

One must ‘mind the gap’ when attempting to explore how corruption and peacebuilding connect, counter or even reinforce each other. The gap in the current literature is striking. Though the past year has seen an upsurge in interest in the intersection of corruption and conflict as well as corruption and statebuilding, how corruption overlays with peacebuilding has received scant attention. Further when one reflects on origins of the even the related literature it is the corruption world that is driving these new areas and not those situated in statebuilding or peacebuilding as such. This of course affects the perspective and conclusions of the subsequent literature.

In this short Thought Piece, the definition of corruption will align with Transparency International’s definition; the abuse of entrusted authority for illegitimate private gain. There is likely valuable time to be spent reflecting on the core notions in this definition and how they apply or change within in a conflict context. For instance, in a conflict or post- conflict society the notion of *entrusted authority* must be understood in the context of extreme insecurity. The entrusted authority can take on the role of ultimate ‘protector’ or ‘predator’ due to the lack of other functioning systems like rule of law or media. This makes the stakes higher for the individual of not partaking in a corrupt system and the potential ‘profits’ so much greater for the corrupt. Or the concept of private gain, this may mean personal as in the individual but also gain for a group, often in conflict dynamics the group is connected by clan, ethnicity or tribe.

Defining what is meant by peacebuilding is of equal importance as the international field struggles with the language being used interchangeably causing confusion in concepts. In this piece, peacebuilding refers to any work that seeks to effect change in the key driving factors or actors of existing or renewed armed conflict², as determined in each

² Definition used by the Reflecting on Peace Practice (RPP) project of CDA-CLP.

conflict context, that would bring a sustained peace. It can occur at any level; grassroots, elite decision-makers and those influential to both of these groups.³

Peacebuilding & Corruption

In reflecting on the work done in peacebuilding it is my assertion that corruption and peacebuilding intersect in three main ways:

1. Ignorance is Bliss: unintentional use of corruption to facilitate peacebuilding ends
2. ‘Buying the Peace:’⁴ the use of corruption, explicitly or implicitly, to obtain an end to violence, generally but not exclusive to, high-level political interactions such as peace agreements.
3. Part and Parcel: where peacebuilders and peacebuilding agencies are the corrupt actors

I. Ignorance is Bliss

Consistent with other sectors within the international humanitarian and development community, the corruption and peacebuilding sectors operate in parallel silos. With different agencies, actors, conference circuits, literature and implementing organisations, the two ‘industries’ generally operate in simultaneous fashion and overlap in only ad-hoc and limited ways. Not surprisingly, the two fields also have differing priorities, frameworks of analysis, approaches and evaluation foci. As a result of this separation corruption unintentionally plays a role in the peacebuilding process and may be an unintentional enabler towards the peacebuilding goals.

The two fields have, quite naturally, ***different priorities***; one to stop violence and build peace and the other to stop corruption and build non-corrupt systems, leaders and practices. The goals of specific projects are generally more specific than this, but are intended to feed into one or the other of these greater overarching visions. These different priorities are then translated into differing perceptions of success for each field, which have implications on the other area, both positive and negative. At present the interplay between the two fields do not appear to be fully understood, nor included in policy or practice decisions.

³ As is best outlined in John Paul Lederach’s Actor Triangle

⁴ Phrase taken from Philippe Le Billon article on Buying Peace or Fuelling War

The *framework of analysis* also appears to differ between the two. At the most pragmatic level the tools of analysis used by the two communities are different and appear to be rarely, if ever, overlaid to determine the interplays between the issues. It is illustrative that in 2003-2004 USAID almost simultaneously were working on two new analysis tools, one for conflict and one for corruption. These tools did not cross-reference the other, leaving it to the practitioner to attempt an amalgamation or as is likely more the norm stay firmly located within their own silo.

In addition to the framework, there are also differing sets of expertise and knowledge that are possessed by practitioners. As a result the issues of relevance, red-flags, indicators and options to counter corruption are not familiar to the average peacebuilding programme decision-maker. It is likely true, that corruption experts are also not familiar with the intricacies of the conflict and peacebuilding principles, processes and expertise. This effects what information is deemed important to know in the context and subsequent decisions.

Take for instance the efforts of a Northern Irish NGO⁵ to support elements within one of the Protestant paramilitaries to stop the use of violence to advance their political agenda. As more and more of the mid to senior level commanders stopped advocating violence, the peacebuilding NGO declared victory. Based on their analysis of the situation success had been achieved. However, a broader lens showed that many of these actors were now using the same command – control structures to perpetuate criminal and corrupt activities for personal gain. As such the project did reduce politically motivated violence against the other community, but traded it for a greater focus on illicit activity which harmed both communities. (now equal opportunity harm!) Further it appeared that those within the paramilitary structure who were sufficiently senior were the ones to predominately utilise corrupt practices while those more junior gravitated towards criminal activities.

This example illustrates, the different perceptions of success, frameworks of analysis and knowledge basis of the actors. This NGO knew in detail the landscape of political violence and the actors, but did not know in-depth the illicit activities that the paramilitaries were increasingly involved. The focus was so clearly on political violence

⁵ This example is drawn from personal work experience in Northern Ireland.

reduction that any shift was interpreted as positive rather than different but the same from the perspective of the community. The question is could more have been expected of this intervention? Without the incentives of the illicit activity in terms of personal gain (financial and power) would the actors have been willing to change their actions? Conversely was it through the peacebuilding programme that these actors saw the 'game was over' in terms of the political war and that they needed to capitalise on their position through corruption and conflict while they still could?

Third, *differing approaches*; grassroots peacebuilding is dominated by a hearts and minds approach⁶ with the core assumption being that if enough individuals are changed personally then greater change will occur in society. Conversely it appears that the corruption field is dominated by a technocratic approach targeted primarily at systems and institutions and with a preponderance of attention towards financial transactions.

Finally, the way in which peacebuilding is *evaluated* currently rarely seeks to determine the intersection with corruption. Potentially evaluation could seek out unintentional intersections between specific peacebuilding actions and the support or deconstruction of corrupt networks and practices. Conversely do the evaluations of anti-corruption measures take account for its effects on conflict and grievances?

At the statebuilding level does the increasing focus on integrated approaches, such as the Canadian Government Whole Government Approach or integrated missions in the United Nations offer an opportunity for corruption and peacebuilding actors to collaborate further? With the multiplicity of voices at the table can the trade-offs be better understood and therefore mitigated against. Alternatively does this mean that once an overarching policy goal is determined that all other pillars/elements are subservient to this perceived greater good?

II. Buying the Peace

The international community has a hierarchy of priorities which shift over time and are associated with different lead agencies. In the immediate term, the first priority in conflict situations is generally to stop the war. In practice, this often implies that trade-

⁶ Evidence gathered by the Reflecting on Peace Practice project based on international and national ngos working in conflict zones around the world.

offs will have to be adopted in order to achieve this end. One of the trade-offs that is increasingly apparent is with corruption. In the most minimal form this means the inclusion of illegitimate or corrupt actors into the negotiations.

In its most extreme form this involves, 'buying the peace' where the continued access to resources or opportunities to personally profit are entrenched in the agreement. Consider the peace agreement in Sierra Leone where the RUF leader was made the Minister of Natural Resources giving him full authority over the lucrative diamond sector, or the Mozambique peace settlement which reportedly included offering the head of the rebel movement a villa in Europe as part of the 'signing bonus' [Personal Conversation]. Arguably these trade-offs are necessary in order to stop violence in these situations. The result however, is that the international community negotiates and enforces a peace agreement that entrenches (to differing degrees) corruption.

Are these trade-offs explicitly recognised and are the longer term implications understood? More pessimistically do those who are enshrining these actors have the contextual knowledge to understand the implications of their actions? Do these international arbiters know how things can be circumvented on the ground and what the longer term consequences on positive peace might be? Do they stay involved in these contexts for enough time to see the consequences of their actions before moving on to the next crisis and replicating their 'tried and true' methods? Let us reflect on the Bosnia model being advocated for Iraq!

As immediacy shifts to a short to medium term perspective, authority in the country is handed over to the national authorities accompanied by a different set of international actors providing aid. These new international actors, such as the World Bank have a different set of priorities often including corruption as high on the agenda. Thus the new and often fragile regime, sanctioned by the international community and often indebted to corruption for its position is now tasked with combating the politically fraught issue of corruption if they want to continue to receive the 'benefits' of the international system. It is the ultimate bait and switch by the international community. These new regimes generally do not need sympathy for this situation, as the only ones better placed to counter this slight of hand are often these newly formed yet corrupt regimes, who

respond to this duplicity with their own set of deceptions in order to capitalise on the system being offered.

With this in mind, the feasibility of the calls in the nascent literature for the inclusion of anti-corruption measures into peace agreements is not surprising, but pragmatically questionable⁷. As O'Donnell stated in her recent address to the World Bank, "peace agreements provide a unique entry point still not fully utilized by the Bank" to tackle corruption. How precisely this could be done while simultaneously achieving an end to the violence is not clearly articulated and as such the calls for inclusion need to be tempered with feasibility. What other options exist in instances where warlords have access to money and weapons that rival the state security apparatus or where civilian casualties are in the thousands and appearing around the world with the consequent CNN-effect on foreign policy? Not surprisingly this thinking originates from thinkers within the corruption field and is true to their priorities and frameworks of analysis.

III. Part & Parcel

Of course there are also instances where peacebuilders themselves, be it personally or agency wide are corrupt. Individuals who set up NGOs which purport to be agents of change for peace, but are instead a means for self-aggrandizement, not only divert resources from legitimate actors, but also harm the public perception of the legitimacy of NGOs and the process of peacebuilding⁸. In turn this decreases the quality of person who is likely to be drawn to work in peacebuilding NGOs and limit their credibility as neutral actors working for the common good. Where corruption is part of the conflict dynamic, these actors become part of the problem not the solution. However, it should be noted that as peacebuilding programmes generally do not entail large amount of resources of goods transfer the scale of corruption is likely less than in the humanitarian world.

Far more research and reflection are required to understand the true interplay between corruption and peacebuilding, both positive and negative. It should be understood that these three groupings are conjecture that require far deeper reflection and the assembling of sound evidence. What is necessary at this time for the research to begin.

⁷ O'Donnell, World Bank 2006 Talk and Ackerman ECOSOC Presentation 2006

⁸ Excellent examples of this can be found in Sri Lanka.

References

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