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Challenges to Peacebuilding in the Developing World

A meeting co-organized by Sida/SAREC and the Swedish Network of Peace, Conflict and Development Research

2006 Conference Report

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ABOUT THE NETWORK

OBJECTIVES

The objective of this network is to strengthen Swedish research on peace and conflict studies in the developing world, and to provide assistance to policy makers and practitioners to develop tools to cope with the most salient situations of violent conflict in the South.

WHAT CAUSES MAJOR VIOLENT CONFLICTS?

Violent conflicts occur in a series of stages at which international intervention may occur. In an increasingly interdependent world, what concrete measures exist that are likely to be effective in addressing violent conflict? The causes of violent conflict need to be assessed and monitored, particularly in developing countries. The significant issues for a particular developing country, region, continent, or generally in the developing world need to be identified, and strategies for approaching them should be worked out in cooperation with policy makers and practitioners involved in peacebuilding and development cooperation.



SUPPORT FOR RESEARCH

The need for a combined approach towards security and development is a priority for those involved in peacubuilding and development cooperation. In order to assist conflict prevention policymaking vis-à-vis developing countries, the Swedish Network of Peace, Conflict and Development Research will pursue three aims.

AIMS OF THE NETWORK

1. *Support, promote and link* Swedish researchers from different universities and university colleges to conduct research on the peace and conflict dimensions of development studies, and development dimensions of peace and conflict research
2. *Assist Swedish researchers* to establish and develop linkages and collaboration with researchers in the developing world
3. *Facilitate the dissemination of research* findings among the interested public, academics, and practitioners interested in peacebuilding and development cooperation

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Introduction

On 9 November 2006, the Swedish Network of Peace, Conflict and Development Research, in cooperation with Sida/SAREC, brought together over 55 participants at Sida headquarters in Stockholm for a discussion of the current challenges to peacebuilding faced by the developing world. The participants represented 11 countries, 19 universities and 18 independent organizations & institutes. During two sessions, six speakers drawn from Malaysia, the UK, Brazil, Ethiopia, the Philippines, and Columbia presented their ideas on external actors and internal armed conflicts, democracy and peacebuilding. Four discussants were asked to reflect upon their presentations, drawing upon their experiences in Egypt, Argentina, the UK and India. Together, the discussion covered a broad range of topics and reflected trends in current thinking around the world in these research areas, particularly from Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Through presenting current perspectives, the speakers opened up spaces for engaging in debate over the effects of external actors in internal armed conflicts, democracy and the prospects for building a sustainable peace. These open discussions were moderated by two members of the Swedish Network of Peace, Conflict and Development Research Steering Committee: Joakim Öjendal, Associate Professor at the Department of Peace and Development Research, Gothenburg University, and Ramses Amer, Associate Professor at the Department of Political Science, Umeå University.

Morning Session

In the morning session, the presentation on external involvement and internal order in Southeast Asia by Dr. Hari Singh, the Executive Secretary of the APISA Secretariat, Strategic Studies and International Relations Program, Universiti Kebangsaan, Malaysia, brought out an interesting finding: in the post-Cold War period, strategic and economic goals in Southeast Asia have tended to blur the distinction between the internal and external realms of the state, resulting in domestic politics becoming more susceptible to the dominant values of the international system. Dr. David J. Francis, Director of the Africa Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, Department of Peace Studies, University of Bradford, UK, devoted his presentation to the shape of external involvement in African conflicts, their shortcomings and opportunities for change. In particular the 'New Nationalism' and maintenance of the status quo of the international system leads to externally imposed order that ignores the role of the West in the creation of Africa's dilemmas, focuses on creating stability rather

than long-term peacebuilding, and involves a quick-fix, short-term involvement, and exit strategy. Williams Gonçalves, Professor of Brazilian Foreign Policy, Universidade Federal Fluminense, Superior War College & Brazilian Naval War College of the Ministry of Defence, Brazil, in his presentation focused on the political changes occurring since 2000 in South America and the prospects for external involvement in internal conflicts. In particular he pointed out that the United States have been actively intervening against insurgents and drug traffickers in Columbia, with the goal of extending their presence in the region to combat all similar elements under the 'war on terror' campaign. In addition, the United States is engaged in a 'virtual' intervention in Venezuela, attempting to promote the downfall of President Hugo Chavez.

Afternoon Session

In the afternoon session, Dr. Alfred Nhema, Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA), Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, discussed democracy and conflict management in Africa. One interesting point he brought out in his presentation was his belief in the need for stable political and economic systems, even before the introduction of a democratic process. Despite the notion that democracy is an integral component of long-term peace, Dr. Nhema felt it is necessary to create stability before democracy can be achieved, and that introducing elections too early would bring about strife and political situations that could bring the downfall of newly negotiated peace agreements. In addition, Dr. Nhema emphasized the need to include key warring parties in any negotiated settlement in order to achieve stability and pave the way for future economic development. Teresa Tadem, Director of the Third World Studies Center, Department of Political Science, University of the Philippines, presented her views on the challenges to democracy and peacebuilding in the Philippines, noting the importance of a bottom-up approach and the need for development assistance to ensure that successes in the grass-roots peacebuilding initiatives are backed up by economic reassurances. Finally, Madeleine Alingué of the Universidad Externado de Colombia presented her views on the situation of democracy and peacebuilding in Columbia, pointing out that external intervention in these areas have tended to misperceive the causes of conflict in Columbia and the reality faced by Columbians. In her view, the liberal peace model, externally imposed, brought about a perpetuation of the conflict rather than progress towards true sustainable peace. Columbia would thus be better served by discovering for itself what was peace and how peace could be achieved. This would involve more interaction with insurgents and more sustained and inclusive dialogue between all the stakeholders in the conflict.

Conclusion

The presentations and subsequent discussions covered a broad range of ideas and areas of inquiry in relation to the challenges to peacebuilding in the developing world. Through the discussion, the participants – which included a broad range of Swedish researchers, policy-makers and practitioners – exchanged ideas and experiences drawn from around the world. The aim of the meeting was to deepen and render more complex the perspective of each participant, and to develop interpersonal networks to facilitate research in the area of peacebuilding and to provide future resources to those policy makers and practitioners involved. In light of these goals, the meeting was successful. A contact list has already been circulated and a network of relationships is developing from the meeting among the participants. The Network looks forward to hosting similar events, drawing upon the experiences of this event to make the next even more rewarding to those involved. We thank Sida/SAREC for their partnership in the work of the Network in general and for their support for this meeting in particular.

Conference Presenters

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For more information on the conference participants and presentations, please visit the conference website:

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