Helpdesk Research Report: Impact and VFM of Capacity Building Support for Conflict Parties in Negotiations

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Query: Provide an assessment of the impact, including where possible value for money (VFM), of international support to national (government) capacity-building and rebel/opposition capacity building for (peace) negotiations based on evidence from key case studies including, if evidence is available, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Northern Ireland and Sudan.

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1. Overview

This report assesses the impact and value for money (VFM) of international support to government and rebel capacity building for negotiations. It finds that there has been little sustained analysis of the impact of this kind of support. Few donor evaluations focus specifically on these activities and those that do are often not made public (expert comments). No studies were identified that directly examine the VFM of this kind of support.

The report largely relies on available literature and expert comments on the effectiveness of capacity-building support to conflict parties for negotiations. It finds some brief discussion of the effectiveness and VFM of these kinds of support in the case study literature. The next section provides a brief overview of the kinds of actors and activities involved in this area. Section three assesses formal evaluations in the area of mediation support. Section four examines several key case studies: Sudan, the Palestinian Territories, Sri Lanka and Nepal. A number of other cases, including Northern Ireland, were also examined, but no relevant literature was identified.

DFID's approach to VFM combines 'economy' (buying inputs at a good price), 'efficiency' (how efficiently inputs are converted to outputs) and 'effectiveness' (how well outputs delivered intended outcomes) (DFID 2011). Some broader evaluations of peace mediation do address various aspects of

VFM, but no evaluations were identified that focus specifically on the VFM of capacity building support for peace negotiations. In general, assessments of value for money are also uncommon in the field of peace mediation (Lanz et al 2008).

Although no rigorous analyses focusing on these interventions were found, one evaluation of a broader mediation support programme was identified. The programme examined was found to be 'largely encouraging', but the evaluation stressed that success varied considerably from case to case (Wils & Herrberg 2011). This evaluation attempted some assessment of the 'efficiency' and 'economy' aspects of VFM, finding that the costs saved by successful mediation were considerable in some cases (Wils & Herrberg 2011).

The case study literature provided some anecdotal evidence that capacity-building interventions were effective, alongside some findings that highlighted negative impacts. In the case of Sudan, these interventions contributed to trust building and supported a process that led to conflict parties signing an agreement. In Palestine, a mechanism for mediation capacity building – the Negotiation Support Unit – led to some tensions. In Sri Lanka, Norwegian capacity-building support to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) helped to generate some successes in the negotiations, at least in the short term, but also generated several negative unintended consequences (Sorbo et al 2011). An evaluation of a USAID-funded programme in Sri Lanka to support negotiations which involved some capacity-building components found little tangible evidence of impact (Timberman 2007). Finally in Nepal, the Nepal Transition to Peace Initiative was found by an internal report to have supported the 'development of key agreements, and assisted in the building of the capacity needed to move the peace process forward' (NTTP 2008, p.5). While the case study literature highlights some positive outcomes associated with these capacity-building interventions, the overall picture is too mixed and fragmentary to support any firm general conclusions about the efficacy of this kind of international support.

There are inherent difficulties with measuring the outcomes or impact of any negotiation or mediation process. There is a lack of consensus in the literature around what constitutes a successful process of mediation. This relates partly to the tendency for conflict parties to possess divergent expectations and desires about the outcome of any negotiation process. It is also related to third parties' divergent goals and a lack of clarity (or secrecy) about these: success could relate to the process itself, to successful negotiation (resolution) or to both negotiation and implementation (settlement) (Bercovitch 2006). The value of mediation may go beyond simply producing a peace agreement – other benefits may include improving the humanitarian situation on the ground, providing hope to affected populations or building trust between key parties (which may successfully contribute to successful negotiations at a later date) (Lanz et al 2008).

Mediation support is generally seen as an economical form of intervention. As the World Bank's recent World Development Report (2011, p.186) noted, while '[i]t is hard to attribute results conclusively to mediation, or to demonstrate what would have happened without it…we do know that it is cheap'. The secrecy surrounding mediation support activities, however, make it difficult to conduct rigorous analysis of the 'economy' or 'efficiency' aspects of VFM in most cases due to lack of available data about costs. Furthermore, the multi-dimensionality and complexity of most peacemaking processes, together with the long-term nature of most war to peace transitions, makes it difficult to link outputs and outcomes and therefore limits the extent to which the 'effectiveness' aspects of VFM can be assessed (Woodrow & Chigas 2011). Most of the case studies analysed below highlighted these difficulties.

Despite a lack of rigorous evidence to support claims about the effectiveness of providing capacity-building support to conflict parties, it is widely accepted in the policy literature that this kind of support is an important component of international efforts to promote peacemaking. A 2009 Conciliation Resources policy brief sets out the main rationale for providing support of this kind. It argues that negotiators are 'more likely to be successful when the parties have an effective strategy and skilled negotiators' and that '[c]ultivating these capacities is in everyone's interests in the long run. If one side is at a serious disadvantage in terms of their skills and knowledge, the likelihood of anyone coming away from the table satisfied decreases' (p.4). The brief notes that this kind of support is 'an investment for both the peace process and for later democratic participation in policy processes and "good politics" after the settlement' (p.4).

MacCartney (2006) notes that it is not always useful for mediators to take on additional roles such as providing capacity-building support to conflict parties and that this confusion of roles can undermine the legitimacy of a mediator's core role. Having said this, he also notes that taking on capacity-building roles can also be helpful to the mediation process, citing Colombia as a success story (MacCartney 2006). The dangers of facilitators or mediating parties taking on a broader range of roles, including providing capacity-building support are also highlighted in a recent evaluation of peacemaking efforts in Sri Lanka (Sorbo et al 2011).

2. Capacity Building to Conflict Parties

A range of actors are involved in providing capacity-building support for negotiations to conflict parties. The most prominent of these is the UN. The UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA) established the Mediation Support Unit (MSU) in 2008, which provides direct financial, advisory and logistical support to peace processes, works to strengthen the mediation capacity of regional organisations and serves as a repository of mediation knowledge (UNDPA no date). A number of NGOs are involved in providing capacity building for conflict parties. Key players in this field include the Centre for Human Dialogue (HD Centre); the Carter Centre; and Berghof Peace Support, which has provided capacity-building support to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka and the Maoists in Nepal, amongst other groups.

Several negotiation support mechanisms have been established by donors to support peace processes. These include the Palestine Negotiation Support Unit, the Government and LTTE Peace Secretariats in Sri Lanka, the Nepal Transition to Peace (NTTP) Initiative, and the Common Space Initiative in Lebanon.

Capacity-building support to conflict parties can take a variety of forms, including:

- Using experts to provide expertise or training on specialist issues (e.g. constitutional issues, oil revenues).

- Study trips to examine the experience of negotiations in other contexts.

- Providing training in generic conflict resolution or mediation skills before or during negotiations. These can include both short- and long-term courses. An example of a short course is the 'Peace Mediation Course' of the Swiss Federal Department for Foreign Affairs (Mason 2011).

Often these activities are linked directly to efforts to foster dialogue between conflict parties – so, for example, a study trip may serve both to enhance the capacity of conflict parties and to build relationships between the two sides. Much of the available literature focuses more broadly on 'mediation support', which as well as referring to assistance to the parties can also refer to broader advisory, logistical or financial assistance to the peace process, or support to mediator in the field (Wils & Herrberg 2011).

Rebel groups particularly value international capacity building support since it often allows them to overcome asymmetries with the state party. At a 2008 roundtable meeting convened by the Berghof Foundation, representatives from rebel organisations stressed the importance of international political capacity building efforts (Dudouet 2008). Support to rebel organisations, however, holds particular issues for donors. Current anti-terrorism legislation in the United Kingdom, the United States and other countries prohibits material support to listed groups (Wils & Dudouet 2010). Prohibitions can cover providing transportation or visas or giving advice or technical support. As a result, mediators will often have to get other external actors to take on capacity-building roles (Wils & Dudouet 2010).

3. Evaluations

Most evaluations of mediation-related capacity building focus on programmes that seek to build the negotiation capacity of civil society organisations or local government institutions. Examples of this kind of evaluation include an evaluation by UNDP Sudan of its 2003 Programme 'Capacity Building in Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding in the Sudan' (UNDP 2003); a 2009 evaluation by Peace Direct of a 'Rapid Response Fund in Nepal' to build the capacity of community-based organisations in conflict-affected regions (Peace Direct 2009); and an evaluation of the Swiss-funded Geneva Initiative in the Palestinian Territories – a programme that aimed to provide a forum for peace-oriented Palestinians and Israelis to promote the Geneva Accord, a bottom-up road map for peace (Kagi & Saner 2009). Another relatively common category of evaluations relate to programmes designed to widen participation in peace processes, such as Moser and Clark's (2001) evaluation of a programme to support women's participation in the peace process in Colombia.

Wils and Herberg (2011) evaluated the role of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) in supporting the UNDPA's Mediation Support Unit. The NRC established an MSU Standby Team of Mediation Experts (SBT) in April 2007. The SBT provided a range of support services to the UN and UN-supported mediation programmes, including providing expert support on issues such as power-sharing, constitution-making, security arrangements and transitional justice. The SBT is jointly managed by the MSU and the NRC, allowing for flexible and rapid deployment and ensuring a degree of autonomy for the experts.

The report found that the record of the team was 'largely encouraging', but also identified some critical lessons learned. The examples cited in the report largely refer to support from experts to mediators, so do not relate directly to the kind of capacity-building examined in this report. Nevertheless the assessment of the effectiveness of the SBT is useful since it helps to sketch how the VFM of mediation interventions can be gauged and gives some insights into the broader effectiveness of this broad category of interventions.

The report finds that some interventions were more effective than others. The deployment of an expert in Kosovo paved the way for successful negotiations, while in other contexts, deployments were not effective. Failure was most often 'due to a lack of adequate logistics, unclear terms of reference and lack of understanding (or even trust) from the field mission or, indeed, the wrong

chemistry of a standby team member with other UN staff' (p.iii). The report also notes that 'personality matters' and that effective support often relies on a 'set of diverse characters and egos' (p.iii).

The efficiency of the SBT was assessed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The team's deployment rate increased from 36% between 2008 and 2009 to an average of 53% between 2009 and 2011. A key determinant of impact was the extent to which experts were prepared for their deployments. Interventions would have been more efficient if deployed staff were more comprehensively briefed.

The report stresses that 'it is important to consider that a meaningful contribution to one peace process could lead to enormous savings not only in financial terms but also in terms of the human costs of conflict' (p.iii). The costs saved by successful mediation could be considerable. In the successful case of the Kosovo deployment, the support of the SBT made it possible to downsize the peacekeeping force from 4,000 to 500 people, 'which contributed to savings that by far exceeded the annual budget of the Standby Team' (p.21).

4. Country Case Studies

Sudan

Fink Haysom was invited to provide expert support to the IGAD peace process from 2002. In an interview with Conciliation Resources (2006) he notes that a workshop focusing on constitutional issues was useful as it 'it placed both parties on the same side of the table - as workshop participants - rather than in an adversarial (across the table) setting' (no page number). The workshop led to the production of a single negotiating text and the participants 'were able to suggest the compromises that would form the basis of a protocol containing a model of asymmetrical federalism' (no page number).

One expert consulted in the process of compiling this report noted that outside experts were used during the North South Sudan Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) process, particularly during the wealth sharing negotiations. Norwegian oil economics experts conducted some capacity building workshops which helped the negotiations to continue (expert comments).

Mason (2007) provides an assessment of Swiss engagement in helping to resolve the North-South conflict in Sudan between 1994 and 2006. This engagement involved supporting the process by providing experts. These experts acted as facilitators, but also provided capacity-building support to the conflict parties by, for example, sharing expertise on federalism. Although the report does not directly assess the capacity-building dimensions of Swiss support, it does conclude that in general this support helped to support the signing of the CPA. The lack of capacity of rebel movements has been highlighted as a key barrier to the peace process in Darfur (MSP et al 2008).

Palestinian Territories

The Palestinian Negotiation Support Unit (NSU), which served as the main technical and legal backup for the Palestinian side in the negotiations, has not been evaluated, but a number of issues have been highlighted in relation to this institution. The unit was heavily funded by the British government and the Adam Smith Institute (Milne & Black 2011). Although no formal or informal evaluations appear to be available, a Guardian report found that the 'role of the NSU in the negotiations has caused tensions among West Bank-based Palestinian leaders and officials, and widespread resentment about the

salaries paid to its most senior managers, notably Adam Smith International's Andrew Kuhn, who stepped down from running the unit last year' (Milne & Black 2011, no page number). Discontent among NSU staff grew as negotiations continued to fail. Many staff were unhappy at the scale and nature of concessions made in the talks (Milne & Black 2011).

Sri Lanka

Norway's peace efforts in Sri Lanka between 1997 and 2009 have recently been evaluated (Sorbo et al 2011). This report notes that '[b]uilding the LTTE's capacity to engage in negotiation was central to the Norwegian idea of transforming the movement. Sustainable peace, it was reasoned, depended upon the LTTE becoming an effective political actor. Norway supported the LTTE Peace Secretariat, the journeys of LTTE cadres around the world, and encouraged training courses and exposure visits' (p.292). The strategy converged with the government's strategy of locking the LTTE into the peace process.

While this approach had some positive effects including the fact that the LTTE's chief negotiator agreed to the Oslo communiqué and the fact that the LTTE produced a political proposal short of secession for the first time. The report also stresses, however, that the approach also generated unintended consequences, which included an internal split within the LTTE and the growing perception that Norway were 'becoming apologists for the LTTE' (p.292).

The report provides some general comments on capacity-building support to the weaker conflict party by mediators. While it is often tempting for mediators to do this in asymmetric conflicts, the report notes that 'mixing the roles of mediation, capacity-building and monitoring is problematic for the third-party mediator, as it impacts on the perceived impartiality/multi-partiality, thus triggering suspicion and mistrust' (p.201). In the Sri Lankan case, Norway took on the role of developing the capacity of the LTTE (largely because other international actors were reluctant to do this or were legally prevented from doing so). The 'unfortunate impact was that Norway was tainted as being "biased towards the Tigers". The conclusion is that such roles should be shared in the international system in a much more balanced way (p.201).

USAID supported a number of mediation support activities in Sri Lanka between 2004 and 2007 and an independent evaluation of these activities was carried out in 2007 (Timberman 2007). These activities included a multi-stakeholder forum for fostering informal dialogue between conflict parties and other political representatives (the 'One Text' Initiative), to which USAID granted $603,600 over the period examined in this evaluation. One Text supported capacity-building by facilitating study trips and trainings. The evaluation found that '[t]here is little of a tangible nature to show from the considerable investment made in One Text' (Timberman 2007, p.2). The initiative's impact was limited by three factors – the absence of a robust track one process, the top-down nature of decision-making in Sri Lanka, and shortcomings in the organisation and behaviour of Sri Lankan political parties. The evaluation nevertheless states that '[t]he lasting impact of One Text is principally as a precedent and a learning experience' (pp.2-3). The report notes that it was difficult to measure the impact of the initiative because 'it is very difficult to determine in hindsight what were realistic expectations for One Text' (p.10). The report states that, together with its support institution, the One Text Initiative 'was not cheap' (p.12).

Nepal

Whitfield (2008) reviews the role of a variety of external actors in Nepal's peace process between 2000 and 2008. This includes an analysis of NGOs such as the HD Centre and the Carter Centre, the Swiss government, and the UN. Although there is no direct assessment of external capacity-building support for conflict parties, Whitfield highlights some general difficulties with assessing external support to the peace process in Nepal. First, none of the efforts to promote dialogue resulted in structured dialogue taking place. Second, much of the advice provided by external advisors was not heeded. Third, the strength of the Nepali peace process was the fact that it was nationally-owned. One criticism of international efforts in this case was that a multiplicity of efforts – 'masala peacemaking' – did not represent an effective use of resources.

The Nepal Transition to Peace (NTTP) Initiative (2005-2007) was a 'national peace support program, designed in consultation with the Government of Nepal, its Peace Secretariat and political parties to build their capacity to engage in the peace process, create an inclusive multi-party dialogue to address all stakeholders' concerns, and institutionalize government and peace structures'. The initiative was supported by USAID. Although this programme has not been evaluated, an interim report by the NTTP states that it has successfully 'helped establish peace structures, supported the development of key agreements, and assisted in the building of the capacity needed to move the peace process forward' (NTTP 2008, p.5).

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6. Additional information

Key websites: Berghof Peace Support, Carter Centre, Conciliation Resources, HD Centre, Swisspeace, USIP

Experts consulted

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