

## **CULTURE EATS STRATEGY FOR BREAKFAST: USING BEHAVIORAL INSIGHTS TO REIMAGINE AGENCY AND INCLUSION**

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### **INSTITUTIONAL LEAD**

**Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium**

### **MODERATOR**

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### **OVERVIEW**

How can behavioural research on conflict-affected situations help de-fragment current policy developments? International interpretations of stabilization and prevention are changing, and there is a shaky consensus on which institutional arrangements to promote in fragile states. This fragmentation feeds the trend for locally owned solutions to trump internationally supported institutional approaches. For this trend to be meaningful, however, individuals need to experience their own agency and inclusion.

### **FOCUS**

The session focused on the ways in which people behave and operate (the ‘culture’) versus the sometimes more pre-planned strategies used by the United Nations and the international community, which then seek to influence actors in those countries that have these very specific cultures or ways of working. What balance needs to be found between these? What might help improve understanding of these behaviours and cultures?

### **KEY TAKEAWAYS**

New insights from behavioural sciences—still in the embryonic stage of research—indicate that conflict profoundly shifts individual’s cognitive bias, not only individually, but also collectively, by simply recalling the conflict. This raises questions about how local ownership can be achieved if cognitive bias and behaviour are not well understood by external actors. An important takeaway is that there is a need for constant self-evaluation of perspective on-site. This is a constant challenge in dynamics when addressing the relationship between inclusion and stakeholders; measuring the level of engagement needed, if continuous or punctual; and paying attention to indicators of higher contexts that need to be addressed. Behaviours of different actors can be understood as culture. This contrasts with strategies that international actors are more comfortable using.

How to create change and the balance between culture and strategy is a difficult challenge and each person has to try to understand their own cognitive bias. Future investigation, especially towards peacebuilding, is needed. However, there is a need to try to address and make programmes more inclusive and aware of the local voices. This is not only important to people’s dignity, but this is also a strategic decision to further contribute to expectations on the ground and seeking more long-term effective implementation.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Include narrative engagement and storytelling as important mechanisms moving towards reconciliation.
- Continue the development of behavioural science and seek inclusion in peacebuilding programmes.
- Develop projects with bias consciousness and constant re-evaluations of the context and actors: people and context change.

- In programmes, address a broader approach to peacebuilding, not limiting its focus to short-term and technical points, but taking into consideration the context and conflict sensitivities.
- Create communication space with local partners.
- Build inclusive coalitions involving local, national, regional and international stakeholders, having in mind that not only one actor will bring all the solutions.

### SESSION QUOTES

‘Research and practice always help us to make it better.’

‘We need to explain why people are getting something and explain why they are not getting something. We need to mainstream fairness and accountability procedures on the post-conflict work.’

‘The most important thing in reconciliation is being heard.’

### HIGHLIGHTS

Doing something is not always better than doing nothing. Official development assistance can raise people’s expectations alongside their frustrations. This raises standards of fairness over time, making it more difficult to meet people’s continuously increasing expectations. A better assessment must be done with regards to people’s cognitive biases and perceptions—as well as needs.

### RESOURCE LINKS AND DOCUMENTS

Sharp, S., ‘What we’ve learnt doing mixed-methods behavioural research in Uganda’, ODI, 13 Nov. 2018, <<https://www.odi.org/blogs/10702-what-we-ve-learnt-doing-mixed-methods-behavioural-research-uganda>>.



**Jago Salmon**  
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A great discussion between @UNZimbabwe and @odi on what behavioural science can teach us on how work on prevention and peacebuilding can learn, adapt and change in complex environments. Thanks to @SIPRIorg for a great forum.

♥ 3 7:32 AM - May 16, 2019

[See Jago Salmon's other Tweets](#)



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