THE ROLE OF LEGITIMACY IN TRANSITIONS FROM FRAGILITY TO RESILIENCE

INSTITUTIONAL LEAD

United States Institute of Peace

MODERATOR

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OVERVIEW

In February 2019 the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) Task Force on Extremism in Fragile States published its final report. Following this and building on the findings of the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium, this session offered an opportunity to discuss the role of legitimacy in consolidating transitions from fragility to resilience.

FOCUS AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of the session was to exchange views and build consensus among stakeholders that come at this challenge from different perspectives—donors, governmental and non-governmental entities in situations of fragility, civil society actors and academics. The discussion looked at a set of key questions: What do we know about how state legitimacy is constructed? How do state-provided services feature in the process of building political legitimacy? What are the policy and programme implications?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The element of learning is key and has become even more important. However, there is a challenge in deliverables 'eating knowledge for breakfast' in that over-emphasizing short-term deliverables may be counter-productive, impeding long-term impact and progress.

One overarching question is why—when there is agreement on and understand of the questions on the table, the tools available, the various shortcomings, knowledge of where there has been failure— do we continue to make the same mistakes? Do not enough people share this understanding? Is it a question of not being conscious of what is being done? Or is it for some other reasons?

One important impediment to making progress is the lack of flexible funding on the donor side. Additional efforts are needed to build trust and strengthen relations with legislators. This will ensure they provide the flexibility and longer time horizons necessary for learning to occur and a long-term impact to occur on the ground.

The need for adaptive approaches continues to come up in discussions. However, the critique of adaptive approaches—where's the evidence that adaptive program management works?—needs to be addressed.

How do existing projects and new projects leverage structures and institutions—including traditional social networks? There is a need to build on and complement local institutions, rather than imposing structures from the outside that may not be fit-for-purpose.

Short time horizons are a huge challenge. Donors have expectations of quick results and there is a lack of patience.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue the discussion on what the process of learning and discovery should look like.
- Empower field missions to engage more with local communities and take into account the local understanding of what legitimacy should look like.
- Learn from cases where donors are addressing issues of legitimacy well.
- Donors need more flexibility and adaptive management programmes.
- Continue to deepen and expand 'do no harm' approaches and build safeguards in decision-making processes to more systematically consider policy trade-offs.

RESOURCE LINKS AND DOCUMENTS

Task Force on Extremism in Fragile States, Preventing Extremism in Fragile States: A New Approach, Final report (United States Institute of Peace: Washington, DC, Feb. 2019), <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2019-02/preventing-extremism-in-fragile-states-a-new-approach.pdf>.

Nixon, H. and Mallett, R., *Service Delivery, Public Perceptions and State Legitimacy: Findings from the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium* (Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium: London, 2017), <https://securelivelihoods.org/wp-content/uploads/Service-delivery-public-perceptions-and-state-legitimacy_Findings-from-the-Secure-Livelihoods-Research-Consortium.pdf>.

Cummings, C. and Paudel, S. B., *Services and Legitimacy: Exploring Everyday Experiences of the State in Nepal's Terai Region*, Working Paper no. 78 (Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium: London, Mar. 2019), <https://securelivelihoods.org/publication/services-and-legitimacy-everyday-experiences-of-the-state-in-nepals-terai-region/>.

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