Protracted Conflict, Aid & Development:
Research, Policy & Practice

Conference report

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A conference held on 2-3 October 2017 at the British Academy, London

How might new research partnerships help policymakers and practitioners respond to prolonged conflict?

The human and economic costs of protracted conflict are massive, with profound consequences for humanitarian assistance, long-term stability and development.

The increasing prevalence of protracted conflict is a huge challenge for humanitarian and development agencies, for multilateral organisations such as the UN, and for national governments. Hence the increasing focus on ending conflict, and the increasing emphasis on linking humanitarian aid and development to security and stabilisation, peace-building, good governance and transitional justice processes, amongst other things.

At the same time, it is increasingly recognised that **excellent, innovative research can generate real-world solutions to seemingly intractable conflict**.

The conference 'Protracted Conflict, Aid and Development: Research, Policy and Practice' brought together senior policymakers, high-level representatives of humanitarian aid and development agencies, and outstanding researchers. The aim of the conference, organised through the UK Global Challenges Research Fund, is to show how new research partnerships might help policymakers and practitioners to respond to protracted conflict.

How might longitudinal and retrospective studies give a better sense of what helped in the past to resolve conflicts, or indeed what didn't?

Research for the world: the Global Challenges Research Fund

The Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF), financed by the UK government and delivered through the UK Research Councils and other partners, is a new, £1.5bn fund, which enables UK researchers to work in partnership with researchers in developing countries. Its aim is to mobilise new knowledge behind the UK overseas aid strategy and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The challenges we face today transcend national boundaries, and so nations have to work together to solve them. The vision of the Global Challenges Research Fund is that researchers across the globe can work with each other in new and transformative ways. It encourages us to break out of our traditional silos, whether they are the silos of traditional academic disciplines, or the separate worlds of research, policymaking and practice.

Part of the vision of the GCRF is to create new learning alliances between disciplines, but also between universities and government, civil society, NGOs, international organisations and the private sector, and to produce what might be called 'actionable knowledge.'

But what do we need to know, to be able to do things differently in future? And how do we address the gaps in knowledge that will affect our ability to act?

How might research enable us to ask difficult questions, around gender-based violence, or non-state armed groups, or localisation, or organised crime, or the aid/ development nexus, or the development/ security nexus, to name just a few of the things that the conference explored?

As well as bringing together researchers, humanitarian and development organisations and multilateral agencies to debate present practice and emerging challenges, this conference sought to identify a new research agenda that might generate solutions to protracted conflict, one of the most serious global issues that we face.

A GCRF research agenda for protracted conflict

The conference gave participants an opportunity to shape a future research agenda for GCRF funding priorities, and future events to engage researchers, policy-makers and practitioners in specific areas of concern.

An immediate focus of discussions was the pressing need for focused research on the effectiveness, or lack of it, of power-sharing through transitional governments/ governments of national unity. It has often been noted that transitional arrangements may deny citizens their right to vote for leaders of their choosing, while perpetuating the underlying conviction of protagonists that the way to power, without accountability, is through constant conflict. More research needs to be done here, to improve understanding of transition from conflict to more inclusive government, and help policy developers and practitioners, especially mediators, to produce better peace agreements: agreements that take into account the fact that, in the end, people should have the right to choose their leaders.

In addition, in post-conference feedback participants identified a range of issues for future GCRF research, including:

- Closing the gap between research, policy and practice: how do we better align expectations and produce quality research that can inform policy, but also challenge policy-makers to engage with forms of evidence that don't reinforce standard paradigms?

- Data collection and methodologies: what are the ethical, political and empirical-methodological complexities (and new avenues of understanding) involved in carrying out in-depth, long-term collaborative work in contexts of ongoing violent conflict, chronic destitution or despair, historical harms or collectives pains, during or post armed conflict?

- How do we open up new and more equal ways to collaborate North-South and South-South, including the practicalities of identifying a shared research agenda and re-designing funding modalities, but also creating new approaches and potentially new solutions to conflict situations?

- What are the longer-term societal aspects of gender-based violence; how do we address the high levels of gender-based violence, including sexual violence, particularly against women and girls in post-conflict societies; how do we address the failure of peace-building and transitional justice processes to take gender-based violence seriously as a societal problem?

- Understanding the ways that violent non-state groups define many contemporary conflicts, and how they shape the contemporary security landscape more broadly, in particular at the interface of conflict and organised crime.

- How do we best collect and make use of data and intelligence in conflict situations? How do we anticipate the future causes of conflict, for example artificial intelligence, remote management and interfaces between natural and man-made hazards, and how do we anticipate the future challenges to preventing and resolving conflict?

- The need to better conceptualise the impact of the current securitisation agenda on ODA financing, conflict prevention investments and the practical delivery of humanitarian aid in conflict zones, as well as civil-military co-operation.

- The need for focused research on the heterodox conflict/ post-conflict threats to public health, such as the toxic and explosive remnants of war, and well as on the impact of conflict in the urban environment.

Support from the UN
A message of solidarity from the Deputy-Secretary-General of the United Nations, Amina Mohammed.

I'm delighted that the Global Challenges Research Fund, building on excellent research being carried out internationally, has been able to convene such a distinguished group of academics and representatives of humanitarian and development organisations. The hope is that this conference, building on hard work and hard thinking being done elsewhere, can make a real difference, building capacity, sharing knowledge and reinforcing research partnerships, to contribute to properly addressing the complex challenges, including their underlying social, historical and cultural causes, that confront us today.

I look forward to the excellent contributions that Africans and other researchers from the global South are making, not only to finding new ways of addressing protracted conflict, but also across the SDGs.

Why research is needed to tackle today's protracted conflicts

Gilles Carbonnier
Professor of Development Economics at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva, and recently appointed Vice-President Designate of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

Gilles Carbonnier began by drawing attention to the fact that today's protracted conflicts are characterised by fragmentation: a greater number of non-state armed groups have been formed over the last six years than were formed over the previous six decades.

For Gilles Carbonnier, one of the persistent and worrying features of today's protracted conflicts is also 'a widespread lack of respect for even the most fundamental rules of international humanitarian law (IHL).'

In such contexts, how can research help? For Gilles Carbonnier, disrespect for humanitarian norms calls for research around prevention in two main areas. First, the prevention of IHL violations: this is something that the ICRC is already working on, building on its research initiative entitled The Roots of Restraint in War. How can arms-carriers be effectively persuaded to respect IHL?

Second, research is needed on how best to prevent the degradation and failure of basic services during protracted conflict. How are we to build, maintain and protect resilient systems for water supplies, healthcare or education?

And there is a deeper question: 'what happens to humanitarian norms over time in protracted conflict? What is the relationship between conflict longevity and respect for law?'

The same question can be asked of humanitarian principles: do they gain or lose currency over the length of a protracted conflict? And what about the acceptance of principled humanitarian organisations, or that of development actors, by local communities? Does humanitarian aid begin a long war as a cherished commodity, but end as an instrument of control, or as fuel for the war economy?

Political fragmentation also needs further research. In many contexts, the civilian population find themselves living under multiple authorities: how can civilians and humanitarian agencies effectively engage and influence these different kinds of authority, for better humanitarian outcomes?

Massive displacement is another visible consequence of today's armed conflict: by the end of 2016, worldwide displacement was at the highest level since World War II, involving about 65 million people. For Gilles Carbonnier 'we need new, policy-relevant research on the lived experience of displaced people, if we are to get the issue of IDPs back on the table of global humanitarian policy.'

Finally, Gilles Carbonnier drew attention to three different types of environment that the ICRC finds particularly challenging in today's protracted conflicts. First, urban warfare is a particular feature of protracted conflict: about 60 percent of the ICRC's budget is dedicated to urban programmes. 'The whole humanitarian sector needs help from urban studies experts, to better understand urban space and human requirements in towns and cities.'

Second, the ICRC has to adapt increasingly to protracted conflicts in middle-income countries. This presents challenges: for example water is not about village wells, but large-scale infrastructure that supplies millions.

Then there is what Gilles Carbonnier calls 'the hard question of humanitarian accompaniment through time. How can we best get alongside people over years, in their daily suffering, coping and adapting, to be of real value in their struggle for security, livelihood and dignity?'

> "A greater number of non-state armed groups have been formed over the last **6 years** than were formed in the previous **6 decades**."
>
> Gilles Carbonnier

What is protracted conflict, what are its changing contexts, and how is research evolving to understand it better?

Matthew Wyatt
Head of Conflict in the Humanitarian and Security Department, DFID

Matthew Wyatt gave some stark statistics: more than 80 percent of refugee crises last more than ten years. 40 percent last for more than twenty years. The shocking figure of people displaced around the world – 65 million – has more than doubled over the last ten years. And those receiving humanitarian aid tend to receive it for longer: in 2014, over 90 percent of those receiving humanitarian assistance had been receiving it for more than three years.

For Matthew Wyatt, 'we all know that one of the key drivers of this is conflict, and that's why working on conflict has now become part of DFID's core business. We can't address global poverty unless we also build stability. But this requires an understanding of the political realities of complex conflict environments. To this end, we've developed a new Building Stability Framework to guide our work. We also have an expanding research agenda on protracted conflicts, both through the GCRF and outside it.'

'I'm very proud of DFID-supported initiatives like the joint UN/World Bank study on development and conflict prevention, which constitutes a real leap forward in thinking about how we can work together and harness the capacities of our institutions, to try and prevent crises as well as to respond to them.'

Alex de Waal
Executive Director of the World Peace Foundation

Alex de Waal made the case for 'challenging or inverting our intellectual homing instinct, on institutions, on regularities, on social contracts: we tend to see these as the norm, and the real politics, the everyday politics, the politics of who does what to whom, the transactional politics, as somehow the detail, the noise.'

'I'd like to suggest that we need to think about these things the other way round. That at many points in history (and this might be one of them), it's actually the transactional politics, the real politics that are the dominant ones, and the institutional politics, the politics of regularity and the social contract, that are the exception.'

For Alex de Waal, 'often what's been reconstituted out of crises is not statehood or state formation but something different. Durable political settlements are elusive. We have an updated, highly marketised, highly monetised, globally integrated form of transactional politics, in which state-building is becoming more difficult, not less. It's a pervasive logic in which political power, political services, political allegiances and symbols have become commodities. We have to think about violence not just as organised conflict, but as signalling behaviour in the market.'

'And at some moments perhaps this becomes a much more open market. At certain moments in political transitions it becomes very easy to enter the marketplace.'

'My last point is that if we see this as a market in power, it's a market that doesn't respect state boundaries, doesn't respect any "legitimate authority". And we are actors in this market – humanitarian or peacekeeping operations are deeply embedded in it.'

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> Alex de Waal

Fiona Terry
Research Advisor in the Department of Law and Policy at the ICRC

Giving her observations on the protracted conflict in Somalia, Fiona Terry asked: 'what has happened to the image and purpose of humanitarian action over time?'

'Aid has become a legitimate target for graft, fraud and corruption in Somalia. And the whole idea of humanitarian action coming in to help alleviate suffering, to help restore dignity to people, that we should be trying to reach those most in need and give aid to all sides: that has really been lost.'

'None of this is new. We all know that aid can become deeply embedded into the economy of war, and fuel more uncertain circumstances. The problem is not a lack of knowledge: the trouble is how we convert that knowledge into action. How do you take academic findings and translate them into policy, and then into practice?'

'This is exactly the stage we're at in our study of The Roots of Restraint in War; having academics in the field looking at the varied behaviour of armed groups, and trying to translate this into how the ICRC can influence that behaviour. It's a huge challenge.'

> "In **Syria** there are over **6,000** non-state armed groups."
>
> *Annette Idler*

Annette Idler
Director of Studies at the Changing Character of War Centre, and Principal Investigator of the Changing Character of Conflict project at the University of Oxford

For Annette Idler, 'it's crucial to look at non-state armed groups. There are increasing numbers of non-state actors involved in conflicts: in Syria there are over 6,000. Secondly there is the trans-national character of those groups, as they operate across nations. And thirdly, there is the way in which information technology is being used, and the speed with which information can be disseminated. This leads to the increasing inter-connectedness of non-state armed groups, which is one of the main dimensions we are looking to understand.'

'Another aspect of recent conflicts is shifting alliances, with short-term arrangements between different groups, not only involving conflict actors but also gangs, criminals and militias. This leads to erosion of the social fabric among local populations, with illicitly governed spaces rather than ungoverned spaces. It leads to an impact that isn't about violence or displacement, but about the distance between local communities and the central state: it's about how the central state loses perceived legitimacy.'

'The point is to look at local perceptions: what does conflict or peace mean to local populations, and how might they perceive differently what we call protracted conflict?'

Babu Rahman
Deputy Head of Research at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Babu Rahman reflected on his own experience of trying to make good research useful to the policy process.

'What kind of research has been most useful, in feeding policy processes on protracted conflict, and how can that research be made more useful?'

'Most senior decision-makers that I have worked for have been interested in answering two key questions, particularly in the area of protracted conflict: "what should we do?" And then "how can we make sure that works?" We don't expect academic research to provide us with a nice policy answer. What's most useful to us is identifying the range of potential policy options, and understanding how those different policy responses could work out in a particular context.'

'I find comparative work most useful: understanding where something has worked, why it's worked, and where things have not worked, why they haven't. So that when we look at a current situation, we can then make a judgment over whether those conditions are present or absent.'

'Three quick points on how to make research more useful to us: make written work shorter. Avoid jargon, avoid presumed knowledge. Go straight to the point: structure is really important. Use bullet points, headlines: the easier it is for us to look at a piece of work and go straight to the specific thing that we're interested in, the more likely it is that we will actually read it.'

'Focus on answering the "so what?" question. What's your elevator pitch? What are your three or four key points? What is the small number of points that you want the reader to remember?'

'The final point is one of attitude. It's about being accessible. What's often most helpful is when you can sit down with someone and talk to them about the problem that you've got, and how their knowledge and expertise can help you to navigate that particular issue. That requires trust and discretion. You need to decide whether you're going to do that: your role in forming policy won't necessarily be acknowledged.'

Jago Salmon
Adviser to the United Nations and the World Bank, and co-author of the joint UN/ World Bank study Pathways to Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict

According to Jago Salmon, 'every so often, policy changes in a major way. We've seen a new UN Secretary-General being appointed on a prevention agenda. He's started restructuring the entire peace and security pillar of the UN, with a focus on prevention.'

'We've seen a dramatic increase in the numbers of conflicts since 2010. We'd been successful at ending more conflicts than were starting, on an annual basis, up until 2010. But with the increase, it has been felt that a policy is needed beyond the standard treatment regime of relief, mediation and peacekeeping. Many conflicts that we're dealing with today are highly resilient to this treatment regime. The costs of conflict, both political and economic, are increasing very rapidly. So prevention then comes on the agenda.'

This is where the UN/ World Bank study comes in, with the aim of filling a policy space on prevention. 'How we move, what it means, what it means for our mutual assets, resources and people. The research there was threefold: one was the case study material, where countries had undertaken preventative action successfully. The second was data that was useful. The last one was consultation: taking account of different cultures of academic thought on prevention.'

'Finally, one important finding of the study is that many recent conflicts are highly correlated with exclusion. Exclusion from institutions, exclusion from security, exclusion from livelihoods.'

> "We've seen a **dramatic increase** in the numbers of **conflicts** since **2010**."
>
> *Jago Salmon*

Malcolm Chalmers
Deputy Director General at the Royal United Services Institute

'My elevator pitch is: if you want to understand the significant rise and escalation in conflict around the world, then political economy – while very important – is not enough. You also have to think about international rivalry and ideology.'

For Malcolm Chalmers, 'today's world is becoming more multi-polar. And a key explanation for the intensification of violence in recent years has been the growing role of proxy conflicts.'

'We also have to understand the role of powerful ideas as mobilisers of conflict, and many of those ideologies are trans-national. We've got to be thinking in terms of a wider range of lessons, which address the motivation of actors in conflict.'

New research on how protracted conflicts end (or don't)

Chris Trott
UK Special Representative for the Sudan and South Sudan

Chris Trott looked closely at the two peace processes that were designed to end the protracted conflict in the Sudans, using them to generate questions especially on the sequencing of peace and constitution-making processes. 'In principle these processes need to move forward incrementally, but there is a bottom line requirement for the outbreak of peace, before getting into constitution-making.'

'So what does a constitution-making process, that also serves peace-making and peace-building ends, look like? Are there core components that should or shouldn't appear at different stages? And how does one select or elect who should be represented, or their representatives? How do you create inclusion that delivers true consultation and representation? And what should be the role of the international community in this?'

Christine Bell
Professor of Constitutional Law and Assistant Principal of Edinburgh University. She is Programme Director of the Political Resettlement Research Programme (PRRP), a DFID-funded research programme looking at peace processes and political settlements

Jan Pospisil
Post-doctoral Research Fellow on the PRRP at Edinburgh University

Drawing on the research of the PRRP, Christine Bell and Jan Pospisil framed some of the pressing issues involved in exiting from conflict, which are preoccupying researchers, policymakers and practitioners.

'The PRRP looks a lot at peace processes and how they work. Since 1990 there has been a clear focus on using mediated ends to conflict, and often those processes are focused on formally, publicly available, signed agreements that operate almost as contracts, almost as quasi-constitutional documents, and almost as ceasefire documents. They come together for a reason: people don't agree to end conflict

until they see what power they're going to have access to in the constitutional future.'

'We've collected these agreements. including pre-negotiating agreements: we've 1,540 peace agreements and 150 peace processes since 1990. Since 1990 the number of peace agreements per peace process has been increasing, so there are more agreements signed for each conflict. The database we are creating distinguishes agreements according to type: pre-negotiation agreements, framework agreements or substantive peace agreements, and ceasefire agreements. Broadly speaking, signing peace agreements is quite successful — around 75 percent of agreements are sticking longer than five years.'

An emerging theme relates to sequencing. One of the biggest revelations, looking at the peace agreement data, has been 'a persistent sequence of interim transitions, whereby people try to cobble together a ceasefire, throw everybody into a temporary power-sharing arrangement, and try to have some sort of return to the democratic process.'

'But the dilemma is: once there is some sort of framework, how do we move from some sort of elite deal, however partial and imperfect, to a broader, socially inclusive project? Research is responding in a number of ways: understanding better the different things that are going on. So there may be a formal elite deal, that may be different from the underlying "real" deal that the parties maybe understand to be operating, and this may be different again from the constitutional legal process.'

Aisling Swaine
Assistant Professor in Gender and Security in the Department of Gender Studies, London School of Economics, and also a member of the Political Settlements Research Programme

Aisling Swaine focused on gender dynamics in political settlements. 'Political processes are highly gendered. We have mainly male actors in there: elite actors who are largely male, and in many cases exclusively male.'

'There's an assumption that men can represent all people: that if you have men in the room, then everybody is represented. Women

are added, sometimes, to peace processes, and to agreements and negotiations. But they're added to represent women: they're not added to represent everyone.'

'Women involved in peace processes are seen as being there for the greater good of society: as if they had no political views of their own, or their own ideologies or their own nationalisms. They're expected to leave those at the door, in the interest of a collective "woman" identity. We don't expect that of men. Men can be the individual man, who's there with his political view, and they can also be the generic, de-gendered human representing everyone. This translates into who gets into the room, whose imperatives get heard, and what that means in terms of the content of these agreements.'

> "Political processes are highly gendered"
>
> Aisling Swaine

> "We've **1,540** peace agreements and **150** peace processes **since 1990**"
>
> Christine Bell

Isolation, fusion or confusion?

Rethinking the relationship between aid and development to be fit for the protracted conflicts of the 21st century

Barnaby Willetts King
Research Fellow with the Humanitarian Policy Group at the Overseas Development Institute

Barnaby Willets King described what some people call the 'triple nexus', discussing aid approaches to humanitarian, development and peace challenges. 'How do these three things fit together? Also, there's a lot of energy around the New Ways of Working and other initiatives, but are these really going to lead to better responses: do we need a more radical rethink of the system, and what needs to change in terms of financing and architecture? Particularly, how we connect these silo-ed humanitarian, development and peace communities?'

Jos Verbeek
World Bank Special Representative to the UN and the WTO in Geneva

For Jos Verbeek, 'what we've seen over the last few years are new partnerships emerging, for example as the World Bank has become more engaged in the context of reducing violence.'

'We're on a journey: we're not just focusing on development issues, we're also recognising that we cannot stand on the sidelines in a humanitarian crisis. Why? Because if we look at the statistics, more than 50 percent of the affected countries are extremely poor. We know that more than 80 percent of protracted crises take more than a decade to resolve. And then of course there are estimates of the reconstruction costs: in Syria about $260bn. We cannot argue that, if a crisis takes ten years, development actors should just wait.'

'The old way of working – where first humanitarian actors go in and stabilise things and then development organisations come – needs to change in favour of much more working in parallel. Hence the new partnerships that the Bank has been developing with organisations such as the ICRC and the UN agencies.'

Barbara Lecq
Protracted Crisis Advisor at DFID

Barbara Lecq gave the perspective of a donor, describing some of the most enduring challenges affecting how the aid community responds to protracted crises. For Barbara Lecq, 'a big challenge is the lack of attention to de-aggregating the impact of aid on development and global stability. Whilst ODA to fragile and conflict states has very substantially increased in the last two decades, it has been extremely concentrated, so in 2012 for instance nine fragile states were receiving 50 percent of funding, and the next 40 states were receiving the remaining 50 percent.'

DFID has been focusing especially on partnerships, such as the partnership with the World Bank around fragile and conflict states, and displacement. 'We've also seen a lot of investment internally on

> "Estimated reconstruction costs in **Syria** are in the region of **$260bn**."
>
> Jos Verbeek

research around the Building Stability Framework, which encourages development programmes to take account of how they can contribute to stability efforts. For example understanding exclusion as one of the drivers of conflict has led us to invest in tackling exclusion by providing services to marginalised populations.'

Somalia is an example where DFID has been trying to think longer-term: nowadays 70 percent of its investments in Somalia are through development channels. 'This is about investing and building, rather than just dealing with the immediate consequences of a crisis.'

According to Barbara Lecq, enduring questions concerning the aid community include 'whether we sufficiently understand the impacts that aid flows have on a country's resilience and on its political and conflict dynamics. And whether we have the right instruments at the global level to tackle and de-aggregate the impact of aid, to avoid it having negative effects.'

Michael Talhami
Urban advisor on water and habitat for the ICRC

Michael Talhami approached the question of increasing co-operation between humanitarian and development actors, asking 'what leads to more effective co-ordination between these different silos, and what are the operational challenges that affect it?'

'In the ICRC in our water and habitat activities we've made a shift, dating back to the Balkan War, from providing purely humanitarian responses, setting up water tanks and trucking for populations, to realising that in urban areas much more is needed in terms of more medium- to long-term, structural support, if basic services are to be adequately provided to the population. It's about retaining the capacity to respond to the immediate things, while bridging that with more medium- to long-term support, to ensure that you no longer have collapses of whole systems.'

In terms of organisations working together, 'the low-hanging fruit is that we can exchange information, and development agencies could and should be more assertive at the onset of conflicts in engaging humanitarian organisations, so that they can influence the programming that they have. In turn, humanitarian organisations should be much more assertive as well, in the earlier stages of conflict, in engaging development agencies to ensure more durable solutions. Humanitarian organisations could benefit from a lot of the expertise that development agencies have, not just about infrastructure, but in understanding how service providers work internally. We need more collaborative ways of working, where we have complementary skillsets, and can make best use of the assets that we have on the ground.'

> "In **2012**, nine fragile states were receiving **50% of ODA funding**."
>
> Barabra Lecq

Depth and breadth

In a varied and wide-ranging conference, break-out groups also considered a number of specific subjects, including:

- Transitional power-sharing agreements
- Non-state armed groups
- Working with, not against, local actors and institutions in resolution efforts
- Gender-based violence in conflict, transitions and post-conflict
- Cross-border and organised crime
- New challenges in conflict prevention
- South-South humanitarianism and self-reliance among conflict-affected populations
- Transitional justice
- Rebuilding lives and creating prosperity.

Delegates also heard from Gill Webber of the Imperial War Museum and Chris Phillips from Queen Mary University of London, talking about museum-researcher partnerships in engaging the public with contemporary conflict.

Katy Thompson
Leads the Conflict Prevention team at UNDP, managing a programme that deploys UN peace & development advisors to support UN Resident Co-ordinators

For Katy Thompson, 'we talk a lot about the humanitarian/development nexus, but how can humanitarian aid help prevent conflict and sustain peace?'

'In Liberia, our experience in the UN tells us that as the peace-keeping mission exits, what we're likely to see is a significant drop in development aid, and a significant drop in political focus. The decrease in financial in-flow often leads to a fragmentation and splintering of development engagement within the UN system and the UN family, and across development assistance providers in general.'

'So our commitment in the UN system has been to try and counter that trend. We have various ways of working that are currently being explored, which should support this effort: one involves deploying Peace and Development Advisors, who work closely with whole-function teams to embed economic analysis and conflict analysis in the work of the UN system. Our Peace and Development Advisors are also working closely with the World Bank on its Recovery and Peace-building Assessment initiative, to produce a common analytical framework for the work both of the World Bank and the UN. These are all areas where learning on the ground is enabling us to perform in more practical terms.'

Dana Landau
Research co-ordinator with the Inclusive Peace and Transition Initiative, based at the Graduate Institute in Geneva

According to Dana Landau, 'our research focuses on peace-making, peace-building and political transitions more broadly, and the role of inclusion in that. As part of this work we were asked to make a study as a contribution to the UN/ World Bank study on conflict prevention, which in itself was a great example of making connections, not just between the UN and World Bank but across the silos we've been talking about.'

The study looked comparatively at cases, to draw out the implications for inclusion: it found that a number of forms of inclusion, such as a formalising of a more inclusive political transition, were able to keep violence levels down.

On the question of what we mean by inclusion, for Dana Landau 'it's a different thing in every context, and it's always highly political. When we're asked for advice based on our research on inclusion, there are often technical answers — how you do it, which modality you use, who should be at the table. There's a sense that if the process is right, the outcome will be right. But in terms of how the peace agenda gets implemented, maybe we should start by thinking of the outcome we want, how that outcome looks, and then think backwards, as opposed to "how do we make a process that looks like everybody's on board?"'

> "A number of forms of **inclusion** were able to keep **violence** levels down."
>
> Dana Landau

Response

Of those interesting 40 countries in the second 'concentric circle,' the states that receive 50 percent of the funding, there are five or ten that are higher risk: should we prioritise among them?

What could we do better if research could tell us more?
Policy & practitioner perspectives

Vincent Bernard
Head of the Law and Policy Forum at the ICRC

Vincent Bernard focused on two main questions. What are the best practices in terms of research influencing policy: what has worked in the past? And what possible research questions, on protracted conflict specifically, would be useful?

'At the ICRC we are interested in the issue of protracted conflict, as part of a project that is specifically dedicated to prevention. Not prevention of conflicts, but prevention of war crimes. That's what we call prevention in the ICRC: creating a conducive environment of respect for the law in conflicts. This is a long-term project. Research can help us: research on norms of restraint, and research specifically on what are the drivers of violence and crimes among fighters. A study first published in 2004 called The Roots of Behaviour in War has been a strong influence on our policy in the ICRC.'

'For many years we have studied IHL with a view to developing the law, interpreting the law, clarifying the law. But we also look now at what makes people apply the law. There we go beyond legal studies: we need to have psychologists, and other types of researchers coming in to help us. We also need to study the impact of respect and lack of respect, adopting a costs and benefits approach. We are starting two research projects, the first on how respect for IHL can prevent displacement, the second on how respect for the law contributes to peace-building.'

Kate Halff
Executive secretary of the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response

Kate Halff began with an example of 'what not to do'. 'If you haven't developed research from the onset with entities that you've identified as being able to take it forward, it's not going to happen once the research is finished.'

A more positive example, of where researchers can provide practitioners with evidence-based analysis of the impact of some of their actions, came from the famine in South Sudan in 1998, when Save the Children employed an anthropologist to carry out a vulnerability study, looking at the impact of targeting food assistance at certain groups and communities. 'It demonstrated that the international actors were giving the message that they were taking responsibility for these groups — female heads of households, disabled people, IDPs etc — which meant that the local social safety nets were no longer taking responsibility for them. Effectively through targeting we were excluding these groups from their community structures. This shows the importance of having anthropologists, and an anthropological lens on the communities and structures we're working with.'

> "If you haven't developed research **from the onset** with entities that you've identified as being able **to take it forward**, it's not going to happen once the research is finished"
>
> Kate Halff

André Heller Pérache
Head of programmes at Médecins Sans Frontières UK

André Heller Pérache explained how MSF uses a group of social scientists to contribute to its studies and stand-alone pieces. 'We've now mainstreamed this in our medical department: it's been a huge success and we're trying to take it forward.'

For André Heller Pérache, 'obstacles to existing information are a huge barrier to collaboration and empowerment. In terms of policy and how to change it, I'd suggest that research alone is not where we should be looking, but data: what kind of data are we collecting, and who has access to it? We need open access to data and the democratisation of its analysis.'

On the question of IHL, meanwhile, there are questions around the way that technology has impacted humanitarian law: for example surveillance technology, or the way that advanced weapons systems can target individuals. 'This is particularly important in relation to loss of protected status: if someone turns on a cell phone in a hospital, a wanted person, will that draw an air strike? We really need case studies that shed light on actual military practice.'

Emmanuel Kwesi Aning
Director of the Faculty of Academic Affairs and Research at the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre in Accra, Ghana

Emmanuel Kwesi Aning spoke about the connection between research and training: 'when there is a request to send peace-keepers into an area, the real question we should be asking ourselves relates to the quality of the troops, the kinds of doctrine they've been trained in, and their ability to understand what they are doing operationally. About ten years ago, almost all the training modules we used did not speak to the lived experience of the soldiers we were training, or the environment they were being deployed into. We as a Centre decided that we would establish a research wing that would do just analysis, and enable us to produce our own training manual.'

'Secondly, we have seen a huge gap in understanding of the motivations that drive people to join the armed forces. What are the attitudes of these unformed officers with respect to democracy, or the rule of law?'

'Finally, what are the processes that contribute to state fragility, weakness, collapse, and then intractable conflict, in which the UN will be requested for troops? Our training now reflects how a particular operational area has reached where it is.'

Laurent Goetschel
Director of Swisspeace and Professor of Political Science at the University of Basel

For Laurent Goetschel 'we've talked about practitioners' expectations regarding the results of research. But I think researchers are also there to ask questions which practitioners may not have, and so they may also produce results that practitioners would prefer not to listen to.'

'One of the added values that research can have is to be thought-provoking, to ask more fundamental questions about the set-up of certain institutions, programmes and practices, which may only indirectly solve certain problems.'

One of the major tasks and challenges therefore is to work seriously on the 'not-fully-existing bridge between researchers on one side and practitioners on the other, but respecting the autonomy and importance of both.'

> "What kind of **data** are we collecting, and **who has access** to it?"
>
> André Heller Pérache

Response

I think most policymakers do want to know where people disagree with them. But both researchers and policymakers need a safe space to talk freely. Isn't that the biggest challenge?

In what ways are you drawing on the research expertise in the countries that you're working with? In what ways are people themselves formulating shared outcomes?

The centrality of respect for human rights to achieving the SDGs

Adama Dieng
Senegalese jurist who was appointed in 2012 as UN Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the prevention of genocide

Adama Dieng took up the idea of making use of local research expertise: 'it is extremely important that we work together in partnership. If I have a message to researchers it is "humility, humility, humility": those on the ground have strong knowledge about their countries.'

Adama Dieng described his role as being to provide 'an early warning of genocide and related crimes against humanity, such as war crimes, which we refer to as atrocity crimes. Atrocity crimes usually take place against a background of international or intra-national armed conflict.'

'Atrocity crimes are not single evils, and they do not happen overnight. This means that if we are alert to the early warning signs of these crimes developing, there are multiple opportunities to prevent them.'

'In order to assess the risk of atrocity crimes in a way that is consistent and evidence-based, and tailor responses accordingly, my office has developed our Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes. Based on a growing body of academic research, the framework sets out fourteen broad factors behind atrocity crimes, with correlating indicators that act as early warning signs.'

The framework is used in the UN system, as well as by Member States and civil society organisations, to analyse, understand and act on the early warning signs of atrocity crimes. And for Adama Dieng, 'when you look at the risk factors and indicators set out in the framework, you can see very clearly how the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, and the prevention of gross violations of human rights and international law that can lead to atrocity crimes, are closely linked.'

'Today, crises are taking place against a backdrop of retreating internationalism, and diminishing respect for international humanitarian and human rights law. We are also witnessing political disunity in key decision-making bodies, such as the Security Council. And there is a level of defeatism about promoting ambitious agendas, like protection.'

But for peace to flourish, governments must be bound by laws which are publicly promulgated and independently adjudicated.

Rule of law institutions are key to stability in any society, and to ensuring peaceful transition.

'UN Secretary-General Guterres has also made prevention an overarching priority. In addition to the human toll, the recent joint United Nations/ World Bank report, entitled Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches for Preventing Violent Conflict highlights the immense financial cost involved in responding to conflict, rather than focusing on prevention. According to this report, targeting resources in just four countries at high risk of conflict could prevent up to $34bn in losses. The report also recognises that growth and development alone are not enough to build sustainable peace: building a just and inclusive society is also important.'

'It is increasingly recognised that human rights are essential to achieve sustainable development. The 2030 agenda demonstrates that development, peace and security, and human rights are closely interlinked. Grounded in international human rights law, the SDG agenda offers critical opportunities to further advance the realisation of human rights, for all people everywhere, without discrimination. What we must now ensure is that our common understanding and acceptance of principles is translated into action. And to understand how we can bridge the gap between policy and action, the research of academics and experience of practitioners are both needed.'

> "If I have a message to researchers it is 'humility, humility, humility'."
>
> Adama Dieng

Securing the peace
Lessons from recent conflicts

Jean-Marie Guéhenno
UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping between 2000 and 2008, a time when UN peacekeeping forces were going through a period of major expansion. Since 2014 he has been the President of the International Crisis Group

According to Jean-Marie Guéhenno, 'the post-Cold War moment is over. There is the deepening divide between major powers, which you can see in the UN Security Council. Obviously this existed when the Cold War was on: I think the difference today is that there is no real agreement on the status quo, nor on how to change it. That makes things much more challenging.'

At the same time, 'regional actors are much more present, because the global actors are more uncertain, more unpredictable for a variety of reasons. The kind of reassurance that you have with a global, benevolent sheriff is no longer there.'

'The third important change is that it's a much more bottom-up world. It's important to understand the local dynamics in places that most people can't find on the map. That makes the work of analysis much tougher.'

'The fourth point is about the crisis of norms, of institutions and of tools that developed after the end of the Cold War. International justice is in something of a difficulty. With dictators too: views that we thought were those of the past are on the up. There are grave doubts around what peacekeeping can achieve, and doubts about the effectiveness of sanctions.'

According to Jean-Marie Guéhenno, 'this is not just the post-Cold War moment, it's also the post-World War Two era. The norms of 1945, which were designed for traditional wars, are under stress. The line between war and peace is blurred, as we see with drone strikes that stretch the concept of self-defence. Another fundamental difference is the absence of ideological confrontation. Today we see money as more of a driving force in conflicts, which is a reason why many don't end. In many conflicts the conflict actors see that full war is bad for business, but full peace is bad for *their* business.'

'The second element which I think really means that the post-World War Two era is over is the crisis in legitimacy of states. Finally, the countering-violent-extremism agenda has been very destructive for conflict resolution strategies: it lumps together a variety of groups, some with local grievances that can be more or less accommodated, and some with trans-national grievances that we're not going to accommodate. By lumping them together it makes the job more difficult.'

'So what does this mean? I think it puts researchers and actors in a difficult position: not to buy into rhetoric that has been overtaken by reality, but neither to join the bandwagon of despair: "it's too difficult, too costly, too complicated. We don't know what we're doing: just give up." There's a need for a recalibration of ambition and what can be done.'

Sarah Lister
Director of the UNDP Governance Centre in Oslo

Reflecting on the research/ policy/ practice interface, Sarah Lister pointed to the 'recognition of the primacy of politics at all levels, which is now accepted in development programming and in multilateral institutions and elsewhere, when it wasn't fifteen years ago. There is the truism that there is no such thing as a technical intervention.'

'So there have been significant shifts in the policy sphere, and lessons learnt, but what has been the role of research in that? Research has expanded our knowledge and informed the changes that have taken place. But the research world I was in fifteen years ago knew about many of these things already. People were writing about them, but they didn't have traction in the policy world. So there is something about a well-timed research piece that catches the attention and helps shape the policy direction and focus.'

For Sarah Lister, this raises the question: 'what are we missing, what's out there in the research world already, that we're not making best use of, because it doesn't have traction in the policy community?'

> **"**This is not just the **post-Cold War** moment, it's also the **post-WW2** era.**"**
>
> Jean-Marie Guéhenno

> **"**There is something about a **well-timed** research piece.**"**
>
> Sarah Lister

Global Challenges Research Fund projects – new conflict research for policy and practice

The conference heard about three ongoing projects on conflict, funded under the GCRF.

Jonathan Goodhand, Reader in Conflict and Development Studies in the Department of Development Studies at SOAS, University of London, and **Catalina Mehecha Cruz** of the Universidad de Los Andes, described the project entitled Drugs and (Dis)order: building sustainable peacetime economies in the aftermath of war. With many wartime economies mutating into criminalised peacetime economies, the project looks at one of the main resources that drive these economies: drugs. At the moment, in relation to drug-affected countries, there is 'policy-based evidence rather than evidence-based policy': the project aims to create a new evidence base which is rigorous and independent, to engage the policy community.

Richard Sullivan and **Hanna Kienzler** from King's College London introduced the programme Research for Health in Conflict: capacity and capability-building across the Middle East and North Africa. With four hubs across the Middle East, the project is about building greater capability in expertise and research methods in conflict and health, including in the UK. Training-up new faculty and health workers, both in the Middle East and the UK, will help to improve the health especially of the marginalised (such as refugee populations) in conflict areas.

Tim Allen and **Duncan Green**, from the LSE, spoke about the Centre for Public Authority and International Development, which undertakes fieldwork in Sierra Leone and a number of other African countries, looking at how governance works in these places. The focus is on forms of 'intimate government': people finding ways of living together without formal state services, or functioning judicial systems. This is often an unseen, unrecorded, unrecognised form of governance that is grounded in the idea of mutuality.

Conclusion: mapping a future research agenda & research/ policy/ practice partnership

Judith Macgregor
Former UK High Commissioner to South Africa

For Judith Macgregor, important themes to have come out of the conference include the need for more work on:

- dislocation between humanitarian and development responses
- the impact (intended or unintended) of humanitarian peacekeeping programmes
- inclusion and exclusion and what they mean.

'How can research be a bridge between the raw data, the reality of what is happening out there, and the busy, time-pressed policy-makers and practitioners, so that the range of options is given to them in a timely and digestible way?'

'You need the longitudinal, you need the historical, but you need to be anticipatory, and recognise the fact that the situation is galloping, and someone's got to keep abreast of that. You've got to take risks, and not be too precious: some stuff will work, some will not. You will learn from your mistakes.'

'How does the research community talk sensibly to the practitioners, and the policy people on the ground? Through safe spaces? And how can one make better use of existing knowledge, and take it into practical policy?'

Randolph Kent
Director of the Futures Project at the Royal United Services Institute

For Randolph Kent, the urgent question is 'to what extent are those who have humanitarian roles and responsibilities prepared to meet an ever more complex and uncertain future?' Faced with threats of pandemics, global indebtedness and climate change, for example, 'how anticipatory are we? How adaptive? What kinds of innovation do we think about? What do we do in terms of

> "Researchers have a **depth of expertise** and an **ability to look over the long term** that we can't possibly replicate within government"
>
> Charlotte Morris

partnerships? What is real collaboration, not co-ordination? And what in a sense is real leadership, and what are we doing in the humanitarian sector to publicise the sorts of threats that governments and international organisations should know about? This is the research agenda for the future.'

Charlotte Morris
Senior Conflict Adviser in DFID's Research and Evidence Division

Charlotte Morris spoke about ways of improving the uptake of research in policymaking. 'There is the question of how we make space for discussions between policymakers and researchers. Then there is the question around impact and relevance: how we help people digest all of the stuff that's out there.'

According to Charlotte Morris, 'you as researchers have a depth of expertise and an ability to look at issues over the long term

that we can't possibly replicate within government. You might feel frustrated that no-one is listening to you, but there might be a set of events around something where you happen to have this great body of evidence: a critical juncture arises. We just need to know what those areas are. Sometimes we might not listen to you very much, but just knowing that there's something we can tap into means that when the right moment comes, we can give you a call.'

Andrew Thompson
CEO of the Arts and Humanities Research Council, and RCUK Champion for the Global Challenges Research Fund

According to Andrew Thompson, 'we've repeatedly had the questions "so what?" and "what's new about this?" It's really difficult to get a sharp perspective on the times in which you live, and what's different and distinctive about them.

'What's interesting to me is drawing out some of those things that I think are distinctive about the times in which we're living, and which may point us towards a future research agenda. So here are some of them, in short order:

- more conflicts urbanised (a hugely distinctive feature of our time, with massive consequences for programming)
- numerically much greater flows of the forcibly displaced, not just across state borders but across continental borders, with big political consequences
- even greater proliferation of non-state armed groups
- conflicts connected, catalysed and perhaps conditioned by trans-national networks, but varyingly so
- the back-tracking of more middle income countries into conflict and poverty
- today's protracted conflicts being difficult to solve, because legacies of the past remain unaddressed, feeding cycles of violence into new generations

- big questions over whether the institutional architecture, designed for a very different age, is up to dealing with the complexities of the problems we are handling
- the revolution in communications technology, providing real-time information on conflict
- young people being more conscious of what's happening, and more able to challenge providers of aid.

Finally, we really need research that is going to help us better understand people's lived experiences of poverty and insecurity and conflict.

> "It's really difficult to get a sharp **perspective** on the times in which you live, and what's **different and distinctive** about them."
>
> Andrew Thompson

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Our research achieves impact – the demonstrable contribution to society and the economy made by knowledge and skilled people. To deliver impact, researchers and funders need to engage and collaborate with the public, business, government and charitable organisations.

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