

Findings Brief

External Review of the Peace, Conflict and Development Program

This findings brief is based on the reports “External Review of IDRC’s Peace, Conflict, and Development Program” by Dr Luc Reyckler, Ms. Cheyanne Scharbatke-Church, and Mr. Philip Thomas with support by Alison Clegg and Brian Heilman and “Peace, Conflict, and Development Program Final Report: 2005-2009” by the PCD program. The full reports are available from IDRC’s Evaluation Unit.

The Peace, Conflict and Development (PCD) program is in its third prospectus period (2005-2011). The program supports applied research on the causes of conflict and on post-conflict challenges. According to the program, in a dense, highly northern- and donor-driven research field, PCD’s comparative advantage is to support southern actors as generators of knowledge, pursue strong south-north collaborations, and encourage analytical and multidisciplinary research. PCD partners with research institutes, universities, networks of researchers, civil society organizations and policymakers.

As of October 2009, PCD had allocated \$28,411,597.00, with an average project size of \$325,000; while guiding 88 projects spanning four continents. In February 2009, the percent of funding by geographic area was: 23% Sub-Saharan Africa; 33% Global; 16% Latin America and the Caribbean; 19% Middle East and 7% South Asia.

1. Program Aims

The PCD Program Initiative was established in April 2005 with five objectives:

1. To **generate evidence-based findings** that can be used by civil society actors to encourage, and national and international decision-makers to consider or implement, context-relevant and effective policy and program decisions on the parameters of peacebuilding policies and programs that are used to address causes of violent conflict, prevent its resurgence, and foster gender and socially equitable development.
2. To **build domestic ownership of peace processes**, and civil society’s ability to socially audit, make transparent, and hold accountable state and international peacebuilding actor decision-making, as well as to the ability of state and civil society actors to effectively engage and hold accountable international peacebuilding actors who are intervening in their national contexts.
3. PCD-supported projects are means through which state, non-state and extra-state actors can engage with each other in informed debates on the shape of peacebuilding in particular contexts. In this way, PCD-supported research serves to **open spaces for discussion and dialogue**, and contributes to the legitimacy and sustainability of peace by encouraging local and national state and non-state actors to interact constructively in the policy-making process.

4. To have researchers engaged in regional and global peacebuilding debates and processes aiming to **influence global policies and practices** and giving greater weight to local and regional priorities and perspectives.
5. To **build capacity** for more rigorous, methodologically creative, and collaborative (between researchers, civil society actors and decision-makers) research.

2. Methodology

A new approach to external reviews of programs was employed which includes two reports – one by the program team and one by an external panel of three independent experts. PCD prepared a final prospectus report outlining the program’s strategy and its evolution, the key research findings, major program outcomes and the main lessons that can be drawn from the program’s experiences. The external review panel judged the program on the appropriateness of the prospectus implementation; the quality of research outputs/publications; the relevance, value and significance of the program outcomes; and, identified key issues for consideration.

The panel used the verification of the self-evaluation principle of the new process as a central parameter in determining the primary sample: all projects listed in the outcomes section of the PCD Report. To reach beyond this set of projects, a comprehensive analysis of all Project Completion Reports (44 in total) was done as well as a review of a random sample of project proposals. This sample allowed the panel to comment on the “evidence and reasonableness” of the majority of self-evaluation conclusions without solely relying on the PCD selected projects.

Mixed methods were used by the panel to increase the validity of the findings through the triangulation of information. Data collection, based on criteria and frameworks for analysis developed by the panel, included document reviews of both internal and external products, 51 telephone interviews, and 64 completed electronic surveys.

3. Research Findings

PCD provided headline summaries of the main research findings emanating from supported projects in four thematic areas.

Violence, Trauma, Justice and Reconciliation (VTJR) research (28%):

- Helps to make the case that clinical approaches to treating conflict-related trauma possess a number of limitations. Psychosocial approaches, on the other hand, provide more context-appropriate models that can promote healing.
- Shows that transitional justice mechanisms have a greater chance of being relevant to conflict-affected communities when they are responsive, publicly visible, and context-appropriate.

Political Economy of Conflict research (14%):

- On diasporas and remittances shows that diasporas play diverse roles when it comes to fostering peace and fomenting conflict. It is helping to refine empirical evidence on the nature of diaspora politics and transnational peace and conflict linkages.
- Reveals a complex interrelationship between globalization and the outbreak of conflict in fragile states.

Democratic Processes in Governance and Peacebuilding research (32%):

- Reveals that democratic peacebuilding become vulnerable to failure if initiatives do not expand beyond the elite level to address the interests and needs of a wide array of different stakeholders, such as ethnic minorities.
- Is highlighting the need to recognize informal or traditional forms of governance as playing a greater role in influencing democratic processes in transitioning or post-conflict states. Importantly, this research also sheds light on the negative implications of such governance systems on women's rights.
- Security and Insecurity research (20%):
- Shows that in developing countries (and especially in post-conflict situations) where the state cannot guarantee security, there exist a multitude of security risks that undermine both citizen security and democratic governance.
- Demonstrates that the proliferation of security actors in conflict-affected countries in the global south highlights the importance of introducing more democratic and civilian-based oversight of national and regional security sectors.

4. Review Findings

Overall the panel concluded that PCD supported meaningful research and related projects on important peace, conflict and development issues. This work has produced high-quality outputs which have contributed to the peacebuilding field in a variety of ways; contributions to trauma healing and gender and reparations knowledge base, increased relational capital within regions and inclusion of gender by policy makers in specific processes. Further PCD has programmed in a way that honours its core principles; particularly southern partners owning the research agenda.

The panel also concluded that this programming period has seen potential not capitalised upon particularly when one moves beyond seeing research as an end in itself to seeing it as means toward a broader goal of social change. PCD did not fully tap its relational and reputational capital in a strategic and creative manner to give greater leverage to the impact of the high quality research that PCD supports. Nor did the support provided by PCD to project teams, result in a significant focus on user influence and the strategies to achieve it. It is clear there is more that can be done to leverage this high-quality and relevant research for change.

4.1 Research Quality

Overall, those who contributed data to this review through the survey and informant interviews perceive the publications to be of high quality and in some cases groundbreaking; contributing to important gaps in theory-building or policy/practice problems. The panel endorses this perception. However there is an important caveat to the panel's endorsement. In the majority of materials, the methodology is not described in sufficient detail to enable a review of their appropriateness or quality.

Except for policy makers, those who are familiar with PCD supported work consistently attest to its relevance. In the case of Northern government policy makers consulted, there are conflicting views about how relevant PCD-funded research is to their needs.

In terms of the accessibility of publication formats, most projects appeared to use classic

academic structures, e.g., journal articles, books, reports. There was, however little evidence of products that targeted policy makers, which is key to user-influence. In a few projects, capacity was developed to translate research into effective policy briefs such as with the Arab Families Working Group.

4.2 Outcomes

PCD highlighted five program-level outcomes it considered most significant:

1. advancement of the peacebuilding field on the important issue of security sector reform;
2. development of the transitional justice field, including the study of post-conflict trauma;
3. building local ownership of, and engagement in, peacebuilding research and practices in conflict-affected regions;
4. a new generation of peace and conflict researchers that can better address the challenges of post-conflict development in their specific contexts; and,
5. projects that address gender gaps in peacebuilding research and advocacy.

The panel came to the following conclusions about these outcomes:

Security Sector Reform is an important issue in peacebuilding that has been highly inequitable in terms of the voices framing the debate and thus support to the creation of a southern owned constituency aligns to IDRC's programming values very well. Yet the Security and Insecurity theme also contains numerous other pressing issues that could have been pursued in a coherent manner. Some of these, such as the role of the crime, corruption and narco-trafficking in destabilising states, overlap strongly with Canadian Foreign Policy interests such as Haiti and Afghanistan, while also being relevant across the globe. This was a missed opportunity for a natural alignment between PCD programming and key foreign policy actors in Canada which could have increased PCD's relevance to and possible influence in key Canadian policy offices.

In terms of penetration into the relevant spheres of influence, e.g., academia, donor governments, policy circles, questions also arose in relation to the SSR work. First, the publications are dominated by informal publishing options, which have the benefit of being free and downloadable, however may diminish dissemination through established networks and affect the perceived legitimacy of the work. Amongst those interviewed who were not directly involved with IDRC, there was a wide range in familiarity with the products; from none to almost all. Where they were familiar, positive assessments were given.

It is important to note that interviews and document review show exemplary instances of successful research – policy interaction such as the Gender and Reparations project as well as the project on Gender and Generational Analysis of Armed Conflict. Yet, there were notable gaps particularly on the global level. For instance, informants commented on the lack of presence of PCD, their partners or partner's work in the creation of the OECD DAC Security Sector Reform Handbook and resulting and on-going policy discussions. Informants identified, and the panel agrees, that these are critical processes in the international discourse on SSR.

It is clear that PCD-supported work contributed to the knowledge base of Violence, Trauma, Justice and Reconciliation and Addressing Gender. For example, the International Centre for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) has produced salient contributions to the understanding of transitional justice, including the role of reparations, gender and the linkages with other transitions in peacebuilding processes. Both the Colombian and Palestinian partners developed a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of violent contexts and its consequences on victims.

PCD has honoured the principle of local ownership and managed well the inherent tension between a programmatic approach and a responsive, needs (as identified by the south) driven approach. Grantees report that PCD staff is active in helping to shape research designs in a way that is useful and empowering without inappropriately defining or driving the process.

Overall, PCD's understanding of and approach towards capacity building remains largely unarticulated. The panel agreed with the PCD findings that the majority of the work in capacity building is focused on strengthening the capacity of individual researchers through training and mentoring. This individual-centric focus does not enable the full spectrum of changes that are needed in building southern capacity.

PCD has made considerable efforts in the relationship dimension of capacity building through its emphasis on multi-partner projects. Further it often uses its networks and relational capital to connect initiatives, which in some cases makes them more inclusive. Partners consistently noted that PCD staff engaged in a respectful manner that fostered trust and collaboration. However, more could be done in terms of leveraging PCD/IDRC connections in order to penetrate Northern policy maker and particularly donor processes.

In terms of gender, PCD-funded research has contributed significantly, to important knowledge gaps in ways that deepen and widen gender differentiated distinctions and their implications for research on violence, impunity, citizenship, justice and reparations. PCD has made significant advances in making gender a relevant issue in certain key policy circles. For example, International organizations in Uganda rely on researchers from the Gender and Generational Violence project to provide key briefings to help shape policy and practice.

4.3 Prospectus Implementation

Regarding the implementation of the prospectus, the panel noted: individual program officer priorities received too much weight thereby decreasing coherence in the program; the PCD team's response to attempt to develop greater focus and enhance coherence was appropriate to the situation; and, there was a gap in adaptive leadership.

5. Issues for Consideration

PCD identified four strategic lessons. The panel agreed and added to them.

5.1 The need for a sharper focus on programming

Inherent in this challenge of achieving sharper focus is the tension between articulating and pursuing programmatic priorities at a macro level while also remaining responsive to the needs and priorities that are identified by southern partners at the micro level. The panel concluded that there is a need to explore further what a "sharper focus" specifically means. For instance, a review of the political economy theme suggests that simply narrowing future themes to ensure tighter boundaries is unlikely to be sufficient to ensure greater consistency of achieving program outcomes. Other gaps existed in the program planning: PCD did not have a clearly articulated description of how the various components within each thematic entry point would hypothetically interact in order to catalyze the change sought by PCD. In turn PCD did not have a clear and shared understanding of what constituted that change.

5.2 The need for broader engagement

The panel found significant evidence aligning to this lesson; particularly the need to be more effective at connecting research to policy – both Canadian foreign policy and internationally. Looking at the program level, PCD did not have an articulated strategy that identified formal influence channels and capitalized on informal spaces and relationship capital. Further there is a tendency to view policy engagement as a final step in the process. The experience of the panel members indicates that inclusion needs to be approached throughout the process.

Broader engagement also needs to be viewed from the perspective of types of partners. Informants and the panel noted that current grantees include the best institutions (usual suspects) in this field. This is particularly true in terms of regional and global projects. Projects focused at the local and national levels seem more successful at involving non-usual suspects (defined as lesser known or even organisations new to peacebuilding research and action). Given PCD's commitment to strengthen the field in the South, greater balance between working with "the best" and targeting and creating space for new voices is necessary.

5.3 The need for better monitoring and measuring

Current monitoring appears to focus on what is done by partners (activities) rather than assessing whether assumptions were accurate, what difference partners are making and the significance of the work to the target population.

5.4 The need for more strategic communications

For the majority of projects neither internal documents nor informant interviews revealed strategies for engagement with potential users, which leads the panel to conclude that much high quality work was produced, but that it was not sufficiently mobilized to influence others. It is important to note that there was not total omission of strategic engagement, however. The panel feels that one must look beyond one-off interactions or end of project dissemination when thinking of strategy and look towards an on-going interaction throughout the life of the work.