The War-torn Societies Project and Third Party Neutral Models of Conflict Management

Foreword

Formally established as a separate entity in late 1996, IDRC's Peacebuilding and Reconstruction Program Initiative (PBR PI) supports research, policy development and capacity building as tools to assist countries emerging from violent conflicts to make the difficult transition to peace, reconciliation, social equity and sustainable development. Among IDRC's programs, the PBR PI is distinctive in two key respects: first, because it focuses specifically on the developmental challenges of post-conflict societies, and second, because its programming approach is designed to contribute actively to the process of peacebuilding and reconstruction. The program initiative supports a wide range of research projects at the national, regional and global levels.

The unique and fluid nature of the research and development problematique in post-conflict societies requires a programming approach which is highly responsive and reflexive to changing contexts. With the end of the Cold War, local wars and intra-state armed conflicts have come to centre-stage in international affairs, and the international community can no longer approach the twin issues of peace and development in a fragmented fashion. New conceptual and methodological tools are urgently required to understand and respond to the precarious and fragile political, economic, and social environments found in conflict-torn countries. Policy and practice must be informed by lessons drawn from the field as well as new analytical approaches.

The PBR PI's Working Paper series is intended to stimulate creative and critical thinking about practice and research undertaken in the field of peacebuilding and reconstruction by diverse actors involved in post-conflict settings. The papers that appear in the series should be viewed as dynamic works in progress, designed to provoke discussion and dialogue. We encourage feedback from readers by mail or electronically through our website at: http://www.idrc.ca/peace.

The paper by Fen Osler Hampson and Necla Tschirgi examines an innovative participatory action research project which has been supported by over twenty donor governments and international agencies, including IDRC, since 1994. The War-torn Societies Project (WSP) was initially conceived as a response to the frustrations and failures of international aid in the early years after the Cold War. Through an experimental methodology which facilitated the active involvement of local, national and international actors in ongoing research and dialogue in four different countries, WSP sought to contribute to better understanding of and responses to the challenges of post-conflict reconstruction in Eritrea, Mozambique,

Guatemala and Somalia. The project has generated an impressive range of materials and publications on WSP's experiences and lessons learned which merit close attention. This exploratory study by Hampson and Tschirgi seeks to situate the WSP experiment within the broader body of literature on conflict resolution, with specific reference to interactive conflict resolution (ICR) techniques and methods. The paper argues that although WSP and ICR are different in design and application, they share a number of similarities, especially with regard to their capacity to create a neutral space for dialogue and discussion among key actors which can contribute in significant ways to confidence building in conflict and post-conflict contexts. The paper concludes that the WSP and ICR methodologies are potentially complementary and would benefit from cross-fertilization.

Executive Summary

Among the various approaches to peacebuilding that have emerged in recent years, the War-torn Societies Project (WSP) is particularly notable for its successful implementation of a participatory action-research methodology that allows societies emerging from conflict to better understand and respond to the challenges of post-conflict reconstruction. The WSP has created an interactive process through which local, national, and international actors in a specific country participate in ongoing research and dialogue to develop a common understanding of the multiple challenges of and responses to peacebuilding.

This study examines an important dimension of WSP that has not yet been fully appreciated: its inherent utility as a mechanism for "third party facilitation and mediation" within the highly politicized context of post-war societies. Although there was no explicit or predetermined focus on techniques and methods of conflict management in WSP, in practice, the technical-functional orientation of WSP contributed significantly to consensus building and the establishment of varying levels of confidence and trust among domestic and external actors and interests in the four countries it was implemented: Eritrea, Mozambique, Guatemala and Somalia.

This study offers an exploratory analysis of the WSP methodology and its in-country application in order to assess its utility compared to other relevant models of external or "third party" intervention in conflict and post-conflict settings. Drawing upon the rich literature on third party negotiation, mediation, and conflict resolution, the paper compares the WSP model with relevant "third party neutral" models of conflict management, specifically interactive conflict resolution (ICR) dialogue facilitation techniques and

methods. In discussing points of similarity and contrast between WSP and ICR, the paper illustrates how different techniques of action-research can be used to facilitate interaction and dialogue to build relationships and promote trust.

The paper argues that although WSP and ICR are quite different in design and application, they share a number of key similarities: both seek to create a neutral space for dialogue and discussion among local and possibly also external actors whose prior relationships may be conflictual (or non-existent); and both require an important element of political legitimacy that comes with the international organizational and donor support for these projects. But whereas ICR initiates dialogue through a methodology that is centred on diagnosing the sources of conflict between different actors, WSP employs a participatory action-research methodology as the main vehicle for addressing concrete macro-policy problems in the milieu of war-torn societies.

The WSP approach is both novel and suggestive about the possibilities of using participatory-action research as a robust confidence-building tool to engage a wide range of local and international actors in a mutually beneficial discussion about the challenges of social, economic, and political reconstruction. At the same time, the paper stresses that ICR and WSP methodologies are potentially complementary and could be mutually reinforcing tools for peacebuilding in the event that similar kinds of participatory action research projects are developed for other war-torn settings in the future.

THE WAR-TORN SOCIETIES PROJECT
AND THIRD PARTY NEUTRAL MODELS
OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

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A direct legacy of civil conflict is also the worsening of political and social polarization and the absence of dialogue. A culture of confrontation prevails and adversaries are excluded on the grounds that any disagreement goes against society as a whole and that dissent is therefore anti-national...[In Guatemala] [t]he signing of the Peace Accords...opened up the possibility of discussion of the most diverse topics in a way never seen before in the history of the country, including themes that a few months before would have been dangerous even to mention. . .Nevertheless, the dialogue in such events was limited because they tended to become simply platforms from which the political and social forces publicized their positions. . . .WSP... offered a forum that soon became the most systematic process of consultation around post-conflict issues. . . .WSP became a privileged actor that provided a space for dialogue among sectors that had never or hardly ever tried to build something together and whose relationships had been dominated by confrontation and exclusion.

(War-torn Societies Project in Guatemala, 1998: 20)

The strength of WSP lies in its capacity and demand for the mediation of conflict.

(War-torn Societies Project in Mozambique, 1998: 31)

I. INTRODUCTION

Societies emerging from violent conflict face many difficult challenges—not the least of which is the danger of a relapse into conflict. Thus, in post conflict contexts, efforts to avoid a return to violence take on added importance and in such contexts "peacebuilding" focusses primarily on the need to "identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict" (*An Agenda for Peace,* 1992).

Among the various approaches to peacebuilding that have emerged in recent years, the War-torn Societies Project (WSP) deserves special attention because it has identified and successfully implemented a participatory action-research methodology that allows societies emerging from conflict to better understand and respond to the challenges of post-conflict reconstruction. The WSP has created an interactive process through which local, national and international actors in a specific country participate in ongoing research and dialogue to develop a common understanding of the inter linkages between the multiple dimensions of post-conflict peacebuilding in order to identify and implement more effective policies and programs. Specifically, the project aims at developing a participatory, multi-actor model for collective analysis, consultation, collaboration and coordination that is particularly suitable for the fluid, precarious and highly conflictual context of societies emerging from conflict.

The project's application in four different settings—Eritrea, Mozambique, Guatemala and Somalia—has demonstrated the distinctiveness and specificity of a "WSP model". As it draws to an end, the War-torn Societies Project has produced a series of reports and studies that document, analyse and evaluate the WSP model as it has evolved in different country contexts. These are valuable by-products of the project and serve to disseminate the lessons of the WSP to aid recipients, international development practitioners and policy-makers who initiated the project as well as the broader academic and research community who engage deeply with the underlying theories and approaches to development and peacebuilding.

Given its focus on the developmental dimensions of post-conflict reconstruction, these accounts of the WSP mainly examine its contributions to interactive and multi-actor processes of policy analysis, policy dialogue and policy development. Yet, the WSP has another important dimension that deserves closer attention, namely, its utility as a conflict management tool in post-conflict societies and ongoing conflict situations.

This paper examines the confidence and consensus building dimension of the WSP. Its purpose is to offer an exploratory analysis of the WSP methodology and in-country experiences in order to shed light on its utility for conflict management and also to familiarize the wider peacebuilding community, and, in particular, conflict resolution practitioners with the WSP[2]. Secondly, drawing upon the rich literature on conflict management and conflict resolution, this paper compares and contrasts WSP with interactive conflict resolution (ICR) techniques. The paper argues that not only do these two approaches speak to each other but that each could be strengthened by drawing upon the methodologies and operational experiences of the other.

In order to assess the relevance, applicability, and lessons of the WSP model for other "third party neutral" conflict management techniques and practices, this paper is structured as follows. First, the paper outlines the key elements of the WSP participatory-action research model. This conceptual discussion of the WSP model is succeeded by a more detailed presentation of the WSP experience in mediation and problem solving in the four countries that were participants in the WSP: Eritrea, Mozambique, Guatemala and Somalia,. This discussion is followed by a brief introduction to the interactive conflict resolution model as a distinct strand of "third party neutral" models of conflict facilitation and mediation since it is most analogous to WSP. The lessons and relevant experience of WSP and ICR are then compared and contrasted. The final section of the paper attempts to derive some more general lessons about the participatory action-research paradigm for students and practitioners of conflict management and resolution.

A brief note on methodology is necessary to underscore the exploratory nature of this study. Throughout its design and implementation phases, the WSP generated a wealth of discussion papers, progress reports, country-specific analyses which aimed at informing its multiple stakeholders of the evolution of the project. These reports have served as the basis for this study. The authors have not carried out field research in the four WSP countries and therefore the comparisons and findings in this study, which are based on only partial glimpses about the WSP, are intended to be suggestive and preliminary rather than in any way conclusive or definitive.

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[2]See War-torn Societies Project, *War-torn societies project in ERITREA,* UNRISD/PSIS, Geneva 1998; War-torn Societies Project, *War-torn societies project in GUATEMALA,* UNRISD/PSIS, Geneva, 1998; War-torn Societies Project. *War-torn societies project in MOZAMBIQUE,* UNRISD/PSIS, Geneva, 1998; War-torn Societies Project, *War-torn societies project in SOMALIA,* UNRISD/PSIS, Geneva, 1998.

II.THE WSP MODEL: PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH AT THE MACRO LEVEL

It is difficult to do justice to the complexities and richness of the WSP project and therefore only a brief, schematic presentation of the WSP model is provided here in order to lay the basis for a comparative analysis of the WSP framework with other, more explicitly mediation-based approaches to conflict management in conflict and postconflict settings.[3]

The War-torn Societies Project was initiated in June 1994 by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) and the Programme for Strategic and International Security Studies (PSIS) of the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva with the support of a large number of international and national actors, donor agencies and researchers. The project was in response to the international community's recognition of the need to respond effectively to the pressing challenges of post-conflict reconstruction in a growing number of countries emerging from violent conflicts. WSP identified a central shortcoming of the existing international approaches: the lack of coordination between the different initiatives and actors at the local, national, and international levels. In a highly innovative fashion, the project sought to develop an approach which replicated community-level participatory action research (PAR) *across all of these levels*. Thus, WSP was originally conceived as a participatory research exercise to enable local authorities and international donor agencies to better understand and respond to the multiple challenges of rebuilding war-torn societies. Integrating and aligning the priorities and programs of international donor agencies with those of local authorities was identified as one of the project's core objectives.

Under the original project proposal, three areas of activity were outlined: 1) research; 2) data base, networking and communications; and 3) policy advice. The research component of the WSP would involve a series of comparative country studies of ongoing efforts to rebuild war torn societies with a particular focus on the effectiveness of the mix of actors and policies involved in social, political, and economic reconstruction. This research would be conducted by multi disciplinary teams of researchers and policymakers at the local and international levels. In an effort to promote dialogue and to facilitate the exchange of experiences and

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[3]For a more detailed analysis of WSP, see: Matthias Stiefel, "Rebuilding After War: A Summary Report of the War-torn Societies Project," WSP/UNRISD, 1998.

information, the project also sought to bring together and link the broadest possible network of active institutions, agencies, and individuals.

The WSP recognized that one of the critical problems frustrating efforts to respond effectively to the challenge of rebuilding War-torn societies was the gap between ideas and action. Thus, a key objective in its participatory methodology was to bridge the gap between research and policymaking. Lessons learned from country studies would be shared with local policymakers and the international donor community through regular consultations and workshops involving policymakers and researchers.

Among the various issues singled out for special attention were the following:

- how the twin objectives of post-conflict peace and development could be met in reconstruction and rebuilding efforts

- how best to integrate the simultaneous challenges of demilitarization, political reconstruction, social reconstruction, and economic reconstruction in the peace-development continuum;

- how best to address the tensions in the relief-rehabilitation continuum in order to link emergency response efforts to longer term development goals;

- how to strike the right balance or mix of external assistance for reconstruction with local requirements or needs for control, responsibility, and self-reliance; and

- how best to coordinate international assistance and relief efforts among a wide range of multilateral, bilateral, and NGO actors.

Within these parameters, a general work plan was drafted which served as the basis for a phased implementation of WSP in Eritrea, Mozambique, Guatemala and Somalia.

In the *preparatory phase*, the Central Co-ordinating Unit in Geneva (CCU) identified a national Project Director who would have primary responsibility for the country project. The Director assumed responsibility for assembling a research team comprised of a research coordinator and other researchers, all of whom were nationals. The Project Director was also responsible for liaison with key governmental officials and external agencies and for arranging logistics and administrative support. Simultaneously, CCU facilitated the formation

of a Project Group comprising representatives of the main internal and external actors involved in post-conflict rebuilding to ensure collective "ownership" of the project.

Once a research team was assembled, the operation moved into the *research phase* which consisted of a series of interrelated research tasks:

- the preparation of a Country Note that discussed key social, economic, and political conditions of the country and selected up to five so-called "Entry Points" for substantive policy research, and

- the establishment of Working Groups that worked on each of the identified themes. Members of the Working Groups were in some sense "self-selected."   Although there were no stringent criteria for choosing them, many had substantive policy knowledge and/or relevant work experience with the issue-area concerned. They helped direct the research activities and ensured that the research remained policy relevant and "fed" into the policymaking process.

It was initially anticipated that the overall duration of the project would be approximately 18 months. It was assumed at the outset that the overall control and responsibility for the project would be in local hands so as to ensure local, collective ownership of the results and, ideally, a self-sustaining policy research process. However, it was also understood that the Coordinating Unit in Geneva would closely monitor the research activities and provide logistical and other means of support when necessary.

The *final phase* of the project was reserved for reporting and evaluating. Project teams would report on and evaluate their experience with the WSP methodology within the particular conditions of their country

Having consulted widely with national and international actors, and having charted out its course conceptually and administratively, WSP launched four country pilot projects under this framework: Eritrea in early 1995; Mozambique in July 1995; Guatemala in August 1996; and Somalia in January 1997. Final workshops were concluded in Eritrea in May 1997, in Mozambique in April 1998 and in Guatemala in March 1998. The Somalia project, due to that country's special circumstances, is continuing under a different institutional arrangement.

The most unique features of WSP as a participatory action research project have been noted by (Doornbos, The War-torn Societies Project, 1997: 4). First, it is macro-oriented insofar as it addresses the broad themes and issues of public policy in a given war-torn society and does so at the national level. This distinguishes it from more micro-oriented participatory-action research projects. Second, WSP tries to work with national policy elites who are connected with major agencies in government or who have responsibility for major policy sectors in the country concerned. Third, WSP seeks to use policy research as a tool or vehicle for initiating dialogue and communication among different internal and external actors in order to foster greater transparency in the national policy process about different actors/institutional goals and priorities; to provide a better understanding about the various policy choices and alternatives that are potentially available; and to promote improved coordination among different actors (internal and external). Fourth, in promoting transparency and dialogue through the research process, WSP seeks to reduce conflict and generate a set of common orientations among different actors/interests which are required if government is to work effectively.

In sum, WSP was conceived, at least implicitly, as a consensus-building tool to contribute to the establishment of basic levels of trust and empathy among key institutional actors in war-torn societies through the mechanism of participatory-action research. However, its immediate focus was on improving policy and practice in post-conflict contexts. It sought to contribute to the inclusiveness, transparency and responsiveness of the policy process. Through its innovative and experimental methodology, it attempted to achieve an optimal integration of research, policy analysis and action. It aimed to produce tangible results in a relatively short period of time that are relevant both in the international and national policy environments and in the lived reality of the country settings.

III. LESSONS FROM THE WSP COUNTRY EXPERIENCES

There is obviously a wide range of lessons that can be gathered from the WSP experience which pertain to the feasibility and utility of participatory-action research in war-torn societies and post-conflict environments. Each of the country studies presents a fascinating story and provides specific lessons for the policymakers and researchers in the countries concerned. However, as noted in the introduction to this paper, our main interest concerns the contribution to and applicability of the WSP experience to conflict management

processes in war-torn societies, specifically as they pertain to peacebuilding problems in post-conflict environments.

As described above, WSP started with a well-developed methodology which was modified to suit four different political contexts. In fact, participants in WSP acknowledge that one of its most striking accomplishments was its ability to "metamorphose" in different settings. In one sense, therefore, it is difficult to "abstract" WSP from the four country contexts in which it was applied, namely:

- Eritrea, where there had been a victorious liberation struggle and where a legitimate government with popular support was in place;
- Mozambique, where the long-running internal conflict had run its course and internationally monitored elections had been held;
- Guatemala, where 35 years of civil conflict had essentially run out of steam and where a peace agreement between the government and guerrillas was to be signed;
- Somalia, where the breakdown of central government structures and failed international interventions left a legacy of diversified regions, some of which were stable and beginning rebuilding..." (Stiefel, "Rebuilding After War," p. 9).

Yet the fact that it was successfully implemented in such diverse contexts confirms the potential appeal of WSP for students and practitioners of conflict management.

One of the main challenges in the conflict resolution field is the development of a better appreciation and understanding of the range of tools and instruments that can be employed by various third parties to initiate dialogue and communication among different institutional and communal elements in war-torn societies. A second challenge is to identify those entry points in a conflict along the escalation-de-escalation continuum where third parties can have maximum influence and affect on social and political confidence-building processes. A third challenge is to understand what kinds of mechanisms best serve the needs and interests of the parties themselves (as opposed to researcher or scholar-practitioner who may have his/her own interests and agenda in peacebuilding). The WSP experience in different countries speaks to these challenges in a number of important ways and also offers new insights into the kinds of tools that can be invented by third parties to address these challenges.

THE ROLE OF RESEARCH AS A CONFIDENCE-BUILDING TOOL

Confidence-building is a central goal to any conflict management and resolution process. The utility and robustness of any confidence-building institution, activity, or set of measures is generally discussed in terms of four main elements:

- Transparency: Does the activity/measure/institution promote greater levels of transparency among the participants to that activity and, if so, to what degree? That is to say, does the activity/measure/institution allow the participants to have a better understanding of the needs, interests, motivations, and behavioral dispositions of the other actors to that process thereby reducing the levels of uncertainty and anxiety of the participants?

- Accessibility and Inclusiveness: Is the activity/measure/institution inclusive or exclusive by design and how accessible are the various fora for dialogue to various societal and international actors, i.e., does it privilege some parties over others in terms of access and the distribution and dissemination of information?

- Sustained Communications: Does the activity/measure/institution sustain communications and the flow of information over time or not? And, by implication, does it generate new information and knowledge about expectations and social behaviors?

- New Information and Knowledge: Does the activity/measure/institution redefine interests by removing the existing barriers to communication and/or by redefining issues through the generation and release of new information to all parties?

Any assessment of a set of confidence-building measures using these four criteria is necessarily qualitative and relative because confidence-building, by definition, is a process rather an attainable end point or goal.

WSP sought not just to establish communications among participants and stakeholders but also to provide new information through the participatory-action research process to the participants. WSP also created mechanisms that sustained communications for the duration of the project thus permitting actors to engage in an ongoing process of research, dialogue, and exchange of views. In this regard, WSP established an innovative set of institutional mechanisms for dialogue and consensus-building in war-torn societies. However, what is especially unique about the WSP experience, as documented in the various country reports,

is that the WSP engaged, in varying degrees, a wide variety of societal and external actors in dialogue. Unlike traditional mediation techniques and methods which are targeted at elites, WSP reached out to many elements of civil and international society. It is this aspect of WSP as a *societal confidence and consensus building mechanism* that merits special attention.

Transparency

Project evaluations suggest that, in general, WSP participatory-research activities helped to promote a better understanding among participating actors about the respective goals, interests, motivations, and behavioral dispositions of the other actors in the reconstruction and peacebuilding process. Although the WSP methodology for researching and discussing national priorities was adapted, changed, or modified to meet local conditions and interests, through the research and discussion process the participants came to share a better understanding of the views and perspectives of other institutional actors and interests. As one might expect, the degree of transparency attained varied from case to case. Further, transparency should not be confused or equated with "consensus" because differences of outlook persisted on key issues even after the research process was completed. Nonetheless, the evidence is striking concerning just how far the exchanges of information and dialogue went in some countries.

In Mozambique, for example, an explicit decision was made at the beginning of the research exercise "to critically evaluate the way different actors think, how they interpret things and what their aspirations are" on the key macro-policy problems confronting the country in the aftermath of an intense civil war. (War-torn Societies Project: The Case of Mozambique: Final Report, 1997: 15). Although the WSP model was supposed to lead to the drafting of a Country Note that would serve as the basis for discussion and thematically identify the appropriate entry points for further research, this proved to be a highly politically charged exercise insofar as "participants inevitably saw the Country Note as a political statement and wanted their own points of view to be formally noted and taken on board. Consequently, the Country Note was never effectively 'adopted'; rather it was agreed that the various points of view expressed in the Project Group meeting would be added in an annex, and the document as such would be filed" (WSP in Mozambique, 1998: 19). Importantly, however, the deliberations of the Project Group contributed to the processes of dialogue and consensus-building so that the project could move forward. Ultimately, four critical policy themes on which there were major social and political divisions were selected for research and analysis: the impact of structural adjustment on agriculture (subsequently narrowed to

marketing and agriculture); decentralization and local power; reintegration of demobilized soldiers; and the role of the media in the national reconciliation process. On each issue, WSP was credited by the participants for having established a unique space for dialogue and discussion. This was especially true for Mozambican nationals who found the exchange of diverse perspectives, opinion, and interests valuable and enlightening (Patricia Weiss Fagen, "Draft Evaluation," 1997: 10). As noted by Fagen,

> "[d]ialogue among people in different regions and/or different affiliations was uncommon prior to WSP. Indeed, outside of intellectual circles, dialogue was a rare phenomenon. As one informant put it, 'we may have talked in each other's presence, but we did not really listen to what the other was saying'....The forum created by WSP filled a real need. WSP entered at a point when Mozambican policymakers, professionals, and intellectuals were ready to move toward greater national conciliation and understanding and helped to contribute to these ends" (Ibid: 10).

This assessment is also borne out in the "Final Report of the Mozambique Project." When asked for their views on the beneficial impact of the project, participants reported that the project had benefitted them by: using the research-dialogue-action methodology in studying and resolving problems; corroborating knowledge already acquired; acquiring new information; and identifying problems for further study." One respondent indicated that "[t]he recommendations are very useful in that actors may change their activities in the field with a view to permanent dialogue and continual conflict management" (War-torn Societies Project: The Case of Mozambique: Final Report, 1997: 45). In particular, WSP contributed to dialogue "among people in different regions and with different affiliations." A frequently heard comment was that because people had lived for such a long time with stereotypes "they had not been motivated to learn about their adversaries' problems, viewpoints, and priorities" (WSP in Mozambique, 1998: 28). WSP thus helped the parties to achieve a better understanding of diverse viewpoints on matters of shared concern and to ensure that those engaged in the discussion would be taken seriously by others thereby creating communicative synergies and contributing to understanding (WSP in Mozambique, 1998: 29).

The WSP Eritrea Project was implemented under somewhat unique post-conflict conditions. Unlike the other countries, Eritrea had emerged from a "victorious liberation struggle that brought about a clear political structure and strong, legitimate governmental authority." Moreover, "Eritrea was not or did not see itself as 'war-torn' in the sense of having to cope

with serious internal social and political divisions" (WSP in Eritrea, 1998: 18). What the new government of Eritrea was concerned about most was losing its newly won independence and sense of self-sufficiency in an entangling array of international aid agreements or "conditional" policy packages from international lending institutions. For representatives of external governments and international aid and donor agencies, the Eritrean attitude was a novel one: "Beyond the *a priori* restrictions on their activities what probably concerns the external actors most is the relative lack of communication from the government with respect to various policy areas, the relative unpredictability that results, and the consequent difficulty to engage in even medium-term budgeting and planning of project activities" (WSP in Eritrea 1998: 16-17).

Although the context differed, as in other WSP projects, the Eritrean Project participants felt that one of the major achievements of the project was its contribution to promoting interaction between the various actors which allowed them to better understand each other's interest and perspectives on major (and obviously contentious) reconstruction issues. Sixty-eight percent of respondents in a post-project evaluation survey gave the WSP process high marks for promoting interaction among the various actors. Individual written responses underscore this assessment. One respondent reported that "[b]y far the most significant contribution of WSP has been in promoting a refreshingly frank and wide-ranging debate between internal and external actors on the major reconstruction issues—social, economic and political—confronting the country. It has provided the donor community with a long sought but elusive opportunity for a productive exchange of views with the government." Another stated that "[p]eople with not much chance of meeting found the opportunity to do so. The whole exercise helped break the ice between the two parties [government and donors]. Some mutual suspicions may have been put aside." Members also acquired a better understanding of the goals and orientations of other actors as indicated in the following response: "I believe that I have gained more in understanding the responsibilities of partners than my own category of actors...most of the notions and orientations among my own category of actors were commonly shared. Thus, essentially the gain was in understanding various external actors' concerns, attitudes and approaches." (War-torn Societies Project: Eritrea: Final National Workshop, 1996: 15-16).

In Guatemala, the WSP process was launched at a critical stage in the peace process. It was initiated in early January 1997 only a few days after the Peace Accords were signed and at a time when there were high levels of distrust among various actors and tensions ran high. As noted in the WSP country report: "In Guatemala, the long years of counter-insurgency had seriously disrupted social and political life and made living together in a community

difficult. The years of internal conflict and impunity had planted the seeds of fear, distrust and reticence among the people". Thus, the first set of meetings were extraordinarily difficult and collaboration was not easy. But the WSP analysis and debate process instilled a growing spirit of confidence and tolerance (WSP in Guatemala, 1998: 17). As also noted at the "WSP Country Team Workshop in Addis Ababa,"[i]n Guatemala, WSP was seen as tool that promoted the dialogue which was so badly needed at the present stage. The fact that common understanding was reached on certain key issues was more important than the research products themselves. The fact that much research had already been carried out in the country meant that there was more time for people to meet and dialogue with each other...Convergences and divergences did of course surface but there was no doubt that many people had been involved, including at the local level" (Aide-Memoire: WSP Country Team Workshop, Addis Ababa, "Notes of Meeting of 31 March 1998": 2).

As for Somalia, the complex situation in that country given the breakdown of central authority was unparalleled: "No single actor—or group of actors—had proved capable of imposing its logic on the post-war situation, yet consensus among the various players had remained equally elusive" (WSP in Somalia, 1998: 18). A decision was made early on by the Central Coordinating Unit in Geneva to identify areas of the country where conflict had subsided and where rebuilding activities were underway so that WSP could play a constructive role. WSP was launched in Northeast Somalia using a step-by-step approach. In the absence of government interlocutors, political authority was contested by clan elders and their respective interest groups so the project had to move very carefully so as not to become too closely identified with any given faction. WSP had to convince all parties that it was a neutral space for dialogue and discussion which could not be used by parties as a platform to promote their own narrow interests. Contact with all groups was essential as was their support for the process of building the project up from regional to zonal levels, a distinctive feature of WSP in Northeast Somalia. Because the project started at a local regional level and then worked up to the zonal in the Northeast, the preparation process which started with three regional and zonal level notes, "played a key role in mobilizing people and were all the more useful because of the lack of systematic information resulting from the conflict. Local actors had highly appreciated the regional and later zonal notes and were able to verify their objectivity and impartiality" (Aide-Memoire: WSP Country Team Workshop, Addis Ababa, "Notes of Meeting of 31 March 1998": 3). Moreover, "the introduction of a forum where public issues [were] discussed openly, transparently, and critically [represented] a break from the kind of centralized and authoritarian leadership which characterized the former military regime and the fighting factions that superseded it" (WSP in Somalia, 1998: 32).

The changing set of nicknames given to WSP by local Somalis in some ways best captures the increasingly positive way the project was perceived as a vehicle for the transparent exchange of information and dialogue. "The project was first received as 'UNOSOM V,' in other words the new incarnation of high-profile United Nations involvement in Somalia. When it turned out that WSP followed a low-key approach (and had not much to offer in material terms), this was replaced by the disparaging *'siiga yar'* (invisible dust) and then by the more sinister *'Impiiriyaalalda calaamiga'* (foreign imperialism). Finally, the project became known by the more neutral label *'War-doon'* (instead of 'war-torn'), which [literally] means 'seeking the news'" (WSP in Somalia, 1998: 25).

In sum, there is strong anecdotal and survey evidence which suggests that the dialogue generated by the various in-country WSP projects served to promote a better understanding and awareness not only about the concrete challenges of peacebuilding and postconflict reconstruction in the societies concerned, but, more importantly, about the interests and goals of a wide variety of internal and external actors engaged in reconstruction efforts. The dialogue process not only helped to generate a shared learning experience but it also removed some of the critical barriers to communication which had hitherto prevented key actors from understanding the perceptual orientations of other parties. As these testimonies indicate, improved communication and understanding insofar as they changed the climate of policy dialogue represent one of the major achievements of the WSP experience. In addition, the WSP exercised transparency in the following two ways:

a) The research that was carried out by WSP aimed at providing information on facts that were needed to establish reasonable policies so as not to be led by misinformation or rumour. It explicitly promoted transparency and openness concerning intended plans of action (by both government and external actors) with the aim of providing this information to a multiplicity of actors who—more often than not—were without proper knowledge of what the other was doing.

b) WSP adopted a transparent style of working as its *modus operandi,* in other words, the activities were carried out in a fully transparent manner and there was no secrecy about who was invited, for what purpose, and who was carrying out research. This was an important model for other social and political actors.

Accessibility and Inclusiveness

By creating a series of forums for dialogue and by actively seeking out dialogue partners, WSP project officials helped to overcome some of the direct barriers to participatory dialogue and discussion that are legacies of armed conflict. As described most eloquently in the *WSP in Guatemala* report, "[o]nce armed conflict is over, one of the great obstacles to physical and social reconstruction is precisely the absence of participatory structures that allow people to collectively assume the challenges of reconstruction. In short, the authoritarian past becomes a negative weight. A direct legacy of civil conflict is also the worsening of political and social polarization and the absence of dialogue. A culture of confrontation prevails and adversaries are excluded on the grounds that any disagreement goes against society as a whole and that dissent is anti-national" (WSP in Guatemala, 1998: 20). Such forums for dialogue, however, have to be accessible to different groups in civil society if they are to overcome this lingering legacy of distrust, although the formidable cultural and political hurdles to effective participation should not be underestimated.

In terms of accessibility as measured by the size and level of participation of different actors and groups in the dialogue process, the WSP experience in the four countries was exceptionally inclusive in the way it engaged a wide variety of local and foreign actors in the research and dialogue process. Given the availability of resources and the obvious logistical difficulties of identifying and including relevant stakeholders in the relatively short period of time the project was set up and running in each country, the quality and level of participation is all the more remarkable. There is obviously some significant variation in the size and composition of the National Project Groups and the various Working Groups on a country-by-country basis. This can be attributed to the fact that the Project Groups were really reflective of the national context.

At one end of the spectrum, the National Project Group in Guatemala was quite unrestrictive in terms of its membership. This was because in Guatemala civil society was quite well developed. The project thus began operations with all sectors and interests in Guatemalan society being invited to participate in its deliberations. The project was launched by the Vice-President of the Republic with more than 50 representatives form government, international agencies, research centres and members of civil society in attendance—a breadth of participation that was unparalleled in Guatemalan history.

Participation was also quite broad in Mozambique where the Project Group attracted officials and representatives from the government, the major political parties, embassies, the

UN and bilateral donors, and a wide array NGOs, again because of the nature of civil society. On a comparative basis the National Project Group in Eritrea was somewhat more limited in terms of its civil society membership because very few NGOs exist in Eritrea. Nonetheless, the project included high-ranking officials in government, senior religious and academic figures, diplomats, and representatives of the major multilateral agencies and available NGOs. Memberships in the various working groups on a country-by-country comparison also varied in size depending upon the issue being studied – although these groups generally tended to be somewhat smaller in size than the Project Groups, and membership was limited to those actors with a key interest at stake, and thus, specialized knowledge, of the issue under consideration.

WSP in Somalia was initiated in the northeast section of the country. It was gradually able to reach out to "all tiers of local authority." However, it was noted that the project was more successful in involving urban men and the male population in general. Some key groups—displaced people, militia, and occupational castes—were absent from the process. The "gender bias" was viewed as "an inevitable reflection of gender inequalities in Somali society." It was also felt that any artificial attempts to increase the number of women in WSP fora "would probably antagonize male participants and encourage tokenism" (WSP in Somalia, 1998: 37), underscoring WSP's sensitivity to local cultural context and reticence to do anything which ran counter to what was acceptable to the local people. The engagement of a female researcher as part of the WSP team helped to ensure that gender issues were not altogether ignored. But the engagement of women in the consultative process remained one of the continuing challenges of WSP in Somalia as did the difficulties of bringing rural or pastoral representatives into the dialogue process.

Sustained Communications

As noted above, the value and contribution of any exercise or activity to confidence-building is also a function of its ability to sustain an on-going process of dialogue among key stakeholders and interests within a given social setting. In general the country reports reveal that WSP had good dialogue and communications sustaining capacity in all four countries at both the Project Group and Working Group levels. WSP was able to sustain communications because:

- it was trusted as a neutral forum;
- it provided "value added" because it provided "objective" information on key issues;

- it did not just pay lip service to "local participation" and "national ownership," but implemented this on a bottoms-up and decentralized way.

The level of commitment and the sustaining capacity of dialogue process initiated by the National Project Group and affiliated Working Groups, however, differed on a case-by-case basis.

In Mozambique, for example, it is reported that actors' participation in meetings varied with some members of the Government and/or FRELIMO party being absent from some of the meetings. Furthermore, time and resource constraints hampered the field research process by limiting the field presence of the project, confining the geographical scope of the project to only a few provinces in the country, and concentrating, in some cases, too much on urban zones (War-torn Societies Project: The Case of Mozambique: Final Report, 1997: 42). It was felt by participants that "the inclusion of more social groups, particularly marginalized youth and rural communities might have enriched the work" of WSP in their country (Ibid). The lack of frequent meetings was also cited as a problem in ensuring a process of sustained communications and dialogue. Even so, the WSP experience in Mozambique proved to be highly relevant to the needs and interests of local actors because the forum was established at a time when "Mozambican policy makers, professionals, and intellectuals were ready to move towards greater national conciliation and understanding" (WSP in Mozambique, 1998: 28). As the Project Director of Mozambique observed, the project provided a much-needed "forum in which all social actors could take part: an informal, non-institutional place where they could get together in a climate of open dialogue and grow closer to each other, getting to know each other as human beings and discussing social problems, elaborating strategies and producing recommendations at the various levels of decision-making" (WSP in Mozambique, 1998: 31).

In Guatemala, participants continued to remain interested and engaged in the research process throughout the project. As described in one evaluation, "one of the most remarkable aspects of the Working Groups was that although the research process was lengthy, a good number of participants kept interest in the process and participated until the end. One of the groups—public security—decided on its own to carry on as an inter-institutional research group, found its own funding, and organized themselves, without waiting for the Project Group to 'consider' the issue" (War Torn Societies Project: Guatemala: Note on the operational experience, March 1998: 5). Nonetheless, there were some significant modalities in terms of governmental engagement and interest in the project which are worth noting. At the outset, as noted in the Project's final report, the government's attitude towards WSP was

favorable. However, during the active research phase, relations somewhat cooled: "The government saw no sense in discussing and debating which Entry Points to choose; rather they saw this as a waste of time and, indeed, as dangerous since it could redirect effort from its logical and necessary course, since the theme to be dealt with was included in the Peace Accords and WSP's task was simply to develop it" (WSP in Guatemala, 1998: 27). But as the project began to move into its final phases, the government became more engaged and moved closer to the project. This is because "[t]he themes that the different discussion groups chose, the tone of the discussions and the results and recommendations produced made it clear to the government authorities that there was no hidden agenda in the WSP exercise. It became evident to government that the project coincided with the agenda and problem-solving methods states in the Peace Accords and was complementary to them" (WSP in Guatemala, 1998: 28).

In Eritrea, there was also enthusiasm for the WSP research-dialogue process. The Working Groups were the focal point of much of the key dialogue and discussion. This is because "for the first time, they provided a channel for substantive communication between the Eritrean Government and nongovernmental , mostly external actors. Recognition and appreciation of the value of this communication, often referred to as 'dialogue', was shared by all sides...External actors emphasized the fact that they had come to better understand government policy on a number of fronts....Government members for their part said they had come to appreciate the value of such a channel as a way of communicating the government's position better, sometimes adding that they realized that the Eritrean Government has not been particularly effective in communicating its policies to the outside world" (WSP in Eritrea: 27). These channels were also more than just a vehicle for communication; they literally "forced participants to think through and articulate their positions" (Ibid).

The "bottoms up" approach taken by WSP in Somalia laid the foundations for a dialogue that began at the regional level before moving up to the zonal. Regional notes served as a venue for engaging a wide range of local participants such that "the sense of local ownership of the project was shown by the strong arguments in favor of the adoption of one Entry Point or another. Significantly, there were discussions among community members about vital issues that concerned them all (WSP in Somalia, 1998: 26). But WSP also institutionalized dialogue in ways that had been lacking in previous interventions by donors and aid agencies which were typically ad hoc and exacerbated by the all too frequent turn-overs in international staff and overly restrictive institutional mandates. As noted in the report on *WSP in Somalia,* "Another key element in WSP's transformation from external actor to internal process is the *degree to which participation and duration have helped confer*

legimacy on the dialogue....By encouraging people to define priorities through an integrated analysis of the situation—without introducing an external agenda—and *by sustaining dialogue over time, WSP has helped shape a discourse rooted in the concerns and aspirations of the people of the northeast and not simply based on the shaky foundation of a promise of aid resources"* [our emphasis] (WSP in Somalia, 1998: 33).

New Information and Knowledge

New information and knowledge can be critical confidence-building tools if they redefine conflicts of interest/perceptions and suggest new avenues of consensus and cooperation. One of the most important contributions of the WSP methodology to understanding broader conflict management and resolution processes is the potential of participatory-action research to serve these particular ends. How well did it work in practice in the four countries? Evaluation responses suggest that the WSP process generally tended to work well in redefining interests through participatory-action research, specifically via the acquisition and dissemination of information and knowledge about complex policy issues; however, the quality and utility of this research obviously varied from issue to issue (and corresponding working group) in any given country.

In Mozambique, for instance, one of the most dynamic working groups dealt with the issue of structural adjustment which was widely blamed for a wide range of social problems in the country. Structural adjustment policies were introduced in Mozambique in order to stabilize an economy that was centred on agricultural production and to ensure that markets worked more efficiently. However, the agricultural sector in Mozambique failed to bounce back in the post-war period and food imports continued to supplement local production in meeting the country's needs. The government's Programme of Economic and Social Production (PRES) was aimed at fostering privatization and introducing a more rational pricing structure for agricultural commodities along with a system of credits for production and marketing. The Working Group brought together participants from the Ministry of Agriculture, the private sector, two embassies, the World Bank, and NGOs. Not only did the issue command the full attention of group members, but a much better understanding of the problems and difficulties associated with the implementation of the government's structural adjustment policies was developed by group members as a result of the research process. "The group dynamics were especially positive because the people involved shared common interests from different perspectives, and considered dialogue important to their interests" (WSP in Mozambique, 1998: 24). The group's recommendations stressed that too much weight had been placed on achieving macroeconomic stability in the government's policies and not

enough attention had been paid to specific sectoral needs and requirements, particularly in the area of agriculture where such problems as the continued prevalence of landmines, destroyed commercial and productive facilities as a result of the war, poor health, sanitation and educational facilities, and inadequate data about agricultural and marketing conditions continued to hamper production. Furthermore, as a result of the group's recommendations, an Association of Producers was set up to present its collective views to the government. In this particular instance, research not only redefined the basic issue but also helped to solve a particular problem (Patricia Weiss, "Draft Evaluation," 1997: 15; Aide-Memoire: WSP Country Team Workshop, 1998: 18).

Another interesting example where participatory research helped to redefine understandings among different actors on a complex policy matter was the issue of infrastructure, foreign partnership and investment in Eritrea. The mid-term assessment report indicated that "[e]ven though the Eritrean government usually approaches rebuilding and development with a heavy emphasis on self-reliance, the emerging conviction seems to be that infrastructural development needs foreign partnership and investment...The positive assessment of foreign partnership and investment emerged slowly through a thorough investigation of the issues surrounding infrastructural development by WSP researchers and was repeatedly articulated during the final WSP workshop" (War-torn Societies Project: A Mid-Term Assessment: Progress of Work and Future Directions, 1997: 4).

Many of the reports that came out of the various Working Groups in WSP in Eritrea were also useful in "taking stock of what needed doing and what were basic requirements to begin with, followed in turn by the formulation of relatively large numbers of recommendations." In this regard, research was devoted "not so much to a weighing of the pros and cons of a specific policy issue, but to a broad baseline survey of the main issues and challenges in the field concerned, potentially followed by more specific and sharply focused enquiries at a later stage" (WSP in Eritrea, 1998: 30). One of the most dynamic and instructive reports of WSP in Eritrea was the governance report which "drew wide attention among external as well as internal WSP participants in Eritrea because for the first time it brought together and explained a whole range of recent government initiatives and measures and put them in a broader perspective before a body of external actors...The interest aroused by the report can be largely credited to WSP, since it was the challenge which WSP conveyed and represented that led to the effort to articulate the Eritrean position on a series of governance issues in a comprehensive manner" (WSP in Eritrea, 1998: 34).

Although these examples suggest that research and new knowledge can be useful tools for redefining old problems and generating new perceptions about how to deal with them, there are clear limitations to the research-policy innovation nexus. As indicated in a number of the final country reports, research may be more useful when it serves as a catalyst for policy dialogue than as a source of new ideas and knowledge that inform public policy choices. In Eritrea, for example, the general conclusion appears to have been that there was remarkably little feedback between policy research and policy discussion: "on the one hand it [viz., research] elicited wide and strong interest in the dialogue and it opened up; on the other hand some of the research materials themselves did not necessarily contain much by way of new propositions inviting debate or controversy...In other words, while to some extent Eritrean WSP research was dialogue-driven, the dialogue that ensued was not always research-driven. Discussing and deciding Entry Point research provided a convenient forum for policy discussion, but the research that was subsequently undertaken appears to have had less influence on subsequent discussion" (WSP in Eritrea, 1998: 35). In this particular instance, the research "medium", to paraphrase Marshall McLuhan, was more important than the research "message."

In other social and political contexts, however, the research medium did serve as a critical vehicle for the exchange of information. Again, however, it should be noted that WSP may have been more effective in serving as a clearing house for existing sources of information which empowered local actors than as source of invention for new ideas about public policy. This was the case in Somalia where WSP "helped to level the playing field between national and international actors. Since centres of documentation within Somalia were destroyed, external actors have much better access to information than Somalia, and this gives them an element of authority—and therefore power—over those who lack such knowledge. By sharing information equitably and providing a mechanism for the exchange of acquired knowledge and expertise, WSP can help to encourage dialogue based on shared knowledge of the facts" (WSP in Somalia, 1998: 33).

The above review of WSP in practice confirms that research in the participatory-action research method can be a useful confidence-building tool when it redefines old problems and identifies new courses of action that can become a rallying point for different interests and constituencies. At the same time, however, it would be a mistake to construe the value of research in overly restrictive or narrow terms. The PAR method can help to build trust and develop a shared sense of the problem (or consensus) through the dialogue and discussion of research products. This process has a special value that is independent of the quality and results of the research product. By disseminating existing knowledge and

information, the PAR method empowers local actors by making already existing knowledge available to them.

OPERATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS RELATED TO PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

While recognizing the value of participatory-research methodology as a confidence-building tool, we should also note the importance of operational considerations in the participatory research method. In fact, the success of the PAR method also depends on such considerations as timing, identifying appropriate entry points for engagement, managing relations with local authorities, and skills in mediation and dialogue facilitation by researchers who are not necessarily trained in or familiar with the techniques and methods of conflict resolution and dialogue facilitation. The WSP experience reaffirms the old saw that in any operation, "the devil is in the details." (WSP's operational experiences can be found in its forthcoming report entitled <u>WSP in Practice</u>.)

Timing and Engagement

One of the great challenges in any third party mediation exercise is determining when it is appropriate to intervene in a conflict setting. A second is how best to engage local, and possibly also external, actors in sustained process of dialogue and/or negotiation. The experience of WSP is suggestive in a number of respects concerning some of the challenges to as well as opportunities for entry and engagement in conflict and post-conflict settings.

Firstly, WSP reminds us not to define third party intervention opportunities too narrowly or restrictively either in terms of the conflict cycle or intersocietal negotiation processes. WSP was initiated in Somalia while there was (and continues to be) an ongoing conflict marked by factional strife and sustained patterns of violence and terror in some parts of the country. But by introducing the project into the Northeast region where violence had abated and where opportunities for peacebuilding existed, WSP helped instill a process of information-sharing and communication among local actors. It thereby contributed directly to the reconstruction process. Similarly, in Guatemala, even though a formal peace treaty had been signed and the process of implementation of the formal accords was well underway, the potential for conflict and violence remained high and there was little real social and political consensus about reconstruction aims and goals in society at large. Communication channels and processes among different local actors, especially the

government and the people, were weak-to-non-existent even though the democratization process was mobilizing a large number of different domestic constituencies and interests. To the extent that there were channels for dialogue and participation, there was competition between the government and other actors—with the government trying to dominate with its own agenda in those fora. WSP was able to foster dialogue that was "less ideological" than those led by the government in other fora. "The non-binding and informal character of consensus decisions reached in the WSP forum, as opposed to the binding character of negotiated conclusions reached in the *Encuentros* [*de Actualizasion,* the government forum], greatly contributed to this difference" (WSP in Guatemala, 1998: 29). In this particular context, WSP was able to play a crucial role in creating a forum where a wide range of actors across the social and political spectrum could begin to talk about what national reconstruction priorities should be. It "generated spaces in which civil society organizations normally excluded from discussion could constructively debate public issues; more precisely, WSP created genuine channels of access to public discussion that became useful tools for democratic development" (Ibid).

Secondly, it should also be noted that WSP took a very long time preparing its engagement, that is to say, making connections with key actors (in particular locals), developing various reconnaissance missions, trying to understand the context and judge whether the situation was "ripe" for any WSP-type activities, finding support and developing a consensus among key actors that WSP should become involved. All this took a long time, but was absolutely crucial to WSP's success. In fact, the more that was learned by adding one country project after the other consecutively, the more time it took to develop the next project. In Somalia, for example, it took close to a year prep time before WSP actually started working on the ground.

Thirdly, the WSP experience suggests that the need for certain kinds of communication channels between local authorities and external actors is not identical for every war-torn society. The WSP experience in Mozambique and Eritrea is instructive in this regard. In terms of the need for local interaction with external donors, by the time WSP was introduced in Mozambique, the need for dialogue and the creation of communication channels had essentially passed. This was because although "the international agencies had played a highly visible oversight role in the early years of the Mozambican transition from war to peace, this was far less true by the time WSP became established in the country. By the time WSP arrived in Mozambique at the end of 1995, the international community was consciously seeking a lower profile" (WSP in Mozambique, 1998: 27). Donors were in the process of pulling out or reducing their levels of assistance (humanitarian and otherwise) in

the country, ONUMOZ had departed, and local actors were in the process of assuming greater control over the reconstruction and development process. Even so, this did not obviate the need for dialogue and discussion. Far from it. Where there was a critical need for confidence-building dialogue, however, was between and among different local actors: government and opposition, "core" urban and rural centers, northern and southern regions of the country, and different economic sectors including agrarian, labor and business elements. In particular, there was a real need to discuss pressing macrosocial problems such as the difficulties associated with the implementation of the government's structural adjustment policies or continuing social and economic problems associated with the demobilization of soldiers. Here, WSP filled an important gap by helping to produce research and foment dialogue among different groups within society over national reconstruction goals.

In the case of Eritrea, the timing provided a different opportunity for WSP. Having recently achieved its independence, the Eritrean government agreed upon its national priorities for reconstruction and development. But its priorities and goals were not widely understood nor necessarily shared by external actors. As a result, dialogue was critical to bridging these differences of outlook, helping develop consensus, and ensuring that donors adopted assistance policies that were in better alignment with local efforts. WSP was therefore able to play a crucial role in bringing local and external actors to the table and improving mutual perceptions and relationships between them.

Local Ownership and Control

One of the main objectives of WSP was to ensure that local actors developed a strong sense of ownership (or proprietary rights) over the tools and products of research. This underscored the importance of making the right choices for project directors as well as local personnel in the various research teams. Not only was it seen as important to make local actors feel that the research process and products were fundamentally "theirs," but it was also recognized at the outset that indigenously developed policy recommendations were more likely to be acceptable to local/national authorities if they represented "home grown" as opposed to "imported" or externally mandated solutions. This sense of local ownership was to be strengthened by having government representatives and officials serve as members of the National Project Group, associated advisory bodies, and/or Working Groups.

In a number of important respects this approach helped to reduce some of the barriers to entry for the WSP enterprise as a whole. First, it reduced suspicions among local participants that WSP was yet another external actor intending on pursuing its own agenda and set of

priorities for peacebuilding. Second, the sense of ownership over participatory-based research meant that local authorities were, at least in theory, more predisposed to accept the policy recommendations that emerged from this process than if they had come from outside or from some externally-mandated process. Third, the ongoing involvement of a wide range of local actors throughout the research process—from the initial designation of research "entry points" in the Country Notes through to the deliberations of the various Working Groups—meant that there were potentially fewer "walls" between the research and associated policy environments, and hence a greater likelihood that knowledge and new information would flow in both directions. The removal of some of these barriers through the creation of country teams is a noteworthy innovation in the WSP experience.

Fourthly, it is worth observing that external actors remain keen to participate in fora that emphasize "national ownership" such as WSP not only because these fora represent one of the few channels open to them for receiving any background to government thinking, but perhaps also because very slowly a conceptual shift is occurring and external actors have begun to realize that the best role international assistance can take is indeed a supportive role vis-a-vis nationally owned outfits.

In practice, however, the WSP experience in the four countries underscores the complexities and difficulties of creating a neutral space for dialogue, research, and discussion about national priorities for reconstruction and development in a highly charged political environment in which different actors and interests, including national authorities and government officials, are actively vying for control and trying to appropriate and control such fora in order in order to advance their own goals and interests. On the one hand, it was important for WSP to engage national and/or local authorities in the dialogue process in order to ensure that the various concrete policy recommendations that came out the various Working Groups did not fall on deaf ears. On the other hand, it was obviously a challenge to maintain the neutrality and impartiality of the dialogue process and to ensure that other groups and interests, particularly those in civil society, did not feel excluded or crowded out. The difficulties of managing these competing expectations is underscored in the different final country reports. It is worth quoting from the different country reports at some length because they all illustrate, in varying degrees and contexts, how these conflicting tensions and pressures were managed. Collectively, they underscore the need for establishing strong personal relationships and developing sufficient levels of trust between project managers and directors and public officials that can assuage fears about loss of control, hidden or predetermined agendas, or concerns by officials that the exercise is simply an academic one that is irrelevant to public policy. The reports also underscore the importance of maintaining

the perceived neutrality of the dialogue and research forum even though this may lead to some resistance from local authorities who seek control over the list of participants and research agenda in WSP.

> In the case of Guatemala, it was evident from the onset of the project that the government was to play an important role and that WSP should seek a good level of government participation. Two circumstances favoured this: on the one hand, the new conservative government came to power as a political solution to armed conflict was already underway....Guatemalan society was already in search of dialogue, enquiry and consensus and the government was already a player in this....On the other hand, a personal relationship was established from the beginning of the project among government officials and WSP leaders and this greatly facilitated formal and informal communication. It also reduced the distrust with which governments generally regard such initiatives, representing as they do a twofold uncertainty for governments: a potential platform for political adversaries, and a road to commitments that government is not prepared or is unwilling to undertake. In other words, governments feel reluctant to get involved in collective exercises which may move out of their control (WSP in Guatemala, 1998: 26-27).

> The Eritrean experience raised important questions about national ownership. For WSP to have a chance of longer-term sustainability in the countries concerned, it is vital to recognize the need for national ownership in one form or another. At the final workshop of the Eritrean project in December 1996, Eritrean President Isias Afwerki made a point of raising this. His cautious warning was echoed by the Mozambican Minister responsible for governmental reform in June 1997, who similarly implied that WSP had made an interesting and valuable contribution, but that it should not get involved in determining policy, which was the government's job....On the one hand, with clear national, effectively governmental support, the potential role and impact of WSP is likely to remain marginal, amounting at best to a kind of 'tolerated playground' for external actors. On the other, WSP in each country is nationally 'owned', however, there is some question as to whether it will still be able to provide the space for meaningful dialogue an exploration of policy alternatives that external (and possibly some internal) actors might be interested in. Would national ownership make WSP a less interesting proposition, particularly for external actors? The short answer appears to be that even, or maybe in a political contexts like Eritrea, where a government seems determined to emphasize national ownership, external actors remain keen to participate in a forum such as that offered by WSP. This may be because it represents one of the few channels open to them for receiving any background to government thinking. This gave WSP a prominent and useful role in Eritrea, even though it was not exactly what had been intended at the outset (WSP in Eritrea, 1998: 16).

> In Somalia, the insistence of international actors—diplomats, donors, and aid agencies—on the identification of valid 'interlocutors', has proved not only fruitless, but often destabilizing. In the absence of accepted public institutions, privileged contacts between an external actor and any internal interlocutor are perceived to represent selective

empowerment, and can exacerbate existing rivalry, leading to tension and conflict....While the value of engaging diverse representatives of the community is not in dispute, international actions are often underpinned with conveniently vague references to 'civil society', and frequently turn out to be counterproductive, producing 'gatekeepers' who monopolize and distort external contacts with community....WSP has helped to create a context in which different Somali groups—various factions within the SSDF [Somali Salvation Democratic Front], modernists, and traditionalists, and others—have come together for meaningful discussion of issues of post-conflict reconstruction. In the first Zonal Project Group meeting, for example, a number of Somali participants described WSP as northeastern institution, not an external actor. A senior figure in one of the administrations argued that WSP differed from international programmes because 'the international community thinks that a failed state also means a failed people, and that they have not a duty to help us but a right to think for us.' Although such comments include an element of rhetoric, they also imply that WSP's efforts to develop local ownership of the process have been successful (WSP in Somalia, 1998: 32).

The WSP experience also highlights some of the operational and logistical difficulties of local ownership-based approaches to participatory research and confidence-building. A research based approach obviously depends upon the presence and availability of researchers who are knowledgeable about the issues, trained in the appropriate social science methodology, familiar with WSP methodologies, and comfortable working in the highly charged and politicized setting of the real world. This is a tall order in any setting and the problems of assembling such a team are obviously compounded in the environment of war-torn societies where human research capital is limited (or non-existent) and those in power may be highly suspicious of intellectuals and researchers who may be critical of government policies. Such difficulties are exacerbated by a lack of data, published sources, and time to do in-depth data collection and research. Comments reported and/or summarized in the various country evaluations tend to underscore these and other problems:

'It was the right approach, but in our group we had to limit ourselves to one area of the country and some subject only. Food security is a too wide subject to cover in such a short period. Priorities had to be set' (War-torn Societies Project: Eritrea: Final National Workshop, 1996: 19).

'I think the focus on policy analysis, designed to yield practical ideas for planners and managers, was appropriate in the view of WSP's objectives. It was also an inspired decision to use senior members of the Government as researchers—with the drawbacks of possible analytical bias outweighed by the benefits of promoting greater thinking and discussion on critical issues while fostering ownership of the main outcomes...Nevertheless, the quality of work has been below expectations, not least in its lack of 'vision' in the individual

papers, inadequate analysis, and impractical recommendations' (War-torn Societies Project: Eritrea: Final National Workshop, 1996: 19-20).

The main weakness of the field research was the time factor: presence in the field was often for a short period only, not allowing repeat visits to the same places and multiple and prolonged contacts with the local actors. As a consequence, it was not possible to 'decentralize' the Project, in other words it was not possible to replicate at the local level (provincial and district) the same dynamic of the Working Groups that was used at the central level, and to implant the 'WSP spirit' more firmly in the field (War-torn Societies Project: The Case of Mozambique, 1997: 48).

Relations Between the Sponsoring Agency and the Local Country Team

Another set of operational considerations concern relationships between the sponsoring agency in participatory-action research and the local country team. Each typically has its own set of objectives and concerns. The sponsoring agency will want to ensure that the needs and interests of the various donors who are sponsoring the research are met; that there is financial and budgetary accountability in the way resources are used; that the country research teams meet overall project deadlines; and that participatory-research methodologies and protocols are followed if not to the letter, in spirit. In the process of appropriating the participatory-action research method, the local project director and research team will have to adapt the methodology to the needs and interests of local actors. Timetables and deadlines will have to be adjusted to meet local conditions. As a result, there is a built-in structural tension in the participatory-action research methodology, particularly if the concept of local appropriation and control over the research process is taken seriously and adhered to during project implementation.

Here it might be useful to distinguish between WSP in theory and WSP in practice. Each country research team appropriated and applied the methodology in ways that suited their interests and their particular understandings of the issues and challenges that confronted them. Initially, this was not the intention of the Coordinating Unit in Geneva, which viewed WSP as a scientific methodology which needed to be applied in a consistent manner to ensure comparability across cases. This created a tension between the methodological requirements of consistency and the practical requirements of participation and "buy-in" by national actors. However, it was precisely the appropriation of WSP by national actors which served to mobilize support and focus attention. Overall WSP is characterized as learning by doing: trial and error in the field, and improvisation in Geneva. This was a process which was not always smooth or easy. It also raises the question of whether the

successes of WSP was the result of the methodology itself, or its application, appropriation and manipulation — or some combination of them all. As one WSP participant observed: "There were moments of relative tension between our research team and our colleagues in Geneva. The project required all of us to adapt. It was an apprenticeship, a constant effort to conform to its spirit and methodology, different from classic research and methodology...There were times when the WSP Director contacted me and we spoke on the phone for hours on end, each of us with different points of view about the process. But we always arrived at a consensus" (WSP in Mozambique, 1998: 32).

The WSP experience underscores these tensions. However, many of teething problems that were experienced in the early phases of the project in Mozambique were resolved in subsequent projects as the need to grant greater levels of autonomy to local staff in project adaptation and implementation was realized. There was a clear learning curve as the project moved through successive phases in the different countries.

It is also important to note that the success of the enterprise in each country required that the groundwork and framework for dialogue be carefully prepared by the advance WSP team. Nowhere is this more evident than in the case of Somalia where it was clear from the outset that the WSP country project model would have to be carefully adapted and refined to local conditions. There was an extensive consultation process during which it became increasingly evident that WSP activities would have to begin at the sub-national level rather than a country-wide level and that the most propitious areas for the project were in the Northeast regions of Bari, Nugal, and Mudug. Key visits by the WSP Director and the future Somalia Coordinator, Matt Bryden, to the region laid the groundwork for WSP activities as did the fact that the situation on the ground was ripe for a WSP intervention. The fact the mission was well received was clearly no accident: "Advance information about the mission and its terms of reference had been conveyed through a number of channels (notably through the Somali Red Crescent Society). The mission [also] coincided with a period of intense activity by the leadership in the northeast to emerge from isolation and improve relations with the international aid community" (WSP in Somalia, 1998: 19).

Mediation and Facilitation Skills

On more than one occasion, WSP project personnel or researchers found themselves having to mediate or serve as go-between actors and interests who were engaged in the participatory research exercise but found themselves in conflict with one another. In fact, some participants saw the strength of the exercise in WSP's potential to "mediate" among key

social and political actors through the PAR process. According to Dr. Brazoa Mazula, WSP Project Director in Mozambique, "The strength of WSP lies in its capacity and demand for the mediation of conflict. During the research in the provinces, we tried to bring together actors from political parties, religious figures of various persuasions, economic agents and representatives of government authorities, national and foreign actors, members of the Working Groups and the researchers working on the respective Entry Points. We were trying to create a space for mutual understanding, to put people into active communication with one another, allowing each of them to present their views so that they could all see the similarities and differences of policies and strategies on the same problems and, based on this, build agreement in the form of a general or specific recommendation for the next phase of the research" (WSP in Mozambique, 1998: 31-32).

In some instances, however, the researchers themselves shied away from their dialogue and facilitation roles because they felt unqualified or unsuited to such tasks. Some even felt that training in conflict resolution methods and interpersonal group dynamics might have made their jobs easier. For example, at the country team workshop in Addis Ababa, a number of related lessons were noted: "[t]here should have been a more consensual approach to the Project Group. A second lesson would have been more training in group dynamics, not only for the researchers. There is a lot of experience around the world about conflict resolution, inter-action, listening techniques. Someone could have come and trained us in these techniques" (Aide-Memoire: WSP Country Team Workshop, Addis Ababa, 1998: 31).

Likewise in the report on *WSP in Guatemala,* it was observed that "the [PAR] method demands skills from researchers that are not usually associated with a researcher's tasks. The researcher has to be at the same time the group animator and therefore familiar with animator techniques. In this sense, the researcher had to share a leadership role with project directors. There was resistance among researchers who did not see their position as being akin to 'social workers', or who resisted the idea of the Working Group seeing the researcher as being at their service and not the contrary" (WSP in Guatemala, 1998: 32).

In its design, WSP did not include an explicit recognition of the importance of mediation and facilitation skills for its project staff; nor did it systematically introduce such training as part of project implementation. However, the four country experiences were instrumental in bringing into sharp relief the potential value of incorporating such skills into the WSP methodology.

IV. COMPARING WSP WITH INTERACTIVE CONFLICT RESOLUTION (ICR) METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

The previous discussion sought to highlight those dimensions of WSP (both in theory and practice) that explicitly or implicitly contributed to conflict management and conflict mediation in four different country contexts. We argued that, even though it was not originally designed as a conflict managed tool, WSP has, to varying degrees, served that function quite well. It is, therefore, useful to undertake a more systematic comparison of WSP with other tools for conflict mediation and conflict resolution.

There are a wide variety of strategies and approaches to conflict management and resolution (Crocker et.al., 1996). However, it should be noted at the outset that most are not directly relevant to the WSP experience because they employ mediation-based strategies which typically involve external actors in a highly politicized and intrusive process of formal negotiation and dispute settlement. Mediation-based activities are premised on the belief that through the use of persuasion, incentives, and disincentives, parties to a conflict can be led to and through a political process of dialogue leading to a negotiated settlement. Mediation, therefore, involves more than just assisting highly-motivated parties in reaching a solution to their disputes (Bercovitch, 1996; Mitchell and Webb, 1988; Princen, 1992). It may also require the use of various site payments and/or penalties and sanctions to get the parties to the dispute to change their cost/benefit calculations about the utility of a negotiated settlement (Touval 1996a; Touval 1996b).

Although such formal and intrusive approaches to conflict management may be appropriate to certain situations such as that of ongoing conflict, they are obviously less relevant to the peacebuilding stage where the tasks of rebuilding the are essentially a "development challenge" (Matthias Stiefel, "Rebuilding After War: A Summary Report of the War-torn Societies Project, 1998: 15) and not a negotiation one. However, the issue of reconciliation continues to remain an important one as most postwar societies continue to remain "unstable, politically volatile, and politicized to the extreme" (Ibid).

Given the post conflict contexts for which WSP was designed, we have chosen to compare WSP with interactive conflict resolution (ICR) which is closer in intent to WSP than the more formal approaches to conflict management and resolution.

THE ICR MODEL: THIRD PARTY CONFLICT RESOLUTION, FACILITATION AND MEDIATION

ICR is not about mediation per se; rather, it facilitates the development and formulation of strategies of communication and exchange among parties to a conflict–and other influential members of society–to change rival perceptions and attitudes, ultimately yielding to join solutions to the conflict problem. As we argue below, the ICR approach shares some of the same assumptions of the WSP model of participatory action research, thus further underscoring the utility of such a comparison. Focusing on the problems of reconciliation and the role various neutral third parties can play in initiating and advancing intercommunal reconciliation processes at the local, national, or elite levels, ICR is of direct relevance to the WSP experience and vice versa. Furthermore, given the widespread involvement of NGOs and other conflict resolution practitioners in intercommunal conflict resolution and training in protracted conflict settings (Zartman and Rasmussen, 1997), a preliminary comparison of the WSP experience to ICR is most timely and warranted. Like WSP, these approaches speak to the attitudinal and cognitive challenges of peacebuilding, including the development of indigenous capacities for or among key stakeholders for dealing with their conflicts (Stein, 1996: 103).

The ICR model seeks to provide a forum or neutral space within which parties can explore options and develop solutions to their conflicts, often outside of the highly charged arena of a formal negotiating structure. Under this paradigm, lasting peace is built collaboratively on an agreement forged through dialogue and a systematic pattern of exchanges and contacts between and among official parties or other influential representatives. Often, the key to success in this process is the involvement of participants beyond the principal political authorities. It often involves a much wider group of civil and opinion leaders whose support is essential for the long-term sustainability of the peace process. In contrast to formal-based mediation, ICR does not attempt to impose a settlement on the parties. Rather, third parties attempt to influence the surrounding environment in order to cultivate a situation that is conducive to fostering dialogue that will reduce tensions and lead to negotiated solutions.

Because much of human conflict is anchored in conflicting perceptions and in misperception, the contribution of third parties lies in changing the perceptions, attitudes, values, and behaviours of the parties to a conflict (Kriesberg 1997; Kriesberg 1992). This process begins with interventions that allow conflicting parties to glean a better understanding of the different dimensions of the conflict and works to develop means to allow them to recognize mutual gains and craft joint strategies towards a solution.

ICR therefore can be initiated at any of the following points in the negotiation process and related conflict cycle:

- low levels of violence where attitudes and perceptions have yet to harden and parties are not willing to escalate the stakes by inviting in high-level mediators to resolve their differences;

- moderate and escalating levels of violence where a prenegotiation process of continuing workshops helps the parties examine the barriers to negotiation, cultivate a relationship, and establish conditions that are conducive to more formal negotiations without accepting the high political risks and costs of formal negotiations; and

- declining levels of violence that follow a negotiated settlement, i.e., the peacebuilding phase of a conflict where workshop interactions among different communal groups and sectors of society (elites, middle-range officials, etc.) can help to further de-escalate tensions and reestablish relations at different levels of society among previously warring parties (Fisher 1997; Crocker et al., 1996).

Attitudinal change can be fostered through various ICR techniques, including special problem-solving workshops, training in conflict resolution, and/or various kinds of third party assistance in developing and designing dispute resolution systems which are compatible with local culture and norms and are directed at elites at different levels of society (top, middle-range, and grassroots levels).

ICR practitioners believe that the most effective method for breaking down psychological barriers is a problem-solving workshop which is viewed to be a more diagnostic and "neutral" approach to examining the sources of conflict (Kelman 1997; Kelman 1996). Problem-solving workshops are organized by a scholar-practitioner in an explicit attempt to alter the dynamics of interaction among conflicting parties. Problem-solving seeks to facilitate and develop the channels and process of communication so as to enable the parties to see their respective interests and intentions more clearly, and to increase their awareness of their own reactions to the conflict. Through the cultivation of mutual respect and objectivity the parties learn to develop a shared commitment to cooperative exchanges in their relationship. Based on findings which show that individuals are more disposed to cooperative behaviour in small, informal, intergroup activities, the problem-solving workshop contributes to conflict de-escalation by building relations among significant players who may be in a position to influence the parties to the conflict. The approach seems

to work best if individuals are middle-range elites with access to those in power, such as academics, advisers, ex-officials, or retired politicians. These workshops help to undermine "we-they" images of conflict in a variety of ways. They help to: establish communications between parties at the sub-elite level; establish linkages among influentials; begin discussions of framework solutions; identify steps that will break the impasse; and in general, create an understanding of these steps and processes that the participants can feed back into the process when actual decisions get made.

Third party-assisted dialogue can also be undertaken by official and non-governmental structures in a pre-mediation context. This activity is directed at groups who are in a hostile or adversarial relationship (Wehr and Lederach 1991). Referred to as "circum-negotiation," this dialogue occurs at a quasi-official level either prior to and around the formal peace process, or in the immediate post-conflict setting once a formal peace agreement has been reached between or among the parties to the conflict (Saunders 1996). As Kriesberg notes, much of this activity is directed at developing "constituency support for peace efforts" (Kriesberg 1996: 228).

The practice of ICR is not confined to the non-governmental sector. It has also informed mediation efforts by a number of regional organizations. Often lacking the resources or the capacities which are at the disposal of states or UN agencies, regional organizations have used consultation, problem-solving, dialogue, and a kind of moral example to shift perceptions and change attitudes among conflict parties. A prime example of the use of this approach is found in the conflict prevention work of the OSCE's High Commission on National Minorities (see Chigas et. al., 1996).

In general, ICR approaches are directed at finding ways of:

- establishing communication channels between different groups in society

- initiating discussions of framework solutions to problems of mutual concern

- identifying steps for breaking impasses

- developing new norms, and

- creating an understanding of the kinds of decision-making processes that can lead parties out of conflict.

In these kinds of activities, third parties are supposed to play a neutral and essentially facilitating role, enabling and encouraging a mutual learning process rather than guiding or, still less, influencing and directing the parties to mutually acceptable approaches to problem-solving. This kind of facilitation role is best played by private scholar-practitioners and nongovernmental organizations because they enjoy expert and reputational authority which is critical for societal interventions of this kind.

Whereas formal mediation is highly intrusive and relies on third parties who can wield or provide "reward power," (positive side-payments intended to induce behaviour change), or "coercive power," (negative threats and sanctions intended to induce behaviour change), ICR of the problem-solving or circum-negotiation variety is typically less intrusive and more dependent on the following kinds of resources:

- "Expert power" which is based on the mediator's knowledge and experience with certain issues;

- "Legitimate power" which is based on certain rights and/or sanctioned authority;

- "Referent power" which is based on the relationship between the influences and the recipient and a relationship that is valued; and

- "Informational power" which works on the content of the information that is conveyed to the parties (Bercovitch and Rubin, 1992).

KEY POINTS OF COMPARISON BETWEEN WSP AND ICR

In light of the above discussion of the main features of ICR, it becomes possible to compare WSP and ICR in terms of their objectives, methodology, target groups, third party roles and functions, and situational elements.

Objectives

ICR and WSP tend to share similar general objectives insofar as both approaches are interested in improving attitudes and relationships among different sectors of society and government. But whereas conflict resolution is a primary goal of ICR, it is only a derivative or secondary goal of WSP. The key objectives of WSP are to assist international donors and local authorities with the tasks of social, economic, and political reconstruction in war-torn

societies by providing a framework for research and new thinking on major policy issues affecting the society as a whole as well as a forum for the exchange of information and experience. Such an integrative approach can help generate a new consensus about policies and priorities, thereby assisting with the tasks of peacebuilding and social and economic reconstruction and reducing the potential for conflict among key institutional actors.

Methodology

ICR methodologies of consultation and dialogue vary considerably in terms of their influence strategies, target audiences and modalities of implementation. The problem-solving workshop typically involves intensive meetings between politically involved but unofficial representatives of conflicting parties, including parliamentarians, leading figures in political parties or movements, journalists, and senior academics who may have served in an official government capacity at some point in their career. The number of participants in such workshops is usually quite small (10-20) and obviously recruitment is essential to ensuring that there is a balance between key groups and that the individuals selected to participate in these workshops are seen as being evenhanded, trustworthy, and respected by their own constituencies. Workshops are usually conducted in a neutral setting, such as a university, and will consist of preliminary sessions followed by joint discussions that take place over a period of several days. Discussions are confidential and private without any formal record being kept of the proceedings. As described by Kelman,

> These and other features of the workshop are designed to enable and encourage workshop participants to engage in a type of communication that is usually not available to parties involved in an intense conflict relationship. The third party creates an atmosphere, establishes norms, and makes occasional interventions...they are asked to engage in a process of joint problem-solving, designed to generate ideas for 'getting from here to there.' A central feature of this process is the identification of steps of mutual reassurance—in the form of acknowledgments, symbolic gestures, or confidence-building measures—that would help reduce the parties' fear of entering into negotiations when the outcome is uncertain and risky. Problem-solving workshops also contribute to mutual reassurance by helping the parties to develop—again, through collaborative effort—a non-threatening de-escalatory language and a shared vision of a desirable future (Kelman 1996: 507).

Like the problem-solving workshop, circum-negotiation tries to engage citizens who are outside of government is a process of public dialogue that parallels the official, policymaking negotiation process (Saunders 1996). The third party facilitator initiates the process by identifying a dialogue group of approximately 12-15 members who reflect different sectors of society and are respected by their local communities. When these citizens are brought together, they are asked to draw a notional map of what they see as being the main problems affecting their relationships and what factors or elements that would be required to change them. As explained by Saunders, "The group has a dual agenda: Concrete problems are the starting point, but the purpose is always to probe the dynamics of the relationships that underlie them" (Saunders 1996: 428). This probing stage is followed a more in-depth discussion of the main issues and how conditions can be created or changed to move relationships to a more cooperative footing. The final stage involves the identification of those initiatives that can be taken by citizen groups in the political arena to change conflictual relationships and initiate a more based process of intercommunal dialogue and interaction. As such, circum-negotiation is directed at marshaling the resources of civil society in peacebuilding efforts.

In contrast to the above methodologies, WSP methodology is a research-based and driven process wherein local policy elites and authorities are engaged in a process of dialogue and discussion through the vehicles of research, policy advice, networking, and evaluation and dissemination. The core research activity is a multi disciplinary venture that brings together national, regional, and international research actors in a joint exercise of collective analysis on rebuilding issues and priorities. The initial vehicle for analysis and discussion is the preparation of the Country Note which identifies some of the key peacebuilding and reconstruction entry points in an integrated assessment of national priorities. This phase is followed by more detailed research and analysis of the key policy problems or sectors identified in the Country Note through working groups which meet regularly and collectively analyse the specific policy and rebuilding tasks of a given policy sector or issue. The close association between research and policy sectors in the working groups, which are comprised of members from both sectors, thus ensures that research remains policy relevant and analysis is translated into operationally relevant language and advice.

Within the WSP methodology, interactive research results and policy findings are disseminated not only through the publication of reports but through direct contact and exchange in various workshops organized at both the country and international levels. These workshops are intended to provide a catalytic role in policy translating recommendations

into action and also an opportunity for participants to discuss, reach a better understanding of the issues at stake, and draw conclusions.

The core activity of WSP is research which is driven by an experimental methodology which has three interrelated goals:

- it is multi disciplinary and integrates relevant disciplines from the social science (economic, sociology, political science, etc.

- it brings together researchers from different constituencies in the national setting; and

- it establishes a bridge between the academic/research and policy communities through a exercise of "joint collective analysis of ongoing processes and emerging policy, with the aim of achieving an optimal interaction between theory, analysis, and practice" by using techniques of applied participatory-action research (Rebuilding War-torn Societies: An Action-Research Project on Problems of International Assistance in Post-Conflict Situations, 1995: 16).

Entry Points

As noted above, ICR methods and techniques have been carried out at virtually all of the different phases of conflict cycle: prior to the onset of major conflict, during the escalation phases, the "peaking out" phase (i.e., where no further escalation of the conflict is possible), and in the de escalatory or postconflict phases. However, the ICR methodology is generally oriented at prenegotiation, that is to say, establishing a basis for dialogue and discussion where there is none. For example, although there may be a formal peace settlement which has been signed by elites, there may still be a strong requirement for prenegotiation among different communal groupings because feelings of animosity still run high and threaten the more general peace process.

It is arguably the case that ICR initiatives are more likely to be useful in those instances where parties refuse to formally recognize each other and where the risks of formal negotiation are deemed to be too high Similarly, in those situations where parties fear that more formal mediated interventions by state or other international actors will unnecessarily raise the stakes in a conflict or be viewed as overly intrusive, ICR initiatives carried out by the scholar-practitioner or various nongovernmental interlocutors may be more attractive to local actors. However, once the parties have recognized each other and communications

have been established at different levels in society, the need for such *interlocuteurs valables* diminishes.

As a pilot project, WSP was carried out in countries that were at different stages of what might be called the post-conflict-to-peace continuum, since —with the exception of Somalia— there were formal mechanisms in place demarcating the formal end the period of violent conflict (cease-fires and formal peace agreements or newly constituted political authorities). Although WSP contains various pre-negotiation elements by initiating research and dialogue on issues that are on the national agenda, it is not tied into a formal negotiation process among national authorities and/or official donors.

It is significant that WSP was launched in "post-conflict," rather than in-conflict, settings because the objectives of interventions in each phase are different. Mediation during conflicts focuses on the definition of those terms and conditions that are acceptable to the principal combatants and able to induce them to lay down their arms. However, in post-conflict settings the focus is on the development of strategies and interventions to promote those institutional arrangements that can (1) facilitate and sustain the transition from violent conflict to sustainable development and (2) build "fire walls" to inhibit normal societal conflict from spiraling back into violence. Or, put another way, in-conflict mediation focuses on the deconstruction of the structures of violence and war, while post-conflict mediation focuses on the construction (and consolidation) of the structures of peace and development.

Target Groups

WSP is targeted at a wide range of actors, including national and international authorities at a variety of levels, and seeks to them in a process of constructive dialogue through the research mechanism in order to advance the peacebuilding process and the process of national reconstruction in the aftermath of conflict. It engages key actors in a dialogue about national priorities in the areas of social, economic, and political reconstruction thereby potentially advancing the process of national reconciliation.

In contrast, ICR is targeted at non-official or sub-official elites at the national and/or community levels who are able to influence more formal negotiation processes because of their positions of influence and trust in civil society. Its methods of dialogue and engagement are limited and indirect, as opposed to direct and quasi-official as in the case of WSP.

Third Party Roles and Functions

Within ICR, the function of the third party "facilitator" is to induce positive motivation, to improve communications, and to diagnose the conflict. The facilitator is responsible for creating a neutral forum that will regulate the interaction between/among the parties in order to ensure that these functions are carried out properly. As noted by Fisher, the functions include: "(a) inducing mutual positive motivation for problem solving, (b) improving the openness and accuracy of communication, (c) diagnosing the issues and processes of the conflict, and (d) regulating the interaction through the sequence of joint problem solving" (Fisher 1997).

In WSP, there is no formal third party. Neither WSP Geneva nor WSP country project teams view their role as "third parties." Yet, WSP does perform certain "third party" functions when it seeks to promote communications and raise the positive motivation levels of different interests to work together through the project team and various working groups. These functions are carried out not by a diagnosis of the sources of conflict but rather through the vehicle of policy-oriented research that is forward looking and directed at analysing specific problems in the post-conflict environment which are a source of widespread concern to participants as a whole. Like ICR, however, there is a problem-solving orientation to the research and the diagnostic process is carried out jointly by teams of researchers and policymakers. Like ICR, this process is highly participatory and dynamic as actors are engaged in an ongoing and sustained process of assessment, analysis, and interactive dialogue.

In ICR, the third party facilitator is the skilled and impartial consultant who is normally an unofficial external actor (e.g., the scholar-practitioner) and expert in ICR process management who may also be quite knowledgeable about history of the conflict in the country or region that is the target of his/her efforts. In contrast, in WSP there is no "formal" third party per se. Although the CCU in Geneva serves as the overall sponsoring and coordinating agency and is responsible for recruiting the local project director and overall logistics (including funding, budgetary control and administrative support), ultimately responsibility for the actual management and implementation of the project rests in local hands under the authority of a project director who is a well respected, national figure and enjoys access to key officials and policy elites. Although Project Group and Working Group participants are local nationals and internationals, through the WSP mechanism they are able to stand outside of existing formal institutional structures.

Like ICR, WSP relies upon similar kinds of resources—expertise and information—and a legitimacy derived from key relationships between WSP project managers and local authorities. However, WSP is more active than a simple go-between or message carrier because it is involved in generating new knowledge and information on major policy issues, while simultaneously serving as the conduit or channel for introducing the results or findings of participatory research and information into policy circles. Thus WSP is to some extent interventionist in orientation and design, but the so-called "interveners" are local as opposed to external actors even though their sources of political leverage and influence lie in similar kinds of resources that are available to the ICR problem-solver.

Another important feature of WSP that helped to amplify its influenced and gain access to appropriate governmental and non-governmental channels was the imprimatur of the United Nations through its association with UNRISD. This too is a "resource" in that it imbued the project with a degree of legitimacy as well as a profile and perceived possibility of follow-on funding whether through participating UN agencies or supporting bilateral actors. Although it must be said that this was also a potential liability as in the case of Somalia where the UN was not popular.

Like ICR, WSP strives to create a neutral space for participants to freely exchange views and information as they assess research and policy priorities and delve into problems of mutual concern. In WSP, conflicts of interest and/or perceptions may be redefined through the research mechanism as a shared understanding of the problem emerges through the gathering and analysis of data. In both WSP and ICR the "third party" role is essentially facilitative and diagnostic. Tactics and procedures of consultation and engagement of participants are designed to foster trust and build respectful and empathetic relationships that will contribute to the general goals of peacebuilding and social reconstruction. The methods and strategies of consultation, as noted above, however, differ substantially.

As discussed above, ICR activities are typically carried out through small group discussions in a preferred neutral and informal setting (e.g., the university). Small size is also a feature of circum-negotiation which tends to be *in-situ* rather than removed from the arena of conflict. By limiting numbers, there is a greater likelihood that participants will get to know each other and develop personal relationships that allow them to engage in more frank and open discussions.

In WSP, working groups in the project teams in different countries were typically quite small in number and usually comprised 15-20 people. There was never an imposed pre-selection

of participants. Thus, as the work of the working groups progressed and various contacts were made, other national and international actors became involved. The research process therefore is open with no predetermined limits being set on membership and participation.

In summation, the most striking differences between WSP and ICR are as follows:

• WSP is closer in design and implementation to multi-stakeholder negotiation processes than to mediation per se, although third parties such as the scholar-practitioner who get involved in problem-solving ICR typically sees him or herself as more of a facilitator and convener than a formal negotiator.

• WSP does not analyze the actual or potential sources of conflict, nor does it seek to "manage" conflict. Rather, it is forward looking and goal-directed, aimed at identifying modalities and means for cooperation on a range of concrete, macro-policy problems of shared concern to society. ICR analyzes conflict sources through the lens of the social science tools provided by the scholar-practitioner facilitator. Its goals are somewhat narrower insofar as it seeks to identify confidence-building measures that will change perceptions in order to promote dialogue and communication at the official and intercommunal levels.

• WSP is, in essence, "action-research" wherein the social scientist collaborates with participants to collect data on a problem, develops interventions or "solutions" to deal with the problem, and evaluates the quality of the intervention and its effectiveness through further data collection. ICR is essentially "facilitation-dialogue" directed at establishing prenegotiation in a variety of pre-, ongoing, and post-conflict settings.

• WSP is country-based and directed by the local stakeholders rather than externally-based or directed from outside. This gives the exercise a different kind of political visibility and legitimacy from much ICR activity which is typically led by "disinterested" external third parties such as the scholar-practitioner or NGO.

Yet, the WSP methodology and experience with project implementation share important features with ICR. In both approaches the external sponsoring agent provides the resources, methodology, and administrative support and logistics that are critical to the undertaking. There is also an important element of political legitimacy that comes with international organizational and donor support for WSP and ICR respectively. It is a legitimacy that lies in the reputational and expert authority of the intervening implementors and one that is

backed by their ability to gather and provide resources to local participants. This kind of legitimacy would be difficult, if not impossible, for local actors to acquire on their own.

Moreover, ICR and WSP both seek to create a neutral space for dialogue and discussion among local and possibly also external actors whose prior relationships may be conflictual (or non-existent) albeit with a major difference: Whereas ICR initiates dialogue via a methodology that is centered on diagnosing the sources of conflict between different actors, WSP uses participatory-action research as the main vehicle for addressing concrete macropolicy problems in the milieu of war-torn societies. Nonetheless, the WSP experience clearly demonstrates the possibilities of using participatory-action research as a robust confidence-building measure to engage a wide range of local and international actors in a mutually beneficial discussion about the challenges of social, economic, and political reconstruction.

V. CONCLUSION

Although the WSP was originally conceived as a participatory action research project to be implemented at the macrosocietal and policy making level, in practice, WSP was very much more. As the project evolved, it developed into an important dialogue and facilitation mechanism which helped to examine and diagnose key sources of conflict among key external, governmental, and societal actors engaged in the processes of peacebuilding and postconflict reconstruction. As we have argued in this paper, the WSP experience in improvising and adapting participatory action research methods in the war-torn society context speaks to a much larger audience of practitioners and scholars interested in understanding the contemporary challenges of peacebuilding. One the one hand, the WSP experience underscores the very real divisions and conflicts that continue to plague societies well into the "peacebuilding" phase of their social, economic, and political development long after a set of formal peace agreements has been signed. On the other hand, the successful adoption and adaptation of participatory action research methodology in the four countries that were the subjects of the WSP experiment suggests that the level of tension and hostility that exist between government authorities and a wide range of external and internal actors can, to some extent, be reduced through dialogue and research facilitation mechanisms—provided that the creation and nurturing of such mechanisms are sensitive to the needs of local actors and to local social and political conditions. In our attempt to situate what is admittedly a unique project implemented under very different circumstances in four

countries that stand at different points on the conflict-peacebuilding continuum, we find compelling lessons in the WSP experience for practitioners and students of conflict management and resolution. In fact, the comparison undertaken in this paper indicates that there is considerable room for cross-fertilization between ICR and WSP methods and approaches.

The first and perhaps somewhat obvious point is that ICR and WSP methodologies are to some extent complementary. One observation that was made repeatedly by WSP in-country researchers was that they all too often found themselves having to serve as facilitators in the various dialogues with took place under WSP auspices. Many, though obviously not all, researchers felt that they would have benefitted from a better understanding of dialogue facilitation and conflict resolution methods and techniques, particularly since coming from a more academic or research-based background they were not as comfortable as they might have been dealing with the various conflicts that arose among different individuals and groups in the participatory action research setting. In future projects of this kind, it might well be appropriate to expose members of local research teams to some kind of preliminary training program in conflict resolution so that they are better equipped to handle interpersonal or intergroup conflicts when they arise, or, alternatively, to ensure that local teams include someone who has professional training and/or experience in conflict resolution.

A second, interrelated observation is that the successful application and implementation of participatory action research methods in the war-torn setting under WSP suggests that the now rather large community of practitioners engaged in conflict resolution training and programming in war-torn societies might well look to participatory action research methods as an important complement to their activities and work on the ground. This is not to suggest that the WSP experience is easily transferable to other postconflict environments and settings, or that such methods can or should be adopted by those engaged in conflict resolution training and facilitation. However, the value and utility of research as a dialogue facilitation and confidence-building tool is clearly demonstrated by the WSP experience. As we have argued in this paper, there is also a modest degree of overlap in methodological orientation and goals between WSP and ICR. This alone suggests that there is need for greater dialogue and collaboration between those engaged in participatory action research and those practitioners involved in conflict management and resolution.

In a more general sense, the WSP experience speaks to some of the broader concerns and interests of the conflict management and resolution community of practitioners and scholars.

As the implementation of WSP in a wide variety of settings and circumstances suggests, the potential number of entry points in a conflict should not be construed too narrowly. There are many problems that external actors, working together with local actors and authorities, can work on to strengthen peacebuilding, but this requires a careful process of communication and assessment. Furthermore, successful participatory-action interventions can occur in various pre, ongoing, and post-conflict environments, as demonstrated in the four WSP projects which were implemented in widely varying local conditions, provided that there is enough political space and willingness by the various actors to come around the table and engage in collective research. Flexibility is obviously a key requirement in the use of any methodology for confidence-building purposes whether of the participatory-action research or conflict management/resolution variety. Any methodology has to be adapted and configured to local conditions with the full participation of local actors.

WSP underscores the real need for the availability of a genuinely neutral fora for dialogue and communication in war-torn societies. The strength of the WSP methodology lay in its capacity to create a neutral space that brought together different actors from government, political parties, NGOs, civil society, and donors who were put into active communication with each other, and thus were able to acquire a better strategic understanding of the same set of problems and points of similarity as well as different understanding that surrounded them. The neutrality of the WSP process gave it legitimacy and also affected the way the groups behaved.

The involvement of different local actors in the participatory action research process is critical to fostering a spirit of local ownership and inclusiveness. It is central to identify and energize social forces which can make a difference and to engage them in participatory action research. But because different local actors may have different policy objectives and may seek to try to control the process of dialogue and research, it is essential to develop trust while not compromising the neutrality and participatory nature of the fora for discussion and research that have been created. Discussion was facilitated precisely because WSP did not try to intervene directly in the political or policy process. Ironically, the more space that was created by WSP, and the more it became legitimate and was seen so by local actors, the more other actors tried to occupy that space. Managing and maintaining neutrality throughout the WSP process was critical to the success of the enterprise.

Advertising the local ownership aspects of the dialogue activity helps to reduce some of the major barriers to entry for the third party which is providing the resources for the research and dialogue. Local ownership, however, means different things to different actors.

Governmental authorities must have a clear sense that they are participants in the process. They must be reassured that research and dialogue are not going to undermine their own political authority. At the same time, they cannot be allowed to crowd out other actors or to control the agenda. They will be convinced about the value of the process if the process serves as a " listening post". The process will be successful if the parties come to see each other less as adversaries than as partners engaged in a common enterprise of social, economic, and political reconstruction.

The WSP experience strongly suggests that the successful facilitator is a self-effacing actor who is eventually replaced by the collective identity of the parties themselves. The potential of engaging in a collective exercise that was facilitated by a "neutral" actor was the reason why the various local actors decided to participate in WSP. However, their sustained and continuing involvement in WSP was very much a function of their own sense that WSP belonged to them; they recognized that WSP was both a forum and instrument of their own making.

Finally, the future oriented and forward-looking approach taken by WSP was obviously an important key to its success in dialogue and facilitation. By researching problems and to some extent redefining them, the WSP showed how conflicts can be redefined in important and significant ways through the participatory action research method. As practitioners and students of conflict management all too well know, one of the central challenges in any peace building venture is to get the parties to look forward, not backwards, in order to begin to redefine their relationships with each other. This is often easier said than done. But the WSP experience proves that under the right set of circumstances and conditions this can be achieved.

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