The Peacebuilding Evaluation Consortium
The Network for Peacebuilding Evaluation
Thursday Talks

“Evaluating Economic Development & Interfaith Peacebuilding in Conflict-Affected Communities”
Lisa Inks, Mercy Corps
Moderated by Melanie Kawano-Chiu, Alliance for Peacebuilding

Part 1: Overview

Building on Carlisle Levine’s discussion, “Seeking Evidence of Causal Linkages: Alternative Approaches”, Lisa Inks will discuss how Mercy Corps Nigeria is conducting a comparative study of three types of conflict-affected communities in order to identify the effects of their programs. Lisa will discuss how Mercy Corps set up the comparative design, the types of data it’s collecting, the challenges they have faced, and what they hope to learn from the process. She will specifically address the challenge of selecting comparison sites, and the ways in which they are using econometric analysis to determine the different outcomes of different activities.

Lisa Inks is currently Program Manager for Mercy Corps conflict management portfolio in Nigeria, including the Community-Based Conflict Management and Cooperative Use of Resources (CONCUR) program, funded by the UK Department for International Development, and the Inter-Religious Peacebuilding in Northern Nigeria program, funded by the GHR Foundation. Lisa leads strategy and implementation of conflict management programming, and oversees research efforts to add to the evidence base of what works in conflict management, specifically around integrated peacebuilding and economic development. Prior to that, she was Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Advisor for MC’s Nigeria conflict programs.

The Peacebuilding Programs:

• Conciliation in Nigeria through Community-Based Conflict Management and Cooperative Use of Resources (CONCUR): A 3-year project funded by DFID

• Inter-Religious Peacebuilding in Northern Nigeria (IPNN): Complementary program funded by GHR Foundation

• Both programs aim to reduce violent pastoralist/farmer conflict with an emphasis on conflicts that cross religious lines and negatively impact local livelihoods and economic growth. These programs are at work in 4 states in The Middle Belt of central Nigeria.

The Intended Outcomes from these Programs are:

• Increased capacity of local leaders to resolve community conflicts in an inclusive, sustainable manner;

• Increased cooperation across conflict lines around economic activity and natural resources
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- Increased support of long-term policy solutions among local and national leaders through business-led research and advocacy.

- Increase economic cooperation and to research and disseminate info on the economic cost of conflict

**Inter-religious Peacebuilding in Northern Nigeria (IPNN)**

- Three-year project complementary to CONCUR, funded by the GHR Foundation

- Focused on 4 “sites” (conflict systems) in Plateau state, where we implement the basic CONCUR model but with additional, interfaith activities

**Objectives:**

- Strengthen the capacity of local religious leaders to promote peace and to resolve community conflicts in an inclusive, sustainable manner.

- Evaluate the impact of faith-based interventions on peacebuilding outcomes in Northern Nigeria.

**Theories of Change: CONCUR and IPNN**

- If Nigerians work together across lines of division to resolve community conflicts, then they will negotiate agreements that are legitimate and sustainable.

- If Nigerians address the underlying drivers of community conflict, then conflict will decline and dispute resolution will be more sustainable

- If Nigerian leaders understand the economic costs of conflict, then they will be less likely to support violence and more likely to promote peace.

- If religious leaders build interfaith coalitions while resolving disputes and addressing economic drivers of conflict, then community members will increase their tolerance of religious difference, and dispute resolution will be more sustainable.

**The essential questions are:** Does the addition of interfaith initiatives to economic initiatives bring about more peace than economic intervention alone? How effective are religious leaders in resolving community disputes in Nigeria, compared with other types of leaders? What conditions allow interfaith activities to affect peacebuilding outcomes?

**Why a Comparative Study?**

- (Lots of) Questions:
  - Will implementing different peacebuilding activities yield different results in the same conflict context? How do we test specific parts of our theories of change? To what degree do our understanding of drivers of conflict and our theory of change need to align?

- (Some) Challenges:
  - No budget or interest for RCTs (Randomized Controlled Trials) (not appropriate); We want more than anecdotes, want to start isolating variables
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- (Imperfect) Solution:
  - Mixed methods study drawing on diverse approaches

Site Selection; this is where it gets interesting and sticky

- There are three groups of sites (CONCUR, IPNN, and non-intervention), comparison are made across groups, but sites are matched one-to-one
- Hard/objective and soft/subjective criteria
  - Demographics, Levels/Frequency of Violence, Religious/Ethnic Composition and Proximity of Groups, Activity of Leaders, Presence of Shared Resources, Causes of Violence
- Sources: Conflict, Resource, Relationship Mapping; News Reports; National Statistics; Local Partners
- Common sense check: identifying the quirks of different communities, Lisa gave an example of a long standing local chief who’s personality may be affecting the conflict in some way

Research Design

- Baseline:
  - Conducted conflict and market mapping; Household surveys; Key informant interviews
- Planned:
  - Monitoring of disputes resolved (about what? by whom?); Qualitative midterm review; Case studies; Final evaluation – survey in same sites (not longitudinal), with some econometric analysis of variables on individual level.

What are we looking for?

- Differences in relative changes from baseline to final in survey
- Links between attitude/behavior changes and peace outcomes
- Non-negligible improvements to outcomes in IPNN sites to justify further funding: Did the interfaith components make a difference?
- Stories of how change occurred – To what do people attribute change and why? (And how are those “stories” different across sites?)
- If we can isolate variables properly, econometric analysis can tell us what is important, and qualitative evidence can explain it.

Challenges:

- Selection bias – choosing sites to work in first
- Very different baseline results across sites – how can we tell what is a reasonable amount of change?
- Timing (what if baselines are not run at exactly the same time?)
- For a small group of communities, how can we extrapolate individual-level responses to community-wide results?
What if the line between activities blurs? (e.g., women-led activities are economic in nature); “Activity blur” if a religious women’s group decide to start a farm, is that religious or economic? **Good development, bad research.**

We know the comparison won’t tell us everything – but how much will it tell?

**Takeaways:**

- Proper humility for context nuances, don’t generalize too far
- The more specific the test, the better
- Set a threshold for your ability to draw conclusions
- Low-budget if you can phase activities
- Both quantitative and qualitative are needed to tell the story
  - Quantitative data has limits in these settings
  - Comparative case studies might be the most useful of all

**Initial Research Findings**

- Strong poverty-conflict relationship, as tracked through freedom of movement
- Land disputes at root of much conflict; role of identity/tolerance inconclusive
- Lack of trust impedes social and some economic interaction despite shared resources
- Disrupted markets decrease ability to work
- Traditional leaders and religious leaders play key role in dispute resolution; women less recognized
  - Religious leaders are cited as most frequent resolvers of disputes in IPNN sites

**Part 2: Question and Answer**

**Melanie:** What is the history of what Mercy Corps has done before? In the past Mercy Corps cast a very wide net for information, doing large scale research. What was the process of becoming more rigorous with your methods? Of reigning in Mercy Corps’ research to be very specific?

**Answer:** There are still larger scale programs, but we have the luxury here of having very specific activities we want to test. Therefore we can go deep instead of wide in terms of what research we are doing and what we are looking for.

**Nick Oatley, Partners for Democratic Change:** How much did these programs cost? You said it was 'reasonable'.

**Answer:** Combined in all 3 sites the baseline survey was $30000, we collected 2000 surveys, 1100 from CONCUR sites, 400 IPNN sites, 600 from non-intervention sites. It could be done at a lower cost if you focused in on a smaller geographic area.
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Our baselines were lumped together in two rounds. Our first round was for CONCUR sites, the second round for IPNN sites; part of the cost efficiency came from our internal capacity, for our second round all of our data collection was in house.

Debbie Trent: On tracking baseline results, could you talk a bit more about how much discussion at the planning stage you do regarding what is a desirable amount of change? How do you look at percentage vs absolute change?

A: Determining a desirable amount of change, and how that will be measured is an ongoing discussion. What is reasonable to expect? The biggest proxy for conflict is freedom of movement on the individual level. We try to test for a 35% percent change in freedom of movement; we want to see at least that in these cases. We are also looking at other variables, like trust and economic interaction and how those are related to levels of violence. We are staying open ended.

Melanie: Can you talk more about types of attitudinal and behavioral change?

A: Behavioral change is a tough issue. We’re looking at behavior at markets, and in other economic capacities. We are also looking at social interactions, and the involvement of different kinds of leaders in resolving disputes. We are tracking the degree to which religious leaders reach across conflict lines; we also ask individual participants if leaders reach across conflict lines in ways that are visible to the community.

Melanie: To continue in that vein, it can be difficult to ask individuals about community level results. Are there an articles or papers you would suggest on this topic?

A: A tough question, can we isolate community level variables in an individual level survey? We attempt to do this when looking at levels of violence and looking at levels of community dispute resolution.

One tool is tone analysis, which is looking at media for themes of hateful rhetoric and tension in media reports as a community level indicator. The challenge becomes, how to link changes in media tone back to our program activities.

Mark Clark: (1) Can you share a bit more what were the actual types of inter-faith program activities? Were they the same in each site? (2) To what extent are the evaluations participatory; do you involve the target group as well as representatives from the broader beneficiary community? - what's the process you use to do that?

A: 1) Our interfaith programs facilitate a process for women religious leaders develop community programs, accordingly, the program specifics change across sites. Interestingly, all the women seem interested in creating programs with concrete economic based outcomes; the challenge there is that such programs make it difficult to compare religious based programs to economic interventions. Another effort is to get different religious leaders to create peace messages within their own religious contexts, we then work to disseminate those messages through radio, text messaging and public events.
2) All of the knowledge is based on a foundation of conflict and resource mapping and community resource mapping, so in that way our work is participatory in that we bring communities together for a conversation and set the tone for what we should be asking in the baseline. In terms of developing indicators and tools, we definitely work side by side with our partners, and are still open ended in which indicators and tools we will use for final evaluations.

Debbie Trent: How you analyze the storytelling text?

A: We haven’t collected the stories yet. Theme analysis would be a good starting point. It might make sense to have different sets of stories and try to break them down start to finish and track them.

Melanie: So, it’s some research, some iterative process.

Leslie Wingender, Mercy Corps: Thanks so much for discussing this very interesting research methodology. I wanted to ask a more specific question about how you will compare the three sites--IPNN, CONCUR, and comparison sites? While you have comparison sites, will you also compare IPNN sites to the CONCUR sites?

A: We will start by comparing across broad groups the quantitative data. Then we will look at the matched sites on a one to one basis. The statistical significance of some of our findings might be low, but there should be interesting changes that can be followed up on.

Melanie: Is the whole Nigeria team involved in these programs and projects?

A: We are lucky to have M&E officers and a research fellow here working with us, they’ve done great work on criteria for site selection. At the moment we’re in a bit of a lull, but things will pick up soon. And when that happens the M&E and Program teams will work together very closely.

Maryam: If an organization is interested in undertaking a similar comparative study, how would you advise on next steps? What boxes need to be checked in order to move forward?

A: A lot of starting programs look at comparison groups, if there is a specific question about a specific activity, then this kind of study can be good. It can be a good way to pick things apart.

Melanie: Lisa, that was a great Talk! You made very complicated processes accessible and understandable - and not intimidating at all.

Everyone, please look on the link for Lisa to share different suggested readings.