cprf Conflict Prevention & Resolution Forum

Improving Governance to Build Peace:
Getting to the Nexus of Corruption and Conflict

Friday, June 11, 2010

Speakers

Alix Boucher
Research Analyst, Stimson Center

Stephen Ndegwa
Senior Public Sector Governance Specialist, The World Bank

Moderator

Steve McDonald
Consulting Director, Project on Leadership and Building State capacity, Woodrow Wilson Center

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Forum Summary:

WASHINGTON, DC - The June **Conflict Prevention and Resolution Forum** (CPRF) was held at the Council on Foreign Relations on June 11th, 2010. The event was attended by individuals from government agencies, think-tanks, non-profits and local universities. The CPRF is organized by the non-profit organization **Search for Common Ground**, and is co-sponsored by the **Alliance for Peacebuilding, American University, 3D Security, Council on Foreign Relations, George Mason University, Johns Hopkins University, Partners for Democratic Change, United States Institute of Peace and Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.**

Alix Boucher

"No corruption isn't going to happen."

Alix Boucher began her presentation in discussing her report on "Mapping and Fighting Corruption in War-Torn States." In her report, she found corruption as pervasive and she looked at the dynamics and the processes that explain corruption. The report includes a comprehensive review on pre-existing literature and looks to specify activities that constitute corruption and how they interact with each other. The report also included a case study of Liberia as a model of explanations and deficiencies.

Boucher cited five nodes of corruption: post-conflict distribution of political and military power, cross border trafficking of people and commodities, strong informal and weak formal post-war economy, national public administration capacity and misdirection of aid. She accepted that a state with absolutely no corruption is impossible so we must instead look at long-term objectives in fighting mass, anti-development corruption. These objectives included trustworthy and legitimate criminal justice systems, transparent governments, stronger public service sectors and leaders with legitimate claim to power.

Boucher then discussed the areas of corruption where the literature did not agree or the theories were contested. For example, by criminalizing corrupt behavior, the state drives many actors underground. Boucher also presents the idea of sequencing reforms that are necessary, beginning with building better border control capacity and customs duties, especially in poor countries. Furthermore, anti-corruption agencies should not necessarily be exempt from scrutiny and could potentially be corrupt themselves. She concluded with a plea for "to build mutual accountability mechanisms" in conflicted states.

Stephen Ndegwa

"We sit on top of evolved institutions."

Stephen Ndegwa began his presentation with three points on corruption that are currently being discussed at the World Bank: moving beyond notion of one-dimension corruption, power sharing agreements actually reflecting stabilized corruption, and thinking carefully about fundamental pursuits of politicians in a particular state. He cited teacher absenteeism as stealing of public funds, a dimension of corruption, as well as corrupt election observers to support multi-faceted corruption. Power sharing agreements that simply stabilize corruption combined with selfish politicians stall or prevent a nation's development. He stressed the importance of having a stable political regime in order to prompt development.

Ndegwa then described a long chain between corruption and conflict, with no specific link being a direct cause of conflict. He cites three different ways corruption induces conflict, including historical raiding of the state as a way of life as in the DRC, a direct connection between illicit trade and conflict as in the Niger Delta, and global donors expecting too much of local institutions and therefore the creation of self-delusion. We should think about creating institutions in a web, not singularly. Ndegwa states, "It doesn't help to have a strong electoral commission but weak election courts".

Ndegwa concluded by making suggestions on fighting corruption including working at various state levels and not defining corruption as only a national problem. By engaging regional organizations, like the African Union, anti-corruption initiatives are not seen as an imposition of the West. Presently, all organizations have some sort of anti-corruption sentiment, which creates more pressure on corrupt institutions. Ndegwa cited an African government sectioned report addressing growing inequality and predicting the election violence in Kenya to exemplify the Africa Peer Review Mechanism as the "most neglected asset that we have". He further addressed the necessity to build elite contacts, which is not going to be easy. Outside organizations need to "encourage dynamics of continuous change" rather than condemning countries to a low equilibrium.

Steve McDonald

Steve McDonald highlighted the differences in the definition of corruption between the North and South, developed versus developing nations. He believes working with people to build trust will help destroy the underlying causes of corruption. He urged to keep regional context and causes of corruption and conflict in mind when suggesting future anti-corruption programs. McDonald closed the forum in discussing the role of power sharing arrangements in preventing corruption and conflict. All participants agreed that power sharing agreements are a beginning to change, not an end point; therefore, to prevent conflict, they must be reevaluated with local players and situations in mind.