RESEARCH ARTICLE

From Design to Implementation: Addressing the Causes of Violent Conflict in Nigeria

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This article considers the ways in which knowledge and research influenced the design of a programme to reduce violent conflict in Nigeria. The diversity of sources and forms of conflict in Nigeria, and the way that local grievances interact with national struggles over politics and resources, combined with a need to show measurable results within five years, made the task of programme design extremely challenging. The article discusses how the project design team responded to this challenge. It describes the four main lessons that emerged from dialogue-based research studies that helped the design team formulate a theory of change for the programme, and subsequently its methodological approach and activities. The studies shaped the central theme of the project, which was the need to transform conflict management institutions into genuinely inclusive forums for dialogue, thereby regaining the trust of those currently excluded from dialogue but yet most affected by violence – particularly unemployed youth and women and girls. The article does not portray research and knowledge simplistically, as the sole solution to project design issues. Rather, it shows that if research findings can take designers directly to the core of the problems as perceived by those most affected by them, then they can play a critical role in designing appropriate interventions and, as implementation proceeds, to demonstrating progress towards project goals.

Introduction

Those tasked with designing programmes to address instability or violent conflict face a number of common operational challenges in assessing the nature of these issues, their causes, and the most effective responses. This article outlines the way in which one project preparation team approached these questions in developing a stability and reconciliation programme for external support in Nigeria. While every conflict context is unique, the experience summarised here may be of value to programme teams working in other countries, as a number of the issues raised are generic to the task of designing conflict management programmes.

The first part of the article addresses the fundamental question of terminology: how do we 'label' – and hence signal in a way that leads to appropriate action – a programme that is directed at reducing conflict? Section two goes on to map the approach taken by the team in the design of the programme. In particular, early research, in the form of a broad set of inception studies on the incidence and causes of conflict and mechanisms

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for managing it, led to the development of a diagnostic typology of types of violent conflict. It also led to a number of key conclusions about conflict and violence in the project zones that were important in shaping the design of the programme. Also highlighted in the article is the consultative approach taken by the team to programme design, during which over 1,200 ordinary people, as well as leaders in public and non-governmental bodies, were consulted. These discussions covered participants' understanding of the causes of violent conflicts and the ways in which they thought their own security – and public security broadly – could be improved.

The brief given to the programme design team, a mixed group of Nigerian and foreign development practitioners, activists and academics, was to design a programme that would build stability and reconciliation in eight of Nigeria's 36 states that have been most prone to violent conflicts in the last decade. In this regard, contemporary Nigeria presents a unique and diverse context. However, as with many programmes in similar conflict contexts, the project was expected to achieve results within in a short timeframe, even while it was acknowledged that addressing instability and violence is inevitably a long-term process. The inception team had nine-months (November 2011 to August 2012) to design the programme; many of its members, along with new recruits, went on to join the team for the five-year implementation phase.

This article does not attempt to provide prescriptive advice on the design of conflict management programmes, but rather draws on the thinking process that the design team went through, and particularly the way in which information contributed by those consulted in this early phase shaped the design the programme.[1] In addition to the consultations, the team drew on its members' own experience and the relevant literature to identify the issues that the programme should address and the most effective ways of addressing them.

What's in a name? Stabilisation; Stability and Reconciliation; Peacebuilding

An early decision that the programme team was required to make was whether or not to confirm its provisional title – the Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme. This exercise was important in that the title would signal both the objectives that the programme was trying to achieve, and the policy framework that would guide its implementation. In this section we review the terminology currently being used to describe interventions in situations of conflict and instability, and how the team reached its eventual position.[2] It considers three terms: 'stabilisation', 'stability and reconciliation', and 'peacebuilding', the first of which has been the subject of recent debate in this journal (Mac Ginty 2012; Dennys 2013). We ask what distinguishes one from another, and consider their respective appropriateness as programme descriptors.

Stabilisation

In the United Kingdom, the term stabilisation has acquired specific meaning through implementation on the ground: western military and civilian involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq since 2002/3 has consistently described its aim as 'stabilisation'. The UK's approach to stabilisation is set out in guidelines issued jointly by three government departments: the Ministry of Defence (MoD), the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Department for International Development (DFID). These represent the military, diplomatic and development interests typically taking part in stabilisation operations.[3] The UK government guidelines broadly reflect US and EU usage.[4]

There is an ongoing debate about the usefulness, ethics and efficacy of stabilisation interventions as they have been applied in countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan (See, McNerney 2005). Mac Ginty and Dennys' articles in previous editions of this journal set out the arguments well. They and other commentators broadly agree on the meanings

ascribed to the term 'stabilisation' and what sets stabilisation apart from humanitarian and development work.[5] These distinctions include the following:

- Stabilisation interventions have an explicit *political agenda* and neither aim nor claim to be politically neutral. A primary aim is to help establish and sustain a government that can be supported to govern effectively and fulfil its core functions, particularly security. Stabilisation interventions by foreign powers may involve regime change or the bolstering of existing regimes.
- Stabilisation normally describes a *joint military and civilian effort*. Because force is normally an essential component of stabilisation, the military tends to take the lead, at least initially. In parallel or subsequently, diplomatic interventions are used to support political processes (e.g. elections), and development projects (justice, infrastructure, education, etc.) to build support for the government and lessen the backing of militants.
- Stabilisation interventions are not primarily motivated by development concerns such as poverty or human rights violations but by assessments of *national and regional interests* by the countries sending troops and civilian personnel. Decisions to intervene may be based on the threat of terrorism, military and economic interests, or large-scale migration as well as regional threats and opportunities. Historical/colonial links may also play a role.

These characteristics indicate significant differences between 'stabilisation' as the term is currently being used in western countries and the types of conflict prevention or peacebuilding interventions funded mainly by development budgets. The most obvious difference is that interventions funded through development aid are not associated with military intervention. However, in other respects, we need to acknowledge that the differences are not absolute. It can certainly be argued that humanitarian and development interventions are not politically neutral, and that donor funding is not devoid of self-interest. It is also worth noting that development actors play a part in stabilisation campaigns. Thus the line between stabilisation and development interventions in conflict-affected countries may be less clearly drawn than it initially seems.[6]

That said, the term stabilisation is scarcely applicable to efforts to address Nigeria's current crises. The various Joint Task Forces (composed of Army, Navy, Air-Force, Police and State Security Service personnel) stationed in different parts of the country (notably the North East and Niger Delta), and the emergency rule periodically imposed by the federal government, might be described as internal attempts to 'stabilise' regions experiencing violent conflicts. However, there has been no joint foreign military and civilian effort to address current crises. In short, the situation in Nigeria is not one of 'stabilisation' in the sense in which the term is currently used and applied.

Having considered, and for the moment put aside, the relevance of the term 'stabilisation' for conflict programming in Nigeria, we now ask how pertinent are the other two terms considered here – 'stability and reconciliation' and 'peacebuilding'. What is their genesis and how applicable are they to the Nigerian context?

Stability and reconciliation

There is no single commonly agreed definition of 'stability'. However, the term implies a sufficient degree of predictability and social order (at the very least, no violent conflict) to enable people to go about their business as usual (Axerod 1990; Dowding and Kimber 1983). That said there is nothing intrinsically 'good' about stability. It does not by itself imply the population has enough to eat, that human rights are respected or that basic freedoms are upheld. Stability can also be an outcome of authoritarian regimes that excel in repression and fare poorly in governance

(Paczynska 2010). The Arab uprisings in 2011 and 2012 all occurred in such contexts (Sottilotta 2013). Perhaps for this reason, stability is generally found coupled with a 'public good' term – for example, reconstruction, reconciliation or peacebuilding – to indicate that it is a positive condition, and a necessary precursor to other activities in conflict or post-conflict settings.

The composite term 'stability and reconciliation' has a number of implications. Here we will focus on four of these. First, the pairing of the words has a positive ring; it evokes a healing process involving the bringing together of factions, communities or individuals that have been hostile but are now willing to address the causes of their differences and work out a way of living together again. Second, reconciliation can entail the re-acceptance of those who have become alienated from their communities, or even harmed them (e.g. former militants, drug or other gang members) back into society. Third, reconciliation can involve the re-inclusion of groups stigmatised or forced out by the conflict. In Nigeria as elsewhere this might include victims of sexual violence, members of ethnic or religious groups forced to flee the violence, or groups whose social and political status as 'non-indigenes' (not hailing from the state they live in) makes them more vulnerable in conflicts (Northern States Governors' Forum 2013).

Finally, the term reconciliation can also be used – although it rarely is – to refer to processes that aim to improve relations and increase trust between communities and state security forces. As in other types of reconciliation, this entails a process; there is a need for agreements about what went wrong in the past, practical measures to improve security force accountability, and agreements between community representatives and state security forces to proactively consult with each other in future (International IDEA 2003).

The term 'reconciliation' therefore adds significantly to the more static concept of 'stability'. It implies processes and structures at multiple levels that bring affected parties into a common space in order to air the wrongs that have been done or alleged, to resolve differences, and to agree a way forward. Therefore, it stresses, albeit implicitly, the importance of institutions, both state and non-state, in establishing and maintaining a positive peace.

We now turn to the question: how does the term 'peacebuilding' differ from 'stability and reconciliation'?

Peacebuilding

The most enduring and widely accepted definition of peacebuilding is that of the UN, outlined by Boutros-Ghali, the UN Secretary General in 1994, and subsequently nuanced by UN committees. A recent (2007) UN definition describes peacebuilding as: 'A range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and to lay the foundations for sustainable peace and development.'[7] While this definition does not explicitly include either reconciliation, nor addresses the underlying causes of conflict, it has been argued that the phrase 'laying the foundations for sustainable peace and development' implicitly includes both of these issues.[8] The UN definition goes on to emphasise the importance of context, i.e. 'Peacebuilding strategies must be coherent and tailored to the specific needs of the country concerned, based on national ownership, and should comprise a carefully prioritized, sequenced, and therefore relatively narrow set of activities aimed at achieving the above objectives.'

Given the aspirations encompassed by the UN definition – to address conflict causes, strengthen national capacities for conflict management, and reconcile conflicting parties – it is clear that the concept of peacebuilding maps very closely onto the concept of 'stability and reconciliation'. Given this semantic homology, why was the term not used to describe the Nigerian programme? The main reason was that the team considered that the term 'peacebuilding' had become so ubiquitous, and was used to refer

to so many very different activities, that it has ceased to indicate any distinguishable approach or specific objective. It has become, in short, a victim of its own etymological success. As Barnett et al (2007: 35) note: 'If the success of peacebuilding is measured against how well it has, indeed, institutionalised peace, the picture is very mixed…. If, however, success is measured in terms of the institutionalisation of the concept of peacebuilding, then it appears to be a resounding success.'

For these reasons, the programme design team decided to retain 'stability and reconciliation' as a more precise descriptor of its aims, objectives and activities. In everyday conversation however the term 'peacebuilding' also became part of the programme's lexicon.

Translating an Understanding of Context into Practical 'Things to Do'

Having identified 'stability and reconciliation', using the above mentioned definition, as its focus, the programme then had to carry out a rapid assessment of what form the dynamics of 'stability and reconciliation' took in Nigeria, and, based on that, to decide what a programme dedicated to that end might actually *do*. The team gained a good understanding of respondents' perceptions of the causes of conflict from the testimonies of the 1,200 people consulted in the design phase. However, they then faced a challenging translation task: how to draw on this information to design a practical operational programme, with activities that could address the problems identified, and results that could be attributed and measured? This process of selection, prioritisation and design is never a straightforward one, especially in contexts of multiple and complex conflicts where respondents' views reflect a diverse range of experiences, perspectives, and interests.

Two approaches can be taken to designing a programme for environments affected by instability and violence – whether political, domestic, economic or criminal. Either one can identify programmes that are already producing results and support them, or

new research can be commissioned to diagnose the key drivers of conflict, and identify the new initiatives required and the ongoing programmes that should be scaled up to address these. The first approach can be more time and cost-effective as it builds on existing analyses and management arrangements, while the second approach is more thoroughgoing.

The design team for the Nigeria programme decided to use both methods. The team commissioned five new analyses that tried to understand the causes, manifestations and impacts of different forms of violence in four broad geographical zones and the ways in which these were currently being addressed (or not). At the same time the team investigated existing mechanisms for dispute resolution along with initiatives for reconciliation and peacebuilding. The new studies focused on two states in the North East, one in the North West, two in the Middle Belt and three the Niger Delta region (See, NSRP 2011-2012; NSRP 2011; NSRP 2012a; NSRP 2012b; NSRP 2013).[9] The population covered by these eight states is approximately 32 million, which accounts for approximately 20 per cent of Nigeria's overall population. To ensure a broad understanding, the studies focused at both state and local levels.

What did the studies reveal, and what did this mean for the programme? Broadly speaking, four main lessons emerged. First, although there were issues and features common to all states, there was considerable local variation in the conflict dynamics identified in the different zones, and consequently in the issues that people described as being the objects of conflict. Second, respondents were familiar with, and already drew upon, a number of conflict-handling mechanisms, but all of these had both strengths and weaknesses, and overall none worked as effectively as it could. Thirdly, the history of conflict in the different locations showed that trust had been eroded over time. This erosion of trust applied between groups, and also affected the confidence in which people held the institutions that were meant to serve them.

Every incident that failed to be addressed hardened attitudes further, entrenching differences, and made reconciliation more difficult. Lastly, it became clear that decision-makers had often overlooked the fact that the poorest and most marginalised were by far the most negatively affected by the violence.

Each of these lessons had implications for programme design.

Types of conflict encountered varied from region to region

The initial studies revealed the extent to which the specific environmental and political backgrounds of the respective zones influenced the forms which conflict took. In the Niger Delta, the source of the oil and gas that provide the country's main source of wealth, conflicts arise mostly from grievances relating to the perceived marginalization of local populations from the benefits of oil and gas extraction.[10] There is a marked generation gap in the Delta, with most young people blaming violence on poverty, unemployment, lack of opportunities, and corruption. Older residents however, including older women and community elders, see this narrative of victimisation around resource control as merely a pretext for violence and criminality on the part of youth. The intensity of ethnic grievances, which used to be a factor underlying violence, has fallen in the eastern delta since the carving out of Bayelsa State from Rivers State in 1996 and the creation of power-sharing and resource-distribution arrangements among competing groups.

In the Middle Belt the studies showed that successive waves of inter-communal violence had polarized settlement patterns along ethno-religious lines (See, Osaghae and Suberu 2005).[11] Plateau and Kaduna States are multicultural societies, partly because of their past role as regional economic magnets,[12] and partly owing to their location on the dividing-line between the culturally and religiously divergent north and south of the country. Competition between different groups for land, livelihoods, and political power and influence has become

progressively more intense and more violent over the last 30 years. Political discourse has been dominated by questions of 'indigeneity' - who can, and who cannot, claim to 'belong' to the state and hence claim representation and preferential access to critical government resources, including education and jobs (HRW 2006).

Borno and Yobe in the North East in the past had the reputation of being among the most peaceful parts of Nigeria. However, they have increasingly experienced widespread poverty, illiteracy and unemployment, exacerbated by desertification and migration to urban areas. Young men in particular are vulnerable to being exploited, both by political interests and by radical religious ideologues.[13] The increase in violent actions over the last two to three years by the Islamist group *Jama'atul ahl al-sunnah li da'awati wal jihad* (JAS)[14] has brought untold danger to the population of the North East, and this has been exacerbated by the heavy-handed responses of the security forces that have negatively impacted on civilians, including women and children.

In the North West, and especially in Kano State, conflict mapping showed the major causes of violent conflict to be competition for power and resources within and between political parties, and struggles for pre-eminence - and perceptions of inequality - among Islamic sects and between Muslims and Christians. Kano is the most populous state in the country, and Kano city is second only to Lagos in population; as a growing commercial centre, the state has attracted young people seeking employment from across the region and beyond. However, economic recession and a growing population, especially the increasing number of young unemployed men, have added to the state's propensity for violence, especially since the 1980s.

These regional variations had implications for the types of conflict manifest in each zone, and hence for programme design.

Overall, the studies identified five main types of conflict.[15] These were:

· conflicts relating to land and other natural resources
· domestic violence and violence against women
· ethno-religious identity conflicts
· struggles over control of local traditional and religious institutions
· political conflicts.

Each of these took on a different form in the different zones, roughly schematised in table 1 below.

Respondents mentioned conflict around environmental resources as a cause of conflict in all zones but most particularly in the Niger Delta, where environmental degradation caused by oil spills and gas flaring has drastically reduced the viability of agriculture and fishing. Compensation for degraded farmland and waterways offered by the oil and gas companies has pitched communities against each other and itself become a cause of conflict. Environmental resource conflict has taken different forms in the other zones. In the North East and Middle Belt, respondents cited farmer-pastoralist competition over land and water as a major issue sparking violence. In the area round Lake Chad, the issue was overfishing by an immigrant group, which restricted the livelihoods of indigenous fisher-folk as well as decimating fish stocks. Struggles for communal land, resulting in mass displacement, were nowhere more apparent than in the Middle Belt, where perceptions of entitlement and marginalization based on ethno-religious identity has made resource-based conflicts more intense and intractable.

Domestic violence, and physical and other forms of violence against women, were common to all zones, and included wife-beating, deprivation of livelihoods and inheritance, sexual exploitation of vulnerable girls, and rape in the context of mass violence (See, Cohen et al 2012).[16] Respondents mentioned rape during mass violence most often in the North East. Also in the North East, respondents emphasized the vulnerability of girls from poor families, who are often obliged to

sell food in the streets. For their safety in the streets, these girls often depend on the 'protection' of the army, or sometimes of criminal gangs, who then expect favours in return.

Struggles for the control of indigenous institutions such as chiefships were also encountered in all zones. Chiefships and similar offices form the bottom rung of the local government pyramid, and have a number of potentially profitable functions attached to them. These may include the allocation of communal agricultural land, or, in the case of the Niger Delta states, the allocation of community benefits given by the oil industry, such as scholarships donated by oil companies. In the North East, people decried the fact that traditional positions are no longer inherited but are now based on appointments and selections, making them susceptible to influences that compromise their integrity and credibility. Wider business and political interests reportedly try to subvert such positions for their own purposes.

Political conflict generally centred on struggles for control of political positions and government machinery, as political power confers the ability to appropriate economic resources.[17] However, in the North East, political conflict was associated most closely and most dramatically with the crisis involving the radical Islamic militancy of the JAS. This group perceives itself as disenfranchised: it has an Islamist ideology that is seeking to replace the existing system considered to be corrupt with one they see as divine in origin. Testimonies from the studies made it clear that the government and the army have failed to win the hearts and minds battle as a result of their increasingly arbitrary and brutal attempts at suppressing the JAS: while the army's intervention is legitimate in the eyes of the population, their methods are not.

The level of complexity indicated by the studies was clearly going to present a challenge – how to build local flexibility, and a capacity to stay relevant to local realities, into a programme which had to demonstrate progress towards a set of core strategic goals? The design team identified two

	Niger Delta	Middle Belt	North East	North West
Natural resource conflict	Land disputes: competition over access to oil-bearing land and to compensation for environmental impact of oil and gas	Farmer-pastoralist competition Mass displacement – 'ethnic cleansing'	Farmer-pastoralist competition Conflict between indigenous and incoming fishermen over sustainable fishing methods	
Domestic violence and VAWG	Throughout	Throughout	Throughout	Throughout
Ethno-religious identity conflicts		Episodes of mass inter-communal violence, with reprisals		Competition for political and economic influence between different Moslem sects and between Moslems and Christians
Struggles for control of traditional and religious institutions	Corruption of chiefs resulting from oil compensation benefits	Challenges to jurisdiction of emirs	Political manipulation of elections for traditional positions	
Political conflicts		Struggles for political ascendency between indigenes and non-indigenes	JAS crisis - population caught between JAS religious extremists and government forces	Struggles for political ascendency between different political parties and religious factions

Table 1: Main types of conflict identified in the four study zones.[18]

complementary strategies to bring these requirements together. On the one hand, it proposed a devolved programme approach that sought to respond to the different causes and manifestations of violence in each zone. In practical terms, this meant setting up four semi-autonomous regional teams. These teams all followed a single logical framework, including the overall goals and results milestones, while also developing separate implementation plans in which the programme's key goals were adapted for the different zones in a flexible and responsive manner.

The second strategy concerned methods of tracking and communicating progress. The programme's logical framework (which set out the key results expected and annual milestones measuring progress towards them) was expressed in terms that were general enough for different regional activities to contribute to them, but specific enough to indicate that the programme had overall coherence. Thus, the monitoring system – and the monitoring team - came to have a central role in the programme. It was essential that all staff were aware not only of their particular workplan, but also how this contributed to the programme's overall achievements.

A particular comment is appropriate on the JAS crisis in the North East, which was gradually escalating during the programme's inception phase. How did information on this crisis obtained through the initial

studies influence programme design? First, it strengthened the team's general perception that inclusivity and accountability was a key component of effective conflict management institutions. The JTF (the combined team of military and paramilitary troops that was deployed to the North East to counter JAS) would doubtless have had a more constructive relationship with the local population had there been citizen input into the way it was operating. Second, this perception in turn strengthened the team's conviction that the programme's role had to include influencing strategic dialogue processes at a senior level that included the military. The research undertaken by the programme gave it the information and analysis needed to transmit a 'view from the ground' to elite decision-makers. The team then developed a number of mechanisms (including, for example, providing financial and technical support to expert seminars where security issues were debated) that permitted this.

Mechanisms for conflict management exist, but are weak

The initial studies identified a range of people and institutions that mediated in disputes, resolved conflict, or had a peacebuilding function either at the individual or the community level. From respondents' descriptions of these structures, it was clear that everywhere traditional and religious leaders were the most trusted to resolve individual disputes or to maintain public calm. Such leaders were considered to be close to the people, and familiar with their problems and their values; they were also thought to be more likely than formal justice mechanisms to find lasting solutions, since they seek restorative outcomes rather than allocating blame. Respondents also trusted them because they saw them as espousing spiritual or religious values rather than the materialistic values of politicians.[19]

Although the most effective mechanisms were seen to be the tried and trusted ones of local chiefs and religious leaders, the studies showed that the credibility of these actors had been undermined. Traditional institutions were not immune from capture or co-optation, given the highly politicised field of the broader society. Respondents felt they could be corrupted by politicians, or by business interests, as in the case of the Niger Delta chiefs accused of monopolising, for individual benefit, the payments made to their communities by oil companies. Traditional and religious leaders could also be subject to intimidation.

In addition, the traditional institutions themselves often clearly lacked inclusiveness. Youth and women were reported as playing minor roles in mediating conflicts, generally doing so, if at all, only within their own circles. For example respondents in the Niger Delta studies described how leaders of women's organisations mediated quarrels between members, and fixed penalties such as fines for bad behaviour such as violence or swearing. Yet only a small number of women were mentioned as operating within the mainstream institutions. The same was true of young people; young women were hardly ever represented in community conflict mediation forums.

Traditional bodies in Nigeria, as in many countries, tend to be made up of elderly, senior men. Women of all ages are excluded, and so too are young men – the group most vulnerable to being drawn into criminality and violence. The restricted membership of conflict management institutions naturally tends to limit the information these senior men receive, and the types of violent conflict they 'see' (sexual violence is rarely recognised, despite its frequency).[20] Because of the gradual erosion in their authority, they are also limited in the degree to which they are able to influence state body response (e.g. the police and military) or bring the main actors in a conflict around the table.

Respondents showed ambivalence about other mechanisms, too: NGO-managed community peacebuilding projects, for example, when mentioned at all, were assessed

positively, but they are relatively recent phenomena, so that few people know of them and they have not yet had significant results to demonstrate. The intervention of the security forces in localised conflicts was generally welcomed in principle, but their methods were not: this was the least trusted mechanism of all, because of the widespread use of unjustified force against innocent populations, and because of the perceived indifference of government to people's suffering.[21]

In every zone, we heard about individuals who had taken a strong stand for peace and reconciliation, often at extraordinary risks to themselves. Such local heroes included local council officials who risked their reputations, and sometimes their lives, mediating between opposing communities or protecting minorities; politicians who donated relief supplies to disaster survivors and insisted on them being shared by all parties; women who defied convention to participate in peace negotiation forums; and army commanders who set up mediation committees. However, it is notable that these instances were exceptional.

The findings of the research regarding the diversity of conflict management mechanisms gave the programme a range of options and entry points to work with. At the same time, these initiatives were often organisationally weak, lacked wider peacebuilding knowledge and skills, and failed to meet the fundamental criterion of inclusion. The implication of these findings was clear: the programme should look to support existing conflict management mechanisms (individual or organizational), yet while doing so identify opportunities to build trust and credibility. The thinking underlying this – the theory of change – was as follows: if conflict management mechanisms encompass a wider range of people, including representatives of women's and youth groups; if they used the totality of all members' networks to anticipate and agree responses to violence; and if they also

became accountable to their constituencies in terms of both strategies and budgets, then they would regain their authority, would be seen as more representative, and would become more trusted by the general public. Higher levels of trust would consolidate community support for their activities and strengthen their capacity to mediate conflicts and address grievances.

Based on this diagnosis and change theory, the design team included funds for training and grants for local conflict management initiatives as key aspects of programme design. However, lack of inclusivity was assessed to be a problem too pervasive to be addressed by work with local issues and institutions alone. The programme therefore sought to influence the policy and practice of institutions at state and federal, as well as local, levels, by promoting inclusive participation in all the bodies with which the programme partnered, including government agencies and civil society. Of the three levels of government (federal, state, and local), the emphasis was given to state governments, since this is the level where decisions and resource allocations that directly affect communities are made. However the inception team also envisaged work on policy formulation with the Federal Government and national-level non-governmental organisations.

An example of this multi-level strategy to building inclusivity is the programme's work to promote women and girls as actors in conflict management and peacebuilding. At the federal level, the programme supports the Ministry of Women's Affairs in developing a National Action Plan for the implementation of United Nations Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security. In the target states, it is planned to set up Peace Clubs for young people (girls and boys, young women and men) between the ages of 10 and 24. The clubs aim to reduce the vulnerability of participants to violence and increase their capacity to mediate conflict and prevent violence. At the local level,

the programme will make small grants to women's organisations working in the areas of peacebuilding, empowerment or protection, to help them expand their activities or try out new approaches.

Trust is a casualty of repeated violence

In all zones, the studies revealed the perception that social relationships had been progressively weakened by conflict and violence, in some cases breaking down altogether. Confidence in institutions had been similarly eroded (Cox 2009; Colleta and Cullen 2000).

The resulting lack of social cohesion undermined possibilities for negotiation and mediation and made it more difficult for authorities to arbitrate or re-establish order (Aghajanian 2012; Keho 2009). In particular, in the Middle Belt people described how they had earlier lived peacefully alongside other ethnic or religious communities, but that this was no longer possible because of the wedge driven between them by violence. Those displaced from communities now had no prospect of returning to their homes.

This finding was by no means confined to Plateau and Kaduna states, where the worst incidents of inter-ethnic violence have taken place. Whether in individual conflicts, such as between husband and wife or landlord and tenant, in relationships between ethno-religious groups, or between community members and agents of the State, such as the army or the police, each new episode of violence, was described as leading to the hardening of attitudes. This then making the restoration of peace less likely. Many of the violent incidents described were 'tit for tat' affairs in which mutual reprisals escalated until trust was entirely exhausted and relationships beyond repair. Furthermore, the psychological traumas of losses resulting from violence – of family, of homes, of community – were considerable and long-lasting, adding to the difficulties of recovery and reconciliation.

The inception study findings conveyed to the programme design team the necessity of relationship-building not only at the community level but also within more formal institutions. Almost all key relationships – between civil society and government, between different faith communities, between the federal and state governments, or between different components of the national security architecture, – were characterised by a lack of communication and lack of trust, and the associated lack of an agreed framework within which decisions could be made about how to respond to security challenges.

It was thus essential for open dialogue to be central to the programme's approach. This meant establishing an enabling environment where participants – that is, people with shared interests, but without a history of engagement – could inform and challenge each other in fora where they felt free and secure to express their views and confident that they would be listened to. This process could lead to the development of a more strategic view of the issues underlining conflict, going beyond immediate responses to ad hoc incidents and stresses. Participants might be young men and women discussing violence against women, representatives of indigenous and immigrant fisher-folk contesting one another's fishing methods, police and community representatives on a police-community relations committee, or national elites debating security challenges. The programme's approach would be to facilitate a long-term process of dialogue that would enable such groups to progressively understand each other's viewpoints and reach agreement on their mutual expectations.

During design, working with media came to be seen as central to the programme's approach. The programme sees 'media' as comprising not only press, radio and television, but also social media and various forms of drama. Inception studies for the programme confirmed that the media have a critical influence on attitudes and discourses around conflict, and have the potential to contribute to the development of a

culture of empathy and mutual understanding. However, they also confirmed that this potential is substantially unmet at present, and indeed on the contrary, many respondents at community level described the media as contributing to hate discourse. As a result, the design team proposed a substantial programme of activities to strengthen the conflict-sensitivity of the media.

Violence has its greatest impact on the poorest and most marginalised

Testimonies from the inception studies include shocking examples of the devastating impact of violence on the most deprived and marginalised communities.[22] Violence resulted not only in loss of life and health, but also in material deprivation, curtailed social relations, and psychological loss and trauma. Key services such as health and education were prevented from functioning (for example in Yobe State in 2012, maternal and child health services lost between a quarter and a third of their staff, and vaccine delivery ceased for weeks at a time). Business declined, as businessmen originating from other zones fled back home for their safety, supplies of basic commodities such as food and medicines could not be transported, and clients lost their purchasing power. People expressed fear that their local economies had been permanently damaged.

That people suffered as a result of the violence was not of course a new or surprising finding. However, the significance of the research was in documenting the level of devastation caused to the average citizen in the conflict zones and bringing it to the attention of decision-makers, some of whom had not before realised its depth and extent.[23] This underlines the fact that, although violence has been growing in Nigeria for a number of years, policy-makers have only recently begun classifying it as a conflict-affected country. As a result of this realisation, the programme began to develop mechanisms to disseminate amongst decision-makers the information it was acquiring on a daily basis from its field representatives.

This took the form of limited-circulation briefing notes and diaries, which helped to raise the general level of awareness among aid officials and senior government cadres of how ordinary citizens viewed the events affecting them.

The realisation that the impact of violence on ordinary citizens was not fully understood underscored the programme's determination to ensure the widest possible dissemination of its results. The programme built this into its design, through a programme of research and influencing that was designed to reach observers and decision-makers, as well as the general public, in Nigeria and beyond.

Research for programming: a summary of our experience

In summary, then, how did the initial studies enable the programme to 'translate' local knowledge into programme design? Our preliminary assessment identified the main factor underlying conflict in Nigeria to be patrimonial politics and the competition for access to oil resources – the struggles of the elites such as politicians and wealthy business people, who use their access to oil wealth to manipulate the 'rules of the game' to their personal advantage. However, ground-truthing this analysis through local-level studies demonstrated the many different factors underlying violent conflict in the respective programme zones, and the need for multiple strategies and actions that would give local people a voice in reconciliation processes. This gave direction to the design of both the substantive programme activities and its monitoring and management framework.

The studies highlighted the complexity and diversity of the ways conflict and insecurity played out in the different zones in which the programme worked, and underscored, as a result, the need for a programme implementation approach which allowed for local adaptation while retaining focus on core goals. Further, they emphasised the need for the programme to promote dialogue in all its work, as a contribution

towards the long-term process of rebuilding trust, clearly a necessary component of reconciliation, and enabled the programme to see the importance of its role as a vehicle for communicating the realities of life at the grass roots to a wider public.

Perhaps the most significant contribution made by the studies was the detailed information that they yielded about what works and what doesn't with regard to existing conflict management institutions, and provided the programme with the foundations of a strategy for supporting and strengthening the existing conflict management architecture.

What did the final programme look like? It is structured around four mutually reinforcing outputs aimed at enhancing the capacity of conflict management institutions to manage conflicts non-violently.

· The first output focuses on security and governance. It supports broader societal participation in conflict management institutions in order to ensure that these institutions become more inclusive, coordinated and accountable;
· The second output focuses on economics and natural resources. It supports initiatives to reduce drivers of conflict especially those linked to access to employment opportunities and land and water use in target areas;
· The third output seeks to enhance the participation of women and girls in peacebuilding processes and support efforts to address violence against women and girls in situations of conflict;
· Finally, the fourth output seeks to leverage the interventions of the programme by supporting policy relevant research on conflict management. It also promotes conflict sensitivity in the media and in development interventions by government and donor agencies.

Conclusions

We began by reflecting on what 'stability' might mean in the context of Nigeria, a country where levels of violence are high but which has not attracted international attention in the form of 'stabilisation', defined as a strategy of external support combining military, diplomatic and development interventions. Rather, the approach of the international community in Nigeria, as exemplified by this programme, has been one of 'stability and reconciliation', which we defined as 'a healing process that involves a coming together of factions, communities or individuals that were previously hostile but are now willing to address the causes of their differences and work out a way of living together again'. We posed the question: how does a team charged with the design of such a process decide what to do? We then described how this particular design team built on citizens' views and perceptions, gathered through inception-phase research, in developing the programme.

In outlining some of the research findings of the studies undertaken to inform its inception phase, this article has sought to show how understanding the varied complexion of conflict dynamics in different zones of Nigeria influenced the programme design. In particular, it has shown how the outcomes of the initial studies shaped the programme's theory of change and its methodological approach, emphasising the need for inclusive dialogue as a way of transforming institutions and helping them to regain trust. They also provided context and direction for the work of different programme teams – the regional implementation teams, the media and research teams, as well as those working with national-level institutions.

The programme's initial studies were important too because they provided a baseline in a context where little information was available on the role of institutions in managing conflict. This was particularly true of the more informal and localised institutions operating at community level. Indeed, the experience of conducting these studies underlines the programme's conviction that ongoing monitoring and research is critical, both to document and reflect on its own impact and to enhance general knowledge

about how to 'do peacebuilding' effectively in fragile contexts.

The task of promoting stability and reconciliation in unstable contexts is as yet poorly understood. Because 'peace' is so hard to define, and because cause and effect is so difficult to attribute, there is a tendency in peacebuilding work to sidestep the collection of hard evidence, and even sometimes to deny the appropriateness of setting observable results at all. While conventional monitoring and evaluation frameworks may indeed be inappropriate to the complexities of conflict contexts, there is nevertheless a need to minimise programming based purely on assumptions about how interventions contribute to peace. It is not simply that more research is needed, but that this research should take designers directly to the core of the problems as perceived by those most affected by them. Conventional academic methods may not be best adapted for this purpose, and the practice of rapid, consultative and participatory methods clearly has relevance in contexts requiring early and effective inroads into deeply-rooted problems. For the programme, on-going research and the simultaneous development of appropriate research methods are critical conditions not only for developing appropriate interventions and achieving desired impacts, but also for demonstrating with confidence the programme's progress towards its goals.

Notes

[1] These design period studies focused on (i) Mapping types of conflict and perceptions of causes and needed action by geographical zone (December 2011), (ii) A study of community-level conflict management mechanisms by geographical zone (2012); (iii) The impacts of violent conflict on business and services (2012); (iv) A study exploring the role of women and girls in peace initiatives (2012) and (v) A study identifying how conflict is portrayed in the media by geographical zone (2012).

[2] We have borrowed the title phrase 'What's in a name?' from Barnett et al's 2007 article, which asks this question of the term 'peacebuilding'. It is equally apposite to the other terms considered in this introduction (Barnett et al 2007: 35ff).

[3] 'The UK Approach to Stabilisation', Stabilisation Unit Guidance Notes, November 2008.

[4] The UK usage of the term stabilisation is similar to that in the US. As one US analyst describes it: 'Stabilization and reconstruction (S&R) operations primarily concern the funnelling of western taxpayers' money into ungoverned spaces through the medium of military and civilian efforts, in partnership with the people therein, in pursuit of mutual security'. (Lindley-French 2009: 1).

[5] Several studies examine the efficacy of aid interventions to 'win hearts and minds' within stabilisation interventions and find them wanting. This is mainly because the causes of violent conflict are at base political and neither military force nor the provision of basic services tackles the underlying political causes (Dennys 2013; Fishtein and Wilder 2012).

[6] The UK guidelines recognise the difficulties that a joint military, humanitarian, diplomatic and development effort can pose, and stress the need for a 'comprehensive approach' which involves '…compromising, understanding, persevering, and recognising that the three 'communities' (military, humanitarian and developmental) have different underlying objectives, cultures and expectations about timescales' (Stabilisation Unit 2008: 15).

[7] This definition of peacebuilding was adopted the UN Security Council Policy Committee 2007. See, United Nations (2010) for the history of the concept and practice of peacebuilding within the UN.

[8] See Barnett et al op cit, and Lisa Schirch 'Strategic Peacebuilding – State of the Field'. *Peace Prints: South Asian Journal of Peacebuilding*, 1(1): Spring 2008.

9 These designations were inherited from the programme tender process, which focused on three regions initially: North East, Niger Delta and Middle Belt. During the design inception phase, a decision was taken to include a Kano as a state. The programme is gradually adopting the official classification and the Middle Belt will be replaced with the North Central geopolitical zone. Kaduna will consequently be classed under the North West zone.

10 For a comprehensive analysis of the factors underpinning grievances in the Niger Delta (see Francis et al 2011: 21- 62).

11 Eghosa and Suberu 2005 provide a useful categorisation of the way that ethnic and religious identities have been mobilised in intergroup clashes in the Middle Belt states since 1999.

12 Their capitals in the past attracted a mixture of population groups as settlers, seeking work in the Jos tin mining industry and in the former administrative centre of Kaduna.

13 There has been an historical pattern of disenfranchised youth being drawn to religious movements that reject the corruption of secular authorities in the northern states since at least 1903, when the Sokoto Caliphate fell under British control. Analysts of the trajectory if Islamic movements include those by Adamu 2010, Agbiboa 2013, Danjobo 2009, Last 2009, and Marchal 2012.

14 Jama'atul ahl al-sunnah li da'awati wal jihad (or JAS for short) is the name the group gives to itself, while 'Boko Haram' is the name that others ascribe to it. The programme's policy is to refer to it by the name it calls itself.

15 Regional variations made it difficult to develop a consistent typology of conflicts. After discussion, the programme design team decided to use the term 'types of conflict' to refer to the different subjects of contestation that are most often cited as leading to violence.

16 In many countries violence against women and girls (VAGW) has been found to increase in situations of violent conflict. However this is not inevitable. And when VAWG does increase, rebel groups and gangs are not inevitably the perpetrators (civilians and state forces are more likely to be implicated). Cohen et al (2013) summarise what is known about the relationship between VAWG and sexual violence in violent conflicts, the implications this has for policy makers, and the continuing knowledge gaps in this area.

17 Since the onset of multiparty democracy electoral processes have been accompanied by political violence in Nigeria as in many other African countries. As Ong'ayo notes, in Nigeria a great deal of this violence is state sponsored, to the advantage of the incumbent, whilst various groups that struggle for state power also deploy hired violence, in the form of informal groups, militias and gangs. (Ong'ayo 2008: 7)

18 NB this table is indicative only: it summarises the overall pattern of study responses.

19 Popular respect for traditional institutions is widespread in Africa, despite their having been modified by colonial administrations and despite criticisms that they entrench the power of older men. For example Logan (2011) in a comparative study of 19 African countries, found that traditional authorities are respected by their constituencies for their conflict management role, leadership qualities, accessibility to their people, and their role as representatives of community identity and continuity.

20 Traditional conflict management institutions elsewhere in Africa also tend to exclude women and youth, but in various different ways. In the case of the Burundian *bashingantahe,* or Wise Men, men are traditionally admitted into the institution along with their wives: however, women accede to member-

ship on their own account only rarely (Naniwe-Kaburahe 2008). For Northern Uganda, Burke and Egaru (2011) note that although most people are content with land adjudication services provided by local chiefs, women and young people as disadvantaged in land-related claims at this level, as they are easily browbeaten and manipulated by more powerful interests, lacking knowledge of the law, contacts, and often documents supporting their claims.

[21] 'Watching us die on CNN' as one respondent put it.

[22] There is growing evidence that violent conflicts impact more on marginalized communities. One of the marginal groups that have attracted interest is pastoral communities who are threatened by climate change and violent conflict. For instance, a study of two pastoral communities in North Western Kenya shows how conflicts have raided the livelihoods of pastoral communities. Faced by declining opportunities for grazing, pastoral communities are engulfed in a cycle of violence against one another. Intermittent incidents of violent conflict take a toll on lives, properties (houses), livelihoods, and public security (See: Shilling et al 2012).

[23] New research that seeks to investigate the impact of conflict on business recognizes that scientific research and policy had hitherto ignored the phenomenon. Some of the reasons advanced for the gap include: the assumption of peace in most theoretical models of economic growth, the absence of suitable theories in economics about the causes and consequences of violent conflict, the difficulty of collecting data in conflict affected areas and the dominance of macro-level approaches in Political Science (see: Bruck et al 2013: 162).

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