

Abstract

The 'Global War on Terror', Non-Governmental Public Action and Aid

Investigators

Professor Jude Howell, Centre for Civil Society, London School of Economics
Jeremy Lind, Centre for Civil Society, London School of Economics

Aims and objectives of research

The overall aim of the research is to analyse the politics of aid policy and practice as it relates to the support of civil society in the changing context of the global war against terror. The specific objectives are:

- i) to describe and analyse the effects of the global war on terror on aid policy and practice as it relates to supporting non-governmental public action around poverty, rights and social justice in aid-recipient countries. By focussing on the cases of Afghanistan, Kenya and India the research will yield detailed, new material about the effects of the war against terror on non-governmental public action in different political contexts and shifts in aid policy and practice around supporting civil society.
- ii) To advance theoretical work on the politics of civil society and development, and more specifically of the complex processes whereby global politics, international security and international aid policy intertwine with national politics and the shaping of local civil societies.
- iii) To contribute towards the development of practical strategies and policies for non-governmental organisations to pursue their activities effectively in the context of a global war on terror.

Key research questions/hypotheses and methods

The proposal sets forth several propositions. The first is that the context of the global war on terror makes it more difficult for non-governmental public actors in aid-recipient countries to advocate around poverty, rights and social justice, particularly where there is a perceived threat to national security and/or US security interests are high. Second, it is proposed that this war changes the policy, political and operational environment for international development agencies, leading to changes in strategy and practice regarding non-governmental public actors. Finally, it is suggested that the effects on non-governmental public action will vary according to the relative strength of civil society, being most pronounced in post-conflict states where state institutions are being rebuilt and civil society is weak; to a lesser degree in emerging democracies, where the institutional framework for and legitimacy of civil society are being established; and least pronounced, though still evident, in developing countries with established democracies and legitimate, vibrant civil societies.

The research uses a multi-method approach, including a critical review of relevant academic and grey literatures, content analysis of policy documentation, country case-studies, focus groups, and semi-structured interviews. The research will be primarily qualitative as the research questions demand in-depth investigation that draws out the contours, nuances and details of complex political processes. There will be some statistical analysis of aid flows and sectoral distribution.

Relation to the programme

This research contributes to the programme in several ways. First, it contributes to the programme's objectives of developing theory around non-governmental public action. It will contribute theoretically to understanding of the politics of civil society and development. The starting-point of much current analysis of donor support to civil society is that donors significantly shape non-governmental public action through their funding and their definition of civil society. This research will highlight the complex dynamics of these processes, arguing that the shaping of civil society takes place through the negotiation of power relations by a variety of actors. In the context of the global war on terror these processes have become more complex as global politics, international security concerns and international development policy intertwine with national politics and the shaping of local civil societies.

Second at the conceptual level the research will probe the adequacy of dichotomies such as global/national, development/humanitarian work, South/North and explore the politics underlying the appropriation of concepts such as civil society, humanitarian, rights, and terrorism. Third, empirically the research will yield illustrative material documenting in specific contexts both the continuities with the past and changes in the spaces and possibilities for non-governmental public action, and in development policy and practice towards civil society as security concerns become more closely integrated into development and humanitarian work. Engagement with user groups at all stages of the research process will ensure the co-production of knowledge. In terms of the programme strands, this proposal relates mainly to Strand C but also to B.

Relevance of this research to user groups

This research is relevant to bilateral and multilateral international development agencies; government policy-makers in the countries under investigation and in the UK, particularly those concerned with foreign policy, international development, domestic and global security issues; to UK-based international development NGOs such as Oxfam, Save the Children Fund; and to non-governmental public actors in the countries under investigation. In particular the detailed empirical research will provide sound evidence of the effects of the global war against terror on local civil societies and on development policy and practice on the ground in varying political contexts. In this way the research can inform efforts by international NGOs to contest the blurring of boundaries between civil and military action in development and humanitarian work and to develop strategies to maintain independence, neutrality and basic humanitarian principles. With regard to international bilateral and multilateral development agencies, the research can similarly contribute to rethinking strategies for engaging with civil society organisations in a changed context of the increasing juxtaposition of security and development concerns. For local civil society organisations the research can potentially provide evidence-based analysis of the effects of the global war on terror and feed into the development of strategies to preserve the terrain of autonomous action around issues of poverty, rights and social justice.

Contacts

email: J.A.Howell@lse.ac.uk

email: J.Lind@lse.ac.uk

May 2006