Pilfering the peace:
The nexus between corruption and peacebuilding

How might the best practices of peacebuilding be applied to anti-corruption? Based on interviews with trainers and staff of the Burundi Leadership Training Programme (BLTP) of the Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars, this article explores possible answers to that question in light of a successful peacebuilding effort. The author also flags ideas for future projects and research at the nexus of the two fields.

Peacebuilding and anti-corruption: Room for collaboration?

Amy Margolies

On June 9, 2009, an article in *The New York Times* documented the failure of anti-corruption initiatives in Africa.[1] Given this grim state of affairs, it is perhaps a suitable moment to explore new directions for praxis. Although in theory convergences may be drawn between peacebuilding and anti-corruption, the practical implications of these connections have not been fully explored. This article examines pragmatic intersections in programming based on interviews with practitioners. The trainers and staff of the Burundi Leadership Training Programme (BLTP), a well-established peacebuilding initiative, commented on this emerging issue. While not specifically focused on anti-corruption, the BLTP provides a vantage point from which to examine the current relationship between the two fields, as well as to highlight areas for potential collaboration. In particular, it suggests how a peacebuilding model like that of the BLTP might be applied to the problem of corruption.

The BLTP was created in response to the need for increased capacities for collaboration, trust and communication among key stakeholders in Burundi. It is an initiative of the Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars, led by Howard Wolpe, Seven-term Congressman, Chair of the House Subcommittee on Africa and Presidential Special Envoy to Africa's Great Lakes Region. Along with Wolpe, Steven McDonald, Consulting Programme Director, and Elizabeth McClintock, Lead Trainer, were interviewed about the potential linkages between the BLTP peacebuilding and conflict transformation programme and anti-corruption.

Corruption and peacebuilding in Burundi

On August 28, 2000, the Arusha Peace Accords were signed by nineteen Burundian political parties, drawing to a close two and a half years of negotiations. However, Burundi returned to conflict soon thereafter, with organised violence continuing until 2006. Existing parties vied for influence, and armed rebel groups attempted to transform into political parties. A number of significant constituencies that were not signatories at Arusha returned to the bush to continue resistance. In response to the continued strife in Burundi, the Burundi Leadership Training Programme was launched in 2002 with funding from the World Bank and USAID's Office for Transition Initiatives. Subsequent funding for the programme was contributed by the European Commission as well as by the UK Department for International Development.

The BLTP directly engages key Burundian leaders in its trainings. Although the programme does not specifically address corruption, workshop participants often raise the subject as an important factor in stalling Burundi's political transition. In the interview, Wolpe remarked, "In Burundi, corruption exists on all levels. The more visible and highly publicised instances of corruption have been government officials ripping off contractors. This is what captured public attention."[2] Corruption became a topic of discussion during and after the peace process. Over the course of several years, Arusha delegates were paid hundreds of dollars in per diems for their participation in the peace accords – a system perceived by many Burundians as corrupt. The cash windfall had a visible impact on the local economy. Today in Bujumbura, there is a neighbourhood called "Arusha Town" because of new homes built by delegates.

Payments for peace agreements are an example of the less-than-transparent ways in which corruption and peacebuilding intertwine. McClintock commented, "There is a very strong relationship between corruption and peacebuilding due to the corrosive nature of corruption on peace, and therefore on peacebuilding. [Corruption] undermines peoples' incentives to continue to participate in the process if they feel that the benefits are not equally distributed."[3] Short-term solutions, when not seen as part of a longer-term strategy, can lead to undermining of trust and motivation to work for the common good.

The BLTP process

In contrast with the precedent set during the Arusha Accords, Wolpe and McDonald decided against per diems to ensure that participants were not attending workshops solely for financial gain. Although an allowance was provided to facilitate participants' travel and costs during the training, this amount was modest, breaking the local tradition. As McDonald noted, "It raised a few eyebrows from Burundians until they realised the seriousness of our intent."[4]

Instead, Wolpe and McDonald spent months building the groundwork for engagement. They interviewed stakeholders from all levels of society, including rebels, government officials and civil society groups. Those interviewed were given the criterion of selecting leaders that could shape the future of Burundi, for better or for worse. The BLTP aimed to balance Hutu and Tutsi, half from the political class and half from civil society, engaging hardliners as well as moderates. Among those selected were extremists and rumoured corrupt actors. Wolpe elaborated, "Every diplomatic colleague warned us not to include [them], saying they would undermine

> ## In post-conflict societies, anti-corruption programmes may negatively affect peacebuilding efforts.

the process."[5] The challenges faced in participant selection reflect a familiar paradox in peacebuilding: those most critical to securing peace are often those with the greatest histories of abuse.

Despite the reputations of a handful of participants, Wolpe and McDonald insisted upon their involvement because Burundians cited them as key to the country's future. Wolpe and McDonald believe that the BLTP's workshops, based on interactive role-playing and simulation exercises, encouraged extremist actors to change their behaviour. Wolpe declared, "There was no one more dramatically transformed than a top general, who is now the principal champion for integration and reform."[6] In this manner, BLTP seeks to repair relationships between key actors, building trust and encouraging a mutual gains approach to problem solving.

Conflict and anti-corruption

Corruption in the post-conflict environment thrives on political volatility, social disorder and economic chaos. Corruption also serves as a survival mechanism in contexts where the population cannot depend on consistent salaries, functioning markets or government services. In response, national governments, nonprofits and multilateral institutions have created initiatives attempting to limit corruption.

Although there are many obstacles to fighting corruption, most observers feel that political will is one of the most fundamental hurdles. If political leaders do not support an anti-corruption agenda, it is unlikely that measures to fight corruption will be successful. Furthermore, political will may be difficult to achieve if key actors themselves are engaged in corrupt activities. The question of state involvement is of particular relevance during or after conflict, when stakeholders may attempt to achieve an agreement at any cost. The "corruption buying peace" phenomenon often occurs during peace processes, as intransigent actors may be enticed into participation with financial incentives.

As in peacebuilding, anti-corruption programmes take on a variety of forms, including punitive, preventative or ethics-based strategies.[7] Anti-corruption work may include efforts to curb the flow of illicit assets, prosecute embezzling politicians or educate the public. Peacebuilding, on the other hand, attempts to transform relationships or pursue reconciliation and through these means, addresses the issue of "political will".

By definition anti-corruption programmes are not strictly conflict-sensitive, in that the potential positive and negative effects of activities in the conflict context have not been analysed. To the contrary, in post-conflict societies,

> ## Corruption serves as a survival mechanism in contexts where the population cannot depend on consistent salaries.

anti-corruption programmes may negatively affect peacebuilding efforts by disrupting patterns of corruption. For example, while removing corrupt actors from the political arena may seem a positive step in post-conflict governance, it may also disrupt peace processes or peacebuilding measures underway.

Locally driven processes are essential to develop legitimate anti-corruption measures. These interventions should be based on public perceptions of what types of corruption are detrimental in the particular society. The BLTP team are in agreement that corruption may only be addressed if desired by programme participants, supported by political will or a newfound appreciation of commonality among protagonists, and guided by local prerogatives rather than by donor priorities. As each region or country possesses distinct social, political and economic mores, the type, scope and intensity of corruption will also differ. McClintock comments, "It would go against cultural norms [in

PHOTO: ADAM COHN/FLICKR

Among the obstacles to fighting corruption, lack of political will is probably the most important. Especially in conflict situations, the state plays a crucial role in creating stability.

Burundi] to not help someone who has been arrested, particularly if that person is a relative. People cannot sacrifice the relationships they depend on, and furthermore, this is not considered corruption. In comparison, having to pay for a birth certificate is unacceptable, because that official is using the power of his/her office to enrich himself/herself in a way that is detrimental to the community."[8] Thus, a fitting definition must integrate public perceptions of corruption, as well as the social norms and values that those perceptions arise from.

Programmatic links and integration

As alluded to above, anti-corruption can be understood as an extension of peacebuilding, in that peacebuilding attempts to change the same conditions and attitudes that facilitate corruption. Wolpe views corruption as a symptom of divided societies where a winner-take-all mind-set is paramount, and success or survival must come at the expense of others. McDonald explains, "It is not so much a lack of political will but a fear of being excluded from power." Wolpe adds, "To the extent that you can begin to alter that paradigm – to generate interdependence, and to recognise that collaboration can strengthen one's own self-interest, you begin to impact the drivers of corruption."[9] Likewise, the team believes that peacebuilding efforts that strengthen relationships and encourage social cohesion can be an essential component in fighting corruption.

Unsurprisingly, most practitioners see the potential for crossover in peacebuilding and anti-corruption in preventive rather than punitive action.

The "corruption buying peace" phenomenon often occurs during peace processes.

The BLTP team is no exception. Their workshops focus on skill- and relationship-building to prevent interpersonal conflict. The team sees the potential for this method to be applied to corruption. During trainings in Burundi, corruption in the military and police was often cited as a barrier to a more effective force, precluding the advancement of institutional goals. The team suggested the programme could provide skills on how to conduct a conversation on corruption in the forces. Consequently, the role the training could have in anti-corruption

work would be facilitative, rather than directive. McClintock elaborates, "The skills would enable people to prepare better strategies by communicating more effectively about how to combat corruption. These are enabling skills, not a solution to the problem."[10]

While attendance at workshops does not guarantee skills will be used, such trainings may help to shift the zero-sum mindset of conflict to one of mutual gains. Trainings may encourage intransigent political actors to work together, and could stimulate political will to fight corruption. In this manner, educational or skill-based preventative initiatives may represent a first step in potentially integrating peacebuilding practice and anti-corruption. McClintock envisions a possible programme in Burundi, "To educate people about the Arusha Accords, and during elections, corruption could be part of an educational component of a peacebuilding programme."[11]

Specialised trainings or dialogues focused on issues of corruption could be another practical meeting point between the two disciplines. Wolpe and McDonald are planning an initiative that would integrate anti-corruption and peacebuilding strategies in the former breakaway state of Katanga province in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The province is situated within a mining region with a history of foreign resource exploitation and corruption. This new project would become a part of the peacebuilding work already being carried out in the DRC, which began in 2006 and was inspired by the BLTP. For the first time, this programme would bring together key Congolese political and national leaders with leading expatriate investors, in particular representatives from mining companies. Wolpe explains, "The process would create cohesive networks of stakeholders and would hopefully produce an agreement or collective effort to develop a more rationalised system of economic regulation and management."[12]

This concept, drawn from previous work in the DRC, suggests a new model for combining strategies from peacebuilding and anti-corruption. These hybrid approaches could produce concrete outputs such as codes of conduct, social contracts or regulatory structures to staunch corruption. However, cor-

rupt actors may have little motivation to participate when financial incentives remain and in the absence of political pressure. Engagement with all stakeholders is clearly the difficult first step, though some companies have shown interest.

McDonald emphasises the importance of the initiative: "In Katanga resources are flowing across the borders without regulation or tariffs, so it is a critical issue in the conflict. This will be our testing ground of dealing with corruption as a cause of conflict."[13] The programme would function as a vehicle by which people come together to dialogue and create solutions. In this manner, McClintock explains, "we would give them skills to talk about [corruption], and they would come up with the regulatory structure which would include some way to deal with corruption, or to combat it."[14] The core concept would be to instil a broader definition of self-interest as being best pursued by taking into account the interests of others.

Challenges for monitoring and evaluation

Definitions of corruption differ across cultures, making the establishment of a universal definition impossible and impractical. The lack of a common definition and the diversity of perceptions of corruption create obstacles to developing standardised monitoring and evaluation practices. Global indices of corruption may provide some guidance and means for broad comparison, but even among these measures there is great variety in the indicators used.

On the programme level, monitoring and evaluation of measures such as improved relationships and increased accountability is a complex and imperfect process. For example, the participation of extremist actors in workshops does not necessarily lead to behaviour change. While relationships developed through workshops may increase horizontal accountability among participants by encouraging collaborative behaviour, it is difficult to prove attribution. As McDonald explains, "Corruption occurs because of fear, insecurities and perceptions of others' disadvantages. Building cohesion, collaboration and a sense of the common future, and creating common nationalism is as key to combating corruption as it is to fighting conflict."[15] However, it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of the trainings on increasing feelings of accountability among participants.

The chief of Burundi's last active rebel group Agathon Rwasa raises his fist as he salutes a crowd moments before declaring on April 18, 2009 that he has renounced his movement's 'armed struggle' bringing to fruition a peace deal to end 13 years of civil war.

The question of evaluation remains a challenge for both initiatives that target corruption and peacebuilding through behaviour change and prevention, and thus will prove equally difficult for integrated programmes. Therefore, it will prove challenging to recognise success, and could likely complicate funding for these "unproved" methodologies.

Future directions

The BLTP provides a perspective on the possibility of integrating the work of peacebuilders and those who fight corruption. In essence, mainstreaming anti-corruption into peacebuilding practice could suggest a more conflict-sensitive model for anti-corruption. Anti-corruption would benefit from a "do no harm" approach, and peacebuilding programmes could more directly address issues of corruption in conflict or post-conflict scenarios. In this manner, peacebuilding can inform anti-corruption and serve as a vehicle for integration on the programmatic level. Peacebuilding practices such as relationship-building, dialogue and a mutual gains approach may provide new skills and capacities for those who confront (or benefit from) corruption. These

stakeholders, in turn, possess the ability to influence political will, one of the greatest hurdles to fighting corruption.

However, the challenge to develop innovative ways to deal with the problem will remain as long as the causes and facilitating factors of corruption persist. Peacebuilders assume that political inclusion and collaboration create incentives for transparency, although the environmental factors that create opportunities for corruption may continue to exist, such as weak rule of law, ineffective institutions and a lack of regulation. The discussion with BLTP practitioners suggests that these factors can also be addressed through training to build collaborative capacity and trust, instil communications and joint problem solving skills, and create a culture of shared interests in state success. When the ability of individuals to work together is reinforced and sustained efforts are made to reach a common goal, then institutions and legal frameworks are strengthened. Therefore, practitioners might be able to take new directions that combine strategies from both fields that possess a potential to offer incentives for peace and transparency. En-

couraging collaboration and dialogue between practitioners from both fields can facilitate this process. All in all, the results remain to be seen and, of course, accurately measured. 🖋

1 Duggar, Cecilia. "Battle to Halt Graft Scourge in Africa Ebbs." The New York Times. June 9, 2009

2 Howard Wolpe, Personal Interview, June 9, 2009

3 Elizabeth McClintock, Personal Interview, June 23, 2009

4 Steven McDonald, Personal Interview, June 9, 2009

5 Howard Wolpe, Personal Interview, June 9, 2009

6 *Ibid.*

7 Jennett, Victoria. Transparency International, U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Center. 25 September, 2006

8 Elizabeth McClintock, Personal Interview, June 23, 2009

9 Howard Wolpe, Personal Interview, June 9, 2009

10 Elizabeth McClintock, Personal Interview, June 23, 2009

11 *Ibid.*

12 Howard Wolpe, Personal Interview, June 9, 2009

13 Steven McDonald, Personal Interview, June 9, 2009

14 Elizabeth McClintock, Personal Interview, June 23, 2009

15 Steven McDonald, Personal Interview, June 9, 2009