



Evaluation of the Norwegian Research and Development Activities in Conflict Prevention and Peace-building

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Final Executive Summary**

Submitted by Channel Research



Norad

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Executive Summary

Approach and Methodology

Since the early 1990s Norway has been playing an important role as facilitator in a number of peace and reconciliation processes. Norwegian researchers have underpinned this by providing up to date information and innovative analyses. They also help develop competence in Norway and abroad, and generate useful contacts that bolster formal negotiations.

This evaluation was commissioned by the Evaluation Department, Norad, to assess to what degree, and in what manner, the research carried out at four Norwegian institutes promotes the objectives of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in conflict prevention.

More specifically the evaluation was asked to define how research is resulting in outcomes that promote *instrumental* and *conceptual* utility objectives. In the context of this evaluation, instrumental utility refers to the value of research and development (R&D) as a means for improving the operational decision-making at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The conceptual utility on the other hand refers to the value of R&D for a strengthening of the Norwegian knowledge base on Conflict Prevention and Peace-building issues, which can eventually be expected to inform public debate, and provide deeper understanding of the issues, thereby helping the Ministry and its partners in peace and conflict work in the long-term.

The consensus about this new field amongst OECD bilateral aid co-operation agencies is that the scope of conflict prevention and peace-building covers all activities carried out in development, security, justice and reconciliation, governance and political assistance. What distinguishes it from other types of aid is the aim to assist the ending of inter-group violence, when combined with the pursuit of just and equitable social conditions.

The activities evaluated are those of the Christian Michelsen Institute (CMI), Norwegian Institute for International Affairs (NUPI), Fafo Applied International Studies (Fafo), and International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO), funded by the MFA and the Research Council of Norway, or NORAD, over the period 2002-2007.

The evaluation has focused on the production of the research (as opposed to an assessment of scientific quality), and on its effects. This can be traced as a link between research outcomes and the key factors of international conflict. The case studies are Palestine, Jordan and Sudan, plus desk reviews on Sri Lanka, Training for Peace (a project training of the civilian components of African peace support operations), and a review of research on gender in conflict in support of UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

Intention and Use of Norwegian Research

Norwegian policy views peace as a symbiotic relationship, best summed up in the aphorism: 'sustainable development promotes peace and sustainable peace promotes development'. Research on conflict is in turn given a high priority in Norwegian foreign policy, and funded through different sources at the MFA and Norad. Poverty and Peace research in particular is an important element at high level foreign policy strategies. During the period under review Ministry of Foreign Affairs funding has resulted in increased efforts on Conflict Prevention and Peace-building (CPPB) research, and resulted in useful network building. The Ministry's planning processes have also been participatory where research institutions have been involved from early on.

Practice has developed a foreign policy approach which is often referred to as the 'Norwegian Model', characterised by a commitment to long term engagement, involvement of Norwegian researchers and NGOs, and the pragmatic, flexible use of human and financial resources in support of peace processes.

This pragmatic use of human and financial resources is channelled amongst others through the four institutes, but also many other institutions in Norway and abroad. Some programmes commissioned by the Research Council of Norway are more long term, but still sharply policy related.

Corroborating a recent evaluation on development research¹, the results of this evaluation on research and development in the area of conflict prevention and Peace-building are comparatively good:

- the four institutes commit senior staff to research in this area;
- a high proportion of the research is written in English making it accessible to a wider, international audience;
- it dovetails with other Norwegian foreign policy research and policy priorities;
- researchers conduct the type of research that is needed;
- and there is some evidence of knowledge utilisation.

While prior to 2005-2006 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Research Council of Norway gave only limited priority to peace research, this has increased now with the programming of both fundamental research (Poverty and Peace Programme) and an annually increasing allocation for applied research from the Peace and Reconciliation Unit.

However the team has faced considerable difficulties in data collection and analysis, due to the differences in definitions of conflict prevention and peace-building (for example a large amount of research in this field does not recognise itself as such) and of financial and project reporting in the Ministry and the institutes. While overall expenditure is clear, it is very difficult to assign specific research outputs to funding decisions, and even more difficult to relate resources to country specific impact, due to the diverse nature of dynamics covered worldwide, as well as the culture of discretion in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Within a rich interface of consultation and mutual familiarity between the research community and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, there is a need to create better incentives for all sides for an efficient and predictable utilisation of research outputs. The evaluation observes that the higher policy coordination wanes as one moves down to the implementation levels.

There is firstly an unnecessary contrast between the short-term and long-term research funding from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where the latter seeks to create capacity and the former is focused on rapid and relevant information. A lack of a common understanding in the project selection has resulted in a loss of efficiency in the research content and environment. Considerable resources are spent on poorly coordinated proposals, on research streams that are not pursued, or foreign policy initiatives that are not supported by research.

Significance of Impact as Demonstrated by the Case Studies

Sudan provides the best example of the Norwegian Model being used in a consistent fashion to achieve highly relevant influence on the key drivers of conflict. The inter-relations of the institutes with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and actors in country have allowed Norway to continue to play an important role.

A review of the larger projects shows that the provision of background information was successful in allowing Norway to address appropriate issues, through a good identification of stakeholders. On the other hand the conceptual research was limited to a small audience. The duration of influence of the institutes is exceptionally strong in Sudan, with important inroads into achieving sustainability/durability of the outcomes in Sudan itself, particularly thanks to the links to local partners. The timing of the research has also been good, coinciding with policy decisions.

In Palestine the conflict drivers are multiple and a large number of them are outside the sphere of research actors, as international policy in particular is subordinated to many other influences. Whereas capacity development and informal Track II contacts have been a waning priority in the current polarised environment, information and conceptual contributions remain exceptionally good. The Living Conditions surveys constitute a relevant and extensive vector of impact.

1. 'Norwegian Development Research – An Evaluation', The Research Council of Norway 2007.

The Training for Peace programme is a good example of the capacity building role that the institutes can play in civilian aspects of peace-keeping, leading to regional knowledge bases and networks of personnel. The sustainability of the programme varies, however, if one speaks of the Norwegian institute (where it is small and where it is not linked to a clearly defined Ministry of Foreign Affairs policy) or of local partners (where there is good sustainability thanks to long range funding).

In spite of a prominent role in the negotiations in Sri Lanka, the MFA has made only limited recourse to the four institutes to provide research and development services in relation to the conflict. Instead it has sought to meet the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' policy research needs by commissioning research on Sri Lanka outside of Norway, including considerable funding to Sri Lankan researchers.

As regards gender in conflict and support to Security Council 1325, the influence of the institutes on the formulation of the Norwegian position has been well synchronised to support the process of formulation and implementation of the Resolution, but still needs to be developed in terms of its application in conflict situations.

Overall Conclusions

Research and development in conflict prevention and peacebuilding has created a dynamic and competitive literature, and a web of significant contacts for Norway, leading to some unique outcomes in terms of peace processes building on previous networks of contacts and access. However the research specialisms of the individual institutes, as well as individual research programmes and researchers within them, combined with short term, particular needs of the MFA, means that it is difficult to trace out a coherent and broad focus within Norwegian R&D on peacebuilding. This leads to a strong performance in terms of the relevance of the research produced to issues in particular conflict, but not to an efficient use of the research by the MFA, and it ascribes a low importance for local partners who turn out to be important elements of good performance.

The conflict situations which Norway engages with involve ever more diverse forms of influence. The complex interaction between macro and micro dynamics creates environments in which broad strategic orientations may constrain initiatives on the ground, but also one where micro-level issues may come to generate strategic effects, mainly due to real time communication and media interest in conflicts. It coincides with increased pressures on the time and attention on MFA officials. In such an environment, research and development on CPPB is an asset which could be further developed.

Interestingly, there is a mutual reluctance, on the part of the institutes as well as on the part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to develop a framework either for research and development or for conflict prevention. Many respondents within the research institutes (and particularly PRIO) have identified the non-determination, informality and flexibility of the existing arrangements, as an advantage (citing in particular a bias in favour of competitive approach to capacity). Some have even said that eliminating this room for maneuver through an MFA defined theoretical and/or conceptual framework would be counterproductive for research as it would limit their independence. From the MFA's point of view it would constrain their ability to commission applied research linked to short term policy needs (some of which must occasionally remain confidential).

It is for this reason that the evaluation does not argue for the development of a new structure to manage research and development in the area of conflict prevention and peacebuilding, but does push towards a better designed and more transparent setup that entails organised dialogues between the MFA and the research institutes on research funding agendas and the commissioning and utilisation of research.

Recommendations

The Terms of Reference ask for advice on how to improve utility. The evaluation would recommend a change in the coordination regime, to better seize this important opportunity for the Norwegian model.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs should in essence create a **coordination regime** for the MFA, Research Council of Norway and for those institutes interested in conflict prevention and

peacebuilding. This will be materialised in meetings and documentation, in which short term priorities of research and development would be better supplemented by the commissioning bodies (including objectives formulated in terms of outcomes, selection criteria, and possible synergies with non-Norwegian institutions). This already exists for the Research Council of Norway, but covers only a small part of the research and is not well linked to the concept of peace and reconciliation as pursued by the MFA. The intent should be for the MFA to strategically build up and sustain the CPPB research environment in Norway, in Europe, and in developing partner countries in a manner that combines flexibility and long term planning.

More specifically, three developments should take place:

1. *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs* should **publish explicit objectives in terms of fields of research** which Norwegian conflict prevention and peacebuilding requires, with greater emphasis on capacity building in Norway and abroad, and priorities in the information base (two of the key outcomes of research and development identified by this evaluation). This prioritization of areas that the MFA wants covered in research projects could be officially published (without being linked to calls for proposals) and aligned to the list of countries in which Norway wishes to invest resources, be they developing countries or not. This would provide medium to long term areas of interest, thematic priorities, and indications on the necessary timing of outputs, and to a certain extent contribute to the greater ‘arm’s length’ distance between researcher and user advocated by the above mentioned evaluation on development research in Norway².
2. Since research is funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and concerns international relations and country situations, the research programmes and projects of the institutes should systematically design and implement strategies of **national capacity building** with suitably qualified partners in other countries but also other countries where research is carried out, which would increase the extent and duration of Norwegian research and development influence internationally. This partnership should become more of a research and development policy priority, facilitated in certain cases with funding by Norwegian embassies,³ and lead to something like an actor-focused policy in peace-building, aligned to conflict analyses and to the value foreign researchers place on having access to internationally recognised forums of debate and review. While not wishing to transform the research institutes into the training arms of Norwegian cooperation, the institutes should seek to further develop strategic research partnerships with southern researchers and research institutes so as to build research capacity and generate alternative perspectives/knowledge on conflict prevention and peacebuilding issues in countries where Norway seeks to play a role.
3. *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and especially Norad* should develop a transparent **knowledge management framework** commissioning and funding R&D specifically for CPPB. This would allow individual researchers and research institutes to plan long-term and to build research capacity that is tailored to meet the needs of the future. In dialogue with the research institutes, this would include the development of theoretical schemes, events and seminars, and an evaluation framework tied to the emerging OECD Guidelines, to guide the work of researchers in assessing the quality of their work based on impact assessment. As part of this the research institutes should develop more collaborative, genuinely strategic research programmes that take advantage of their respective areas of expertise and competence in developing conceptual, thematic and country specific research outputs. This would contribute to the ability of researchers to maintain a long term focus, marking a recognition that capacity building represents the bottleneck in Norwegian research⁴. In support of this knowledge management framework, Norad should consider moving beyond merely technical oversight of research projects to developing some capacity to assess the substantive content of research and steer it towards appropriate and relevant users within the Norwegian foreign policy machinery.

This coordination would act as a nexus of information, dialogue and ideas, but without creating constraints on either side. It would not entail additional policies, or establishment of problematic institutions, but would promote an enhanced synergy between research and policy components of Norwegian efforts in support of conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

² “Norwegian Development Research – An Evaluation”, 2007.

³ There are interesting examples of this already happening in India.

⁴ “Norwegian Development Research – An Evaluation”, 2007.

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