

WNCAC
Washington Network on Children in Armed Conflict
Conference Minutes
September 26, 2008
10 AM – 12 PM

Addendums

PPT: Felix Unogwu – WNCAC Survey Results 2008

PPT: Mark Hamilton – Theories of Youth Violence & Mobilization Strategies

Photos

Identity Group Brainstorms

Felix introduced the session by first asking those present to introduce themselves. He then reviewed the WNCAC survey results via a PowerPoint presentation. The top reason for attendance listed by members was “networking.” Additionally, the top two areas of interest were child soldiers and youth and peacebuilding.

The conference today reflects a key area of interest as suggested in the recent survey by WNCAC focusing on “youth and peacebuilding. Two guest speakers were invited to address this topic: Susan Shepler, PhD, an associate professor at American University and ethnographic researcher focusing on reintegration in Sierra Leone; and Mark Hamilton, a PhD candidate at American University whose work centers on research and writing about youth incentives for mobilization. Both speakers collaborated prior to the conference for co-presentation.

Speaker Introductions

Susan Shepler introduced herself and her work as originating from an anthropological perspective, with key emphasis on local context and the ways in which people create their own categories and meanings. Her research has been conducted in Sierra Leone over a period of years following a group of ex-combatants, beginning with their time in psycho social programs to their return to community and afterwards. Among other topics, Dr. Shepler looked at: how local youth and communities understand the categories of terms such as “youth,” “child soldier,” and so on; differences in reintegration for girls and boys; resiliency – that so many war-affected youths can function again; youth agency – how youth understand systems and the ways in which they worked these systems; what is authentic participation vs agency sponsored part?

Dr. Shepler posed a key QUESTION:

How can agencies effectively partner with youth, allow them to have their own message?

She refers specifically to Yvonne Kemper’s work “Youth in War-to-Peace Transitions” regarding three frameworks for viewing youth and conflict programming. These three interventions are: (1) rights based (2) economic (3) socio-political – all 3 leading to

different programming and as well as different perceptions of “participation.” Kemper recommends a holistic approach combining all three for effective programming.

Susan suggests that all frameworks are political in the sense that children are political actors in reaction to frameworks. They will ACTIVELY respond to discourse and use it for their purposes.

Mark Hamilton began by prefacing his work briefly to include research in South Asia and Latin America on youth incentives for mobilization. He suggested that in order for programming to be effective, one must look at local context and youth agency. He asks; What are the structures and incentives for violence by youth? To answer this question, he encourages analyzing and addressing the roots of the conflict. He purports that currently there is a trend that divorces incentives for youth participation from programming. In other words, due diligence and effective programming requires programs to marry the “roots to the response.” In his PowerPoint, he proposes a “WEB” of youth transitions – and states that youth are generally in a stage of transition between the need for protection and aspiration and desired for self-sufficiency. They are caught in the middle.

Mark proceeded to with a PowerPoint presentation called “*Incentives for Mobilization & Reflections on Our Programming*”. He suggests that one can peer through three lenses to determine incentives for mobilization. These are (1) Group Dynamics (2) Grievances or (3) Greed. Within each of these categories Mark listed relevant theoretical foundations. For *Group Dynamics*, he cited the “youth bulge” theory that has a biological foundation (youth are unstable and young men are violent) as well as institutional (social crowding of resources.) For Grievances, he cited Gurr’s theory of relative and absolute deprivation (frustrations due to unmet or mismanaged expectations), especially in the realm of political and economic arenas. For Greed, incentives for mobilization were viewed through terms of “carrots and sticks” or “reward or punishment,” (war booty vs fear).

Group Activities

A significant portion of the conference was dedicated to active engagement of participants. Mark and Susan designed and facilitated a number of activities centered on first, youth incentives for mobilization and second, programmatic

Activity 1

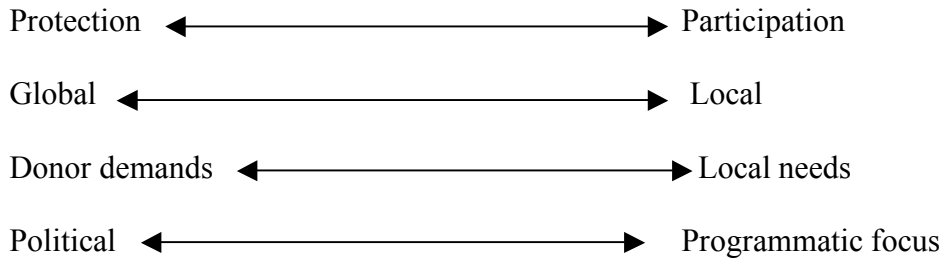
Mark asked members to move towards one of the three categories which they felt best described incentives for youth mobilization. As the group discussed their decisions, it was apparent that many felt a relationship between all three incentives and that none existed in isolation as the sole incentives for youth.

Activity 2

Following this activity, Mark then asked the room to divide themselves into the following groups: state military, non-state armed group, gang/criminal network and political party. The groups were then asked brainstorm and record goals, strategies and constraints for mobilizing youth. (please see “Group Notes: Strategies for Mobilizing Youth”)

Activity 3

Dr. Susan Shepler moved into the next section of discussion and activities focused on the theme of local agency as well as the different youth program approaches. The following was drawn on a board and the audience was asked to consider a specific program they had personal knowledge of and map it conceptually as to where it fell on the four following spectrums:



This activity gave attendees a chance to describe some of their programming experience, successes and challenges.

Recommendations

Susan Shepler recommended programmers to consider the risks and benefits of both ends of each spectrum and Mark Hamilton encouraged a broader perspective in youth work. He shared the “Ladder of Participation; From Manipulation to Decision-Sharing (found in his powerpoint) and suggested careful consideration of the Anderson framework of DO NO HARM.

Announcements

- Sunday, September 28, 2008, 5- 7 PM: President of Sierra Leone will be present at American University in Ward Hall
- Programming opportunities coming up in Nigeria (Dept. of State/HR & Labor)
- October 8, 2008, 1 – 5 PM: New Interagency Network Evaluation of Youth Programs in Areas of Conflict (EYPAC) hosts a symposium with speaker Annie Bertrand of Mercy Corps. Contact: Kacie Marano - youthindicators@gmail.com
- Equip3/USAID – Youth & Livelihood Program Guide now available
- Non-Violent Peace Force is now recruiting for trainings and missions in the US and abroad.