Universität Basel

Research Project

Regaining Trust in Post-Conflict Societies. A comparative Study, Part I

Third-party funded project

Project title Regaining Trust in Post-Conflict Societies. A comparative Study, Part I
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Department
Project Website http://www.unibas-ethno.ch/forschung/forschungsprojekte/trust.php
Project start 01.10.2007
Probable end 30.09.2010
Status Completed
General theme
Trust is a societal resource that permeates all spheres of everyday life and enables individuals to interact with others and institutions. It is often presumed that trust fades during times of conflict. Violent crises in particular seem to reduce the level of societal trust to a degree that prevents the reconfiguration of society after conflict. Especially long-term conflicts in Africa have led to situations where the lack of trust is often perceived as all-embracing and heavily affecting the future of society.

However, our feasibility study "Regaining Trust and Civil Security in Post-Conflict Societies" conducted from April 2006 to March 2007 on which this project is based, revealed that social trust is not simply disappearing during crisis. It rather changes and transforms into other types of trust. Though this process may affect the general level of trust in society, there is a need to distinguish between specific societal spheres where actors may still reproduce particular types of trust (defined below). The project hence addresses the question how societal trust transforms and re-emerges in post-conflict societies. It adopts a typology of trust and a methodology developed from the empirical findings of the feasibility study as well as theoretical considerations. The typology aims at covering trust in a wide variety of social settings and situations. It also aims at tracing the transformation of trust from one type into the other. We are heading for an empirically informed contribution to the theory of trust in society, in particular with regard to post-conflict societies in Africa.

Methodological approach
The project focuses on four ideal types of trust: personal trust, basic social trust, institutional trust, and normative trust. The typology is mainly based on the findings of the feasibility study but significantly enlarges the scope of enquiry with regard to processes. We adopt a comparative approach based on field studies by four researchers in two border regions, namely northern Côte d'Ivoire and the neighbouring regions of Burkina Faso, Mali, Liberiaäand Guinea and northern Namibia and the adjacent parts of Angola. Empirical enquiry is based on the Emic Evaluation Approach, a triangulation of a mapping of actors, discourse analysis and practice analysis. The findings are brought together in a series of internal workshops and then presented at international conferences.

Research questions first refer to the four types of trust. Subsidiary questions address trust within the processes of social re-configurations after conflict. The main empirical questions are:

- Basic social trust: How do specific actors evaluate the likelihood of being safe in a certain place at a certain time?
- Personal trust: How do specific actors evaluate existing and future relationships to other actors?
- Institutional trust: How do specific actors identify situations where institutions and their representatives will play a predictable role?
- Normative trust: How do specific actors identify spheres in which they assume validity of particular norms?
- Trust as process: Will situations in which trust is more or less consciously evaluated precede the emergence of trust as a non-reflective attitude?

Relevance

Regaining trust has been identified by major international organisations as a cornerstone in peace building processes. The World Bank, Swisspeace and other institutions have already shown interest in the outcome of the feasibility study in the context of fostering social cooperation and civil security after conflict.

International cooperation

The project is embedded into cooperation between partners from Europe and Africa, in particular in the two regions of field research (CSRS, Point Sud, UNAM Windhoek). The project is also carried out in close cooperation with the ESF COST action A24 and the AEGIS network of European Centres for African Studies as well as the African Borderlands Research Network (ABORN).

Keywords Conflict, Trust, State, Statehood, Africa
Financed by
Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)

Follow-up project of 5637 Regaining Trust and Civil Security after Conflict: A feasibility study in Western and Southern Africa

Add publication

Add documents

Specify cooperation partners

ID	Kreditinhaber	Kooperationspartner	Institution	Laufzeit - von	Laufzeit - bis
298473	Förster, Till	Babo, Alfred, Dr	Université de Bouaké	01.09.2007	30.09.2013
366685	Förster, Till	Kocra, Lossina Assoua, Ass Prof Dr	University of Bayreuth	01.09.2007	30.09.2013

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