Research Paper 61

Thinking and Working Politically in Protracted Conflict: Distrust and Resistance to Change in the DRC

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The Developmental Leadership Program (DLP) is an international research initiative based at the University of Birmingham, and working in partnership with La Trobe University in Melbourne.

DLP aims to increase understanding of the political processes that drive or constrain development. Its work focuses on the crucial role of home-grown leaderships and coalitions in forging legitimate institutions that promote developmental outcomes.

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Acknowledgements

Summary

Since the end of the Second Congo War, the international community has mobilised considerable resources in promoting peace and sustainable development in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Despite good intentions, however, the intervention has become little more than a protracted exercise in crisis containment. Neither the huge UN Mission, the hundreds of charities and NGOs working in the country, nor the billions of dollars of donor assistance invested, has managed to support a solution to endemic conflict. For Congolese citizens who have lived through nearly two decades of internationally-supported "post-conflict peace," lack of progress has undermined the legitimacy of the intervention, which many feel does not serve their interests. At the same time, the unwillingness of so-called "local beneficiaries" to comply with the logic of external intervention has led many international intervenors to view the DRC as a lost cause, whose people are unwilling to help themselves.

Although there is consensus that the intervention in the DRC is failing, opinions on the reasons for this and therefore on what needs to change differ greatly. Drawing on extensive field research carried out over three years with Congolese citizens, expatriate UN and NGO workers in the Congo, and international donor organisations and policy-makers working on the DRC, this research critically examines how perceptions are acting as barriers to achieving change. It explores these divergent opinions and argues that unless the international community takes seriously the concerns of both Congolese and international workers operating on the ground, patterns of dysfunction, contempt and mistrust between intervenors and locals will continue to manifest.

Actors need to think and work politically to address these sources of distrust and make positive, long-term change happen. However, in order for politically astute programming to be effectively implemented, donors need to understand that external intervention (and external intervenors) are an intrinsic part of the political economy of Congolese conflict, and that local perceptions of international intervenors (and *vice versa*) have themselves become significant barriers to peace. Three aspects of intervention in the DRC are currently overlooked, and yet are important in preventing change from happening:

- **Congolese people's mistrust in external intervention.** This mistrust is rooted in a deeper history of exploitation and interference by Western powers, and is rarely acknowledged by organizations working in the DRC. Furthermore, the fact that many organizations operate in accordance with a mandate that has been externally imposed, with few immediately obvious benefits and improvements to people's everyday lives, has led many Congolese people to feel that conflict has become yet another resource for international actors to exploit for their own gain. As a consequence, where locals do engage with international programmes, they often co-opt or adapt projects for their own needs. Often these leads to a focus on short-term gains which might undermine the long-term logic of intervention. It is important for external intervenors to not disregard those who adapt projects to their own needs as spoilers and saboteurs, but to take it as an early warning sign that their projects are not context-appropriate.

- **A very low bar for defining "success" in the Congo.** There is a tendency for expatriate staff to be relatively risk averse, both out of a fear of the consequences of trying new approaches and because of a lack of institutional memory about what has been done before. As noted in the paper, there are relatively few international workers who have spent several years in the DRC, and the sheer magnitude of the task of crisis containment leaves little time and space for critical reflection on the logic of intervention. It therefore becomes easier to blame the failure of otherwise well-resourced and well-intentioned programmes on Congolese non-compliance and pervasive insecurity, rather than on a design failure. As a result, many projects continue to be funded and implemented even though past evidence shows that they are not fit for purpose.

- **The incentives of international staff operating on the ground usually discourage thinking and working politically.** Within donor organisations, there is a significant cadre of governance advisors who champion the need for flexible programming, working with potential spoilers to avoid project sabotage, and working outside the constraints of the traditional log-frame project. These champions of thinking and working politically (TWP) often rely on staff working on the ground to report back to them about the need for TWP and suggest new ways of working. However, the impetus of TWP rarely comes from staff on the ground, who are traditionally risk-averse and resistant to change. If progress is to be made, TWP programmes need buy-in from both local actors and from field-based international staff. Otherwise, these staff feel that they are shouldering all the risk without reaping any benefit.

There are a number of implications for how international intervenors can think and work politically to overcome mistrust and respond to potential spoilers:

- **International intervenors could more explicitly acknowledge the history of intervention in the DRC**, and build into their programmes space to explore how a proposed project or course of action is likely to be perceived and received by the community it is implemented in. This could be done in the design phase of a project cycle and in collaboration with local communities. Often, organisations claim to be carrying out participatory programming, but in practice this is often limited to explaining an already agreed project to the pre-identified "beneficiaries".

- If projects are co-opted or used in ways other than the purpose for which they were originally intended, then it is important to understand why they are being used that way. **Intervenors should not dismiss co-opters as necessarily saboteurs or, if it is evident that a project is being sabotaged, efforts could be made to understand *why* local actors are choosing to sabotage it**. Non-compliance can be a strong indicator that a project is not fit for purpose, and efforts could be made to incorporate potential spoilers into the next phases of programme design.

- **Donors need to support the creation of an institutional memory when intervening in states affected by protracted conflict.** Too often, policies that have proven to not work in the past get reworked as "new" ideas because personnel in the both the donor and implementing organizations cannot remember the past failure. Utilising the contextual knowledge and institutional memories of trusted Congolese staff, and training Congolese staff to take on positions of authority within implementing organisations, may help ensure that institutional memory stays in-country.

- **Funding could be available for projects that explicitly champion thinking and working politically, and implementors need to feel that they are supported and protected if they suggest high-risk, but high-reward programmes.** More could be done to encourage engagement with locals, including providing appropriate support and incentives to this end.

1

Introduction

This paper examines the nature of international intervention in the DRC and tries to understand why, despite nearly two decades of a large and ambitious UN intervention, a large NGO presence, and numerous donor-funded aid programmes, there has been little progress in finding sustainable solutions to peace and development. Especially in the troubled eastern regions of North and South Kivu, a sense of fatigue has set in around international intervention. Many international intervenors are frustrated by the lack of progress in the country, leading some to view the country as a lost cause in which the best they can hope for is the prevention of further violence and conflict. At the same time, local actors are sceptical about what the international community is doing in the country. Some even believe that international actors are conspiring to keep the Congo weak and unstable for their own personal gain. This paper addresses this mutual mistrust and stalemate between international and local actors, and argues that if intervention is going to achieve sustainable and meaningful change in the DRC, there is a need for intervenors to think and work politically. It shows that if future programmes are going to receive the political buy-in necessary to succeed, they should address the interests and incentives of all actors – both external and internal.

The paper also seeks to locate the history of international intervention in the DRC in the 21st century among the body of empirical case studies on thinking and working politically (TWP). It makes the case for the importance of TWP, through three observations. First, while technocratic programmes may seem less risky over the short-term, not thinking and working politically over the long term can create ill-will among local actors which can then undermine future programming. Second, not all flexible and adaptive programming is TWP. In the DRC, it is clear that certain programmes *have* adapted to changing contexts. However, they have not taken into account how these adaptations are perceived, or attempted to gain political buy-in for these new directions. Because of this, they have often ended up creating new obstacles. Third, and linked to this, effective TWP looks backwards as well as forwards. New interventions in the DRC tend to be framed as if each fresh approach was operating in a historical vacuum, rather than acknowledging past failures and applying these lessons in program design. This paper therefore seeks to unpack the donor-centric challenges to doing development differently, and examine how TWP could be used to improve intervenors approaches to both doing no harm, and doing some good.

This case also serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of failing to explicitly grasp the political realities of intervention. The DRC shows that where states that have been plagued by protracted and complex conflict, even well-resourced and well-intentioned interventions can inadvertently end up compounding violence and insecurity in the long term. This paper challenges the assumption that poor interventions arise only from a lack of political will and lack of resources. In the DRC, some may argue that international commitment could be greater, and those on the ground may complain that they don't have the resources they need. Even so, relative to the resources mobilized to many other post-conflict states, international commitment to building the peace in the DRC has been consistently strong and well-resourced.

The UN Mission in the Congo (MONUSCO)[1] is the longest, largest and most expensive peacekeeping mission[2] in the organization's history. MONUSCO had a budget of almost US$1.5 billion for 2015-2016, and more than 22,000 uniformed and civilian personnel deployed.[3] Donor commitment has also been strong: since 2000, the DRC has consistently been in the top ten recipients of Official Development Assistance (ODA) from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) – receiving on average $US2.6billion a year in aid from OECD donors between 2012 and 2014 (OECD, 2016). This donor assistance has been instrumental in maintaining the state's authority over the country, and foreign donors have in the past contributed more than half of the Congolese

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1   The acronym for The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In 2010 MONUSCO replaced replaced the United Nations Organization Mission in Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) which was established by the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement in 1999. In 2010, "to reflect the new phase reached in the country" (MONUSCO, 2010) the Mission changed its name to MONUSCO.

2   I will discuss later in the paper conceptualizations of the mission as a peace-enforcing, rather than peace-keeping mission, but I use the term peacekeeping mission here to distinguish MONUSCO from observer missions, such as that in Lebanon which may have had a longer duration but involved much more passive UN engagement.

3   Latest figures at https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/monusco (Fact sheet). MONUSCO has an approved budget of more than US$1.1 billion for 2017-2018.

national budget (Autesserre, 2010). International commitment in the DRC cannot be judged simply by the personnel and funding deployed to it, but this significant and sustained mobilisation of resources challenges the often-repeated idea that 'we simply do not care about the Congo' (Jones, 2015). International donor organisations, NGOs and the UN have put considerable effort into their peacebuilding interventions, as have those working in the global development industry who are dedicated to promoting sustainable peace and development in the country.

However, progress over the last 15 years has been limited and the DRC currently has the highest number of internally displaced persons in the world.[4] Its democracy has become increasingly unstable, and without the humanitarian assistance of a number of international organisations, many of its citizens would die from starvation and disease. This situation has led to frustration and fatigue from both local actors and external intervenors. There is widespread Congolese dissatisfaction with international intervention; for instance, influential members of one of its most prominent pro-democracy movements, LUCHA[5], have called for the removal of MONUSCO as a first step towards lasting peace.[6] At the tamer end of this dissatisfaction is a perception that MONUSCO is ineffective and props up a weak and/or predatory state. At the more extreme end of the spectrum is the belief that the international community has a vested interest in keeping the country in perpetual conflict.

Meanwhile international actors, increasingly frustrated with the lack of progress in the DRC, have tended to blame failures on spoilers within the country. Donors are increasingly aware that the Congolese state is uninterested in promoting peace and development. As other protracted conflicts have intensified in the Middle East and elsewhere in Africa, donors have hit a level of fatigue with the DRC. Both on the ground and in international headquarters, the late 19th century 'Heart of Darkness' narrative about the Congo is often revived. Development workers talk about neo-patrimonialism and kleptocracy as being so endemic that the country perhaps ought to be written off as a lost cause. Expatriates who had been living in the country for a few years often told stories of Congolese self-sabotage and "victim complexes" which actively prevented intervention from succeeding.

The sum of these attitudes is a sense of mutual mistrust between Congolese and international actors. In peacebuilding and statebuilding interventions, each party feels that the other has no real interest in building a sustainable peace. To understand *why* interventions in the past have failed to achieve more robust peace and development outcomes, it is important to understand the causes and consequences of this mistrust.

This paper offers evidence of the causes of this mistrust, how it is manifested, and the consequences this has for intervention effectiveness. It shows how politically informed programming may help address some of the factors which give rise to mistrust and sabotage. This will not only benefit current programmes but also reduce resistance to future interventions. However, designing more politically informed interventions requires more than change at the programmatic level; it also requires those working on the ground to actively buy in to the idea of TWP. Development practitioners need to be persuaded that TWP is not a risky alternative to traditional programmes, but rather a way to mitigate against unintended consequences that may arise from otherwise well-designed programmes. In other words, the paper calls for TWP to be seen as a solution to risk rather than the cause of it. The paper offers a typology of attitudes among development workers which may act as a barrier to promoting TWP and argues that these attitudes (and the concerns about TWP that arise from them) need to be addressed if politically-informed interventions are going to work in the long term.

Evidence is presented to support the following key findings to explain why interventions have failed to break the vicious cycles of conflict that persist in the Congo.:

- **Firstly, there is a need for more long-term political analysis and knowledge on the DRC which is finely attuned to the history of intervention in the country.** While there is evidence from the DRC that intervention programmes do try and adapt to learn lessons from failures of the past, there is rarely open reflection on how past interventions have fundamentally altered the political environment. As a result, the political economy analysis which informs programming tends to be dismissive of Congolese mistrust of intervention based on past experience.

- **Secondly, external intervenors may need to critically reflect on the normative basis of the urge to intervene in conflict/post-conflict contexts.** While the logic and motivations of intervenors may seem self-evident to donors in headquarters, it is not always seen that way by those on the ground. This paper therefore seeks to highlight some of the very different opinions that exist both in terms of beneficiaries' perceptions and in terms of the motivations of donors' implementing partners.

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4   According to the IDMC Global Report on Internal Displacement 2017, 900,000 were displaced in 2016 alone.

5   A portmanteau of the phrase "Lutte pour le Changement" (Struggle for Change)

6   A spokesperson for LUCHA told one interviewer: 'For us, the presence of MONUSCO [United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DR Congo] is a form of taking responsibility off the Congolese state. The Congolese state has to feel responsible be-fore [sic] its own problems. Therefore, one of our demands for peace is to tell MONUSCO to start packing and to leave the DRC to confront its own problems' (Heredia, 2014)

- **Thirdly, there is a need to bridge the gap between the growing consensus around TWP from donors and the lack of awareness of politically-informed ways of working in the field**. Evidence from the DRC shows that little has been done to persuade staff that TWP may be the solution, not the source, of more problems. Staff on the ground may agree that there is a need to be more politically smart, but many perceive this approach as unnecessarily risky at the personal, professional and institutional levels. There are few incentives and support structures to help them change their minds. As a result, they resist the idea of TWP-based work and prefer to stick to more traditional programming which they perceive as risk-free and politically neutral

- **Finally, this paper attempts to raise as a question for further discussion the issue of where the impetus for successful TWP should come from**. Donors and international policy-makers believe that it needs to come from those working on the ground. In the DRC, those on the front line are unlikely to advocate for TWP or far-reaching change to the way they intervene. They are caught in a vicious cycle in which instability is pervasive and persistent, and this instability itself deters them from addressing its root causes.

These points are based on findings drawn from the history of intervention in the eastern DRC, but it is hoped that they are a useful contribution to a wider discussion about the importance of TWP in conflict-affected states more generally. There is a tendency to think of TWP programmes as being suitable for more stable contexts, and for programmes that are seen as more unambiguously "developmental", rather than "humanitarian" or "post-conflict". However, especially in situations of protracted conflict, peacebuilding programmes which fail to come to terms with the evolving political environment that they operate in risk compounding instability in the long-term. I argue that TWP should not be confined to the later, developmental stages of peace- and statebuilding. There is no reason why they might not be built into post-conflict interventions much earlier on.

After a brief note on methodology, this paper is divided into four sections.

The first section makes the case for TWP and highlights the gaps in evidence and understanding about what constitutes TWP. Although the concept of TWP is relatively new in the development industry, a small but dedicated cadre of committed advocates have brought the idea to the attention of more mainstream thinking. However, as with any idea that gains wider traction, there is a danger of the concept being misunderstood, diluted or co-opted. This section therefore explores what is meant by TWP in this paper. It also discusses the perceptions of risk that are sometimes associated with TWP.

The second section discusses the international community's presence in the DRC, the present failures of intervention, and how intervention is perceived by local people. This is presented through a series of vignettes gleaned from fieldwork. It shows how perceptions can turn local agents against intervention, and explores how locals sometimes adapt and co-opt intervention practices to meet their own (short-term) needs.

The third section examines individual actors' responses to local perceptions of intervention. It also analyses how intervenors justify the shortcomings of intervention and resist changing their working methods, despite acknowledging past failures. Individual responses were wide and varied, and this section offers a typology of attitudes which, I argue, present a variety of barriers to change and a range of incentives for intervention.

The fourth section suggests ways in which international actors – both on the ground and in international headquarters – might be incentivised to think and work politically, and how local actors can be persuaded to trust in future interventions. This final section therefore focuses on taking local perceptions of peacebuilding seriously and acting at the micro level.

2

A note on methodology

This paper draws on research carried out as part of a larger project on armed groups and political inclusion in the eastern DRC. While it can be read as a stand-alone piece about intervention in the Congo, the background to this research has been set out in the previous paper in this series, *Understanding Violence in the Eastern DRC* (Perera, 2017a). As such, it draws on the same fieldwork and data collected in the Congo between November 2013 and March 2016[7]. The research presented here draws on interviews and ethnographic research from fieldwork carried out in North and South Kivu[8]; key informant interviews with international researchers, journalists and policy makers; crowdsourced data[9] collected from Congolese civilians and armed group members; and desk-based reviews of existing and emerging research on the Congo. Discussions among donors, policy-makers, practitioners and academics at various international meetings and conferences from 2014 to 2016 are also included in this paper. Many of these meetings took place under Chatham House rules, and therefore none of the quotations cited from these meetings are attributed.

The research has adopted a mixed-methods approach, and although it is not an action research project, I have relied on a process of continual learning and iterative adaptation (O'Keefe, et al., 2014). Since the fieldwork was completed, attempts have been made to test recommendations and conclusions through a series of extended conversations with selected informants and presentations at international forums. The aim was to garner feedback on my findings and discuss differences in understandings. This paper presents feedback from members of the international community based both in the DRC and in international headquarters. Some of this feedback highlights the dominant concerns and narratives of these actors and pinpoints where there has been both resistance and openness to change.

A number of terms used throughout are open to interpretation and contestation, and it must be acknowledged that there is great heterogeneity within the labels ascribed to certain groups of actors. The term "international actors", for instance, here refers to a very broad church – from NGOs, the UN Mission and UN agencies, to international donors and the international media. I have attempted to differentiate between international intervenors – defined as those working on the ground (usually in short-term posts and responding to rapidly evolving situations) – and international policy-makers (designing longer-term programmes, policies and priorities). This paper distinguishes between NGO workers and UN workers (and within the UN workers, between civilian and military). However, it does not divide these into further categories because, given the focus of this paper on how these actors view the Congolese population and how/why they resist doing things differently, the views of actors within these categories are as varied as the differences between each group. Instead a typology of resistance to change is offered, categorizing the justifications, incentives and narratives deployed by different types of actors.

A large portion of the evidence presented in this paper takes the form of quotes from formal semi-structured interviews, but also stories, vignettes and anecdotes based on participant observation both within the DRC and at meetings with international practitioners outside the country. This data is concerned with perceptions of the dynamics of conflict and intervention in the DRC, which I argue is instrumental in shaping the reality of different actor's experience in the DRC. I am extremely grateful to all the informants who took the time and effort to speak to me throughout the research process, sometimes divulging information which could have detrimental effects on their own positions. As some of the data presented also comes from off the record sources, I have anonymised all of my informants and removed information pertaining to their position and organization so that they cannot be identified.

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7   See Perera (2016) *Understanding Violence in the eastern DRC* (Birmingham: DLP, forthcoming).

8   This fieldwork includes more than 200 interviews carried out in North and South Kivu between August and November 2014 with armed group members, members of the Congolese government, army and civil society, UN military and civilian personnel, national and international NGO workers, and researchers and journalists with extensive experience of working in the eastern Congo. I am extremely grateful to my two research associates, Victor Anas and Josaphat Musamba, who assisted me with this research.

9   I am grateful to the British Academy for awarding me a Small Research Grant to run a small project "Crowdsourcing the Congo" (BA Award Ref: SG141762).

While the paper highlights some of the negative implications of some of the attitudes and actions carried out by the different actors throughout this paper, this should not be read as a moral judgement or criticism against the individual actors themselves. With very few exceptions, almost all the informants interviewed for this research had a justification for their actions and attitudes. There was no evidence that any of them were acting in bad faith. However, the data revealed considerable differences in the priorities of different actors. I argue that these different priorities (and perceptions of these priorities) and the paths that they determine, can themselves become obstacles to development. As such, I reject arguments that a lack of interest, competency or resources from the international community explain the poor performance of intervention in the DRC and instead focus on understanding why good intentions are not translating into good outcomes.

The research draws on the existing literature of everyday realities of peacebuilding (Autesserre, 2010; Henry, 2015), but also goes beyond the everyday to understand how Congolese actors, who have witnessed more than a decade of peacebuilding mistakes, build grander narratives of what intervention in the DRC represents. The paper then explores how these narratives are used to shape adaptation (and resistance) to peacebuilding which themselves can become barriers to sustainable peacebuilding.

This paper can be read in a number of ways: Firstly, it presents the DRC as a cautionary tale which illustrates how seemingly energetic interventions can nonetheless lead to stagnant development. Secondly, the paper shows how perceptions of intervention can act as a significant barrier to their success. Regardless of whether these perceptions are grounded in reality, it is essential that intervenors reach outside of their own internal logics and engage with actors whose priorities may be very different to their own. Thirdly, it gives a long-term view of international involvement in a particular country or region over several decades, and the unintended consequences that continue to shape the actions of both external and local actors. It is hoped that by drawing on the lessons of the DRC, those involved in the design of future interventions (both in the DRC and beyond), will be encouraged to include mechanisms which mitigate against the unintended consequences which may have arisen from earlier phases of intervention.

There are also some ways in which the paper should not be read. Above all, this paper should not be read as a justification for international withdrawal from the DRC. While it is clear that intervention could be better, it is acknowledged without reservation that international support to the DRC since 2000 has been instrumental in preventing Congo's relapse into total war. Similarly, although the paper criticizes the over-emphasis on conflict-containment and humanitarian disaster aversion, this is not to belittle the significance of the work that has been done in these areas. Certainly, without both activities, the death toll in the DRC would be considerably higher than it is today. Secondly, while the paper attempts to highlight problems with the structures and incentives that shape how international intervenors operate in the DRC, it should by no means be read as a criticism of individual intervenors themselves. A significant part of this paper engages with the different types of international peacebuilder on the ground and the manner in which their attitudes to intervention may facilitate or hinder change in the DRC. But the conclusions that can be drawn from these findings need to go beyond simply insisting that intervenors need to change their attitudes. These attitudes arise because of certain structures and cultures within international organizations as well as deeply held fundamental assumptions (at the organizational level) about what interventions can, and should, achieve. Unless these structures and cultures change, a shift in attitudes among individual actors will have little impact. Finally, the paper calls for international intervenors to take risks. However, "risk" as I have used it here, should be understood in terms of challenging the organizational cultures and structures of international intervention that I mention above. It should not be misunderstood as a call for intervenors to compromise on their security. I am all too aware of the very real security risks that intervenors in the DRC face, and many of the people that I have interviewed for this research risk their lives on a daily basis in order to carry out their work.

The production of this paper was held up during writing after two members of the UN Group of Experts Michael J. Sharp and Zaida Catalan, were kidnapped along with their Congolese colleagues and murdered. Michael was a friend of mine, and I personally felt uneasy writing about the failings of international intervention and the need to take risks, when people like Michael and Zaida had literally given their lives in the pursuit of peace and justice. While Michael and Zaida had paid the highest price for their commitment to bringing peace to the DRC, there were many others whose attempts to speak up for marginalized populations and hold the Congolese government to account had resulted in oppression. Both Ida Sawyer from Human Rights Watch and former member of the UN group of Experts, Jason Stearns had publicly had their visas revoked, and a number of people I spoke to reported being harassed by the Congolese intelligence services. As the Congolese government becomes increasingly authoritarian, international actors are becoming increasingly restricted in what they can do.

Such a situation highlights one of the key dilemmas facing those international intervenors working on the ground in the DRC. On the one hand, thinking and working politically requires them to engage with those in power in order to get things done. On the other hand, those in power are often actively attempting to hinder peace and development. Intervenors who try to speak out about the atrocities committed by the government tend to find themselves expelled from the country (or worse). Indeed, one of the key barriers to TWP is that those who actively try and engage in this work risk removal from the country, which then prevents them from having the impact they work so hard to achieve.

So what can be done to ensure that a balance can be struck between risk and stagnation? How can actors think and work politically in a manner which does bring about development, rather than simply prop up the existing government? Certainly, peace and development in the Congo requires working towards changing the attitudes and incentives of those in power – something which to date has not been a priority in intervention programming. However, before intervenors can focus their attention on changing the incentives of those in power, there needs to be a wider institutional shift in international organizations themselves which acknowledges that sustainable change in the DRC cannot be achieved unless they make concerted efforts to think and work politically.

3

Thinking and working politically in the Congo: How can it be done, and should we even do it?

In the previous paper in this series, *Understanding Violence in the Eastern DRC*, I discuss how a failure to understand the political nature of armed groups in the eastern DRC has led to the stagnation of efforts to curb armed group violence, and produced unintended consequences which have compounded insecurity in the long term (Perera, 2017a). These findings fit with a growing body of evidence 'that an understanding of political dynamics is frequently the critical missing ingredient in project design and evidence.'[10] Indeed, it is now widely accepted that politics matters for development, and as such the last decade has seen the idea of thinking and working politically (TWP) gain increasing traction in mainstream development discussions (Carothers & Gramont, 2013; Booth & Unsworth, 2014; Hudson & Leftwich, 2014).[11] Yet, despite this initial enthusiasm, and the widespread acceptance that more attention needs to be paid to politics in development, TWP has been slow to translate into a practical uptake within both institutions and programmes.

Three factors are generally cited as accounting for this impasse by advocates of TWP. Firstly, there is a lack of consensus about what exactly TWP entails and how far it should go. Dasandi et al (2016) outline three phases in the TWP agenda, which each increase in intensity: Phase One, 'thinking politically' emphasizes political economy analysis and the better understanding of the political context within which aid interventions take place. Phase Two, 'working politically' takes this analysis a step further to consider the operational implications of intervention, and how a more politically-informed analysis can facilitate better programming. And Phase Three 'politically smart, locally led' programming places domestic political factors at the forefront of determining developmental impact. At several of the meetings discussing TWP that I attended, practitioners who advocated for TWP noted that often programming gets stuck in Phase One. TWP therefore usually becomes little more than 'getting outside consultants to do PEAs that may or may not be read by those working within the organization.'[12] In another TWP meeting, some attendants were concerned that the definitional ambiguity of TWP ran the risk exposing the practice to 'empty rhetoric, apolitical adaptation and normative orientation'[13] if it is adopted more widely.

While there is still much work to be done on clarifying exactly what is meant by TWP, this paper uses a broader working definition of the concept, which focusses on the intrinsically political nature of external aid interventions:

> 'TWP forces external actors in particular to consider the impact they have on the politics of recipient countries and to see themselves as political actors, not just providers of funding and technical assistance. It brings to light the unintended consequences of inadequately designed projects. It sharpens the focus on local leaderships and their successes – and failure – in bringing about needed reforms. In short, TWP does not fit a single model, nor is it only relevant for programmes that address explicitly political issues. Instead what we tend to see fits along a spectrum' (Dasandi, et al., 2016, p. 3)

Secondly, there is a lack of robust evidence to show that TWP works. Indeed, as Hudson and Marquette note, although there is plenty of evidence to show that ignoring politics can have disastrous effects on development, the inverse relationship is not so clear, 'we don't have a very good evidence base for what works, when and why' (Hudson & Marquette, 2015, p. 67). A lack of clear evidence makes it difficult to translate the *knowledge* that we need to think and work politically into more politically-savvy *action*. In the face of uncertainty regarding 'how to do' TWP, there is a danger that what some

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10   See the Thinking and Working Politically Community of Practice research note: ''The case for thinking and working politically: The implications of 'doing development differently''' http://publications.dlprog.org/TWP.pdf

11   The DLP research paper, *Thinking and Working Politically: From Theory-Building to Building and Evidence Base* (Dasandi, et al., 2016), provides an excellent overview of the evolution of the TWP concept and the present debates, evidence, and gaps within the TWP literature.

12   Thinking and Working Politically workshop (London: 23rd January 2014).

13   Thinking and Working Politically Community of Practice meeting (London: 8th September 2016).

may regard as TWP is piecemeal or superficial. Indeed, TWP advocates have raised concerns that TWP was being used interchangeably with flexible programming.[14] It is clear that politically informed programming[15] is about more than simply being flexible, even if flexibility is a crucial aspect of TWP. As I will discuss later, flexibility which ignores politics runs the danger of introducing further negative unintended consequences as it can make intervenors appear inconsistent and incompetent to local actors.

Finally, and has been discussed at numerous meetings on TWP, those who are willing and capable of delivering politically informed programmes often lack the institutional capacity or support to do so. In his discussion on the challenges of managing development differently, Pablo Yanguas notes that several TWP success stories have relied on 'lone rangers' who were 'willing to go an extra mile despite corporate incentives and cultures' (Yanguas, 2015). At one meeting, it was noted that 'being politically savvy' was not a core competency sought when recruiting staff, and that although hiring within the development industry within the last decade had at least moved away from focusing on specialist technocrats towards development generalists (who at least understood the importance of politics and governance), there was still a dearth of TWP skills among staff in both donor/organization headquarters and field offices[16]. Among the development practitioners in the eastern DRC that I spoke to who were well-attuned to local politics (and wanted to work in a politically-informed way), many lamented the lack of institutional support that they were given to 'think outside the box'. One UN worker explained: 'I tried to suggest a different way of dealing with it [a problem related to the inability to distinguish between army and armed group combatants] and I got my ass kicked. This is not how they do things, and they don't like it when you do things differently'.[17] This feeling that intervenors should not challenge the status quo was echoed by several other informants: 'We're not encouraged to think too deeply here, we are meant to do our job, not f*** up, and move on.'[18] TWP is therefore perceived as going against the risk-averse ethos of many development organizations. This was echoed in many of the TWP meetings, where practitioners described themselves as conducting TWP as a kind of 'guerilla campaign' – disguising what they were doing in 'safe' or 'technocratic' language in order to get institutional approval.

Indeed, the issue of risk associated with TWP can be a key deterrent in preventing organizations from taking the approach more seriously. Politically-informed programming usually requires a loose programme design which does not lend itself to rigid logframes and targets. It also requires giving staff the trust and freedom to design and implement programmes which are difficult to oversee through traditional monitoring methods. There is little evidence on how this flexibility can and should be given though. Indeed, the evidence from TWP success stories shows that (effective and capable) staff were trusted to pursue their broader objectives in a politically astute manner, but it was noted that much of this relied on a set of fortuitous circumstances in which the personnel, context and political will were well-aligned to produce positive outcomes. Among the success story case studies presented at one meeting, all those involved agreed that success of the programmes relied on how savvy and enabling country directors were, and the extent to which they got behind the TWP agenda. If country directors were not attuned to TWP, then the number of potential points of entry and/or leverage would be significantly reduced. Similarly, the importance of staff capable of implementing such programmes was also emphasized. But the magic formula of enabling directors, savvy staff, and fortuitous circumstances was only something that became apparent *post hoc*.

Furthermore, while willing and capable staff were a necessary condition for success, without sustained institutional support and interest, programmes could still fail. Even where organizations are willing to give staff the freedom to work in this manner, they are often keen to emphasize the need to minimize risk. Mantras such as 'fail fast and fail cheap' were often cited among development practitioners, and others noted that often politically savvy programmes, which might have been able to affect long-term developmental change, were often shut down before their benefits could be fully realised. Indeed, among TWP advocates, there was a strong sense that TWP programmes needed both time and patience if they were going to succeed, and there was a notable lack of willingness to spend the time and resources needed to nurture this success. Pressure to 'get the money out fast' and act quickly in order to produce tangible results was often cited as over-riding the impetus to TWP.

In conflict-affected states such as the DRC, the appetite for unconventional or risky programming is even smaller, as the potential risks that donors and organizations working on the ground face if their programme fails are much higher. When discussing the cost of failure in development programmes in countries with lower levels of conflict, development practitioners tended to be concerned with a) not delivering a developmental good b) wasting money and c) loss of face with both funding bodies and local actors. While these concerns are both serious and justified, the stakes in conflict-affected areas are even higher still. A majority of NGOs and UN agencies in the eastern DRC are delivering emergency humanitarian assistance and UN peacekeepers are engaged in front-line conflict containment, both of which require rapid responses

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14   Thinking and Working Politically Community of Practice meeting (London: 8th September 2016).

15   Following Dasandi et al, I used TWP and Politically Informed Programming somewhat interchangeably here.

16   TWP Community of Practice Meeting (Bangkok: 5 June 2015).

17   Interview with UN Worker (Nairobi: 21 July 2014).

18   Interview with NGO Worker (Goma: 28th August 2014).

with little time and opportunity to experiment and adapt. As one NGO worker pointed out 'We deliver humanitarian assistance. If we don't, people die'.[19] In this context, the scope and opportunity to deliver better long-term assistance (i.e. reducing the persistent crises that cause a dependence on humanitarian assistance), is overruled by the fact that the immediate problems (i.e. the humanitarian crisis itself) needs to be dealt with as quickly as possible in order to minimize the loss of life. Doing so means that short-term fixes with technocratic aims and outputs (even if they compound dependence and undermine resilience in the long-term) are almost always favoured over TWP.

Indeed, in many of my discussions with both UN and NGO workers operating on the ground in the eastern DRC, regarded TWP as idealistic but untenable at best, and at worst irresponsible. In several of the TWP meetings attended for this research, donors based in headquarters emphasized that the need for TWP needed to come from the country offices. However, in the case of the DRC, it is clear that donors (and in particular governance advisors within donor organizations) are more convinced of the importance of TWP and politically informed programming than those operating on the ground. Those delivering humanitarian assistance often see their work as fundamentally (and proudly) apolitical, and often mistake TWP as implying impartiality. For them, politics is a dirty word that *should* be ignored. Paradoxically, however, by ignoring politics, humanitarian and peacekeeping interveners are increasingly seen as partisan by local actors because they are perceived to be propping up a corrupt and predatory state. Furthermore, the lack of development progress over more than a decade of extensive and expensive external intervention has led many local actors to question the intentions of external interveners. They are suspicious that 'conflict in the Congo is just another resource for the West to exploit'.

The consequences of a failure to think and work politically in the Congo, has manifested as an increasingly contemptuous relationship between intervenors and local populations in the eastern DRC. This relationship is highlighted in the following section to demonstrate the imperative for international intervenors to acknowledge the history of intervention in the Congo, and how it affects how they are perceived by Congolese populations. The failure to acknowledge such perceptions not only prevents intervenors from understanding the priorities of local populations, it also fosters a sense of ill-will which itself is one of the reasons why seemingly neutral, well-meaning, interventions are often met with contempt by local populations.

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19   Interview with NGO Worker (Goma: 28th August 2014).

4

Mutual contempt between local actors and international intervenors

In recent years, there have been a number of prominent critiques of how the international community has intervened in the DRC (Autesserre, 2010; Autesserre, 2014; Stearns, 2015). In general, these studies have been well-received by the international community, and are among some of the most widely read and cited works among development practitioners working in the eastern DRC. While Autesserre notes that international peacebuilders rarely have time to read academic literature prior to their deployment to a particular country (Autesserre, 2014), many of the peacebuilders I interviewed for this project had made considerable effort to read widely on the Congo both before and during their deployment. Several informants discussed the DRC in academic terms – alluding to Agamben's state of exception, neo-patrimonial networks, or the 'marketplace of violence' (Raeymaekers, 2013). Many held postgraduate qualifications in political science, and prided themselves in the number of academic works on the DRC that they had read. These actors considered themselves politically informed and tried, where possible, to apply that knowledge to their everyday workings. 'We've all read Autesserre' one informant assured me 'We know that in the past we did not consider local conflict, but we do now, we really understand the importance of this.'[20]

However, many informants did conflate TWP with simply doing political economy analyses[21], and these analyses focussed on understanding of the big-P politics of the state and formal statebuilding without focussing too much on how small-p everyday interactions and processes that enable (or disable) change. However, as several other observers have pointed out, formal statebuilding measures often have little immediate relevance to the everyday lives of most Congolese people (Hellmuller, 2013; MacGinty, 2011).

Furthermore, in the political economy analyses carried out, international intervenors were posited as outside observers who were external to politics. There was little acknowledgement that intervenors themselves shaped the political landscape and influenced how local players interacted. Indeed, there was a resistance to including international actors within these analysis as many of the informants believed that the intervention was, and should be, apolitical. Therefore, when local actors claimed that the MONUSCO intervention was itself party to the conflict, international intervenors were dismissive. For them, local perceptions and beliefs about intervention where nothing more than ill-informed rumour, and there was nothing that inter-venors could do about people who wanted to spread rumours. There was also no real acknowledgement that local buy-in into the intervention was itself a critical ingredient in determining its success. Indeed, this lack of acknowledgement may come from the fact that, even within the critiques of intervention in the DRC, the justification for intervention itself is rarely questioned. Kai Koddenbrock notes, authors such as Stearns and Autesserre critique intervention from the point of view of improving it, but do not challenge the assumption that intervention in the Congo is necessary:

> 'The persistent Western urge to transform the DRC or save it requires such conceptual reductionism to legitimize intervention and make that legitimacy appear self-evident. This happens in concert with an inexhaustible belief in the benefits and impacts of Western intervention. These post-colonial conceptions are a diagnostic basis for persistent and shifting Western interventions, whether humanitarian, developmental or peacebuilding' (Koddenbrock, 2012, pp. 549-550)

In contrast, in interviews with several Congolese informants, intervention in the Congo was frequently cited as a *barrier* to development. While some saw external intervention as a benign but ultimately ineffective force, others viewed it as much more nefariously motivated. The contempt that many Congolese actors had for intervention and the reasons for that contempt were not taken seriously by many of the international intervenors interviewed. Thinking and working politically would involve engaging with this contempt and the consequences that rumours have for the efficacy of programmes and interventions. While intervenors on the ground may have understood and internalized Autesserre's work on flawed dominant narratives held by international peacebuilders (Autesserre, 2012) and the framing of conflict that led to the failure of past interventions, they failed to engage with the idea that locals frame back.

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20 Interview with MONUSCO Officer (Goma: 26 August 2014).

21 These analyses varied considerably in quality, but I found evidence that more dedicated members of staff were conducting quite sophisticated analyses and collecting a lot of useful information.

A conversation with a Congolese lawyer (who I shall call 'Andre') illustrates this point: Andre lived in Kinshasa, but had come to Goma to represent a client who was involved in a dispute over land ownership. Andre was quite disparaging over the state of the Congolese legal system, and was keen to share his opinions on Congolese politics, and what he believed was the underlying cause of armed groups in the east. Andre's opinion was not that dissimilar to many of the other Congolese views that I discussed in *Understanding Violence in the eastern DRC*; he lamented the lack of education and livelihood opportunities available to young men in the east, and believed the Congolese state had let them down. None-theless he was fiercely patriotic and proud to be Congolese. He spoke of his country as a nation with endless potential but which, for reasons of poor political will and missed opportunities, was failing its citizens. Despite his frustrations with the Congolese state, the main target of Andre's frustration was the UN intervention in the country, the state may be corrupt and inefficient but "MONUSCO sont voleurs" (MONUSCO are robbers). He then proceeded to tell me a string of stories about UN workers in Kinshasa spending money on champagne parties in Kinshasa. He also told me about women he knew who had been in relationship with UN troops on the promise of marriage only to find themselves abandoned, pregnant and ostracized from their families. Although the details of the stories were not always that clear, Andre was telling me them to support his steadfast belief that the UN was doing more harm than good. For him, the UN was "stealing" aid money meant to help Congolese in need and instead spending it on lavish and immoral lifestyles which exploited the very poverty that they were meant to be alleviating. With surprisingly little variation, Andre's views were echoed by many of the Congolese people I spoke to during fieldwork. I was repeatedly told stories about the "deuxieme bureaus"[22] of overseas troops who would lure Congolese women with promises of money and marriage only to abandon these women when they returned to their home countries. I heard several sophisticated conspiracy theories about how the UN was purposefully prolonging conflict in the Congo to keep the gravy-train of peacekeeping going, as well as some who believed that under the guise of "diplomatic immunity" the UN was operating a global drugs and minerals smuggling operation. I did not find credible evidence to necessarily support these claims, but it was clear that some Congolese actors were using the behaviour of certain UN workers in the DRC (and I would emphasize that it was only some) to give credence to these rumours. Regular parties as expensive bars and nightclubs, where drugs were taken and prostitutes sought business, could easily give those (who can't see UN workers labouring hard in their bunkerized compounds (Duffield, 2012; Smirl, 2015) during the day) the impression that the UN is in the DRC to party rather than protect.

While many UN workers were aware that these stories about the UN were circulating in Goma, they tended to dismiss them a phenomenon which just tended to occur, and which was beyond UN control. 'I know a lot of people think we're drug dealers, and that sucks. But there's not really much we can go about that.'[23] This UN worker did not know who started the rumour, or why it was spreading and was adamant there was absolutely no truth in it. However, several Congolese informants – regardless of whether they believed in this particular rumour – did note that a lot of drugs were consumed at UN parties and did they not believe these drugs originated in the DRC. It was believed that drugs like cocaine came from South America through Mozambique and only the UN had the international networks to facilitate its transportation. They also noted that in the past UN staff had been found guilty of illegally transporting gold and other minerals.

UN staff were adamant that the illegal smuggling incident was a one-off and that those involved had been disciplined using the UN's internal disciplinary procedures and removed from the DRC immediately. However, a failure to communicate this to the wider Congolese population had led to speculation that the UN were covering up a wider conspiracy. Similarly, while UN policy forbids the use of drugs, senior staff noted that they could control what individual staff members did in their free time. Few UN interviewees saw a link between the allegations of drug dealing with staffs' recreational drug taking. This echoed a wider lack of acknowledgement that individual UN member's behaviour in their 'free time' often constitutes their primary interaction with Congolese locals, and that this had a significant effect on determining how the UN was perceived as a whole.

Of course, reckless personal behaviour was not reflective of all the UN workers in the eastern DRC. In an extended interview with one UN worker (whom I shall call 'Tom') it was clear that there were some in the UN who were very aware of the reputational risk that the partying lifestyle of certain development workers placed on the UN as a whole. "This is not a holiday camp, but some people think it is. Those people don't really stay [in the DRC] long. They see it as an experience on their resume, but they are not interested in the country." For Tom, these "party people" giving the UN a bad name, but 'they never stay long, they're usually gone in a year'. Tom was also extremely critical of the UN's actions in the DRC. Tom felt those higher up in the UN had not properly understood the Congolese contexts, and were blindly applying poorly-adapted policies from Afghanistan. In his spare time Tom read widely on the DRC, and had tried to travel to as much of the country as he could. He had carefully analyzed the differences between governance Kinshasa and Goma, and spent much of his rest and recuperation time in neighbouring countries in order to learn about the regional context.

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22 Literally meaning "second office" – it refers to the practice of UN troops from other countries taking a Congolese wife and having a Congolese family while deployed in the country, and then leaving them (often destitute) when they return back to their home countries.

23 Interview with MONUSCO Officer (Goma: 1 September 2014).

Yet, despite Tom's genuine interest in the African Great Lakes, and his disdain for those UN workers who partook in the heavy-partying promiscuous lifestyle, he did not have any sympathy for Andre's complaints about the UN Mission.

> Me: What do you think about Congolese resistance to international intervention?
>
> Tom: What do you mean resistance?
>
> Me: Well, it seems like some Congolese people don't really feel that the intervention is helping them.
>
> Tom: Well of course we're not here to help these armed groups who are killing people and raping… what…do they expect our help?
>
> Me: No, not the armed groups, I mean just ordinary Congolese civilians, they feel that the UN are not here to help them.
>
> Tom: Why else would I be here?
>
> Me: I don't think they're talking about you personally, I think they mean the UN more generally. I mean, I think they see no change…and they question the incentives of the intervention.
>
> Tom [getting visibly angry]: They question *our* incentives? What about *their* incentives? You want to know why there's no change? Because of these people [the Congolese]. They don't do anything. You walk down the street and it's [people begging] "Papa, papa please." I am not your Papa. They are just waiting, waiting for us to do everything…they don't want to do a thing for themselves… You want to know how to stop this crisis? [They need to] take responsibility …They're the ones cutting [each other's] heads off, not us… They're the ones robbing *themselves*.[24]

Tom's reaction to the question of mistrust revealed a contempt for the Congolese that I had not previously seen. Just as some Congolese actors believed that the international community had nefarious intentions, there were international actors who saw the Congolese people themselves as the biggest obstacle to peacebuilding. This belief was most frequently held by those who had been in the DRC for more than two years. Even those expatriates who didn't feel this contempt could understand why people felt that way.

> 'Of course there's huge contempt. Of course there would be. I mean, I love the Congolese, this is my country now, but you look at some of the stupidity of some people, you talk to those who've tried to do community engagement, and the things they're asked [to do and give]… it's impossible *not* to feel contempt. You talk to [he names an NGO worker working on community outreach] about her work, and she's had enough. People are only willing to help so far, why do you think she's leaving? She tried, but now she's... she's done. Come back in two years and speak to [he names some expats he considered idealists] see how ideal they'll be then, *if* they're here [in Goma] that is'[25]

Interviews in South Kivu revealed similar stories from international intervenors – particularly those who had made an attempt to leave the aid world bunkers and spend time with the locals. One director of an NGO explained that a local guard she employed in Katanga had stolen confidential records from her office to sell to the market as wrapping paper for groceries.

> He was literally selling it for peanuts [laughs]...And my friend, she has her brand new generator ruined because her guard was adulterating the oil to pocket the extra oil money. Can you believe it, a $5000 generator ruined because he [the guard] was trying to make a few dollars? And then of course he lost his job, so he lost out on much more than the 1 or 2 dollars he made watering down the oil. These people they don't think. And we have to work with them… of course they're not all like this… but they [those who are like that] make it hard.[26]

For Congolese civilians in the eastern DRC, a job with an international NGO or UN was one of the most stable and well-paid jobs available. For example, one informant who had previously been a teacher was now applying for a job as a UN security guard: 'The government they don't pay, but the UN, they pay well'[27]. He thought that he had a good chance of getting hired because he spoke French and English and had a University degree. However, there were those who resented the new economy that the UN was creating. They argued that while the UN were providing jobs in the short-term, they were undermining the development of a Congolese professional class that would be essential to development in the long-term:

24   Interview with UN worker. Goma, 25 August 2014.

25   Interview with expatriate researcher. Goma, 27 August 2014.

26   Interview with NGO worker (Bukavu: 19 September 2014).

27   Meeting with a teacher outside the MONUSCO compound (Goma: 22 August 2014).

> If teachers are all going to do simple [unskilled] jobs for the UN, who will teach the kids? How can the Congolese learn to do these things for ourselves when the UN is gone [if we have no middle class]? Why pay these people to be cleaners and guards? Why not pay them to do the jobs they have studied for?'[28]

Furthermore, the existence of UN jobs themselves had become a new source of tension among Congolese communities. During fieldwork for this project there were rumours of a corruption scandal whereby (both Congolese and non-Congolese) staff within the human resources department would not forward job applications to be considered by the interview panel unless a bribe was paid by the applicant. Some potential applicants said that they were told if they got the job they would have to pay a portion of their salary to the person who had got them the interview 'like an agency fee.'[29] The size of the bribe or proportion of the salary seemed to vary depending on who you asked, but in one interview an applicant told me he was asked for $500 'which I couldn't pay, so I couldn't get the job'[30]. While the exact nature of the scandal varied according to different informants, it was clear from interviews with UN expatriate staff that this kind of bribery was a problem within the UN:

> It's a big problem, but if you tell your friend [who couldn't pay the bribe] to tell me when he applies, I will make sure we see his application. Do you know who asked for the bribe?...It's usually a Congolese, but sometimes we get others [nationalities]…we pay good wages, but people still want to make more money…You might call it greed, but really it's stupidity, because if we find out you've done it [asked for a bribe] we will sack you, and you won't find a job as well paid.[31]

Interestingly, the Congolese response to this bribery scandal tended to down-play that some Congolese UN staff were involved in extorting bribes, and focus instead on the predatory nature of the non-Congolese staff. 'They know people are desperate for jobs and money, and they try and take from these poor people just to line their pockets.'[32] When asked about Congolese staff who also ask for bribes the response was more understanding. Several informants mentioned that local staff were paid only a fraction of what expatriate staff were given, and that they could not rely on the UN for a secure livelihood. 'The local staff are the ones who risk their lives in the field, and they earn nothing' one Congolese NGO worker told me. 'We have to sometimes take other jobs.'[33]

These anecdotes show that in contexts where the interests and motivations of intervenors do not align with the immediate needs of the communities, the communities themselves can be significant obstacle to the delivery of certain programmes. As several researchers looking at the everyday realities of peacekeeping observe, Western norms and logics of intervention are often ignored, appropriated or sabotaged by locals for their own ends (Goetschel & Hagman, 2009; Hellmuller, 2013). Yet, even in programmes that explicitly state an interest in wider community engagement, co-option or sabotage of programming is rarely seen as an indicator that programmes are not meeting local needs.

Development workers seeking to implement TWP frequently emphasize that they are often constrained by the short-term nature of project cycles. This is an even more pronounced problem in conflict-affected states where, as one development worker put it 'you have to programme under pressure and spend a lot of money in a short time.'[34] Those committed to thinking and working politically, therefore, advocate for more time. In one meeting, several practitioners observed that thinking and working often requires long-term thinking and programming, but it was noted that programmes which aim to work on a long-term basis often get shut-down *because* they run for a long time.[35]

As discussed above, there is considerable evidence to support the need for long-term programming, and certainly the overall findings from my research in the DRC demonstrate the dangers of short-term thinking. However, it is worth bearing in mind that whatever pressures that practitioners in the field feel to prioritise short-term solutions that may nonetheless undermine long-term progress, Congolese people themselves will feel similar, if not greater pressures. In an interview with a Congolese student he explained why, despite knowing that they undermine development in the long-term he continues to support an armed group. 'I cannot think for my future in one year if I am not able to live tomorrow. I want peace, and so do they [his friends in the armed group], but before peace we must survive.'[36]

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28 Interview with Congolese Academic (Bukavu: 26 September 2014).

29 Private discussion with Congolese civilian (Goma: 19 August 2014).

30 Private discussion with Congolese civilian (Goma: 19 August 2014).

31 Interview with a UN worker. (Goma: 27 August 2014).

32 Private discussion with Congolese civilian (Goma: 24 August 2014).

33 Interview with local NGO worker (Goma, 5 September 2014) 'Other jobs' in this sense meant other ways of finding money and could be a euphemism for bribery and extortion.

34 Interview with a DfID worker (London: 8 September 2016).

35 Thinking and Working Politically Community of Practice (Bangkok: 5 June 2016).

36 Interview with Congolese student (Bukavu: 18 September 2014).

In *Understanding Violence in the Eastern DRC*, I demonstrate that armed groups' tactics tend to be defensive, instrumental, short-term and opportunistic because they have the structural constraints which mean that they cannot necessarily commit to a long-term strategy. This kind of poor people's politics (Hughes, et al., 2013) is even more pronounced among Congolese non-armed civilians who international NGOs and UN agencies employ, work with, and engage with in community outreach programmes. Understanding and addressing their everyday needs and incentives may help foster a better understanding between locals and intervenors.

However, a failure to acknowledge the immediate and everyday needs of the locals that they engage with is not the only reason why intervenors in the DRC are unable to bring about more sustainable change. While some of those who engaged closely with Congolese civilian populations may have been frustrated by what they saw as Congolese self-sabotage, a majority of those working on the ground did not feel this way. Indeed, many of the intervenors interviewed either had very little day-to-day engagement with Congolese people, or had not experienced any incidents in which the immediate needs of individual Congolese actors had directly sabotaged their programming. These informants were also extremely committed to bringing about peace and prosperity. Yet, despite their good intentions, they too were unable to bring about change in the DRC. However, they were also resistant to changing the way they designed and implemented their programming and were particularly weary of bringing politics into their work. In the following section, therefore, I discuss these actors and the different attitudes prevalent among the international community in the DRC which may act as barriers to thinking and working politically, and therefore sustainable change.

5

Resisters of change in the eastern DRC

As discussed above, donors are beginning to grasp the importance of thinking and working politically, and a dedicated (albeit small) cadre of influential policymakers has emerged who appreciate the need for politically informed programming. While many donors and policy-makers were understandably concerned about the potential risks of engaging more directly with armed groups, they generally accepted that there was a need to fundamentally reconsider what peacebuilding in the Congo meant, and how we might do it differently. However, as several governance specialists noted in TWP meetings getting ministerial buy-in to politically informed programmes was a key obstacle to making them happen. An interview with a Parliamentarian who was active in the All Party Parliamentary Group on the African Great Lakes explained why programmes which seek to take a more nuanced and holistic approach to alleviating conflict might be difficult to sell to ministers. 'The interest in the Congo is often overshadowed by conflict elsewhere, and a lot of MPs simply do not grasp the enormity of the situation.'[37] Against this context (and with pressure to be seen to be doing good, and doing it quickly) less risky technical programmes which deliver clearly identifiable outcomes are more likely to get approved than risky, long-term programming with significant, but nonetheless incommensurable, aims. Among actors within donor agencies, it was widely accepted that approaches to peacebuilding in the Congo *needed to change*, the real obstacle was how they could *sell* that need for change to those with the power to make it happen.

Although these actors tended to talk of the need for ministerial approval, and support from those 'in power', the research found that resistance to change in the Congo – in rhetoric at least – did not come from those "higher up the food-chain," but rather from those on-the-ground staff working *in* the DRC. These were the staff who had to deal with the everyday realities of working in the DRC. Fundamental changes to how they operated in the DRC carried considerable risks – not just in terms of their own safety and security, but also in terms of their careers and the intervention itself.

It should be noted that both among and within organizations there was a great deal of heterogeneity of opinion regarding the purpose and performance of intervention in the DRC. However, as a very broad generalization, those working for international NGOs saw themselves as very different to the UN in terms of both their intentions and scope. INGO workers tended to regard any negative backlash that they experienced from Congolese locals was as a result of the bad reputation of the UN, and many spoke about the sensitization work that they were required to carry out in communities who were unable to distinguish between their organizations and the UN. Certainly, there was a sense in which "MONUC"[38] was being used by Congolese communities as a catch-all term for any international organization in the field regardless of whether or not the organization in question was actually UN or not.

However, complaints from Congolese people about intervention were not limited to the UN. As a result, while several NGO informants believed that local contempt for their presence was easily overcome by clearly explaining to local communities that they were not the UN, this was not echoed in interviews with members of those communities. Rather, the research found that clarification had limited impact on the levels of trust they had in the NGOs themselves. Rumours abounded that certain NGOs were government spies, or working for mining companies. In one instance, a Red Cross SUV had driven recklessly on one of the roads and knocked over a roadside stall injuring some of the traders. Rather than seeing this as an accident, locals had concluded that the Red Cross was being used by a rival community to intimidate these traders so they would leave the area.

These types of small everyday incidents are often seen as unimportant by the local NGOs who (understandably) emphasize the significance of the vital aid that they deliver on a daily basis. However, often it is the less-than-ideal manner in which they sometimes can operate that tends to be remembered by local populations, and these small incidents can take on a life of their own once they enter the rumour-mill. One Red Cross worker did note that these incidents needed to be taken more seriously, as they had real impact on her work in community liaison. She explained how she could spend months building trust with armed groups and the Congolese army in order to secure an area for the Red Cross to work. This work could then be undone in less than a minute by a reckless Red Cross driver. As a result of this problem, the she

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37   Interview with British MP (London: 23 July 2014).
38   Many Congolese communities still referred to the intervention by its old name.

was pushing for the Red Cross to train their drivers to be more careful as part of her programme (which focussed on delivering essential health supplies).[39]

Local NGOs, who are often struggling for cash and resources, have their own narratives of the work of international NGOs. A number of local NGO workers were frustrated that funding structures meant that they were at a significant disadvantage in attracting resources for their work. Many local NGOs felt that their projects were intrinsically better at addressing local needs, but that international NGOs would design projects that appealed to international donors and then 'the money they get they spend on expensive salaries and SUVs'[40] rather than helping Congolese people. Therefore, while many of the international NGO workers that I spoke to attributed local contempt to a simple misunderstanding by locals about the differences between NGOs and the UN, it was clear that local frustrations ran much deeper than that, and some local actors were critical of the NGOs themselves rather than merely their association with the UN.

There was also a notable difference in responses within the UN between civilian staff (who primarily worked on the humanitarian mission) and military staff. It was also the case that the civilian staff tended to be highly educated individuals from the Global North, while UN troops overwhelmingly came from the Global South. Civilian staff believed that it was the behaviour of the military intervention and its troops which undermined their own efforts with the community. These frustrations usually focussed on two issues: Firstly, that the military intervention was not fully implementing its mandate. 'They're just here to get the money for their own countries, they don't care if the war continues or not.'[41] Several interviews referred to an instance in which the commander of a UN battalion had supposedly told his troops 'Nkunda N'Job' – implying that if they actually succeeded in militarily defeating armed groups (in this case the CNDP) their presence would no longer be needed and the lucrative UN money they received would dry up. Secondly, civilian staff lamented the professional conduct of the military personnel themselves. There were many reports of soldiers either using prostitutes or setting up 'deuxieme bureaus' with local Congolese women. This has led to a huge backlash to the intervention from Congolese men, particularly given the emphasis placed on Congolese sexual violence and exploitation in the DRC (Perera, 2017).

Many civilian workers felt that inaction and sexual exploitation by soldiers in the military intervention explained why Congolese people felt that international intervenors were exploiting conflict in the Congo for their own financial gain. However, like the NGO workers, they did not fully acknowledge that there *was* a level of understanding among local populations that the civilian and military branches of the UN were separate. Furthermore, some of the local disdain for the UN was *specifically* directed at the civilian elements. As most civilian personnel rarely left UN headquarters in Goma, many Congolese civilians did not see the point of their presence in the country. This gave the impression that vast amount of development aid was being spent on bunkered bureaucrats, who sat in air-conditioned compounds and partied in Goma using money that was meant to be helping the Congolese people. The issue of bunkered bureaucrats out of touch with context was also echoed in interviews with UN military personnel. One commander felt that UN civilians had no right to criticise the military's lack of action. It was, after all, his troops that were out in the field, fighting armed groups, and risking their lives while the civilians stayed in their secure compounds.[42]

The above broad divisions (between NGO workers, civilian UN staff, and military UN staff) can help to explain why little is done by various international actors at the organization level to acknowledge and address the frustrations that Congolese populations have towards international intervention. However, it does not tell us a lot about why various international intervenors at the individual level do not push for changes in the way they themselves operate even if they are aware that their present mode of operation is not working. Furthermore, it does not explain why, in many cases intervenors on the ground tend to resist change and are skeptical about TWP.

Despite the obvious variations in attitudes among individuals working for various organizations, it was clear that the dominant belief amongst field staff working for both the UN and various NGOs was that intervention in the DRC was necessary, even if its current application was flawed. They did not see the need to question the underlying logic of what they were doing, and they were relatively dismissive of suggestions that their interventions *themselves* might be undermining longer-term peace. For these actors, effective peacebuilding in the Congo did not require them to fundamentally rethink intervention or think and work politically.

Again, the research found that attitudes towards intervention and change varied considerably both within and between organizations. However, I have tried to group these attitudes below to create a *typology of resistance* to change. This typology does, however, come with several caveats. Firstly, the evidence suggests that most intervenors do not necessarily fit neatly into these categories. It is clear that complexities of people's understandings of conflict and intervention in the DRC cannot by as neatly compartmentalized as I have set out below. However, what I have tried to do is discuss a *type* of attitude which is likely to have several variations but which can be attributed to a certain kind of underlying assumption.

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39   Interview with Red Cross worker (Goma: 3 September 2014).
40   Interview with local NGO worker (Goma: 28 August 2014).
41   Interview with MONUSCO Officer (Goma: 1 September 2014).
42   Interview with MONUSCO military officer (Goma: 9 September 2014).

Individual actors are therefore likely to only partially display some of the characteristic's within a category, or even straddle more than one category. Secondly, even if two intervenors hold a similar type of attitude, this does not mean that they will necessarily act in the same way. Therefore, this typology should not be read as a means to predict certain types of behaviour, but rather understand what obstacles need to be overcome if trying to encourage these types of actors to think and work politically in the future. Finally, I describe this as a typology of resistance to change, but this does not mean that attitudes within the typology necessarily defend or maintain the status quo. The resistance to change that I refer to is a resistance to challenging the underlying key assumptions of intervention (i.e. that it is both necessary and needs to be conducted with respect to state sovereignty). However, this does not mean that intervenors do not change their actions over time. While some may chose not to challenge the status quo at all, others may seek modest change and others still may agitate for what they view to be dramatic or radical change. What they all do tend to resist, to varying degrees, is the need to think and work politically.

The typology of resistance to change draws on Jock Stirrat's seminal article on representations of development personnel "Mercenaries, Missionaries and Misfits." It is therefore unconcerned with whether these 'stereotypes of development workers are correct or not, but rather with what they tell us about the values and self-identities of people who work in the aid business' (Stirrat, 2008, p. 420). As such the typology is intended to be used 'an entry-point for exploring the tensions and contradictions in ways in which people working in the industry view themselves and others' (Stirrat, 2008, p. 407) and the concomitant effects that this has on how external actors intervene in the DRC.

There were of course a number of international intervenors who were actively trying to think and work politically, and who may be described as 'lone rangers' (Yanguas, 2015). These actors were willing to defy the constraints of institutional structures and incentives in search of more meaningful change. Michael J. Sharp and some of his friends and colleagues stood out as fitting such a description. However, what is notable about all of those who would fit into this lone ranger category is the extent to which they were personally invested in the DRC itself. These workers were less concerned with career progression and more concerned with their commitment to the Congo. They had been living in the DRC for several years, learnt local languages, formed close relationships with Congolese colleagues and friends. These actors have been excluded from the typology because, while they were the ones most willing to think and work politically, they were often unsupported by their wider institutions. Most of these actors tended to become freelance workers and researchers in order to gain deeper understandings of the dynamics of change. Even though Michael and Zaida were working for the UN Group of Experts, a number of their friends and colleagues displayed dismay at the lack of institutional support they were given, even after their deaths, as they searched for truth and justice. It is beyond the scope of this paper to delve too deeply into the internal politics of the UN, or the relationship between the UN and the Congolese state. However, it is clear that if more development workers are willing to buy into the idea of TWP there needs to be more active support for them.

The typology groups development workers who tended to be resistant to ideas of thinking and working politically into four overarching categories:

1. The implementation solutionists

2. The cogs in the machine

3. The new dawn optimists

4. The doomsday counterfactualists

The Implementation Solutionists

It should be noted that none of the informants believed that no change whatsoever was necessary in their work. Resistance to change instead manifested itself as resistance to drastically changing the underlying assumptions of intervention, or intervening in a more politically informed way. There was also resistance to acknowledging that intervenors themselves affected the political context and that programming needed to take these changes into account. One of the types of actors most resistant to more deep-rooted change were those I categorise as 'implementation solutionists.' The term borrows from the 'technology solutionists' that Evgeny Morozov describes in *To Save Everything, Click Here* (Morozov, 2013). Just as technology solutionists believe that inherently social problems can ultimately be fixed by the invention of a sufficiently sophisticated technology, implementation solutionists believe that the reason more sustainable peace and development in the DRC has not yet emerged is because the implementation of past interventions have not yet 'got it right'. Several of the informants who fell into this category believed that more meaningful change was hindered by the sub-par implementation of their existing intervention. For implementation solutionists exisiting programmes had failed to cement lasting peace because they were either insufficiently resourced to reach everyone who needed it, or because the programmes only dealt with certain aspects of conflict and similar programmes dealing with other aspects were needed.

For implementation solutionists, although they recognized that the causes of conflict and underdevelopment may have had political origins, fixing these problems did not need require them to think or work politically. Rather, a better-managed and better-resourced intervention *could* engage with stakeholders in an impartial and apolitical way. Thinking and working politically would only complicate what seemed like a simple solution – better intervention and more of it. Actors who fell into this category did not question if locals wanted what they were offering, or if the manner in which they were currently delivering assistance created new problems. Rather, they believed that local resistance to their interventions was simply down to incorrect local understandings. Either locals did not appreciate the benefit of what they were offering, or felt that they weren't receiving enough assistance (sometimes relative to other groups).

Resistance to change among implementation solutionists manifested in a number of different ways of which three are worth highlighting: Firstly, when reporting back to funding bodies and headquarters, implementation solutionists usually emphasized a lack of resources for a particular programme, rather than reflecting on whether the underlying assumptions of the programme met the needs that they were trying to address. As such, they tended to sideline problem-driven iterative adaption. Secondly, even when implementation solutionists did acknowledge that a certain type of intervention had not been successful, there was relatively little reflection on the unintended consequences of their failure. This is not to say that implementation solutionists were not interested in lessons learnt, on the contrary they were very interested in learning from past mistakes of poor implementation. However, when a new programme was designed and implemented it did not acknowledge that a past failure itself may have changed the political environment in which they were intervening. For example UN workers who were working on the new disarmament, demobilization and reintegration [DDR] programme with the Congolese government did not see the need to explicitly raise past failures in the new programme. Indeed, while almost all the UN workers acknowledged that both Phase One and Phase Two of the DDR programme had been disastrous and undermined faith in the DDR system, relatively little space was given in the design of DDR III to acknowledge that the lack of trust generated by Phase One and Two's failures needed addressing.

Finally, as implementation solutionists see their work as inherently apolitical, and believe that better implementation of (often technocratic) programmes is the solution to meaningful peace and development, they tend to eschew attempts to engage with complexity and uncertainty which may undermine their ability to come up with clear solutions. As Finkenbusch notes, the 'less they know (in the reductionist, generalizable sense of the term), the less they can govern in a purposive way and with the reasonable expectation of actually achieving anything' (Finkenbusch, 2016, p. 165). It is easier for them to stick to clear linear narratives about the drivers of conflict and underdevelopment. These simple narratives are also easier for donor organizations and headquarters to digest and, when coming from those who are 'working in the field,' often end up being reified as objective truths.

The Cogs in the Machine

As noted by many policymakers in TWP meetings, the high turnover of in-country staff in conflict-affected states is one of the key barriers politically-informed programming. The DRC, and particularly the eastern DRC where this research too place, the problem of inexperienced staff on short-term postings was evident. A vast majority of those UN staff interviewed in the DRC were early career development workers on their first or second field posting. For those for whom the DRC was not their first posting, their past experience tended to be in countries in conflict or crisis such as Afghanistan, Mali, Central African Republic or Iraq, and it was to countries like this that those who left the DRC tended to go on to. The DRC was considered a good posting to get for 12-18 months for early career development workers as high staff turnover presented opportunities to rise quickly in the ranks. Its status as a danger posting also looked good on CVs. Many UN personnel in positions of great responsibility were in their early- to mid-20s and were using their posting to learn their craft (Autesserre, 2014). As such, they tended to be extremely cautious when it came to challenging received wisdoms of peacekeeping, and putting forward new ideas. Informants noted that there were incentives to push for changes which would unnecessarily complicate their lives and gain them reputations as troublemakers. Instead, they were incentivized to carry out the tasks they had been assigned during their posting and then move on to their next posting without ruffling too many feathers.

These workers are described in the typology as 'cogs in a machine'. Although cogs in the machine are oftentimes aware of the need to fundamentally change how they intervened, they nonetheless feel powerless to effect any meaningful change. As such, even when they saw opportunities for thinking and working politically, they tended not to report their ideas to those higher up in the organisation. When discussing thinking and working politically with those who fell into the "cogs in the machine" category, many *did* believe that there was a need to take an approach that engaged more directly with the political realities of the environment in which they were working. However, they did not feel that it was necessarily *their* job to do so. Rather, they believed that there needed to be a strong move towards thinking and working politically that came from those in a much more senior position (i.e. at headquarters). As it stood, workers felt that they were discouraged from thinking and working politically. Until an actual command was given which explicitly told workers to think and work politically, provided safe spaces to do so, and actively rewarded those who engaged in politically savvy work, cogs in the machine were not willing to risk their own careers engaging in risky programming which went against

standard procedures and protocols. Furthermore, even if they were willing to take a risk and initiate a successful politically smart programme, the benefits of doing so would only be felt after they had left the country. Given that they as individuals would not receive the recognition for its successes despite taking all the risk, there was no incentive for cogs in the machine to take the risks in the first place.

Many of the international staff I spoke to who were based in headquarters and donor organizations relied on in-country staff to report back to them about the political realities of intervening in the DRC. However, those in-country staff in the DRC who felt like cogs in the machine tended to avoid reporting back in political terms and focussed instead on reporting logistical difficulties which may have prevented them from implementing their existing mandates. This created an impasse in which headquarter staff were waiting for an on-the-ground imperative to compel them to design more politically smart programming from those in the field, and field staff were waiting for the headquarters to tell them when and how to adopt a more politically savvy approach. As a consequence, field and headquarter staff *both* tended to emphasize that there were 'people in the organization' who wanted to stick to technocratic approaches and who blocked attempts to think and work politically. However, when pushed to name exactly who was against TWP, very few could pinpoint actual individuals. I was unable to find a single influential person within either the UN or the World Bank who said that they were actively against supporting thinking and working politically, and yet many of those I interviewed alluded to a sort of Wizard of Oz-style character who would block them if they tried and might potentially end their careers.

The New Dawn Optimists

If the cogs in the machine category represented some of the more fatalistic and pessimistic members of the development community, on the opposite end of the spectrum were those categorized in the typology as 'new dawn optimists'. Whereas cogs acknowledged that their interventions were not working, but nonetheless continued to work with a kind of ironic acquiescence to a system that they believed they could not change, the new dawn optimists not only believed that the system could be changed but also that it was *currently in the process of changing*. This belief was particularly prevalent among workers who were engaging with local communities and who thought that their work was *already* thinking and working politically. For example, a MONUSCO officer who was working on community engagement with the I4S noted that 'we understand in the past that we did not sensitize local communities, but we do now. We have a number of sensibilization [sic] programmes, and we really are changing how we work…It's happening now, we have learnt from the past and we *are* changing.'[43] For the new dawn optimists, there was an acknowledgement that the failures of the past happened precisely because past interventions did not think and work politically. However, these criticisms were no longer relevant because the current programmes were taking political factors into account and engaging with those needed to make change happen. Yet, the MONUSCO officer above was referring to a new phase of the I4S that had begun implementation in 2014. Three years on, the I4S is still struggling to achieve its objectives, and a new phase of the I4S has been planned.

Writing of his experiences in 2006 Anjan Sundaram described peacekeeping in the eastern DRC as a 'stasis in continual movement: the ways of thinking had become frozen, so that each change seemed unexpected, and severed from the previous change. There could never be a whole understanding; there was only reaction' (Sundaram, 2013, p. 217). New dawn optimists tend to think in terms of reaction: They believe that a change in how they carry out a particular initiative equates to a fundamental change in nature of the programme/intervention itself. New dawn optimists tended to conflate thinking and working politically simply with flexible programming. For example, the MONUSCO officer quoted above noted that previously the I4S had not sufficiently taken local needs into account and this was creating tensions in the community and mistrust towards MONUSCO. In the new phase, he argued, they had engaged community liaison officers, who were well trusted in the communities to advocate on behalf of MONUSCO and explain the programmes. This showed the I4S had learnt from the past and adapted accordingly. However, the assumption that trust could be built simply by sending in community liaison officers was very much taken for granted, and the extent to which the community liaison officers (assuming that they were as well-trusted as MONUSCO believed them to be) might have their trust undermined by their association with MONUSCO was not addressed. Furthermore, there was very little engagement with the fact that past failures of the I4S may have had any knock-on effects on its future interventions. New dawn optimists tend to look forward without looking backward, and therefore resist the idea that thinking and working politically requires those doing it to acknowledge that the political environment may have been altered by their *own* interventions.

The presence of a large number of new dawn optimists in the eastern DRC may be linked to the fact that, as a whole, the intervening community in the DRC is relatively young and early career. Many want to believe that what they are doing is making a real difference. The cognitive dissonance that they truly believe they are building peace in the DRC, despite the fact they can clearly see the persistence of conflict and insecurity, is overcome by the belief that while others may have got it wrong in the *past*, what they themselves are doing *now* is going to build peace. As such making fundamental changes to their current mode of intervention is premature and unfair because there is no evidence that it will fail, and they believe it to be sufficiently different from previous interventions to succeed.

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43   Interview with MONUSCO Officer (Goma: 27 August 2014).

New dawn optimists have often been in the DRC less than a year, and therefore were not present either in the field or in the organization during the previous phase(s) of a programme's implementation. Therefore, they may have a relatively superficial understanding of why past iterations of programming failed, and do not question simple or single-factor explanations (e.g. the MONUSCO worker above believed that I4S previously failed simply because it did not sufficiently engage with local actors). Because international staff members in the eastern DRC often do not stay in post for very long, the institutional memories of organizations' field offices tend to be short. As such, it is entirely possible that an old way of thinking can be posited as a new approach without anybody within an organization having been in post long enough to remember that it had been tried, and failed, before. As reporting back to donors and headquarters tends to underplay complex political issues and focusses instead on a lack of resources, there are no archives of past experiences that new members of staff can consult if they wish to fully understand what has and has not worked in the past. This can be a significant barrier to change, as those who genuinely want to think outside the box have limited knowledge of what is a new approach and what has been tried before.

The Doomsday Counterfactualists

The categories of change resistors so far discussed in the typology have all believed that their interventions *do* have the potential to fundamentally transform the DRC. However, there is a final category of resistors who have a much more modest view of what intervention itself can achieve. For this final category, change is not necessary because the intervention has always been successful in achieving its *raison d'être* – namely, the prevention of another full-scale civil war. This reflects Autesserre's observations that peacebuilders believed that there would always be some level of violence in the DRC (Autesserre, 2009). In the typology, these actors are classed as 'doomsday counterfactualists' because they justify their resistance to change based on the counterfactual reasoning that, were there to be no intervention in the DRC (or a different type of intervention), the country would inevitably be engaged in a full-scale Hobbesian war of all against all.

This is not to say that doomsday counterfactualists are necessarily uncritical of the present intervention in the DRC, and there are two sub-categories of counterfactualist: The first are "soft" counterfactualists. They may believe that interventions could be better, but they are satisfied that the existing intervention is better than none at all, and therefore the imperative to change is not that great. Tom, the MONUSCO official discussed at the start of this paper, for example, was very critical of MONUSCO's intervention, yet at the same time he defended the intervention in the DRC as preventing what seemed like inevitable greater violence from recurring 'I was here when the M23 invaded. They were here on the streets of Goma… Look, now there is no armed group in Goma… [because] MONUSCO is here.'[44]

The second category of counterfactualists are much more vehement in their defense of the status quo because they believe that even small changes in the way that crisis is contained could set off a chain of events that would inevitably lead to full-scale war. For example, when presented with the idea of working with armed groups to help build up the east's road infrastructure, one NGO worker was horrified – not just of working with armed groups – but also because of the consequences of improving the road structure itself. 'Fixing the roads will just make it easier for the armed groups to come here. It's only because we have bad roads that we're not eating monkey meat here in Goma.'[45] This worker was, admittedly, one of the more extreme doomsday counterfactualists, but many of the interviews with development workers contained concerns that thinking and working politically could inadvertently empower certain groups to return the country into a full-scale civil war.

In his article on donor official's apologetics for hybrid regimes in Africa, Stephen Brown notes how donor officials observing elections in various countries across Africa often 'emphasized the achievement of stability, security and order and the (usually exaggerated) spectre of chaos and civil war' (Brown, 2011, p. 519). As a consequence, Brown argues, officials tend to set the bar on what constitutes an acceptable standard of democratization in Africa very low. Similarly, doomsday counterfactualists have set the standard for what constitutes success in intervention on the narrow goal of conflict containment. By these standards the need to think and work politically is neither necessary nor desirable. Like the implementation solutionists, conflict containment is viewed as an apolitical activity, and therefore complicating their work by engaging in politics is likely to create problems that might jeopardize their primary objective of conflict containment. While the bar might be low, for doomsday counterfactualists containment is all that intervention can realistically achieve. Goals of a more sustainable positive peace and development should be left to the Congolese state and its people, and it is beyond the remit and capabilities of external intervenors to try and bring this about.

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44   Interview with UN worker (Goma: 25 August 2014).
45   Interview with NGO worker (Goma: 8 September 2014).

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Conclusion

This paper has argued that fourteen years of failed interventions in the DRC have created a sense of fatigue among external intervenors and locals which has bred a mutual sense of distrust. This distrust has itself become a considerable barrier to peace and development, and the time has come for external interventions to look beyond mere conflict and humanitarian crisis containment to focus more explicitly on sustainable peace and development which will prevent conflicts and humanitarian crises from recurring. This requires the international community to think and work politically, and to challenge some of its fundamental assumptions about how to facilitate long terms peace. It also requires reviewing the impact that past failures of intervention have had on the way that international actors working in the DRC are seen, and consequences that this has for how local actors perceive intervenors. It is of course important for peacebuilders to consider the way that they frame the causes of conflict, as Autesserre has eloquently argued (Autesserre, 2010). However, it is equally important to appreciate that locals frame back, and it is no longer appropriate to think of international actors as external to the political economy of the DRC.

The paper makes the case for the importance of TWP in conflict-affected states like the DRC, but also challenges the assumption that the impetus of TWP will come from those working on the ground. As the typology of resistance to change shows, staff working on the ground have few incentives to change the way in which they design and implement programmes, and are unlikely to report back to headquarters the need for far-reaching and fundamental change. It is important that those working in headquarters empower field staff to think outside the box and use their local knowledge to develop more politically-informed programmes. But there is also a need to recruit and train politically-savvy staff and to reward those who are willing to take the time to understand and engage with the political context and stay in post for long-periods of time. The problem of poor institutional memories is clearly a barrier to understanding why intervention has failed in the long-term, and investing in the resources to create this memory should be a priority.

In the following paper, *The Legitimacy Loophole*, I argue that the DRC challenges some long-held assumptions about peace- and state-building. Key among these assumptions is the idea that security and stability need to come before development. Indeed, it is possible that development may itself be the source of security and stability. Ignoring the need for long-term development in order to concentrate on immediate stabilization can have the unintended consequence of compounding chronic conflict. However, simply challenging these assumptions and acknowledging the need for more fundamental change is not enough. Donors need to support programmes that incentivize local elites to facilitate and support development initiatives. And these programmes require politically informed and savvy design. It also requires those development workers who are responsible for implementing these programmes on the ground to think and work politically and embrace fundamental changes in the way in which they have been intervening. Understanding why, in the current environment that they operate in, they might resist change is essential to realising the obstacles that need to be overcome and finding incentives which will encourage them to think and work politically.

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