Political Settlements Research Programme

Background of the input:

• DFID-funded research programme on political settlements (‘... the new Holy Grail ...’)
• RQ: ‘How to transform political settlements towards open and inclusive settlements’
• hybrid position in terms of DFID’s demands: produce high-level academic research, and strong policy impact at the same time
Risk Management in DFID

• Three levels of risk: corporate, operational, intervention
• Differently assessed along a traffic light system that works with subjective ratings (usual matrix approach: impact/probability)
• ‘risk registers’
• Five main responses: transfer, tolerate, treat, terminate or take the opportunity
‘Risk Appetite’

• Important concept in UK government: ‘the amount of risk to which the organisation is prepared to accept, tolerate or be exposed to at any point in time’
• DFID: high risk appetite when it comes to achieving targets, more particularly:
  • ‘DFID has a high risk appetite to invest in research opportunities which support the creation of new evidence...’
  • But very low risk appetite ‘in relation to staff safety and security and fiduciary risk’
Risk in Fragile Situations

- DFID uses particular risk assessments when dealing with fragile situations:
  - Country risks, partner risks, programme risks
  - Additional elements: reputational risks, political risks, security risks, fiduciary risks
- Generally: high risk appetite in fragile situations (e.g., budget support)
- Main approach in risk management: diversifying, knowledge production

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Barriers to Risk Management

- ‘box-ticking’
- Staff looks for optimistic signs, positive trends are overstated
- Resource problem, in particular staff time – risk management has to be senior management responsibility, not a technical exercise
- Strategic risk assessment done by top-management, neglecting local expertise
‘Duty of Care’

- Low risk appetite in terms of staff safety translates to strict duty of care procedures
- Corresponds with tight ‘ethics procedures’ of UK universities and research institutes
- DoC provisions in programmes and projects are constantly tested, reviewed and revised (particularly in the field)
- Safety procedures have to be in place and working – strict requirement by DFID
Risk and Innovation in the Context of Fragility

- DIFD is willing to make **serious investments in research and innovation in the context of conflict and fragility**:  
  - Political Settlements Research Programme (PSRP)  
  - Justice and Security Research Programme (JSRP)  
  - Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC)  
  - Upcoming: Conflict Research Programme (CRP)

- About £20mio invested into fundamental research on conflict and fragility by DFID over a period of 10 years
- Willing to engage with **new concepts** (political settlements, political marketplace), and to **challenge ‘common knowledge’**

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Example: Research Programme Risk Assessment

• Self-measurement – KPI table, DFID measurement – main instrument: annual review

• Four risk categories: output quality, output impact, programme management, external environment (relevant in fragile settings)

• Annual review: scoring, risk rating (for research almost always ‘moderate’ or higher – assessed against logframe)
  • ‘... One particular risk the PSRP wanted to highlight was the security of researchers in fragile and conflict affected states. The Programme has a strong approach to this particular risk.’
  • Again: duty of care, assessed by DFID in the field (DRC)
Working Politically in Fragile Contexts

- ‘Evidence’ suggests more political work is necessary – hence ‘political settlements’ approach

- Particularly PSRP and forthcoming CRP are concerned with the question how to do that – main concerns are issues of inclusion (inclusive institutions, inclusive settlements?) and peace-justice-trade-offs
Working Politically in Fragile Contexts

- Risk management approach of diversifying – adaptive learning instead of rigorous programming
- ‘theory of change’ needs to take account of complexity
- Political settlement analysis
- Strategic policy formulation: from ‘best practice’ to ‘best fit’
Concluding Remarks

• ‘high risk appetite’ leads to offensive uptake of new innovations and concepts

• **Positive**: relevant questions are tackled, policy up-to-date with research, theory-practice-gap lowered – how to work politically in fragile contexts is not just accepted as a question, but answers are sought

• **Critiques**: ‘the next DFID invention’, almost too much in terms of innovation and concept development, implementation cannot cope