

DOES PEACEKEEPING WORK? KEY FINDINGS FROM RECENT RESEARCH IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO AND MALI

INSTITUTIONAL LEAD

EPON Network and Challenges Forum

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THEMATIC FOCUS

Most of the increase in violent conflict since 2010 and 80 per cent of all humanitarian needs are associated with approximately 12 fragile and conflict-affected states. By 2030, the share of global poor living in these states is projected to reach nearly 50 per cent. If the violent conflicts affecting these states cannot be resolved, or at least significantly reduced, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will not be achieved. A number of instruments are employed by the international community to prevent and manage conflicts, to reduce fragility and to sustain peace. Among these, a peace operation is one of the instruments that has the greatest potential to enhance the implementation of the SDGs in fragile and conflict-affected states. But do peace operations work? There is a significant discrepancy between the findings of most quantitative studies that state that peace operations do work, and the inability of specific peace operations to end violent conflict, despite being deployed in several of these states—in some cases for decades. The objective of the Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network (EPON) is to improve research-based knowledge on the effectiveness of specific peace operations and the impacts they are having on the conflict systems they are trying to influence. The International Forum for the Challenges of Peace Operations (Challenges Forum) is a global partnership of 49 organizations and departments in 22 countries aiming at improving the effectiveness of international peace operations.

SUMMARY

A main priority within the United Nations' work on sustaining peace should be to focus more on prevention and drivers of conflict instead of just being a crisis management apparatus. Crisis and conflict management shrinks the room for sustainable development. The situations in Mali and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) are multidimensional and there is a need to integrate peacekeeping in many policy areas. New thinking is developing within the UN and it needs academic research to assist in this process. Long-term perspectives, exit strategies and ensuring the primacy of politics are crucial to create space for sustainable development. It was emphasized that closer cooperation with regional organizations and inclusion of women, youths and marginalized groups are important parts of successful peacekeeping.

A major challenge to peacekeeping is that the mandates from the UN constitute linkages to the government of the country without involving them in the formulation and negotiation of the mandates. A related key factor is national ownership and leadership. A major challenge is when governments do not provide basic services for the population. This space is often filled by other actors, including armed and extremist groups. Thus, there is a need for approaches to build state capacity. There is also need for greater coordination among different actors. Financing is another

challenge for peacekeeping. The focus should be on targeting root-causes, not just solving short-term problems. Moreover, peacekeeping operations need to be more people centred.

Earlier studies have shown that peacekeeping does have a significant effect in reducing violence and preventing spillover effects. However, some peace operations contradict these results. Hence, EPON wanted to study these operations separately and more closely. Even if it is too early to state any significant results in general, some patterns can be identified. One refers to methodology—the research has shown that it is more efficient to study a specific episode of a peace operation instead of studying the whole time-period of a mission (factors changing rapidly). Studies have also pointed out some key indicators: ownership, coherence, and women, peace and security. When these indicators are included in peacekeeping, the mission is more likely to succeed. Missions usually have a limited mandate as part of a complex process. Thus, their efficiency needs to be evaluated with regards to other processes in the same context. The EPON research tries to capture the whole situation, which has lacked in previous studies. In the future there is a need for a mega-analysis including all the indicators and processes.

The international community wants quick results in the DRC. However, it is impossible for the UN Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) to deliver. When focusing on long-term results in the DRC, the mission has been able to change dynamics. MONUSCO has prevented a major violent conflict from developing. The violence in eastern DRC poses a threat to the population but is today considered as less of a threat to regional and international stability. The mission has contributed to the enhancement of a dynamic civic space and greater democracy. It has also played a role in information collection, which have been used by, for example, the International Criminal Court. In DRC, a major challenge is the resistance of the government to collaborate. Another operational constraint is the multiple interpretations of what peacekeeping is and should be. The lack of political framework prevents the mission from having a real impact on the primacy of politics.

The situation in Mali has a lot in common with the DRC. Until 2016, the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) was quite successful in decreasing killings, and it contributed to the peace agreement and the elections in 2014. But since then, the situation has worsened. MINUSMA's mandate is to support the peace process, but it is hampered by the government's lack of capacity and political will. A significant problem is central Mali, where the absence of the central governments has created room for other groups to operate and for violence to escalate. MINUSMA is also operating within a broader counterterrorism context, where some parties are trying to enforce military solutions to local problems that might need different solutions.

It was highlighted that the core of the problem in Mali is the lack of a social contract between the population and the government. Without dedication from the government, peacekeeping is difficult. MINUSMA needs more resources to be able to reverse the development in the centre of the country.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

A number of key challenges need to be addressed to improve the efficiency of UN peacekeeping, including ensuring relevant and achievable mandates, adequate funding and long-term strategies, including exit strategies. The UN Security Council bears a great responsibility in this regard and the permanent members particularly so.

The tool box should be expanded. Peacekeeping is only one of the tools in the toolbox, and it may not always be the right one. Regional organizations, host governments and the affected population must be better integrated in the development of UN mandates and there must be strategies for exit and continuation in forms other than peacekeeping.



To achieve this, peacekeeping mission needs to take a people-centred approach. There is a need for the missions to connect with the people and allow time for the missions to engage with them. Instead of international experts implementing their solutions, the solutions should be developed from the local community and receive international support.

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