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INFOCORE Definitions

Post-conflict

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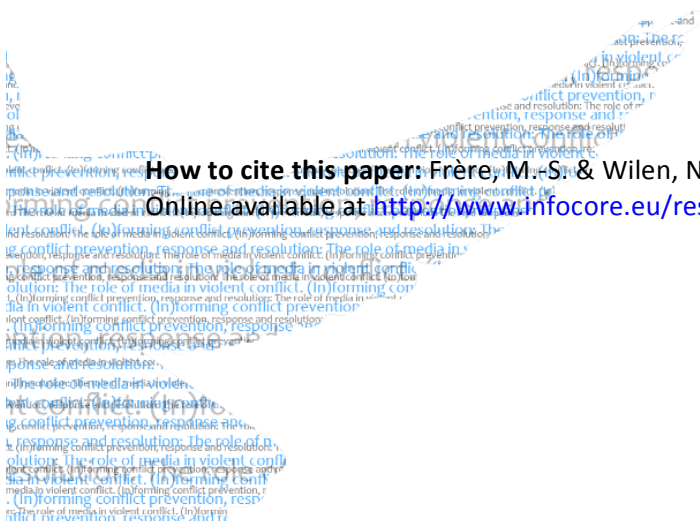
INFOCORE DEFINITIONS

POST-CONFLICT

Literally, post-conflict is an adjective, which serves to describe the period immediately after a conflict is over. Yet, despite its linguistic simplicity, practically, the term is more difficult to define. Firstly, conflicts do not necessarily end with the signing of official peace agreements. Often, low-intensity conflict replaces violent conflict because one or several actors are either excluded or not content with the peace agreement. The end of a conflict and subsequently the start of the post-conflict phase therefore become difficult to determine.

Secondly, the term post-conflict is highly politicized due to the consequences that it entails for the state and the society, which is labelled post-conflict. A post-conflict state is still in a fragile phase, but it does not belong to the more urgent phase of violent conflict and is therefore less likely to receive as much attention and aid as a country that is not categorized as post-conflict. This obviously has wide-ranging consequences for the society at large, as on the one hand the international community can chose to withdraw its presence from the state in question, despite its fragility but even if external donors and partners may not actually withdraw or even decrease its presence in the host state, they are most likely adjusting their behaviour, planning and strategies to a post-conflict setting, which may have far-reaching consequences (Autesserre 2010, p.66). Another possibility is that the (new) government may want to show and establish its status as independent and therefore ask international actors to leave prematurely. In both of these cases, the risk of a fall back into conflict is high.

Thirdly, the concept of post-conflict does not indicate what sorts of conflict that is over. It is doubtful whether the term would be used to describe a state that has been involved in an international war overseas such as the US after its involvement in the first Iraqi war. For internal conflicts however, the term is less ambiguous in the sense that there is no need to refer to different states.

One way of overcoming the problems of defining and identifying the post-conflict period's beginning and ending is to adapt a process-oriented approach in which post-conflict states are seen as lying along a transition continuum where the achievement of different milestones signifies progress towards a more sustainable peace (Brown, Langer, Stewart, 2011, p.4). Here the dichotomy between conflict and peace is replaced by a gradual approach, which may be more similar to the empirical reality than the more closed concepts of either conflict or peace.

References:

Autesserre, S., (2010). *The Trouble with the Congo: Local Violence and the Failure of International Peacebuilding.* Cambridge University Press: New York.

Brown, G., Langer, A., Stewart.F., (2011). "A Typology of Post-conflict Environments", Centre for Research on Peace and Development, Working Paper n°1. Available at: https://lirias.kuleuven.be/bitstream/123456789/330374/1/wp01.pdf, accessed 9 March 2014.

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