

PC-AAA-758

99832

war-torn societies project in

Eritrea



WSP



PSIS

The WSP dissemination phase

This publication is one component of a wider exercise of not only evaluating the first four years of the War-torn Societies Project but also of sharing this evaluation and the lessons learned during the project with a wide variety of interested audiences. The lessons have been compiled into a set of core reports that analyse the WSP experience in the four countries in which it was piloted, document WSP's operational experience at field and headquarters levels and draw conclusions on the project overall.

The War-torn Societies Project: the first four years

(an overview of the WSP experience and lessons learned)

WSP in Eritrea (an account of the project in Eritrea)

WSP in Guatemala (an account of the project in Guatemala)

WSP in Mozambique (an account of the project in Mozambique)

WSP in Somalia

(an account of the ongoing project in Northeast Somalia)

WSP in practice (an account of WSP's operational experience)

In addition to the reports, three companion volumes are being published in collaboration with WSP successor bodies and/or regional publishers in the countries in which WSP has completed its pilot work.

Post-conflict Eritrea: prospects for reconstruction and development

published in association with The Red Sea Press

From conflict to dialogue: the WSP Guatemala way (English) and

Del conflicto al dialogo: el WSP en Guatemala (Spanish)

published in association with FLACSO

(Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales Sede Guatemala)

Rebuilding through dialogue: the Mozambican way (English) and

Reconstruindo pelo dialogo: o caminho de Moçambique (Portuguese)

published in association with CEDE

(Mozambican Centre for Research on Democracy and Development)

Copies of the reports and details of how to order the co-published books are available from

WSP Info/UNRISD

Palais des Nations

1211 Geneva 10

Switzerland

Or on the WSP web site at <http://www.unrisd.org/wsp/>

© UNRISD/PSIS 1998

WSP in Eritrea was prepared by Martin Doornbos and edited by June Kane

The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of UNRISD/PSIS or WSP concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or its authorities or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

Table of contents

Abbreviations	4
The War-torn Societies Project	
How WSP began	5
What's new in the WSP approach	7
Assessing the WSP experience	11
Eritrea	
Launching WSP Eritrea	15
Setting up the project	17
Staffing and preparations for research	21
The Working Groups and research themes	23
Entry Points and dialogue	29
What comes next?	36
Conclusions	42
References	43
Annex 1 Chronology of events	44
Annex 2 WSP Eritrea project staff and Working Group members	47

Abbreviations

CCU	Central Coordination Unit of WSP
ELF	Eritrean Liberation Front
EPLF	Eritrean People s Liberation Front
ERRA	Eritrean Relief and Rehabilitation Agency
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
IGAD	Inter Governmental Authority for Development
NGO	Non governmental organization
PAR	Participatory action research
PFDJ	People s Front for Democracy and Justice
PSIS	Programme for Strategic and International Security Studies
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WHO	World Health Organization
WSP	War-torn Societies Project

The War-torn Societies Project

How WSP began

The War-torn Societies Project (WSP) a collaborative project of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) and the Programme for Strategic and International Security Studies (PSIS) of the Geneva Graduate Institute of International Studies, was launched in June 1994. Its first aim was to help clarify policy options in societies that are emerging from major social and political conflict.

In the aftermath of the Cold War, there had been a dramatic rise in the number of instances of profound internal strife in countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. Invariably these had momentous implications for the structures of societies in these countries and posed major challenges for those providing immediate relief and aiding longer-term rehabilitation – be it social, economic or political. UNRISD, the United Nations research institute devoted to social development, saw a responsibility to explore what and how social science could contribute to post-conflict rebuilding. In 1993, therefore, UNRISD convened a preliminary workshop devoted to that question.

Within UNRISD itself, interest in the issue had grown out of a number of earlier projects on political violence and on ethnic conflict, and more directly from projects on the return of refugees and on Cambodia. On the PSIS side, work on these questions had included formulating a new strategy for Swiss humanitarian aid and assessing UNDP work in conflict and disaster situations. The experience of these agencies, and of others involved in the delivery of aid, was discussed at a brainstorming seminar held in Cartigny, Switzerland, in 1994 that brought together, for the first time in such a form, representatives from war-torn societies and some of the major actors in international assistance. At Cartigny, these shared interests in post-conflict rebuilding laid the foundation for a concrete plan of joint action that would link research and policy. The War-torn Societies Project was born.

In the aftermath of the Cold War, there had been a dramatic rise in the number of instances of profound internal strife in countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America.

The essential premise of WSP was that post-conflict rehabilitation typically involves a whole range of actors – internal and external – but that it is often hampered by these actors' lack of understanding of how some of the basic issues and priorities involved in rehabilitation interact. This lack of understanding was seen to be compounded by insufficient exchange of information on the various actors' policy agendas, and last but not least by the limitations and inflexibility of some of the external actors' own terms of reference.

With these initial assessments of some of the hurdles in view WSP undertook to initiate in selected war-torn societies action research projects that would facilitate jointly sponsored research activities into priority areas for social and economic reconstruction and to promote policy dialogue and synchronisation among the main actors involved. Research and policy action were seen as potentially interrelated in several ways: research would help identify priorities for policy involvement and adjustment while also mapping out what programmes various actors were already engaged in, actors in turn might not only respond to research findings but call for new areas of enquiry, collectively steering research into new or more directions. In the process, it was expected that there would be value in promoting and facilitating dialogue about research priorities and findings, as well as about their respective policy agendas, among different actors: government agencies and other national actors, multilateral and bilateral aid agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The WSP approach was laid down in a Project Document accepted as a basis for action at the 1994 Cartigny seminar. The document outlined a number of crucial steps that were to be followed and elements that were to be included in each country project. In terms of organizational structure and staffing, this involved choosing a national Country Project Coordinator, necessarily a consensus figure

who would have overall responsibility for the project and for liaising with key government and external actors, forming a Project Group comprising representatives of the main internal and external actors involved in post conflict rebuilding that would assume collective ownership of the project, recruiting a Research Coordinator and other core researchers and providing for administrative support staff and logistic support.

Operationally the first task for the core research team was to prepare a Country Note, a substantive

paper discussing the key social, economic and political conditions and requirements of the country in the post conflict situation, paying due attention to how various issues were connected. The Country Note was to be prepared on the basis of both existing data and research and broad consultation with main internal and external actors. It would serve as a basis for discussion in the Project Group and for selecting usually not more than five key themes or Entry Points for research that could highlight policy issues in which different actors would be engaged.

For each of these themes a Working Group was then to be constituted, made up of representatives of the different actors with a particular interest or involvement in the policy area concerned. Members of these Working Groups would interact with the relevant researcher(s) and by implication with each other, on the question of which issues would be given priority and how and would generally

The first task for the core research team was to prepare a Country Note, a substantive paper discussing the key social, economic and political conditions and requirements of the country in the post-conflict situation

give direction to the research and feedback on the basis of its preliminary findings. In the conduct of the research activities and in Working Group deliberations a special effort was to be made to ensure a 'meaningful policy mix' as well as actor mix. WSP projects were expected to last approximately eighteen months, a period considered both necessary and sufficient to initiate a process that might eventually become self-sustaining. Throughout the life of the projects, a Central Coordination Unit (CCU) in Geneva would closely monitor the research activities, provide backstopping where necessary and arrange for logistical support.

Based on this general framework, WSP was launched in Eritrea in June 1995, in Mozambique in July 1995, in Guatemala in August 1996 and in Somalia – after a prolonged preparatory period – in January 1997. The Eritrean project ended with a final workshop in December 1996. Its life was officially extended until May 1997 to allow for the preparation of a successor arrangement and then again to the end of October that year when WSP Eritrea was officially closed. In June 1997 it was decided to extend the project in Mozambique to the end of that year to allow for more effective dissemination of the research findings and further consideration of possible successor arrangements. Subsequently the transition phase was extended to the end of April 1998 at which time WSP Mozambique was closed. The Guatemala project had its final workshop in March 1998 and was formally brought to a close the following month. As WSP itself approached its intended closing phase in December 1998 plans were in place to extend the Somali project to additional locations, including Somaliland and thus to extend its life beyond the close of the wider pilot project.

What's new in the WSP approach

There are various possible ways of looking at the WSP experience and judging where it fits into the research/policy nexus. It can be considered according to its potential as a venue for policy dialogue. It can be defined by its capacity to generate policy-relevant research data or can be judged by its comparative advantages as a tool for identifying and solving problems. Each of these approaches will highlight a particular aspect of what in most WSP countries was a complex set of processes and interactions, involving researchers, policy makers and other interested parties.

Each of these approaches, by implication, also adds to our general thinking on the possible links between research and policy. Such links occur in many forms in different contexts though quite often they have been obscured by a lack of adequate feedback mechanisms. It is common, for example, to say that sound policy preparation requires reliable research back up (and feedback) although the understanding of what the exact connection is and how it can be assured is constantly being redefined. WSP has come to represent one significant effort towards understanding the research/policy connection specifically in contexts where post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation are on the agenda.

One interesting way of looking at the WSP experience – at least in part – and of understanding its rationale and objectives is to consider it in the context of the development of participatory approaches towards problem oriented and problem-solving social research. Some of WSP's roots in fact can be traced back to innovative forms of participatory action research (PAR) that became quite prominent in the late 1960s and 1970s. At that time they were developed particularly for application in micro contexts such as small rural communities (Stiefel/Wolfe 1994). Anthropologists and other researchers would associate themselves with say small groups of peasant farmers and in extensive discussion and dialogue with them would try to identify the needs and aspirations of local communities and help them think through how members of the community could themselves contribute to achieving these. Understanding and raising awareness of the key problems social groups were facing including alternative ways of overcoming them were key concepts guiding this new approach.

On the research side the problem-orientation and participatory dimensions of this new approach stood in stark contrast to classical anthropological research in which researchers would make painstaking efforts to observe and accurately record social interactions within the community they studied while basically trying to stay outside those processes themselves. On the policy side the basic assumption of this new participatory approach was that it might allow for sounder ways of identifying needs and problem-solving options than would be provided by solutions and programmes devised elsewhere and simply handed down to passive recipients.

Both the problem orientation and the participatory dimensions demanded entirely new and different roles and skills on the part of the researcher. Observation and analysis were by no means to be superseded but would have a more preparatory and supportive role and beyond that the researcher would also act as a facilitator providing a venue (at least symbolically) and guiding the interaction and collective thinking among participants in the project. Instead of striving for scientific objectivity (which at roughly the same time came under heavy fire as ultimately unattainable anyway) researchers were expected to be able to develop a basic sense of empathy and identification with the local community's self examination and search for ways of improving their condition. This new role posed its own professional requirements and codes of conduct which in due course would become the subject of a good deal of discussion and elaboration.

PAR was first developed in the 1960s and 1970s in Latin America and other so-called Third World regions in the wake of liberation theology and as a supplement to conventional research methods. It soon gained a place in the repertoire of social science research strategies and methodologies although the somewhat exaggerated expectations that initially accompanied it were in due course moderated to more realistic proportions. Elements of PAR can since then be recognised in various kinds of problem-solving strategies.

WSP methodology was directly derived from some of the basic ideas and experiences of PAR. Largely through the initiative of the WSP Director who had been a prime mover in the use of PAR in UNRISD – in particular as Director of UNRISD's Popular Participation Programme – From these early experiences – in particular the stress on the common recognition of issues and policy priorities – on dialogue to better appreciate different actors' perspectives and on the empowerment of local actors to participate in decisions affecting their future – came the general direction of the methodology to be used in the project. What makes WSP methodology different and unique however is that it represents a quantum leap from a research methodology designed to be implemented at the micro level to implementation at the macro level – addressing broad national issues and involving a variety of actors – internal and external – who play key roles at the macro level.

In WSP the participants are representatives of major agencies rather than a community of peasant farmers. The facilitators are a WSP Country Project Coordinator with a research team rather than an individual researcher and while PAR researchers were generally (though not necessarily) outsiders, WSP researchers are invariably insiders widely recognized as interested parties in the process.

There is a further difference. Micro-level PAR not only addressed itself to the local level but also sought to empower local participants like small farmers in their dealings with powerful agents such as landlords or the state. In confrontational situations its own role was thus essentially conflictual. In contrast WSP methodology – in its efforts to create bridges for dialogue and communication – is basically consensual.

The underlying assumptions of WSP methodology are that, particularly in post conflict situations there is an acute need for broad based dialogue and communication for sound information and the sharing of it – on the requirements and priorities for reconstruction. Post conflict situations are potentially characterized by a lack of clarity, confusion and/or overlap as to which actors – government branches, private organizations, international agencies – are doing what and what policy responses they are developing to immediate and long term needs. Also there is usually little open space – if any – for regular communication among key actors in the field.

WSP's premise therefore is that mapping key issues and key policy initiatives through jointly initiated research and using the results as a basis for dialogue towards an improved understanding of different policy approaches and possible coordination may help fill important gaps.

What makes WSP methodology different and unique is that it represents a quantum leap from a research methodology designed to be implemented at the micro level to implementation at the macro level.

Does it? The answers to that can only be given with confidence when the various WSP pilot projects have all been completed and more fully analysed. Nonetheless a few striking experiences already stand out.

In the first two countries where WSP projects were launched – Eritrea and Mozambique – the dynamics of the projects worked out quite differently, as might have been expected in different contexts. In both countries, however, participants reflecting on their involvement in WSP Working Groups singled out the element of dialogue as having been of most significance in helping them better understand different actors, positions and policies. Representatives of NGOs or multilateral agencies, for example, reported that it was through WSP that they had come to better appreciate the rationale of government policies, while participants from government or political organizations observed that WSP had provided a much needed venue for sharing some of their policy thinking with other actors engaged in reconstruction efforts. Beyond this, almost all quarters said that involvement in WSP had been a shared learning experience, and in a number of instances had helped to indicate attainable solutions to common issues.

A similar appreciation emerges from the WSP experience in Guatemala and Somalia, where the project created a much needed democratic forum for all actors – particularly local and national actors – to meet and search together for a better understanding of common challenges of post-war rebuilding, and to search for new solutions.

The particular context in which WSP-type action-research is undertaken is of crucial importance in determining both the needs and the possible scope for its engagement.

In terms of providing a venue for creative dialogue and generating a sense of common orientation from the initial country experiences, it appears that WSP may indeed have succeeded in transposing some basic elements of PAR from the micro to the macro context.

But if this seems to hold significant promise for national and international engagement in reconstruction efforts, there are limits to the WSP model of participatory, problem-oriented research. Again, the particular context in which WSP-type action research is undertaken is of crucial importance in determining both the needs and the possible scope for its engagement.

In this connection, it will be useful to recall one basic assumption underlying the WSP concept: that PAR at the macro level will be especially relevant in those post-conflict situations where it is unclear which actors are pursuing what policy objectives, and where there is a clear need to arrive at broader consensus. In many post-conflict situations, the government wants to retain overall command of the policy process and is determined to keep the initiative in setting out strategies for national reconstruction. In such situations, it is likely that participatory policy research that seems to go beyond dialogue would be seen to infringe on this. Dialogue, as such, may still be seen as useful and even of potential

service to the government in office but the government will be more likely to ensure that policy dialogue it did not initiate itself does not encroach on the (re)setting of national policy priorities

In fact there is potential ambivalence in government responses to the WSP approach. WSP's role in facilitating dialogue between different actors (among whom there are possibly some former rivals) is likely to be seen as valuable and it is not unlikely that governments might seek to make use of the venue WSP offers as an additional forum to get their messages across. At the same time though there is likely to be concern that the policy dialogue that ensues might follow an entirely autonomous course and engender new policy. Though the concerns are delicate and may not always be explicit they are genuine and need to be recognised by all parties. In principle though WSP's particular approach to action-research can potentially make a strategic contribution to rethinking key issues in post-conflict reconstruction in tandem with and in support of government efforts in parallel directions.

Assessing the WSP experience

From its inception WSP attracted wide international interest. Donor agencies in particular showed a keen interest in its potential and gave it their initial support. Many different actors asked what lessons WSP might produce and speculated on what difference it might make in a number of contexts. There were at times high expectations of WSP's possible role. Donor representatives and other observers, for example were from the outset interested to learn whether the project has impact though without specifying what this might mean. If a true assessment of the role, potential and impact of WSP is to be made it is important first to ask what expectations are reasonable.

The aims of WSP itself bear repeating:

WSP is a pilot project that aims to make a contribution towards post-conflict reconstruction and peace-building through an innovative approach and methodology that brings relevant internal and external actors together around a number of key policy themes of common interest.

WSP thus aims to achieve better insights into basic problem areas, to promote improved coordination of rehabilitation and development efforts and to de-politicize divisive issues, thus indirectly contributing to reconciliation.

These objectives evolved in the course of the project with key focuses changing subtly from one phase to the next. From the beginning WSP pursued multiple objectives that were not always clearly defined, priorities changed or progressed as the project moved through different stages. Thus at the 1994 Cartigny seminar WSP was conceived essentially as a response to the frustration of the international community over its all too apparent failures and the ultimate objective was to assist the international community to perform better. Initially WSP projects in the pilot countries were seen primarily as a tool to reach that objective.

Once WSP country projects had been initiated in the selected countries however assistance to rebuilding processes in these countries naturally enough became an overriding objective. The change in orientation this signified was profound but perhaps not immediately visible as external actors kept an active interest in WSP though now to better understand how their own programmes would relate to national policies.

As stock is taken of WSP's efforts to improve insights into basic problem areas and promote relevant dialogue among a larger field of actors there is also an enhanced interest in trying to ascertain to what extent some of the lessons learned may be generalized to other post conflict situations and possibly to international development assistance more broadly.

At the point at which WSP's impact is assessed a number of other factors need to be taken into consideration for example WSP's contributions to post conflict reconstruction and reconciliation are likely to be indirect rather than direct in nature. Accordingly the impact of WSP is more likely to refer to how well it succeeded in creating a means of facilitation in contributing to improved communication and understanding possibly in helping create a new view of or changed climate for policy dialogue (likely to need longer to assess) and not necessarily to any concrete shifts in policy. Again actors might well adjust their policy agendas in the light of deliberations in a WSP context, but it has not been an objective of WSP as such to influence policy in any particular direction. The impact of WSP should thus not be judged by whether or not it has done this.

It is also important to remember that WSP is essentially a pilot project experimenting with a previously untried approach to policy oriented PAR. This has two important implications: the first is that the first phase of WSP is in many ways a means of testing the WSP package the instrument or methodology itself the second is that WSP 1994-1998 is a first try out in a variety of different post conflict situations. Questions may still be unanswered therefore, on how ready the methodology is for application elsewhere or whether it should first be further adjusted. By implication any assessment should also take into account whether what is being measured is the potential of a project approach that is to be further developed or a methodology that can now be fully assessed in terms of its performance.

It is perhaps more important to remember that during the pilot phase WSP projects have been operating under conditions that may not necessarily be present in the future. In particular the close monitoring and logistic support from the CCU in Geneva and the high level of support from donors may not continue beyond the pilot phase. When drawing lessons from the experience so far and assessing its relevance and validity for application elsewhere therefore we have to consider how the blueprint for WSP projects would fare without these forms of support. Is it conceivable that a WSP package could be composed in a form that could be employed relatively easily without much external assistance?

The first stage in the assessment of all four WSP country projects was to develop a set of tentative guidelines and questions. This was used not as an exhaustive check list but as an indicative framework in which the assessment might be used to draw lessons particularly since from the beginning WSP had been seen not as a static product but as an interaction between research and policy deliberation and between different sets of actors.

As the lessons learned focus is central to the whole exercise it is useful to spell out more explicitly what is meant by lessons and to ask lessons for whom and from what?

Clearly in the case of a project like WSP which operates at different levels insights and lessons drawn from the activities differ from one actor to another. Lessons are likely to be relevant to different bodies at different times and for different reasons. At least three different levels can be distinguished in the context of WSP all with their own distinctive value but also significantly related.

Firstly, lessons learned in the context of the empirical research conducted in one of the WSP country projects or through the confrontation of policy assumptions with substantive research results from the field lie at the core of what WSP is about. In other words, fresh research evidence may prove to be relevant to key policy actors. The lessons concerned do not necessarily represent scientific discoveries or breakthroughs (that was not why the research was undertaken to begin with) but interesting findings of wider relevance should not be *a priori* excluded. The key point is that research evidence about actual conditions may represent an important additional resource for policy actors (whether or not this was strictly called for by the actors concerned) and therefore can represent relevant lessons learned at that particular level. But to offer the same lessons at other for example international levels and thus presume their wider validity might not serve much purpose and could even be counter-productive if these lessons had been long recognised in other contexts or were to be found in more general theoretical literature. It is obviously important therefore to keep in mind the likely relevance of lessons to particular levels of actors.

In the case of a project like WSP, which operates at different levels, insights and lessons drawn from the activities differ from one actor to another

Secondly lessons learned in the conduct of organizing and monitoring WSP projects – largely relating to methodological matters rather than to substantive findings – concern a different but equally crucial resource to operational actors. This is particularly true of the experience and insights gained in the process of setting up successive WSP projects in different country contexts and from keeping track of subsequent actions and initiatives. Lessons learned here might include those arising from both successes and failures and might arise in response to

unanticipated turns in the course of WSP projects. In either case the lessons learned are largely a function of learning by doing or self-teaching. Lessons of this kind thus concern the adequacy of WSP as an instrument that is being tested and possibly improved during its pilot phase. Naturally, the dimensions that might come up for attention and scrutiny in this connection are as varied as the WSP enterprise as a whole: logistics, project preparation, training, research, action, interconnections, and not least the question of the desirable extent of local autonomy vis-à-vis CCU guidance.

Thirdly, lessons learned from the introduction of WSP in different contexts relate to the processes of interaction between various categories of actors involved in WSP in different country situations. They refer particularly to the kind of processes and relationships that emerge at the macro level in different situations, between government and external actors for example, and provide answers to the question of how and why WSP prompted such different response patterns. By implication, the lessons learned here might advance our understanding of the kind of social and political contexts in which WSP has a greater chance of making a useful contribution and might give some insight into the extent to which WSP might be replicated in different contexts.

It will be clear that there are likely to be important links among these three categories of potential lessons and the actions and interactions underlying them. We might expect, for example, that actions determining lessons learned within the second category (interventions at the level of the WSP package introduced) would indirectly have an impact on the kind of lessons forthcoming in the first category, the more substantive and communicative dimensions of WSP. These in turn are likely to have an important bearing on the way WSP is perceived and positioned within the wider macro-political context, thus contributing to lessons in the third category. While *a priori* these various links might seem obvious, by their very nature they are not easy to identify and analyse.

Lessons of wider relevance can also be drawn, for example, although WSP-based lessons are derived from and in turn initially applicable to international assistance in post-conflict situations, some of them may have relevance to development assistance more generally. This is because the performance of international assistance actors in rebuilding war-torn societies often reveals problems and patterns that are of a general nature but that become more visible in the extreme conditions pertaining in a post-conflict situation.

In each of the country reports produced as the first phase (1994-1998) of WSP comes to a close, these questions and interactions are considered.

Eritrea

Launching WSP Eritrea

No assessment of the role WSP came to play in Eritrea is possible without some preliminary remarks on the Eritrean context in which the project was launched. In particular, the background to the struggle for liberation, the orientation of the political leadership that emerged from it, its present role and position vis-a-vis Eritrean society, the style and mechanisms of policy making, and the overall strategies and objectives towards which government policies are oriented are of key importance as they strongly influence the nature and style of policy interactions.

To understand the complexity and orientation of the political leadership in Eritrea, it is important to keep in mind the ongoing importance of the liberation struggle against Ethiopian annexation, specifically its duration, nature and intensity. The war that came to an end in 1991 had lasted 30 years and been intense. It had required an extraordinary degree of adaptation and improvisation. These factors carried even more weight because, more than almost any other war in recent times, this one had been fought in isolation. Moreover, there had been a costly war within the war, adding to the physical and social scars, as the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), ultimately victorious, was for some years engaged in a fierce power struggle with the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) from which it had split.

On the Eritrean side, the war was not fought by a regular army, operating through regular divisions and hierarchies, but by flexible units with a common background in a movementist type of engagement. They had attracted young men and women from many walks of life, urban as well as rural, who after the war derived a sense of pride and a certain privilege from their status as ex-fighters. Over the years, social life within the EPLF had developed its own codes and ethos, which many of those in the leadership and rank and file had assumed and continue to live by.

Upon delivering ultimate victory and political independence to Eritrea, the EPLF, as a matter of course, took up political leadership in the post-conflict era, replacing the Ethiopian administration that had been in control. Its outlook, now from the commanding heights of government and as the newly named People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), is one that sees a continued unified front as a prerequisite for confronting the challenges of post-war reconstruction and development. Moreover, those within the PFDJ largely consider that the means by which the challenges of war were successfully tackled can validly be employed in meeting the challenges of peace. Whereas one side of this ethos stresses learning by doing and addressing issues as they arise, another side emphasizes adherence to maintaining unified policy positions vis-a-vis internal as well as external actors.

This unified yet flexible culture has several implications for the style of government in Eritrea. For example, there is ongoing reliance on informal lines of communication among PFDJ members and on ad hoc decision making and policy readjustments as issues and situations demand. Also, there are as yet relatively few written general policy statements being issued and very few fixed positions of government responsibility have been created. Instead, government is regularly reshuffled to the extent that not only every minister will be expected to change seats but many other senior officers similarly exchange positions often to areas that are entirely new to them. One implication of this is that no attachments to any particular government office nor any authority derived from any specific expertise, are likely to develop. Overall unity and command are thus more easily maintained.

This pattern has many ramifications and can be interpreted in a variety of different ways though all imply a particular emphasis on the unity principle. In relation to the external world, what counts is the Eritreans' determination not to let the war-born sense of self-sufficiency and independence slip away in the entanglements of international aid agreements, policy packages or the conditions attached to them. As the youngest of independent African states, Eritrea appears determined not to become a donor-driven country as so many others have in

Africa and if this implies foregoing potentially attractive propositions, it seems ready to pay the price. There is a take it or leave it attitude towards foreign donors who are welcome to support projects or programmes that have received government approval but whose propositions for involvement in different sectors carry little weight, if any. Rather, the government seems determined to do things its own way, even if that means following unorthodox steps, taking internationally unconventional decisions or saying it is not ready to adopt a particular policy stance. There is a

popular Eritrean saying sometimes cited in this connection: Never kneel down. What counts is that the initiative remains firmly in Eritrean hands.

External agencies – bilateral, multilateral or non-governmental – are generally not accustomed to this. Elsewhere they have usually found willing partners to listen to their proposals and *a priori* prepared to accept externally devised policy packages and the conditions that come with them. UNDP compounds, with representations such as those of USAID, the EU and World Bank, have consequently come to constitute key nerve centres in many African countries, at times having more detailed or current information on certain policy issues than the government does. No wonder then that the Eritrean stance vis-à-vis external actors has been a novel experience for many of them and one that takes some getting used to. Beyond the *a priori* restrictions on their activities, what probably concerns the external actors most is the relative lack of communication from the government with

What counts is the Eritreans' determination not to let the war-born sense of self-sufficiency and independence slip away in the entanglements of international aid agreements

respect to various policy areas the relative unpredictability that results and the consequent difficulty to engage in even medium-term budgeting and planning of project activities

There is an implicit dialogue of sorts underlying this pattern of internal/external relations in Eritrea. Multilateral and bilateral agencies as well as NGOs expect the Eritreans to get their act together and develop normal working relationships with the external world and its representatives. The web of international arrangements and agreements to which all independent states are party is growing increasingly intricate and the international system expects the Eritreans to assume their role with all the rights and obligations this involves. What is more with globalization and worldwide economic transitions occurring at an accelerating rate it is sometimes argued – and some Eritreans would agree – that if Eritrea does not engage in this wider arena and catch up it will miss the boat.

The Eritreans on their part seem unconvinced that such normal relationships are absolutely necessary and would rather take their time to develop relationships their own way or wherever possible on their own terms. This is not intransigence. Part of the thinking is that during the 30 year liberation struggle the fighters on the front were thrown back on their own devices with few if any outside powers coming to their support. They therefore question why they should be rushed into collaborative arrangements now. Moreover it appears that the ex-fighters still largely in command are determined to retain overall control of strategies for post-war development despite possible opposition from returnees from exile who might be more inclined to build cooperative international links. Finally in much the same vein there are fears that if Eritrea unconditionally joins the system this would inevitably entail becoming relegated to some kind of junior partner in many external relations – and this it is felt is definitely to be avoided. Clearly there is still a strong nationalist sentiment at play. Independence that has been fought for is to be consummated not dissipated.

It was in this context and climate that WSP Eritrea was launched. In retrospect the responses and interactions it generated were in many ways predictable, although when the project began it seemed to set out in entirely uncharted directions.

Setting up the project

The WSP Eritrea project was readily chosen as WSP's first country project at the Cartigny seminar. Eritrea had already been earmarked as a possible candidate for a WSP project as it was considered to represent a particular type of post-conflict situation namely one resulting from a victorious liberation struggle that brought about a clear political structure and strong legitimate governmental authority. In that sense it seemed to be a relatively straightforward case and a suitable candidate. Moreover one of the seminar participants at Cartigny was Dr Nerayo Teclmichael a well-respected Eritrean of international standing who at the time headed the Eritrean Relief and Rehabilitation Agency (ERRA). Dr Nerayo was

enthusiastic about the idea of WSP as it was put forward at the seminar and proposed that Eritrea be chosen among the pilot projects. At the time a number of countries were still being considered as candidates for a WSP pilot including Uganda, Mozambique and Cambodia but with this added plea from a key figure in Eritrean development Eritrea was soon chosen.

Eritrea certainly fulfilled the WSP criterion as a country whose infrastructure had been severely damaged and where rebuilding and rehabilitation efforts were high on the agenda in a whole range of areas. As would become clear in the course of the project however Eritrea was not or did not see itself as war-torn in the sense of having to cope with serious internal social and political divisions. Nor would it in the end turn out to be a straightforward case. In fact when Eritrea was chosen in the spring of 1995 no one was really aware how special and unique a case Eritrea would be with respect to handling the external/internal actor balance.

In April and June 1995 WSP Director Matthias Stiefel and Head of Operations Oto Denes made several exploratory visits to Eritrea. During these missions expectations of what the project might come to constitute in the Eritrean context were discussed with key members of the Eritrean Government, including President Isaias Afewerki, and other potentially interested actors. Although during

these discussions it became clear that WSP Geneva and the Eritrean Government had somewhat different expectations about the potential outcomes of the project it also appeared that these did not constitute conflicting agendas. In fact WSP Geneva subsequently made an effort to compare notes on the progress of the project with the Eritrean leadership at regular intervals.

With a necessarily experimental character Eritrea thus became WSP's first country project. Dr. Nerayo himself became Country Project Coordinator and Dr. Berhane Woldemichael a

former representative of the Research and Information Centre on Eritrea in London was appointed full-time Research Coordinator. Setting up the project itself was in many ways a learning experience which for lack of any blueprints or set scenarios on how to go about the logistics of such a task was approached in time-honoured learning by doing fashion.

For hundreds of requirements from setting up an office and acquiring necessary equipment to recruiting staff and researchers and sharing out relevant tasks numerous choices and decisions had to be made. In many cases this involved clarifying sometimes avoiding more fundamental questions such as who should be taking the decisions in the first place. Indeed a cluster of questions concerning the elaboration and understanding of WSP Geneva/WSP Eritrea relations the decentralization of operations the extent of autonomy of decision making and ultimately the project's ownership announced itself from the earliest stages.

Eritrea was considered to represent a particular type of post-conflict situation, namely one resulting from a victorious liberation struggle that brought about a clear political structure and strong, legitimate governmental authority

The logistics of establishing WSP in Asmara, Eritrea, proved complex and initially took precedence over the organization of research operations. Underlying this was WSP Geneva's early decision to establish WSP Eritrea as a separate entity and thus provide a neutral physical WSP space where actors could meet. As a result, affiliation with or location at the premises of either UNDP or the University of Asmara was not sought; instead, a modest villa was rented that was to serve as an administrative and documentation centre as well as a venue for Working Group meetings.

From the beginning, the Research Coordinator was closely involved in the organization of the office: what kind of equipment to acquire, allocation of space, hiring of administrative staff. In the course of this, though, two kinds of issues emerged that illustrate questions of more general relevance.

Firstly, WSP Geneva felt it should be consulted on the kind of acquisitions made, whereas WSP Eritrea (the Country Project Coordinator as well as the Research Coordinator) felt that such decisions should be made locally. A strongly worded exchange of correspondence ensued. This entailed more than questions of levels of competence; it reflected potentially different ideas about how the project should be run and ultimately bordered upon and could possibly become entangled with questions of ownership. A certain tension between two principles of organization surfaced: on the one hand, the Eritrean premise was that the project was to serve national Eritrean objectives, including those of Eritrean capacity-building, but on the other, there was the *de facto* control of funds centrally in Geneva, since WSP Geneva had to authorize all expenditure (WSP Eritrea could not be a separate legal entity with its own bank account).

The logistics of establishing WSP in Asmara, Eritrea, proved complex and initially took precedence over the organization of research operations

This issue was compounded by a certain lack of familiarity on the part of WSP Geneva (and in a way of all parties concerned) as to what basic amenities would be required to set up a WSP-type operation. Many conventional research offices in Europe as well as in Africa would have fairly plain and functional office equipment and, for want of more specific criteria, these were taken as a model by Geneva. However, this ignored the fact that WSP Eritrea – as a meeting place for senior government and external actors – might need something extra. The Asmara team, or at least the Country Project Coordinator and Research Coordinator, implicitly recognised this. As a result, at the start, some of the office equipment that was bought – most memorably, the (reportedly second-hand) carpet in the Research Coordinator's office (which was also used for Working Group sessions) – raised questions in Geneva, where there were fears that this might send out the wrong signals. In Asmara, however, it was felt that the purchases reflected the status of staff and visitors expected in the project office.

Similar questions concerned the administrative staff hired at the beginning of the project: an office manager, a secretary/receptionist, a general assistant, a part-time accountant, a driver, and night and weekend guards. These were seen as somewhat excessive by WSP Geneva, particularly since they were all in place before operations actually began. It was argued that they had been recruited in anticipation of the size and kind of project involvement that as yet seemed quite uncertain. Again, WSP Eritrea justified this as being part and parcel of an office with a certain level of status, and argued that the salaries concerned were actually very low.

Other logistical issues were practical and involved problems of releasing funds to WSP Eritrea, as well as making computer equipment and other facilities (reproduction, fax, e-mail) available to the office. Due to circumstances beyond the control of WSP Geneva, transferring the resources due to WSP Eritrea often turned out to be a complex undertaking, incurring serious delays, as well as misunderstandings between WSP Eritrea and Geneva.

Some of these complexities, of course, might have been anticipated from experience in East Africa or of the United Nations system. Part of the problem was that funds, as well as equipment, had to be channelled through UNDP Eritrea.

This was compounded by the very nature of WSP, a project presenting itself as independent and operating with one foot outside the United Nations system, yet administratively obliged to go through its procedures and clearances. These could not easily accommodate the requirements of an *ad hoc* project of limited duration and needing to exercise flexibility.

The combined result of the fairly elaborate office set up and the complex procurement procedures was, initially, at least, a considerable demand on the time of the Research Coordinator. A further

effect was that, for a prolonged period, most of the communications between WSP Eritrea and WSP Geneva concerned administrative and procurement issues, and often had a tone of friction. This was not made easier by the lack of electronic mail communication in the early days. In response, WSP Geneva explored additional and occasionally unconventional routes to provide WSP Eritrea with the required resources, and on the question of authorization versus autonomy, in the end, leaned as much as possible towards the latter.

In retrospect, it is clear that many of the complexities encountered or engendered in the process of setting up WSP Eritrea were an inevitable consequence of having to arrange the logistics of a project that had no precedent. In fact, it is important to recognize that it was through the experience of setting up the WSP Eritrea office that several basic lessons about what to do and what not to do were

It is clear that many of the complexities encountered or engendered in the process of setting up WSP Eritrea were an inevitable consequence of having to arrange the logistics of a project that had no precedent.

learned. Not least of these was an awareness of the need for WSP country offices from the start to have adequate autonomy and to be constituted as distinct legal entities.

Staffing and preparations for research

In addition to the positions of Country Project Coordinator and Research Coordinator, plans for the Eritrean WSP project had provided for a Principal Researcher, an International Researcher, and a Regional Researcher, the latter two in a part-time advisory capacity. In addition, close regular contact and consultation on questions of research methodology and materials were anticipated with the CCU in Geneva.

The first Country Project Coordinator, Dr. Nerayo, saw his role mainly as an umbrella function, opening doors on behalf of the project in government and donor circles and securing political support for it, as and if necessary. Shortly after the first Project Group meeting, however, and thus still in the early phases of the project, Dr. Nerayo was seconded to the WHO regional office in Brazzaville and was replaced as WSP Country Project Coordinator by Dr. Tesfai Ghermazien, the Minister of Agriculture. Dr. Tesfai was selected by the President of Eritrea from a short list that had been drawn up by Dr. Nerayo in consultation with WSP Geneva. Dr. Tesfai held a basically similar view of his role as Dr. Nerayo had, playing a generally stimulating role as coordinator while also staying alert for political sensitivities that the project might create.

The day-to-day running of the project was left largely in the hands of the Research Coordinator, Dr. Berhane, who came to function as *de facto* overall project manager and who, partly due to the procurement problems encountered, partly perhaps by inclination, devoted a considerable part of his time to administrative matters. As a result of this, research coordination *per se* received less attention than it might have, although no doubt a key factor in shaping the respective roles was also the dynamics of the project itself and the management required. There was clearly a need to free the Research Coordinator from at least some managerial tasks. Additionally, as the Working Groups began to function effectively, it became clear that WSP researchers would spend much of their time as animators of the groups, in addition to their research tasks. This had not been anticipated. Since there was also an obvious advantage in having a native English speaker to help with information flow and document editing, it was decided to appoint Ms. Victoria Bawtree to work full-time with the project. Ms. Bawtree, a retired staff member of the FAO who enjoyed the confidence of the Eritrean leadership, joined WSP Eritrea in January 1996 and made significant contributions to its smooth operation during its final phases.

The Principal Researcher of the project was Dr. Ruth Ivob, a political scientist of Eritrean origin on leave from the University of Missouri and author of a book on the Eritrean national struggle published by Cambridge University Press (1995).

The appointment like that of the Country Project Coordinator and the Research Coordinator was made by WSP Geneva. Fairly soon however differences between the Research Coordinator and the Principal Researcher in personalities work styles and perspectives on what WSP might be made to mean in the Eritrean context resulted in strained relations and ultimately the resignation of Dr Lyob. Following this the position of Principal Researcher was not filled but a new arrangement was worked out by which in future different researchers would become affiliated to different thematic Working Groups and be able to work more autonomously. This arrangement took effect following the presentation of the Country Note and the selection of Entry Points for interactive research that grew out of it.

The International Researcher Martin Doornbos was a Dutch political scientist familiar with the region and with experience in organizing research policy exchanges on the rebuilding of post conflict societies. He was invited to join the project on an intermittent basis specifically to give feedback on research designs and draft materials and to advise both WSP Eritrea and WSP Geneva on the project's development more generally. This appears to have worked out reasonably well for much of the time though on the whole WSP Eritrea and the individual researchers called less on the International Researcher than they could or perhaps should have done.

In any future WSP-type projects, it might be important to consider exactly what role a regional researcher might play

The original project plans also provided for a Regional Researcher whose task was expected to be to bring a regional Horn wide perspective to WSP activities in Eritrea. Following an initial search for suitable candidates however the idea was abandoned partly because this particular role came to be seen as redundant in the light of the project's staff development thus far and the Eritreans' general familiarity with developments in the region partly perhaps because it became less

clear what regional dimensions or perspectives could or should be brought in, and partly because the funds earmarked for the position could usefully be used for other tasks. In retrospect, though abandoning the idea of a Regional Researcher may have been a mistake. This person might have helped to open up the Eritrean project from the beginning to the region and might also have diffused the sharper edges of the internal/external positioning that was to ensue. In any future WSP type projects it might be important to consider exactly what role a regional researcher might play.

Finally it had been presumed that the researchers would have close working relations with the CCU in Geneva. There were visits by CCU staff for mostly political or logistics purposes however except for a couple of fruitful short-term interactions (notably on the preparation of the Country Note and training of field research assistants) there were not substantive links on the research itself.

WSP's documentation centre was maintained and able to respond to requests for research materials or other assistance but few if any such requests were actually made by the Eritrean personnel. In retrospect this is not so surprising anyone immersed in the day-to-day realities of Eritrean policy issues is unlikely to see the need to place these in a wider comparative framework or to relate them to broader theoretical debate. In fact Eritrea-based researchers were likely to have limited knowledge of the existence of broader literature though not through any fault of their own.

Another lesson relates to the feedback function originally assigned to the CCU. There was invariably too little time to give useful feedback on draft materials prepared in Eritrea or by the time it was given it was too late to be effectively used. Hence this aspect of the Geneva/Asmara working relationship did not work as satisfactorily as had been anticipated. The research side of the Eritrean project generally evolved more autonomously than had been expected when the CCU was set up. This may by itself not have been a bad thing however. Given a general need to develop self-sustainable project approaches a monitoring relationship with the CCU in Geneva that was too long or too imposing might well have been counter-productive. This again underscores the need to be clear on what is expected from national WSP projects when they are launched.

The Working Groups and research themes

Following the preparatory steps largely devoted to logistics the WSP Eritrea research team was expected to draft a Country Note that would serve as a point of departure for selecting a number of Entry Points – essential rebuilding issues on which WSP research efforts would be concentrated.

However the Eritrean Country Project Coordinator and Research Coordinator decided to reverse this order and first commissioned a number of papers on selected themes that they thought might provide suitable inputs to a Country Note. This was against the judgement of the Principal Researcher and contrary to the scenario the CCU in Geneva had envisaged which foresaw that a Country Note would first be drafted to provide a basis for a Project Group discussion at which Entry Points might be selected. The CCU was not satisfied with the first draft of the Country Note and seconded a member of its Geneva-based staff to Asmara to help write it up. All in all several months went by before this intervention and this caused the project to finally take off much later than anticipated. In retrospect it is not clear whether WSP Geneva was not clear in transmitting its procedural expectations or was too insistent on maintaining a level of control or both.

Once completed the Country Note provided a broad overview of key issues in Eritrean reconstruction and development. Sections were devoted to the positive and negative legacies of the Eritrean conflict and the challenges that lay ahead to post-conflict experiences of reconstruction (including political rebuilding issues

affecting rehabilitation and social reconstruction (reintegration of war affected populations, food aid and economic rebuilding) to local initiatives and to the role of external actors in rebuilding. The document was presented in February 1996 to the first meeting of the Project Group – the broadly representative body of external and internal actors invited to take part in WSP and to serve as its forum as well as initiate further steps.

The meeting itself constituted an important and unprecedented event: it assembled all relevant external actors and a large number of internal actors for a full day of relatively open discussion and was a major achievement, breaking new ground in Eritrea.

At the Project Group meeting, the themes chosen as Entry Points for further research were food security, social reintegration, human resource development, infrastructure and governance. There had been other possible themes – notably gender issues and the plight of pastoralist communities – but these received insufficient backing to be selected. In addition, the role of international assistance had itself been proposed as an Entry Point, but this was felt to be a theme of such general importance that it should be considered within all the Entry Points. In the end, it was also agreed that gender issues, the role of private business and local

initiatives should be given attention as cross-cutting themes within each of the chosen Entry Points. This did not quite work out. The role of private business was taken up in the governance paper, which may possibly have been a reason why the other researchers did not pursue it; gender issues were touched upon in the context of social integration, but less or hardly at all in the other themes, and though an effort was made to capture the local initiatives dimension, insufficient connections could be established with the main lines of thematic Entry Point research to make this work.

The meeting assembled all relevant external actors and a large number of internal actors for a full day of relatively open discussion, and was a major achievement, breaking new ground in Eritrea.

During the discussion of Entry Points, an important distinction emerged between the ways in which internal and external actors dealt with questions of international assistance. External actors tended to propose more short-term relief and conflict-related issues, or to look at issues in a short-term perspective, while the Eritreans chose longer-term concerns, or preferred to look at the same issues in a longer-term developmental perspective. Such was the case with food aid, which the Eritreans chose to consider from the perspective of food security. Such was also the case with the reintegration of refugees and ex-combatants, which the Eritreans wanted to consider as part of the more general category of reintegrating marginal or excluded communities into society, and with government/external actor communications, which the Eritreans saw as part of the much broader issue of governance. Similarly, human resource development and infrastructure

development were themes deliberately chosen by the Eritreans with a long-term perspective in mind

The same tendency emerged in discussion on the role of international assistance more generally. The Eritrean approach was not to focus primarily on aid when looking at Eritrean relations with the international community but rather on Eritrea's integration into a wider economic and political context regionally and internationally. This was of course perfectly consistent with the determination shared quite generally within Eritrea to avoid becoming a donor driven country, and thus with aid-driven external relations.

Once the Entry Points had been selected Working Groups were formed around each theme and Project Group members were invited to indicate in which Working Group they would like to participate. Meanwhile Dr Berhane took a number of research assistants into the field, trained them in the processes needed to collect and analyse data and left them in place as a resource for the Working Groups and core researchers. The core researchers themselves were recruited for the research tasks to be undertaken in dialogue with the new Working Groups, on each of the themes. The Country Project Coordinator made it clear to Geneva that the recruitment of researchers would be handled solely by WSP Eritrea. Since recruiting qualified researchers is no easy task in Eritrea WSP Geneva probably felt relieved with the Country Project Coordinator's reassurance that the Eritrean team would be able to identify suitable candidates.

When the Eritrean researchers were identified however WSP Geneva was first surprised to note that all five were high placed and busy government officers and that most worked in the government departments that related closely to the issues they would be researching. So for example the head of the planning department of the Ministry of Agriculture was assigned to undertake the research on food security, the principal project officer engaged in the resettlement of refugees with ERRA was to take on the research into social integration and the Acting Land Commissioner was given the theme of governance. In addition the Director of the Housing Bank a macroeconomist by background was to research human resource development while a second senior government economist, later to become Secretary General of the Inter governmental Authority for Development (IGAD) based in Djibouti was invited to take up the theme of infrastructure development. In each case the idea was that the research would be conducted on a part time basis and in principle with the help of research assistants for fieldwork.

The rationale offered for recruiting government professionals on a part-time basis as WSP researchers was that it would be extremely difficult to find suitable alternative candidates in Eritrea. Besides it was reasoned the researchers would have the advantage of considerable familiarity with the problem areas in question and direct access to most of the available data in the country. These arguments were no doubt valid even though in the diaspora there would also have been

many qualified Eritreans able and probably interested in taking on the research tasks. Recruiting Eritreans from the diaspora would probably have been prohibitively expensive, however. Other suitable candidates might have been found in Eritrea, although this would certainly have required a good deal more effort.

This arrangement nevertheless meant that no independent researchers would be enquiring into policy areas that might be considered sensitive, and that what would be presented as WSP research findings could count on the approval of the Eritrean Government. In effect, no other arrangement would have been politically possible if WSP wanted to have any influence at all. Meanwhile, one important implication of the choice of working with government officers was that it would give a particular slant and direction to the discussions within the various Working Groups, namely that of an informative dialogue on government policy between government and external actors. In this connection, all the Working Groups had come to comprise a good mix of internal and external members.

Participants in the WSP Eritrea Working Groups reported both at the time and later that the groups soon developed into the project's key locus and focus of activities. If until this point establishing WSP in Eritrea had seemed an uncertain

venture into new territory, with all the problems this might involve, at this point the project clearly picked up its own momentum. From the start, the various Working Groups became highly animated discussion groups on the chosen themes, generally comprising members with an interest in the topics concerned through their professional engagement with external aid agencies or with Eritrean government departments.

From the start, the various Working Groups became highly animated discussion groups on the chosen themes.

The Working Groups' first task was to further define and delineate the scope and boundaries of the research to be undertaken under the specific heading of each of the groups. To this end, the core researchers associated with each Working Group prepared outlines of the research, and these were discussed at the first meetings of the groups and subsequently modified in the light of comments. In part it was because everyone present at the discussions was interested in the topics being discussed, but for different reasons and in different ways, that the discussions were so lively. Not only was there wide debate on the issues that might be covered in each research task, with much back-and-forth on whether parameters should be broad or closely defined, there was also a significant learning experience as members became familiar with each other's particular involvement and preoccupations, and where there were points in common. Often also, members gave advice on methodology and possible approaches to the research and offered to make relevant data available to the researchers.

The other main and continuing reason for keen interest on the part of many Working Group members in these meetings was that for the first time, they provided a channel for substantive communication between the Eritrean Government and non-governmental – mostly external actors. Recognition and appreciation of the value of this communication – often referred to as dialogue – was shared by all sides – although for different reasons.

External actors emphasized the fact that they had come to better understand government policy on a number of fronts. Some wondered however whether the reverse – government gaining a better understanding of the perspective of external actors – would also be true. Government members for their part said they had come to appreciate the value of such a channel as a way of communicating the government's position better – sometimes adding that they realized that the Eritrean Government had not been particularly effective in communicating its policies to the outside world.

On the topic of WSP as a channel of communication between government and external actors – some also pointed to the need to recognize that the channel was more than just a vehicle for communication, it actually forced participants to think through and articulate their positions. In general – nevertheless – it was recognised and reaffirmed that policy was a matter for the Eritrean Government – and that the exchanges taking place under WSP auspices – neither intended to nor did influence policy in a direct way.

Clearly then – it was the Working Groups and not the Project Group that emerged as the heart of WSP activities in Eritrea. The Project Group was too large a body for effective communication – at too high a level of representation – and met infrequently. Nevertheless – it played an important role in giving wide visibility to the project and drawing a great deal of attention to it. The Project Group also represented the thematic unity of WSP engagements. It functioned as an umbrella for WSP activities and formally sanctioned the initiation of new steps within the project. In principle – therefore – the Project Group figured as the notional owner of WSP Eritrea. What this means will be explored further in connection with basic questions about symbolic ownership of WSP – questions that have come to command a good deal of attention in the course of the project. In any future post-WSP arrangements it may be useful to revisit the precise role and function of a body at the level of the Project Group.

The Working Groups seemed to function quite naturally as meaningful venues for dialogue and research activity in the Eritrean project – and it may be instructive to look more closely at some of the factors that may have facilitated this – and at some of the strengths and weaknesses of the Working Group format.

For the first time, the Working Groups provided a channel for substantive communication between the Eritrean Government and non-governmental, mostly external actors

Firstly there is no doubt that the informality possible in a group of 10-15 participants contributed greatly to the effectiveness and positive atmosphere of the meetings. Secondly part of the credit is probably due to the manner in which the Country Project Coordinator Dr Tesfai Ghermazien and the Research Coordinator Dr Berhane Woldemichael convened and led Working Group meetings. As they both chaired many meetings of each of the groups not only did a certain homogeneity of approach emerge but in raising issues and questions from a relatively independent perspective they often succeeded in stimulating substantive dialogue and a meeting ground between researchers and other internal and external actors.

A third source of strength of the Working Group format was evidently the common interest in the subject matter concerned. Apparently the WSP venue was significant here even for Working Group members who occasionally met each other on matters of common concern officially but without the informality that facilitates stimulating discussion. Finally the fact that reports from the Working Group meetings were written and circulated within days of the meeting undoubtedly contributed to forging good group dynamics. In sum the Working Group format developed into an effective venue for researcher/actor interactions.

Closely connected to the question of Working Group format and to the role of the Project Group was the scope of the selected themes. In all five themes chosen in Eritrea (food security, social reintegration, human resource development, infrastructure and governance) the scope was very broad indeed. The reasons for this probably varied from a deliberate attempt to try and cover broad interrelated problem areas to the practical constraints at Project Group level to formulate more sharply defined areas for enquiry, or possibly a combination of both. At any rate it should be observed that a broad body like the Project Group with perhaps 50 participants present for up to a day cannot be an effective body to define research themes satisfactorily. At most it can through votes in favour of key words point to certain broad areas that it would like to see taken up. Then it becomes necessary either to develop much more specific research questions on selected key issues within each area or else assume that priority must be given to a broad mapping of problems and prospects within these areas possibly to be followed up by more detailed investigation later. In the Eritrean case the latter seems to have happened.

It is also important to note though that the breadth of the themes chosen was perhaps too ambitious in the time available which everyone agreed was too short. What had been underestimated was the time consuming complexities involved in translating a macro level policy oriented action-research project into an operational and political reality and once it had been established the additional time required to adequately fulfil its objectives. Within the time planned for the research it was virtually impossible to do justice to the vast problem areas implied in the selected themes.

Part of the reason for this may have been that everyone had expected that the main role of the project was to be as a catalyst, encouraging the putting in place of longer term arrangements. At any rate, within the time available for the initial research, it was hardly possible to move on from the general to more specific issues, which might have come closer to concrete policy questions. As the project was expected to present its findings in a final workshop, again at Project Group level, it was natural that most of the reports tabled were basically broad overview papers, rather than papers that would position themselves at the centre of policy debate. This does not diminish the reports' value as general introductions and sources of data on the policy areas concerned. But it does underline that, if the final output of the Eritrean research seemed to lack specificity and direct policy relevance, this was not necessarily the researchers' fault but mainly a coincidence of the Project Group not being in a position to give more precise research directions, and the time span available being much too short to permit the research to move towards more specific issues.

Only the paper on governance stood out as an argument based paper that provoked a good deal of interest and discussion even outside WSP circles, partly because its particular theme and focus allowed an overview of the Eritrean Government's recent policy initiatives in administrative and political restructuring, but also because it raised some quite fundamental questions about government/external actor relations and the premises of international assistance. In short, the connections between the selection of Entry Points by the Project Group, the time available for research on them, and the nature of the research output, deserve careful attention in the design of any WSP or post-WSP arrangements.

Entry Points and dialogue

In a country like Eritrea, which had recently emerged from a prolonged war, there was not much chance for policy research in the conventional sense to develop as a regular activity. Though overall strategies were clear and well understood, to a large extent policy making on the ground had to be based on continuous experimentation, improvisation and adaptation.

This is not to say that research did not exist during the days of the EPLF. In fact, a good deal of field and desk research was conducted during the struggle, mostly by the Departments of Public Administration, Health, Education, and Political and Cultural Affairs. Moreover, starting from an entirely different conception of research, the Eritrean struggle may well claim to have pioneered various important new forms of research in action – action research of a kind – such as the development and testing of new practices and techniques in the medical field, or in communications, behind the front line.

In more normal circumstances, however, policy oriented research inevitably involves a whole range of desk tasks and the drafting of research reports, all to

prepare basic policy choices that have to be made or for assessing policy performance in various fields. In this sense during the years of the struggle Eritrea was not involved in research. Inevitably this may lead to a culture in which there is resistance to seeing research as a logical prelude to policy formulation. As the issues on which decisions have to be made become more complex and ever-changing however, research comes to be seen as more helpful. This requires both policy-makers and researchers to adapt and consider new orientations. In fact moving towards an optimal research/policy relationship is likely to involve a gradual process of mutual adjustment of expectations between policy makers and policy-researchers.

Against the background of an Eritrea which had known an extended gap in policy research activities, it is not surprising that when WSP proposed an action research project starting out from broadly defined Entry Points at the macro level, both researchers and Working Groups set out first to map out what their research field comprised of in terms of basic assets and problems in the current Eritrean situation.

In each case too, there was a tendency to try and take stock of what needed doing and what were basic requirements to begin with, followed in turn by the

formulation of relatively large numbers of recommendations. Thus the various research projects were devoted not so much to a weighing of the pros and cons of a specific policy issue, but to a broad baseline survey of the main issues and challenges in the field concerned, potentially followed by more specific and sharply focused enquiries at a later stage. Again, an exception was the governance report which, though also quite general in scope and coverage, focused on the government measures and initiatives that were being taken towards establishing a new political/administrative framework in Eritrea.

As the issues on which decisions have to be made become more complex and ever-changing, research comes to be seen as more helpful.

Thus, for example, the report on infrastructure development prepared by Berhane Woldemichael surveyed a number of key areas of infrastructure development including road construction, ports and port management, the railway system, the energy sector and telecommunications. For each of these areas, the report examined the current state of affairs, then discussed key requirements and priorities, before a description of the institutional and management capacity for the sector and some specific projects and policies that had been launched or were being considered.

For several specific areas the report discussed alternative policy approaches that could be considered. Apart from official documentation on each of the sectors, the report was based on interviews with selected officers as well as potential users.

and investors particularly in regard to the functioning of the port of Masawa. Generally the report represents a useful preliminary survey of *The state of infrastructure development in Eritrea* – the title it was given.

The report put forward a substantial number (27) of recommendations basically on the kind of steps that might be taken when reflecting on policy approaches to infrastructure development. In keeping with the preliminary overview quality of the research itself these recommendations were largely general reminders and potentially useful preliminary hints on infrastructural policy development. For example, A most urgent task for the effective function of the infrastructure services is the introduction of efficient management systems in the different sectors. This should include the appreciation of the impact of one's own role on the function of other sectors (Recommendation 5). Investment in roads has to be managed efficiently if it is to be cost effective. [A] heavy investment in a road construction could be wasted in no time if there is no efficient maintenance system (8). The port of Masawa is faced with many problems. Although attempts have been made to improve the situation since independence it has far to go to become a port of international standard (11). Energy conservation and environmental protection should be introduced into the educational system to achieve their long term sustainability (22). As was also the case in some of the other thematic reports the conclusions were not necessarily based on the analysis but seemed to be additions, presumably following extensive brainstorming in the respective Working Groups.

The report on human resource development prepared by Arara Tseggai took a different approach in its attempt to identify the current state of affairs and requirements. In principle stock taking of human resources can begin from the supply or demand side. A supply side approach might start from the availability and employment needs of refugees, ex-combatants and other categories of skilled and unskilled labour in search of adequate employment opportunities and might explore what options there are to give each category a meaningful role in the process of political rebuilding and economic recovery. This report however took demand as a point of departure. Recognizing that demand can be broken down into long-term and short term and can be further differentiated with respect to either the formal or the informal sector, the research concentrated on the specific category that is both short term and formal so as to be able to arrive at a base line picture of formal sector human resource requirements in Eritrea. The paper thus reported on an extensive questionnaire-based survey of human resource requirements and training needs in Eritrea conducted among selected policy makers, employers (of both government organizations and private firms) and training programme administrators.

About the same time the report – entitled *Development of human resources for national reconstruction* – was finalized. Broad based discussion on the need and nature of human resource development strategies began inside and outside government circles in Eritrea. As an outcome of these discussions, human

resource development was adopted as one of the key strategies for Eritrean national development. The WSP report presumably played a useful preliminary role in these discussions and will be further enriched if, in its final version, it can capture and incorporate the essence of the national discussion taking place.

In line with the human resource development report's more limited orientation, the recommendations selected by the respective Working Group were similarly both fewer (8) and relatively more specific. For example, it is feasible to bring in high-level technicians and professionals from abroad at this juncture with the clear idea of training Eritreans to take over from them in a timetable planned from the start. To persist in doing it ourselves may prove harmful in some areas of economic activities (4). A re-entrenchment in the health field towards giving prominence to primary health care is the better and preferred policy. The Eritrean struggle is relatively rich in its experience in this field and should be pushed forward (6).

The report on social reintegration prepared by Tecl'emichael Wolde Giorgis (Rosso) similarly aimed at giving an initial overview of its specific area of focus, namely the challenges and problems created by the process of social reintegration in post-conflict Eritrea, more particularly the situation regarding returnees and ex-combatants. Its author was experienced and had access to data, so was quite well placed to prepare the report. He had for years been one of the principal officers responsible for the government's reintegration programmes.

The report *The challenges of reintegrating returnees and ex-combatants* was in two parts: Part I offering a general overview and Part II presenting case studies of four settlement sites. The overview opened with a discussion of the definition of reintegration and the scope of the research, which concentrated on the specific problems encountered in the process of reintegrating returnees and demobilized combatants. It then gave a background to the magnitude of social disintegration in Eritrea, detailing the needs for social reintegration of both refugees and fighters, before discussing various dimensions of the reintegration process with respect to these two categories. Regarding the reintegration process, the report discussed the policy framework and the specific programmes adopted. The overview further contained an analysis of existing policies and programmes, discussing issues of food and agriculture, land and shelter, and had several pertinent recommendations to make in this regard for both internal and external actors, notably that in refugee resettlement it would be useful to develop more flexible packages of assistance than uniform fixed site allocations.

Part II of the report contained a detailed account of experiences and findings in four locations: Alebu, Ali Ghider, Fanko, and Gahtelai, discussing the extent of social reintegration, aspirations and achievements, environmental issues, gender and vulnerability issues, and the provision of social services. Recommendations following from these field studies were limited to 10, but included relevant suggestions for specific adaptations or extensions of the reintegration

programmes. Among its recommendations, for example, was that a systematic study be carried out so as to work out special programmes of support for the elderly and the households headed by women. As no fewer than one third of the households fall into this category and there are real physical and social limitations to their participation in agricultural activities, it becomes essential to identify ways of helping them find alternative sources of income (5) and [an] evaluation of the different approaches to the provision of shelter, as well as the various models, needs to be conducted. Time and money has been wasted in testing out different solutions, while notions of participation and the prioritization of target beneficiaries have been more difficult to put into practice (7).

The report on food security in Eritrea, prepared by Håile Awålom, comprised a general overview as Part I and a more extensive discussion of issues of food security and agricultural policy in the Gash Barka Region as Part II. The author, at the time a senior officer in the research division of the Ministry of Agriculture, used the opportunity of the WSP assignment to bring together a wide range of available data on the state of Eritrean agriculture and agricultural policy to provide a background for an informed assessment of the extent and prospects of food security in the country. Part I of the report, after sketching a general picture of the chronic lack of food security in post-conflict Eritrea, took up a number of broad aspects of agricultural, livestock and fisheries production in relation to food security, and then discussed various policies and programmes to promote agriculture and food security in broad and general terms. Part II described in considerable detail agricultural production and land use systems, paying particular attention to such matters as cropping systems, with specific reference to Gash Barka. This included a discussion on the pros and cons of promoting cash crop and food crop production to address food security, livestock production systems and their constraints, agro-industrial development with a number of different examples, natural resource conservation measures to improve food security, and the role of agricultural research for increased crop and animal production, as well as the contribution of agricultural credit and marketing policies to sustaining food security.

The report concluded with an analysis of different options for achieving food security, and an extensive discussion of recommendations (34) for policy makers, sub-divided into a number of specific policy areas. Coinciding with the research, the discussion that took place about food aid monetization in Eritrea led the Working Group, among other things, to emphasize the crucial importance of ensuring that food to be purchased would indeed be available in local markets. Clearly, *Food security in Eritrea* brought together an extensive and important compilation of materials that will help inform the discussion about agricultural policy and food security in the country.

Of the various Entry Point papers prepared in the context of WSP Eritrea, no single paper aroused as much interest and discussion inside and outside WSP circles as the report on *Governance issues and the Eritrean context* by

Alemseged Tesfai. There are probably several explanations for this. Firstly, this was a very well prepared report covering a whole range of dimensions of governance in Eritrea past and present in an informative and readily accessible manner. After some preliminary discussion on the concept of governance, the paper first gave an interesting historical account of aspects of governance during the Italian, British and Ethiopian periods of government before coming to the years of the struggle and the period since independence. Following this, it delved into a number of specific areas and issues that had recently been attracting attention and that had been the subject of much discussion, notably, the changing structures for local administration and communication, the purposes of the land proclamation, the question of popular participation, the role of the National Unions of Eritrean Women and Youth and Students, and the scope for the private sector in the light of the government's macro policy.

All these were discussed in an instructive manner, highlighting both the issues and policy choices concerned and explaining the rationale of the instruments adopted. Finally, the paper looked at the question of international economic cooperation and the Eritrean approach to the relationships involved. Instead of accepting a donor/recipient relationship characteristic of many other countries in Africa and elsewhere, Eritrea developed a concept of partnership in development, premised

on equality of involvement, from which it seeks to engage in international economic cooperation. In this connection, the paper suggested that the label 'war-torn society' may actually have been a misnomer in the Eritrean case since, apart from the physical destruction caused by the war, it was felt that socially the country had emerged from the struggle as unified as practically possible.

The governance report drew wide attention among external as well as internal WSP participants in Eritrea because for the first time it brought together and explained a whole range of recent government

initiatives and measures and put them in a broader perspective before a body of external actors. Discussions within the WSP Working Group on governance were not surprisingly reported to be among the liveliest and most intensive. The interest aroused by the report can be largely credited to WSP since it was the challenge which WSP conveyed and represented that led to the effort to articulate the Eritrean position on a series of governance issues in a comprehensive manner.

Several of the key points covered in the governance report were subsequently elaborated by Alemseged Tesfai in his analysis report on WSP in Eritrea. In this report, entitled *Eritrea post-war challenges of development: analysis of WSP Eritrea research* and prepared for the final national workshop held in Asmara in December 1996, Alemseged presented a broad overview of the research findings from each of the Working Groups. Beyond this, he initiated a thoughtful

The label 'war-torn society' may actually have been a misnomer in the Eritrean case since, apart from the physical destruction caused by the war, it was felt that socially the country had emerged from the struggle as unified as practically possible.

discussion on the links between the different research themes, placing them in the context of the policy mix and the unity of policy pursued during successive phases of reconstruction by the Eritrean Government. Again, the paper questioned the relevance of conventional donor/recipient relations for Africa generally and for Eritrea in particular, outlining alternative forms of partnership based on recognition of mutual respect. Precisely because it spells out these alternatives at some length, the paper is also of considerable relevance to WSP itself, since initiating a WSP project in a context such as Eritrea means abandoning assumptions about more common dependency-based relations between internal and external actors.

The relative absence of feedback connections between policy research and policy discussion in Eritrea underscores a paradox in the performance of the Eritrean WSP project: on the one hand it elicited wide and strong interest in the dialogue it opened up; on the other hand some of the research materials themselves did not necessarily contain much by way of new propositions inviting debate or controversy. In fact, it could be argued that the research efforts *per se* and the discussions that took place around them were not as intimately linked as had been intended when the WSP methodology was devised.

This could be because the Working Group provided a much wanted venue for discussion about policy and policy objectives in various sectors (which to some extent may even have been facilitated by the broad and non-specific focus of the chosen themes), even though the actual discussions were not necessarily prompted by or directed to particular research issues. In other words, while to some extent Eritrean WSP research was dialogue-driven, the dialogue that ensued was not always research-driven. Discussing and deciding Entry Point research provided a convenient forum for policy discussion, but the research that was subsequently undertaken appears to have had less influence on subsequent discussion.

In part this may explain a certain ambivalence that has been evident in the many expressions of interest in favour of continuing WSP activities in Eritrea. Almost all those in favour of continuing WSP referred to the value of the dialogue that the WSP experience had facilitated. Few laid emphasis on the research results themselves. In some cases Working Group participants added that they were less certain whether the research function had been necessary at all. Some suggested that policy-oriented discussion could take place on the basis of invited papers or an occasional lecture by a visiting scholar. Others said that a research component would be required in any future configuration, since otherwise discussion or dialogue would be akin to a social club. Few considered that research inputs from the project had been vital to the focus and direction of the discussions.

Initiating a WSP project in a context such as Eritrea means abandoning assumptions about more common dependency-based relations between internal and external actors

The potential of the research/dialogue link if it can be effectively established is significant and should not be ignored but in the Eritrean case it was not reached. In the longer run one should expect that the Eritrean Government in its further transition from war-time to peace-time patterns of policy formulation will increasingly come to recognize the need for relevant policy research and for engaging in new forms of policy-research interaction.

Meanwhile as far as WSP is concerned it appears that in re-examining the links between research initiation and formulation and between research output and policy dialogue a strategic starting point would be at the level of the Project Group. If the Project Group is in some form retained in post-WSP project designs, then it will be useful to give further thought to the steps and mechanisms involved in moving from stating general research themes to developing more specific policy-oriented research questions.

What comes next?

The Eritrean WSP experience raised important questions about national ownership. For WSP to have a chance of longer-term sustainability in the countries concerned it is vital to recognise the need for national ownership in one form or another. At the final workshop of the Eritrean project in December 1996 Eritrean President Isaias Afewerki made a point of raising this. His cautious warning was echoed by the Mozambican Minister responsible for governmental reform in June 1997 who similarly implied that WSP had made an interesting and valuable contribution but that it should not get involved in determining policy which was the government's job. It is quite possible that similar words of caution will be voiced in other contexts where WSP might be perceived as addressing policy agendas.

On the other hand without clear national effectively governmental support the potential role and impact of WSP is likely to remain marginal amounting at best to a kind of tolerated playground for external actors. If WSP in each country is nationally owned however, there is some question as to whether it will still be able to provide the space for meaningful dialogue and exploration of policy alternatives that external (and possibly some internal) actors might be interested in. Would national ownership make WSP a less interesting proposition particularly for external actors?

The short answer appears to be that even or maybe particularly in political contexts like Eritrea where a government seems determined to emphasize national ownership external actors remain keen to participate in a forum such as that offered by WSP.

This may be because it represents one of the few channels open to them for receiving any background to government thinking. This gave WSP a prominent and useful role in Eritrea even though it was not exactly what had been intended at the outset.

Ultimately however the question is fundamental because it raises the issue of power and control over policy processes. In reality national ownership means government involvement or control which can take various different forms. The question poses a dilemma to both sides. External players will have to weigh up opportunity costs: they are likely to participate as long as they see a net advantage in receiving relevant information. National governments, as the Eritrean and Mozambican experiences appear to illustrate, are also likely to be interested in the potential for communication that WSP offers, though for their own purposes, if it can help strengthen their overall coordination and command over national policy processes. However they are likely to become more suspicious and critical of a project that seems to shift the locus of policy debate outside their reach, and even to relegate government to just one seat among others in its proceedings. To the extent that hosting a WSP project means sharing or diluting this control in favour of stronger external influence, national governments are naturally unlikely to be in favour of it. In this sense the dilemma is basically unresolvable: both sides should be aware of it and balance any necessary concessions with the advantages of participation.

At an operational level, the question of national ownership is related also to the roles of Country Project Coordinator and Research Coordinator and the status of the research team, as well as to the way their roles are perceived in the specific national context. Thus in the Eritrean case the decision to have a cabinet minister as Country Project Coordinator and to recruit most researchers from among top government officials shows how keenly aware of this the government was and how strategically it confronted the possibility of losing some control over the policy process. Within its limited parameters WSP Eritrea thus became closely linked to the government, although it still provided a welcome venue for communication with external actors.

WSP projects call for special attention when they are being set up and as they end. The phasing out of a WSP project in particular raises several new and important questions. How should WSP projects ideally be wound up? How can an exit strategy from WSP be prepared during the course of the project? And what ideally should WSP leave behind?

Two points must be made. Firstly it is not primarily up to WSP to decide a preferred exit option, but to the various participants in WSP activities who will have formed an opinion on the relevance and form of continuation. Towards the end of the project in Eritrea an internal evaluation was organized. The Research Coordinator developed a questionnaire that was circulated to all 54 Project Group members and that aimed to assess the impact the project had had in putting policy issues on the agenda and to what extent it had succeeded in furthering policy dialogue.

The response was positive. Many more external than internal actors sent in responses, although at the final Project Group meeting in December 1997, where

the internal evaluation report based on this survey was discussed it was emphasized that the silence of many Eritrean government officers that had been involved in WSP should not be interpreted as lack of interest

From the survey and from subsequent responses at the Project Group meeting it became clear that there was wide interest in continuing WSP activities in some form. This led to discussion on how this should proceed and by implication to the broader issue of how successor arrangements should in principle be considered. Should WSP projects be seen as preparatory to more permanent successor arrangements or should any lasting features or institutional carry overs of WSP be seen as welcome but coincidental by products, the key contribution remaining the temporary country project itself? This is the view taken since WSP was first mooted and in principle there seems every reason to maintain it

Although a relatively short lived WSP experience like that in Eritrea might not leave lasting marks in terms of striking research findings or clarification of some key incongruities hampering effective international assistance towards reconstruction and development it nevertheless whetted appetites for a different kind of communication between internal and external actors. Undoubtedly then anything that might be created as a national successor to WSP would be at least as important if not more so than the initial experience itself. Although by mid 1998 there is no immediate follow up of WSP initiated external internal dialogue in Eritrea there is a clear understanding of the need to continue that dialogue

There is no clear answer to the question of whether WSP should have an automatic follow up mechanism. What is more important is that testing the ground for whether this is desired, realistic and likely should occur throughout the project's life. Some post-project issues do need to be tackled as the project ends, however particularly disseminating the results

To illustrate this in the Eritrean case it was unfortunate in retrospect that the thinking about a successor body affected other winding-up activities. It would have been desirable to disseminate research results quickly but this was not done because it was anticipated that a new centre would be established. Much valuable time that went into exploring the statutory and substantive roles of the proposed centre might have been spent on simply continuing informal research and dialogue as long as there seemed to be a logic to it

Some lessons can be learned from events leading up to the non implementation of a successor body idea in Eritrea. First of all again there is a need to build in a dissemination phase for research results from the very beginning and to implement this whether or not a successor body emerges. In Eritrea a belated effort to disseminate the research materials produced in the course of the project did not get under way until mid-1998

Secondly as to the kind of successor body that was planned establishing a Centre for Development Studies in Eritrea would have seemed an excellent step

(and outcome of WSP) and having such a centre would in no way have appeared a luxury in Eritrea. On the contrary, the country might very much need a centre of this kind, although it may in fact not yet have come to the point where it feels it is ready for it. Nevertheless, it must also be asked whether a more formalized institutionalized research centre would have been the most effective venue for the informal dialogue many Working Group members appreciated in WSP. Given the prevailing political culture and climate in Eritrea, it might have constituted just one layer of formality too much.

Directly related to this is a third point, a question only at this stage. Clearly, continuity of WSP-type activities, whether in Eritrea or elsewhere, requires some kind of institutional umbrella, particularly if a fully fledged autonomous centre would be too much. But this raises the question of what affiliations this umbrella might have. In Eritrea, there are very few options, each presenting its own problems. From the start, WSP Eritrea deliberately avoided any such affiliations that might invalidate its status as a neutral venue for different policy actors, even if this meant an administratively more complex and financially much more costly project. This issue has to be revisited, however, at the close of the project, and the costs of affiliation or independence weighed.

Taking this one step further, it might be useful to reconsider the basic position that WSP has adopted so far in avoiding affiliation as country projects are set up. There have been many good reasons for insisting on autonomy, and most are still valid. And yet, if there had been a loose affiliation with some body to begin with in Eritrea, it might have been easier and much more natural to continue activities on more or less the same basis with the collective sponsorship that was ready to support the proposed Centre for Development Studies.

It would also have helped in other, practical ways. For example, local dissemination of research results would have required a recognizable and preferably more permanent imprint, which might have been available through affiliation to an existing permanent body. In short, the unexpected shelving of plans for a new Centre for Development Studies in Eritrea may hold lessons on the appropriateness of reconsidering the operational independence of WSP country projects from the start.

The question of a successor to WSP in Eritrea had been examined at the final Project Group meeting in December 1996. At that meeting, the Project Group looked back with general approval to WSP's role in Eritrea and proposed that the possibility of successor arrangements be explored.

A small Working Group composed of both internal and external actors undertook the groundwork to create an Eritrean Centre for Development Studies as a successor to WSP. Several external actors pledged financial contributions towards the centre's functioning during the first year, and the Eritrean Government intimated it would assume responsibility for its accommodation. In the plans drawn up for the new centre, several of the distinguishing facets of WSP were to

be maintained such as the internal/external actor mix and the dialogue around research themes while additional roles were also contemplated.

The Working Group set about its task with gusto simultaneously exploring several dimensions of the new centre's foundation. Statutes were drawn up to enable it to function as an independent legal entity, a provisional management structure was devised, options for accommodation were tentatively explored and last but not least a fully-fledged research programme entirely devoted to questions of Eritrean human resource development was formulated. At a subsequent special WSP Project Group meeting in April 1997 a provisional management board was installed. For a transitional period in the first few months of 1997 WSP Geneva agreed to retain final responsibility. Finally the Working Group identified a candidate for the post of Director of the new centre and when all preconditions appeared to have been fulfilled the government was formally requested to release him from his post.

In May 1997 however the Eritrean Government announced it wanted to further reflect on the precise aims and functions of the centre. Naturally this announcement led to discussion and speculation as to what the government's considerations might be in this regard. Central to many discussions was the question of what kind of centre might finally emerge. Some external board members wondered whether a centre would actually come to exist at all or whether it was a victim of the interim Board's preoccupation in the preparatory stage with formal structures rather than substance. There was also concern that the momentum might be lost potentially causing the idea of a new centre to simply disappear from the agenda altogether. Others however initially felt that the government's move to reflect further should be taken at face value and that there were good grounds to expect that the initiative would be taken up again in due course.

Eritreans who had been closely involved in WSP were confident that the centre would be realised but also pointed to the need for further consideration of the precise functions it should serve. There were two more specific reasons why the centre's functions were seen to need more thought. First the choice of human resource development as an overall research theme for the centre's attention happened to be announced at a time when various other bodies were also becoming engaged in work on human resource development (macro policy the university individual ministries – all had been asked to set up their own research units on this topic). As part of a comprehensive re-organization exercise in the Eritrean Government in fact it had been decided that each ministry should engage in three key tasks: policy development, regulatory activities and research and human resource development. Evidently it was felt that the proposed centre's initiative in this regard might lead to overlap or duplication.

A second reason presumed to have motivated the call for reconsideration concerned the exact functions of the new centre. This had directly to do with

Eritrea's reassessment of the WSP experience. On the Eritrean side it was noted that the two key aspects of WSP – research and dialogue – both had their positive elements and that the dialogue part in particular had been an important vehicle in conveying the Eritrean point of view to external actors. It was through WSP – and thus to its credit – that the Eritrean participants felt they had come to realize that they lacked and needed a forum of this kind for regular contacts with external players. Given this primary interest in dialogue, there was still a question of how this might be related to any research component and to what extent research is essential.

Views on this at the time seemed not to be clear cut, but to merge along a continuum. At one end was the view that the centre, though possibly engaging in some research activities itself, should instead coordinate research done by other bodies and concentrate on dialogue as its primary mission (it was felt this could also be served by activities like sponsoring occasional guest seminars on themes of current policy interest). At the other end of the continuum was the view that dialogue must have its own primary research basis to give it direction.

One key Eritrean observer of WSP, while basically positive to a follow up, raised other questions regarding setting up a new centre, the time-frame and its independence. By time frame he meant that, in order to have intrinsic value, research activities would require ample time and continuity; by independence he meant that a research centre should be able to present its findings with its own independent imprint. He queried whether a centre in which different interested parties, internal and external, would be represented but in which the external partners would by definition be temporary, would achieve these

It was through WSP – and thus to its credit – that the Eritrean participants felt they had come to realize that they lacked and needed a forum of this kind for regular contacts with external players

There were other reflections and considerations at the time, including expectations that decision-making about the new centre might be affected by the large-scale organizational reshuffling going on in the Eritrean Government. These are indicative of the kind and level of additional complexities that may arise once the idea of establishing an independent centre as a successor body is raised. In Eritrea, the government put an end to all such thinking and re-thinking in September 1997 when it decided that, while the War-torn Societies Project had been an invaluable experience, the Eritrean Centre for Development Studies would for the time being not be launched as the government for now wishes to concentrate and focus efforts and resources on other activities.

There is a lesson to be learned here. In the Eritrean case, as in some others, the appeal of interactions among actors that WSP prompted led to expressions of interest to continue with the dialogue in one form or other. This prompted the

search for adequate institutional formulae and a suitable successor arrangement. This itself, however, raised new questions as to what the optimal format might be, and this in the end caused the idea to be shelved altogether.

There was, however, an expressed need for a continuation of a venue for dialogue during a specific phase – when a post-conflict rebuilding agenda and the nurturing of new relations in the context of that is of vital importance. That phase is in principle temporary until such time as normal working relations and links – presumably including those between research and policy – are in place. What appears to have been most wanted during such a phase is the possibility of continuing the same kind and level of informal interaction and dialogue as took place during WSP itself.

Given this, the logical way forward might have been to try and provide for relatively short-term, in principle temporary, continuation of a venue for informal dialogue among key actors. In Eritrea, however, the search became instead one for some arrangement that was to be not temporary but long-term, not informal but institutionalized, and not only a forum for continuing dialogue but a centre with a specific brief in the field of development studies, potentially therefore with a changing and widening substantive agenda. Laudable as these objectives were,

they did not directly derive from nor provide continuity to the WSP experience itself. Moreover, WSP's philosophy had been that if the interactive approach it had initiated seemed to meet with positive responses within any particular context, it would withdraw and leave it to the actors concerned to continue the dialogue. It should then be asked whether any desire for continuity might not, in the first instance, be best served by temporary and relatively non-institutionalized arrangements that would continue WSP's role as long as there is a demand for it (and while different actors are prepared to give it material

support) rather than by embarking on an institution-building project.

It was in Eritrea, among other things, that WSP first learned many important lessons about how to maintain its neutral ground as a suitable venue for interactive policy dialogue.

Conclusions

First and foremost, it should be recalled that Eritrea was the first country in which WSP launched its relatively complex interactive action research programme. It was therefore in Eritrea that, with a good deal of trial and error, a WSP process was brought to life for the first time and where, through numerous on-the-spot adjustments, the basic contours that would be followed elsewhere were drawn. It was in Eritrea, among other things, that WSP first learned many important lessons – not entirely without costs – about how to maintain its neutral ground as a suitable venue for interactive policy dialogue. Similarly, the experience gained first in Eritrea in the handling of CCU/country relations was important and must

have helped in the WSP country projects that followed. Similarly, Eritrea provided WSP with its first lessons on the meaning and implications of national ownership and how to come to grips with it.

The Eritrean context was also important in providing experience in the creation of a WSP Project Group and in the preparation of a Country Note and subsequent project steps. In this respect, learning that the Working Group format was a useful way of managing WSP research themes was of particular relevance. Together with this and numerous other methodological innovations, one other key lesson learned in Eritrea was that the time budgeted for a WSP country project had been much too short.

Beyond these various lessons learned, which no doubt have contributed to improvements in the approach adopted elsewhere, one broader implication of the Eritrean experience stands out. This was that the Eritrean case came to represent a quite fundamental qualification to the premise on which WSP had first been designed, namely as a sophisticated tool for improved external assistance in post-conflict rebuilding activities. The main lesson that Eritrea taught WSP was that its key value lay in its role as a facilitator and venue for dialogue among different actors, especially external and internal, around issues of post-conflict reconstruction. Once this was realised, it became clear that WSP could, and did help Eritrea in turn to reflect on the value of overcoming crucial communication gaps in policy preparation, and in engaging in broader informal dialogue on issues of shared policy interest.

References

Doornbos, M. et al. (eds.)

Beyond conflict in the Horn: the prospects for peace, recovery and development in Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea and Sudan. James Currey, London, 1992.

Iyob, R.

The Eritrean struggle for independence: domination, resistance, nationalism 1941-1993. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995.

Stietel, M. and Wolte, M.

A voice for the excluded: popular participation in development. Utopia or necessity? Zed Books, London, 1994.

Annex I: Chronology of events

Preparation Phase

March 1995 - July 1995 (5 months)

Mid March 1995

The CCU represented by the Director and Head of Operations completes its preparatory mission to Eritrea during which it is able to

- evaluate the country's suitability as a case study
- identify three members of the Country Project team and the International Researcher
- secure the support and participation of national authorities, United Nations agencies other multilateral and bilateral actors and international and local NGOs

Mid June 1995

A second CCU mission is undertaken by the Director the Senior Researcher and Head of Operations to

- obtain the support of the Eritrean Government
- help in defining the research agenda
- address operational and administrative arrangements

July 1995

The project is launched although practical problems setting up the office in Asmara delay the establishment of a fully functional office until August

First Research Phase

August 1995 - February 1996 (7 months)

August 1995

The research team begins preparing the Country Note. This involves analysis of humanitarian assistance social rehabilitation conflict resolution and political and economic rebuilding in Eritrea

September 1995

As concerns arise that there is not sufficient clarity on the WSP research methodology the CCU International Researcher visits for assessment and training

October November 1995

Missions by the Senior Researcher and Research Associate

The WSP Director visits and is involved in

- consultation with the Eritrean authorities
- establishing a clear workplan with respect to the Eritrean Government's interest in the project
- appointing a WSP Eritrea Country Project Coordinator as part of staff restructuring

December 1995

Workshop on the Management of Social and Institutional Rehabilitation in Addis Ababa examining the results of a four-country comparative study of these themes the Eritrean component having been carried out by WSP

January 1996

A final version of the Country Note is ready

February 1996

A national workshop is held creating a forum for the constitution of the WSP Project Group, and a place where key actors can meet to discuss WSP issues

It also brings together internal and external actors to discuss the Country Note and define Entry Points. Working Groups of field and other researchers around the Entry Points are formed.

Second Research Phase March 1996 - September 1996 (7 months)

February - April 1996

A number of field visits take place.

March 1996

During a mission by the CCU Research Associate, local Eritrean researchers are trained in WSP research methodology. The workplan for Phase II research is prepared by the Country Project Coordinator, outlining the schedule of meetings, field and other research activities and preparation of reports for the coming six months.

March - May 1996

Monthly Working Group meetings are held and reports are prepared. Field research results are fed into a series of overview reports around the Entry Points and compiled into an overarching summary of the findings of all the Working Groups: *The Challenge of Reconstruction*.

May 1996

A twice-monthly Eritrea Newsletter is launched to update Project Group members, WSP Geneva and interested actors on WSP activities.

June 1996

The Challenge of Reconstruction is presented to the second Project Group Meeting, along with the work of the individual groups. The meeting is attended by the CCU's Head of Operations and Project Officer.

The Visions Project, an attempt to capture local perspectives of post-conflict rebuilding efforts on film, is introduced as part of the action-research phase for presentation at Working Group meetings.

September 1996

All research papers are finalized, with findings on the five Entry Points brought together by mid-October. An overall analytical report on the findings of WSP Eritrea, *Eritrea post-war challenges of development: analysis of WSP Eritrea research*, is written.

Reporting and Evaluation Phase October 1996 - December 1996 (3 months)

December 1996

An internal evaluation of WSP Eritrea is documented in papers prepared by the research team, forming part of the background discussion material for the third Project Group Meeting. This is intended to be the final meeting, however, during the meeting a consensus emerges on the need to pursue the WSP experience in Eritrea on a self-sustaining basis.

A proposal is put forward for a WSP successor body in the form of an Eritrean Centre for Development Studies, and a transition phase is initiated. This involves creating a team to work for three months with a view to reporting back to the Project Group on the modalities of setting up the Centre.

The Successor Body

January 1997 - October 1997 (10 months)

March 1997

At the fourth and final Project Group Meeting the team tasked with looking into the creation of a Centre to continue WSP activities on a self sustaining basis submits its report. The report which details possible statutes, workplans and composition of a governing board is endorsed by all participants. Work begins the next month on setting up the new body.

September 1997

The Eritrean Government decides to suspend the launching of the Centre indefinitely, leading WSP to terminate the transition and officially close WSP Eritrea on 31 October 1997.

Annex 2: WSP Eritrea project staff and Working Group members

Project staff

Project Coordinator	Nerayo Teclmichael (July to November 95) Tesfai Ghermazien (from December 95 to April 97) Arefaine Berhe (May to October 97)
Special Advisor to the Project Coordinator	Victoria Bawtree
Research Coordinator	Berhane Woldemichael
Principal Researcher	Ruth Iyob (July to September 1995)
Researchers	Alemseged Tesfai (Governance) Haile Awalom (Food Security) Teclmichael Wolde-Giorgis (Rosso) (Social Reintegration) Araia Tseggai (Human Resources) Tekeste Ghebray (Infrastructure) (March/April 96) Berhane Woldemichael (Infrastructure) (July September 96)
Assistant Researchers	Tuku Woldeamlack Senayit Yohannes Eyasu Andemariam Selamawı Zere Abenet Essayas
International Researcher	Martin Doornbos
Visions Project	Christuan (Hilal) Sabatier Ruth Simon
Office Staff	Lemlem Emmanuel (July 96 - May 96) Freweine Bercket Harinet Berhe (March - October 97)

WSP Eritrea Working Group members

Food security

Ministry of Agriculture
Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)
United States Agency for International Development (USAID)
Environmental Agency of Eritrea
Lutheran World Federation
World Food Programme (WFP)
Italian Agency for Development Cooperation
European Union (EU)
WSP Researcher Haile Awalom

Social reintegration

Eritrean Relief and Refugee Commission (ERREC)
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development (ACORD)
Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD)
Oxfam UK and Ireland
Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (Swiss Consulate)
WSP Researcher Teclmichael Wolde-Giorgis (Rosso)

Human resources

Office of the President (Budget Division)
Ministry of Education
United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
University of Asmara
National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students (NUEYS)
World Health Organization (WHO)
Radda Barnen (Swedish Save the Children)
National Confederation of Eritrean Workers (NCEW)
United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
German Agency for Technical Cooperation/Project Administration Service (GTZ-PAS)
Ministry of Labour and Human Welfare
United Nations Volunteers (UNV)
Dutch Liaison Office
WSP Researcher Araia Tsegai

Infrastructure

Office of the President (Macro-Policy Division)
Ministry of Construction
Italian Agency for Development Cooperation
Lutheran World Federation
European Union (EU)
Ministry of Transport
Chamber of Commerce
WSP Researcher Tekeste Ghebray/Behane Woldemichael

Governance

Ministry of Local Government
Norwegian Church Aid (NCA)
United States Agency for International Development (USAID)
Popular Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ)
Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development (ACORD)
Ministry of Finance
Constitutional Commission of Eritrea (CCE)
United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
Land and Housing Commission
National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW)
Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD)
WSP Researcher Alemseged Tesfai