

# **Understanding Influence: Statebuilding Research and British Policy in Fragile, Conflict-Affected Countries**

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# Structure of the Presentation

1. Project background and general findings
2. The country level perspective
3. Case study: SSR in Sierra Leone
4. Recommendations

# Project Background

- Half way through final year of a 3 year project
- State building as a concept risen to the forefront of international agenda – development, security and human rights convergence around importance of fragile states and statebuilding as the consensus response
- Increasing demands to demonstrate research use in order to justify ODA spending – ‘should it go to saving children or more research?’
- “Understanding Afghanistan”, 2007/8

# Aims and Scope

- Study the manner in which statebuilding-oriented research sponsored by DFID has influenced and can influence British policy in fragile, post-conflict environments
  - Focus on DFID-funded/commissioned research but placed in wider context, from which it can't realistically be isolated
  - Linked focus to wider HMG departments with involvement in state building interventions (mainly FCO/MOD)
  - Not looking beyond policy influence to implementation – too complex
  - Less concerned with measures of influence than with process issues, dynamics, apparent challenges and opportunities for improvement. Not grading projects or centres

# Research-Policy Nexus

- Despite its lengthy history, has thus far focused on commercial or scientific questions
- Increasingly expanding into arena of international development, but sectoral or thematic focus continued to revolve around scientifically-oriented issues such as natural resource management, health and agronomy (RAPID - special focus on developing countries uptake)
- Lack of studies exploring research use in statebuilding; despite millions spent on state building research (e.g. £23m spent on Governance between 2001 & 2010)

# Anecdotal Assumptions

- Existing belief of generally poor relationship between research and policy in statebuilding – apparent in number of high profile works on the subject (Ghani & Lockhart; Collier; etc)
- Weak knowledge base and poor research use in state building
- Little if no influence on policy
- Policy is driven by other imperatives rather than evidence or research
- Research is always playing catch-up to policy in such a fast-moving field

# Concepts and Terminology

- **Research:** disciplined enquiry contributing to a body of knowledge (ESRC, 2005) (wide definition encompassing books to analysis and evaluation)
- **Types of Research:**
  - Academic Research: Deep, long-term, comparative, generalised (books, journal articles, academic working papers)
  - Grey literature: think tank reports, working papers, policy briefs, discussion/occasional papers, synthesis papers
  - Action oriented research: country focus, ad hoc, short-term, directly commissioned in-country, problem-solving, or ‘action research’, analyses, evaluations

# Concepts and Terminology

- **Policy:** authoritative and planned course of action
- **Types of influence:**
  - Primary: Formal government policy documents, (e.g. white papers)
  - Secondary: Somewhat specialised, programme oriented policy documents such as country plans, op plans, briefing papers or sectoral strategies
  - Conceptual (enlightenment): Widely adopted conceptualisations that frame the debate (e.g. concept of fragility, understanding politics of development)
  - Policy relevant research influence: Giving rise to further policy relevant research - multiplier effects on research and policy environment



# Approach and Methods

- Extensive mapping of research & policy outputs on statebuilding, resulted in focus on three subject clusters: political settlements; understanding conflict and fragility; and tax as statebuilding
- Quantitative: Bibliometric (citation analysis) and content analysis, examining documents. We have used it as a foundation to understand the extent of influence, but majority of findings based on qualitative analysis
- Qualitative element involving in-depth interviews, documentary analysis, interviews and field visits
- Over 100 interviews in London and in 3 case study countries (Afghanistan, Sierra Leone and Nepal)

# A Moving Feast

- Extensive changes in HMG research management, particularly within DFID – the ‘quiet revolution’ since 2008:
  - Increased resources towards improving evidence use (in general) and high-level commitments in WPs etc.; improved funding mechanisms (Centres & now Research Programme Consortia)
  - New research strategies (2008-13); new roles (e.g. Senior Research Fellows), teams (e.g. Evidence into Action Team, incl. evidence brokers - retrospectively examine quality of research and relevance to policy)
  - Organizational restructuring (e.g. creation of Research and Evidence Division, RED: colocation of policy and research teams);
  - New regional research hubs (South Asia Hub, West Africa Hub, etc)
- Fast-moving research frontier – proliferation of new research institutions, centres, programmes. More cases to study. As time moved on we have been able to reflect on greater degree of practice

# Tentative Findings

## GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

- Impossible to conclude measures of influence definitively, because influence is:
  - **Complex**: many perspectives, variables and factors involved given variety of forms of research, types of influence, levels and forms of policy and programming
  - **Contingent** on circumstances or more or less chance happenings – events (international or in-country), new Ministerial priorities, right person at right time, meeting the right person
  - **Conditional** on personalities of staff (HQ or country) and background or seniority, nature of specific issue or problem at hand, country conditions

# Tentative Findings

## “TWO COMMUNITIES”?

- Aspects of the cultural divide certainly apparent ...
- Policymakers: accuse researchers of attacking mainstream development practice without offering alternatives; don't understand pressures policymakers operate under; lack understanding of rationale of interventions; some research seen as hostile
- Researchers: Policy makers make decisions based on political reasons and not necessarily based on evidence. Policy makers are not open to criticism
- But not as bad as often assumed ...

# Tentative Findings

## “TWO COMMUNITIES”?

- General improvement of uptake over time since c. 2000 (Building peaceful state and societies, 2010)
- Deepening, widening and strengthening of research use (result of both improvements in research and the institutional change mentioned earlier)
- Growing trust: debate, exchange and extensive interaction
- Anecdotally – best donor in terms of evidence use

# Departmental Cultures

- **DFID:** Appetite for deeper, longer-term research; use of research more institutionalised; more money available, etc
- **FCO:** little evidence of engaging with longer-term research. Like actor bios, political intelligence. Little sight of what DFID is doing (but appetite). Less incentive to show things are working as in DFID. Research Analysts (40-50) only real source of research & link to academia
- **MOD:** statebuilding activities (stabilisation & SSR). Main hubs: Development Concepts & Doctrine Centre, DCDC (JDP 3-40) & Directorate of Operational Capability (lessons). Evidence of active learning culture – seminars, etc. Demand for research tactical & solution driven. But concerns raised - ‘little knowledge a dangerous thing’ (re. governance); over-optimism thus overlook potential problems; lip-service to deeper issues

# Assessing Influence

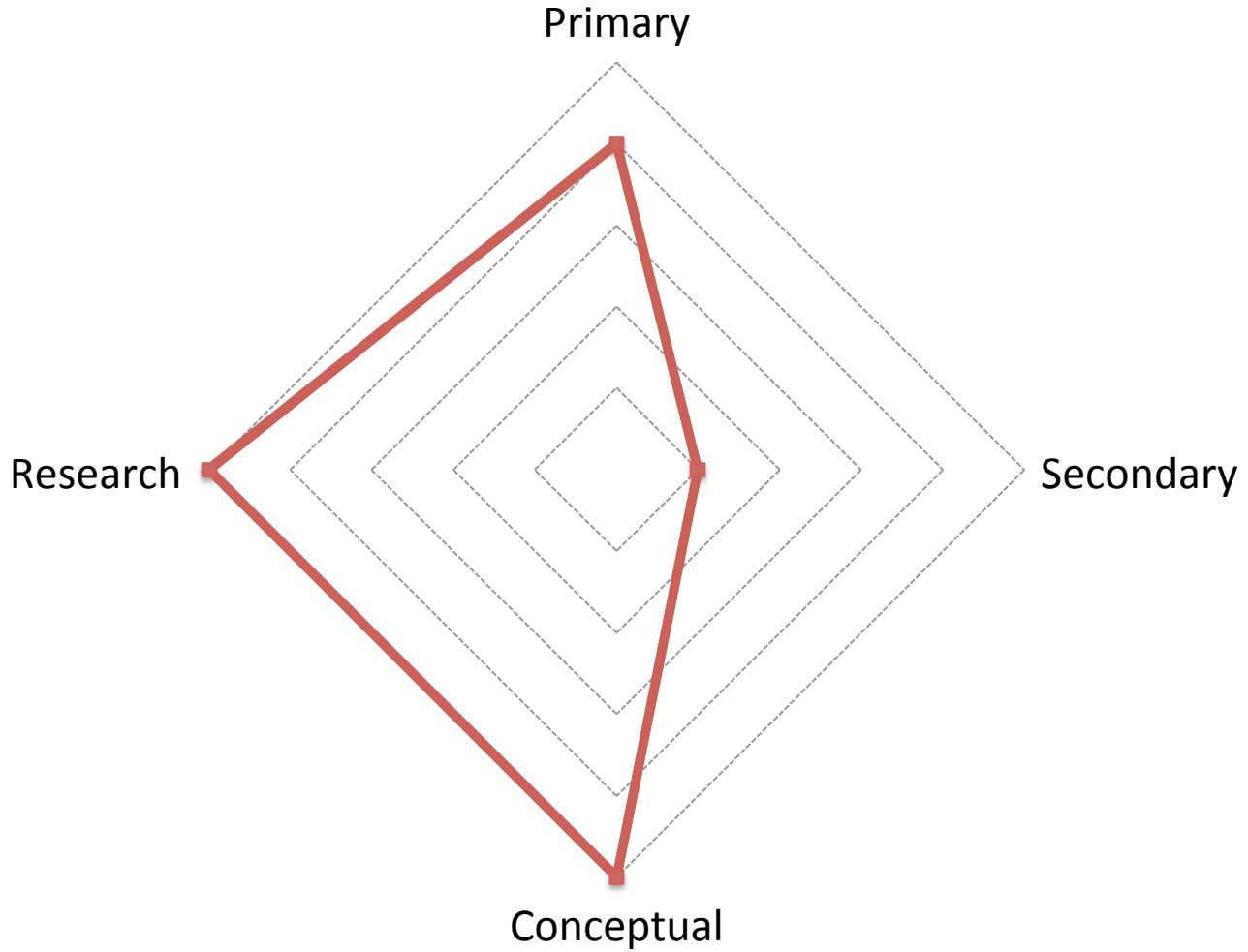
- The following overarching findings derived from a combination of quantitative analysis, documentary analysis and interviews – judgement and interpretation
- It does not cover all statebuilding research – rather identified clusters of DFID-funded research
- Extremely tentative, not definitive or final – not a science
- Generalisations – do not apply to all cases

# Assessing Influence

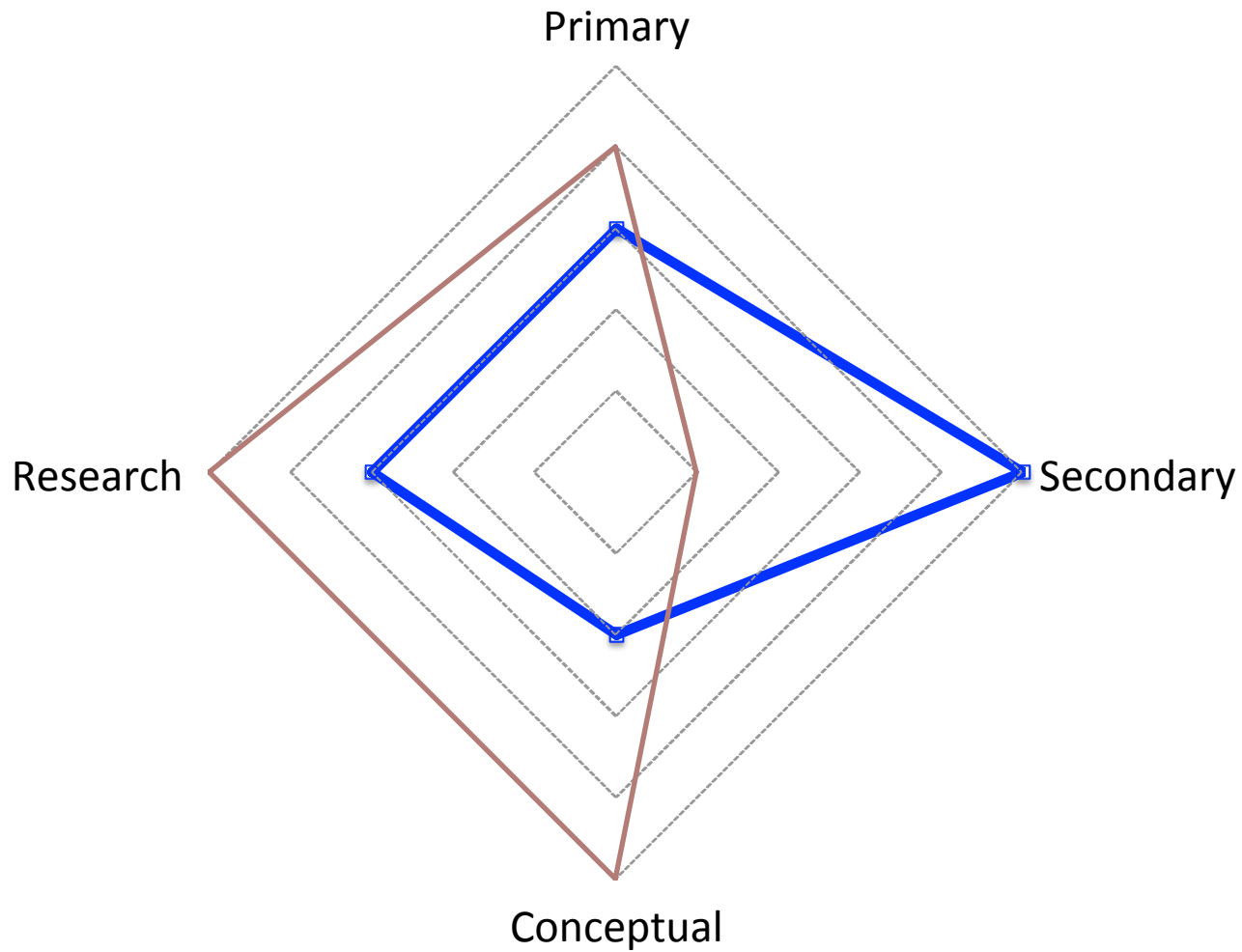
Type of influence	Academic	Grey Literature	Action oriented
Primary policy	Med-high	Medium	Low
Secondary policy	Low	High	High
Conceptual/ framing	High	Med-low	Low
Leading to further Policy research	High	Medium	Med-low



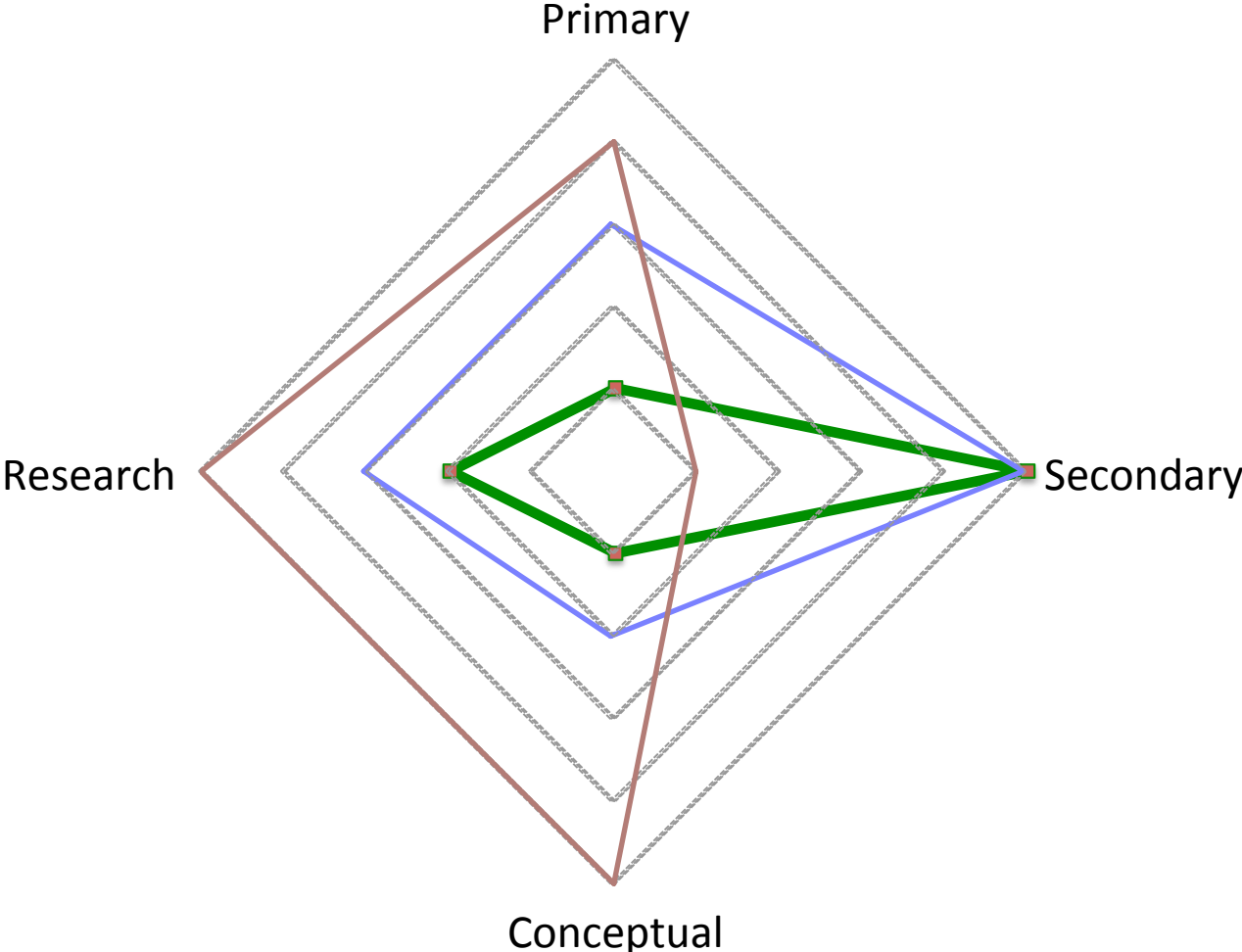
# Academic Research



# Grey Literature



# Action Research



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# Introduction

- Areas I will cover:
  1. Factors promoting use and forms of influence
  2. Issues in policy, research and at the interface
- Case study countries
- High interest in the subject and often strong views

# Factors Promoting Use

## DEMAND-DRIVEN

- Problem-solving
- Corporate incentives and requirements
- Personal interest

# Factors Promoting Use

## SUPPLY-SIDE

- Circulation: pushed out by HOPs, RED, Centre newsletters, email bulletins, etc
- Network supply: through colleagues, retreats, seminars, etc

# Forms of Influence

- Instrumental: direct uptake (analysis, surveys)
- Justificatory: retrofit evidence to existing policy
- Osmosis: ideas seeping in, shaping terminology, concepts and ideas
- Secondary: indirect via high-level policy papers
- ‘Travelling knowledge’: backgrounds, knowledge, training
- Ammunition – tactical use in negotiations with partners; leverage



# Issues in Policy

## OPERATIONAL

- Staff turnover: ownership; knowledge management; institutional memory
- Risk aversion (programmatic, security, political)
- Time pressures: linked to staffing issues; advisers as managers
- Policy context: UK-lead vs. subordinate partner (futility; super-tanker)

# Issues in Policy

## SUBJECTIVE

- Country management and leadership: promote active research environment
- Staff: background, interests, responsibility, seniority etc
- If research resonates with personal experience

# Issues in Research

- Nature of the subject: evidence pointing in opposite directions, contested; difficulty of research in fragile states – trust due to methodological difficulties (access, etc)
- Research attributes: nature of conclusions; realism; presentation
- Research process: working closely; dissemination of findings
- Subjective issues: credibility of the researcher in eyes of policymakers – those who have ‘done it’; personal relationships and trust

# Issues at the Interface

- Translation of general research into operationally-relevant findings or practical, concrete solutions
- Research-policy cross-over: both ways; exchange and secondments
- Intermediaries: knowledge services (GSDRC) and Research Analysts producing summary products/briefings.

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# Case study: SSR in Sierra Leone

## INTRODUCTION

- Retrospective analysis of a specific policy
- Backward tracking approach
- Holistic policy developed during and after the conflict

# First Period: ‘fire-fighting’ solutions

## THE COUNTRY CONTEXT

- “On our arrival we found Freetown in complete disarray and still in a state of virtual war. The functions of state were practically collapsed, with ministries in confusion and officials lacking clear aims and direction”
- “I walked into an empty building and about three people in there, who hadn’t really an idea of what they were doing. [...]. There must be about 5 people in there. Three of those I had to get out, because they were just political placements”

# First Period: 'fire-fighting' solutions

## POLICY AND RESEARCH CONTEXT

- SSR policy and research agenda starting in late 1990s
- Direct relationship with researchers (Dylan Hendrickson, Nicole Ball – not always used for research)
- Efforts toward a joined-up approach; high amount of freedom at country level
- Importance of personal relationships for policy making
- Direct UK role in Sierra Leone policy making



# First Period: 'fire-fighting' solutions

## USE OF RESEARCH

- No role for research in the decision to intervene; lack of a pre-planned strategy; events and exigencies shaping policy more than research
- Importance of the background and experience of personalities on the ground
- Use of anthropological/historical books, or ad hoc, operational research, rather than academic research from universities
- Ideas and models coming from other experiences

# Second Period: post-conflict years

## THE COUNTRY CONTEXT

- Lift of the Presidential State of Emergency in Spring 2002
- Increased security in the country
- Reformed, reinvigorated, and new-born Sierra Leonean security institutions
- Three peaceful Presidential elections, with change of ruling party
- Reorganisation of some SSR programmes in the country (JSDP staffed by locals and in Moyamba: more security and more capacity)

# Second Period: post-conflict years

## POLICY AND RESEARCH CONTEXT

- Progressive institutionalisation of SSR policy and research
- ‘Post-hoc rationalisation’ of events on the ground
- DFID opening of the office in Freetown
- Problems in passages among programmes; Three layers: HQs, country offices, contractors and subcontractors
- Advisory, mentoring, supporting role for the UK; Collaboration with other donors in the country

# Second Period: post-conflict years

## USE OF RESEARCH

- Increased uptake and use of research (more time, access, availability)
- Examples of use of research: JSDP; ASJP; IMATT perception study; IMATT direct use of SSR book; ONS collaborations
- Formal and informal professional relationships with trusted researchers (Paul Jackson, Peter Albrecht, Richard Fanthorpe)
- Under-use of local researchers (Fourah Bay College; sometimes used as consultants, but mixed accounts)

# Conclusions

- Context stability as the main variable shaping the influence of research into SSR policy
- Policy and research evolution as a second variable influencing the use of research
- Structural issues hindering the use of research in SSR: peculiarities of the discipline, lack of evidence of ‘what works’, political dimension

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# Recommendations

- Improve awareness and communication of research output: who is doing what, what is DFID funded or not, country office feeding into the bigger research agenda better
- Enhance link-up across government (DFID, FCO, MoD) research functions and analysis (e.g RA in FCO and Advisors in DFID)
- Improve ownership of research and institutional memory – research management (people don't know what has been done)
- Improve pre-deployment and induction

# Recommendations

- Policy-research interchange, particularly at the country level
- Strengthen challenge function, reference groups and experts
- Intermediary functions key – strengthen
- Do more to build local research capacity