

Measuring peace essential to effective peacebuilding

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Lack of effective means of measuring the quality of the peace may contribute to recurrence of violence in war-torn areas, according to a new book by Oxford professor Richard Caplan.

Every year, billions of dollars are spent, and tens of thousands of

personnel are deployed around the world, in support of efforts to build [peace](#) in [conflict](#)-affected states. Yet despite these efforts, conflict recurrence remains a chronic problem. A new book published this week, *Measuring Peace*, aims to address the problem of creating sustainable peace by confronting an uncomfortable truth: despite the enormous amount of money and resources spent on peacebuilding, there is still very little evaluation of what practices can lead to a stable peace, or even how to benchmark progress towards peace.

Between 1945 and 2013 alone, 105 countries suffered civil wars; more than half of these relapsed into violence following the cessation of hostilities. "Peace may fail for a number of reasons," says author Richard Caplan, Professor of International Relations at the University of Oxford. "But many efforts have been hampered in one important respect: by the lack of effective means of assessing progress towards to the achievement of consolidated peace."

Measuring Peace is the outcome of years of research on professional peacebuilding organisations, including the United Nations, NATO, the World Bank, and others. "While we can never know for certain whether a peace is a stable peace, we can do a better job of measuring the quality of a peace, and the vulnerability of that peace to conflict relapse," Caplan observes. "However, in order to do that, peacekeepers need more robust methods to gauge progress."

A number of examples of how this can be done in the field already exist, which Caplan documents. "We see many individual cases of how peacebuilding actors have successfully enhanced their capacity to assess the quality of peace in conflict environments. In some cases, these efforts have arguably prevented the outbreak of further violence," says Caplan. "Unfortunately, these are often isolated efforts. Effective practices are not diffused across the organisation, or shared with the broader peacebuilding community."

Effective methods for measuring peace are essential to creating lasting peace in conflict areas, as well as ensuring that money and human resources are used toward worthwhile activities. "The absence of effective assessment means we don't necessarily know which peacebuilding interventions work and which don't," says Caplan. "Policy-makers want to know that national and international funds are being invested in constructive initiatives that are most likely to be successful. This will always be difficult as local context will differ from conflict to conflict; however, using more effective measurement practices and encouraging the sharing of good practice among peacebuilding practitioners would be a step in the right direction."

"Better assessments of the quality of peace are not a panacea for conflict recurrence," says Caplan. "However, to the extent that sound analysis can inform [policy decisions](#), more rigorous assessments of the stability of peace can make a substantial contribution to preventing further outbreaks of violence."

Provided by University of Oxford

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