



Challenges of Local Ownership: Understanding the Outcomes of the International Community's 'Light Footprint' Approach to the Nepal Peace Process

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates whether a 'light footprint' approach to peacekeeping and peacebuilding by the international community more effectively addresses local drivers of conflict than the dominant model of large, multidimensional peace operations. It considers international engagement in the Nepalese peace process through the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN), and argues that the international community's approach to local ownership became more focused on non-imposition and therefore less politically engaged over time as a result of both local and international factors. This facilitated local elite ownership of the process, which fundamentally undermined the international community's capacity to support peace consolidation as elites moved away from key transformational pledges of the peace settlement.

KEYWORDS

United Nations; peace process; local ownership; DDR; Nepal; constitutional reform

Introduction

Peace processes in civil wars are notoriously difficult endeavours, and often fail to establish lasting peace despite the involvement of the international community and the investment of significant resources. In many post-war societies, although peace processes prevent the resumption of civil war, they do not establish durable peace. Instead, 'neither war, nor peace' situations often taken hold, marked by the insecurity, low-level violence, and ongoing tensions between groups which characterize many nominally post-war states – and which sometimes threaten to spark a return to large-scale violence (Mac Ginty 2006). Some research posits that this is due to the use of a 'template-based approach' to peacebuilding which often fails to address the local drivers of conflict, suggesting that alternative approaches which focus more on localization and local ownership rather than externally driven processes might more effectively lay the foundations for lasting peace (Richmond 2004, 2006; Mac Ginty 2012; Westendorf 2015).

This article explores the ways in which the international community's approaches to peacekeeping and peacebuilding affect the consolidation of peace after civil war, and asks whether or not a 'light footprint' approach that departs from the dominant model of large, multidimensional peace operations to foreground local ownership might better