

Kerstin Bauer, Gregor Dobler, Till Förster:

Regaining Trust and Civil Security after Conflict – A Feasibility Study

(SNF-Project 100013-112508/1, Duration: April 2006 to March 2007)

Final Report

Summary

Trust is a societal resource that permeates all spheres of everyday life and enables individuals to interact with others and institutions. It is often presumed that trust fades during times of conflict. Violent crises, let alone long-term conflicts, seem to reduce the level of societal trust to a degree that prevents the reconfiguration of society after conflict and thus heavily affects its future.

However, our feasibility study “Regaining Trust and Civil Security in Post-Conflict Societies” conducted from April 2006 to March 2007 (SNF 100013-112508) revealed that social trust is not simply disappearing during crisis. It rather changes and transforms into other types of trust. Though this process may affect the general level of trust in society, there is a need to distinguish between specific societal spheres where actors may still reproduce particular types of trust and to address the question how societal trust transforms and re-emerges in post-conflict societies. Drawing on a typology of trust and a methodology developed from the empirical findings of this feasibility study, an application for a further research project on the transformation of trust has been submitted to the SNF in March 2007 (No. 10013/117766).

Results

A. Organisation and Output

Three researchers were part of the project: Kerstin Bauer, Gregor Dobler and Till Förster. They did fieldwork individually in different sites in Namibia/Angola and Côte d’Ivoire/ Mali/ Burkina Faso. When not in the field, they met weekly for discussions of the approach, of theories of trust and of conceptualisations necessary for the feasibility of the project. They also organised a series of workshops and panels on the topic to discuss and improve the general understanding and conceptualisation of trust in African societies. All three presented papers of their findings at these workshops and conferences.

- Basel, January 9–10, 2006: *Threatened Trust: The Transformation of the State and Fading Civil Security* (co-funded by the KFPE for African participants and by the ESF COST action A24 for European participants).
- Frankfurt a.M., July 12–15, 2006: *Transformations of Trust: African Societies Facing Political Transition* (panel 22 at the VAD Jahrestagung, African participants funded by the DFG).
- Basel, December 8–9, 2006: *Towards a Typology of Trust* (funded by the ESF COST action A24 for European participants).

Other panels on more specific questions related to trust in post-conflict societies, each involving all three researchers as speakers, will be organised at:

- Leiden, July 11–14, 2007: *Trust and the Reconstruction of Society* (panel at the European conference on African Studies).
- Basel, November 30–December 1st, 2007: *Transformations of State and Statehood*. (panel at the SEG conference [Swiss Society for Anthropology]).

The workshops and panels have led to a collection of papers that will be published in a volume edited by the three applicants.

B. Theoretical Framework

In 2005 we started from the assumption that a basic distinction of two types of trust, personal and institutional, would lead to a more open assessment of trust in society. A thorough examination of our field data together with our more theoretical work on alternative typologies of trust led to a more differentiated conceptualisation distinguishing four basic types of trust which will be adopted in the upcoming next stage of the project.

1. Basic social trust. This type is addressing the most fundamental trust in the generalised other. Social life would be inexistent without the general assumption that unknown others one meets in everyday life will not be hostile to us or at least will not harm or kill us. Basic social trust is interpersonal and as such based on experience. However, only the generalisation of personal experience can generate basic social trust. Our findings show that this type of basic social trust is not entirely independent of social spheres and settings: Generalised experiences and attitudes may affect all contexts of interaction, but they become more relevant when complexity and in particular social insecurity is high.

2. Personal trust. We understand personal trust as trust in already existing relationships, i.e. between actors that are already familiar with each other. Actors thus trust their friends and partners on the basis of numerous former, personal interactions. Like type one, this type is based on experience. However, it is based on a specific strand of experience that is independent of other strands and to some degree also of generalisations as outlined above. If the level of basic social trust in society is low, personal trust may become more relevant as it still allows to interact with a limited number of others despite all the insecurity that prevails in other interactions. The studies we carried out in 2006 and 2007 show that these social ties are not unaffected by the crisis. Some of the existing bonds of personal trust intensify while others tend to transform into loose and informal relationships. Again, it is crucial to know how actors perceive this change in their social environment, how they see and maybe judge their partners and friends and what confirms or weakens their trust.

3. Institutional trust. This type combines two aspects, one that focuses on persons and another that concentrates on their position within society. Trust in office bearers is simultaneously trust in institutions, when, for instance actors assume that the civil servant in the local office will render them the service that they have a right to receive. The assumption is not based on strands of interpersonal experiences – though it might be affected by them –, but on induction from other experiences. If an actor has learned from other, similar situations that persons in a particular office act as representatives of the institution that they belong to, he or she will frame similar situations the same way and expect that other persons will do the same. The essential point is hence how a situation is framed (in the sense of Goffman and ethnomethodology) and how these frames are evaluated by the actors. Trusting an institution in everyday life means to link a particular situation to a particular framework.

The findings of our preliminary research all confirm that institutional trust is extremely affected by conditions of precarious statehood. If the state's administration is unreliable or not working at all, as in northern Côte d'Ivoire, other societal institutions may be affected by the general loss of institutional trust too. However, some institutions that prove that they do better may have an advantage and profit from the failure of the state and its institutions. A case in point are the hunters' associations that took on many functions of the former police. It seems that they profited considerably from the fact that they were direct competitors when the state was still in place: The ordinary people directly compared their performance and made a choice among those that promised them security.

4. Normative trust. Like institutional trust, this form of trust is based on induction: An actor assumes that a norm is valid for all cases of a kind if it has proved its validity in one such case. Trusting norms is not based on inductive knowledge but on induction from the

reliability of the social world as a whole. The question is: How is normative trust maintained or weakened under conditions of precarious statehood?

On the one hand, our field research shows that normative trust is not exclusively linked to the presence of the state or state-like institutions. Many norms – former official norms that were sanctioned by the state as well as informal norms – are still respected by many if not most of the actors. In some cases, actors do not trust their validity, in others they do. A study of trust in society needs understand the processes by which existing norms are maintained if the state and its administration fades and why people still trust in their validity when official sanctions disappear.

On the other hand, people often rely on normative forms of trust based on kinship and joking relationships to (re)construct and (re)confirm social relationships during and after the crisis.

The four types may be ordered along two cross-cutting modes of interaction: that of individual versus collective, and that of experience versus induction.

	experience	Induction
individual	personal trust	institutional trust
collective	basic social trust	normative trust

Fig. 1: Types of Trust

If taken as ideal types in the sense of Max Weber, the four types seem to correspond closely to four modes of interaction. They may serve as a basis for a comprehensive empirical approach to address trust in society in all relevant perspectives. All four types are related to each other, and as a complement to the description, it is similarly important to understand their interrelatedness.

C. Individual field research

All three researchers of the feasibility study on “Regaining Trust and Civil Security in Post-Conflict Societies” did intensive fieldwork in their respective research areas and co-operated closely. They built a network with other European and African scholars on the subject and integrated a first PhD candidate into their research group.

Till Förster, social anthropologist, has worked continually on questions of social organisation and social change in West Africa since the late 1970s. His existing material, based on many years of fieldwork, has served as a point of reference for pre-conflict society in urban as well as rural northern Côte d’Ivoire. During the feasibility study, Till Förster has improved the conceptual approach and developed the *Emic Evaluation Approach EEA* as a methodological tool for the analysis of trust in society. In a more general form, he presented the EEA on the occasion of the conference *Non-State Actors as Standard Setters* in February 2007 to an international audience (Förster 2007 in print).

In January 2007, Till Förster spent three weeks in northern Côte d’Ivoire and Mali. This fieldtrip was dedicated to methodological questions and the feasibility of a longer fieldtrip in the future. Empirical work was mainly conducted in the city of Korhogo and two rural villages nearby. Three main questions of feasibility were addressed:

- a) *Is the area safe enough to conduct empirical research?* It turned out that most actors consider the city of Korhogo to be safer than before September 2002 when the crisis led to the separation of the northern parts of the country. Since then, state authority

is virtually absent and several non-state actors provide security in the city of some 160,000 inhabitants. A more or less stable balance between what the ordinary people call “the rebels” (*Forces Armées des Forces Nouvelles, FAFN*) and so-called traditional hunter associations guarantees that neither party dominates the security market within the city. In the more rural villages, the hunter associations seem to be somewhat dominant, though this needs more empirical enquiry.

- b) *Are the actors accessible?* Contrary to expectations, it wasn’t difficult to identify relevant actors in the city and in the countryside. Though the societal structure has changed, in particular with regard to the economic activities of ordinary people, most of the actors were willing to talk to me as a researcher. Since I knew many of them from former fieldwork stays, I often profited from the relation of trust that we already established years ago. However, it was also possible to establish new relationships when necessary. Last but not least, many militia men were as open as the ordinary people I talked to. Many of them wanted to provide more information than I expected.
- c) *Is it feasible to inquire into the fields addressed in the project?* Again, it was easier than expected to address questions of trust. I started with informal conversations about topics close to trust but soon realised that the theme was no obstacle to an intensive exchange of ideas, estimations and assessments. My familiarity with many of the partners I was talking to certainly facilitated the dialogue, but on many occasions, unknown persons joined the conversations and contributed to it. Almost all partners agreed to record the conversations and interviews on mini disc. The recordings cover about 16 hours of dialogue.

Preliminary results show that trust is emerging along personal ties on the one hand and within institutional spheres on the other. It was thus possible to trace several ties of trust over the past four to five years back to the time before the separation of the country.

Gregor Dobler, social anthropologist, has been doing research in the former conflict areas in northern Namibia and southern Angola since 2004. Drawing on earlier stays and contacts in Namibia, he has conducted 12 months of fieldwork in the Oshikango area. He is very well established in the region and has a reliable local network of contacts, key informants and field assistants. During his first field stay in 2004, Dobler has concentrated on the border boom town Oshikango. The town is a “young” social setting, where people from many origins (although mainly from the region) come together to form a new society. Trust is essential for a successful establishment of everyday relations, let alone cross-border trade relations, and has been in the centre of presentations and refereed publications relying on these first six months of field work (Dobler 2005a, 2007a,b, in print).

During his second field trip financed by this project (April to October, 2006), Dobler has extended both the geographic and the time perspective of his work. He has started to include the smaller and more stable social settings of rural farming homesteads and the establishment of social relations in the wider region through kinship, corporate groups and civil society institutions. He has also shifted his focus from observing the actual creation of trust to a more historic perspective on war experiences and the social reconfiguration of the post war years. The wars in Namibia and Angola ended in 1989 and 2002 respectively, but fieldwork data have made it clear that the experience of these wars is still very much present in the area, and that both networks of trust and trust in a generalised other are still very much affected by the war and by social configurations it has brought about. Northern Namibia and southern Angola are still in many respects post-conflict societies. While the deeper time perspective makes it impossible to actually observe processes of reconfigurations of trust, the pre-study has shown that historic hindsight can provide an important theoretical corrective to a perspective shaped by the current perception of the actors.

Dobler has recorded extended life histories of around 25 persons living in northern Namibia (histories that often made a strong relation of trust between researcher and subject necessary). He has conducted shorter interviews with a large number of people and has observed many everyday interactions relating to the war experiences. Very fruitful group discussions took place at several occasions, always drawing on current political events relating to the war and post-war years.

Dobler's mapping of important institutions and individual actors in the war and post-war situation has included changes over time and first explanations of these changes. In addition to fieldwork-related sources, he is well acquainted with the archival material relating to the area in the Namibian National Archives, the archives of the Anglican Mission in Odibo and the archives of the Lutheran Church in Oniipa, sources indispensable to complement an oral history perspective.

In all these sources on the war situation, the impossibility to judge the trustworthiness of other actors has loomed large. Many of the institutions that could provide a framework for mutual trust were affected or destroyed by the war. Families were torn apart; the Churches were at first divided in their political attitude; Traditional Authorities sided with the colonial government; neighbours and relatives fought on different sides in the conflict. Furthermore, guerrilla and counter-insurgency tactics employed by both sides were often aimed at destroying trust in social situations and social networks.

After the war, the lines of conflict and of eroded trust made social co-operation difficult. In a preliminary assessment, three sets of institutions and norms were decisive for the establishment of a functional social and political order: institutions and social relations based on a local pre-war society, a shared morality based on an inclusive interpretation of Christian faith by the Churches and institutions linked to Swapo and the central state.

The pre-conflict society in northern Namibia was organised in openfield homesteads dispersed in the area and linked through kinship networks, spatially organised social differentiation and migratory movements extending over a large area. Spatial mobility was high, both due to farming and to the migrant labour system, and family relations or the adherence to the realm of a specific headman served to establish social relations with unknown individuals. Together with other factors, this has led to an ethics of courteous public exchange and mutual acknowledgment of the other's public self that could serve as a means to establish trust not necessarily in private persons, but in actors in the public sphere, and made room to de-link constructive co-operation in the public sphere from individual histories of (mis-)deeds and mistrust. On the institutional level, conscious efforts were made after the war to purge institutions from their involvement in the conflict and to make them acceptable to all parties. For example, "Traditional Authorities" had lost much of their legitimacy during the struggle years. Fearing a vacuum of regulation in the era, many local actors still invested their trust and their cooperation into them, providing them both with new legitimacy and future obligations towards co-operation.

A large majority of people in northern Namibia belong to Christian mainstream churches linked to European missionary activities (Lutheran, Anglican and Catholic). As the struggle proceeded, these churches became more and more outspoken against the colonial regime. They were the basis of the most important elite networks and formed a link between the opposition in exile and in the country. After the end of the war, most of the local pastors were strong advocates of reconciliation and of an inclusion of former adversaries into a single social order. Their message has made a profound impact for public reconciliation.

After 1990, Swapo changed from guerrilla movement into democratically elected ruling party. It followed a policy of national reconciliation that often extended to the local level, especially to traditional leaders, while in the same time making clear who had won the conflict. In northern Namibia, the party gained enormous legitimacy from its role in the struggle against the colonial regime and provided a link between personal lives of many

people and the central state that strengthened the state's legitimacy and its capability to provide a stable and independent framework in which mutual trust could be re-established. This has never been without frictions, and fissures and distrust in the northern Namibian society slowly re-emerge. The very unequal distribution of income in Namibia and the generational conflict between a youth without perspectives and their elders who often have gained power and wealth after being part of the liberation struggle make conflicts re-appear and are reminders of the fact that sustainable social trust needs a basis in economic and power relations.

These three forces in the re-establishment of trust are crucial importance, but to understand how trust is, or is not, re-established through them, the level of individual actions and concrete negotiations in everyday life has to be taken into account. Even the help of local institutions that favour the establishment of trust cannot guarantee that trust is successfully re-established. Many examples for (un-)successful establishment of trust have surfaced during the fieldwork. For a better theoretical understanding of the factors influencing the establishment of trust on a local level, a clearer typology of trust has been developed and operationalised into research questions (presentation "Towards a typology of trust", December 2006), even if field data has not yet fully been analysed.

Kerstin Bauer, social anthropologist, conducted 2 field travels (2 x 6 weeks): The first one was carried out in southern Burkina Faso, the second one in northern Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso.

During the first research travel (March/April 2006) empirical work was conducted in the city of Bobo-Dioulasso and nearby villages (Darsalami, Toussiana) in the *Province du Houët*. This administrative district has received more than 23,000 registered refugees and repatriated persons who have fled Côte d'Ivoire. Bauer started with a mapping of the different social actors (refugees, returnees, state institutions, international NGOs, local organisations and self-help groups) and investigated what kind of services they are providing to the civilian population or its subgroups. Focusing on returnees from Côte d'Ivoire and travellers crossing the border between Burkina Faso and northern Côte d'Ivoire, she concentrated on the questions identified in the application of the feasibility study: Where and how did the actors seek for security? Whom did they trust? Who was asked for support? Who was providing support and protection (to whom) and who not?

To cope with everyday life during periods of crisis, displaced persons rely on diverse social actors and institutions perceived as reliable and providing support. Observing the establishment and maintenance of relationships of trust and support, Bauer discovered that strategies do not only differ according to specific situations but also according to social and ethnic groups. Bauer identified two different groups of refugees from Côte d'Ivoire with different capabilities to maintain or establish reliable relations of trust and security:

1) The members of the first group are Burkinabè returnees who are seen as *déracinés*. After having lived in Côte d'Ivoire for decades, most of them have lost almost everything they possessed. These repatriates are now facing economic and social difficulties because of the increasing demand for the few available jobs and the pressure on available land in Burkina Faso. Additionally, they have obviously missed to maintain social relations in Burkina Faso based on kinship and origin which could provide support and social security in this period of crisis. Therefore, several locally initiated self-help groups have been founded to get access to financial support from the state or international aid organisations. But such relations of support are not automatically generating trust. On the contrary: Bauer's findings show that distrust, jealousy and the lack of transparency concerning the finances are causing the dissolution or fission as well as new formations of local self-help groups. During her second field stay in Bobo-Dioulasso (February/March 2007) she went further into this question.

2) The second group being object of the investigation – the Muslim Dyula – differs considerably from the first one. Even in the period of violent conflict, the Dyula continue to

travel regularly across the border for trade, business and family affairs. As a trading people characterised by mobility, they are always concerned with maintaining predictable relationships of trust and trans-local networks providing security for people on the move. On the one hand, they possess kinship relations along their trade routes. On the other hand, the Dyula rely on institutionalized relationships like the *jàtigiya*, an institutionalized host-stranger-relationship that reaches beyond kinship and ethnic boundaries. Our findings show that despite the maintenance of such forms of institutional trust, it is personal trust that seems to be of central importance during times of crisis. For example, travelling in northern Côte d'Ivoire is safest in areas, where a person is well-known and personal networks could provide protection. Security seems often to be based on personal relationships with the rebels, namely on friendship and kinship relations. But as the example of the *jàtigiya* shows, personal trust is not substituting or displacing institutional trust. Which other forms of institutional and normative trust do persist in periods of crisis and how do they transform? Bauer went further into this question during her second field stay, when she travelled to Ferkessédougou in the rebel-held northern part of Côte d'Ivoire.

First, she started with a mapping of the social actors and an analysis of the security situation. Then she concentrated on the observation of the relations between the different social actors focussing on the relationships between the rebels and the civilian population. To (re)construct and (re)confirm relationships of trust, people do not only build on personal relations. Bauer's findings show that the social actors also rely on institutional and normative forms of trust – especially on (pseudo-)kinship, joking relationship (*senankuya*) and the institution of the Griot (*jeliya*). During the Ivorian crisis, some Mande Griots achieved an important position in the political sphere e.g. as mediators.

Applying non-standardised interviews and participating in everyday conversations, she investigated the transformations of trust relations. Changing social relations are a frequent topic in everyday conversations, e.g. when trust in a friend or relative is fading away because he has become a rebel or a criminal. Bauer asked which factors or events affected the weakening or confirmation of trust and she explored how the actors perceived, experienced and judged these transformations. During periods of conflict, people may lose their ability to judge who is trustworthy and who is not, because some actors and situations have become unpredictable. Our findings show that people are obliged to act differently in situations of unpredictability and insecurity: e.g. they avoid dangers through being discrete and invisible, staying in, and other avoidance strategies.

Conclusion

All in all, the one-year feasibility study has clearly shown that research in the transformation of trust is both feasible in the selected regions and can provide important insights in structures that facilitate or hinder social reconstruction after conflict. To concentrate on *transformations* of trust instead of merely describing fading trust has allowed the researchers to identify factors that help to avoid social disintegration rather than merely analysing failure.

We have identified personalised *lines of trust*, linking specific actors, and more anonymous *spheres of trust* emerging in collective interaction. In times of crises, trust does not simply fade, but it often retracts from the more anonymous spheres of trust into more personalised lines of trust. In the future, the four dimensions of trust we have identified will serve to investigate the emergence (or re-emergence) of more general from more personal forms of trust. Thus, we hope to provide a theoretical description of the re-emergence of trust in societies after conflict that can serve to develop measures that can help to re-establish trust after conflict. As the next step in that project, a three year research project based on the findings of the feasibility study has been applied for in February 2007.