

## Practitioners' Perspectives

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*There is a special place in hell for women who do not help other women.*

*Madeleine K. Albright*

*Every time we liberate a woman, we liberate a man.*

*Margaret Mead*

### Introduction

This article reviews the experience of an institutional partnership between staff in the Division of Peace Studies at the University of Bradford, UK and the Department of Defence and Diplomatic Studies at Fatima Jinnah Women University in Rawalpindi, Pakistan. It serves as a context to the other articles in this special edition of the *Journal of Peace, Conflict and Development* and as a reflection on the practical experience of developing peace and conflict training materials with a "strategic" partner overseas. Ten lessons learned from the academic collaboration in Pakistan are outlined. While focused on Pakistan, the article may be of generic value to those undertaking research or knowledge transfer activities in similar contexts.

### The INSPIRE Partnership

Before its formal incorporation into Peace Studies in 2011, the Centre for International Cooperation and Security (CICS) at the University of Bradford operated as a financially independent centre that delivered consultancy and research on peace- and conflict-related issues for a variety of national governments, NGOs and international organisations. CICS also delivered training courses to senior and mid-level career professionals, including six annual short courses for Ministry of Defence (MoD) staff (2007-2013) and the Chevening programmes sponsored by the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office: *Security Sector Reform in Countries Emerging from Conflict* (2006-2010), *Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding* (2010-2011) and *Using Democracy for Peace* (2010-2011). While

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each MoD short course ran for five days, focusing intensively on a given theme or geographical area, the Chevening programmes ran for five months, incorporating academic and applied learning, study trips and social events.

The Chevening programmes brought a diversity of professionals to Peace Studies, including government and security officials, journalists, politicians, lawyers, NGO workers and civil society activists, from an array of countries.<sup>2</sup> The experience of running them provided CICS staff with important insights into the training and knowledge gaps of colleagues from conflict-prone, post-conflict and fragile states and the most effective mechanisms for enhancing their academic and experiential learning.

In 2008, CICS was approached by a colleague from the Department of Defence and Diplomatic Studies (DDS) at Fatimah Jinnah Women University (FJWU) to partner for British Council funding for an academic collaboration. The planned partnership was intended to develop training materials on peace and conflict issues for staff at DDS, with the longterm ambition of developing Peace Studies at FJWU. The colleague also saw Pakistan's new intake of female parliamentarians as potential stakeholders in the project. Concerned at a perceived limited engagement by female parliamentarians with the country's security and development issues, the colleague had in mind a model of training and curriculum development that would be "owned" and developed by FJWU and then passed on to students and MPs through teaching and training in the University and parliament of Pakistan. Given CICS experience in short course delivery and curriculum development, the partnership appeared to match skills and interests in a way that formed a viable project relationship. In terms of proposed curriculum content, the FJWU colleagues were inclined to the view that this should focus on contemporary academic debates in international relations and security studies, and introduce students and parliamentarians to the study of peace in all of its various approaches. There was seen to be a vacuum of engagement with new research and thinking in these disciplines, with the Pakistan academic environment heavily oriented to realist approaches and limited in its exposure to Western academic debate.

The funding stream identified by the FJWU colleague was the British Council's INSPIRE programme. INSPIRE aims to develop International Strategic Partnerships in Research and Education between the UK and the Central South Asia countries of Pakistan, Bangladesh, Kazakhstan and Afghanistan.<sup>3</sup> For the British Council, "The strategic partnerships are aimed at internationalisation of the institutions, capacity-building and building effective and sustainable impact."

While the opportunities presented by INSPIRE were attractive, an important limitation of the programme was that it did not provide costs for staff time. Although the budget to support collaboration through, for example, international travel and conference events was generous, the financing was out of step with trends (and pressures) in the funding of UK higher education activities. Nonetheless, CICS gained institutional support for the collaboration owing to the strong ties between the

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<sup>2</sup> For example Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bosnia, Burma, Cambodia, Cameroon, Colombia, Egypt, Ethiopia, Jordan, Liberia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Serbia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Somaliland, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Occupied Palestinian Territories and Zimbabwe. In 2011, this important element of UK diplomacy was suspended following government budget cuts.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.britishcouncil.org/pakistan-higher-education-inspire.htm> [accessed 18 Nov. 12].

University of Bradford, the Bradford community and Pakistan. Within Peace Studies, the Pakistan Security Research Unit (PSRU), founded in 2007 by Professor Shaun Gregory, has developed a rich stream of research on the interplay between Pakistan's internal security and the country's impacts on regional and global security.<sup>4</sup> Across the wider University, there were a number of initiatives to support academic and cultural linkages with Pakistan, encouraged and supported by the Chancellor of the University Bradford, the politician Imran Khan.

The FJWU/CICS proposal was accepted by the British Council and became one of the ten INSPIRE partnerships between universities in Britain and Pakistan. Recalling the enthusiasm and ambitions on hearing the news, lesson number one (with the benefits of hindsight) *is that projects that do not buy out staff time get squeezed by the primacy of the "core" academic business of teaching, administration, research and knowledge transfer.* It quickly became apparent that the capacity of both partners to dedicate significant periods of time to the project would be constrained and that the absence of a budget to pay for staff time was a limitation for the teams in both Pakistan and the UK.

From the first lesson, we can move quickly on to the second. This is that in *any collaborative research or KT proposal it is essential to establish the full extent of partner buy-in* at an early stage. In particular, it is important to determine from the outset how far the proposed collaboration is strongly driven (and subsequently dependent on) an individual, or if there is an engaged team. Within months of the INSPIRE partnership start date, the colleague that had initiated the proposal from FJWU won a Fulbright Fellowship and left Pakistan with her family for the USA. This followed their first meeting in Bradford with the CICS team, during which academic and training curricula were discussed and methods for surveying female parliamentarians assessed. Responsibility for INSPIRE subsequently fell to the Head of DDS. As the Head had only been peripherally involved in the initiative, new professional relationships had to be established between the project leads in the two countries and scheduled plans of work re-negotiated across different time zones and working hours.

A particular challenge for the new DDS lead was that the project initiator had a detailed and developed vision of the INSPIRE relationship, and it was she who had developed the links with female parliamentarians through her own particular stream of research. The new project lead inherited a partnership and project that did not directly dovetail with her research interests and which was informed by contacts and networks specific to the project initiator and which now had to be re-established.

The changes to the FJWU team also placed significant responsibilities on the small group of teaching staff in DDS. While in the original proposal, the project initiator would lead on training her colleagues and developing the curriculum proposal in Pakistan, the remaining DDS staff now had to assume a higher level of responsibility for their own learning and identification of knowledge gaps. This in turn required support from Peace Studies partners and amendments to the project schedule in order facilitate learning exchange. Priority was placed on bringing the new DDS team to the UK for meetings

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<sup>4</sup> <http://spaces.brad.ac.uk:8080/display/ssispsru>

and training at the earliest opportunity, bringing us to lesson number three: *the visa systems for Pakistan and the UK are complex and burdensome.*

In developing the project timetable of work, the unpredictability of the visa and related travel processes had not been factored into the schedule. This proved to be less problematic at the UK end, with Bradford benefitting from the presence in the city of Pakistan consular offices. Proximity between the consular office and University made the task of pursuing forgotten but essential documents less challenging than the rigours and delays posed by UK Borders Agency to colleagues from Pakistan. Visa turnover time also proved infinitely shorter and more predictable at the Bradford end. But planning management gains here were offset for the British partners who had to navigate risk assessments, without which no flights could be booked (once the visa was obtained) or the next hurdle - travel insurance - cleared. This leads on to the fourth lesson: *once contrasting time zones, teaching schedules, holidays and family events have been taken into account, schedules have to accommodate unanticipated security incidents or humanitarian crises.* During the course of planning for the return visit of Peace Studies staff to Pakistan, the country was affected by a number of serious security incidents and the catastrophic floods of 2010 that made the trips inappropriate.

Once all of the above challenges had been met, the fifth lesson is that *it is important to be realistic about the programme of work that can be achieved during an international partners meeting.* The expectations of a working week can quickly narrow with jet-lag and the initial disorientation that comes with a visit to a new country, with different customs, languages, cultures, food and work schedules. For the Bradford team, there was also a sixth important lesson: *that while security protocols are important for team safety, always check to see what facilities are available in the secure site in which you will be accommodated and determine how accessible you will be to team partners and others with whom you may want to meet.*

Housed in Islamabad's high security Red Zone (mainly for foreign embassies and their staff), the team found entry and exit to their accommodation entailed a protracted process of searches and questions, which in turn made it difficult to predict departure from the compound for meetings – or if there would be any departure at all as drivers sent to pick up the team were not guaranteed entry into the Red Zone, if they had not sent details of identity and vehicle registration number 24 hours in advance. The Bradford team was accommodated in the Zone in a beautiful house with an amenable young man who served as chef, cleaner and porter. However, there was no internet connection or landline and the mobile phone signal was as unpredictable as pick up by the suitably vetted drivers that we and our partners were meant to find. The Red Zone itself is a sprawling expanse of scrubland, offices and accommodation. While the team was keen to wander around the compound following alluring tip offs about various embassy social facilities, the enthusiasm for adventure was offset by the warning that the Zone is home to wild boar! The end result was akin to the Big Brother/ Big Boss house, with the project team leader (somewhat) unfairly voted out every night... On the final evening of the visit, the team summoned the bravery to venture into the dark in search of the Red Zone's Social Club. Armed with torches, a corkscrew and a penknife to defend against attack from dangerous pigs, the team found the Club located within a short distance of their accommodation. The best advice that can

be passed on as a result of this experience is *always undertake a daylight reconnaissance of facilities so that you are not deprived of chips, chocolate, and opportunities to meet foreign officials.*

As a result of the first visit and an improvement in the security situation, the second trip saw the Bradford team accommodated at a secure hotel in Islamabad. This ensured full access to communication facilities and vetted drivers and it enabled the team to arrange meetings, with the reassurance that colleagues would have better luck surmounting the security checks of affable hotel staff than those posed by the somewhat less amenable security patrol of the Red Zone.

The second trip was also informed by the seventh lesson learned: *over-reliance on partner meetings to develop the programme of research can be a challenging error to recover from.* Schedules slip and change, and working days become quickly condensed. Do not be over-ambitious with a programme of in-country work and prepare for the fact that important meetings may be missed or require re-scheduling. In insecure country contexts, road layouts can change and new security protocols can be randomly introduced, adding further to delays and disorientation. The schedule of the second trip was consequently more modest than the ambitions of the first and as a result, did not engender the same frustration with missed deadlines and tardy arrivals.

Where mitigating plans can be put into place such as the use of conference calling, Skype and document emailing before or after visits, assumptions should not be made about the accessibility of IT for partners or its value as a means of communicating and developing ideas, particularly when English is not the first language. Iterations of documents and work plans replete with track-changes and comments can become hard to follow, particularly if teams do not have concentrated periods of buy-out time during which they can contribute to, and concentrate on, formulating outputs.

This brings us to the eight important lesson learned in the INSPIRE partnership. *At the start of an academic collaboration it is important to engage with issues of resource access and the administrative capacity on the part of the partner institution.* Not only did academic colleagues at FJWU have to adapt themselves to delivering a major research project without always having access to the requisite primary or secondary source material, they also had to quickly engage with financial budgeting, monitoring and reporting requirements. In order to facilitate capacity building here, the CICS programme administrator offered to visit FJWU staff during a private visit to Pakistan. This contribution proved invaluable to the smooth running of the partnership. As the project developed, the CICS programme administrator became a core part of the team, advising FJWU on budgeting for conferences, expenses and travel, with her role ultimately evolving into that of overall co-ordination of non-academic matters. From this experience, it is strongly advised that any capacity building partnership acknowledges the need not only for academic training and learning, but also for administrative support in order that sustainable skills are developed and programmes run efficiently. The contribution of the programme administrator was invaluable and the challenges posed to partners by complex financial reporting requirements should not be underestimated.

In relation to "capacity-building" more broadly, this has become a watchword of many UK and donor programmes with conflict-prone and low-income countries. But building sustainable capacity is an intensive process that has to be well resourced. Where the requirements of employment in

academia are a Masters level qualification, this has important implications for the capacity of a team in the partner country to deliver project outputs that include peer-reviewed articles. Developing that capacity requires a programme of study that is beyond collaborative projects unless an explicit element of the programme of work is doctoral-level training of partner staff.

## Women belong in the house... and the Senate

*The ninth lesson of the project is to not make assumptions about the needs and capacities of your partners and stakeholders.* A key group targeted in the project was female parliamentarians. As discussed in the various articles in this Special Edition, there had been a large increase in the number of female parliamentarians in Pakistan as a result of changes to the election quota system. For the original initiator of the project, this group of women was seen as deficient in the skills that would be necessary for them to make an effective contribution to legislative scrutiny and initiation. They were understood as being in urgent need of training, and able to contribute time to a focused programme of knowledge building led by FJWU.

However the survey of parliamentarians by FJWU partners found exactly the opposite. In contrast to the perception that the women MPs were ineffective actors, a token presence marginalised in the Parliamentary process, some were instead strongly engaged in key policy areas, occupied influential positions within the House and had little to no time to commit to a structured learning process. Most importantly, there had been a significant change in the organisation of female parliamentarians since 2008 – when the INSPIRE partnership was first initiated and when elections for the new intake of MPs were held. Owing to an initiative by the first female Speaker of the Parliament, a cross-party Women's Parliamentary Caucus had been created and this was gaining significant traction in terms of articulating peace and conflict issues in the legislature as these affected women and girls in Pakistan.

These dynamic developments forced the team from Peace Studies and DDS to rethink the project outputs. In order to determine where the INSPIRE partnership could be of value to the female parliamentarians, interviews were held with the Director of Research and Information Services of the Pakistan Institute of Parliamentary Services (PIPS) and head of the Women's Parliamentary Caucus. These established that the most practical assistance that could be offered to the female parliamentarians was to develop a series of training manuals that would be housed by PIPS. In particular, it was stressed that these manuals should focus on practical toolkits that would enable parliamentarians, the Caucus and its research support staff to engage with and adapt policy analysis frameworks. There was strong demand for practical knowledge of conducting conflict analysis and conflict sensitive design processes, but most specifically – and importantly - of gender mainstreaming, gender audits and gender sensitive design. While the Women's Parliamentary Caucus was focused on improving the position of women and girls in Pakistan society, there was little knowledge of how interventions and initiatives that were intended to be benign could have potentially adverse consequences.

This emphasis on the need for practical training and experiential learning around the gendered impacts of Pakistan's multiple-level conflicts was echoed by officials, academics and students that

attended the first conference convened under the INSPIRE partnership that was held in Islamabad in March 2011. At this conference, the modules that had been developed as a follow-up to the parliamentary meetings were presented and warmly received. In particular, the focus on gendered aspects was seen as an important contribution. The modules that were presented were also informed by a redefinition of the learning and training requirements of FJWU students. Where the project had initially sought to deliver teaching and research capacities in new disciplinary areas and debates, the FJWU team and DDS students flagged the importance of employability skills and applied learning. As with the female parliamentarians, there was particular demand for knowledge of toolkits and analytical frameworks through which conflict and peace building processes could be analyzed and understood.

The final and tenth lesson of the partnership was that despite the numerous challenges and adversities that may be encountered, *working with academic colleagues from overseas is highly rewarding*. Through the INSPIRE partnership, the Peace Studies team was enabled to visit a fascinating and beautiful country, one that had not previously figured on the agenda of the two Latin American specialists that led the partnership from the UK end. INSPIRE provided important insights into not just the challenges but also the immense opportunities for peace and development in Pakistan and the willingness of many of the country's people and officials to contribute to change. The experience was also a stark reminder of the need to look beyond the headlines and the narratives that so often frame "insecure" countries. This is not to underestimate the security threats faced by Pakistan but to stress the ordinariness of day-to-day life and the warmth of the country's culture and hospitality. We conclude the INSPIRE project with the reflection that while the demands of "building capacity" can be underestimated, building personal friendships and collegiate, intellectual partnerships around common interests is the key to sustainability.

British academics are under intense pressure to demonstrate that their research has "impacts". But as stressed in best practice guidelines, it is usually only possible to "nudge" change rather than catalyze dramatic social, cultural or economic shifts. It is strongly hoped that the INSPIRE partnership goes some way in modestly nudging improvements to policy analysis in Pakistan and that the project contributes in a small way to the immense efforts of Pakistan's academic, parliamentary and policy community to address the needs and interests of the country's female population in relation to security and development.