

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of Aberdeen		
Unit of Assessment: 21 (Sociology)		
Title of case study: Informing Better Post-Conflict Peacebuilding Interventions		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2011-2018		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Gearoid Millar	Senior lecturer	01/2013-current
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2013-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Research undertaken by Dr Gearoid Millar at the University of Aberdeen's Institute for Conflict Transition and Peace Research has examined the role and impact of external interventions in post-conflict societies. Millar has made an important contribution to better understanding how external actors in post-conflict societies can hinder the prospects of long-term peace. Millar has shown both how external organisations can negatively affect local communities, contrary to their intended goal, and how scholarly work can better understand these errors and contribute to better policy. As such, the research has impacted the advocacy work of international organizations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) attempting to inform policy.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Aiming to promote job creation and sustainable economic growth, Development Finance Institutions (DFIs) invest heavily in private sector projects in low, middle-income, and often conflict affected countries. Despite their intentions to create productive employment and facilitate peace, particularly in post-conflict societies, these development projects can also adversely affect local communities when they fail to recognize the complex sociocultural, political, and economic environments into which they intervene. As such, a gap exists in the development finance sector in the lack of methodologies for assessing the long-term impacts of development interventions and the lived experience of DFI-funded projects on the communities they seek to support.</p> <p>Dr Gearoid Millar's work has addressed these problems in two ways. The first is by providing an in-depth examination of one case (Addax Bioenergy) in Sierra Leone that has led to substantial contributions to the understandings and advocacy work of a number of Land Rights and Food Security NGOs [2-7]. And the second is through the development of the Ethnographic Peace Research (EPR) approach, which is a means of assessing the impact of international interventions from the perspective of local individuals and communities in post-conflict societies [1]. Both of these elements are intertwined and exhibit the contribution Millar has made to this important field of policy and intervention practice [6].</p> <p>Through the former, for example, and by focusing on the role and impact of the Addax project in Sierra Leone, Millar has demonstrated how a corporation sought to produce ethanol in rural Sierra Leone for export to Europe, claimed that the project would be a 'positive social actor', and engaged with local communities in order to employ local labour whilst claiming to protect local livelihoods and food security [3-5]. Millar's work however, illustrates the highly damaging impacts of the project on the customary order and structures of authority within the area of the project [3, 7], on women's livelihoods and security [4], and through the generation of new conflicts over the resources the company inject into this highly unequal and impoverished economy [5]. His work shows that the investment landscape in conflict affected societies is far more complex than</p>		

appreciated and that a substantial level of unpredictability results from the interaction between global and local actors. As a result, the powerful interveners often fail to understand the potential fallout of their actions and very often that their interventions do not contribute to sustainable peace [5].

The EPR approach Millar has developed and promoted is central to overcoming this failure on the part of DFIs and the projects they fund. This approach is widely cited as a tool by which to understand the complex interaction of global and local actors in peacebuilding interventions (Kreikemeyer, 2020, [Pingeot](#), 2019, [Richmond](#), 2018; [Brauchler](#), 2017). His EPR method deviates from the standard practice in the field and encourages semi-structured interviews, participant observation and extensive qualitative field notes to generate grounded understandings of how local individuals and communities perceive and experience international interventions. It acts as a methodological roadmap for developing relevant and accessible forms of data that can bring to the fore local voices and local contexts, and encourages knowledge exchange between scholars and peace practitioners [1, 6]. These two contributions together have impacted on the advocacy efforts and achievements of international organizations and NGOs which seek to influence how DFIs approach post-conflict and development investments.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[1] Millar, (2014) *An Ethnographic Approach to Peacebuilding: Understanding Local Experiences in Transitional States*. London: Routledge.

[2] Millar (2015) Investing in peace: foreign direct investment as economic restoration in Sierra Leone?, *Third World Quarterly*, 36:9, 1700-1716, DOI: [10.1080/01436597.2015.1044960](https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2015.1044960)

[3] Millar (2015) Knowledge and Control in the Contemporary Land Rush: Making Local Land Legible and Corporate Power Applicable in Rural Sierra Leone, *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 16:2, 206-224 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/joac.12102>

[4] Millar (2015) "We Have No Voice for That": Land Rights, Power, and Gender in Rural Sierra Leone, *Journal of Human Rights*, 14:4, 445-462, DOI: [10.1080/14754835.2015.1032219](https://doi.org/10.1080/14754835.2015.1032219)

[5] Millar, (2016) Local Experiences of Liberal Peace: Marketization and Emerging Conflict Dynamics in Sierra Leone. *Journal of Peace Research* 53:4, 569-581, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343316632580>

[6] Millar (2018) Decentring the intervention experts: Ethnographic peace research and policy engagement, *Cooperation and Conflict* 53; 2, 259-276 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836718768631>

[7] Millar (2018) Co-opting Authority and Privatizing Force in Rural Africa: Ensuring Corporate Power over Land and People, *Rural Sociology*, 83:4, 749-771 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/ruso.12203>

Grants:

Millar 'Ambition and ambivalence: peace studies in a changing world', Leverhulme trust; 09/18-08/19 (GBP46,848)

Millar Consultancy for 'Lectures and online content on peacebuilding and development', University of Turin; 08/18-07/19 (GBP2,137)

Millar 'Ethnographic peace research: strengths, challenges and ethics', Independent Social Research Foundation; 04/16-12/17 (GBP4,999)

Millar 'Evaluating large-scale foreign direct investment in transitional Sierra Leone: stabilising peace or instigating conflict?' Carnegie trust; 11/13-11/13 (GBP2,420)

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Research undertaken by Dr Millar at the University of Aberdeen has directly impacted the advocacy efforts of international and domestic NGOs in their attempts to inform policy discussions regarding DFI-funded investments in post-conflict societies. In addition, his work has introduced a roadmap by which DFIs and the projects they fund can be held accountable in order to limit the corporate deployment of power in rural Africa that has already negatively impacted communities.

Providing an evidence base for NGO advocacy

Millar's research in Sierra Leone has provided a detailed evidence base that has enabled NGOs to analyse the developmental impact of European and other DFIs and to advocate for changes based on those impacts. Swedwatch, for example, a Swedish NGO dedicated to investigating the extent to which companies take responsibility for human rights and the environment through responsible investment, used an early draft of Millar's paper titled 'We have no voice for that' (published in the *Journal of Human Rights* in 2015), as the basis for a high-profile 2013 report titled 'Utan Mark, Utan Makt', (translated as 'No land no power') [S1]. The report argues that; despite Addax's ambitious sustainability targets, they needed a 'clearer rights perspective' in the investment venture, so that women could participate and benefit from the project. The lead researcher from Swedwatch stated that:

(Millar's research) strengthened our focus on and understanding of the gendered impacts and the need to highlight them both as human rights impacts in themselves but also to see the linkages between gendered impacts and conflict [S2].

Sweden's national broadcaster, SverigesRadio, then highlighted the new focus enabled by Millar's ethnographic research. As they noted when discussing the Swedwatch report:

According to a report presented today, it is mainly the women in the area who have been affected... The report has focused on women's rights – as it is a stated goal of Swedish aid policy... according to the report, the communication works poorly between Addax Bioenergy and the locals [S3].

Following on from these early uses of Millar's research findings, a 2017 briefing paper released by the Dutch NGO, Fern – commissioned to track European Union involvement in forested regions and the rights of people who depend on them – drew heavily on Millar's research and used the bioenergy project (now controlled by Sunbird Bioenergy Mabilafu) as one of the primary case studies [S4]. As well as concluding that the project had an overall negative impact on the local population, the briefing advocated for a set of recommendations that align with Millar's findings; evidencing how Millar's research directly informed Fern's advocacy efforts.

This impact can be seen most directly in the 2020 monitoring report [S5] jointly prepared by one national NGO (the Sierra Leone Network on the Right to Food – SiLNoRF, Austria), and one international NGO (Brot Für Alle - Bread for All), a Swiss-based organisation and member of a multi-partner network). This report draws directly on Millar's research and culminates in recommendations to Sunbird, to the government of Sierra Leone, and to local stakeholders, again based on Millar's findings. As the author of the report, Land Rights Expert in Sierra Leone has stated [S6]:

Dr Miller's research has provided valuable insights to the lived experiences of communities affected by the project, strengthening the argument that large scale monocultures are by no means 'sustainable' developments. Dr Millar's research publications have underpinned a number of the central arguments of our report and providing evidence that clarifies which lands were used, the cost of these negotiations and gendered impacts of the negotiations.

The author goes on to note that:

Dr Millar's findings have contributed towards our efforts to begin addressing the knowledge gap that exists and communicating findings to the current company involved at the project site, to policymakers, and to the DFIs in order to create a platform to facilitate much needed dialogue as well as raising awareness amongst stakeholders of the ongoing issues facing communities and providing a voice to those disadvantaged by operations.

Bread For All Agricultural and Land Rights Expert (Sierra Leone and Liberia) corroborated the value of Millar's research to the report, highlighting Millar's role in 'clarifying which lands were used, the cost of these negotiations' stating [S7]:

The work of Dr Millar supported Bread For All in defining a strong position on large-scale land acquisitions based on scientific evidence. This kind of evidence also helps us in our lobby work towards the governments in Sierra Leone, towards the DFIs and also the company.

Enhancing understanding of the challenges surrounding foreign direct investment in post-conflict societies

While the narrative above evidences Millar's impact on NGO advocacy work regarding DFI supported projects in Sierra Leone, his larger effort to develop the EPR approach to better allow peace studies scholars to contribute to advocacy and policy formation has impacted on how scholars contribute to policy and practice. Millar's work has also been widely shared for public readership, including through *The Conversation*, farmlandgrab.org in 2016 (<https://bit.ly/2OzSFdt>) and in the *Huffington Post* in 2016 (<https://bit.ly/3cjDeyn>) [S8]. Aimed primarily at a targeted audience of NGOs, journalists, and social activists, the articles explore the role of DFIs in funding international projects that fail to uphold humanitarian and environmental sustainability goals; goals that DFIs explicitly cite as their raison d'être.

As noted above, the EPR approach is widely cited by scholars as a tool by which to understand the complex interaction of global and local actors in peacebuilding interventions (Kreikemeyer, 2020, Pingeot, 2019, Richmond, 2018; Brauchler, 2017), but in 2018, the Peace Science Digest also undertook an analysis of Millar's research and found something similar [S9]. Peace Science Digest is a project of the War Prevention Initiative of the Jubitz Family Foundation and it acts as a tool to facilitate change by translating academic texts for policy audiences and increasing the visibility and application of academic knowledge. As a result of their review, Peace Science Digest stated that Millar's work:

examines one of the very concerns the Peace Science Digest was created to address: the difficult of making academic scholarship accessible and useful to peace practitioners.

They further note that the research:

brings up big, philosophical questions about the extent to which our actions can influence the world in the ways intended—with practical implications for how we understand our role in the world and the usefulness and value of our interventions [S9].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[S1] *Swedwatch*: Malena Wahlin, (2013) 'No Land, No power ('Utan Mark, utan Makt'). The women without the right to make decisions when Swedfund invests in Addax Bioenergy' in Sierra Leone Swedwatch report #53, https://swedwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/swedwatch_-_utan_mark_utan_makt.pdf)

[S2] Statement from Lead Researcher at Swedwatch relating to increased focus on gendered impacts

[S3] Quote from *SverigeSRadio*: (5th March, 2013) 'New criticism of Swedfund project in Sierra Leone'

[S4] *Fern*: (Aug 2017) report titled 'European Development Finance Institutions and land grabs. The need for further independent scrutiny', draws heavily on Millar's research, https://brotfueralle.ch/content/uploads/2017/07/FERN-Report_EDFI-and-land-grabs-2017.pdf

[S5] SiLNoRF, Brot Für Alle (2020) report titled, 'The owners change, grievances remain'. Monitoring report: Sunbird Bioenergy Mabilafu Project, <https://breadforall.ch/content/uploads/2020/10/Sunbird-in-Sierra-Leone-final.pdf>

[S6] Statement from author of [5] monitoring report, SiLNoRF

[S7] Statement from Land Rights Expert, Brot Für Alle

[S8 (group)] The Conversation (monthly audience is c. 25,200,000 unique users onsite) and farmlandgrab.org in 2016 and in the Huffington Post in 2016 (c.9,000,000,000 readers a month)

[S9] Peace Science Digest: (August 2020) 'Peacebuilding within a Global Conflict System', <https://peacesciencedigest.org/peacebuilding-within-a-global-conflict-system/>