

Addressing Public Health in Post Conflict Situations: The Role of Public Private Partnerships, a Case Study from the Democratic Republic of Congo

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Armed conflict has a drastic impact on a range of health outcomes and behaviors in the countries in which it occurs. Violence directly impacts morbidity and mortality and instigates population movements and system collapse which can lead to malnutrition, widespread disease, and an absence of health services and goods. Post-conflict countries are left with the health impacts of armed conflict and few systems or resources to address the populations' health needs. In the post-conflict period governments are often in their fledgling stages and working to develop numerous structures with few resources. At the same time, donor agencies transition from providing emergency aid, to long-term development aid, with little room between for the special needs of post conflict situations.

Public-private partnerships for health have become increasingly popular over recent years, prompted in part by a WHO commitment to building health partnerships with private companies, particularly in the areas of product development and drug provision. The exchange of expertise and resources that characterizes public private partnerships and allows them to accomplish objectives that few other structures can has helped bring them to the forefront of public health work. Along with their growing popularity, public private partnerships have brought a chorus of concerns over the implications of private corporations impacting public health programs and public policy. The central question of these concerns, 'whose interests do private companies working in health partnerships have at heart?', speaks to both their strength as entities that have distinctly different orientations and skills that are often absent in health NGOs and governments to contribute

to health projects as well as the very real possibility that private interests could trump the public good.

This case study considers the example of a public private partnership for food fortification with micronutrients in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The research aims to develop a better understanding of the roles and implications of public private partnerships in post-conflict contexts. The civil war that began in the Congo in 1997 has slowly been coming to an end since 2002, leaving many parts of the country in a relatively calm state. However, major health problems and dilapidated infrastructure remain, including an estimated 58 percent prevalence of vitamin A deficiency and iron deficiency anemia in children under five and few government resources to address the problem. The food fortification partnership, composed of a private food production company, international organizations, government ministries, and non-governmental organizations, aims to work in unison to address micronutrient deficiency in the Congo. This paper seeks to utilize the case study to bridge the gaps in the literature on post-conflict health, public private partnerships, and the role of private companies in post-conflict settings by making specific inferences on how public private partnerships can have a unique impact on populations' health and health systems in post-conflict settings. An examination of public private partnerships in post-conflict settings will add to conversations on addressing pervasive health problems during the critical post-conflict period, as well as the debate on the merits and drawbacks of public private partnerships.

Data for the case study was collected through nine in-depth interviews with leaders in the food fortification partnership as well as observations from meetings and work with the partnership. In-depth interviews covered three main areas: The food fortification partnership's goals and objectives

and each organizations objectives in the partnership; the interviewee's views on the partnership's past, present, and future work; interviewee's views and ideas about public private partnerships in post-conflict settings. Interviewees spoke on their organization's goals in the food fortification partnership, their perceptions of other organizations' goals, perceived reasons for the partnership's slow progress, work that can be done to improve the partnership, directions for future work, and their views on the roles of public private partnerships in post-conflict situations including the food fortification partnership. Data was analyzed in Max-QDA qualitative data analysis software.

Initial findings indicate that cooperation between private companies, NGOs, international agencies, and government industries during the post-conflict period lends more than resources to health programs. In the formative period of post-conflict restructuring private companies' built-in distribution mechanisms for delivering fortified products helps to overcome major barriers that a lack of roads and little funding for difficult transport and logistics presents. In addition, efficiency, a critical element of that keeps corporations profitable, appears to have a substantive positive impact on corporations public and non-governmental partners. At the same time, public private partnerships can help encourage social responsibility among private companies, who are likely to be new in the post-conflict country. Many valid concerns that private companies take advantage of public private partnerships solely to further business objectives exist. While private companies are unlikely to engage in projects that have a direct negative impact on their earnings, this case study indicates that private companies' attention to protecting their financial interests may be no greater than that of humanitarian organizations, and their altruistic objectives no less.

