Peace and Security Funders Group INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS FUNDERS GROUP

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ADVANCING PEACE, SECURITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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Influencing Policy and Outcomes: Lessons from Advocacy Campaigns

Tuesday, March 19, 2013, 11:00 am -12:00 pm

Speaker:

- **Rebecca Hamilton**, Journalist and Author, *Fighting for Darfur: Public Action and the Struggle to Stop Genocide*

Facilitator:

- **Katherine Magraw**, Executive Director, Peace and Security Funders Group (PSFG)

Katherine introduced Rebecca Hamilton and framed the session. Hamilton's book, *Fighting for Darfur: Public Action and the Struggle to Stop Genocide,* examines the impact of the enormous public campaign focused on Darfur on US policy and on events in Darfur.

Hamilton was deeply involved in the activist movement. She was increasingly dismayed by the mismatch of the efforts of the campaign and the results on the ground. Her study is an effort to evaluate and analyze the campaign's impact. She engaged in a process of "reconstruction" of the actions of the activists, the responses by policymakers, and the results on the ground. This type of laborious assessment is not common in the human rights community for several reasons: 1) there is always a "crisis of the day," so it is hard to justify looking back when there are current issues on which to focus; 2) the community operates under a "siege mentality" as opponents work to delegitimize the movement. A critical assessment could provide fodder to those opponents.

The Save Darfur campaign was based on a particular theory of how to stop the genocide that was based on the lessons learned from the Rwandan atrocities: if they could get large numbers of ordinary citizens to speak out against the genocide this would cause the US government to care enough about the situation to step in and stop it.

Successes of the movement:

- Agenda-Setting:
  The movement got Darfur on the U.S. agenda and kept it there for years. From 2005-2008, $2 billion in appropriations were allocated to Darfur (second only to Iraq and Afghanistan and tenfold more than any other African country). This doesn't reflect a disproportionate need, but was because Darfur had a mass movement backing it up, representing the voting public.

- Media Coverage:
  Advocates managed to keep Darfur in the press through a coordinated letter-writing campaign directed at editors to demonstrate that there was enough interest from the general public to sustain the reporting. This was so successful that there was 50% greater reporting of the Darfur crisis three years into the crisis than at the beginning -- thanks all to advocacy efforts.

  However, despite these successes, the campaign mostly failed to influence the actions of the Khartoum government or improve the situation on the ground.

Challenges the movement faced:

- Simplification:
  To reach a mass audience you need to reach less educated public. There are better and worse ways to do this with differing consequences. A successful way to intake new information is to hang it on pre-existing schema: the story broke around the 10th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide. The American public knew enough about this that they could relate to it so Darfur was described as a "Rwanda in motion." It was a successful strategy to get people in, but difficulties arose when the time came to translate this into proposed policy solutions.

  Advocates were also dealing with people in sound bytes. As the conflict progressed and a situation arose where the lack of humanitarian assistance was the most pressing need, the public had not updated itself with that info and so could not mobilize around that need.

- Misapplying lessons from the past:
  The policy framework on Darfur became too entangled with Rwanda (get the U.S. calling it genocide, push for UN peacekeepers, etc.). The real failure was to update the lessons from Rwanda for a new context and a new time in world history. When the genocide in Rwanda was happening the U.S. was at the peak of its hard/soft power. In a post-Iraq context, the geo-political landscape was quite different but the movement didn't adjust for this.

- "Feeding the beast" and the need for success:
  When dealing with a movement of volunteers, you need to continually demonstrate impact and success in order to keep them engaged. Thus the campaign started to come up with "quick wins" and the notion of success was redefined. Successes became sending 10,000 emails to the Secretary of State, rather than getting Darfuris back in their homes. The movement was no longer paying attention to the needs of the conflict and became too concerned with reporting on wins.

  The policy demands also then get skewed by the demands of the movement. For instance, pushing to get the United States to share intelligence with the ICC was a real need, but that couldn't be shared with the larger movement. It is okay to push for quick wins if these are tied to outcomes on the ground. If not, then there is an ethical challenge. People want to report to their funders on successes but what does this really mean if those outcomes and wins are disconnected from the ground. Who are you actually serving? You need to ask: does survival of the movement produce results on the ground or has survival of the movement become an ends in and of itself? Also there is the issue of the changing global order -- getting the U.S. government to the place you want them is no longer enough. What does that mean when you have a movement that is a primarily-U.S. based constituency?

Katherine Magraw noted that she found Hamilton's book very compelling and saw many parallels with issues on which she has worked, particularly nuclear arms control and disarmament issues. The need for a win, regardless of its meaningfulness, can trump all.

Katherine Magraw asked the participants about their experiences with other policy advocacy movements and if there were any lessons learned they were willing to share.

David Abramowitz briefly discussed the human trafficking campaign in which Humanity United has engaged. They use a hybrid approach where 12 U.S.-based human rights organizations are advocating on a wide range of issues related to human trafficking. Previously the movement was very fragmented (labor versus sex trafficking, etc.) and there was no coordinated theory of change. Two things were missing: 1) an understanding of how you really get things done; and 2) an understanding that the people most engaged with substance and who can come up with the best solutions are not the people you need to build a movement and generate a large public campaign. We are working through the "grasstops" with organizations that already have constituencies and we bring those groups together and mobilize them. The challenge there is that changes have been incremental because those "grasstops" groups can't claim to have a political constituency in the same way as strong grassroots movements can.

One participant responded that in many ways foreign policy remains the same -- it is a constant. The important question is to what extent the local populations are actively engaged in all of this. In his experience the key thing is the geopolitical interest of the U.S. in any issue – this trumps everything else.

Hamilton responded that this was a huge issue for the Darfur movement. At the start there were no Darfuris involved. This was partly because there was an assumption that the local population couldn't really engage or use their agency because there was a genocide in Darfur. Over time the movement worked better with the diaspora Sudanese community, but having representatives from the start is key.

Another participant commented that they are grappling with how to support campaigns in developing metrics. Many foundations have results-based metrics, and foundations need to have internal conversations to come up with metrics that translate for campaigns and movements. Effort-based metrics (emails/tweets you send out) versus results-based metrics (looking at long-term policy change) are one way to do this. Currently you have campaigns that have to generate reports based on metrics that they don't find useful for themselves but they need them for their funders.

Another participant noted that the nuclear disarmament movement coalesced behind the nuclear freeze. They were good at educating the masses on this issue, but after initial successes the freeze proposal didn't get passed. Slowly the movement collapsed into a "grasstops," insider game and the energy hasn't been recovered. How do you keep people educated about the mechanisms of advocacy, sustaining large numbers of people -- the maturing part of the struggle?

Katherine Magraw added that the nuclear freeze movement has many parallels to the Save Darfur movement. "Feeding the beast" in the nuclear disarmament case was feeding the media. The media created an illusion that the movement was more powerful than it was. This was helpful until it hit political obstacles because then the movement seemed like a bigger failure. Now there is no popular movement -- people need to see successes or at least progress, but this has often distorted the brunt of our efforts. Reflecting on failures and doing this type of deconstructive and critical work takes courage. Why isn't this done more often in the human rights or peace and security fields? In addition to the

reasons Hamilton sited for this is that it is hard to be critical of our allies. We want to bolster them rather than tear them down. The community needs to find a way to be honest.

Another participant noted that this session was especially rich after hearing from Representative McGovern who has worked on genocide for his entire career. Would like to see more of these types of discussions and include Rep. McGovern. How can we help the Lantos Human Rights Commission? It would be good to hear directly from them on this.

Another participant asked how you can mobilize when the Supreme Court is about to do something terrible for human rights: the Kiobel case may decide that you can't sue corporations for human rights violations and may go beyond that and cripple the Alien Torte statute. How do you mobilize when the danger doesn't come from the executive or legislature but from the courts?

A participant asked Hamilton to speak about the changing geo-political context and how that has impacted U.S. foreign policy decisions.

Hamilton responded that this is tricky because there is often a sense that it would be a waste to fail to sustain what gets created with a popular movement. This question needs to be scrutinized. Mass movements are useful for some things but not all. The beginning of your analysis should be what is needed on the ground. The geo-political issue in Darfur was critical -- China was actually the biggest player there. Looking at the BRIC countries you have three that are democracies -- what is going on there? Who is starting to think about the ways to use citizen engagement outside of the United States in increasingly important contexts like these? The U.S. was actually counterproductive in Darfur in some cases, for instance, with the genocide determination by Powell. He did this because he thought that if the U.S. said this was genocide that the UN Security Council would have to react. But this came very soon after the WMDs in Iraq debacle and that was no longer the case.

A participant asked if the Responsibility to Protect obligation meant that military force, or more extensive international involvement, should have been used in Darfur?

Hamilton responded that this would have been counterproductive. There would have been a sense that the U.S. was looking to invade a third Muslim country. This was possible in Libya because of regional support, which was absent in the Darfur case.