

BOOK REVIEWS

***Explaining Post-Conflict Reconstruction.* Desha M. Girod. United State of America: Oxford University Press, 2014.**

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Explaining Post-Conflict Reconstruction by Desha M. Girod logically tackles the question of why post-conflict reconstruction works in some countries but is unable to function efficiently in others. The author's main arguments throughout the book are that post-conflict countries with low strategic value and minimal resources often do better with foreign aid for reconstruction and have less chance of coup than countries with high strategic value and resources. The book is well organized and put in a coherent structure that clearly presents and supports Girod's arguments through sufficiently analyzing data from a diverse spectrum of information. Overall, I found this book extremely interesting and relevant at this time as international organizations around the world are struggling to find more effective ways of performing post-conflict reconstruction and are often left without ends meeting.

The book begins with an in-depth introduction to the topic and the author's primary two arguments. In the first two chapters, the author also introduces and provides rational for the chosen case studies of Mozambique, Angola and Uganda to help reinforce the given hypothesis. Chapter three is laid out as a statistical analysis of the author's first argument suggesting that countries with low strategic value and minimal resources often do better with foreign aid for reconstruction. Chapter four provides a statistical analysis for her second argument that countries receiving foreign aid with low strategic value and minimal resources have less chance of coup. Chapters five and six take into account the statistical data from chapters three and four and add the qualitative data from the case studies of Mozambique, Angola and Uganda to solidify the presented arguments. Lastly in chapter seven, the book examines abnormal situations that defy her findings and provides possible suggestions and research for improvement in post-conflict reconstruction.

Girod's first argument in this book is that countries with low strategic value and minimal resources often do better with foreign aid than countries in the opposite situation. She indicates that these types of countries are often left in a state that leaves them desperate and cooperative with any outside help possible. These countries often follow the guidelines presented to them by foreign donors because they are aware that if they do not comply, they will cease to receive future aid and will be left in the same devastated condition as before. Countries that have a high strategic importance to foreign donors and possess a vast array of resources are often more hesitant to comply with donors guidelines because they have more

opportunities and financial means of their own. The second argument that Girod presents is that countries receiving foreign aid that have low strategic importance and limited resources often avoid coup attempts. She states that the reason why these countries experience less frequency of coups is because they pay little attention to making ties with opposition groups and diminishing hostilities. Countries with low strategic importance and minor resources follow donor's guidelines more closely which usually involves inviting the opposition groups to negotiations in an effort to sustain peace. In addition, countries with high strategic importance and resources tend to spend less foreign aid money towards proper institutions of security which also leads to increased chances of coup.

Over the last several decades, civil wars across the globe have both popped up and diminished leaving extensive damage and human suffering. As a result, donor countries and international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have stepped in to pick up the pieces. Unfortunately, the strategies for reconstruction presented and instituted by these donor countries and international organizations are often not met with success and occasionally can make the situation even more severe than it was previously. For example, post-conflict reconstruction has been taking place in both Iraq and Afghanistan for the greater part of the last decade and has been wrought with massive problems stemming from aid disbursement and proper management of these funds. The problems related to these reconstruction failures can be seen from the donor and the receiving parties in these countries. Much of these problems have to do with effectively working with the leaders and people, dispersing aid accordingly, corruption and proper usage of funding in these post-conflict zones.

Girod does an excellent job of attempting to prove her two main arguments by extensively examining and analyzing various countries that have emerged from civil conflicts from 1970 to 2009. Specifically she chooses Mozambique, Angola and Uganda as her primary case studies to help solve the phenomena of properly instituting post-conflict reconstruction. She effectively chooses Mozambique after 1992 and Angola post 2002 as examples because both countries were extremely similar after their civil wars in terms of socioeconomic aspects and prior history. The major difference between these two countries is that Mozambique had little resources and low strategic importance while Angola had recourses for sale in the form of diamonds and oil and was receiving strategic funding from donors. Uganda is used as a third example because originally after its first ceasefire in 1986 it was considered a low-windfall country but in the mid-1990's this changed when they discovered newly found resources.

The case studies of Mozambique and Angola are perfect because they clearly illustrate and prove her proposed arguments. In the situation of Mozambique, which has miniscule resources and low strategic importance, aid offered by institutions

such as the IMF and the World Bank proved to effectively help turn around the situation in Mozambique. The author suggests that the reasons for this are because the leaders of Mozambique at the time properly followed the guidelines presented by the donors and allocated the received funds effectively to perform reconstruction. She states that the reason for this is because the leaders had little other options if they wanted to continue receiving aid. And without other sources of income they would have been stuck in the same devastated situation without proper and due compliance. In addition, Girod states that Mozambique was successful in avoiding coups due to the fact that by following the guidelines presented to them, they were able to ensure a proper degree of security and stability. Also, the guidelines required that the government at the time also included representation from the opposition party which furthered diminished the chances of a potential coup.

Angola on the other hand had both resources and strategic value after its civil war. In addition, Angola also received both strategic and non-strategic funding from foreign donors. However, because Angola had access to other sources of internal income, they diligently chose to not follow the guidelines presented by donors and instead chose to use the extra funding for the desires of the elite in their country instead of helping those suffering. And due to their strategic importance and resources, donors still continued to fund their supposed reconstruction plans because they were left in a position where they had already invested too much. Also, by poorly allocating their receiving funds for proper sufficient security and making peace with the people suffering, they became at a far greater risk to potential coups. In Uganda's unique situation, they began in a situation much like Mozambique but due to their newfound resources they ended up in the same situation as Angola.

In the final section of the book, Girod introduces a few cases such as a Rwanda and Cambodia that did not follow the norm and defied her findings among Mozambique, Angola, Uganda and several other countries. These countries, for various reasons that were explicit to their situations, did not follow the same pattern of the primary case studies presented. Many of the reasons for these abnormalities came from leadership decisions and surrounding external factors that included sanctions imposed by foreign governments on specific resources. In addition to these extreme cases, the author also provides a myriad of suggestions for better implementation of post-conflict reconstruction and provides several ideas for further research into this topic.

The specific ways in which I have judged this book have been how well the author has presented her desired arguments, how relevant are the chosen case studies, how relevant is this material at this time, how accurately are the arguments analyzed and proven and what additional material if any could be included to add to this book. In

my opinion, Girod has done a very good job of clearly presenting her two arguments. She provides an adequate amount of background information about the subject and then clearly explains the rationale of why she has chosen this particular topic for research. In addition, she shows that she has spent ample time examining this topic by providing the case studies of Mozambique, Angola and Uganda. Although, it would have been more effective if she also examined more closely the countries that she mentions briefly at the end of the book that did not follow her hypothesis. The case studies that were provided fit very well to support her arguments but a more in-depth side by side comparison to a country that did not follow her argument at all would have been helpful in strengthening her point.

The structure of the book was well laid out and for the most part clear to understand. However, chapters three and four detailing the statistical analysis of the author's primary two arguments would have been difficult for someone without a background of statistics and an ability to understand complex mathematical models. Though, the author helps to supplement this material with some simplified terminology and through presenting the qualitative data from the case studies in chapters five and six. The material presented is very prevalent for this time period because the question of how to use foreign aid correctly in post-conflict countries is an ongoing problem and is costing large amounts of money on a daily basis. The additional material that I believe would have been interesting to add would have been more information regarding the current situation in Afghanistan and Iraq's reconstruction and a clearer picture of how they compare to the aforementioned case studies. In addition, I believe it may have been interesting to hear about additional causes for post-conflict reconstruction failure.

Overall, this book provided great new insights into this field of study and I have only had a few issues in regards to how it was structured and its message in general. The author did a very nice job of covering the majority of all of the bases to support her arguments and left very little untied. The book was clearly laid out and covered both quantitative and qualitative aspects to help reinforce the presented hypotheses. However, the quantitative portion would have likely been difficult for someone not familiar with statistics. I also really enjoyed this book because of its prevalence to this current time period. With so many errors and problems occurring today with post-conflict reconstruction, this book comes at a perfect time and provides very interesting perspectives on ways to improve the situation such as paving the way for stronger degrees of transparency and bypassing governments in post-conflict countries to deliver aid. I would highly recommend this book to anyone interested in post-conflict reconstruction and would definitely look forward to reading any additional material from Girod on this topic in the future.