


Slide 1

Promoting best practice in arms control: the role of civil society

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Slide 2



What is 'best practice'?

- Goals clearly defined at outset
- Evidence based
- Goals match the problem
- Outcome focussed, not process driven
- Outcomes are monitored and quantified
- Transparent
- Adaptive
- Equitable

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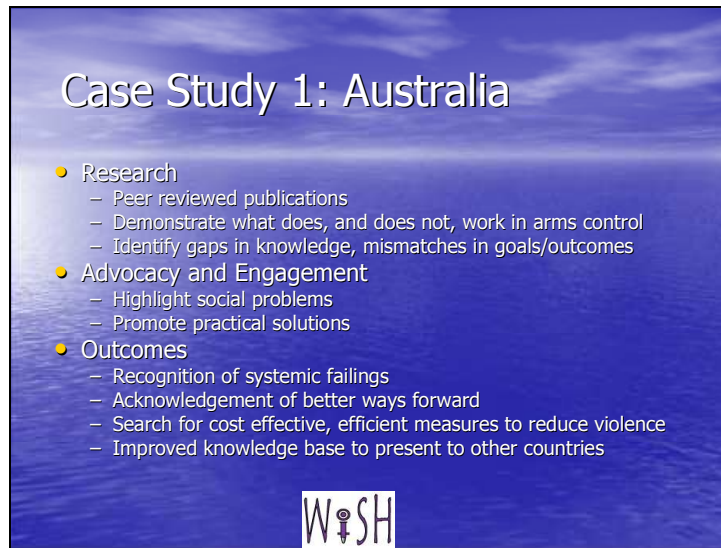
Dealing with illicit small arms, and achieving stability, means striving for best practice. Some see best practice as 'whatever is politically advantageous or ideologically agreeable.' The rest, fortunately, recognise best practice as a set of steps and guidelines that maximise the ability to achieve real results. Results that come from identifying the real problems, and working in a transparent, inclusive, and equitable way to find and deliver real solutions. Solutions that can make a positive difference to people's lives.

The role of civil society

- Research
 - What knowledge do we have?
 - What are the real problems?
 - Do the goals match the problems? Will the actions address the problems?
- Advocacy and Engagement
 - Ensuring transparency, scrutinising decisions
 - If something does not work, will it be changed?
 - Are principles of equity and justice followed? All voices heard?
- Outcomes
 - Ensure that the outcomes are met
 - Monitor and quantify outcomes
 - Do the outcomes address the problems?

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Civil society plays an important role in promoting the principles that underlie 'best practice'. The three areas I'll touch on - research, advocacy, and outcomes - are all necessary to supporting the PoA. In each of those areas, action by civil society has already made a difference by identifying weaknesses and shortcomings of arms control, with a view to strengthening best practice for overall stability in our region.



Case Study 1: Australia

- Research
 - Peer reviewed publications
 - Demonstrate what does, and does not, work in arms control
 - Identify gaps in knowledge, mismatches in goals/outcomes
- Advocacy and Engagement
 - Highlight social problems
 - Promote practical solutions
- Outcomes
 - Recognition of systemic failings
 - Acknowledgement of better ways forward
 - Search for cost effective, efficient measures to reduce violence
 - Improved knowledge base to present to other countries

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Turning first to Australia, a stable, prosperous country. Our firearms legislation, with its emphasis on bureaucracy and prohibitions, is considered among the most restrictive arms control in the developed world. Until recently, it has been promoted as a model of best practice, for other countries to emulate.

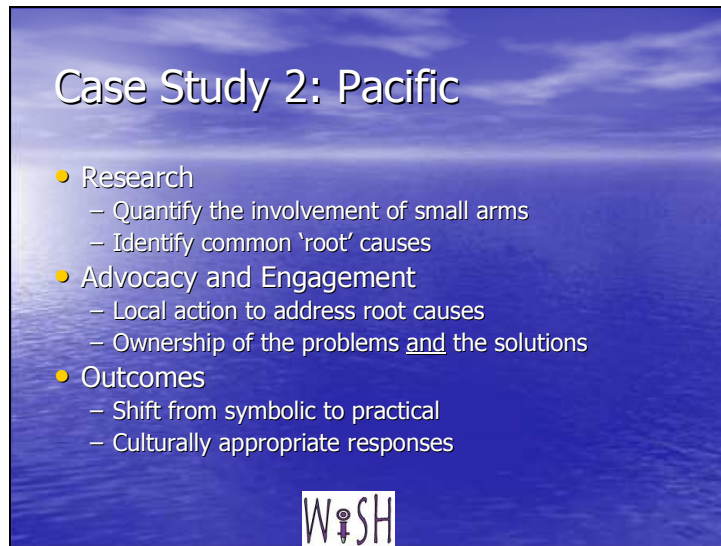
However, applying the term best practice does not mean that the system to which it is applied is in fact 'best practice'. Through the actions of civil society, many areas where Australia's approach fails to achieve best practice have been revealed. For example, although the goal of the legislation was broadly defined ('to deliver a safer Australia'), there had until recently been almost no systematic evaluation of outcomes.

Government had sufficient data collection capacity, but meaningful analysis was scarce. Evaluations centred on process – like the number of firearms confiscated or the amount of paperwork around licensing – but failed to determine whether outcomes like a reduction in lethal violence had been delivered by these processes. It is now known that the desired outcomes were not achieved.

We have also identified mismatches between the original goal and the methods that were employed to achieve that goal – due largely to poor or nonexistent evidence to inform the decisionmaking process. To give a couple of examples, with over a decade of data, we now know that the restrictions on legal firearms ownership did not tackle issues of illicit use; they did not target the groups most likely to engage in violent or criminal activity. Similarly, through proper scientific analysis, we have learned that universal registration of all firearms did not impact on firearm homicides.

Based on this knowledge, the responsible action by civil society has been to advocate to government for more carefully designed and targeted initiatives to disrupt illicit firearms transfers (for example, intervening in organised crime and the illicit drug trade). We also promote the need for holistic social programmes that tackle the underlying contributors to violence – whether armed or unarmed.

The outcomes that have been achieved are growing recognition that the Australian model is not – as was once argued – a best practice approach to tackling illicit arms, and that alternative approaches should be sought if genuine results are to be delivered. While it is unfortunate that substantial resources went into our system, it is fortunate that civil society has been able to improve the evidence base in this area. This enables other countries to learn from our mistakes, and empowers them to make more informed decisions that are right for their own circumstances and needs, as well as avoid processes that ultimately do not deliver results.

A presentation slide with a blue background and white text. The title is 'Case Study 2: Pacific'. Below the title is a bulleted list with three main categories: Research, Advocacy and Engagement, and Outcomes. Each category has sub-points. At the bottom center is the WASH logo, which consists of the letters 'W', 'A', 'S', and 'H' in a stylized font, with a female symbol (a circle with a vertical line and a horizontal line) integrated into the letter 'A'.

Case Study 2: Pacific

- Research
 - Quantify the involvement of small arms
 - Identify common 'root' causes
- Advocacy and Engagement
 - Local action to address root causes
 - Ownership of the problems and the solutions
- Outcomes
 - Shift from symbolic to practical
 - Culturally appropriate responses

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This leads into my second case study; a look at how the knowledge civil society has provided about Australian arms control and illicit arms use has been applied in the Pacific and how that has facilitated parts of the PoA in countries which (unlike Australia) face significant economic and political challenges and (in some cases growing) instability.


First, civil society has supported data collection to quantify the extent of involvement of illicit arms in violence overall, and to illustrate the relationships between poverty, poor governance, and violence.

This in turn has created a space where it can be recognised that armed violence and the illicit arms trade are symptoms of instability and the factors that underlie instability. This is a significant step forward from the previously argued position that armed violence causes – or can be addressed in isolation from – instability.

This has allowed civil society to advocate for action on addressing the root causes of violence, thus ensuring that the problems are clearly identified, the goals well defined, and the solutions practical rather than symbolic.

To give an example of poor practice, the weapons free village programme was a symbolic response to entrenched problems of deprivation and insecurity. It was an example of the problem being misspecified (small arms were seen as the problem), leading to an ineffective response (the symbolic removal of small arms within a community, accompanied by a failure to build capacity, infrastructure, and hope within communities). It failed to hear the voices of local communities, who called for culturally sensitive assistance rendered without judgement or conditions. There were also problems with transparency – due in part to confusion over the goals of the programme; was it about stability and capacity, or simply the removal of small arms?

By learning from this, civil society is now able to promote practical measures such as assistance in helping communities take control of their own problems and the solutions to those problems – whatever the community may see those problems and solutions to be.



Partnerships: Making links

- Problems:
 - Lack of police capacity to deal with armed (and unarmed) violence
 - Disruption to daily lives of women and children
- Partnerships:
 - (a) With other nations, to enhance police capacity,
 - (b) With civil society, own and other governments/authorities, to create safe travel/continuation of daily activities for women and children until capacity is sufficiently strengthened,
 - (c) Link with existing initiatives (e.g., safe houses) for a holistic intervention.

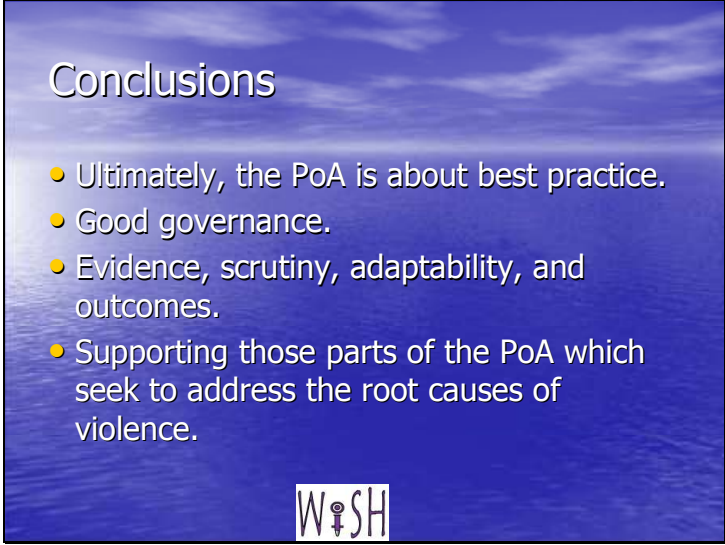
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Finally, an example in the context of police capacity to deal with armed violence (let me point out that this also applies to unarmed violence). One way to address the direct problem – the lack of capacity – is for other nations to lend their own expertise and technology to assist police in better intelligence gathering and disrupting criminal activity.

However, one of the flow on effects of the lack of capacity to deal with violence is disruption to the everyday lives of women and children. Travel, for example, is perilous or simply out of the question. This leads to lack of access to goods and services, education, and so on. Here, civil society can support parts of the PoA by working with communities to develop safe travel programmes.

This will involve working with communities to determine what types of arrangements those communities feel is most appropriate for their needs, working with local and other agencies and authorities to identify ways in which those arrangements can be linked with other programmes (like the Port Moresby safe house programme), and approaching governments and aid agencies to bring them on board – in whichever way the community identifies as most fitting.

Through these measures, women and children can be connected with education and other opportunities, which is particularly important if children are to grow up with a sense of hope for their future and avoid the poverty and deprivation that leads to involvement with violence.



Conclusions

- Ultimately, the PoA is about best practice.
- Good governance.
- Evidence, scrutiny, adaptability, and outcomes.
- Supporting those parts of the PoA which seek to address the root causes of violence.

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In summary, the PoA is ultimately about best practice, which is going to look different in different areas. To achieve this we also need to base best practice on the underlying rules of good governance: accountability, transparency, effectiveness, and the rule of law. Without the research, scrutiny, advocacy, and outcomes-focussed approach of various sectors of civil society, the PoA would still be mired in the view that one size fits all – and, worse still – we would not even know which size fits and which size does not. But by incorporating the principles and guidelines of best practice, and working in partnership, the PoA, and particularly the aspects which seek to deal with the root causes of armed violence and illicit arms transfers, can be supported.

Slide 8



Questions?

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