

**THE FIRST TEN YEARS:
AN ASSESSMENT OF THE OFFICE OF
TRANSITION INITIATIVES**

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Introduction

The United States Agency for International Development's Office of Transition Initiatives was established in 1994 "to bridge the gap between relief and development."¹ In particular, USAID sought a mechanism by which it could "stabilize emerging democracies and cement fragile peace accords." Whereas traditional USAID's prime focus in the 1990s and subsequently was directed at helping fragile nations create enduring, economically sound, institutions and infrastructures, the new office within USAID was intended to respond rapidly to post-conflict opportunities and challenges – to make a real difference without concerning itself unduly about long-term developmental priorities.

Before the creation of OTI, USAID was able to mobilize resources quickly for relief efforts only through its Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance. USAID as a whole, with very different and thoroughly commendable objectives, was widely regarded as too institutionally and bureaucratically sclerotic to be able to move decisively whenever it was necessary to help birth new or newly configured nations in the post-Soviet era. OTI was therefore established with fewer bureaucratic constraints than other overseas arms of the U.S. government. It was specifically asked to be nimble, imaginative, and innovative in the ways in

¹ OTI, "Bi-Annual Report: Special Tenth-Year Edition – A Decade of Transition, 1994-2004" December 2004, 2

which it (on behalf of the U.S. government) assisted countries emerging in ragged fits and starts from the throes of civil wars, battles with ex-colonial masters, or other major intrastate cataclysms. From 1994, OTI became the designated first responder to non-humanitarian/relief crises.

The establishment of OTI wisely and explicitly recognized that the one of the key developmental challenges of the 1990s and beyond was to determine how the U.S. could best intervene to bolster the chances that a post-conflict country would emerge strong politically, socially, and economically. OTI was explicitly tasked with supporting national transformations, and with helping to ensure that those transformations would be democratic both in form and in substance.

From its creation, OTI was thus given major responsibilities across the universe of global polities greatly at risk. That universe included dozens of potentially weak states, some of which would (without OTI or similar assistance) almost inevitably founder, fail, or collapse.² By the mid-1990s, many of these kinds of states were mired in slaughter: Millions would die in Afghanistan, Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Indonesia/East Timor, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, and the Sudan. For some, the cycles of war would continue for years. OTI's role was to assist those polities that emerged ready for meaningful change after years, if not decades, of merciless combat. Sometimes odious dictatorships would be overthrown and OTI could assist the successor regime's effort of national construction. Often, too, the outbreak of peace or the rise of

² The terms fail and collapse are used technically, in accord with Robert I. Rotberg, "The Failure and Collapse of Nation-States: Breakdown, Prevention, and Repair," in Rotberg (ed.), *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences* (Princeton, 2004), 1-45.

people power presented the kinds of democratic upsurges into which only an endeavor like OTI could provide needed injections of ideas, capital, and technical assistance.

OTI's founding and continuing mandate was to steer fragile, war-torn, post-conflict countries along a democratic path; to help turn incipient into real democracies; to jump-start destroyed economies; to create or re-create viable political, social, and economic institutions; and – in a general sense and in several specific real senses – to make a substantial difference at the very inception of an emerging nation's life. OTI was also charged with mitigating existing or renewed conflict and with promoting reconciliation – with helping to heal and permanently bandage a society's wounds.

In keeping with its mandate and its operating principles, OTI prides itself on being able to intervene quickly – to have boots on the ground within weeks of the creation of a transitional opportunity. “It seeks to enter countries at the cusp of change...before traditional developmental activities have had an opportunity to take hold.”³ OTI can be regarded as the special forces of developmental assistance. OTI is capable of undertaking “quick-impact” interventions capable of catalyzing broader change.

OTI seeks by design to stay in a new country no more than two, or at the most, three years. By definition, if OTI were to stay longer anywhere it would be doing a job different from its own. Despite this mantra, in fact OTI has entered some desperate countries more than once; it has also re-started its activities in countries where a first effort failed, or at least fared poorly.

³ OTI, *Decade of Transition*, 3

OTI, like the Peace Corps, understands the importance of development or transition from below. It focuses on grass roots as much as capital-centered actions. Indeed, more than any other U.S. operation, bar the Peace Corps, OTI believes in the importance of nurturing civil society at a nation's grass roots. It even situates personnel outside central cities and works actively with indigenous, non-urban, nongovernmental organizations. Operating in this manner is less an affectation than a matter of steady procedure. It contributes to OTI's ability to work on the ground together with local citizens, and to innovate locally as well as nationally. Because of its size and methods, OTI is also able to make smallish grants to local NGOs, thus empowering rural as well as urban inhabitants.

OTI has had the good bureaucratic fortune to have been bound by fewer procurement, recruitment and retention, and accounting constraints than most U.S. overseas operations. It has also operated leanly, both in the field and in Washington. But it has not worked independently of USAID, the Department of State, and the White House, as some of its creators may have preferred. Indeed, in order to maintain its ability to act boldly and rapidly, and to experiment and innovate in the field, OTI has listened carefully to the beat of Washington's drums, and to embassy tocsins. OTI's weaknesses – tight budgets and limited permanent staff – have in some sense been its strengths. OTI has innovated mightily, as much because of its special character as because of its need to insert itself neatly into appropriate niches in needy countries.

Projects and Dollars

Between 1994 and 2004, OTI completed twenty-four interventions in twenty-three countries, spent \$745 million doing so, and in 2005 had recently entered or was about to enter nine new transitional situations (over and above continuing operations and comparatively massive obligations in Afghanistan and Iraq). Of the \$745 million, \$420 represented core expenses for the twenty-four “standard” interventions during the ten-year period. Work in Iraq and Afghanistan, over and above the “core” expenditures, cost \$325 million through 2004. Four of the eleven new OTI engagements were repeats—returns to countries in which OTI operated between 1994 and 2004.

In order to understand whether the first ten years of OTI contributed to peace, democracy-building, reconciliation, and conflict mitigation in the troubled developing world, its leaders sought an unbiased, thoroughly objective assessment of OTI’s accomplishments and—conceivably—its misplaced or poorly executed actions. What is OTI’s legacy, based on its first decade? Have its interventions made the developing world a little safer for democracy? Have OTI’s efforts reduced conflict and promoted reconciliation? Has OTI, overall, made a difference? (For the purposes of this study, “legacy” is defined as “what is left behind, what people remember, what is sustained and sustainable.”)

By asking the Program on Intrastate Conflict and Conflict Resolution within the Belfer Center of Science and International Affairs of Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government to undertake such a study, OTI engaged an academic enterprise that had long focused its scholarship and research on countries at risk within the developing world—exactly those kinds of

new and endangered nations that constitute OTI's special mandate. The Program on Intrastate Conflict has pioneered the academic study of failing and failed states, of governance in the developing world, of methods of post-conflict reconciliation, and of the post-conflict reconstruction of nations emerging from autocracy, intercommunal conflict, and genocidal destruction. The Program deals on a continuing basis with problems of conflict reduction and post-conflict recovery. Additionally, it examines leadership, governance, measurement, and reconciliation. So the fit between OTI's needs and the Program's expertise was tight. The Program had recently published *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror* (Brookings, 2003); *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences* (Princeton, 2004); *Truth v Justice: the Morality of Truth Commissions* (Princeton, 2000); *The Good Governance Problem: Doing Something About It* (Belfer Center, 2004); and books, reports, and articles on the specific conflict situations in Burma, Sri Lanka, the Sudan, and Zimbabwe. In addition, the Program staff has designed and managed large, multi-million dollar donor-funded post-conflict assistance projects in Africa.

Measuring Legacy

There are a number of ways by which to measure an organization's legacy. We could, money and time permitting, use a detailed questionnaire to survey a thoroughly representative sample of OTI country responses, targeting grant recipients and interrogating local professionals and political actors about their experiences with OTI. We could ask them – local politicians and bureaucrats, journalists, judges, external monitors, and many others – for their views about

the lasting quality of the OTI initiatives. By carefully preparing an effective, detailed survey instrument and engaging in such a large-n gathering of opinions, followed by a careful examination of the data, it would be possible thus to measure OTI's legacy by inspecting all completed projects – the weak ones as well as the strong ones. The full picture would emerge. From such a longitudinal examination, the flawed initiatives could be identified, the positive ones epitomized, and the average ones discussed. We would also amass, through this method, a variety of useful commentary capable of being coded and analyzed. OTI's full legacy would emerge, warts and all.

Time and resources were in fact limited for this first phase of the investigation. Because OTI's original deadline for this study was tight, leaving but a few months over the summer of 2004 and into the early autumn to accomplish the necessary investigations and develop substantive conclusions, and because the period of field study was truncated further as a result of contracting and procurement delays, the Program on Intrastate Conflict (with OTI's concurrence) decided first to sample the range of OTI completed country cases rather than to attempt to analyze them all. Second, it quickly arranged to send talented young researchers from the Kennedy School into the field to six sample countries, large and small, on four continents – East Timor and Indonesia, Kosovo and Macedonia, Sierra Leone, and Peru.⁴ The researchers went out armed with sets of detailed questions and a strong understanding of

⁴ The author of this Report is grateful for the excellent research and advice and counsel of Donald Lambert, Blake Mobley, Eric Rosenbach, Victoria Salinas, and Makiko Watanabe. Elisa Pepe and Cara Fitzpatrick skillfully administered the overall OTI project, and Debbie West helped to prepare the printed version of this Report. The author is also grateful to Robert Orr, past Executive Director of the Belfer Center; to Juliette Kayyem, Acting Executive Director of the Belfer Center; and, for his strong support throughout, to Graham Allison, Director of the Belfer Center.

the overall OTI philosophy and the somewhat specialized approach of individual OTI country missions. Several of the researchers had prior experience in their countries of study. One was already in country on a World Bank mission. Several spoke the local languages well. Despite varied and distinctive settings, they each returned to Harvard having successfully interviewed a substantial sample of recipients, host country officials, NGOs, contractors, and OTI and USAID administrators.

This report is based primarily on those very detailed interview reports, on additional interviews conducted in Bolivia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Liberia in January 2005 by Kennedy School second-year graduate students, and on an examination of the documentation for the sample country cases and OTI's own reports about the accomplishments of its first ten years.

The Bolivian, Congo, and Liberian operations are still on-going, so they do not fit properly within a legacy study. However, a rapid examination of those additional on-going cases provided supplementary information about OTI's organizational strengths and weaknesses in the field.

The OTI Model

The global post-conflict terrain is very difficult, and is often resistant to well-meant efforts of assistance. In that context, the OTI community has every reason to feel good about what has been achieved – what has been left behind on the ground. Not everything has worked. Certain overarching goals have not been met. But, overall, OTI has done very well, using a model of direct action and engagement that deserves to be more widely understood – even emulated.

OTI's strongest overall legacy is primarily what it has done to empower stakeholders. It has managed across a wide range of projects to involve civil society at the grass roots as well as to engage civil society as a whole. An example of the latter involvement is the valiant but flawed attempt in Peru to bring soldiers together with representatives of civil society to thrash out future civil-military relations. A more successful version of this kind of endeavor is illustrated by OTI's experience in Macedonia, where a series of town meetings and group activities were arranged around the discussion of real local physical projects or improvements. These so-called confidence-building activities at the local level were effective and successful, and were managed from the field. Likewise, in Kosovo, the same community development model was employed to build local capacities for governance and to promote moderate local leadership through a concentration on community based infrastructural efforts, using community materials and labor. One organizing assumption was that mixed communities were less likely to destroy projects to which the several communities had contributed. So far, that has proved a correct assumption.⁵

In all of our sample countries, OTI initiated important cross-societal and intra-societal conversations. This part of the OTI legacy is inherently intangible, but very real. Fostering intercommunal dialogue is fundamental to OTI operating procedures in a way that few other international assistance agencies can understand. Without an approach founded fundamentally on facilitated face-to-face discussions at the local and micro level, OTI would operate less distinctively across its range of troubled nations, and with far less effectiveness.

⁵ But see International Crisis Group, "Macedonia: Not Out of the Woods Yet," 25 February 2005.

These conversations take place both in capital cities and in the countryside. That OTI pays attention to non-metropolitan areas is one of its strengths even though its emphasis on grassroots initiatives is much harder to measure retrospectively. Yet, in its best programs, OTI did empower citizens, and thus contributed to national awareness and accountability. To have empowered civil society outside of a nation's main centers is now regarded by locals in host countries as significant and of lasting value.

In consonance with this method of operation, the OTI practice in our sample countries – observed reasonably well as far as I can tell – has been to select projects to fund based largely (not completely) on the basis of local inputs and in consultation with local NGOs. Many of the projects are small, however, so the smaller projects carry higher (implicit) overheads in terms of opportunity cost and real administrative cost.

That said, OTI's particular legacies of success, country by country, are less important than what it has done to develop disparate citizenries who now, arguably, have the necessary tools with which, and a renewed impetus, to look after themselves. As OTI itself says, "A country's own political will for transition is key. OTI interventions cannot create it or substitute for the lack of it."⁶ But they can and do nurture and sustain the first inklings of incipient political will for democracy, reconciliation, and avoidance of conflict.

Making a Difference

⁶ OTI, *A Decade of Transition*, 5

OTI was established to make a difference – to assist post conflict societies in making the transition from war and societal disarray to a sustainable and fruitful peace. OTI mitigates conflict, promotes reconciliation, and supports democratic transformations. OTI seems to have been designed by noble architects who believed that successful transitions were created out of the whole cloth of participatory governance, strong rule of law frameworks, the establishment of political and economic freedom, a familiarity with the techniques of self government, capacity building for democracy, decentralization, civilian oversight of militaries, the training of nongovernmental advocates, building accountability through the media and improving transparency generally, weakening corruption, and backing the search for societal restorative justice rather than retribution.

This report therefore assesses the nature of OTI's legacy by examining some of the big questions that flow from such an impressive and ambitious list. Can we say that OTI contributed to the establishment of democracy and good governance? Did OTI help to establish and provide positive platforms for long-term peace? Did OTI play a positive role in mitigating conflict, reducing ethnic tensions, and dampening inter-religious, cross-language, and intercommunal hostilities? Did OTI's actions enrich the civil society process? Did its efforts weaken the corrupt tendencies of the societies in which it labored? Did soldiers start to take orders from civilians in part because of OTI? Is the culture of accountability and transparency now stronger in those countries in which OTI worked?

OTI's legacy does not wholly depend upon positive answers to such questions. But we need to ask the big questions in order to appreciate the richness of OTI's contribution and the nuanced and calibrated quality of that contribution, and to understand those arenas and lines of action where OTI may have accomplished less than its objectives. There is a role here for the healthy weighing of alternatives and counterfactuals. What if OTI had focused more on one set of problems and less on some others?

Democratic Tendencies: The exercise of paving paths to the door of democracy is difficult, complex, and often a matter of many small or seeming insignificant actions adding up to a meaningful whole. It is often hard to discern results that we can truly label successful democratic scaffold building. Nevertheless, nearly all of OTI's on the ground initiatives were implicitly directed at one or more aspect of democracy enhancement. Bundled together, OTI did make the transitional world marginally safer for democracy over the ten-year period examined in this study.

Strengthening accountability and transparency through strengthening the media and by other means contributed to the bolstering of participation. So did grass roots efforts at empowering civil society and civil society actors. More narrowly, in some settings, OTI sought to train new congressional representatives, train the drafters of legislation, organize and train judges, and decentralize governance and encourage regional or local autonomy. Helping to foster the Campaign for Good Governance, the Network for Justice and Development, and the Independent Youth Forum – all in Sierra Leone – contributed to a lasting awareness of such issues, and to their potential

resolution. In Bolivia, as in Indonesia, OTI has sponsored voters' guides (on the gas referendum and the new constitution). Across our sample, these and similar actions were well-intended, many were successful (meaning that they changed society for the better, even if marginally), and some fell flat – really flat. In some settings, doing X worked well. In other settings, either because of different techniques or different personnel, or because of different cultures, X did not work at all. Overall, given the many constraints of time and money under which OTI labored in this or that troubled transitional nation, its activities and results deserve a high grade under this most important of rubrics -- democracy building.

Sustainable Peace and Conflict Reduction: Is it too soon to assess OTI's contribution in these areas? Possibly, but because they are such important areas we should do so, well understanding how difficult were many of the situations inherited by OTI. Clearly there were outstanding successes: The comparative peace today in Macedonia testifies to the patient efforts of community conversations and in-gathering accomplished in Tetovo and elsewhere. OTI also supported moderate mayors and empowered local community problem solving throughout Macedonia. Likewise, East Timor's rapid transition could not have been accomplished with such comparative ease absent OTI's heroic efforts at its inception and throughout the first three years of the emergence of East Timor from Indonesian rule. Equally strenuous efforts in Aceh and Papua, in Indonesia, achieved far less, not least because of the problematic situations intrinsic to both long-standing separatist conflicts. OTI's efforts to create a neutral space in the Maluku seem to have helped to produce a much more lasting result. OTI was

also active in village reconstruction and societal rebuilding efforts in Poso and Ambon. It is providing water pumps at the village level in Liberia, and helping students to renovate schools in Monrovia. But probably the most telling work in this area was undertaken in Sierra Leone, where OTI was well placed to contribute signally both to the actual peace process (by being involved in facilitating the actual negotiations and in helping to bring the ultimate negotiations to closure) and to the realization of the final achievements of the ultimate peace accord. Arguably, Sierra Leone would not have had a transition at all, much less a successful one, without the efforts of OTI. (Some of the community-building lessons learned in Sierra Leone are being introduced into Liberia, where improving relations between youths and elders is a critical goal, and in turbulent regions of the eastern Congo.) So we give high and lasting marks to OTI for Macedonia and Sierra Leone, and for East Timor, with mixed and lower marks for the efforts in this area of action in Indonesia, Kosovo, and Peru. Educating 1200 conflict management trainers in Nigeria proved an exercise in futility, given the subsequent course of political turmoil in that massive country.

In East Timor and Sierra Leone, OTI as an institution and gifted OTI personnel on the ground were able to appreciate how best to provide added value in a rapidly shifting, potentially chaotic, period of transition. In both situations they responded well despite an absence of structure and widespread insecurity. In the more recent case of Liberia, however, OTI was slow to act vigorously, especially after the signing of the August 2003 Peace Accords (which were quickly followed by a USAID Disaster Assistance Response Team

assessment). Not until February 2004, did OTI award a contract to Creative Associates for the work in Liberia, and no permanent OTI representative arrived in Monrovia before the end of July 2004. Between February and July, twelve individuals and twenty-three missions attempted to offer programming direction to a Liberia reeling from war and ready for the kinds of OTI assistance and projects that had made such a difference (in comparable periods of stress) in East Timor and Sierra Leone. In Liberia, the country strategy was revised regularly, and revamped finally only when a permanent country representative arrived. In early 2005, it was not evident that OTI had an effective strategy for Liberia that was being implemented, although grants were being made under the rubrics of good governance and transparency, media and accountability, human rights and transitional justice, and community reintegration and reconciliation.

Rule of Law: Peruvian congressional representatives were introduced to legal perspectives, local judges were trained in East Timor, and many local civil society groups in all of our sample countries were helped to appreciate their civil rights and how to exercise those rights, but the outstanding successes in this area were in Peru, where an OTI project contributed significantly to a strengthened legal process by facilitating the training and establishment of numbers of public defenders, and in East Timor, where OTI arranged the training of sufficient negotiators to secure a fair share of the new nation's principal offshore oil and gas resources. It transported the negotiators to Australia. OTI significantly helped to create the Office of the Timor Sea, to sustain the efforts of the negotiators. In Peru, before OTI, there had been a mere five public defenders in

the nine provinces of Peru; as a result of OTI's emphases, there were thirty in 2004.

Economic Opportunity: The outstanding success under this rubric from our sample is East Timor, where OTI was responsible for jump-starting the collapsed economy of the brand new nation. OTI was in East Timor very early: 70 percent of Dili had been destroyed. OTI saw an immense and urgent need, embraced it, and became the primary provider of cash for labor on infrastructural projects within Dili and the rest of East Timor. It employed 63,000 Timorese on \$4 million worth of reconstruction through 469 projects that included road repairs, school building refurbishments, irrigation system maintenance, and so on. Without OTI, East Timor's economy, and therefore democratic reconstruction, would have faltered and the transition to peace and democracy might have been aborted or developed more slowly. OTI legitimized the recovery operation. Also in East Timor, OTI funded the preparation of the National Development Plan, and made it happen.

Where else? Within our sample, the only other country in which OTI made a difference in this area was Sierra Leone, where by helping to guide the country and its leaders into the Kimberly Process, and by helping to regulate and reintegrate the diamond fields into the Sierra Leonean economy, OTI made a signal contribution to the early economic functioning of that destroyed and impoverished nation. The Kimberly Process is the name of the multinational, producer-consumer accord signed in 2002 by countries containing alluvial and underground diamond sources and by the main importing and cutting/polishing nations. Its primary aim is to ostracize and penalize diamond

production outside recognized national streams, thus reducing traffic in illicit “blood” diamonds and limiting the spoils of war.⁷ Sierra Leone’s Diamond Area Community Development Fund, backed originally by OTI, still remains an important agent for good in the diamond fields. The Fund holds a percentage of diamond export revenue in escrow until there is sufficient revenue for the local chiefdoms to implement community development projects.

The Fight against Corruption: OTI has fought the good fight in this difficult area, but with little success. Where it made major efforts to bring corruption out of the closet and tried to support local efforts to produce effective anti-corruption commissions and actions, as in Peru, there is little to show. That is, even where commissions exist, corruption still flourishes at approximately the same high levels as before OTI helped local civil societies and/or governments to intervene. Corruption is endemic and intractable in most parts of the developing world; it is no wonder that OTI, singlehandedly, can do little. OTI, not surprisingly, has almost always been outclassed and outgunned by the cultures and traditions of corruption. Nor was OTI any more successful in Indonesia or Sierra Leone than it was in Peru. The lessons of the Sierra Leonian experience presumably helped to influence the OTI Liberia decision not to emphasize anti-corruption activities in its work plan.

Even though direct support for anti-corruption commissions and civil society-elite dialogues about corruption have accomplished little (in terms of diminishing the pernicious quality of corruption within individual countries), OTI can justifiably claim to have shed a valuable spotlight on the practice of

⁷ Ingrid J. Tamm, *Diamonds in Peace and War: Severing the Conflict-Diamond Connection* (Cambridge, MA, 2002)

corruption by developing innovative ways to encourage and strengthen a culture of accountability in nations as distant as East Timor and Sierra Leone. Rule of law training has assisted in this effort, too, but building capacity among journalists and broadcasters has provided an even more effective and sustainable method of emphasizing the value of holding politicians and bureaucrats to account. Impunity in this area, and in others, is harmful to the emergence of democracies in transitional situations.

The Media: This is an area in which OTI has made outstanding, almost unique, contributions to the development of new nations and new societies. If we accept the premise that accountability and transparency, and therefore democracy and good governance, are well served by an informed public, and if one also stipulates that new governments will serve their people best and more completely if they know that knowledgeable and experienced journalists and broadcasters will observe and comment on their activities, then OTI performed extraordinary services in our sample countries by helping to create newspapers and radio stations, TV programming, and opinion polling operations, by training journalists in modern techniques, and by physically reconstructing broadcast facilities. In East Timor, OTI established the *Timor Post*, now the country's daily of record. It helped to create other newspapers and *InterNews*, a local embryonic Associated Press. It repaired or rebuilt thirteen broadcast stations and towers, allowing local radio to operate. It funded TV broadcasts, particularly those where politicians were compelled to justify their actions and policies. In Sierra Leone, OTI backed the creation of the Talking Drums Studio, a producer of radio programs with close ties to civil society. Talking Drums created, inter alia, a

series of soap operas about the nature of reconciliation. Arguably, those soap operas have contributed in a meaningful way to the improved receptivity for reconciliation in Sierra Leone (or in Freetown, at least). In Indonesia, OTI helped to establish an important opinion polling consortium, assisted in upgrading the engineering facilities, boosted the programming of fifty radio stations, and devoted time and effort to the training of journalists. In Bolivia, OTI supported explanatory television and radio broadcasts by President Carlos Mesa Gisbert and other government officials during the run up to the natural gas export referendum. In the Congo, OTI backed the creation of Radio Okapi, the country's only independent radio station.

Arguably, no other initiatives of OTI have been so transformative and so well sustained as those in the media realm.

Civil Society: Our researchers were uniformly impressed by OTI's efforts in this area. Through a variety of measures that have already been mentioned, OTI's disparate and decentralized, sometimes poorly organized, initiatives raised human and social capital levels and helped to elevate the skill qualities of the many local NGO operatives who were engaged in dialogues, discussion, and formal and informal training exercises. In East Timor, OTI made in-kind grants to twenty-six local NGOs, some of which still function in the fields of human rights, women's rights, water resources, and sanitation. OTI in East Timor also sponsored the NGO Forum – a collection of NGOs working together. In Indonesia, there was massive voter education before the 1999 elections, much of it through radio and TV, plus a number of workshops and seminars to put policy makers together with NGO leaders.

OTI's method of distributing a plethora of small and smallish grants works best in the civil society field; it is less well-suited to democracy building, reconciliation, and many aspects of conflict reduction.

Civil Military Relations: OTI laudably sought to elevate the American democratic principle of civilian supremacy over soldiers to the level of a recognizable norm, especially in Indonesia and Peru. Those two OTI projects encouraged legislation and sponsored a series of workshops between scholars and officers (Indonesia), and civil society leaders and officers and cadets and university students (Peru). In Peru, an OTI-arranged commission met to develop constitutional changes capable of curtailing the power of the nation's soldiers. Neither effort left an enduring legacy, although several interviewees in Peru believe that the OTI activities in this sphere did increase transparency and help to begin reforming the local civil-military culture.

Demobilization, Disarmament, and Youth Reintegration: OTI was importantly active in these areas in East Timor, where it had to play a strong role in helping to demobilize and to reintegrate ex-combatants. It put them to work and provided a variety of portals through which they could re-enter post-Indonesian Timorese society. In Sierra Leone, a strong youth program brought ex-combatants and young civilians together to facilitate the process of re-integrating the ex-warriors into post-war civilian society. Certainly, at some level, this process was successful, even though OTI was involved in the effort for too short a time to demonstrate improved rates of literacy and develop improved skill sets capable of providing the ex-combatants with livelihoods. Once OTI funding stopped, sustainability in this case was lost. But, interviewees report, the biggest

deficit of the program was the fact that newly trained ex-soldiers were prepared for opportunities that did not (and still do not) exist in the new Sierra Leonean society.

Justice and Reconciliation: Many post-conflict countries have addressed past crimes against society through comparatively speedy, less expensive, restorative justice methods in preference to the standard laborious procedures of retributive justice. OTI missions have supported these national efforts, sometimes encouraging the creation of full-blown truth commissions, sometimes simply supporting ongoing efforts to set up effective commission processes. This was particularly the case in Peru where its Truth and Reconciliation Commission would not have emerged so quickly absent OTI backing. OTI provided technical assistance, computer support, and backing for investigations. It also helped the TRC to hold sessions in rural parts of Peru. But through no fault of OTI, this example of a truth commission broke no new ground, and has made little discernible difference across the difficult political landscape of Peru.

Questions and Concerns

OTI's founders, leaders, and practitioners should justly be proud of everything that has been accomplished. As it embarks upon its second decade, there exists an enormously secure foundation on which OTI can build. There are also some potentially shaky parts of the structure that need to be given further attention—if only to enable OTI to grow stronger and its missions more robust. A few of these continuing issues are:

- 1) *OTI may be spread too thin. Are there transitions upon which it makes little sense for OTI to expend serious sums of money and effort? Should OTI consider focusing its new missions only on those places, and its grants only on those kinds of issues, where the ten-year legacy results show a strong likelihood of enduring success? Should OTI try to do a few things well rather than many indifferently? It makes good sense for all OTI country teams to focus on media development and accountability training, areas in which OTI has demonstrated unquestioned excellence and unique sensibilities. But there are other areas where OTI's energies and funds have rarely proved effective.*

In order to enter a country, OTI gauges whether the operating environment is stable, whether the target country is ripe for transformation, and whether there are serious U.S. national interests at stake. Ripeness is equated with high levels of local political will for democratic change and strong commitments to fundamental reform. In future, OTI may also wish to consider whether OTI itself would likely have a comparative advantage. Will the kinds of interventions that OTI now does well work in that country? Ten years after its inception, OTI has an implicit tool kit, and not all emerging nations respond well to its specific components.

In Liberia, this question seems to have been answered by a decision not to enter the field of anti-corruption training. Although corruption is at the root of nearly all Liberian governance issues, a decision—possibly based on lack of success elsewhere—was taken to expend no funds or efforts in this area.

In Liberia, it was also decided not to devote official energy and grants to disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of non-combatants, possibly

because the UN was already heavily involved in this area (and OTI arrived late), or because Liberia seemed less receptive to such actions as compared to Sierra Leone.

Instead, OTI in Liberia has been focusing on providing new governmental ministries with “offices in a box.” This worthy effort helps the new Liberian government establish itself. But is this the best use of OTI resources?

- 2) *The need for sustainability sometimes may trump fulfilling the transition initiative mantra and mandate; consideration might be given in some instances to lengthening projects so that they will embed themselves more fully in the local society. Is the short term too short term? Is OTI occasionally in too much of a rush to complete its transitional endeavor?*

Almost everywhere, local NGOs felt that their good efforts had been cut off prematurely by OTI decisions to leave a still emerging country at the end of a two- or three-year transition period. Even some of the best projects had been deprived of full sustainability by such procedures. OTI was unable in most cases to transfer the best of the on-going projects to other operations of USAID, or other donors. Examples have already been cited - in Sierra Leone, in Indonesia, in Peru, among others.

- 3) *More flexibility in the size and quality of grants, and more attention to cash instead of in kind, might help in certain circumstances. Should OTI strive for larger, transformational opportunities and begin to limit grants at the smaller, more fragmented end of the giving scale?*

Laudable as OTI's attempt to reach out to "populations who have been marginalized and excluded," and to "maximize the number of direct participants and beneficiaries at the grass-roots level," small and smallish grants bear heavy transactional costs.⁸ And even though OTI avoids accounting hassles by transferring goods and not providing core budget support, it is not clear that OTI's overarching goals are well served everywhere by adhering to such procedures. Experimentation and flexibility are positive attributes; but in some country director hands such grant making has appeared scattershot and random.

- 4) *Is the OTI method as well adapted to large, complex countries as it is to smaller, more fragile states?*

This study did not, by design, investigate OTI's actions in Iraq or Afghanistan. Nor did it look at Nigeria. A conclusion, which needs to be tested, is that OTI maximizes its impact and its funds when it is a big player in a smallish arena, not an add-on player in a much larger, inevitably much more complex transition. A good argument could be advanced for narrowing the geographical scope of OTI involvement. More profound differences can obviously be expected in the more focused, usually smaller, countries. But what would be the size cut off? Is the Sudan about the right size for an OTI intervention? Is the Democratic Republic of Congo of appropriate size?

⁸ OTI, *Decade of Transition*, 15

5) *Is OTI doing enough to improve governance?*

In too few of the projects examined in this study did OTI explicitly set out to strengthen the governance capabilities of post-conflict or newly transitional countries. In the ongoing case of Liberia, that absence is noticeable. Not even in East Timor, where OTI had an enormous comparative advantage, was attention paid to developing qualities of good governance (aside from important work on rule of law and accountability). Making governance a stronger focus of OTI activity may need explicit direction and assistance from Washington.⁹

Admittedly, almost anything that helps to bolster the new government's capability, and the resources of civil society, helps to improve governance. But a more focused, charged, approach to this issue would help OTI implant democracy more thoroughly across its future areas of activity.

Decentralization (which OTI promoted in Indonesia) may or may not help to foster good governance. It is not clear whether the decision to back autonomy was well thought out and, if well considered, was actually promoted effectively. In future cases, OTI's country teams may wish to develop overall strategies rather than piecemeal ones to enhance good governance.

6) *Does OTI focus sufficiently on grooming real political leaders? Should it work more with emerging political elites?*

⁹ For a definition of governance, see Robert I. Rotberg and Deborah L. West, *The Good Governance Problem: Doing Something About It* (Belfer Center, 2004).

If the governance question has heretofore been addressed only partially and not explicitly, building capacity in the elected political leadership development area has almost never been addressed directly. Most OTI efforts in this realm have involved grass roots and civil society leadership. The political elite sector has been neglected. Yet that is where the action is; the more fragile and jejune the transitional nation, the more leadership is central, crucial, and determinative. Without the provision of focused, talented, good, effective leaders, transitional democracies cannot grow and be sustained.¹⁰ Again, Washington ought to consider how best to sensitize its country teams to the relevance of improved political leadership and the need for serious action in this sphere.

Another way of addressing this question is to ask whether OTI in the future would double or treble its impact on democracy and conflict mitigation if it worked more (not exclusively) with elites (as it did in Sierra Leone)? OTI's grassroots bias is admirable, but is it the best or the only route to democracy-building in transitional nations?

7) *Should OTI respond earlier to crises, and before being summoned?*

This question embodies a delicate political dimension. But if a mechanism could be developed to plunge OTI into emerging situations at the very earliest indication of an impending transition, USAID and the U.S. government's

¹⁰ For the importance of leadership in the developing world, see Robert I. Rotberg, "Strengthening African Leadership," *Foreign Affairs*, LXXXIII (2004), 14-18

attempts to make a difference in building democracy in troubled parts of the world would greatly be strengthened.

The Legacy and the Next Ten Years

OTI's legacy is strong and lasting. During its first ten years it contributed meaningfully to the growth of democratization, accountability, conflict reduction, and reconciliation in our sample countries (and elsewhere) by helping to foster a broad and deep range of media activities, including the establishment of newspapers and radio stations and the training of journalists; by strengthening and empowering civil society almost everywhere; by bringing together in purposeful settings ethnic groups hitherto suspicious of or opposed to each other; by training legislators, judges, and military officers; by grasping the nettle of desperation, as in East Timor, and consequently transforming vicissitude into opportunity; and by experimenting, sometimes failing, and nevertheless keeping an innovative eye on the various ways in which OTI can assist new nations to emerge democratically from chaos and dictatorship.

OTI responded energetically and well to transitional challenges and opportunities in key countries during its first decade. It made a difference in those embryonic or newly reconfigured nations primarily by finding a variety of ways to strengthen the performance of the media, by convening exercises in mutual regard that helped to mitigate conflict, by spending modest funds on informing emergent peoples about electoral possibilities and methods, by helping to fund special reconciliation projects like truth commissions, and by training judges and legislators.

All of these and many other deliveries of assistance were made over ten years without expending huge sums. Excluding activity in Afghanistan and Iraq, OTI spent less than \$500 million across its twenty-three countries. By the standards of foreign assistance amounts, whether American, British, or Scandinavian, OTI produced very impressive results with what must be considered limited expenditures. This study did not specifically address cost effectiveness, but OTI clearly has done much that is positive with very little. This study has no way of evaluating whether even more might have been accomplished for \$500 million. Given the number of projects involved, and OTI's method of working through contractors and NGOs, it is surprising that so much has been achieved with such modest financial resources.

Because OTI prides itself on moving forward with faster than deliberate speed, and without an excess of personnel, it is evident that OTI suffers now and then from administrative lapses. Sometimes Washington and the field, the field and its contractors, and the contractors and local NGOs, communicate poorly, or not at all. Some of the country failures (where OTI has left prematurely, or without accomplishing very much) resulted from managerial mistakes, poorly supervised personnel, or weaknesses in OTI-wide and country-specific strategy. But those insufficiencies have been balanced by innovative breakthroughs, remarkable personal interventions and effective projects, and a generally high level of commitment to democracy building and reconstruction.

As OTI moves forward, it is possible to draw many legacy lessons from the first ten years. Among the more salient are:

- The most successful of the twenty-four country interventions flowed from a robust diagnosis of an emerging nation's needs, a willingness to target critical areas of immediate importance, and the ability to innovate on the ground.
- Each successful intervention was led by purposeful country directors, supported and guided from Washington, but without heavy oversight.
- Country directors in charge of the successful endeavors succeeded in part by being flexible and experimental, and by quickly adapting to incipient failure.
- Core personnel imbued with the OTI mission and embodying its ethos are essential for the success of country missions.
- Even with effective core personnel, unless contractors and sub-contractors are equally comfortable with and appreciative of the special mission and methods of OTI, success is hard to achieve.
- After ten years, OTI knows what it does well. Future missions should thus be encouraged to employ fewer rather than more strategies, and attempt to make a difference using specific kinds of strategic tools.
- All missions should have a media and accountability component. They should focus on empowering civil society. They need to craft responses to ongoing sources of conflict. They need not focus as much as heretofore on reconciliation and justice.
- After ten years, OTI might well want to be explicit about its tool kit, and about in what kinds of emerging situations its own skill set and tool kit

are best suited. There should be no need to re-invent the OTI wheel in each of its new countries.

- There are some post-conflict cases where OTI's chances of being effective are limited. Those cases should be avoided.
- Intractable situations should be avoided, and those may include exactly those larger arenas where OTI will not be able to play a significant role or have a large presence and from which OTI will not be able to exit within two or three years.

OTI has demonstrated the wisdom and perspicacity of its founders. It has made a difference, in innumerable ways. Democracy is a little stronger in the developing world today, thanks to OTI. It enters its second decade on a wave of success, and with positive lessons from its legacy that should stand it well as this decade becomes as dangerous and crisis ridden as OTI's first.