

# Dangers of High Expectations – Expectation Management Theory and Practice

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## **1. Introduction**

In 1970, Ted Gurr was the first to describe the rise of expectations and the consequential disappointment in a given society as a trigger for conflicts. The reasoning behind this concept of relative deprivations was that the personal disappointment and angers those individuals feel after an expectation has proven to be unsubstantial can be translated into societies as well, which under certain circumstances can eventually lead to violent conflicts. Even though, the research for causes of violent conflicts has shifted its focus to factor like identity (ethnicity or religion), economic marginalisation or institutional repression, the notion of Gurr remains important (Bussmann; Hasenclever; Schneider, 2009). Empirical studies show that expectations of the people are especially relevant in states that have recently discovered natural resources such as oil and gas. The cliché of the “black gold” that automatically generates wealth is still widespread, even though scholars suggest that due to the negative macro economical and political consequences an oil bonanza often comes along with, there is not much reason for optimism. It is this divergence that might cause conflicts in societies. Only very seldom, the revenues that are generated from natural resources have been used effectively for the benefit of the society as a whole. Ghana is a country that could well suffer such a scenario as a follow-up of the oil boom that the country experiences at the moment.

In the following paper, the theory of relative deprivation by Gurr will be outlined and supplemented by theoretical implications of necessary expectation management techniques by political actors in order to avoid societal conflicts. Henceforth a case study for Ghana will be presented to derive recommendations that political actors and civil society organisations could use to influence the Ghanaian expectation management for the better.

## **2. Collective Frustration as a Trigger for Conflicts**

The main reason for high expectations in a society is unrealistic media coverage or the transportation of unsustainable promises by political stakeholders through mass media. In states that have recently discovered natural resources, the unrealistic image is created because of the naïve thinking that natural resources automatically lead to high financial gains. This can especially be observed when the respective state suffers low social and economical development. In such states, people hope for employment, poverty reduction, better infrastructure, and higher incomes. In most cases, however, such expectations remain unsatisfiable because on the one hand the expectations are unrealistic from the beginning and on the other hand, the phenomenon of the resource curse causes an inverse development meaning that the positive outlook of financial gains can turn into macro economical destabilisation and recession.

In his book „Why men rebel“(1970), Ted Gurr has outlined a theory that describes the process from high expectations in a society to the emergence of violent conflicts that arise from the disappointment of these. The terminology of Gurr names the collective disappointment after unfulfilled expectations as so-called relative deprivation. Logically, relative deprivation is the difference between the expectations that people have and their realistic potential to fulfil these:

Relative deprivation is defined as a perceived discrepancy between men's value expectations and their value capabilities. Value expectations are the goods and conditions of life to which people believe they are rightfully entitled. Value capabilities are the goods and conditions they think they are capable of attaining or maintaining, given the social means available to them. (Gurr, 1970: 13)

The intensity of deprivations is therefore determined by the height of expectations (value potential). It is important to note that Gurr refers to the individual perception of the value potential and not the real perspective to reach certain values (ibid: 27).

The individual perception of value potentials and the consequential intensity of deprivation depend on different factors. Firstly, the content of expectations is decisive. Political expectations such as better political participation opportunities are less conflictive than hopes for economic development because the latter are decisive for the physical survival of individuals. In addition to that, the lack of economic values can easier be measured than deficits in political participation (ibid: 130-131). Secondly, the initial position of the individual might amplify its expectations. For example in relation to economic expectation this means that the poorer a person is before expectations arise, the higher the deprivation of the person, after he/she has fallen back to its initial living conditions.

Furthermore, Gurr sees another source for rising expectations in the improvement of the literacy rate in a country and in the transportation of Western education in developing countries because the values that are being taught then have nothing to do with the reality of the countries, which then again leads to disappointment and disillusion (ibid: 95). However, this thesis is highly doubtful, because it could also be argued that a better education enables people to evaluate political actions in a more realistic way which generally leads to more realistic expectations about their value potential.

Gurr specifies different sorts of deprivation. In the case of resource states, in most cases there is aspirational deprivation. The term describes the feeling of missing means to fulfil certain expectations and not the frustration after a real loss of values that had been reached already (ibid: 50). In regions that are directly affected by the new resource industry, there is also progressive deprivation meaning a rise of expectations and a decline of value potentials at the same time. An example for this would be the environmental degradation that is caused by the exploitation of oil wells, which destroys the basis of life for the regional populations without receiving any compensation from the state.

However, not in all cases unfulfilled expectations in societies automatically lead to violence. Therefore, Gurr explains which conditions favour violent conflicts after frustrations. Generally, Gurr assumes that the above described factors that amplify the intensity of deprivation also raise the probability of violent reactions (ibid: 13). But next to these, there are also other factors that influence the use of violence after collective frustrations. Gurr identifies these mainly in the socio-psychological background of the respective individuals. Firstly, the violence potential strongly varies with the intensity and popularity of normative justifications for violence. For example, people in regions that were shaped by decades of war have a higher incentive to use violence as a means because they got used to it. Even though violence is negatively connotative in such situations, it is still seen as an effective way to achieve collective interests. This efficiency is connected to the second factor that Gurr

lists: The potential for violence strongly varies with the intensity and popularity of the perspectives for success that violence has. Basically, this factor deals with the utilitarian question if the use of violence will lead to a satisfying result for the deprived and if it can contribute to the fulfilment of their wishes and hopes. As noted before, both factors strongly correlate, because if someone has simple normative justifications for the use of violence, it is also possible that this mean is seen as an effective way to reach ends (ibid: 156-160).

Apart from the socio-psychological background of the people, also the social environment is an important factor. The use of violence becomes more probable, when the source for their deprivation is not clear to identify because of the complexity of political and economical contexts. In such cases collectives are prone to simple explanations given by third actors:

In modern and modernizing societies [...] the origins of many deprivations are obscure. The most knowledgeable citizen may have difficulty in identifying what group or institution is responsible for inflation, unemployment, declining religious morality, or status insecurity. If he is both intensely discontented and unable to find concrete sources of responsibility in his social environment, he is highly susceptible to new doctrines which provide palatable explanations [...]. (Gurr, 1970: 179-180)

These rather simple explanations can then be used to sell violence as an effective way for solving the problems and improving the value positions of the collective (ibid: 218). Examples for such processes are separatist movements, typically led by charismatic politicians.

Another socio-political factor is the legitimacy of the government, which generally is seen responsible for unfulfilled expectations. Gurr suggests that citizens in democratically legitimized states rarely use collective violence to implement their interests because they have the opportunity to participate within the democratic institutions. Nevertheless, also democratic legitimated governments can be the target of violence, if certain political or economical actions destroy the values from which the legitimacy is derived. An example would be the constriction of the electoral law (ibid: 183-190).

Generally, authoritarian regimes without democratic legitimisation are more prone to the use of collective violence by their population for attaining their interests. Such states have effective mechanisms for civil control and repression but do not provide alternative ways of participation and expression of interests. Also, Gurr notes that repression often provokes counter violence:

On balance, the use of coercion by a regime poses more risks than the use of coercion by dissidents. The extensive use of force by either side is likely to be dysfunctional to their initial goals, nonetheless. (Gurr, 1970: 272)

After having described the social mechanisms behind the theory of relative deprivation and the factors that lead to violence after collective frustrations, in the following, the management techniques to control societal expectations will be dealt with. An important source is the work by Lindstädt and Staton (2010) who argue that it is possible for politicians to control expectations. The authors prove with a mathematical-logical research design that

politicians on the long run can never profit from publically communicating promises before elections or political reforms. The reason is that political promises always implicate the risk of disappointing expectations. If on the other hand a realistic or even a conscious understatement of the possible results of political actions is given (“Downward Expectation Management”), the risk of frustration vanishes, while the possibility arises that unsuspected positive results could be honored by the people (“Overperformance Bonus”) (Lindstädt; Staton, 2010: 12-14). In fact, results after promises are almost always viewed in a negative way because of the high expectations:

If someone expects to observe a high-quality outcome and does not, he will be dissatisfied, potentially more so than he would have been with an objectively worse outcome about which he had low expectations. (Lindstädt; Staton, 2010: 5)

Translated into resource-economies and in relation to the concept of relative deprivation by Gurr, it can be concluded, that governments should not make promises of economic growth, improved infrastructure, etc. after discoveries of natural resources, in order to avoid future conflicts stemming from unfulfilled expectations. This is especially important for developing countries, because the effects of the resource curse might even hamper the economic development instead of supporting it.

Instead, the population should be informed about the realistic positive and negative consequences of the resource exploitation at an early stage. The responsibility for this education is shared by politicians and mass media within a state. The best scenario would be an education programme about the possible effects of the emergence of a resource industry before the exploitation begins, in order to provide the option to completely step back from resource production. Of course, a democratic structure including press freedom is necessary for such neutral public education.

Lindstädt and Staton however also suggest that a defensive or negatively oriented prognosis of political results is rarely observed in democratic states. According to the scientists, this behaviour is imminent in the system. If political competitors raise expectations by promising gains, they might risk failure, but they have higher chances in elections, because people want to hear positive outlooks (Lindstädt; Staton, 2010: 21). Because of this, the management of expectations in democratic states has to be related to the continued political competition.

### **3. Expectation Management in Ghana**

After having outlined the theoretical background of expectation management and deprivation as conflict cause, the case study of expectation management in the oil and gas sector in Ghana will be presented in the following. In order to find out about the expectations about oil within the Ghanaian population, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung has conducted a study in early 2011, asking more than 5000 15-35 year olds about their opinions and feelings on the topic (see FES publication Youth and Oil & Gas Governance). First, the results of the study will be outlined to afterwards connect these with the political actions that could be observed in recent years.

### **3.1 Expectations about Oil and Gas Production in Ghana**

The results of the study prove that the respondents generally have high expectations towards the upcoming oil industry. 81 percent indicated to have high or very high expectations about the oil. Also when asked for the possible consequences of the oil production, the majority of the respondents ticked positive effects. About 4170 participants of the study expect economic growth and 64 percent believe that the oil sector will create more jobs. More than 50 percent think that the oil production will be the basis of improvements in living conditions and infrastructure. Of the negative effects only environmental degradation and corruption were relatively popular answers (40 percent).

In the light of this vast optimism the question arises what exactly the respondents hope for. From the given answers one could then derive actions that should be taken to satisfy the demands of the people.

Of the 81 percent of the respondents who indicated that they would personally profit from the oil production, about 46 percent reasoned to be able to find a job easily. Other popular answers were hopes for improvements in education and the health system. Also progress in infrastructure, for example road building were often given as answers. The hope for jobs seems to stem from the assumption that the oil industry will stimulate other sectors to grow as well, which 82 percent believe. Compared to the realistic impact that the oil industry can have on the employment situation in Ghana, it becomes obvious that a plan for investments by the government is urgently needed to generate positive effects for other industrial sectors. In the oil production itself, there will be only about 300 new jobs which have to be filled by highly specialised employees. This is also due to the fact that there is no further manufacturing industry in Ghana apart from one delapidated refinery in Tema.

With these results it can be summarised that the vast majority of respondents has positive expectations towards oil which is connected to the hope for jobs. Furthermore, there seems to be great trust in the positive effects of oil production. This perception contradicts with the empirical proven consequences of the resource curse (vgl. Ross, Sachs).

Interestingly, the respondents had realistic ideas about some aspects of the oil and gas sector. The thesis "Non-Ghanaians will profit from the oil and gas production" was affirmed by 64 percent. This answer suggests that the people are conscious about the fact that Ghana will not get the complete amount of money but that the country is depending on foreign help by partners who must be paid with a share of the revenue. However, this consciousness does not seem to alleviate the optimism, especially because the question asked did not exclude the profit of Ghana.

Given the difference between the realistically expectable scenario and the individual expectations within the population it is of great interest what these expectations are based upon. The answers in this question can then be an indicator for mistakes in the expectation management of the government or for exaggerated and wrong media coverage.

Generally, the respondents seem to have trust in the oil management of the government and also in private actors like international corporations. The thesis "government and corporate agents manage oil and gas revenue well" was neglected by less than a third of the respondents. Nevertheless, apart from positive answers by 44 percent, there seems to be great unsureness about the questions, which was answered by 30 percent with "not sure". This trend is even amplified in the question if the laws passed by the government are sufficient to control the oil and gas industry. Here, almost 36 percent answered to be unsure

about this. The reason for this seems to stem from great ignorance about the oil policy of the government. Almost 88 percent did not know about any legislations by the government to regulate the oil industry, even though there were some discussed in parliament at the time the study was conducted.

One reason for the deficient knowledge could be the access to information about the subject. Even though 82 percent indicated to have great interest in news about the oil policy of the government and want to participate in the discussion about the consequences of the resource in their country (74 percent), the majority feels to be badly informed (56 percent).

The study suggests that radio and television are the most important media being consumed by 77 percent and 69 percent. For a minority also newspapers and internet is a source for information. The stunning fact that a majority of the respondents has interest in the topic and consumes media regularly but has a deficit in information, seems to approve the assessment of the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (2009), suggesting a low quality of the media coverage in Ghana. Indeed the main focus of media, especially radio and TV is entertainment. Information and news about daily politics are only covered rudimentally and in many cases highly polarised (Agboklu, 2011). To gain exact knowledge about consequences of the media coverage of oil in Ghana on the expectations of the people, a media analysis would have to be made, which is not possible in the frame of this work. Nevertheless, the collected data allows to draw the thesis that the respondents have a positive attitude towards oil economy even though they do not feel well informed. This could be explained by the wide spread cliché of oil to cause quick wealth, which is especially transported by experiences of petrostates like Saudi Arabia. Interestingly this image cannot even be corrected by the much closer opposite experience of Nigeria.

### ***3.2 The Expectation Management of the Ghanaian Government***

Taking a look at the communication by politicians about oil in Ghana, it becomes obvious, that the topic began to enter the political arena very early. Not later than in the election campaign of 2008, which is basically directly after oil was discovered, oil had become an important point on the agenda of all parties (Elischer, 2009: 6). In some cases the populism of some party agents was mirrored by their speeches about the subject. Former president John A. Kufuor named the oil directly after its discovery “black gold” and said to BBC: “With oil as a shot in the arm, we’re going to fly”(quoted from Gary, 2009: 5). Such expressions are careless in spite of their perception within the population because unsubstantial expectations are generated while a sophisticated information policy is undermined. In the country report about Ghana by the Bertelsmann Transformation Index it is suggested that the topic of oil has raised the intensity of the election campaigns extremely (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2009: 1). Following the theory of expectation management by Lindstädt and Staton and their thesis about the difficulty of expectation management in times of democratic elections, it seems to be probable that the instrumentalisation of the topic for the parties’ election strategies has contributed extremely to a rise of expectations in the population.

### **3.3 Can Disappointment of Expectations lead to Conflicts in Ghana?**

In chapter one it was described under which circumstances unfulfilled expectations can lead to violent conflict following Ted Gurr's concept of relative deprivation. In the light of the results of the study, the question arises if such a scenario could be an option for Ghana as well.

Describing the expectations of the young population in Ghana in Gurr's terminology, it can be summarised that the central problem is a decomposition of the detachment of aspirations and expectations. While aspirations mean that individuals have the motivation to reach a higher value position, expectations imply that there is hope for fulfilment of the value position by a third agent (Gurr, 1970: 27). In relation to the oil discoveries in Ghana, these expectations were raised in unreasonable heights by unwise political expectation management and wrong connotations and clichés that were communicated about the oil industry. In addition to this, the demonstration effect which was described by Gurr (ibid: 93) can be observed in Ghana. This effect contains the orientation to maximum value positions within a society by formulating individual expectations. Because there is rich elite in Ghana defining itself with objects of prestige shown in public, there is a demand in the rest of the population to reach this value position as well. The oil industry seems to offer a chance for individual economic improvement.

Especially looking at the expectations about new employment opportunities, it seems impossible to fulfil them from a realistic angle. Because of this, according to Gurr, the basic condition for a relative deprivation is given:

[...] if redistributions or economic development plans do not increase economic value stocks, the long-range effect is to increase the instigation to political violence: expectations that are intensified by marginal increases in value capabilities lead to virulent grievances if the expectations prove unattainable. (Gurr, 1970: 130)

Nevertheless, it has to be noticed that relative deprivation does not automatically lead to violence. There has to be a potential for violence in the social group of the "disappointed". To detect this affinity, Gurr has formulated different conditions. These do not seem to match with the situation in Ghana. The society is working according to the rule of law, public institutions are functional. Furthermore, apart from smaller regional conflicts Ghana generally has a peaceful historical track record. The population was not socialised in an environment in which violence has become normal. Also, the government is democratically legitimised following international standards. All these factors lower the probability of violence according to Gurr.

In direct relation to the unfulfilled expectations, violence becomes more probable, if the frustration is consciously steered by certain agents through propaganda to blame the government. If this works efficiently and the attainment of higher value positions through violence has functioned before, the probability of the frustrated to use violence rises. For now, both cannot be observed in Ghana, because the public institutions have broad support within the population. Exact data about the affinity for violence for interest satisfaction could be collected in qualitative interviews, which offers additional research potential in this matter.



As already outlined in the theoretical part of this work, collective violence within a society is a result of different factors like identity, institutions, economy and social psychology that function complementary (Bussmann; Hasenclever; Schneider, 2009). Even if some potential conflict causes cannot be observed in Ghana, the probability for violent riots seems to be quite low. Despite many deficits it is especially the functionality of the Ghanaian democracy and the consequential efficiency of public institutions which are responsible for the appeasement. In addition to that, there are control mechanisms from civil society, because non-governmental organisations and unions can freely express critique without fearing repressions by the government.

#### **4. Recommendations for an Expectation Management in Ghana**

This paper has shown that unwise political communication has led to high expectations about oil production within the Ghanaian society. It is highly unlikely that these expectations will be met in the future. Even though the main causes for this development lie in mistakes made by political actors during the last four years, there is still the chance to put the individual perceptions about the oil sector in a more realistic light.

To achieve this, it is necessary for politicians to be conscious about the consequences of public expressions and comments on oil. It is necessary that oil is part of public politics in Ghana but the topic should be dealt with great care. This means that it should not be instrumentalised in populist party politics. A realistic communication basis will be profitable for the population, the parties and most importantly the state of Ghana.

In order to support the consciousness about the effects of oil in society, programmes of public education in the matter should be initiated and supported in cooperation with international experts. Local communities have to be informed about the small chances for them to profit from the oil. Alternative ways of prosperity must be offered which could be realised by a basic economic long-term strategy that the government has failed to implement yet.

As the study revealed, there is a lack of quality in the news coverage of public media. It is the responsibility of every single Ghanaian journalist to support quality and information programmes within their media companies. The demands of people should be included in the coverage and understandable formats should be used in order to assure an effective and educative communication of political topics through public channels.

#### **5. Final Remarks**

The consequences of the lack in expectation management can already be observed in the Western Region of Ghana where thousands of people move to Takoradi to find work in the oil industry. All these hopeful people have few prospects to find a job. The main effects are unemployment and rising prices in the region causing suffering for the local population as well. It is therefore urgently needed to acknowledge the problem of high expectations within the Ghanaian population and to establish measures for an effective expectation

management in Ghanaian politics. This is a responsibility of Ghanaian politicians, civil society groups and journalists.

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