Peacebuilding, the World Bank and the United Nations

Debates and Practice in Burundi, Liberia and Nepal

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH AND EMERGING RECOMMENDATIONS

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Abstract

The following research findings and emerging recommendations are the product of a year-long study and represent a baseline for International Alert's continuing work with international institutions on peacebuilding. Broadly speaking, this area of Alert's work is a response to the reality that years of international commitments to supporting peace in countries affected by violent conflict and fragility have yet to produce commensurate sustainable peacebuilding results. The study seeks to shine a spotlight on the behaviour, systems and practice of international institutions charged with managing and delivering aid. It proposes a series of recommendations for institutions seeking to strengthen their role in supporting peace, development and prosperity in fragile and conflict-affected countries. This paper is a summary of a longer Working Paper of the same title.

Background

As donor governments seek to tighten their budgets and legitimise spending on official development assistance, greater emphasis has been placed on achieving value for money and sustained results. Fragile and conflict-affected countries feature prominently on the international agenda, but they present the most complex challenges. Despite extensive international commitments, undertaken with good intentions, sustainable impacts on long-term peace are still elusive.

The policy debate on these challenges has moved forward considerably, most recently with the release of the paradigm-shifting 2011 World Development Report on conflict, security and development. However, while many areas for improvement have been identified – including the need for greater context specificity, conflict sensitivity, coordination and coherence – for the most part, these issues continue to be spoken about in the abstract and focused at the policy level. This does not equate to changed behaviour and practices in the field. Furthermore, specific interpretations and concerns about what these issues mean for practice

vary considerably within institutional headquarters, between the field and headquarters, as well as between different international institutions.

This study focuses on how two major international institutions – the World Bank and the UN – have sought to support peacebuilding, by examining their engagement in three fragile and conflict-affected countries: Burundi, Liberia and Nepal[1]. International Alert's understanding of peacebuilding is broadly defined as building the capacity within society to manage conflicts non-violently, while making equitable and sustainable development progress. In other words, our approach is based on the commonly held idea of building "positive peace", rather than just the absence of violence.

There are no easy answers to these complex issues, but in this study Alert has sought to understand systemic obstacles to, and possibilities for, UN and World Bank institutions to better enable and support peacebuilding. By presenting examples where the current system is robust in responding to peacebuilding needs, as well as areas that can be reinforced and strengthened, we propose priorities for changes in how institutions function and deliver programmes. The changes proposed are pragmatic in their aspirations – they are rooted in an examination of international engagement in target countries through the lens of the country context and inclusive of a broad spectrum of local civil society perspectives. Nonetheless, the proposed changes remain cognisant of dynamics within international institutions and the difficulties they face in translating commitments and strategies into effective operations on the ground.

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1   The study is the result of desk research and interviews that took place in all three countries, with officials from the UN and the World Bank, governments and civil society. Interviews were also held at UN and World Bank headquarters. Outcomes were further informed by consultation workshops held with key stakeholders in Bujumbura, Kathmandu and Monrovia, to discuss initial findings. The methodology employed means that this is not an evaluation of peacebuilding, but rather a perceptions-based study of institutional behaviour in-country.

Three Key Issues

Three key issues emerged from our research. These issues also form a framework for our emerging recommendations.

(1) Engage strategically

Peacebuilding, statebuilding and development in fragile and conflict-affected countries are deeply political. Yet, in Burundi, Liberia and Nepal, the World Bank and the UN work first and foremost with central government. Depending on how this primary relationship is managed, it can crowd out parliament, local government and other voices as national priorities are being negotiated and agreed upon. As a result, critical and complex peacebuilding issues, such as reconciliation and land conflict, tend to fall off the agenda. Simultaneously, the opportunity to support the development of a culture of inclusion, participation, transparency and accountability between central government and citizens – crucial to long-term peace and stability – is lost.

(2) Operate responsively

In Burundi, Liberia and Nepal, multiple internationally supported plans set out competing sets of priorities often focused either on peacebuilding *or* development. A lack of coherence between plans makes it difficult for both government and international institutions to play their respective roles to the greatest effect and indicates a lack of rootedness in the local context. The opportunity for plans and programmes to produce impacts that are more than the sum of their parts is lost. This is compounded by the lack of a widely-employed conceptual understanding of long-term peacebuilding within international institutions – the will to interlink initiatives around a long-term vision for peace and development is stymied.

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Another challenge facing international institutions is the pressure to show quick results. Quick impact initiatives are a useful step in building confidence and providing some sort of peace dividend. However, there is a tendency for multilaterals to begin implementing projects without comprehensive analysis and planning. This works against their ability to set the basis for long-term interventions, and take up important opportunities for inclusive dialogue and planning. At the same time, it diverts attention away from confronting more challenging and critical peacebuilding priorities.

3 Structure flexibly

Nevertheless, responsible and innovative leadership within the country teams of the World Bank and the UN can transform how they engage on the ground, even while institution-wide institutional reforms are taking place – a process that will inevitably take time. Indeed, forward-thinking initiatives can provide examples for and inspiration to the larger reform process. Thoughtful approaches are being piloted in some countries – for example, to strengthen responsiveness to local context or institutional coordination – and there is much that can be learned within and between institutions. However, multilaterals do not currently dedicate sufficient core human and financial resources either to developing and piloting new ways of working in fragile and conflict-affected countries, or to systems for communicating and promoting knowledge exchange of both successes and failures. Staff do not necessarily have the competencies or incentive structures to prioritise working differently in these contexts. This limits the contribution that international institutions can make to sustainable peace.

Summary of Research Findings: Five Trends

A Governance: Legitimacy beyond central government

A characteristic of a peaceful state is that their leadership's legitimacy is derived not only from formal processes such as elections, but also from formal and informal institutions that facilitate citizen-state relations, national unity and popular ownership of political processes and public goods. Yet currently, international institutions focus too narrowly on the formal institutions of central government. As the World Bank's primary client is the government, active engagement of the wider population in the planning, delivery and evaluation of aid depends on local dynamics. Such dynamics include that government's attitude to inclusion, the quality of state decentralisation and the strength of the civic sector in advocating or organising for change. Where these local dynamics are weak, achieving accountability and legitimacy is impeded. The UN, while having the scope to deal more directly with civil society, has tended to opt for symbolic engagements – engaging only a select group of preferred civil society stakeholders, or involving civil society so late in a process that they are reduced to rubber-stamping pre-negotiated plans or acting as service delivery agents for pre-agreed initiatives, as opposed to being active participants in their country's recovery. The exclusion of the multiple and diverse voices that make up society can reinforce inequalities and injustices, which in fragile and conflict-affected countries can fuel or re-ignite violent conflict. International institutions risk doing more harm than good. They also miss the opportunity to contribute to building the foundations of a stable and peaceful state.

In Burundi, the World Bank's role has been restricted by its primary partnership with the government, which at times has a hostile relationship with the political opposition, parts of the civic sector and international community. In this context, the Bank was unable to ensure civic sector engagement in the development of the second Poverty Reduction

Strategy Paper (PRSP). It was only as a result of a dialogue between the UN, civil society and government that civil society groups were able to secure government commitment to their participation in the process. In a case such as this, the Bank is placed in an awkward position – it risks relying too much on a country's leadership rather than its people for the legitimacy of its engagement and for development results.

In Liberia, the impetus for strengthening the citizen-state relationship comes from the government, which recently established a Memorandum of Understanding to guide and systematise relations with civil society. Despite these efforts at greater inclusivity, the UN has been slow to follow suit. It was only after local civil society organisations requested participation in the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) planning processes, and through an elected rather than a selected representative, that they were included as active participants. Unfortunately, by the time they became involved, the plan had already been set and it was too late to incorporate their inputs.

B Context: More than the starting point

The prioritisation of local peacebuilding needs by international institutions is influenced by wider factors than the context alone. Indeed, external factors often seem to dominate their choices. They tend to over-simplify complex realities and think of a linear transition from "post-conflict" to "peacebuilding" to "development". This can result in pressure to make rapid and visible progress along this imaginary continuum, leading to some key issues dropping off the agenda too soon. In addition, institutions fall into the trap of framing the context in a way which suggests the kinds of programmes that they know how to do and have done before, rather than responding to the demands of the context itself. Moreover, institutional tools and methodologies for context analysis, programme design and monitoring are often insufficiently flexible for fast-changing, complex and fragile environments.

In Burundi, the idea of this linear progression was used to justify the refocus of national and international efforts and resources from peacebuilding to economic development. The language of peacebuilding has been dropped and senior officials in the UN speak of Burundi opening a new chapter in which economic growth takes "centre stage". Yet, the local context indicates a continued need for peacebuilding: security threats still plague the country and the political opposition and civil society live in fear of violent retaliation should they challenge government behaviour. Furthermore, underlying causes of conflict remain unaddressed: local actors identified land tenure as a critical peacebuilding issue, yet UN staff admitted that this issue was downgraded in their analysis and official strategy because of their inability to address the challenge in any substantial way. The UN would be well placed to provide support; however, since it does not, attention to this issue is lacking.

In Nepal, the World Bank introduced a Peace Filter – a programming tool which supports more conflict-sensitive programming. The development of tools such as these, which guide institutions to adjust operations and remain flexible and responsive to context, is particularly important. They help to ensure that despite complicated political situations, peacebuilding issues continue to be highlighted, taken account of and, where possible, addressed.

C Mandates: Scope for responsiveness

Mandates, both specific mission mandates and broader institutional ones, are easy targets when missions or country offices do not produce desired results thoroughly or quickly enough. In some cases, the mandate does obstruct effective engagement with the context: the World Bank's Articles of Agreement bind it to decision making based solely on economic, not political, considerations. However, politics and economics are deeply interlinked, and *inaction* is rarely a neutral position, particularly in fragile environments. Equally, however, obstacles to institutional performance can also relate to the interpretation or implementation of a mandate rather than the mandate itself, or the quality of institutional relationships

with key stakeholders involved in implementing the mandate, such as government. Complex contexts and often considerable mandate-based restrictions on engagement while they are challenging, do not preclude responsiveness to peacebuilding needs and context-specific action.

In Nepal, the UN recently spearheaded the development of a Peace and Development Strategy to guide international priorities based on the issues originally highlighted in the peace agreement. The World Bank was not an official signatory to the strategy, deeming some of the content too politically sensitive. Nevertheless, it was closely involved with the process as an observer, indicating its ability to *think* politically and be involved in important processes, even if it is unable to *act* politically.

In Burundi, the UN political mission's mandate stated it was to fulfil a 'robust political role'. Yet, it was given very little scope for this type of involvement. In the end, the government asked the head of mission to leave because in attempting to fulfil this mandated responsibility, he was considered to be too sympathetic to the political opposition. The key stakeholder relationship with the government rather than the mandate obstructed productive engagement.

D Comparative advantage: Harnessing complementarity

Greater cooperation between the World Bank and the UN has long been a priority for those concerned with achieving aid efficiency and peacebuilding impacts. At headquarters, both institutions demonstrate a degree of commitment to better coordination, but in the field coherence is still a challenge. They still tend to adopt institution-specific strategic priorities shaped by institution-specific context analyses. There is little commitment to mobilising and harnessing comparative advantage based on institutional strengths and a shared strategic view of country needs.

In Nepal, the development of the Peace and Development Strategy was a collaborative effort, led by the UN, but involving many bilateral and multilateral institutions. It outlined a set of strategic priorities based on needs articulated in the peace agreement itself. Despite agreement on the need for a common strategy, respondents from the international community active in Nepal indicated that their institutions would be unlikely to use the document substantively and relinquish control over their own strategies, priority setting and budget cycles.

In contrast, in Liberia – which has a less complex donor environment than Nepal but which also struggles with less government capacity – the government is leading the development of an aid management system designed to ensure coherence. A committee will vet all projects (multilateral, bilateral and international NGO) being started in the country on the basis of their relevance to the national development strategy. This process will be challenging to implement, but the aspiration is that aid will be better targeted towards more locally-owned priorities and that the comparative advantage of international institutions can be better harnessed for the right peacebuilding impacts.

E Operationalising commitments: Flexibility where it is needed

The translation of policy into practice is a constant challenge. But innovative and dynamic leadership of institutions in the field, where the local context allows for it, has a decisive impact on their capacity to contribute to the achievement of peacebuilding results. However, there is limited systemic support within the World Bank for this type of leadership and for innovative initiatives designed to strengthen the Bank's impact in complex and fragile environments. Narrowly-defined job responsibilities and internal time management systems – which do not explicitly allot time for peace and conflict work or activities such as interagency coordination – were frequently cited by staff as restrictive. Moreover, funding for governance work or peacebuilding-related initiatives frequently comes from specially targeted donor trust funds rather than core Bank budgets. For both the UN and the World Bank, a dependence on external, and sometimes short-term, consultants

to undertake peacebuilding work and analysis can limit how insights and learning are internalised into institutional thinking and practice. Consultants are useful, but effective systems and structures need to be in place to ensure that learning is integrated and promoted to improve overall institutional performance. Lastly, the pressure to deliver fast and visible impacts produces considerable difficulties for sustainability. Local systems destroyed and fragmented by years of conflict are ill-equipped to pick up and meet the recurrent demands of high-performing programme interventions. At the same time, programme choices are being influenced by the global pressure to produce quick and tangible results, which often do not match the complex reality of needs in fragile environments.

The World Bank in **Nepal** stood out during this study for leading the way in terms of innovating – from staffing composition (including a governance advisor focused on political economy and a Peace Team examining methodologies for conflict-sensitive programming), to piloting new programming tools (Peace Filter), to supporting programmes that contribute to peacebuilding (Emergency Peace Support Project). The Country Director plays a decisive role in enabling the office to engage with the needs of the local context.

In **Liberia**, UN staff described the double-edged sword of their engagement: if they do less, they are criticised for not having enough impact in the short term; whereas if they do more now, the country systems will struggle to sustain activities on their departure, bringing to the fore issues of capacity in national institutions. The UN staff are also afflicted by the oft-cited issue of short project and funding cycles that mitigate against the long-term thinking and planning needed for sustainable results and that make objectives difficult to achieve in the allotted time. For example, in a project for young ex-combatants, after the preliminary preparation period, only six months remained for rehabilitation and training in a new skill. This severely limited the impact that training had and many youths did not end up pursuing their chosen profession.

Three Emerging Recommendations

① Engage strategically: Recognise and respond to the political nature of peacebuilding and development from the outset

International institutions must equip themselves to respond better to the complex tensions that arise in fragile and conflict-affected environments between multiple political demands so that they can: work in partnership with governments and elites which may only have partial political legitimacy; respond to their Member States (in the case of multilaterals) and to international power dynamics; support actions that improve stability and security; and proactively foster the emergence of a relationship between citizen and state that is characterised by responsibility and responsiveness. The last of these political expectations is too frequently given the least attention.

1.1 Build strategic relationships: International institutions need to build relationships with all those who have a stake in peacebuilding, including spoilers, but especially those who have the potential to broker an improved citizen-state relationship. Crucially, they need to balance sustained support for central government capacity transformation with comparable support for parliament, local government, media and civil society.

1.2 Communicate the approach: International institutions need effective communication strategies to accompany their peacebuilding efforts, manage expectations, and forestall the deterioration of the early optimism which frequently accompanies the election of a new government and the arrival of international assistance. In part, this communication will need to be quite surgical: identifying key groups, even individuals, and targeting them with information specific to their potential role in peacebuilding.

1.3 Start with the positive: Bolstering the citizen-state relationship is always likely to be politically sensitive. Therefore, a tactical approach is needed, based on identifying opportunities to build trust and cooperation,

rather than confrontation. For example, in the first instance, international institutions can encourage open and inclusive joint visioning, prioritisation and planning exercises between civil society and government, instead of pushing "watchdog" activities that have a focus on anti-corruption and accountability. While the latter are important, they are more likely to be successful in an environment where mutual trust and cooperation have been established first.

1.4 Harness comparative advantage and invest in institutional cooperation:
The comparative advantage of UN entities with a political mandate and the World Bank with substantial economic resources – and both as providers of different types of technical expertise – must be harnessed within a holistic approach to peacebuilding. Where political environments are particularly volatile, deeper cooperation between international institutions with different mandates, especially those that are explicitly mandated to negotiate political stakeholders, can improve individual and collective institutional effectiveness. Currently, headquarters-level cooperation is not matched by efforts to increase coherence in the field.

② Operate responsively: Agree strategic priorities that reflect the local context and a locally-specific approach to peacebuilding

Multilaterals and their bilateral donors must reflect on and adapt the financing arrangements of aid modalities to ensure that these do not contribute to the disconnect between institutional plans and local peacebuilding needs and opportunities. Project financing arrangements and narrow results agendas, among other external factors, can have a detrimental effect on the degree to which local context and local voices shape and drive the direction of international support for peacebuilding.

2.1 One country, one set of priorities: Too many national strategic processes and plans compete for people's attention and time. This can lead to confusion over priorities, incoherence, inefficiencies, omissions and a lack of local ownership. While it is normal for different agencies, government and civil society to have their own plans, it should be possible to do a better

job of developing comprehensive and widely-owned guiding peacebuilding and development priorities. International institutions should take the lead in facilitating inclusive processes to develop and regularly update these peacebuilding and development priorities.

2.2 Use dialogue to explore different perspectives and get planning right:
Complex local dynamics need complex and dynamic responses. These are best explored through genuine, inclusive and time-consuming dialogue rather than technocratic approaches. Processes must be designed to capture a multiplicity of diverse views – there will not be one "people's voice" – and these processes must allow for the negotiation of difficult compromises. While challenging, such processes increase local ownership over priorities and decisions. At the same time, they build understanding of peacebuilding complexities and the potential for incremental progress.

2.3 Plan for long-term engagement and an incremental approach to transformation from fragility to resilience: Pressure to deliver results in the short term reinforces a focus on quick-win initiatives. However, such initiatives need to be delivered with adequate lead-in times, project cycles and exit strategies that provide the bedrock for clearly phased frameworks of transformation. These should include short, medium and longer-term goals that tackle the most challenging, often omitted, peacebuilding priorities, such as reconciliation and land tenure. There should be benchmarks for each of the goals that recognise that results will not always be quantifiable. Projects and programmes should not create parallel structures to national government and, where possible, should not stop abruptly. Instead, they should wind down gradually to allow for a thorough handover and maximum local capacity-building.

③ Structure flexibly: Enable responsible and innovative leadership within institutions

Innovative leadership in-country coupled with predictable strategic funding can transform how international institutions engage with the local context and deliver peacebuilding dividends on a day-to-day basis. Nevertheless, the lack

of institutional support for innovation in responding to the demands and opportunities presented by fragile and conflict-affected countries remains a serious constraint on leadership initiative.

3.1 Institutionalise predictable and substantial funding streams to support the strengthening of citizen-state relations: Innovative in-country leaders (in government, civil society or international institutions) recognise the need to strengthen the citizen-state contract alongside strengthening the institutions of state. However, they struggle to find funds for this work. Short-term, ad hoc, stop-gap funds can be found by a determined leadership and have been used. However, institutionalised, predictable and substantial financial support is badly needed.

3.2 Institutionalise emerging expertise: Peacebuilding initiatives often happen alongside the core technical/sectoral work of international institutions. As a result, they often depend on consultants rather than core staff to perform key peacebuilding-orientated roles (context analysis, social development, governance and political economy). This reflects an undervaluing of the critical difference these disciplines make to institutional effectiveness in fragile and conflict-affected countries. International organisations need to review their approach to staffing and ensure that they have sufficient expertise on hand – at every level. They also need strong mechanisms for capturing emerging expertise and learning for exchange between staff on rotations and consultants.

3.3 Develop and incentivise appropriate performance indicators for staff: A culture of working differently in these countries needs to be encouraged and instilled among the staff of international institutions. Staff – from director to working-level staff – need to be accountable for and empowered to do all that is needed to contribute effectively to peacebuilding. This means, for example: strengthening competencies, and adjusting recruitment patterns and performance indicators; allowing more time to be spent on developing relationships and networks, both local and with the rest of the international community engaged in-country; being willing to defend changes in approach when required by the context; and allowing for more variance regarding staff disciplines and perspectives.