Reflections and Recommendations for the UN Secretary-General’s Report on Peacebuilding in the Aftermath of Conflict

July 2012

Conciliation Resources welcomes the development of the Secretary-General’s Report on Peacebuilding in the Aftermath of Conflict. This is an opportunity to draw together learning from UN, as well as practitioner and civil society, experiences to date, and to set a forward looking agenda for the longer-term transformation of armed conflict and peacebuilding. Our feedback is based on Conciliation Resources’ peacebuilding work in eight conflict contexts, and our Accord publication series, which seeks to inform and strengthen peace processes by documenting and analysing practical lessons and innovations of peacebuilding.

1) Key challenges for peacebuilding

Cross-border challenges
Conflicts rarely remain within states. They cross borders. They are dynamic and incorporate regional and international challenges such as, refugee flows, ‘nomadic’ armed groups like the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), criminal networks, illicit trade in blood diamonds or small arms, or cross-border political, economic and social ties. An exclusive emphasis on bilateral relations and statebuilding response strategies risks incorrect analysis and inflexible engagement, missing important entry points and opportunities for peacebuilding.

The UN could develop conflict system strategies in addition to country strategies, enabling systematic engagement that can respond to shifting dynamics, across national borders where necessary. Flexible architecture that focuses on issues and problems rather than countries could be used to support more adaptable regional and cross-border responses. A good example of this is the role played by the UN expert panel in investigating arms transfers into Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) from Rwanda in late 2008.

The UN has been investing in regional offices such as the UN Office for West Africa (UNOWA). Whilst this has been a welcome and effective initiative, UN country missions also need to develop coherent cross-mission, cross-country approaches to common challenges facing states and tackle triggers of violence that do not respect borders.

Similarly, the Peacebuilding Commission could adopt a cross-regional approach to its engagement with the countries on its agenda. The UN Peacebuilding Fund for example could be used to incentivise this focus on problems rather than countries.

A regional approach does not need to be solely preventative, however: regional forums and commissions focusing on issues such as youth and resource exploitation can foster dialogue and trust between countries, and create vital linkages between communities and government. In order for the UN to effectively support such regional initiatives, enhanced coordination and collaboration between UN country missions across regions should be developed.

Regional organisations as the response?
Regional organisations can be essential peacebuilding partners. They can often help overcome obstacles created by an emphasis on state sovereignty, and help readdress power asymmetries, through creating the political space for dialogue or collaborative action. But regional organisations do not provide ‘off the peg’ solutions. They can lack capacity and can be highly politicised. For example, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in eastern Africa successfully facilitated the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Sudan but has been ineffectual in the Ethiopian–Eritrean conflict. The UN can help regional organisations move beyond security responses, enhance their ability to address underlying grievances and conflict drivers and encourage them to engage more with regional civil society.

2 For more on this see article on ‘Congo, Rwanda and the National Congress for the Defence of the People’ in Accord 22, *Paix sans frontières: building peace across borders*, 2011
The UN could also look beyond state-based regional architecture. Community actors often have a far better understanding of cross-border conflict dynamics and the possible peacebuilding priorities and solutions. Conciliation Resources has supported a number of innovative cross-border community coalitions, including the regional Civil Society Task Force (CSTF), which is helping join up local communities in countries affected by the Lord’s Resistance Army (Uganda, South Sudan, DRC and Central African Republic (CAR)). It brings together community, religious and traditional leaders to share experiences, discuss common challenges and agree on joint action plans.

**Peacebuilding needs to remain a priority even in apparently ‘post-conflict’ societies.** There is a danger that peacebuilding priorities and actors will be sidelined as talk turns to development and economic growth, for example UNMIL reviewing its role in Liberia, and talk of Sierra Leone ‘graduating’ from the UN Peacebuilding Commission. Our current Accord publication on Lebanon examines how peacebuilding and conflict prevention have been de-prioritised in Lebanon, increasing that country’s vulnerability to conflict.3

Peacebuilding support must remain a central tenet of UN engagement in areas where ongoing weaknesses in governance, justice and security, and reconciliation still threaten peace and stability, and issues such as youth disenfranchisement, election violence, and cross-border challenges such as drug trafficking and organised crime, may provide new triggers for violence.

**Prevention is also part of the cure.** Although a country may be termed ‘post-conflict’, resilience to continued and new outbreaks of violence may be low, and conflict prevention strategies should be developed alongside peacebuilding ones. The Department of Political Affairs and UN Development Programme have developed and coordinated conflict prevention strategies, and UN early warning systems on emerging crises have improved. But these systems also need to better understand and anticipate triggers of renewed violence, and be better integrated into peacebuilding activities.

2) **Inclusivity can strengthen peacebuilding processes and outcomes**

We welcome the recent UN focus on inclusive peacebuilding approaches, and feel that civil society experience could provide a key learning opportunity for the UN.

**From the start: inclusivity in peace processes**

The people living in the midst of conflict often have the greatest insight into its causes and also its resolution. One way to deal with the challenges of elite-level peace agreements that are vulnerable to collapse is to ensure that peace negotiations are more inclusive. Comparative experience (from Guatemala, Angola, Indonesia, Mozambique and Northern Ireland4) shows that peace negotiations with structured opportunities for broader public participation can:

- widen the range of issues addressed, including the underlying causes of conflict
- help produce broad, legitimate peace agreements
- strengthen inclusive political participation in future governance
- facilitate a degree of political reconciliation.

We welcome UN work to develop guidelines on mediation and that the process of doing so has involved consultation with civil society organisations engaged in peace processes and mediation support. At Conciliation Resources, as a member of the International Contact Group (ICG), we provide mediation support to the Malaysian facilitator of the peace talks between the Government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). The ICG is the only Contact Group to have international NGOs working alongside diplomats as part of a formal peace-support structure. As a member of this, we have suggested ways forward at moments of deadlock in the peace talks, and we ensure the inclusion of the voices of civil society in the process.

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3 See Accord 24, *Reconciliation, reform and resilience: positive peace for Lebanon*, 2012

Inclusivity in peacebuilding: participatory conflict analysis

The effectiveness of peacebuilding interventions could be greatly improved if conflict analysis and peacebuilding priorities were based on an informed understanding of the local context. National and international efforts to prevent and resolve violent conflict and support post-conflict recovery are often poorly informed by the views and experiences of people directly affected by violence and instability.

However, in many situations local civil society actors lack the capacity, skills, confidence and access to undertake systematic context analysis and to transmit these to complex international organisations. These organisations in turn lack opportunities for direct contact with the communities their interventions are designed to help.

Conciliation Resources, in collaboration with Saferworld, developed the People’s Peacemaking Perspectives project, through which the perspectives of communities affected by conflict and instability are being shared with a wide range of international and national decision-makers. The ideas and recommendations are based on evidence and experience gathered from local people who have limited opportunity to make their voice heard. The project has led us to several key conclusions and findings, outlined in a report on the project, including the importance of conflict analysis that ”focus[es] on [peacebuilding] responses in order for analysis to inform conflict prevention and peacebuilding”.

The UN could find more meaningful ways of consulting and engaging with a broader set of civil society actors. At present civil society is encouraged to attend Peacebuilding Commission meetings and may informally contribute, but more active and direct support of civil society capacity and opportunities for engagement is needed to overcome the challenges that more marginalised civil society face.

The following examples demonstrate the potential for supporting and engaging platforms of inclusion:

**Talking borders**

In West Africa Conciliation Resources developed a docudrama called Talking Borders which gives a voice to marginalised border communities in the border areas of Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea allowing them to convey their security concerns to policymakers in Freetown and Monrovia. Women make up 90 per cent of small-scale traders in cross-border communities, with involvement in trade presenting great opportunities for economic empowerment but also serious threats to their security.

Talking Borders has been screened at a workshop of national security agents in Sierra Leone, and issues raised from community screenings were also presented to policy-level actors at a meeting in Freetown in late 2011. The docudrama has also sparked the interest of the region’s parliamentarians and has led to a fact-finding process to explore how they can contribute to better cross-border relations.

**The regional Civil Society Task Force (CSTF) in LRA affected communities**

As a result of the contacts, shared analysis, skills and confidence established through the regional CSTF, members communicate regularly on LRA activities and formulate action points.

In December 2011, partners in DRC received information from their colleagues in CAR of the southward movement of the LRA towards DRC. This information was then sent on by radio, messengers, through the market and religious networks. In a short period of time, communities along the main axis of Haut Uele were informed and advised on how to reduce potential vulnerability. They also held meetings with MONUSCO to inform them about the potential threat posed by the southward movement of the LRA. MONUSCO responded by increasing patrols especially in towns.

This efficient, coordinated, low cost and locally owned mechanism reduced the vulnerability of communities by informing them and advising them on roads and axes to avoid during Christmas.

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5 See *From conflict analysis to peacebuilding impact: Lessons from the Peacemaking Perspectives Project*, March 2012
Coherence

Inclusivity in peace processes also means engaging with and including armed groups involved in the conflict. If you don’t talk to those using violence, how can you end or prevent that violence? But proscription – the act of putting an armed group on a list of designated terrorist organisations – can have the unintended consequence of inhibiting engagement in mediation and peace processes.

The UN system has started to acknowledge this, evidenced, for example, by the recent splitting of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda lists in an attempt to create more space for dialogue in Afghanistan. However, the situations in Somalia, the Middle East and elsewhere illustrate how formal and informal limitations and pressure points restrict the space for the UN and other actors, including civil society, to engage with proscribed groups.

Ownership

Inclusivity also means deepening and broadening ownership of key debates and processes. Conciliation Resources welcomes the UN’s recent focus on deepening ownership beyond simply ‘national’ lines towards more inclusive definitions.

In this context, the New Deal for engagement in fragile states should be welcomed. In its implementation, the UN has so far focused on its ongoing programmes covering political governance, justice and security in the seven pilot countries. But, the New Deal between donors and recipients can only work if it is also based on a ‘new deal’ between authorities and local populations living in conflict-affected and fragile situations.

A key principle in the vision of the New Deal is that constructive state–society relations are at the heart of successful peacebuilding and statebuilding. And, although the New Deal recognises the role of women, youth and marginalised groups as key actors for peace, most of these people remain unaware of the New Deal. In order to be able to hold their governments and international actors to account, people need to know what to measure them against and be able to judge whether these commitments are really going to add up to more peace and development on the ground.

3) Institution building in order to sustainably consolidate peace

Institution building should include reform of state–society relationships

Whilst institutional capacity and democratic elections are important, their strength and durability is linked to public trust of them. It is also important to work ‘upstream’ to strengthen state–society relations to build equitable, inclusive political settlements and good governance so that grievances are minimised or addressed.

In Liberia election processes in fact aggravated political exclusion for certain groups, for example the Mindango ethnic group. Levels and layers of exclusion should be identified, and peacebuilding should encourage engagement with, and participation of, marginalised and periphery groups and communities, for example youth and border communities. In West Africa accountability initiatives to educate people about their civil rights and facilitate exchanges between communities and local government representatives have provided a way to bridge the state–society gap. Supporting civil society can be an important way of providing increased channels for claiming accountability, transparency, respect for human rights and the rule of law.

Invest in locally based conflict prevention and resolution capacities

Good analysis and information is of limited value if the appropriate local institutions are not in place with mediation capabilities and legitimacy to respond in a timely manner. Support to conflict prevention should include building local and national capacities to manage and resolve conflict.

The UN needs to continue to build these capacities within state and regional institutions. In fragile contexts where formal institutions may lack legitimacy or capacity, there is a need to support non-state initiatives and institutions, for example local NGOs and unofficial dispute resolution initiatives.

6 People’s Peacemaking Perspectives: Liberia and Sierra Leone, November 2011
The following examples reflect on Conciliation Resources’ support of informal institutions, and possible priorities and opportunities for UN peacebuilding:

**Building resilience across conflict divides**
At Conciliation Resources, we have been working to support civil society engagement on both sides of the Georgian–Abkhaz conflict. When violent hostilities resumed in August 2008, these activities helped contain the violence by sustaining engagement across conflict divides. This was only possible because we had invested in a solid and relatively autonomous web of civil society actors across Georgia and Abkhazia prior to the new crisis. This contributed to a context in Abkhazia in 2008 that was much less vulnerable to escalation than that in South Ossetia, where there was no analogous level of long-term international engagement. Flexible and long-term funding, which has not been tied to specific short-term outcomes, was key to achieving this.

**Trading for peace in Kashmir**
Trade across the Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir was resumed in 2008 to develop economic linkages and build confidence between conflicting parties. Cross-LoC trade has helped to soften the border and is helping Kashmiris to re-establish links between divided families, trading communities and civil societies. A significant development has been the formation of the Federation of Jammu and Kashmir Joint Chamber of Commerce, the first official cross-LoC institution, which connects Kashmiri civil society and traders to governmental apparatuses on both sides of the line. To realise the peacebuilding potential of intra-Kashmir trade, peacebuilding objectives need to be prioritised and clearly articulated. The Joint Chamber provides a mechanism to develop and cohere the economic and peacebuilding functions of the trade initiative: to build grassroots pressure for normalising relationships across the LoC; to support sustained economic interdependence; to develop collective Kashmiri strategies and capacity; and to mainstream peacebuilding objectives.