Clarity, Coherence and Context

Three Priorities for Sustainable Peacebuilding

Cedric de Coning
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Preface – From the Project Director

At the 2005 World Summit in New York City, member states of the United Nations agreed to create “a dedicated institutional mechanism to address the special needs of countries emerging from conflict towards recovery, reintegration and reconstruction and to assist them in laying the foundation for sustainable development”. That new mechanism was the UN Peacebuilding Commission and two associated bodies: a Peacebuilding Support Office and a Peacebuilding Fund. Together, these new entities have been characterized as the UN’s new peacebuilding architecture, or PBA.

This Working Paper is one of nine essays that examine the possible future role of the UN’s peacebuilding architecture. They were written as part of a project co-organized by the Centre for International Policy Studies at the University of Ottawa and the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs. All of the contributors to the project were asked to identify realistic but ambitious “stretch targets” for the Peacebuilding Commission and its associated bodies over the next five to ten years. The resulting Working Papers, including this one, seek to stimulate fresh thinking about the UN’s role in peacebuilding.

The moment is ripe for such rethinking: During 2010, the UN will review the performance of the PBA to date, including the question of whether it has achieved its mandated objectives. Most of the contributors to this project believe that the PBA should pursue a more ambitious agenda over the next five years. While the PBC and its associated bodies have succeeded in carving out a niche for themselves, that niche remains a small one. Yet the need for more focused international attention, expertise, and coordinated and sustained assistance towards war-torn countries is undiminished. It remains to be seen whether UN officials and the organization’s member states will rise to the challenge of delivering on the PBA’s initial promise over the next five years and beyond, but doing so will at least require a vision of what the PBA can potentially accomplish in this period. The Working Papers produced in this project are intended to provide grist for this visioning effort.

Roland Paris
Ottawa, January 2010
Summary

This paper will focus on three challenges that should inform the 2010 Review of the UN Peacebuilding Commission, namely: (1) developing the UN peacebuilding concept and operational model; (2) significantly stepping-up efforts to improve system-wide coherence; and (3) seriously implementing the principle of local ownership.

- There is a need to revisit and clarify exactly what it is the UN understands with the peacebuilding concept, and the Peacebuilding Commission is ideally suited to be the forum where such a debate should take place.

- Our peacebuilding efforts are challenged by deep-rooted coherence dilemmas. Instead of glossing over these dilemmas, the Peacebuilding Commission should be a strategic marketplace where these dilemmas can be debated and managed.

- In order to improve the sustainability of peace operations the UN Peacebuilding Commission will need to focus on three critical areas, namely local ownership, local context and local capabilities. Peacebuilding that focus only on building the executive branch of the state is not a good recipe for a sustainable peace. Investment in the immediate aftermath of a conflict should be primarily focused on developing capacity so that societies are empowered to manage their own downstream development. Local social capital and inherent capacities should be identified, recognised and used as the basis for further development.

1. Introduction

The nexus between development, governance and security has become the central focus of the international effort to manage transitions, and peacebuilding is increasingly seen as the collective approach under which the dimensions of conflict management, security, humanitarian action, governance, rule of law, human rights and development can be brought together under one common framework. The international
debate about the need for, and appropriate role of, peacebuilding culminated, as the centrepiece of the UN reform proposals of the 2005 World Summit, in the establishment of the UN Peacebuilding Commission.

This paper is a modest attempt to take stock of what we know about peacebuilding in general, and the UN Peacebuilding Commission in particular. It aims to suggest how, in the context of the 2010 review process, the United Nations peacebuilding community can identify a few priority areas on which to focus.

This paper argues that our understanding of the peacebuilding concept is closely interlinked with our notion of sustainability. It will focus on three challenges that have the potential to significantly improve our peacebuilding practice. These three areas for review are:

1. Improving our understanding of the peacebuilding concept through encouraging formal and informal debate, and the institutionalisation of a specific peacebuilding model in the United Nations;
2. Significantly stepping up efforts to improve system-wide coherence, including our understanding of the limits of coherence; and
3. Meaningfully operationalising the principle of local ownership, including finding more creative ways to balance the need for predictable international models on the one hand, and local context on the other.

Taken together, these three challenges represent opportunities for policy action that have the potential to enhance our collective ability to facilitate more sustainable peacebuilding processes.


2. Peacebuilding and the Sustainability Dilemma

The emergence of peacebuilding should be understood in the context of an increasingly complex and interdependent international conflict management system.

Peacebuilding is increasingly seen as the collective approach under which the political, security, rule of law, governance, human rights and development dimensions of these international interventions can be brought together under one common strategic framework. Whilst there is no one common definition, approach or model for peacebuilding that has gained widespread acceptance, one can identify a number of common characteristics that have emerged over the last decade and a half of peacebuilding practice. The first is that peacebuilding is primarily concerned with securing or consolidating the peace. It is concerned with preventing a lapse, or relapse, into violent conflict. Peacebuilding is aimed at consolidating the peace by addressing those conflict factors that may, in the short and medium term, threaten a lapse, or relapse into conflict, as well as addressing the root causes of conflicts, that may threaten the peace over the long term. In Burundi, Liberia and Sierra Leone, for instance, such short-term conflict factors may include land and ownership disputes, youth unemployment, poor social services and impunity caused by weak social-justice systems, whilst the root causes are related to the structural inequalities inherent in society. There is thus a conflict prevention aspect that is central to our understanding of peacebuilding. However, people at all levels, including those intimately engaged with peacebuilding in the field on a daily basis, still find it difficult to make sense of the concept. On the one hand it is difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish from some aspects of peacekeeping in the immediate aftermath of conflict, and on the other it is difficult to distinguish from development.


The second is that peacebuilding is a multi-dimensional or system-wide undertaking that spans several dimensions. There are different models or approaches, but most range from differentiating between three core dimensions to the more elaborate that list six to eight different dimensions. The UN Secretary-General’s report *No Exit without Strategy* argues that peacebuilding should be understood as fostering the capacity to resolve future conflicts by: (1) consolidating security, (2) strengthening political institutions and (3) promoting economic and social reconstruction. Barnett et al. refer to the same three dimensions as: (1) stability creation, (2) restoration of state institutions and (3) socioeconomic recovery. The World Bank has summarised these three dimensions as (1) security, (2) governance and (3) development and its President has linked it, in the Afghanistan context, to the counterinsurgency principles of clear, hold and build. These are the same three dimensions that are reflected in the so-called 3D (diplomacy, development and defence) Whole-of-Government approach.

The UN’s Integrated Approach opts for a more elaborate list that includes: political, development, humanitarian, human rights, rule of law, social and security aspects. The UN’s *Report of the Secretary-General on Peacebuilding in the Immediate Aftermath of Conflict* lists five areas of action, namely: (1) basic safety and security, (2) political processes, (3) basic services, (4) core government services and (4) economic revitalisation. The African Union’s *Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development Framework* lists five areas, which it terms constitutive elements, but it also adds gender as a self-standing element. When comparing these it becomes clear that there is broad convergence around the core dimensions of peacebuilding and these are summarised here in Table 1.

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Table 1: The Dimensions of Peacebuilding

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<th>Security &amp; Rule of Law</th>
<th>Providing a Safe and Secure Environment</th>
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<td>Police, Corrections &amp; Judicial Reform (Rule of Law)</td>
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<th>Political &amp; Governance</th>
<th>Support the Peace Process &amp; Oversee the Political Transition</th>
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<td>Support the Peace Process &amp; Oversee the Political Transition</td>
<td>Political Participation, National Dialogue &amp; Reconciliation</td>
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<td>Political Participation, National Dialogue &amp; Reconciliation</td>
<td>Electoral Capacity Building and Oversight (Observation)</td>
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<td>Electoral Capacity Building and Oversight (Observation)</td>
<td>State and Government Institutions, Public Administration &amp; Civil Service Capacity Building (Governance)</td>
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<tr>
<td>State and Government Institutions, Public Administration &amp; Civil Service Capacity Building (Governance)</td>
<td>Extend State Authority throughout the Territory</td>
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<td>Extend State Authority throughout the Territory</td>
<td>Conflict Management Capacity</td>
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<th>Socio-economic Recovery</th>
<th>Physical Infrastructure: Roads, Ports, Airports, Electricity, Telecommunications</th>
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<td>Stimulating and Facilitating Economic Growth and Employment</td>
<td>Strengthening Civil Society</td>
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<th>Humanitarian Assistance</th>
<th>Emergency and Early Recovery Services in the Areas of Food, Water &amp; Sanitation, Shelter, Health, Protection and Returns of Refugees/IDPs</th>
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Humanitarian assistance should be highlighted as one function that is treated differently in the various models. There is widespread recognition that it is independent from the other functions in that it does not share peacebuilding’s essential conflict prevention objective. Some models, including the UN’s Integrated Approach, nevertheless include humanitarian assistance within peacebuilding as a function that takes place independently, but parallel to, the other peacebuilding dimensions. The UN approach argues that it needs to be included in the overall framework in order to be factored into planning and coordination mechanisms.

The third aspect relates to the tension that exists between independence and interdependence. The various peacebuilding actors exist as independent agents with their own mandates, programmes and resources, and yet they are also interdependent on each other to achieve their respective objectives, and that of the overall peacebuilding undertaking. Most peacebuilding-related programmes only make sense as part of a larger system of related programmes. Disarmament and demobilisation programmes, for instance, rely on the assumption that others will provide a series of reintegration programmes, and they all rely on the assumption that there are other programmes in place that will create security, improve opportunities for education and healthcare, and create employment for ex-combatants or alternative opportunities for sustainable livelihoods. Such a network of programmes exist both as independent programmes with their own sources of funding and separate implementing arrangements, and as a network of interdependent programmes whose combined output produces an outcome that their individual efforts could not have achieved independently. This duality between the independence and interdependence of the various programmes, agents and dimensions that constitute the peacebuilding system lies at the core of the coherence dilemma. This tension can not be resolved only managed on a case-by-case basis taking into account the local context, and pursuing coherence is thus about managing interdependences at a specific point in space and time.

Various models, such as: The Utstein Report (D. Smith, Towards a Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding: Getting Their Act Together, Overview Report of the Joint Utstein Study on Peacebuilding, Evaluation Report 1/2004 (Oslo: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2004), the UN’s Integrated Approach (Note of Guidance on Integrated Missions) and NEPAD’s Post-Conflict Reconstruction Policy Framework for Africa include humanitarian assistance. Many in the humanitarian community argue, however, that humanitarian assistance fall outside the scope of peacebuilding, and should not be included in peacebuilding models. See for instance E.A. Weir, Conflict and Compromise: UN Integrated Missions and the Humanitarian Imperative, Monograph No. 4, (Accra: KAIPTC, May 2006). The humanitarian dimension is included as part of the larger peacebuilding framework throughout this paper and in Table 1, as per the UN concept, with due regard for the principle of the independence of humanitarian action, as recognised in paragraph 10 of the Note of Guidance on Integrated Missions.

The fourth aspect relates to our perspective of time. It is now recognised that peacebuilding is a long-term process, and that a longer and more sustained international commitment is more necessary than was understood a decade ago. Failures to sustain the international engagement in countries like Haiti, Liberia and Sierra Leone were seen as an important factor in the relapse into violent conflict experienced in these cases. A causal link was thus made between sustained international attention and lasting peace processes. This longer-term timeframe for peacebuilding was agreed on at the World Summit in 2005 and resulted in the establishment of the UN Peacebuilding Commission, with the aim of ensuring that the international community in general, and the UN in particular, remains engaged in countries during the peacebuilding stage.

This was regarded as necessary because the UN Security Council’s attention tended to be focused on those crises where the UN has a direct stake, usually in the form of a UN peacekeeping operation. When such operations came to an end, the countries in question moved off the Security Council agenda. The UN Peacebuilding Commission now represents not only a specific focus on peacebuilding, but it also helps to keep countries where there no longer is a UN peacekeeping presence, but where the peace is still fragile and reversible, on the UN agenda.

After the first five years of the UN Peacebuilding Commission one can argue that this approach has had the desired effect in Burundi and Sierra Leone. Whilst both peace processes are still fragile, and thus not yet self-sustainable, the UN Peacebuilding Commission has been able to keep them on the agenda of the UN system. In so doing, the PBC has ensured that they have received more international and regional attention and focus than would otherwise have been the case, and this has contributed to preventing a relapse into conflict over this period.

There is also a recognition that although peacebuilding requires a long-term commitment, there is also a need for immediate and short-term gains to solidify the peace, build confidence in the peace process and stimulate a vision of a better future. This has resulted in practices such as the now standard inclusion of funds for quick impact pro-

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jects in UN peacekeeping budgets, and an acceptance that some aspects of Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR), Rule of Law (RoL) and Security Sector Reform (SSR) should be funded out of the assessed contributions to the UN peacekeeping operations budget. In fact, the Secretary-General’s report on peacebuilding in the immediate aftermath of conflict, of June 2009, focuses exclusively on this part of the peacebuilding agenda of the UN. More needs to be done to give meaning to the urgent need for short-term peace dividends, but the immediate aftermath of conflict has been the traditional area of focus of the UN Security Council, at least from a peace and security perspective. The Secretary-General’s report is thus a useful reminder of the importance of laying a firm foundation for sustainable peacebuilding, and not missing many opportunities in these early phases to capitalise on the goodwill and momentum of the peace process.

This section attempted to summarise some of the major developments in peacebuilding thinking over the last half decade. However, the number of peace processes that have relapsed into conflict, and the number of situations that are still highly fragile, remind us that there still are more questions than answers, and that we need to give urgent and focused attention to a number of critical aspects of international peacebuilding, if we want to improve the success rate, sustainability and overall impact of our peacebuilding efforts. In the next section we will focus on the first of the three areas this paper will address, namely the need to improve and expand our understanding of the UN approach to peacebuilding so that it can become a meaningful platform for sustained action.

3. The Need for a Conceptual and Operational UN Peacebuilding Model

The term peacebuilding was introduced in 1992 by then UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali in An Agenda for Peace, as: “action to identify and support structures which tend to strengthen and solidify peace to avoid a relapse into conflict”. Peacebuilding was explained as “the counterpart of preventive diplomacy”, where pre-
ventive diplomacy was seen as action aimed at avoiding a crisis whilst peacebuilding is aimed at preventing a recurrence. In the Agenda for Peace, conflict prevention and peacebuilding was thus juxtaposed at the opposite ends of the conflict management spectrum, with preventive diplomacy representing the first or opening stage of an intervention, and peacebuilding the last or closing stage.

According to this model, the UN response to conflict, in its simplest form, is first to prevent conflict (preventive diplomacy). If that fails, the next step is to make peace (peacemaking) by gathering all the parties around the negotiation table. If a cease-fire or an agreement is reached, the UN could deploy a peacekeeping mission to monitor the cease-fire and to otherwise assist with the implementation of the agreement. Lastly, the UN will assist to rebuild the country with a specific focus on addressing the root causes of the conflict so as to ensure that the conflict does not re-occur again (peacebuilding).

This original conceptualisation and chronological model have an enduring impact and many people at the policy, funding and operational level still have these original concepts in mind when working with conflict prevention and peacebuilding issues. In fact, the UN Secretariat has institutionalised the model, with separate departments for prevention and peacemaking, peacekeeping and, with the new Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), now also for peacebuilding. Bureaucratic dynamics among these units ensure that there is a healthy dose of competition for resources and influence among them, and although they cooperate in many meaningful ways, these tendencies also reinforce their different identities and thus the very notion that prevention, peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding are separate phases or facets of the peace process.

However, over the past decade and a half our understanding of the peace instruments highlighted in the Agenda for Peace has been refined through practice and analysis, and they are now broadly understood to be interdependent and interlinked aspects of the same process, rather than chronological steps or stages in a linear conflict management continuum. In this context there is a need to revisit and clarify exactly what it is that the various actors, and especially the United Nations, understand with the peacebuilding concept. This is not merely of academic interest. Conceptual confusion leads to policy vagueness, duplication, omission and competition. It complicates resource mobilisation and causes budgetary confusion, and at the operational level it contributes to inefficiency and ineffectiveness, and thus ultimately to loss of impact and sustainability.

\[22\] An Agenda for Peace, para. 57.
We should also not shy away from the fact that the way peacebuilding is understood is not only a technical debate, but also a political issue. The debate should thus not be confined to those professionally engaged in peacebuilding. It should first and foremost be actively pursued as an international diplomatic debate. When the peacebuilding concept was introduced in *An Agenda for Peace*, it reflected an optimism that existed in the immediate post-Cold War period for collective third party intervention. There was a sense in the period between the end of the Cold War and before 9/11, that collective third party peacebuilding could represent a new era of benevolent international intervention.

The sense of optimism has since evaporated and has been replaced by a largely divided perception of peacebuilding. Some in the North, for instance the G8+, view peacebuilding as a tool for managing failed or failing states, and assisting them with establishing the values and structures that typify liberal-market democracies, which those in the North view as synonymous with responsible and stable sovereignty. Some in the South, for instance those leading the Non-Aligned Movement and the G77, are sceptical and view peacebuilding as having the potential to harbour a new form of colonialism, which if unchecked, can result in the neo-imperialist and capitalist exploitation of vulnerable post-conflict societies. It is important not to shy away from this debate, but to create forums where those with opposing views can shape each other’s understanding of peacebuilding, and where the different schools of thought can develop a better understanding of the interests and issues that drive their respective approaches to peacebuilding.

The international community in general, and the UN in particular, will find it difficult to develop a coherent peacebuilding system in the context of a deeply divided international diplomatic community. At worse, the UN may find itself back in the Cold War context where contradictory interests and disagreement over the concept, content and process of peacebuilding, for instance among members of the UN Security Council and the Peacebuilding Commission, prevent the international community, and especially the UN, from taking coherent action.

The core of this debate should take place in the UN Peacebuilding Commission, but the Commission should also encourage and facilitate the debate in various regional forums, within the academic commu-
nity, among civil society and within the context of the national dialogues that should shape the future of countries emerging out of conflict. There seems to be a tendency to avoid these debates for fear of stimulating confrontation among UN Member States, but the reality is that the Member States are polarised on these issues into the broad North/G8+ vs. South/NAM/G77 groupings, and that without debate, they are trapped into these positions without having the opportunity to educate each other about the reasons why these groupings have such divergent views on these matters. It is understandable why the UN Peacebuilding Commission shied away from being the forum for this debate during the first five years of its existence, but there are several reasons why it should now take on this task as a central focus of its agenda and role.

Firstly, the current lack of a common understanding of what UN peacebuilding entails and how it should be pursued has been a major contributing factor to incoherent international and national action, and has ultimately contributed to a poor record of sustainability. Secondly, the UN Peacebuilding Commission is the only UN body focused solely on peacebuilding and there is thus no other body in the UN system where this debate should rather take place. Thirdly, the UN Peacebuilding Commission represents a neutral meeting ground between the interests and issues normally dealt with by the UN Security Council and ECOSOC, between North and South, and between the internal and external actors. This is one of the greatest comparative advantages of the Peacebuilding Commission and this unique position should be used to facilitate and encourage dialogue amongst these key stakeholders. And lastly, peacebuilding is not a static concept that can be defined by a committee, endorsed by an assembly and then operationalised. It needs to be continuously refined, improved and operationalised. In fact, as the work of the UN Peacebuilding Commission has shown to date, there is a degree to which peacebuilding will take on a unique meaning in every specific context that it is applied, and this duality and tension between what is common and what is context-specific, is partly what needs to be captured in our refined understanding of what peacebuilding is. The Commission is ideally placed to take on the task of developing and refining a conceptual and operational model of peacebuilding for the UN system, and this should be a responsibility that is central to its long-term work plan and identity.

The UN Policy Committee, in its May 2007 deliberations, approved a useful working definition of peacebuilding: “Peacebuilding involves a range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict, to strengthen national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and to lay the foundations for sustainable peace and development. Peacebuilding strategies must be coherent and tailored to
the specific needs of the country concerned, based on national ownership, and should comprise a carefully prioritised, sequenced, and therefore relatively narrow set of activities aimed at achieving the above objectives.26

In broad terms we can thus say that peacebuilding aims to consolidate and institutionalise peace by undertaking a range of actions that go beyond merely preventing violence (negative peace).27 It aims to address the underlying root causes of conflict and to create the conditions for a just social order (positive peace).28 However, this broad understanding of peacebuilding becomes confused when, in practice, we use the same peacebuilding concept in two very different operational models, namely targeted and systemic peacebuilding. Much of the conceptual confusion comes about when these two distinct operational models of peacebuilding are muddled together, and the UN Peacebuilding Commission is well placed to consider these two models and how they are interrelated. In fact, the Peacebuilding Commission itself struggled with these two concepts and found, for instance in Burundi, that its work at the level of the Integrated Peacebuilding Framework on the one hand, and at the level of the Peacebuilding Fund on the other, brought these two distinct, but interrelated approaches to peacebuilding in conflict with one another. The Peacebuilding Commission will thus have to resolve the tension between these two models, both within its own work, as well as in the guidance it generates for the UN system as a whole.

**Targeted Peacebuilding**

Targeted peacebuilding refers to activities aimed at addressing urgent or imminent risks to the peace process, and it usually takes the form of a specific time-bound programme aimed at addressing a particular need or risk. These can be identified as short- to medium-term conflict factors that may potentially impact negatively on the peace process, and that can be addressed through specific targeted programme responses. This is also referred to as preventative peacebuilding or instrumental peacebuilding in that it refers to programming that is meant to avoid a relapse into conflict. Some donors now have funds specifically earmarked for peacebuilding, and those funds would most likely be used to finance specific programmes in this category. The activities supported by the UN Peacebuilding Fund typically also fall in this category and are aimed at addressing specific peace consolidation

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needs that have either remained unfunded, or under-funded, or that have newly emerged.

The time frame for targeted peacebuilding is necessarily short- to medium-term, because it is focused on immediate or imminent threats to the peace process. Examples of targeted peacebuilding programmes include conflict resolution training and capacity building, the development of institutional capabilities needed for conflict prevention, such as the Peace Commission in Southern Sudan or the Ituri Pacification Commission, support for civil society or women’s groups to participate in peacemaking initiatives, and support for national reconciliation initiatives, including aspects of transitional justice. Some donors would also include support for specific programme activities that form part of, or support, Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR), Rule of Law (RoL) and Security Sector Reform (SSR) in this peacebuilding category. However, in Sierra Leone, Burundi and Liberia we have also noted that some of the activities earmarked in this category may appear to be very similar to traditional development categories, such as youth employment, infrastructure development and basic social services. This is because the frustrations with the lack of progress in these areas have become so critical in some of these communities that it has become a source of a potential relapse into violent conflict, and urgent action is required to show that some of these needs are being met.

Some donors do not earmark funds specifically for peacebuilding, but prefer to encourage a conflict-sensitive approach to development when working in conflict-affected countries. Conflict-sensitive development programmes have a developmental objective, for example, poverty reduction, but are sensitive to the conflict environment within which they operate, in that specific steps are taken in the design and management of the programme to avoid aggravating the situation. In some cases, the design of the programme can also be intended to proactively support conflict prevention efforts, and in the latter case such activities are almost indistinguishable from targeted peacebuilding.29

An important prerequisite for a targeted peacebuilding approach is an understanding of the risks to the peace process, and the conflict factors that characterise the conflict system. A Post-Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA) or another form of risk analysis should be undertaken as part of the process leading up to the design of appropriate targeted peacebuilding programmes. It is thus important to work towards a common understanding of what the conflict factors in a particular context are, from the earliest planning stages and continuously throughout

29 M.B. Anderson, _Do No Harm, How Aid can Support Peace or War_ (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 1999).
the life cycle of the peacebuilding system. Funding for, and capacity building towards, effective participation in a PCIA approach could also be regarded as a targeted peacebuilding activity. As with most of these processes the real value does not lie so much in the end-product, e.g. the PCIA report, but rather in the sustained focused interaction among stakeholders that was necessary to generate the product, because this process of interaction among stakeholders leads to an improved and nuanced understanding of each other, and the situation at hand, and that deeper level of insight will have numerous spin-offs far beyond just the PCIA report. A network is created in the process, and the members of the network can continue to work together, or in smaller hubs, to resolve or manage issues that may subsequently emerge.

**Systemic Peacebuilding**

Systemic peacebuilding, on the other hand, emerges out of the total combined effort of the activities undertaken under the various peacebuilding dimensions introduced earlier (see Table 1), and thus exists in the form of a system-wide or holistic process. This overall effort may sometimes be described as a strategy or vision, for example, in an integrated strategic framework such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) in Liberia or the Afghan Compact. There may be specific processes and structures that facilitate the development, management and monitoring of such peacebuilding frameworks and these may be purposely funded. In general, however, support for systemic peacebuilding occurs in a highly fragmented manner in that the various agencies that participate in, and contribute to, the overall process, each independently design, manage, monitor, evaluate and secure funding for their individual programmes. These activities are not necessarily identified as, or funded as, peacebuilding activities at the programme level, although some of the programmes discussed in the targeted peacebuilding section may be. Instead, they would be considered and funded as, for instance, development, human rights, or Rule of Law activities. It is when these activities are considered together, in the context of their combined and cumulative effect, over time, that their systemic peacebuilding identity emerges.

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A strategic or integrated framework that is aimed at an overall strategic vision for the systemic peacebuilding process, such as a conflict sensitive PRS, maps out the overall priorities and objectives of the systemic peacebuilding strategy for a particular country. Recent examples include the Results Focussed Transitional Framework (RFTF), interim IRSP and RSP in Liberia, the Peace Consolidation Strategy and PRSP in Sierra Leone, and the Integrated Peacebuilding Framework in Burundi. Individual programmes become part of the systemic peacebuilding process when they contribute to, and are considered as part of, the overall effort directed towards achieving the objectives set out in the strategic vision. In some cases the individual agencies and activities may be conscious of their role in the overall framework, but in some cases this linkage is drawn only at the systemic level, for instance in strategic evaluations or in annual PRS reports. This does not imply that the connections are artificial, but rather that those at the programme level are not always aware of the degree to which their individual activities contribute to an overall systemic peacebuilding framework.

There is debate over the extent to which a development activity such as poverty reduction or infrastructure development, e.g. the construction of a road, can be regarded as having a conflict prevention objective, and thus be considered to be part of a peacebuilding framework. The confusion lies in the perspective and context. An individual donor or implementing agent may not think of, or categorise the funding of, for example, the construction of a road, as peacebuilding from a programme level perspective. However, from a systemic perspective, e.g. in the context of an integrated peacebuilding framework, the construction of roads may be regarded as an important element of a larger systemic peacebuilding framework. It may create work, including for ex-combatants, it may stimulate local economies and improve livelihoods by providing access to markets, it may stimulate local contractor capacity, it may open up outlying areas previously marginalised because of their inaccessibility, and assist in the extension of the authority of the state into those territories, and it may contribute to overall economic growth, all of which are important aspects of an environment conducive to a successful peace process and thus preventing a relapse into conflict.

If the Peacebuilding Commission is serious about addressing the sustainability dilemma of peacebuilding action then it should start by tackling this conceptual dilemma and its operational implementations head-on. The UN system needs conceptual clarity and a common un-

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33 The Utstein Study found that more than 55% of the programmes it evaluated did not show any link to a larger country strategy (D. Smith, Towards a Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding: Getting Their Act Together, p.16).
derstanding of the UN’s approach to peacebuilding. The Peacebuilding Commission, with support from the Peacebuilding Support Office, should be the principle policy-making body on peacebuilding in the UN system, and in so doing, should be responsible for conceptualising peacebuilding in the UN context, and for determining overall UN strategy and policy direction on peacebuilding in the UN system.

This implies that the principle function of the Peacebuilding Commission should be to produce strategic direction and supporting policies on peacebuilding to the UN system. It also implies that the Peacebuilding Support Office should have the resources and skill set to support the Commission in carrying out this function, and that it should, in addition, be the main repository for expert knowledge on peacebuilding in the UN system. One of the important functions of the Peacebuilding Support Office should thus be to identify and research lessons and best practices, and to transform these into policy advice.

4. The Need for Enhanced Coherence as a Critical Factor in Sustainable Peacebuilding

A large number of evaluation reports and research studies that have analysed the record of post-Cold War peacebuilding efforts have identified significant problems with coherence and coordination, and have found that this has contributed to the poor rate of sustainability of these operations to date. For example, the Joint Utstein Study of peacebuilding, that analysed 336 peacebuilding projects implemented by Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Norway over the last decade, has identified a lack of coherence at the strategic level, what it terms a strategic deficit, as the most significant obstacle to sustainable peacebuilding. The Utstein study found that more than 55%
of the programmes it evaluated did not show any link to a larger country strategy.

The need for, and benefits of, improved coherence is widely accepted today in the international multilateral governance context. There is now broad consensus that inconsistent policies and fragmented programmes entail a higher risk of duplication, inefficient spending, a lower quality of service, difficulty in meeting goals and, ultimately, reduced capacity for delivery, and thus impact. In this paper, ‘coherence’ is understood as the effort to direct the wide range of activities undertaken in the political, governance, development, human rights, humanitarian, rule of law and security dimensions of a peacebuilding system towards common strategic objectives.

There is a widely held assumption that a more coherent approach, that manages to produce a comprehensive and coordinated system-wide effort, will have a more relevant, effective, efficient and sustainable impact on any given peacebuilding process. It is important to recognise, however, that the highly dynamic and non-linear nature of complex systems implies that coherence can never be fully attained. It is possible, however, to distinguish between systems where there is less, or more, coherence, and pursuing coherence should thus be understood as an aspiration that can be measured only in degree, not in end states.

Coherence also needs to be understood in the context of the natural tensions and inherent contradictions between the various peacebuilding dimensions and among the different peacebuilding actors. The agencies that are responsible for programmes and campaigns may often have to settle for ‘second best’ or ‘partially coherent’ solutions in order to establish a workable foundation for cooperation.

We can distinguish between four elements of coherence in the peacebuilding context, namely: (1) agency coherence, i.e. consistency among the policies and actions of an individual agency, including the internal consistency of a specific policy or programme; (2) whole-of-government coherence, i.e. consistency among the policies and actions of the different government agencies of a country; (3) external coherence, i.e. consistency among the policies pursued by the various int-
national actors in a given country context (harmonisation); and (4) internal/external coherence, i.e. consistency between the policies of the local and international actors in a given country context (alignment).

**Agency Coherence**

Agency coherence refers to consistency among the policies and actions of an individual agency, including the internal consistency of a specific policy or programme. Consistency in this context refers to one agency working at cross-purposes with itself. This does not imply that there is no room for differences and debate during the policy formulation and review process, but once a policy or intervention has been agreed on it needs to be implemented in such a way that all the different elements of the agency contribute to the overall objective in a complementary fashion.

**Whole-of-Government Coherence**

Whole-of-government coherence refers to consistency among the policies and actions of different departments and agencies of the same government or multilateral institution. The Canadian Government’s so-called 3D (diplomacy, development and defence) concept is the classical example, and is aimed at ensuring that its peacebuilding interventions are supported coherently by all the relevant arms of government. At the multilateral level the United Nations, European Union, African Union and NATO are each engaged in various initiatives aimed at improving coherence. Integration was one of the central themes of the Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, the so-called Brahimi Report. The Secretary-General, in his comments on the Report, called for a plan that can help the different parts of the UN system to work together to develop country-specific peacebuilding strategies that are coherent, flexible and field driven. The UN’s Integrated Approach, that has subsequently been developed, refers to a specific type of operational process and design, where the planning and coordination processes of the different elements of the UN family are integrated into a single country-level UN system, when it undertakes complex peacekeeping operations. The UN Peacebuilding Commission can play an important role in facilitating and encouraging whole-of-government coherence in the UN system when it comes to peacebuilding.

45 UN, *Decision Number 2008/24 – Integration*. 
External Coherence
External coherence refers to the harmonisation of policies and actions among the external actors in a given country context. One area which is particularly relevant is the relationship among donors, both bilateral and multilateral, and addresses the need for donors to harmonise their policies and practices so as to limit the transaction costs associated with their support. The Peacebuilding Commission provides the donor community with an additional meeting place where they can further improve their attempts to foster coherence. The added advantage of the Peacebuilding Commission is that it provides a forum not only for the security-development linkages, and the internal-external debate, but it also brings all donors interested in a specific country together.

Internal/External Coherence
Internal/External coherence refers to the alignment of the policies and actions between internal and external actors, especially at the strategic framework level, in a given country context. The need for overall strategic frameworks is widely recognised and accepted but poorly applied in practice. As the Utstein and other recent studies sited have pointed out, the lack of a clearly articulated overall strategy is, in fact, a critical shortcoming in most past and contemporary peacebuilding systems. The first prerequisite for coherence in any peacebuilding system is the development of an overall strategic framework. Without it the various peacebuilding agents have no benchmark against which they can judge the degree to which they are coherent with each other in the context of an overall strategic framework. The degree to which such strategic frameworks are currently absent goes a long way to explaining the lack of coherence evident in past and present peacebuilding systems. The work of the UN Peacebuilding Commission in the context of internal/external coherence and strategic frameworks are thus critical for sustainable peacebuilding, and should be an important part of its long-term agenda.

Limits of Coherence
Persistent evidence-based feedback from the field indicates that at the operational and tactical levels, many of the assumptions we have about coherence are, at best challenged, and at worse, flawed. The research and evaluation data sited earlier in this paper indicate that peacebuilding efforts appear to be challenged by enduring and deep-rooted coherence and coordination dilemmas. For instance, Paris and Sisk argue that peacebuilding should be understood as inherently contradictory, with competing imperatives facing the internal and external

46 de Coning, Coherence and Coordination in United Nations Peacebuilding and Integrated Missions: A Norwegian Perspective, p.16.
actors, both between and among themselves, that constitute “vexing policy dilemmas”, that require trade-offs between multiple mandates, needs and priorities without any obvious solutions.47

The empirical and theoretical evidence thus indicate that there is much less room for coherence than generally acknowledged at the policy level. The result is that the policy debate is setting itself overly ambitious targets for coherence that is impossible to achieve in reality. A more realistic understanding of the limitations of coherence and the inherent contradictions in the system will allow the international community to adopt a more sober approach to coherence and to set itself more humble goals. The UN Peacebuilding Commission would need to address this dilemma in its quest to develop a common UN system-wide approach to peacebuilding, and recognise that one of its own roles in this process is to provide a neutral and impartial marketplace where trade-offs and transactions among stakeholders can take place in a relatively safe and controlled environment.

5. The Importance of Local Context and Local Ownership in Ensuring Sustainable Peacebuilding

There is wide recognition that externally driven peacebuilding processes are unsustainable.48 Whilst some argue for autonomous recovery49, most developing and developed countries favour peacebuilding systems that are informed and determined by local context and supported by international expertise and resources.50 From this perspective, local context means that peacebuilding activities should be needs-based, and the priorities, sequencing and pace of delivery need to be informed by the dynamics of the host system, not by those providing assistance and support, through local ownership and meaningful internal/external coordination. Achieving a balanced and meaningful partnership between internal and external peacebuilding agents is thus one of the most important success factors for any peacebuilding

50 As evidenced by the parties to and content of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.
system. It is also one of the most difficult to achieve. In order to improve the sustainability of peace operations, the Peacebuilding Commission will need to make progress on three critical areas, namely local ownership, local context and local capabilities.

**Local Ownership and State Formation**

Local ownership in this context means that the future direction of a particular country is in the hands of the people of that country or, put differently, is not determined by external actors. One would imagine that a period of social upheaval and renewal should result in a new social contract among the people that address the shortcomings of the past and determine their common understanding of the role of the state and the relationship among the different communities that make up the society.

In most contemporary peacebuilding systems, however, the focus has been on state building rather than state formation.\(^{51}\) The difference is that the former is focussed on the technical apparatus of the state, such as the security services, whilst the latter is aimed at facilitating the ‘social contract’ between the people and the state and addressing the way in which a state is formed and how it relates to the people. State formation is concerned with aspects such as the separation of powers and the checks and balances on the powers of the various elements of the state.

State building is too often narrowly focused on the executive branch. Peacebuilding today is overly associated with security sector reform and rule of law. These areas are popular because they are technical and lend themselves easily to the kind of programmatic interventions the external actors are used to. Most importantly they are not controversial and thus welcomed by the governments in power. The result is that external actors invest in the instruments of governance, instead of the elements of the state, and this leaves the executive, and thus any government that comes to power, in a position where it is not adequately kept in check by the legislative and judicial branches of the state. Peacebuilding that focuses only on the executive branch of the state is not a good recipe for a sustainable peace process, and may sow the seeds of future discontent.\(^{52}\)

The UN Peacebuilding Commission should refocus the local ownership debate around state formation, rather than state building, and find innovative ways of facilitating the development of new social con-

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tracts among people and state in the countries it is engaged with. In this context the Commission needs to encourage processes that make the leadership accountable to the people, not to the international community. This implies a shift away from state building towards state formation, and will require an investment in facilitating national dialogue, and the development or reform of constitutional frameworks. It also implies a renewed focus on aspects such as strengthening the overall sociopolitical framework, for instance the division of powers between the executive, legislative and judicial, and the strengthening of civil society and social capital in the form of a free press, a free and independent judiciary, as well as human rights, electoral and other independent commissions that perform a vital role in the functioning of the overall sociopolitical framework.

Local Context and External Legitimacy

Local context means that peacebuilding needs to be informed by local, not international, needs, priorities and context. Again this is an obvious principle that few will challenge, but in reality it is so difficult to achieve that few have actually managed. There are two forces that work against this principle. The first is that the local actors are in disarray in the immediate aftermath of conflict and their ability to articulate a coherent set of needs and priorities remains weak for years thereafter. The second is that the external actors have a well-resourced and internationally legitimised system that thinks it is acting on local needs, when in fact, it is overtly influenced by previous experiences and internationally generated models and theories of change.53

The international community should step back into a facilitation role, so that local actors can fill the vacuum and inform the needs analysis. Local actors must be empowered and encouraged to identify and articulate their needs and priorities. International actors need to be trained in understanding and countering their own tendency to replicate their last experience elsewhere and to overwhelm, or drown out the local voices. They need to be trained how best to facilitate and encourage local voices and capacities without undermining them. And local actors need to be trained and encouraged in how to identify and articulate local needs and priorities, how to facilitate local dialogues and discussions that can identify needs and priorities and how to reach out to and empower all the voices in society, including those that may not normally be heard in official discussions.

The true implications of taking local context into account may be difficult for the external system to accept. Local needs and priorities may be different from what the international system is willing or able to provide. Promoting norms that have a high priority for the donor community, such as human rights and gender equality, may not be a priority for the local community, and the international community may not have the technical expertise or systems to provide support for local priorities such as small-scale animal husbandry and agriculture. At another level, local priorities may result in different time scales than what the international community is used to. For instance, local leaders may seek an upfront investment in capacity building prior to implementation of various medium-to-long-term governance and development initiatives, so that these programmes can be managed by local managers, whilst the international community may be under pressure to launch such programmes earlier in the process.

The UN Peacebuilding Commission should take on the responsibility of tackling the vexing policy dilemmas generated by the implications and challenges of the local context debate. It can provide a space where they can be discussed and transacted, and it can be a forum for knowledge generation and research. None of the stakeholders benefits from leaving these issues unaddressed, especially if sustainable peacebuilding is acknowledged as the common objective.

**Local Capacities and Social Capital**

Local capabilities in this context imply the recognition that any society has developed a range of coping mechanisms that have been shaped and formed by local context and that can be utilised to manage or support processes aimed at dealing with various social challenges. The challenge is how to identify and work with such local capacities, without supporting or further entrenching the inequalities in the society that may have contributed to the conflict. Peacebuilding tends to replace local social capital with external models or perceptions of the state, and the result is that we tend to undermine or destroy the little capacity that exists in a society and replace it with a weak and dysfunctional new capacity. We need to find new and innovative ways of working with existing social capacities, and perhaps transforming from within those that are problematic, rather than replacing them outright with new untested systems that then fail to provide an alternative service.

For instance, state building tends to generate new or reformed central state capacities, especially in the rule of law and security contexts, and we tend to de-legitimise and sometimes even criminalise existing local social capacities in the form of traditional justice systems and local
security arrangements, without ensuring that an adequate alternative is in place. The net result is a drop in overall capacity because we are weakening the existing social capacity before offering a viable, credible and legitimate alternative. Whilst it may be the case that the existing structures are weak and unsatisfactory, at least they provide some level of service that should not be disrupted until such time as a better alternative is in place. An alternative approach may be to develop new systems that compliment and build on existing social systems, rather than replacing them. Where existing social systems are regarded as inappropriate, they can be encouraged to transform over time but one needs to recognise that such change needs to occur at a pace acceptable to the local community for it to be sustainable.

Capacity building needs to be transformed from the existing paradigm of replacing local capacity to one where existing local capacities are recognised as the basis from which new capacities can be developed. This approach should be informed by a recognition that local capacities have been shaped by local historic and sociocultural contexts that make it uniquely suited to the local context, and thus locally legitimate. New untested capacities need to earn local legitimacy before replacing existing local capacities.

Capacity building is a critical aspect of peacebuilding and the UN Peacebuilding Commission can work together with existing knowledge centres in, for instance, the UN Development Programme, to generate knowledge on capacity building in the specific peacebuilding context, and can then serve as a vehicle to disseminate this knowledge to stakeholders and to inform its work. Capacity building needs to be transformed from its current predominantly North-South knowledge and skills transfer approach to one where the local social capital and inherent capacities are recognised and used as a basis for further development.

6. Conclusion

This paper has focused on three challenges that should inform the 2010 Review of the UN Peacebuilding Commission, namely:

(1) Improving our understanding of the peacebuilding concept through encouraging formal and informal debate, and the institutionalisation of a specific peacebuilding model for the UN system;
(2) Significantly stepping up efforts to improve system-wide coherence, including our understanding of the limits of coherence; and
(3) Meaningfully operationalising the principle of local ownership, including finding more creative ways to balance the need for predictable international models on the one hand, and local context on the other.

There is a need to revisit and clarify exactly what it is the United Nations understands with the peacebuilding concept. We should not shy away from the fact that this is not only a technical debate, but also a political issue. The debate should thus first and foremost be actively pursued as an international diplomatic debate. The UN Peacebuilding Commission is ideally suited to be the forum where such a debate should take place.

Persistent evidence-based feedback from the field suggests that many of our underlying assumptions about coherence and integration are, at best challenged, and at worse, flawed. Our peacebuilding efforts are challenged by enduring and deep-rooted coherence and coordination dilemmas. There are pervasive fundamental differences in the mandates, value systems and core principles of some of the peacebuilding actors that cannot be resolved, only managed. The UN Peacebuilding Commission should provide a neutral and impartial marketplace where these trade-offs and transactions among stakeholders can take place in a relatively safe and controlled environment.

Externally driven peacebuilding processes are unsustainable. In order to improve the sustainability of peace operations, the UN Peacebuilding Commission will need to focus on three critical areas, namely local ownership, local context and local capabilities. Local context means that peacebuilding activities should be needs-based, and the priorities, sequencing and pace of delivery need to be informed by the dynamics of the host system. Peacebuilding that focuses only on the executive branch of the state is not a good recipe for a sustainable peace process, and may sow the seeds of future discontent. International pressure to invest heavily in the immediate aftermath of a conflict should be a focus developing capacity to absorb future investments. Capacity building should not be about replacing local capacity; instead local social capital should be the basis from which capacity can be further enhanced.
List of Working Papers – The Future of the Peacebuilding Architecture Project:

Kwesi Aning and Ernest Lartey: Establishing the Future State of the Peacebuilding Commission: Perspectives on Africa

Thomas Biersteker and Oliver Jütersonke: The Challenges of Institution Building: Prospects for the UN Peacebuilding Commission

Cedric de Coning: Clarity, Coherence and Context: Three Priorities for Sustainable Peacebuilding

Rob Jenkins: Re-engineering the UN Peacebuilding Architecture


Erin McCandless: In Pursuit of Peacebuilding for Perpetual Peace: Where the UN’s Peacebuilding Architecture Needs to Go

Angelika Rettberg: The Private Sector, Peacebuilding, and Economic Recovery: A Challenge for the UN Peacebuilding Architecture


Necla Tschirgi: Escaping Path Dependency: A Proposed Multi-Tiered Approach for the UN’s Peacebuilding Commission

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About the Contributors

Kwesi Aning, Head, Conflict Prevention Management and Resolution Department, Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre, Ghana

Thomas Biersteker, Gasteyer Professor of International Security, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva

Cedric de Coning, Research Fellow, African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) and the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI)

Rob Jenkins, Professor of Political Science, Hunter College and the Graduate Center, and Associate Director, Ralph Bunche Institute for International Studies, City University of New York

Oliver Jütersonke, Head of Research, Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding (CCDP), Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva and Research Fellow, Zurich University Centre for Ethics (ZUCE)

Ernest Larrey, Research Associate, Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre, Ghana

Carolyn McAskie, Senior Fellow, Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, University of Ottawa, and former Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding, United Nations

Erin McCandless, Founder and Co-Executive Editor, Journal of Peacebuilding and Development, and Adjunct Professor, New School for General Studies, New York and New York University, New York

Roland Paris (Project Director), Director of the Centre for International Policy Studies and Associate Professor, Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, University of Ottawa

Angelika Retberg, Professor of Political Science and Director of the Research Program on Peacebuilding, University of the Andes, Bogotá, Colombia

Eli Stamnes, Senior Research Fellow, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI)

Necla Tschirgi, Research Associate, Centre for International Policy Studies, University of Ottawa, and former Senior Policy Advisor, Peacebuilding Support Office, United Nations
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