Peacebuilding Commission
Working Group on Lessons Learned

Informal expert-level meeting on
"Extension of state authority"
19 May 2015

Main findings

I. Introduction

1. On 19 May 2015, the Working Group on Lessons Learned (WGLL) of the Peacebuilding Commission convened an informal, expert-level meeting to discuss "Institution-building: The challenges for the UN system." The purpose of the meeting was to hear from representatives of the UN system and from one country on the PBC agenda on the different challenges that post-conflict countries are facing in extending state authority.

2. The meeting was opened by the Chair (Japan), and benefited from presentations by PBSO, DPKO and UNDP, as well as by a representative of a post-conflict country (Liberia).

3. At the outset, the Chair noted that rebuilding core state institutions that provide security, justice, public administration, as well as basic social services, is fundamental for a successful transition from war to lasting peace and development. The UN and other peacebuilding actors have been paying more attention to the importance of consolidation and extension of state authority; however, numerous challenges exist, such as limited national capacities that undermine the locally-owned institution-building process, included in the field of security and justice. The Chair, thus, invited the briefers to share lessons and good practices for dealing with these issues.

II. Summary of Presentations by Panelists

4. In the opening remarks, PBSO highlighted that two defining characteristics of the state relate to the monopoly of violence and the monopoly of taxation. These form the basis of a social contract, where citizens pay taxes and are protected and therefore, receive services from the state in return. But a social contract cannot develop without trust. Peacebuilding is about the restoration of trust – trust between the state and society and among groups. The social contract and trust needs to be inclusive of all of the country's territory. Extending the state beyond the capital and building institutions is inherently political. Too often institution-building is approached just as a technical exercise and avoids the difficult discussions on the role of the state. Institution-building needs to be anchored in political agreements that are achieved through inclusive dialogues. These inclusive dialogues can be critical to create support for the reforms.

5. He informed that PBSO, along with DPA, DPKO and UNDP were engaged in a Columbia University Capstone project on the extension of state authority, which

looked at Security Council mandates for seven countries going back to 1999. It was striking that none of the mandates defined "state authority" and none mentioned the term "legitimacy". The workshop identified four inherent dilemmas: 1) center vs. periphery, which is particularly problematic with a predatory central state; 2) government vs. governance, which arises when the government does not have the legitimacy; 3) internal vs. external legitimacy, i.e. legitimacy that is bestowed by the international community, but is not based on legitimacy by the population; and 4) formal vs. informal, when the building of formal institutions does not take account of existing informal institutions. The project also identified four design constraints: 1) scope (regarding geography, sectors, duration); 2) sequencing (should reconciliation and SSR, for example, precede the extension of state authority); and 3) financing, which is often lacking or late to arrive.

6. DPKO noted that support of the extension of state authority has been part of peacekeeping operations' mandates since UNIFIL, and that it has been generally aimed at: a) providing assistance to government actors (planning, budgeting, capacity-building, trainings, etc…); b) enabling the operation of local government in remote areas; c) supporting the construction of government building and other infrastructure through quick-impact projects. DPKO also noted that peacekeeping missions, in view of their deep field presence, have a number of comparative advantages in the area of extension of state authority, including the ability to link political processes at different levels.

7. DPKO stressed that the extension of state authority should do no harm. It is therefore pivotal to start with a good analysis on the presence of state authority in different areas of a country, on the informal and traditional mechanisms to deliver services, on the perception of specific institutions of the state, and on the revenue collections and spending authorities. This kind of analysis and the development of good strategies for stabilization and extension of state authority require capacity and a strong coordination mechanism to make sure that government and major international actors are aligned behind one strategy.

8. While focusing on restoration of state authority in Central African Republic, UNDP noted that support to restoration and extension of state authority should be linked to addressing triggers of conflict. In CAR, a fragility and conflict analysis identified the following conflict triggers: extreme poverty, exclusion and marginalization of minorities, divide between Capital and the periphery, regional differences in development and access to services, and mutual fear and suspicion between communities. This points to a state that has not been able to build legitimacy and trust, create space for dialogue to avoid conflict escalation or tap into socio-economic potentials for development that could benefit the many. The lack of opportunities, especially for the youth, has left the communities vulnerable and a target for recruitment by armed groups. This has fuelled frustrations and conflict. It is at the local level that the national policies meet the aspiration of the population. The extension of state authority outside of the capital is therefore crucial to able the state.

9. UNDP stressed that efforts should therefore be made to support governments to address triggers of conflict, and that legitimacy and trust is built in the process of redefining the social contract. This takes time. Funding should be planned long-term, so as to look beyond stabilization and reconstruction. Local governments should be

put in a position to deliver basic services in line with the needs of the local population and to manage contestations driven by local issues to avoid conflict escalation. By redefining the social contract and delivering those services local governance actors become drivers of stability and an engine of peacebuilding, statebuilding and recovery.

10. The representative of Liberia referred to the ongoing debate about what constitutes state authority. He noted a definition proffered by researchers from Columbia University that "state authority is understood to mean the ability and capacity of a government to exercise its power over the whole territory and the entire population", and that the researchers stressed that a state's "inability to exercise or extend its authority over the entire country highlights the weakness of the state and its government." He said this holds true for many countries in or emerging from conflict. He described a number of issues related to state authority that had prevailed throughout Liberia's history. He said beginning in the early 1950s, successive Liberian Governments were able to effectively bring the interior of the country under the control of central administration. This allowed the state authority to be extended at both national and local levels. The Liberian representative said that during the civil crisis, state authority gradually dissipated and the centralized governance system upon which Liberia had relied since independence was eroded. In post-conflict Liberia, the government endeavored to restore the authority of the state and ensure people's access to security and justice beyond the confines of the capital. This requires building the trust of the citizens in the security and justice system. He said while the rule of law and the security sector reform remain crucial to the extension of state authority, capacity and means to implement the priorities remain essential.

11. In regard to the work by the justice and security hubs, he said the first hub was inaugurated in 2013 in Gbarnga and is currently operational. The hub was an attempt of the government to decentralize justice and security services to areas outside the capital. He said under the hub concept, elements of the justice system and rule of law actors, including the police, immigration, county attorneys, public defenders, magistrates and judges, were working together in delivering justice and security services to the Liberian people. Services in the second and third hubs (Zwedru and Harper) have started. He stated that 'capacity and means' for institution-building remain Liberia's focus, particularly in light of UNMIL's drawdown. He noted that UNMIL's mandates have included assistance to the government to extend its authority throughout the entire country and averred that Liberia has benefited from UNMIL assistance and through bilateral and trilateral partnership arrangements. While progress is being made, logistical constraints remain.

III. Main findings

12. On the basis of the presentation and interactions between the panelists and the Member States, the following represents the main findings from this meeting:

- Provision of basic services, including security and justice, remains a big challenge in post-conflict countries. Further efforts are needed to reinforce national capacities and secure resources for consolidating and extending state authority.

- Restoration of state authority requires restoration of trust between state and society. Peacebuilding is aimed at restoring that trust.

- It is important to do a conflict analysis right up-front and to monitor the country-capacities at early stages, even if costly.

- Local governments should be put into a position that provides basic services based on needs expressed by the local communities. Platforms for dialogues with communities to prevent grievances to escalate and the performance of local governments to provide basic services can contribute to the trust in the state. In this regard, services such as security and justice, as well as education, health and access to water are crucial elements, which need to be quickly restored in order to rebuild trust in state institutions.

- Support for national capacity development should be mainstreamed into missions' mandates.

- A discussion on what role the PBC should play to better support mission and non-mission settings should be held in order to inform the Organizational Committee.

- The Security Council should make better use of the advice given by the PBC in order to ensure a smoother transition from peacekeeping operations.

- Funding of the building of institutions to extend the authority of the state is often inadequate, partly because donors focus on activities where results are easier to measure and materialize sooner.

- DPKO and UNDP have been playing an active role in supporting institution-building in post-conflict situations. Moreover, the Peacebuilding Fund is a crucial actor in supporting capacity building efforts. The international community should also focus its support on long-term engagement (20 to 30 years).

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