PEACEBUILDING COMMISSION
WORKING GROUP ON LESSONS LEARNED

Comparative Experiences in Developing National Capacities after Conflict

Trusteeship Council Chamber
15 December 2008

Concept Note

Introduction

Sustainable peacebuilding depends on national ownership. However, countries emerging from war are often unable to take full ownership of their own reconstruction since their economy, political institutions, and social fabric are seriously undermined by conflict. Thus, they rely on extensive external support. Although external financial and technical assistance are essential to meet pressing needs, countries emerging from conflict face the challenge of steadily reducing their reliance on external assistance while strengthening their domestic capacities to rebuild their societies and to consolidate the peace. National capacity development is therefore an integral part of peacebuilding.

The United Nations Development Group has identified eight components of capacity development: (i) human resources, (ii) public sector accountability, (iii) access to information, development knowledge and technology, (iv) inclusion, participation, equity and empowerment, (v) financial resources, (vi) material resources, (vii) environmental resources, and (viii) external / international relations. While these are important for long-term capacity development, they do not necessarily address the immediate, context-specific capacity needs of post-conflict countries.

Capacity assets, gaps and priorities vary greatly across as well as within countries over time. Nonetheless, there are useful experiences and lessons from developing countries and international partners on capacities to manage difficult transitions. Although capacity development is a long term effort, it requires investments and planning at the beginning of a transition in order for both short term and long term capacity gains to take root. In fact, transitions are considered a window of opportunity for important transformations and scaling up of societal, organizational and individual capacities to meet pressing political, economic, legislative and service delivery needs. [1]

Depending upon their initial conditions before the war, the level of destruction wrought by the war and the quality of their leadership, post-conflict countries have pursued a wide range of policies and programs in developing their national capacities. This concept note provides an overview of key insights drawn from country studies and the larger peacebuilding literature on post-conflict capacity development. At the WGLL session on

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[1] UNDP Practice Note – Capacity Development During Periods of Transition, p 1.

15 December, these will be supplemented by presentations on country experiences by national actors from post-conflict countries.

What Do We Know About National Capacity Development?

In line with their circumstances, countries have pursued various capacity development strategies at the individual, institutional and societal levels. In states weakened by conflict, timely and carefully targeted capacity development programs can make a difference between sliding back into turmoil or moving towards strengthening the foundations of the state. Indeed, early investments in **building state capacities are recognized as essential in certain key areas**. These include:

- State capacities to provide core functions, including security, basic service delivery, and budgeting;
- Public administration reform, including "contracting in" to support critical government functions;
- Management of aid and donor relations.

Another area which requires special attention is **salary reforms** which can contribute to building public sector capacity by enabling the government to motivate retain and attract competent staff.

Many governments adopt ad hoc or piecemeal approaches to fill immediate gaps. Their ability to design and implement capacity development strategies are hindered by the shortage of qualified staff within the government. For example, at the end of its conflict in 1992, the government of **Mozambique** faced severe capacity shortages at the middle management level due to earlier lack of investment in higher education and the low level of public sector pay. Between 1994 and 1999, the government invested in strengthening and streamlining the central government and launching its decentralization process. Yet, by 2001, and according to a report by the African Capacity Building Foundation, the state administration capacity in Mozambique was still extremely weak due to continuing shortage of educated and qualified personnel.[2]

In many post-conflict societies, the competition between the government, the private sector and international organizations for the limited supply of qualified staff leads to an overall inflation of salaries and heightened incentives for corruption. One important strategy to overcome shortages in the public sector has been the adoption of national salary reform or salary supplementation schemes. In **Cambodia**, for example, the Priority Missions Groups (PMGs) of selected civil servants were provided up to three times their usual pay to spearhead reforms for a period of 12-18 months based on specified outputs, ethics and performance.[3]

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[2] The African Capacity Building Foundation, *Studies in Reconstruction and Capacity Building in Post-conflict countries in Africa: Some Lessons of experience from Mozambique*, Revised Report December 2003.
[3] UNDP *Practice Note – Capacity Development during Periods of Transition*.

It is increasingly recognized that an early assessment of existing capacities and needs is useful as the basis for a national capacity development strategy. Following the Bonn Agreement, for example, the government of **Afghanistan** undertook a comprehensive review of its capacities both at the national and sub-national levels, and developed six key capacity development strategies between 2001 and 2006. These included: aid effectiveness and integrated planning; training and leadership development; incentive systems; institutional reform and change management; public engagement capacities and mentoring. Yet, their implementation has run into significant problems, partly due to the lack of an integrated and systemic approach to capacity development.[4]

Comparative findings from other national efforts to date provide useful lessons:

- Targeted capacity development that takes account of conflict dynamics and aims to transform rather than just to rebuild is crucial for sustainable peacebuilding.
- In cases where social cleavages have been at the heart of the conflict, efforts to remedy some of these structural causes may be negotiated into a peace agreement in the form of power-sharing or other arrangements. These have important implications for capacity development but, if not managed carefully, they may also contain the seeds of further conflict and/or administrative inefficiency.
- Early recovery in post-conflict transitions presents special challenges as it often requires simultaneous support to ensure security, protect and address the needs and rights of victims and vulnerable groups such as IDPs and women, strengthen the rule of law and access to justice, and deliver quick results to demonstrate the "peace dividend". This requires strategies to define priorities, strategic allocation of international capacities, and phased approaches.
- In the longer term, sustainable institutional development requires addressing the middle and junior level gaps found in many state institutions as well as the centre-periphery inequities that characterize many post-conflict contexts.
- Post-conflict environments provide unique opportunities for the empowerment of women, opening new space for women's leadership roles and transforming government to deliver for women as integral parts of capacity development strategies.[5]

While seeking to redress their capacity deficiencies, many post-conflict countries continue to rely on external financial and technical assistance. There is compelling evidence that despite good intentions, the influx of international assistance often introduces serious distortions and negative incentives for capacity development. Thus, national leaders face the dilemma of depending on foreign financial and technical assistance while recognizing their inherent or potential pitfalls. Evidence shows that in many cases a period of capacity substitution is often unavoidable as countries require technical assistance to meet specific capacity gaps. However, in such arrangements, there needs to be a clear exit-strategy as well as a commitment to promote national ownership to ensure that peace dividends can bolster accountability and trust in national leadership.[6]

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[4] Ponzio, Richard, Capacity Development in Afghanistan 2001 – 2006 (UNDP, 2006)
[5] UNDP Practice Note – Capacity Development During Periods of Transition
[6] UNDP Practice Note – Capacity Development During Periods of Transition

One common strategy to avoid heavy reliance on foreign experts is the so-called "brain gain" whereby countries encourage their diaspora nationals to return home to contribute to its development.[7] First initiated by UNDP in 1977, the Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals Programme (TOKTEN) proved particularly useful in post-conflict countries such as in Afghanistan (after the Bonn Agreements in 2001) and Vietnam (1990-2003). TOKTEN allows expatriates to return home for short periods to contribute their skills and services. Benefiting from the experiences of countries such as Sierra Leone, Afghanistan and Cambodia, Liberia has recently adopted multi-pronged capacity building initiatives, including TOKTEN, namely the Liberia Emergency Capacity Building Support Project (LECBS) and the Senior Executive Service Programme (SES). While TOKTEN sought to help reverse the heavy brain drain during the war years, LECBS was designed to assist the government in its package of governance reforms through administering salary supplements and strengthening institutional capacity building and operational effectiveness.

Perhaps one of the most important, and also elusive, factors in national capacity development is the role of national leadership.[8] Country experiences reveal that the vision and commitment of national leaders at all levels (including among the "losing" side) set the tone for national reconciliation which is essential for capacity building.

Other important factors include rapid access to information, knowledge and technology. Since war-affected countries tend to be cut-off from fast-changing economic, technological and other innovations, the transfer of practical knowledge through training, mentoring and other methods emerges as critical, especially in such areas as public finance management and the delivery of basic services. However, the role of peer-to-peer learning and learning from what worked in other countries is as relevant for private and mixed enterprises as it is for the public sector. Indeed, the private sector and civil society are essential partners in national capacity development.

The main lesson from a comparative analysis of diverse national experiences is that there are no standard recipes for capacity development. However, there are innovative approaches and successful programs which can be adapted to different contexts in order to strengthen national ownership of peacebuilding. Similarly, there are cautionary examples of misguided or inappropriate strategies in post-conflict contexts which need to be avoided. The main principle of post-conflict capacity development is to search for the "best fit" rather than "best practices."

There is growing interest in identifying how international actors can contribute to national capacity development during the various phases of humanitarian assistance, peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding with a view to not only re-building but also "building back better."[9] Thus, concrete lessons from individual countries on what

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[7] UNDP Capacity Development Action Briefs – Case Evidence on "Brain Gain"
[8] Johnson-Sirleaf, Ellen, Challenges for New Leadership Teams in Fragile States, (World Bank Institute, Capacity Development Briefs, Issue No. 21, March 2007)
[9] UNDP Practice Note – Capacity Development During Periods of Transition, pp. 6–7

works and what does not work in national capacity development is a particularly promising area of post-conflict peacebuilding.

Key Issues for Consideration

Based on the experiences of selected post-conflict countries, this session will examine the specific challenges faced by different countries as well as innovative approaches they employed to overcome capacity deficiencies in the early phases of national recovery. Key questions for panelists include:

1. What were the most serious deficits in national capacities (both in the public and private sectors) immediately after the war? How were these needs identified?
2. How did the national government deal with these deficits in the short, medium and longer term?
3. What were the priority areas of capacity development in the early phase of transitioning from conflict to recovery?
4. Did the government have a national capacity development strategy?
5. What concrete strategies were used to strengthen public or private sector capacities?
6. In what ways did international support help or hinder domestic efforts to strengthen national capacities?

Format and Structure

This open meeting will be held from **3:00 pm to 6:00 pm.** in the **UN Trusteeship Council Chamber**. It will be in the form of a panel discussion.

Chair:

H.E. Mrs. Carmen Maria Gallardo Hernandez, Permanent Representative of El Salvador to the United Nations

Panelists

- **Mr. Toga McIntosh**, former Minister of Planning and Economic Affairs of Liberia
- **Ambassador Gert Rosenthal**, Permanent Representative of Guatemala to the UN,
- **Ambassador Filipe Chidumo**, Permanent Representative of Mozambique to the UN.

Outcome

Following the meeting the Secretariat will prepare a Chair's Summary of relevant lessons for national capacity development in post-conflict countries. The document will be distributed to PBC Chair and the Chairs of the various country-specific configurations.

Selected Resources

The African Capacity Building Foundation, Studies in Reconstruction and Capacity Building in Post-conflict countries in Africa: Some Lessons of experience from Mozambique, Revised Report December 2003.
http://www.acbf-pact.org/knowledge/documents/KM-Post%20Conflict%20Study%20Report%20on%20Mozambique.doc

Government of Liberia & UNDP, National Human Development Report for Liberia: Mobilizing Capacity for Reconstruction and Development (2006)

Johnson-Sirleaf, Ellen, Challenges for New Leadership Teams in Fragile States, (World Bank Institute, Capacity Development Briefs, Issue No. 21, March 2007)

Ponzio, Richard, Capacity Development in Afghanistan 2001 – 2006 (UNDP, 2006)

UNDP Capacity Development Action Briefs – Case Evidence on "Brain Gain" (No.1, April 2007)

UNDP Practice Note – Capacity Development (July 2006)

UNDP Practice Note – Capacity Development during Periods of Transition (September 2007)

Wolpe, Howard and McDonald, Steve, "*Burundi's Transition – Training Leaders for Peace*" (Journal of Democracy, Volume 17, Number 1, pp. 132–138, January 2006)

Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, "*Building Civil Society in Post-Conflict Environments: from the Micro to the Macro*" (Occasional Paper Series – What Really Works in Preventing and Rebuilding Failed States, Issue 1, November 2006)

World Bank-UNDP-ISE Forum at the Greentree Foundation, Rebuilding Post-Conflict Societies: Lessons from a Decade of Global Experience (New York, 2005)