Operational Field Perspectives on Peacebuilding

Louis Hoffmann

Introduction*

With some 50 million people forcibly displaced in 2013, and increasingly protracted conditions of conflict and displacement, peacebuilding continues to play a significant role in work to address root causes and impacts of conflict and violence at the field level. For organizations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), for instance, sustainably resolving displacement is a prerequisite to, and a core hallmark of, sustainable peace. In fact, sustainably resolving displacement and achieving durable peace are mutually dependent. As such, the current levels of protracted displacement do not bode well for the current state of peacebuilding.

Drawing on the author's operational experience from around the world, this paper aims to provide a field-driven, bottom-up perspective on current peacebuilding efforts. In particular, this paper focuses on three specific gaps:

- Enhancing local engagement through improved vertical integration of peacebuilding efforts;
- Meeting humanitarian needs as a core foundation for building peace with an improved focus on horizontal integration of humanitarian and peacebuilding efforts; and
- Recognizing the challenges inherent in the complex dynamics of criminal violence.

* This paper is based on the presentation "IOM Operational Field Perspectives on Peacebuilding" delivered at the Annual Meeting 2014 of the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform (Geneva, 21 November, 2014). The opinions in this paper do not necessarily represent official IOM views and are the sole responsibility of the author.

The Geneva Peacebuilding Platform is a joint project of four institutions:

Background

The number of forcibly displaced persons continues to grow and the reality of global displacement is increasingly complex. The number of people displaced by violence and conflict today is the highest since World War II. By the end of 2013, 33.3 million persons were internally displaced by conflict and violence, a 16 per cent increase from 2012;[1] while another 16.7 million were classified as refugees.[2] More concerning, the average period people live in displacement is currently a staggering 17 years.

As an example, there were 12.5 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in sub-Saharan Africa in 2013, the largest 'regional accounting' of IDPs globally, and constituting more than one third of the world's total.[3] Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Sudan make up the largest populations of these IDPs, followed by Iraq, Somalia and the Central African Republic (CAR). Examples of the main causes of displacement in sub-Saharan Africa include "struggles for political power, extremist violence, disputes over natural resources and inter-communal violence that was often linked to land."[4]

In addition, there are currently nine UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) missions in Africa (Western Sahara, CAR, Mali, DRC, Darfur, Abyei, Liberia, South Sudan, and Cote d'Ivoire). Peacebuilding therefore clearly represents a large institutional commitment by the United Nations, host governments and the member states that support these interventions.

The operational work of peacebuilding occurs nationally, locally and at individual levels and requires a perspective of, if not engagement with, all three levels simultaneously. Generally, peacebuilding practice builds on incremental successes and consistently re-visits objectives, project design and focus. This requires not only sustained commitment but also agility, flexibility and a heightened tolerance for risk – none of which are necessarily hallmarks of large, institutional approaches.

At the same time, conflict is spreading rather than disappearing and thus there is much work to be done. In a context of more diffuse, non-traditional dimensions of conflict; in a world of heightened access to media and technology; and in a world over-wrought with large-scale disaster response (no fewer than four L3 responses ongoing simultaneously in 2014,[5] in addition to the global response to the outbreak of the Ebola virus disease) the international community is left with little time to invest in the bubbling sources of future conflict, or to identify new issues on the horizon

Reflecting on current institutional commitments to peacebuilding from a field programming perspective, a key challenge has been 'how to bring good local practice to scale in sufficient

---

[1] "Global Overview 2014: people internally displaced by conflict and violence," Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), May 2014 (http://www.internal-displacement.org/publications/2014/global-overview-2014-people-internally-displaced-by-conflict-and-violence).

[2] "War's Human Cost: UNHCR Global Trends 2013", United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), June 2014 (http://www.unhcr.org/5399a14f9.html).

[3] "Global Overview 2014: people internally displaced by conflict and violence," Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), May 2014 (http://www.internal-displacement.org/publications/2014/global-overview-2014-people-internally-displaced-by-conflict-and-violence).

[4] "Global Overview 2014: people internally displaced by conflict and violence," Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), May 2014 (http://www.internal-displacement.org/publications/2014/global-overview-2014-people-internally-displaced-by-conflict-and-violence).

[5] The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) defines Level 3 (L3) emergencies as "major sudden onset humanitarian crises triggered by natural disasters or conflict which require system-wide mobilization" IASC, *Humanitarian System-Wide Emergency Activation: definition and procedures*, IASC Working Group paper, March 2012.

force to reverse the momentum of today's conflict, while ensuring systemic coherence and synchronicity of effort'. This is the first of three challenges, identified as gaps, that improved practice in peacebuilding should seek to address in operational contexts ahead.

Vertical integration of peacebuilding efforts

The first gap to address is the vertical integration of peacebuilding efforts, by recognizing and achieving more systemic coherence at the national, local community and individual levels. There is increasingly a need to better tie in national political processes and UN mission mandates with local peacebuilding activities and local actors.

Out of some necessity and with important advantages, key elements of today's peacebuilding architecture have become large, institutionally-driven processes. Yet, from the operational perspective, peacebuilding is very much a local enterprise: good programming aims to be inclusive, self-sustaining and, most of all, invested at a local level where peace dividends pay off and contribute to political consensus and social cohesion. However, at the country level, bringing good, locally-oriented peacebuilding efforts 'to scale' in the complex universe of UN peace operations is not only very challenging but indicates where some fundamental elements of the approach need to change. While bureaucracies tend to grow static and self-reinforcing, conflict on the other hand is highly adaptive and more diffuse, and this provides an important indication of how the assistance community must focus its peacebuilding tools and interventions.

The growing complexity of the political processes designed to resolve conflict are a direct reflection of the dynamism and fluidity of conflict, and further highlights the important challenge of identifying primary sources of conflict as the core of a sustainable peacebuilding strategy. The complexity of these processes can be observed, amongst others, by cases wherein ethnic and religious themes, as a political characterization of conflict, often mask the true root causes of conflict. Years of investment in many conflict areas tells us that the true root causes are more likely to relate to governance, access to justice and distribution of natural resources. The challenges and the subject matter of resolving conflict are dynamic, and thus a question to be raised is how institutions can or should adapt to match these challenges for future peacebuilding efforts.

We should avoid that our well-intended efforts at systemic coherence amongst peacebuilding actors actually result in larger, heavier systems and processes, including those for funding, programme design and delivery. Peacebuilding therefore requires a continually improving understanding of how to identify and address source issues and the origins of conflict. This is distinct from recent tendencies to integrate peacebuilding efforts with top-down approaches and larger institutional structures. With so much authority emanating, frequently, from UN Mission mandates and the crowded contexts of operational actors (UN and non-UN), it can be difficult for important pieces of the peacebuilding community to see –let alone invest in – the value of a local approach and an optimal treatment of the source issues of conflict.

The recent evolution of conflict and concurrent demands for earlier engagement to protect rights and foster peace demonstrates the need for a better ability to address the source issues and stay ahead of the dynamics of today's conflict. Intrastate state conflict, and non-state armed actors are increasingly the norm in today's contexts, with attendant challenges to international intervention and humanitarian law. Further, the state of communications and technology provides not only innovative avenues for assistance delivery but, at a more rapid rate, it also coalesces smaller groups and broader agendas into conflict; heightens the visibility

and impact of smaller armed groups; and generally adds to state fragility at a greater rate than the international community seems able to address conflict-induced need.

It is not only expensive to respond to conflict in this way, but also indicates that governments, agencies and organizations must be better outfitted to recognize and address the source issues of conflict and to do so earlier – source issues such as natural resources including land and property, access to basic services, access to justice and preservation of rights. Better addressing these phenomena requires both early engagement in addressing potential conflict sources, and a bottom-up approach to peacebuilding.

From an operational perspective, and in the face of more unwieldy institutional approaches to peacebuilding, the international community needs to re-focus on giving more credit and credence to three operational aspects of building peace at the field level: greater agility of instruments supporting peacebuilding, greater flexibility in programmes designed to drive transformation out of conflict, and a higher appetite for risk at the programming level. These are traits in which the larger institutional structures of peacebuilding must increase value for investment, and lend more prominence in the development of strategies to build resilience and peace from the bottom-up.

Meeting humanitarian need as a core foundation for building peace

The second gap to address is the necessity of meeting humanitarian need as a core foundation for building peace. The attendant challenge is to better synchronize the efforts of the international community toward a closer confluence of humanitarian and peacebuilding activities. Successful peacebuilding interventions are founded on certain essential preconditions that are necessary in some substantive degree for peace to take root. These include, for instance, law and order, security, respect for rights and meeting basic human need. Several of these areas are already the integrated focus of many peacebuilding initiatives but meeting priority needs through principled humanitarian action is a distinct course of assistance with respect to the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence – and must rightly remain so in the more political environments of peacebuilding.

Conflict contexts pose a great deal of risk to assistance actors, and credibility with all sides in a conflict is essential to meeting the greatest humanitarian need and to doing so safely. The programming goals of those operating within the framework of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence pose some distinct differences and challenges to the goals of the peacebuilding community, which tends to prioritize a distinctly different set of factors in its actions. For example, peacebuilding actions tend to base engagement more on political relevance than humanitarian need; to be inclusive of armed groups – including where relevant criminal gangs; and to be extremely adaptive in its approaches in ways that humanitarian delivery cannot often afford.

Although this is not an innovative observation, reality still indicates that the international community collectively needs to better link humanitarian delivery and peacebuilding initiatives, and to find practical ways forward to comprehensively deliver both peacebuilding and humanitarian assistance. Better interaction and improved 'tolerance' of these distinct agendas is necessary alongside the recognition of the mutual importance of both activities – meeting humanitarian need, and – as importantly – working to resolve the core drivers of that need.

The international community is well past a linear approach to relief and development, and must recognize the fluidity of transition and conflict transformation. Because humanitarian need and

transition from conflict so often occur simultaneously – and may 'co-occur' repeatedly throughout prolonged conflict and transitional contexts – it should be an accepted standard to coordinate and synergize the importance of humanitarian needs-based programming alongside the engagement and the risk-taking necessary to address root cause issues and build peace. Addressing fundamental humanitarian need is very much a prerequisite for building peace.

Conflict-affected populations must be capable of focusing on peace, investing in peace, and delivering on peace. In order to want peace, individuals and communities must be free from other wants such as impediments to food, water, hygiene and health.

In many local interventions, much of this work is successfully combined, for instance by building on humanitarian programme delivery to build 'constituencies' for peace as well as to inform the design of follow-on peacebuilding initiatives. But there remain deep cultural divides between the communities, despite the shared objectives. As the international community looks to review peacebuilding architecture, we need to systematically continue to look for creative ways of bringing information-sharing, conceptual exchanges, and situational assessments into the joint work of the humanitarian and peacebuilding communities.

Complex dynamic of criminal violence

The third gap addressed in this paper is a call for greater action with respect to criminal violence. There are few specific answers, but – from a displacement perspective – criminal violence is a growing factor in peacebuilding and more work is needed to better understand synergies with, and the related effects of, peacebuilding practice and criminal violence. As part of a systematic response, more urgent work is needed in developing operational methodologies for engaging actors and building peace in violent and crime-affected contexts. Conflict and criminal violence are increasingly sharing effects on the displacement scale, and so we must look more concertedly at highlighting the distinct challenges and potential synergies of addressing criminal violence as a 'root cause' issue for peacebuilding.

From the perspective of peacebuilding, there is therefore a need to improve the understanding of the dynamics between conflict-related violence and criminal violence, as well as a distinct need to develop tools at all levels to address criminal violence as an equivalent challenge to state stability and citizen security. A growing body of field practice suggests that community and individual empowerment is essential to addressing violence, including criminal violence. At the same time, traditional peacebuilding approaches – including use of tools such as access to livelihoods, income generation, and education – are not likely to address sufficiently the source issues of criminal conflict.

With a growing number of people impacted by criminal violence, the peacebuilding community must better incorporate both the potential effect of criminal 'off-shoots' of conflict-related peace processes while developing a better set of tools for engaging organized criminal actors in order to build sustainable peace. These challenges provide a new and necessary dimension to the scope of peacebuilding and to ongoing considerations for a better architecture for peacebuilding practice.

Closing

Field practice for peacebuilding is constantly evolving based on context and, as such, remains a valuable source of input for a review of the broader architecture and for future success in peacebuilding. From this perspective, much of the challenge to more effective peacebuilding lies in integrating actors and institutions, vertically and horizontally, to achieve greater effect. More specifically, this means accurately assessing and efficiently addressing root cause issues at a rate that is greater than the destructive effects and spread of conflict witnessed by the international community in recent years. Responding to the course of conflict in places like Syria and the Central African Republic, where there has been greater humanitarian need with every new outbreak of violence episode and each new stage of conflict, is no longer sustainable for the international assistance community. Limited assistance dollars mean the need to improve the efficacy of interventions, while better identifying and addressing future sources of conflict. And there are yet new challenges to peacebuilding that will also require widening perspectives and tools of engagement to include criminal agendas in the peacebuilding arena, in addition to the development of new tools that will effectively mitigate, if not substantially extinguish, widespread organized criminal violence as a growing threat to individuals, communities and states.

About the author: Louis Hoffmann is Head of the Transition and Recovery Division in the Department of Operations and Emergencies of the International Organization for Migration in Geneva where he focuses on issues of post-crisis recovery, durable solutions, community stabilization and peacebuilding. He previously served as a liaison with the United States Government for the Organization's emergency and post-conflict operations worldwide. Louis Hoffmann has an extensive field background, having served in Sudan, in the capacity of Darfur Coordinator prior to becoming Head of Office to South Sudan in 2005, where he directed the Organization's IDP and community recovery programmes. Since joining IOM in 1999, Louis has also held posts in Serbia, Afghanistan, Austria, East Timor, and Macedonia covering a range of programming activities including return and reintegration programming for Internally Displaced Persons and Refugees, assistance to demobilized ex-combatants, community reconstruction and rehabilitation projects, as well as 'out-of-country' voting. Louis joined IOM with a background in the resettlement of refugees.

About the White Paper on Peacebuilding: The White Paper on Peacebuilding is a collaborative, multi-stakeholder process initiated by the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform and supported by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. It has the objective to situate UN peacebuilding within the broader peacebuilding universe and to articulate visions for the future for building peace in violent and fragile contexts. The White Paper places peacebuilding within the changing characteristics of armed violence and security, and within the practical evidence of engagements in peacebuilding contexts emanating from a diversity of fields. Ensuring a better relationship between UN peacebuilding and the broader peacebuilding field is a complementary effort to the existing work surrounding the 10-year review of the UN peacebuilding architecture and an effort to take stock of the nature and evolution of the broader peacebuilding universe.