

The Geneva Peacebuilding Platform Annual Forum

“Evaluating Peacebuilding: Measuring Peace Consolidation in the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) Focus Countries”

Thursday, 4 December 2008
Geneva, Switzerland

Introduction

The Geneva Peacebuilding Platform (GPP) Annual Forum is a unique opportunity to bring together practitioners from the Geneva and New York peacebuilding communities – from field-based organizations and missions, and from civil society and academia – to discuss pressing issues of specific relevance to peacebuilding practitioners. The meeting was organized as a genuine dialogue forum, gathering a panel of varied and experienced actors and a focused audience to discuss actual peacebuilding challenges in an open and constructive environment. In this way, it aimed to further the goal of the GPP, in providing a forum for dialogue between Geneva-based organizations that are engaged in various ways with the process of peacebuilding, as well as to contribute to a better understanding of peacebuilding-related issues, to interface with New York and with countries that are in various stages of reconstruction.

Previous meetings organized by the GPP have looked specifically at the development and functioning of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) and the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF). These organizations were developed as a reaction to a recognized institutional gap in the response of the international community to conflict and post-conflict situations. They were developed specifically out of the recognition of the very frequent tendency for relapse within these situations, as well as the tendency for the perpetuation of conflict even after a peace agreement is signed. It is this challenge of mobilizing the international community to fill this acknowledged institutional gap that forms the broader context for the meeting's agenda.

This meeting provided a closer look at the focus countries of the PBC – specifically Burundi, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau and the Central African Republic¹ – the objective being to see what the expectations were of these countries when the PBC initiated work with them, and what has happened over the last two years. Moreover, the meeting provided an in-depth discussion regarding the tools currently available in terms of needs assessment, and whether these tools have reflected the actual needs of reconstruction and societal transformation. The meeting aimed to provide a substantive look at how the process of peacebuilding is to be evaluated, both from the dimensions of institutional reform and social change, and furthermore, what is

¹ Unfortunately no representatives were available to attend this meeting to speak on behalf of the peacebuilding process in the Central African Republic. This was due to the fact that the country was then engaged in a week of national dialogue to develop its Strategic Framework. Therefore, this report focuses on the case studies of experiences in Burundi, Sierra Leone, and Guinea Bissau.

actually envisioned when we talk of peace consolidation. In this way, the participants sought to move beyond a look at the mechanisms and functions of the peacebuilding process, and to focus instead on the experiences, both in positive and negative terms, of building peace that can be drawn upon from these case studies. Significantly, the GPP Annual forum provided the first opportunity for the representatives of the PBC focus countries to exchange their experiences in peacebuilding with the PBC. The hope is that through this type of dialogue, there can be a transfer of experience from countries which are now, or will be in the future, on the agenda of the PBC.

The Need for Conceptual Clarity in Peacebuilding: The Problem of Definitional Ambiguity

In order to adequately measure the process towards peace, some participants articulated that it is perhaps necessary to first clarify the conceptual underpinnings of peacebuilding. Recent research has indicated not only that many actors operating within the broad field of peacebuilding are using diverging definitions of the term, but that these definitions can also have a direct impact on what kind of activities are undertaken². Peacebuilding has thus been infused at various times, and in different contexts, with a multiplicity of meanings; these include being understood as the cessation of conflict, the creation of institutional structures for managing conflict, or the elimination of the structural conditions that create conflict in the first place, to name a few. The danger is that this lack of a broadly shared definition could affect the substantive content and coherence of the Commission's activities, given that the plethora of actors engaged in various 'peacebuilding' activities may be acting under very different understandings of how their activities actually relate to the creation of 'peace'. Some participants pointed out that the very concept of peace, and therefore efforts aimed at peace consolidation, can at best be understood as "fuzzy, outdated, and incomplete." One challenge for the PBC will be how to manage this multiplicity of actors so that their efforts are directed in a positive and coherent manner.

The issue of definitional ambiguity is therefore a problem in terms of the development of peacebuilding strategies, specifically the Strategic Framework. Some criticism was expressed here in the sense that there often seems to be a disconnection between the theory and practice of peacebuilding. Again, it was mentioned that many activities undertaken in the name of 'peacebuilding', and often appearing in the Strategic Framework, have weak theoretical basis. Thus, there is a significant need for more attention to be paid towards how each action undertaken is conducive to building peace. The participants discussed how there has been efforts to address the structural causes of conflict in peacebuilding, such as youth exclusion, social inequalities, and resource management; yet it is also important to note that how these issues are conceptualized, and incorporated into the Strategic Framework, largely determines how we proceed with peacebuilding. Related to this point is the fact that despite there existing a general belief in the international community that peacebuilding needs to be contextually sensitive, there is also a tendency to work off the same assumptions in all cases. More focus needs to be given to different interpretations and approaches to peacebuilding, and how these can logistically be bridged and merged.

Essentially then, there was a general consensus that the PBC needs to take a more active role in being a facilitator of coordination and conceptual clarity in order to provide the foundation for developing effective and accurate measurements of

² See Michael Barnett, Hunjoon Kim, Madalene O'Donnell and Laura Sitea, 'Peacebuilding: What is in a Name?' *Global Governance*, Vol. 13, no. 1 (2007).

peace consolidation. This is especially important in terms of working with the many actors that are engaged in aspects of peacebuilding, while not actually viewing themselves as part of the process (ie. terming themselves as involved with 'development assistance' instead). The PBC can be essential in building knowledge internationally about the concept and functions of peacebuilding.

Local and National Engagement in Developing the Strategic Framework

Participants engaged with the peacebuilding process in both Sierra Leone and Burundi expressed a feeling of overall positivity from their experience of being on the agenda of the Peacebuilding Commission. An example of a positive development was provided from the case of Burundi, where the process of developing the Strategic Framework opened up a dialogue between the main political parties on the need for a common agenda for peacebuilding in their country. However, some necessary improvements were also expressed. For example, in Burundi, members of the PBC have made very infrequent visits to the country, but when these visits occurred, they help to stimulate the enthusiasm of those engaged in the peacebuilding process on the ground. Unfortunately, the tendency has been for these visits to not be accompanied with any evidence of applying the lessons learned to facilitate better practices. Thus, it was argued, in both Burundi and Sierra Leone, the PBC needs to take a greater initiative in becoming engaged at the grassroots level of the peacebuilding process, especially in terms of providing more substantive direction in constructing effective institutional and administrative processes which will be able to contribute to the building of peace in the country. Essentially, these participants advised the PBC to take a more hands on approach with the countries in which it works in the future in order to waste less time in getting the process going towards building peace.

It was also noted that on this issue of local engagement that the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) is perceived in a much more positive way by those engaged with the process at the grassroots level due to the fact that it is seen as making a real contribution on the ground. It was noted in the case of Burundi that people are often confused by the activities of the PBC versus the PBF, and that more engagement by the PBC would help to overcome this weakness. Others argued along the same lines that the PBC needs to ensure in its future activities that it realizes the importance of constructing a Strategic Framework that is realistic and not overly extensive and ambitious. If expectations are placed too high, people get disappointed.

In any event, there was also a vocalized tension between the need for inclusivity and strategy: as peacebuilding moves from the conceptual level to application, it is important to keep in mind what is actually possible in terms of operationalization. There must be a realization that peacebuilding strategies at the local, national and international level will need to be regularly modified and adapted to ensure that the desired results are being facilitated. It is important that a balance is struck between the active engagement of the PBC and the facilitation of ownership over the process both at the local and national level, an important issue that is dealt with more substantively in the next section. Thus, it was a frequently made point at this meeting that there exists a need for the Strategic Framework to develop out of engagement at both the local and national level, and not to be solely driven by New York.

Encouraging National Appropriation

The need to create a sense of “ownership” amongst those involved from the local to the national level over the peacebuilding process was discussed throughout the meeting. Although the experiences in Burundi and Sierra Leone seemed to indicate that there was a sense of national appropriation that occurred with the process of developing their respective Strategic Frameworks, the case of Guinea Bissau was much less positive.

It was articulated that although there is much that can be learned from the experiences of Sierra Leone and Burundi, and subsequently applied in future cases, there is also a danger of turning the peacebuilding process into a set of automatic steps to be followed without the necessary contextual sensitivity. In the case of Guinea Bissau, it was argued that the Strategic Framework was developed at far too great a pace, which greatly lowered the societal engagement necessary to create any sense of national ownership. It was thus argued that there exists a danger in the entire process losing credibility, which will then damage future UN peacebuilding activities.

Many stressed that in Guinea Bissau there exists little local ownership over the process, something which then substantially limits the overall ability to measure current efforts towards peace consolidation. Some participants articulated the rather bleak situation for peacebuilding in the country, where “everything is UN-driven, there is no one on the ground, and no monitoring capacity.” This issue of monitoring the process towards peace consolidation become increasingly problematic if there is very limited local engagement in the process, as the indicators being used as measurement are very unlikely to be actually adequately representative of what is needed for peace in the specific context.

Additionally, some participants noted that there is a general sense of fatigue developing in some cases due to the amount of documents, and meetings which have come to be part of the peacebuilding process. It was noted that although there is substantive agreement regarding the need to engage more local actors who tend to have a better understanding of what the situation requires, these individuals are often more interested in survival than in participating in meetings. As a result, more effort needs to be made to truly efficiently engage with society at all levels in order to effectively, and not just with societal elites, in order to build a true sense of national ownership over the peacebuilding process.

Building National Capacity

An important element related to the need to facilitate national ownership over the peacebuilding process is the complementary need to also build national capacity. Essentially, national ownership cannot happen without increased capacities; it needs to be taken into account that the goal of peacebuilding is to develop a strategy properly from the onset so that at a certain point, national actors are able to take over. The UN was argued to play a key role in overseeing this transfer in ownership, based on the development of sufficient capacity at the national and local level.

In the case of Guinea Bissau, the development of a Strategic Framework was undertaken through a series of thematic discussions, sometimes held less than a week apart. The danger in this was indicated in the lack of an appropriate level of national capacity in terms of coming up with an in depth of analyses by local and national actors of the current situation. In Guinea Bissau, the methodology used in developing the Strategic Framework was thus not adequate for accurately determining the core peacebuilding issues. Because of the pace of the process, the quality of analysis lead

to a Strategic Framework that was very development focused. As a result, it may be very difficult to come up with a subsequent methodology of how this process will translate into peace consolidation. Some participants thus argued that Guinea Bissau is an example of a missed opportunity in terms of building national appropriation over the peacebuilding process.

A significant example of this missed opportunity was provided by some participants in the fact that women in Guinea Bissau really took up the peacebuilding process as a chance for women's empowerment. These women set out to develop a set of ideas as to how the Strategic Framework could be engendered, based on a national consultation. However, this gender language was ultimately discarded in the editing process. This again was tied back to the point articulated in the previous section that peacebuilding, as manifested through the Strategic Framework, is a fundamental process and needs to be highly sensitive to the fact that many people see the process differently. Some participants argued that these locally engaged actors should have their ideas incorporated instead of the end product being driven mainly by the PBSO and PBC in New York.

Given this, it is important to remember that any benchmarks which are developed to measure the process towards peace consolidation must reflect the commitments of national and international actors, something that requires a highly consultative process. These benchmarks must be established levels of achievement, which are time-bound and accompanied by clear indicators. It is critical that the goal here is to develop a truly country-wide monitoring process. Building both national capacity and national ownership allows for the rapid recognition of gaps in the process and for corrective actions to be taken in response, something that is not possible without effective monitoring capacities.

Mobilizing Resources and Sustaining Attention

A key motivation in the creation of the PBC was the recognized need for more sustained attention and resources to countries coming out of violent conflict. However, in all three cases studies discussed at the meeting it was agreed that there is simply not enough resources, especially in monetary terms, to meet the objectives set forth in the respective Strategic Frameworks. It was argued that the PBC needs to be more engaged in mobilizing donors so that the resources needed for consolidating peace and encouraging development are made available. An example from the case of Sierra Leone was given by the fact that although nineteen peacebuilding projects have been developed in the country, funding has only been secured for three.

It was also noted that initially, the PBF was intended to be a mechanism for providing only short-term funding, and to attract further donor funding to projects on a longer trajectory. This has not translated into actual practice, with the PBF shouldering the majority of all funding towards peacebuilding projects. It was pointed out that not only does the PBF seem unable to marshal additional funding, it also seems unable to maintain even current levels. A few cases were pointed of the appropriation of external funding – namely the last minute provision of Japan to fund the recent elections in Guinea Bissau – but over all, this has been the exception rather than the rule. There has also been funding given on a project basis to peacebuilding in Burundi: Luxemburg funded a project on sexual violence, and the Netherlands has funded the building of military barracks, but again, this has not been the norm.

In most cases, it was noted that donors seem to be unwilling to provide further assistance on top of contributions to the PBF or to the peacekeeping mission. Moreover, it was also noted that even with the Japanese contribution to Guinea Bissau, these elections put a substantive drain on the already scarce resources

available to the peacebuilding process overall. This was all discussed as evidence that the PBF does not seem to be performing its intended function, and may be in need of further exploration in order to better facilitate an appropriate sustained level of long-term funding for the peacebuilding process.

Many participants did point to the positive contribution that the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform can and does play in both coordinating and sustaining attention, as well as being a conduit between grassroots and national actors, Geneva-based organizations and the headquarters in New York.

Monitoring and Evaluating Peace Consolidation

The issue of how peace consolidation should be most effectively monitored and evaluated in countries coming out of violent conflict was an underlying question throughout the meeting. In order to ensure that peacebuilding is being measured in a way as to accurately reflect a country's transition to peace, the proper prioritization and sequence of issues (within the Strategic Framework) is essential. Some participants mentioned that there is a significance in understanding violent conflicts as to a certain extent "path dependant". Thus, there needs to be more attention given to the structural causes of conflict. As such, it was argued by some that the benchmarks used to measure peace consolidation must involve a detailed consultation at all levels. They also must involve clearly defined goals and achievements. It was indicated as essential that the measurement of peace consolidation be developed locally, and not at the international level. This point reflected one made earlier – that often the successful work done at the project level has not been matched at the strategic level. Participants argued for a greater understanding to be developed – and reflected in the monitoring and evaluation of peacebuilding – of the connection between how action at the project level relates to the national level.

It is important, however, to also strike a balance between the development of an accurate Strategic Framework and following an effective timeline. Some participants emphasized the existence of a gap in terms of evaluation capacity in the field of peacebuilding, linked to evaluation fatigue. This perception stems mainly from the fact that evaluation is sometimes seen as a waste of money with studies taking too long to produce at too high a cost, and articulating mostly self-evident remarks. As such, it was discussed that often times, the development of peacebuilding benchmarks cannot be both "inclusive" (consultative at all levels) and "strategic" (quick implementation for maximum effectiveness); perhaps a balance between these desirable aspects must be struck.

It was also emphasized as to the importance of including "coherence analysis" when measuring the success of certain activities or policies towards creating 'peace'. This is both in terms of internal coherence (whether policy input links to output), and also whole of government coherence, as well as vertical (international, regional and national actors), and horizontal coherence (between the proliferating number of engaged actors). It was also noted, however, that having some overlap in functions of actors on the ground is not universally negative: it was indicated by some at the meeting that to a certain degree, a sense of "messiness" has historically been quite helpful in peace processes.

Conclusion: Ways Forward to Better Peace Consolidation

The future direction of the PBC, the PBF and the PBSO remains a subject of much debate. Some argued that the PBC should be transformed into a global platform for setting standards, reforming global policies to be contextually sensitive, and to build evaluation capacities in the countries facing conflict. However, first it is important to start with the need of common definitions of peace, peacebuilding and peace consolidation. There is a need to harmonize the many different planning frameworks used by those engaged in various ways with the peacebuilding process, and to work towards a common UN-wide peacebuilding monitoring methodology.

Yet, it was also stressed that monitoring of peace consolidation needs to account for how the process is being perceived on the ground and that although indicators can benefit from the collected knowledge of past peacebuilding engagements, ultimately the true measurement of peace must be developed locally. There is an important role for the UN to play in facilitating the peacebuilding process at the local level, and not being what some termed a "high-level interlocutor" coordinating the process from New York.

There was a general recognition of the complementarity of national capacity and national appropriation, in that national capacity needs to be built "faster and more aggressively" for any hope of the kind of ownership to occur that is necessary for sustained peace, and the important role that the UN (through the PBC, PBF and PBSO) must play in this process. It is important for the UN to strike a balance between becoming more active at the local level, as was advocated by some participants, and encouraging national capacity for appropriation of the process to occur in a more time efficient way. There was lastly a general sense that the current level of resources, both in terms of funding and attention, will not be adequate to achieve the kind of deliverables that need to be provided by the peace consolidation process. The UN will be imperative in overcoming these many challenges for peacebuilding, and building upon its current successes, in the future.