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Conflict and Post-Conflict Governance: The Stakeholder Perspective

Summary

- Post-conflict governance requires simultaneous and complementary action on three levels: national governance, local governance, and civil society.
- Norbert Mao, a parliamentary leader from Uganda, offered this progression for managing the trade-off between short-term stabilization and long-term capacity building: “In the emergency phase, you should do it for us. In the reconstruction phase, you should do it with us. And in the development phase, you should do it through us.”
- Efforts to develop the capacity of local governments to deliver services may be more responsive to external assistance than programs aimed at overcoming systemic dysfunctions in the central government, in part because municipal officials are more accountable to their communities.
- Civil society should be a prominent player in transitioning to “local ownership,” which may erroneously be conceived in terms of ownership by national and perhaps local governments. Building the capacity of civil society entails connectivity with international partners and ideas, not just financing.
- There are trade-offs involved among the three stakeholders. Among the most salient, when a legacy of abuse of power by the national government and repression of opposition groups must be confronted, an active civil society is essential. An invigorated civil society can fundamentally challenge illicit structures of power that profited from conflict.

“Overcoming a legacy of abuse of power and demonstrating responsiveness to all groups, no matter which side of the conflict they may have been on, is vital to creating a long-lasting peace.”

Introduction

On May 26-27, 2010, Deloitte Consulting LLP and the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP) co-sponsored a conference entitled Conflict and Post-Conflict Governance: The Stakeholder Perspective. The purpose was to draw upon the experiences of national politicians, mayors and civil society in conflict-affected countries to help improve technical assistance programs in the transition from war to peace. These local stakeholders identified themes that reinforce principles laid out in USIP’s “Guiding Principles for Stabilization and Reconstruction” and are summarized in this brief.¹

National Government

Balance short-term and long-term needs. Countries emerging from conflict have an immediate need for security, resources, and technical skills that existing state mechanisms cannot provide.

In the early stages of post-conflict recovery, national institutions typically must work with international organizations and donors to provide essential services. Norbert Mao, a parliamentary leader from Uganda, offered this progression for managing the tradeoff between short-term stabilization and long-term capacity building: "In the emergency phase, you should do it for us. In the reconstruction phase, you should do it with us. And in the development phase, you should do it through us." Nevertheless, during the emergency phase, it is essential to lay the foundation for capacity-building projects.

The trade-off between short- and long-term requirements is recognized in USIP's "Guiding Principles," as reflected in this principle dealing with the development of local capacity:

If international assistance is required while capacity is built, typical approaches include 1) temporary substitution for these governments; 2) direct assistance for capacity-building to these governments; 3) support for public-private partnerships; and 4) assistance through non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Even when government capacity to provide services is very weak, delivering services "with" rather than "for" local government improves prospects for legitimacy and stability.²

Ensure legitimacy and accountability. Accountability and transparency are crucial to the legitimacy of national government in conflict-afflicted countries. Overcoming a legacy of abuse of power and demonstrating responsiveness to all groups, no matter which side of the conflict they may have been on, is vital to creating a long-lasting peace.

USIP's Guiding Principles also emphasize the need for transparency and accountability mechanisms to ensure that essential services are delivered effectively and reliably, stating:

In societies emerging from conflict, government policies and use of state assets may have benefited elites and their networks at the expense of the population. . . Redressing this common pattern of abuse requires, at a minimum, an adequate regulatory framework and budget management executed through some basic professional administration that strictly adheres to human rights conventions and the law. . . Mechanisms for transparency and accountability help ensure that the government protects the resources it needs to provide services, operates within the bounds of the law, and responds to the population's needs.³

Local Government

Strengthen the capacity of local government. In societies emerging from conflict, the central government may have discriminated against opposition groups in the delivery of services or, owing to its predatory orientation toward society, been unresponsive. Overcoming these systemic dysfunctions may take an inordinate amount of time and effort, whereas local governments may respond with more agility to offers of external assistance to aid in service delivery. One of the reasons is that municipal officials are more accountable to their communities. Brian James, the mayor of Mutare City in Zimbabwe, asserts that the sustainability of local government results from the involvement of local people who have a vested interest in its success. According to Dr. Hector Silva, mayor of San Salvador, El Salvador, when people are asked who they trust the most, local government ranks higher than the central government because of its proximity to the people.

“Guiding Principles” endorses development of local government capacity for very similar reasons:

Developing and strengthening the institutional capacity of sub-national governance can lead to increased responsiveness to local concerns, create a venue for conflict management of local disputes, and present opportunities for emerging leaders or previously marginalized groups to enter government. These aspects of decentralization can enable more effective service delivery and inter-group political discussion that strengthens bonds within and across communities after conflict.

Consider decentralization as an option for moderating conflict. A crucial factor in the success of decentralization is funding. The biggest challenge local governments tend to face is revenue generation, which is often not a local government function. Typically, central government and municipal levels of revenue differ dramatically. Decentralization can assist in reallocating resources, but the central government has to be open to this process.

The potential role of decentralization in stabilizing societies emerging from conflict is also identified in “Guiding Principles”:

Sub-national institutions typically require real decision-making power and authority, control over budgets and resources, the institutional capacity to deliver services and adequate and timely pay to be effective. Decentralized governance, the degree and forms of which should be a host nation decision, can create rapid and visible results to garner legitimacy within local communities through responsiveness and transparency and emphasize revenue generation as a key priority.

Civil Society

Make civil society a prominent player in the transition to local ownership. Local ownership may erroneously be conceived in terms of ownership by national and perhaps local governments. Precisely because they may fundamentally challenge illicit power structures that profited from conflict, civil society must be factored into this equation. Yet because civil society comprises elements historically marginalized from power, their inclusion will happen only through the application of pressure from international actors. Building the capacity of civil society entails connectivity with international partners and ideas, not just financing. Civil society beneficiaries must have a voice in the design of programs intended to promote their influence.

These admonitions are solidly endorsed in “Guiding Principles” as a cross-cutting principle:

The ultimate responsibility for the stabilization and reconstruction process belongs to the host nation. This means assisting the host nation government and civil society to lead and participate in both planning and implementation... Partnerships with host nation actors should be guided by impartiality, inclusiveness and gender considerations based on a solid understanding of the local context (to include civil society, private sector actors and all ethnic, religious and minority groups).⁴

Empower youth and women. Sixty-two percent of the population of Afghanistan is under the age of 18. The figure is more than 50 percent in Pakistan and Haiti. Providing this group

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employment opportunity and an avenue for registering their concerns is a potent antidote to violence. Women, making up at least 50 percent of these populations, are a potentially powerful constituency for peace. Despite their significance to a sustainable transition from war to peace, these groups have traditionally lacked influence. Tying aid to issues critical to civil society—human rights, women’s rights, and democracy—is key to empowering youth and women.

These issues are also accentuated in “Guiding Principles”:

Focus on key political and social constituencies that require the most assistance, such as the poor, women, veterans and demobilized soldiers. Finding ways to empower youth through human capital development is also critical as some have primarily been involved in violent conflict and will not have had access to education or skills training. Training for youth should also be integrated with remedial education.⁵

Reform of the constitution is necessary but not sufficient. The constitution should empower civil society to serve as a check on the national and local governments’ abuse of power. Constitutional principles—that government is beholden to the people, is expected to respond to their will, and must respect the inalienable rights of even marginalized and disempowered groups—afford international actors a focal point for conditionality by establishing the government’s responsibility to respect human rights, women’s rights, and democracy. None of these aspirations will be accomplished by codification alone; they require long-term effort, but they are vital to giving the people who have lived through conflict a voice in a more peaceful future.

This proposition is consistent with the “Guiding Principles,” which states, “Laws should guarantee the right of association, expression, information and participation.”⁶

Foster a vital role for the media and political parties. The media are critical to a healthy long-term relationship between government and civil society because they provide non-violent means of transmitting grievances. The media need to be sensitized to the problems of common people so that their concerns can be communicated to those who wield power.

“Guiding Principles” also calls attention to the vital role of a free media in sustaining civil society: “Nurture and sustain a media sector that is pluralistic.... A pluralistic media sector includes a diverse array of voices with competing perspectives, including marginalized populations such as women and minorities.”⁷



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USIP provides the analysis, training and tools that prevent and end conflicts, promotes stability and professionalizes the field of peacebuilding.

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Endnotes

1. *Guiding Principles for Stabilization and Reconstruction*, Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2009.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 8–108.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 8–109.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 3–134.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 9–154.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 8–121.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 8–123.