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**Does the UN Peacebuilding Commission  
Change the Mode of Peacebuilding in Africa?**

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## 1 Introduction

In December 2005, the United Nations created a high-profile Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) to serve as a dedicated institutional mechanism to fill the gap in the international architecture for post-conflict response. As such the PBC was mandated to link the political, security and economic functions of the United Nations in conflict and post-conflict situations. This paper analyzes the PBC's own integrated strategies for peacebuilding in Sierra Leone and Burundi, through cumulative performance reports and views of practitioners.

## 2 Post Cold War Peacebuilding

In almost all previous and on-going peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations, the UN has been represented by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the United Nations Development Program, the Department of Political Affairs, as well as over thirty other UN agencies, funds and programs including international financial institutions and regional organizations. Outside the UN structures, several international development agencies created dedicated emergency or transitional units to deal with initial post-conflict situations. Like the World Bank, the Task Force of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization of the Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) prepared guidelines for 'Development Cooperation in Conflict: Prevention and Post-Conflict Recovery'; the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) expanded the mandate of its Division of Emergency Response; the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) strengthened its Emergency Unit and prepared guidelines on armed conflict and children; and the US Agency for International Development (USAID) created an Office of Transitional Initiatives. The involvement of so many players with competing interests in peacebuilding missions means that the coordination and integration of peacebuilding activities remains a serious challenge.

In addition, the attendant administrative burdens normally imposed on recipient institutions by competing demands from a multiplicity of donors tend to further weaken their already limited and overburdened capacities, discomfiture fragile domestic political coalitions and, in extreme circumstances, exacerbate the risks of reversals, setbacks and failures. Recalling growing research findings on conflict studies that conclude there is about a fifty percent chance of post-conflict

countries to reverting to conflict, the UN acknowledged publicly that it regularly failed to prevent such recurrences and to establish functioning, responsive and inclusive political institutions in war-torn societies.<sup>1</sup> It further acknowledged that the short timeframes, limited mandates, financial and personnel resources, and equipment provided often tended to grossly underestimate what was required to achieve durable peace and development.

The problems of coordination exists on four inter-related levels: first, at the field level between the various international actors including governmental and non-governmental agencies involved in peacebuilding missions and domestic actors within the country itself. Second, within bureaucracies of major donor governments, whose different departments and agencies often pursue different goals and activities within the same mission. Third, serious problems of coordination also exist within the UN system, where bureaucratic rivalries and turf battles are a legion. Fourth and finally, there are coordination problems at the headquarters level between all the major international state building actors as well as the major governments supporting these actors. Arguably, each of these many actors tends to compete for influence and visibility. While all international actors tend to subscribe to the broad goals of transforming war economies into liberal market democracies, there is no universal agreement on what is required to achieve this goal, or how to achieve it under different circumstances.

It was against this background that in 2004 the former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan tasked a High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change to take stock of threats to international and human security and make recommendations to improve the UN response. The Panel's subsequent report found that the UN had a vital and irreplaceable role in peacebuilding, with unique legitimacy and comparative advantages that could not be replicated elsewhere<sup>2</sup>. The report expressed concern about the fragmentary nature of the peacebuilding initiatives by many actors, within and outside UN, each pursuing different and at times conflicting goals. It noted also that

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<sup>1</sup> UN Report of the Panel on UN Peace Operations. UN doc. A/55/305 – S/2000/809. 21 August 2000: Executive Summary

<sup>2</sup> Report of the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change. A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility. New York: UN, 2004.

there were inadequate relationships between the UN agencies with the international financial institutions (IFIs) through which it could effectively steer the relevant political-financial linkages necessary for effective post-conflict recovery. Moreover, the Report added that with resources disproportionately directed toward peacekeeping and emergency humanitarian needs, insufficient attention was being paid to the medium- to long-term tasks, such as building sustainable institutions in post-conflict countries. These missions often were too brief, too limited, and too focused on speedy political and economic reforms to consolidate peace, particularly in fragile environments. Above all, the report identified a key institutional gap: there was no place in the UN system explicitly designed to assist countries in their transition from war to peace.

### 3 The UN Peacebuilding Commission

As a result of the above glaring inadequacies, the Panel's report recommended the establishment of a Peacebuilding Commission, as a "single intergovernmental organ dedicated to peacebuilding, empowered to monitor and pay close attention to countries at risk, ensure concerted action by donors, agencies, programs and financial institutions, and to mobilize financial resources for sustainable peace." Thus, the UN policy focus had to shift from speedy political and economy reforms to building effective, legitimate and sustainable governmental institutions. The Secretary General endorsed most of the report's proposals in his March, 2005, report, *In Larger Freedom*.<sup>3</sup> The 2005 World Summit endorsed the proposals and subsequently the General Assembly and the Security Council passed concurrent resolutions in December, 2005, formally establishing the PBC. Both resolutions mandated the PBC to:

- bring together all relevant actors to marshal resources and to advise on and propose integrated strategies for post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery;
- focus attention on the reconstruction and institution-building efforts necessary for recovery from conflict and to support the development of integrated strategies in order to lay the foundation for sustainable development;

- provide recommendations and information to improve the coordination of all relevant actors within and outside the UN, and to develop best practices to help ensure predictable financing for early recovery activities and to extend the period of attention given by the international community to post-conflict recovery.<sup>4</sup>

It should be emphasized right from the start that the PBC serves solely as an advisory body to the Security Council and the General Assembly. It has no independent authority or decision-making power over other bodies. Furthermore, its recommendations and advice are on the basis of consensus among the members of the PBC.

### 4 Structure of the PBC

The PBC operates in three different configurations. The first configuration is the Central Organizational Committee. It comprises 31 member states, including seven from the Security Council, ECOSOC and General Assembly, as well as five from the major financial donors and five top troop contributors to the UN. The Central Organization Committee determines the agenda and assigns specific cases to country-specific groupings of representatives from the country under consideration, contributors of finance, troops and civilian police, other countries in the region, regional and sub-regional organizations, regional and international financial institution and the senior UN representative in the field. The second configuration is the Country Specific Meeting of the PBC. It addresses issues particular to individual focus countries and brings together participants in New York with parties in the field via video-telecommunications through a series of formal and informal meetings at the UN Headquarters as well as through country missions. The third and final configuration is the Working Group on Lessons Learned. The Working Group studies and distills lessons from national and international experiences in post-conflict engagement. It also develops forward looking lessons and recommendations for post-conflict strategies and their implementation.

The PBC is supported by two other bodies: the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) and the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF). The former is comprised of a wide range of experts who gather

<sup>3</sup> The Secretary-General. *In Larger Freedom: Toward Development, Security and Human Rights for All* UN Doc. A/59/2005. 21 March, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> As outlined in the Security Council resolution UN Doc. S/RES/1645, of 20 December, 2005 and UN Doc A/RES/60/180 December 30, 2005.

and analyze information from the Commission members on their peacebuilding activities, contribute to the planning process for peacebuilding operations, conduct best practices analysis, and develop policy guidance. The latter mobilizes funds from voluntary contributions in order to bridge funding gaps in the crucial time between conflict and recovery. The Fund's initial funding level was set at least \$250 million. The Fund concentrates on four main areas:

- activities in support of the implementation of peace agreements;
- activities in support of efforts by the country to build and strengthen capacities which promote coexistence and the peaceful resolution of conflict
- establishment or re-establishment of essential administrative services and related human and technical capacities; and
- critical interventions designed to respond to imminent threats to the peacebuilding process.

The PBF has a two-tiered decision-making process with a central allocation of funding under the Joint Steering Committee, comprised of representatives from the recipient government, the UN, civil society and donors. Its mandate is to oversee the broad parameters for the use of the Fund. The UNDP administers the Fund, with the PBC playing an advisory role in setting the funding priorities. The General Assembly plays the guiding role. There is also a PBF Advisory Group consisting of ten eminent persons, nominated by member states. According to the PBF's terms of reference, the Joint Steering Committee must ensure that the funded activities will support the priorities identified in country specific strategic frameworks, to address any gap that cannot be funded through any other mechanism, and determine that the earmarked activities do not duplicate other on-going interventions.

## 5 The PBC and Peacebuilding Strategies

Post-conflict interventions seek to address two overall objectives: to facilitate a transition to sustainable peace after the guns have gone silent and to support economic and social reconstruction. Not surprisingly, the enormous complexity of peacemaking, provision of urgent humanitarian assistance to war-torn communities, the entrenched actor interests and overlapping man-

dates of the international development agencies tend to divert attention, more often than not, from embracing a common post-conflict intervention framework. As noted earlier, the PBC's brief is to bridge the operational gap between the UN Security Council security mandate and the development mandate of the international financial institutions, the UN development system and the donors. Building and consolidating peace in post-conflict societies requires that the security, political, and economic risks be addressed simultaneously, and that support be mutually reinforcing. In order to institutionalize coordination among different actors and to integrate priorities and goals, the PBC/PBSO develops Integrated Peacebuilding Strategies (IPSS) for each candidate country. The central argument behind the introduction of IPSS is to develop a common approach to peacebuilding and reconstruction, endorsed by the relevant national governments, local and international civil society organizations, the IFIs and other outside donors. It is also expected that such a platform would serve as an important institutional mechanism for joint decision-making, and ultimately provide a more coherent international support in post-conflict settings.

Most analysts tend to agree that a full resolution of war-related crises will neither be effective nor lasting unless all factors and all forces standing as impediments to the realization of peace, security and development are fully and comprehensively addressed. This 'political economy' framework of conflict includes an understanding of the uniqueness of each conflict system, in terms of its own particular socio-economic and political history, the root causes and immediate consequences of the conflict, the specific configuration of the actors and their interests, and the capacity of the key change agents. It is equally vital to address the nature of the regional and international environments within which the envisaged transformation from war to peace is expected to take place.<sup>5</sup> Above all, a comprehensive peacebuilding and reconstruction strategy needs to accommodate the multi-level character of conflict, proliferating actors and rapidly shifting boundaries. Such a comprehensive un-

<sup>5</sup> See Woodward, S. "Economic Priorities for Successful Peace Implementation" in Stedman, S. et al. (Eds) *Ending Civil Wars: The Implementation of Peace Agreements*. Boulder, 2002:183-214 and Boyce, *Investing in Peace: Aid and Conditionality after Civil Wars*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Adelphi Paper 351, 2002

derstanding informs the conflict resolution approach, intervention methods and tools to be employed. Arguably, the process of peacebuilding is not simply a list of activities to be undertaken, with matrices of actors, methods and impacts. What kind of peace to be built informs what types of intervention activities to be undertaken, in what sequence and for how long. Unlike the seemingly ideological neutrality of relief operations, the task of peacebuilding and reconstruction is as openly political as that of development, carrying with it certain assumptions about the primacy of particular norms, values and institutions.

## 6 Taking Stock of PBC Performance in Burundi and Sierra Leone

### Coordination of Actors

Sierra Leone and Burundi were identified as the first two PBC focus countries. By the end of 2006, the PBC had identified overlapping thematic priorities for each country. For Burundi, the priorities were good governance, the rule of law, security sector reform and community recovery. For its part, the PBC agreed to encourage effective coordination among international donors and peacebuilding agencies to help with the mobilization of resources to Burundi to support its peacebuilding priorities. For Sierra Leone, the priorities were youth empowerment and employment, democracy and good governance, and judicial and security sector reform. As in Burundi, the PBC pledged to promote greater international coordination, mobilize resources and generally to support the efforts of the government.

As pointed out earlier, coordination for peacebuilding and reconstruction for post-conflict countries entails developing strategies, determining objectives, planning, sharing information, determining roles and responsibilities, and mobilizing resources. It also entails synchronizing the mandates, roles and activities of various stakeholders and actors in order to meet common objectives. The realization of this primary objective has remained hugely illusive for the PBC. At the level of implementation, the current approach to peacebuilding continues to be compartmentalized. There are disjointed links between decisions made by major financial actors such as the IMF, the World Bank, international development agencies and the UN development systems and the political support offered by the

UN.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, there is a general unwillingness and individual pride to sacrifice their respective autonomy and independence.

### Policy Effectiveness

By the end of 2007, the PBC had developed IPSs for Burundi and Sierra Leone and had adopted monitoring and tracking mechanisms for periodic assessments of progress in consolidating peace for both countries.<sup>7</sup> But to what extent have these policy instruments been effective? As mentioned before, the PBC as an advisory inter-governmental organ lacks operational executive authority to preside over or affect policy coherence and coordination.<sup>8</sup> As various evaluation reports and our own interviews have confirmed, lacking any real authority to ensure that its recommendations are taken up, that funds are disbursed from the Peacebuilding Fund, or to authorize other UN agencies to carry out the work, the PBC has at best served as a 'coordinating forum' rather than a management body with power to formulate policies, approve programs and budgets and evaluate performance reports.

Under such circumstances, therefore, the basic principles of coordination and coherence continue to elude the PBC. As Rob Jenkins notes, the PBC has no authority to require independent donor agencies or multilateral financial institutions to restructure their respective strategies, plans and projects even if these would appear to duplicate (or in some way undermine) the work of peacebuilding actors, either domestic or external.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See Center for International Cooperation and International Peace Institute. *Taking Stock, Looking Forward: A Strategic Review of the Peacebuilding Commission*. Commissioned by the Permanent Mission of Denmark to the UN April 2008:17.

<sup>7</sup> UN Peacebuilding Commission. *Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding in Burundi*. UN Doc.PBC/BDI/4 22 June, 2007; and *Sierra Leone Peacebuilding Cooperation Framework*. UN Doc. PBC/2/SLE/1 3 December, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> See periodic internal reports of the PBC performance. General Assembly. *Reports of the Peacebuilding Commission on its First and Second Sessions*. UN Doc. A/62/137-s/2007/458. 25 July 2007 and A/63/92 – S/2008/147 24 June, 2008; and ActionAID et al. *Consolidating Peace? Views from Sierra Leone and Burundi on the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission*, 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Jenkins, R. "Organizational Change and Institutional Survival: The Case of the U.N Peacebuilding Commission." *Seton Hall Law Review* 2008, 38 (1327):1327—1364.

## Sustained Attention on Countries and Financing Possibilities

Furthermore, the PBC's lack of authority is further manifested by its inability to sustain an enhanced attention on its candidate countries. This is, in part, reflected in the limited amount of resources pledged and given and, in part, in the vagueness of the intended period of engagement. The Strategic Frameworks for Burundi and Sierra Leone recognize that both countries will need the sustained attention of the international community until the establishment of the foundations for sustainable peace and development. At the same time, financing instruments for long-term development tend to be too slow, unpredictable and too cumbersome to respond to the needs in a fragile post-conflict environment. However, according to African diplomats interviewed in New York, because most of the countries on the current PBC watch list are perceived to have negligible economic and security importance to powerful states, they tend not to attract as much attention as either Iraq or Bosnia.<sup>10</sup> Not surprisingly also, the PBC work plans for Burundi and Sierra Leone are drawn on a six-month basis. By August, 2008, the Fund had only attracted a paltry US\$260 million in pledges from 44 foot-dragging donors.

## Conflicting Interests

The core members of the PBC constitute a collection of various member states with competing and/or contradictory national interests, values and priorities. Arguably, the long-running political battles among member states in the Security Council and the General Assembly tend to be quietly smuggled into the PBC arena.

A joint study by the Centre on International Cooperation of New York University (CIC) and the International Peace Institute (IPI) found that the PBC process was highly politicized, extremely cumbersome, confusing, and often frustrating in the field and at the headquarters.<sup>11</sup> This observation also was confirmed repeatedly by our interview respondents from the PBSO. First, the CIC/IPI study observes that the traditional tensions in the UN (in particular, over the balance of

power between the Security Council and the General Assembly) continue to color the PBC's proceedings, especially in the Organizational Committee. More specifically, the study argued that some key members of the PBC, especially the Permanent Members on the Security Council, rarely attended scheduled PBC meetings. Worse still, their respective representatives who participate actively in the field, in New York and via their capitals, have not always engaged with a single, coherent voice but instead have taken contradictory positions in different venues. Equally disturbing, some PBC members from developing countries who are neither donors nor represented in the field have always missed the opportunity to meaningfully and objectively add their views. The videoconferencing facility, an institutional arrangement to improve coordination and communication between actors in Headquarters and the field, was not perceived by developing countries to be as interactive as physical meetings.<sup>12</sup> Ultimately, one of PBC principal objectives of promoting effective participation and dialogue among members tends to boil down to negotiations among the traditional donor countries.

## Engagement with National Actors

Beyond the coordination of international actors, the PBC is grappling with equally troubling difficulties of fostering coherence and coordination among the legitimate representatives of the host societies themselves, so that the international actors could engage meaningfully and effectively with national leaders and other opinion makers. In the Specific Country Meetings of Burundi and Sierra Leone, the PBC consultations included representation of senior government bureaucrats, bilateral donors and international NGOs. Indeed, without government participation from the early stages, the entire peacebuilding enterprise would be unlikely to reflect the political priorities and concerns of the government and the program would inevitably be resented and rendered ineffective, regardless of the quality of its design, delivery or supervision. Similarly, a group of NGOs that produced the first-year report card on the PBC in June of 2007 found out that, procedurally, the PBC had also taken initial steps in terms of consulting a handful of civil society organizations in Burundi and Sierra Leone as part

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<sup>10</sup> Interviews with African diplomats at the UN Offices in New York February 2009.

<sup>11</sup> See Center for International Cooperation and International Peace Institute. *Taking Stock, Looking Forward: A Strategic Review of the Peacebuilding Commission*. Commissioned by the Permanent Mission of Denmark to the UN April 2008.

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<sup>12</sup> See Center for International Cooperation and International Peace Institute. *Op. cit.*

of the country respective PBF National Steering Committees.

However, the same report further points out that most of the civil society representatives were state-appointed, mainly urban-based and possessed highly questionable grassroots credentials. Arguably, from the elitist government standpoint, these are the kinds of NGOs that have the right knowledge, expertise and experience that can be brought to bear in facilitating the process of defining peacebuilding objectives and the rules of engagement, as well as proposing planning and monitoring methodologies. However, the net effect of such ill-advised selection criteria for participation had a two-way deficit: the majority of the people in rural areas were not at all aware of the purpose and meaning of the PBC and the development of a peacebuilding strategy, and the PBC did not get an accurate picture of the people's needs and concerns beyond the capital cities.

Nevertheless, several observers and diplomats interviewed in New York unanimously and confidently claimed that the PBC mechanism was engendering yet another important political space for the national NGOs to engage in policy making negotiations with their respective governments, bilateral donors and multilateral agencies. The new space was serving the critical need of building confidence between the government, the UN, donors and civil society, and was fostering new democratic norms of participation and consultation. Unfortunately, the poor information flows, lack of adequate preparatory time, and formidable language barriers were often identified as obstacles to quality participatory processes by some members of the national NGO communities in both Burundi and Sierra Leone. Similarly, most of the African diplomats interviewed in New York confirmed the PBC's value-addition role in promoting productive national dialogues in post-conflict societies. They unanimously confirmed that as civil society organizations create a space to engage in the PBC process, they gradually develop and nurture a group stake in the peacebuilding, reconciliation and healing by addressing what they perceive to be the root causes of the conflict. Our interviewees recommended only the need to address the weaknesses in the selection process, the empowerment of the selected representatives, and the promotion of a democratic policy management processes within the PBC.

## 7 Conclusion

The discussion has demonstrated that while the PBC offers rudimentary new approaches to peacebuilding many shortcomings still need to be addressed, both within the PBC itself and the international development regime at large. One key PBC reform need is to give the Commission greater authority in decision making processes that affect the coordination of actors, resources and policies in order to achieve sustainable results. On a larger scale, an enlightened peacebuilding strategy for sustainable development should revisit the policy framework for war-torn economies. It should be driven by a duty of care that transcends borders---seeking to design and implement comprehensive aid, trade, investment, debt, technology and power partnerships that underwrite genuine sustainable development. Arguably, economic growth and export promotion in Africa would be chiefly dependent on factors beyond the continent's control. The terms of trade of non-fuel commodities vis-à-vis manufactures have continued to fall, and many African economies continue to suffer tremendous losses. These losses have adversely affected the sustainable development prospects of poor post-conflict countries due to the fact that they contribute to increasing their debt problem and to exacerbating their persistent poverty. A deliberate reform effort in the South's terms of trade vis-à-vis the West through some institutional mechanisms would be required in order to stem, or even better, reverse the current South-to-West flow of economic resources. Seriously affected countries would require compensatory and contingency financing without IMF-related conditions or currently compromised ODA flows. The World Bank recommendation of considering the provision of such a global public good, e.g. global commodity price insurance instruments to address the key price volatility problems of developing countries, should be aggressively pursued by all genuine development cooperation platforms. Such a multilateral instrument would also help to create conditions for a more equitable trading system, reduce resource wastage and unsustainable consumption patterns, and expand financial resources in Africa for a smooth transition to sustainable development.<sup>13</sup>

The implementation of reforms in the international development regime will only yield positive development results if they are re-enforced

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<sup>13</sup> World Bank. Can Africa Claim the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 2000.

by equally enlightened governance regimes in post-conflict societies. As noted earlier, un-democratic governance was one of the key triggers of conflicts in Burundi and Sierra Leone. The enlightened governance in both countries should include significant reforms in governance structures that institutionalize democratic political systems at all levels of society, and that respect human rights, the rule of law and social equity. It should also include strong commitment to promote stable and equitable economic growth and to provide public goods and social protection which commits itself to raise the capabilities of people through universal access to education and other services. Finally, reformed governance structures should seek to promote a vibrant civil society, empowered by the freedom of association and expression that reflects and voices the

full diversity of views and interests. Such national reforms will go a long way to maximize opportunities that will be engendered by the proposed progressive international development cooperation regime.

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