



Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace in Peace Operations: Focusing on Impact in the Field

Abstract

Peacebuilding and sustaining peace in peace operations continues to be a complex endeavor. While the UN has come a long way in adapting its peacebuilding tools to the changing landscape on the ground, much more needs to be done to ensure that the implementation of peacebuilding efforts is geared towards making an impact in the field. This paper examines four key pillars to strengthen the contribution of peace operations to sustaining peace.

Introduction

Sustaining peace in countries emerging from conflict continues to be one of the most complex challenges of our time. Although much has been done over the past decade to keep the peace and halt violence, efforts to support longer-term peacebuilding processes – including institution building, reconciliation, and political and economic transformation – have not always been adequately prioritized or resourced. In fact, peacebuilding has often been misconceived to be linked with exit and transition strategies of peace operations rather than an integral dimension of peace operations’ mandate during its entire life cycle. As a result, peace operations tend to drag on for years and the task of sustaining peace becomes even more difficult. Today, more than thirteen countries¹ in Africa require sustained peacebuilding support and the demand is expected to increase in coming years.

Since the adoption of the 2016 twin resolutions on sustaining peace (A/RES/70/262 and S/RES/2282), the United Nations (UN) has undertaken widespread reform measures to improve its peacebuilding tools and approaches, including the reform of the development system and the empowered Resident Coordinator mechanism, the enhanced role of the Peacebuilding Commission

1. See List of Countries Declared Eligible to the Peacebuilding Fund by the Secretary-General, 2020, available at: <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/content/countries-declared-eligible-pbf-secretary-general>.

ABOUT THE EVENT

The Virtual Challenges Annual Forum 2020 (VCAF20) will take place virtually from 7-11 December 2020. Hosts for this year’s Forum are the Challenges Forum Partners: the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) in South Africa, the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. With the overarching theme “Framing Peace Operations in a Changing Global Landscape”, VCAF20 proposes to reflect on how to sustain effective peace operations in a changing global context.

Challenges Forum is a global partnership that uses its convening power to generate innovative ideas and promote results for more effective peace operations.

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(PBC), and the renewed focus on the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF). And while it is too early to assess the effectiveness of these structural changes, there have been positive signs of more coordinated and integrated efforts in the delivery of peacebuilding tasks, including common country assessments (CCAs) and the UN sustainable development cooperation framework.

Today's global context, particularly since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic (covid-19), presents the first real test for the revitalized UN peacebuilding architecture,² and the broader peacebuilding community, to demonstrate their ability to respond flexibly to growing and shifting peacebuilding needs, while keeping an eye for the long-term. As the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic deepens, it is likely to exacerbate social vulnerabilities, strain the capacity of national institutions, and hamper recovery efforts. At the same time, there are concerns that an emerging global recession will further undermine efforts to mobilize much-needed resources for peacebuilding processes and hasten transition processes/withdrawal of UN peace operations³ in contexts where peace remains fragile. This, coupled with a narrowing space for multilateral cooperation, presents a complex environment for peacebuilding actors.

Against this backdrop, it is becoming increasingly clear that strengthened field partnerships are necessary to consolidate peacebuilding gains and sustain peace. While the UN has come a long way in adapting its peacebuilding tools to the changing landscape on the ground, much more needs to be done to ensure that the implementation of peacebuilding efforts is geared towards making an impact in the field. With this in mind, and as the international community deliberates the future of peacebuilding and sustaining peace in peace operations as part of the 2020 Review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture, it is important to consider the following four pillars to strengthen peacebuilding impact in the field:

1. People-centered peacebuilding approaches are necessary to deepen the foundations for peace:

Although the host state is the main interlocutor in peace operations, the Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) initiative and the Security Council and General Assembly twin resolutions

2. European Union Institute for Security Studies "Virtual Informal EU Consultations For the 2020 Un Peacebuilding Architecture Review," May 2020, available at: https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/unpba_summary_report.pdf
3. OECD, "Mission drawdowns: Financing a sustainable peace: Sustaining gains and supporting economic stability post UN mission withdrawal", March 2020, OECD Development Policy Papers, No. 28, OECD Publishing, Paris, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1787/a0b4c681-en>.

on sustaining peace, among other political instruments⁴, underscores the importance of people-centered approaches in peace operations. This reinforces the view that peacebuilding support to national institutions on one hand, and local capacities on the other, are not separate processes; in fact both should be seen as complementary and mutually reinforcing. Accordingly, UN peace operations need to be increasingly oriented to bridge the divide between nascent state institutions and the local population. They can therefore contribute to building positive state-society relations.⁵

Nevertheless, too often, peace operations prioritize support to 'technical' peacebuilding processes, and discount the relevance of subtler and more intricate aspects of peacebuilding, such as restoring social cohesion and addressing the sources of grievance in society. This separation is particularly prominent in the implementation of mandated tasks such as the extension of state authority, where the focus is usually on expanding the physical presence of the state as opposed to its ability to respond to the needs of its citizens.⁶ That is why, engaging with local and community actors is critical to ensure progress towards intended results.

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Local actors⁷ have a nuanced understanding of the conflict dynamics at play and are often primary agents of peacebuilding. Particularly now in the wake of Covid-19, local actors have proven to be indispensable in responding to immediate challenges and consolidating peace. While engaging with local and community actors is becoming a more common practice in many peace operations, in reality however, these types of consultations are not always linked with ongoing efforts aimed at sustaining peace. Peace operations need to become more

4. These include: the 2015 Report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) 2015, and the 2018 Report of the Secretary General on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace.
5. de Coning, C et al 2015 Towards More People-Centric Peace Operations: From 'Extension of State Authority' to 'Strengthening Inclusive State-Society Relations'. *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development*, 4(1): 49, pp. 1–13, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/sta.gl>
6. Youssef Mahmoud and Delphine Mechoulan, "Peace Operations and Prevention for Sustaining Peace: The Restoration and Extension of State Authority." International Peace Institute, March 2017, available at: <https://www.ipinst.org/2017/03/peace-ops-for-sustaining-peace-state-authority>
7. Local actors can include traditional and religious communities, civil society organizations, vulnerable and marginalized groups.

adept at systematically engaging a broad range of local actors in their work in order to provide impetus for peacebuilding processes to develop from the ground up.

Building national and local institutions for basic service delivery, such as education, justice, and healthcare, is central to efforts aimed at strengthening trust between the people and the state. There are a number of recent country examples to draw on in this regard. The technical support team deployed to Gambia (AUTSTG) presents an interesting approach, particularly because The Gambia is “not a typical post-conflict country.”⁸ The mission is comprised of ten experts working in different government departments to strengthen institutional capacity, while ensuring local ownership of the process.⁹ Such innovative and cost-effective approaches to building national institutions should be further explored and reinforced.

Central to this process is an appreciation of the role and limitations of peace operations. Indeed, the task of building resilient local and national institutions goes well beyond the capacity and lifespan of peace operations to deliver on its own. That is why, integrated and joint programming with the UN country team (UNCT), regional organizations, and other relevant actors, based on comparative advantages, is necessary to ensure sustainable and impact-driven results.

2. The role of women in building resilient and inclusive communities:

Over the past few years, women’s participation in peacekeeping operations has gained considerable momentum due to concerted efforts by the Secretariat and troop/police contributing countries. As we mark the 20th anniversary of the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1325, there are some concrete – albeit modest – achievements to celebrate in the peacekeeping sphere, including a progressive increase in the number of female peacekeepers¹⁰ deployed in missions, the deployment of all-women police and military units, and most recently the adoption of the Indonesian-led Security Council resolution 2538 – the first to specifically address the role of women in peacekeeping. Comparably, less attention has been directed to women’s leadership in peacebuilding processes. Women at the local level are making an immense contribution to building

8. Chido Mutangadura “Will Gambia be a turning point for AU peace efforts.” Institute for Security Studies (ISS). May 2019, available at: https://issafrica.org/iss-today/will-the-gambia-be-a-turning-point-for-au-peace-efforts?utm_source=BenchmarkEmail&utm_campaign=ISS_Today&utm_medium=email

9. Ibid.

10. Information Management Unit, DPPA-DPO, “Highlights of Key Achievements - Action for Peacekeeping,” November 2019, available at: https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/191101_a4p_achievements_one_pager.pdf

inclusive societies and sustaining peace efforts, particularly now at the time of Covid-19. In Libya, for example, women peacebuilders are leading community awareness activities on Covid-19 and providing medical support to those in need.¹¹

To ensure the experiences and contributions of women peacebuilders are accounted for in broader peacebuilding efforts, greater visibility to women-led peacebuilding efforts is required. In addition to providing a safe and secure environment for women, UN peace operations – together with the UNCT – should strengthen strategic and systematic engagement with women organizations and integrate their peacebuilding priorities into mission planning and decisions. This requires enhanced expertise in gender-responsive peacebuilding within missions and UNCT in order to contribute meaningfully to women’s protection and empowerment in society.

There are welcome moves underway within the UN Secretariat to strengthen accountability for gender-responsive peacebuilding, such as updating of the Secretary General’s Seven Point Action Plan on Gender-responsive Peacebuilding. Nevertheless, a great deal of the work on women’s leadership in peacebuilding is happening at the policy level, where women groups are invited to contribute to high-level consultation meetings; much less effort is directed towards empowering women at the country-level, with only “0.2% of bilateral aid to conflict affected contexts going directly to women’s organizations in 2016–2017.”¹² The PBF Gender Promotion Initiative (GPI) should continue to provide targeted support to women peacebuilders, with particular emphasis on ensuring coherence of approach among relevant UN actors operating in mission settings. Other stakeholders should follow through with their own commitments to implement the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda. In this regard, the PBC can play a more active role in advocating for strengthened gendered resourcing and expertise in mission settings¹³, particularly now as political support for the WPS agenda seems to be waning and divisions within the Security Council are becoming more accentuated.

11. UN Women, “Connected by their phones, women peacebuilders lead Covid-19 prevention efforts across Libya.” June 2020, available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/6/feature-women-peacebuilders-lead-covid-19-prevention-efforts-across-libya>

12. UN, “Secretary-General’s Peacebuilding Fund: 2020-2024 Strategy,” pp.4. March 2020, available at https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/pbf_strategy_2020-2024_final.pdf.

13. DPPA/PBSO and UN Women, Review Report on the Implementation of the PBC Gender Strategy, 2020, available at: https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/review_report_of_the_pbc_gender_strategy_implementation.pdf

3. Youth are an important constituency for peace:

Despite the limited space for their participation in peace and security issues at large, youth are proving to be a critical resource for sustainable peace and development. The Security Council has so far adopted three resolutions on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS)¹⁴ that recognize the important and positive contribution of youth to efforts aimed at sustaining peace. While broadly endorsed by member states and the UN system, the YPS agenda is still very much a work in progress. There is still much untapped potential for engaging young men and women in peacebuilding efforts, particularly in Africa, where the youth represent a large proportion of the population.

In effect, UN peace operations – together with regional organizations and UN country team entities – can do more to recognize the role of youth as formal actors in peacebuilding; thus adding a sense of legitimacy to their work and enabling their meaningful engagement with national actors. Working in tandem with UN peace operations, the UNCT can play an important role in support of youth entrepreneurship, economic empowerment, and access to resources in order to boost long-term recovery and development. Nevertheless, the YPS agenda continues to be highly politicized and not much guidance is provided to missions and UNCT on how to effectively harness youth creativity and energy. To this end, there is a need for clear guidelines and context-specific strategies for UN peace operations and relevant peacebuilding actors on the implementation of the YPS agenda. This would enable the UN to take advantage of the full range of tools available to advance inclusive and sustainable peacebuilding processes.

4. Unpacking what “Good Peacebuilding Donorship” looks like:

Lack of adequate and predictable financing for peacebuilding, particularly in the time of Covid-19, is hampering efforts on the ground and holding back progress on the implementation of the sustaining peace agenda. For this reason, the UN has started the 2020 Peacebuilding Architecture Review with a call for a ‘quantum leap’ in the financing of the PBF to meet current and future demands.¹⁵ And while the PBF does indeed require more support to be able to act as a catalyst, it is also just one

14. The three YPS resolutions are UNSCR 2250 (2015), UNSCR 2419 (2018), and UNSCR 2535 (2020).

15. Secretary General Remarks at the Meeting of the Peacebuilding Commission on the 2020 Review. Available at: <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2019-11-22/peacebuilding-commission-the-2020-review-remarks>

piece of the broader puzzle. There is a need for a more critical discussion on how different financing sources can be better utilized and structured towards supporting sustaining peace. Indeed, it is not just a matter of ‘more money’, but there is also a need to develop a shared understanding about ‘what type of funding is required’ and ‘how it should be spent/channeled.’ The Secretary General has recently emphasized the idea of “good peacebuilding donorship;” with little guidance as to what it really means in practice. Reference is often made to enhanced coherence and joint planning within and between donors, international financial institutions, peace operation, UN agencies and other relevant actors involved in peacebuilding efforts across the peace continuum.¹⁶ However, the notion of “good peacebuilding donorship” should also be explored from the lens of the local population. In that sense, national and local actors need to be more systematically engaged in determining peacebuilding needs and priorities. It is also critical that donors draw and build on existing peacebuilding structures in society with the view to enhance resilience at the community level. Consistent with this view, the role of peace operations in supporting existing peacebuilding processes at the inception of a mission should be further reinforced by integrating peacebuilding funding in mission budgets. To date, insufficient programmatic funding is significantly undermining the ability of peace operations to act as early peacebuilders and make a meaningful contribution to sustaining peace.

What this means for the future of peacebuilding and sustaining peace in peace operations:

Today’s new and unpredictable era of global pandemic requires scaled up and coordinated peacebuilding efforts. In this context, navigating between immediate concerns and longer-term peacebuilding priorities will be a fine balancing act; one that will define how the UN understands and operationalizes the sustaining peace agenda. And although the sustaining peace agenda has often been criticized for its conceptual vagueness and all-encompassing approach, it has developed considerably over the past few years to provide operational guidance for peace operations on how to effectively contribute to sustaining peace.¹⁷

16. UN General Assembly and Security Council, Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace—Report of the Secretary-General, UN Doc. A/74/976 – S/2020/773 , 30 July 2020, pp.19. available at: https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/sg_report_on_peacebuilding_and_sustaining_peace.a.74.976-s.2020.773.200904.e.4.pdf

17. See for example Presidential Statement S/PRST/2017/27 of December 2017.

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The four pillars discussed in this paper present useful entry points for UN peace operations to support peacebuilding processes. Each of these pillars is an ongoing endeavor to help build and sustain peace at the society level. They converge in their aim to strengthen local and national ownership of peacebuilding efforts. In principle, UN peace operations have the unique ability to link these four pillars into one workstream to strengthen impact in the field. To be able to do this, peace operations need to recalibrate their work, and their budgets need to be reprioritized, so that greater emphasis is placed on enhancing both national and local capacities, including women and youth. This is becoming particularly important in today's context, as three of the largest peace operations¹⁸ are at some stage of transition and withdrawal.

Looking ahead, there is reason to believe that a more nimble, adaptive, and pragmatic approach to peacebuilding is likely to gain traction. The recently established United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan (UNITAMS), and its peacebuilding mandate, presents just one model of peace operations in a changing global context. And as significant changes in the number and function of peace operations may be underway, we need to be able to depend more heavily on the only constant, that is the local population.

18. These are MINUSMA (Mali), MONUSCO (Democratic Republic of the Congo), and UNAMID (Sudan).

