
REFLECTIONS ON PEACEBUILDING AND THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE FRAMEWORK

TORE ROSE

Abstract

In each country where the United Nations agencies are present, the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) defines a strategy for assistance over five years that must be coherent internally as well as coherent with national strategies and the plans of other donors. Conflict prevention and peacebuilding have become more important to aid donors in recent years, and have entered the mainstream of development assistance; consequently the UNDAF needs to be rethought in its approach to conflict prevention and peacebuilding in contested, fragile, and post-conflict states. This is because, first, in such states political issues become particularly dominant in the UNDAF process, and second, legitimate national processes to promote reconciliation and to develop a vision for a better future cannot easily be time-constrained to fit into externally driven programming exercises. This article reviews the nature of the UNDAF, examines some illustrative experiences in Rwanda and Sri Lanka, and summarises key elements of effective conflict prevention and peacebuilding practice. It then identifies the main 'process' issues that need to be dealt with by international assistance actors wishing to support conflict prevention and peacebuilding, and suggests a realistic perspective on the UNDAF as a mechanism in this respect.

Introduction

This article deals with certain problems that arise with externally supported conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities in conflict-ridden and disputed or fragile states. Here peacebuilding is seen as those activities which become possible once overt conflict has ended, or before overt conflict has broken out. Of particular concern are the *process* and *dialogue* aspects of peacebuilding, which complement the more *interventionist*, aid-supported activities such as improved justice systems and policing, demobilisation-reinsertion, small-arms control, electoral assistance and the like. The article looks at 'process' in two contexts: first, the consultative processes that are required for the programming of international aid, and second, how such programmes can include support for national reconciliatory processes and dialogue which by their nature cannot easily be defined in advance and whose timelines and outcomes are inherently uncertain.

Two central and recurring problems arise. First, the tension between the donors' view that aid for fragile countries should address the root causes of their instability and the supposedly national processes resulting in national ownership of such root-causes analysis. Second, the difficulty of having legitimate participatory processes produce results within externally imposed timelines. In shorthand, the first may be called the *introspection conundrum*, and the second the *marathon sprint paradox*. Both have their roots in the historical shift from donor-managed aid to recipient-managed aid.

This article draws on my experiences and observations after many years as a practitioner in development and peacebuilding, as well as my central role in the Rwanda and Sri Lanka cases discussed below and in the Peacebuilding Forum presented in the penultimate section. I have been privileged to observe the promise and the dysfunction of international assistance, the well meaning but often misguided attempts to bring order to disorder, and some of the disappointments and successes of post-conflict assistance. I am motivated by the wish to see the many worthy and sensitive policy declarations translated into reality on the ground, and this article also discusses why that is so difficult.

The UNDAF

For about 10 years now the basic tool – and the reference point at the country level – of the UN's development assistance system has been the United Nations Development Assistance Framework. The UNDAF continually evolves in its methodology, design and substance. It was at first seen as a professional-technocratic exercise designed to give an overview and bring some order to the dispersed in-country activities of the different agencies of the UN system, a situation which had come under increasing criticism from both host countries

The UNDAF's supposedly central role in aid programming and its increasingly elaborate consultative and collaborative requirements have turned it into as much a political exercise as a technocratic one.

and donors. Implicitly, its introduction also served to strengthen the role of the UN Resident Coordinator which until then had been a largely honorific appellation. The UNDAF's supposedly central role in aid programming and its increasingly elaborate consultative and collaborative requirements have turned it into as much a political exercise as a technocratic one. The UNDAF

cycle typically takes 18-24 months from inception to completion. In practice the deadlines for each of the steps in the Common Country Assessment (CCA)/UNDAF process are not easily respected. However, since the UNDAF's presentation and approval is inscribed on the agenda of agencies' executive board meetings long in advance, it is essential to respect the end point, *i.e.* the submission of the signed final draft UNDAF. So inevitably, earlier slippage in the preparatory steps causes a rush to completion.

The philosophy of the UNDAF is that it should provide a coherent, synergistic and results-oriented framework within which UN agencies then programme their activities, normally over a five-year period. After initial hesitation, the World Bank and the regional development banks are now voluntarily associated with this exercise. The UNDAF is preceded by the CCA, a baseline analytical document on which the proposals in the UNDAF should be based. The CCA is the responsibility of the in-country heads of UN agencies led by the UN Resident Coordinator and should incorporate wide-ranging consultations. It needs to be acceptable to the authorities since it will be the basis for the UNDAF. The UNDAF itself should emerge from a more formal consensus involving the UN system and the government, while taking full account of national policies and other international assistance, and inputs from civil society and other relevant actors through consultative processes. The government must sign off on the UNDAF, and indeed should be an equal partner to the UN system in its preparation. So the content of the UNDAF in effect also represents the government's views.

Broadly speaking, the CCA identifies development challenges, and the UNDAF sets out a strategy to address them. Given that conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding have taken on higher profiles in recent years, particularly in respect of donor funding decisions, the UNDAF must place particular emphasis on these aspects in post-conflict and fragile/disputed states.

Peacebuilding and the UNDAF: Some Critical Factors

Political and institutional

Attracting and maintaining funding, including country-specific funding, is central to each UN agency's survival and to the careers of its country representatives. This gives those representatives strong incentives to ensure that the UNDAF is of high quality. In due course the UNDAF must be presented to, and accepted by, the donor community in New York, and the activities proposed therein – to be supported largely by the UN system – must attract interest and funding. What constitutes a 'quality' UNDAF in the eyes of donors, which is reflected in the instructions for its preparation, is that it forthrightly presents the root causes of the identified development challenges and conflict parameters

Attracting and maintaining funding, including country-specific funding, is central to each agency's survival and to the careers of its country representatives.

in a country, drawing on the CCA analysis. It should then propose actions – in particular those involving the international community as aid donors – that will address these root causes. In addition, the proposed interventions must generally promote the international agenda as summarised in the Millennium

Development Goals (MDGs) and, particularly in the case of conflict prevention and peacebuilding, be normative in promoting human rights and good governance, including the diffusion of political power, political pluralism, independent judiciary and media, effective policing, reduced corruption, and a democratic and transparent polity in general. A government in a conflict-ridden or disputed/fragile country will very often be sensitive about such fundamental analysis, and to the proposed responses that UN country representatives are under pressure to develop and include in UNDAFs; this gives rise to the *introspection conundrum*. We may note that for the UN system the 'binary option' used by bilateral donors is not available, i.e. working only with countries favoured on certain criteria, while avoiding those not so favoured. This can make UN programming especially difficult since the normative agenda always applies.

There are many parallel donor programming exercises in the UNDAF. They can be emergency, rehabilitation, recovery or transition programmes, needs assessments or sectoral programmes as well as World Bank-driven poverty-reduction strategies and the World Bank's own Country Assistance Strategy (CAS). Each has its own dynamic, agenda and political dimensions. Furthermore, bilateral and European Union (EU) aid programmes may represent large aid flows, and each of these actors will have its own approach and agenda. UNDAF instructions require that all aid programmes be taken into account in order to show the overall coherence of international assistance. Thus the UNDAF exercise – in reality only one among several of the international community's programming instruments – and its follow-through can become additionally complex in fragile states where a greater number of parallel exercises are likely to be occurring. As limited examples of fallout from this rainbow of instruments, the multilaterally driven 'Brookings Initiative' undertaken in Rwanda and the 4R Initiative in Sri Lanka are discussed below.

Time pressures

Today it is widely understood that conflict prevention and durable peacebuilding require time, patience, flexibility and, above all, true local ownership springing from legitimate and participatory national processes that promote understanding, reconciliation and

vision building for a better future. In the abstract there is no contradiction between such principles and the instructions for preparing UNDAFs, with the important exception that the UNDAF exercise is in principle bound to a tight calendar. This gives rise to the *marathon sprint paradox*: that which intrinsically takes a long time must be completed rapidly. Indeed, this problem can arise in all international aid programming; it flows from the management imperatives of donor organisations, in turn imposed by their dependence on political funding decisions.

Today it is widely understood that conflict prevention and durable peacebuilding require time, patience, flexibility and, above all, true local ownership springing from legitimate and participatory national processes that promote understanding, reconciliation and vision building for a better future.

Two basic problems

Thus, two intrinsic problems arise which can make it difficult to incorporate peacebuilding effectively into the UNDAFs:

- The *introspection conundrum*: the need to draw out the fundamental roots of conflict (from the CCA), and to present ways to overcome them, while having the endorsement of the country's political authorities. They will often perceive this as threatening to their interests or at the very least may fear the destabilising consequences of such openness. The consequence can be that certain issues become taboo, or are acknowledged only very indirectly and no clear response is presented, whereas everyone knows they are important to face up to if durable peace and development are to be hoped for.
- The *marathon sprint paradox*: the fact that participatory and legitimate national processes, giving true and deep national ownership of the UNDAF's contents, cannot by the very nature of such processes be required to follow a time-bound schedule. But a proper understanding of the roots of conflict and the way forward is dependent on such participatory processes, as is discussed below. The consequence can be that participatory processes become perfunctory and limited to 'the usual suspects', while what are claimed to be thorough conclusions are rarely validated with participants, and 'national' ownership is a chimera, except that the national government signs up in the name of the people it formally represents.

Unfortunately both the *conundrum* and the *paradox* also arise, in attenuated forms, in respect of the development issues that are the bread-and-butter of UNDAFs.

The conundrum and the paradox have come to the fore because of the historical shift from donor-imposed programming to recipient-determined and recipient-managed programming, even if ultimate control remains with the holders of the purse strings. This situation demands a certain amount of creative pretence, as seen in the phrase 'the government project/programme' which may in fact be a donor-driven creation. But the old system, when each donor or agency operated in its own vacuum and had a take-it-or-leave-it approach to the national authorities, was no longer tenable. However, as is elucidated below, the UNDAF is not quite as influential and powerful a tool as it purports to be, so the important thing is to create a formal programming parameter (the UNDAF) that will in fact allow determined parties to do what they really consider important but were constrained from being too open about. Furthermore, as UN officials in the field well know, the UNDAF, once completed, is usually pulled out of the drawer only in support of or as justification for a particular issue.

Indeed, emphasis has increasingly been placed on making the UNDAF a short and incisive strategic document rather than an over-specified wish-list as it tended to be at the beginning – rather like a sensible incoming government's initial policy statement. As a result, the possibilities increase for, first, the national government being able to insist on cryptic language concerning the causes and cures for conflict and, second, the UN system accepting mild language that can later be used to justify strong proposals for action. But if it can be agreed with the government, it is certainly desirable that an UNDAF is strategically clear on conflict reduction and peacebuilding as this can only strengthen the legitimacy of subsequent activities on the ground.

A problem can arise when UN agency headquarters and the UN Development Group Office (UNDGO) – the high-level operational linking mechanism between UN agencies – look at draft UNDAFs. This is because they primarily have donor reactions in mind, along the lines of a wish-list to be ticked off and which is derived from the current conventional wisdom. While development professionals usually understand that it is the country's own way of seeing things that matters most – at least as a starting point – other bureaucratic and institutional survival considerations weigh more heavily when they serve at HQ. And it is HQ officials who hold the carrots and sticks over UN country representatives, which gives the latter incentives to ensure compliant content in UNDAFs. So UNDAF drafters – in the last phase nearly always from the in-country UN system – tend to be torn between discreet language in order to ensure government buy-in and robust language to ensure 'quality' for the donor community.

The *introspection conundrum* reminds us that donors tend to demand more of assisted countries in terms of deep thinking and frankness than they tend to expect of each other. Could one demand a Belgian plan for conflict reduction between its different language groups in order to benefit from the EU budget? Or ask the same of Spain concerning the

Basque problem? The setbacks of the EU Constitution in 2005 seem to a large extent to have been due to a lack of grassroots participatory involvement and bottom-up vision building – exactly what donors propose is needed for successful peacebuilding (and for development strategies more generally) when they are speaking of developing countries. The irony

The *introspection conundrum* reminds us that donors tend to demand more of assisted countries in terms of deep thinking and frankness than they tend to expect of each other.

is that a relatively totalitarian state will find it easier to formulate clear and incisive plans than a messy and democratic one, which will be compelled to find woolly compromises. So it may be that donors' demands for 'quality' UNDAFs – while desirable in principle and entirely logical – are not only fairly unrealistic but can be the result of an undesirable process whereby a small circle of government and UN officials prepares what it knows donors want to read. On the other hand, and exaggerating only slightly, should an UNDAF really be done by the book, it would represent the outcome of grassroots agitation, a national conference, a parliamentary debate, a government reshuffle, and a historic turning point for the country all in one. A considerable effort indeed in relation to likely modest changes in aid activities and levels! This is another aspect of the *conundrum*.

A two-pronged approach suggests itself. First, inscribe into the UNDAF support for processes that encourage movement towards normative, internationally accepted goals, including processes in conflict prevention and peacebuilding; second, and in parallel, continue with the currently emphasised outcomes-orientation through 'interventionist' peacebuilding activities. In other words, in respect of conflict prevention and

peacebuilding, the UNDAF could contain proposals both for supporting processes, as well as for interventions such as better policing, small-arms control and disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR), recognising that these are operationally different types of activities.

The problem here is that when it comes to implementation, support for processes runs counter to normal aid practice which focuses on outcomes and their associated logical frameworks, as is generally required for financial and management controls. And while a short and incisive UNDAF could indeed call for process-oriented activities, this is not realistic unless implementing agencies can cope when the time comes to turn this into practice on the ground. More generally, while a programmatic approach – which in principle should more easily accommodate a process orientation – has gained wide acceptance in the donor community, concrete activities still tend to take place within the traditional project paradigm which has inherent difficulties in supporting relatively fluid processes.

Two Illustrative Cases

Experiences in Rwanda and Sri Lanka are used to illustrate the discussion of the *conundrum* and the *paradox*. Rwanda in 2001 had a politically strong and dominant government, and both the polity and society remained extremely sensitive to the circumstances, background and consequences of the 1994 genocide. In Sri Lanka in 2003 the two-decades-old civil war was at a stalemate, with the rebels controlling a significant portion of national territory, and the big issue was to re-launch productive peace negotiations. So in the former the UN system sought to introduce reconciliation and strengthened participatory processes into the UNDAF, while in the latter the UNDAF and needs assessment were needed as building blocks for peace negotiations.

Rwanda

In Rwanda the CCA-UNDAF process was done by the book, in its then version. It gave an in-depth analytical CCA which for a time served as a widely read reference on Rwanda's developmental challenges. Subsequently the UNDAF's preparation was highly labour-intensive with several rounds of group consultations to conceptualise it and then give content to its structure. This involved government, civil society and UN staff. The result was an unwieldy volume of interesting approaches and substantive ideas, a veritable Gordian knot which was dealt with as described below.

The final outcome, the Rwanda UNDAF 2002-2006, was entitled 'Poverty Reduction and Peacebuilding'. It was welcomed by the UNDGO in that it attempted systematically to take account of the legacy of conflict and violence over several decades between the Hutu and Tutsi so-called ethnic groups (which in fact do not carry many of the identifiers normally associated with ethnic groups, such as differences in language, culture and religion). In particular, the genocide of Tutsis and 'moderate' Hutus in 1994 – the most rapid mass killing recorded outside a battlefield – and its sequels weighed heavily. The UNDAF set out, among other activities, to promote peacebuilding in the context of UN system assistance.

In setting the stage for the five UNDAF themes, it made explicit three critical tensions in society: the tension between stability (control) and participation (dissent and non-violent conflict resolution); the tension between justice (remembering) and reconciliation (forgetting); and the tensions arising from the Great Lakes regional environment in respect of security and stability. One of the five themes of the UNDAF, 'Transitional Issues',

addressed immediate conflict-reduction initiatives (e.g. demobilisation and settlements), while 'Governance and Justice' addressed more traditional peacebuilding (e.g. decentralisation and reconciliation). Human Rights was made a crosscutting issue for all five themes. Two other themes, 'Productive Capacities of the Poor' and 'Regional Integration', addressed the poverty-conflict nexus and the regional dimension of conflict in the Great Lakes region. Working through to this UNDAF outcome meant having to deal with both the *conundrum* and the *paradox*.

With respect to the *introspection conundrum*, even if the UNDAF approach met considerable interest and goodwill in most quarters, it was always clear that certain politically sensitive but core issues such as the ethnic label and political power nexus and the limits on democratic space could not be adequately addressed if collaboration between the UN system and government were to function. However, the question might be asked whether it is the role of international development assistance to spotlight difficult political issues that have their natural home in the United Nations Secretariat or in bilateral diplomacy. In the first theme, 'Governance and Justice', for example, both the challenges and the solutions were couched in terms of government policy, as is in fact desirable under the UNDAF instructions. 'Transitional Issues' such as demobilisation and reintegration, and sustainable settlement, were relatively straightforward at the level of generalities.

Another set of problems arose in respect of the *marathon sprint paradox*. The consultative process resulted in too much material and too many points of view getting into the final draft; they could not easily be removed without new cycles of consultation which were not

The consultative process resulted in too much material and too many points of view getting into the final draft; they could not easily be removed without new cycles of consultation which were not feasible given the time constraint and cost parameters.

feasible given the time constraint and cost parameters. There was also the evident risk that those whose views were compressed would complain that the participatory process was a sham. The solution was to prepare an abridged version of the UNDAF in a very limited group, realising but not acknowledging that this would be the document that would be read. Thus the well trodden issue of 'a small group of

professionals, mostly foreigners' writing the UNDAF – albeit within the constraint of the full final version – did to some extent exist, basically in order to get the document processed successfully at agency HQs, in UNDGO, and with the donor community. The government was nevertheless pleased with the result and co-signed the foreword of the abridged version.

As mentioned, the main peacebuilding elements of the UNDAF were support for a number of governance initiatives. The most significant of these were the Unity and Reconciliation Commission and the Human Rights Commission. The first represented the main process-oriented initiative, essential for legitimate and durable peacebuilding, even if it was an organ of government. It included the *gacaca* system for judging and punishing the 'minor' *genocidaires* in their communities, and in the process engendering catharsis and dialogue and, hopefully, a degree of reconciliation. Recourse to this traditional justice system was anyway essential, since modern courts could simply not process the 120,000 imprisoned suspected *genocidaires* in their lifetimes.

During the UNDAF exercise Rwanda was chosen as a pilot for the 'Brookings Initiative' initiated by the leadership of three large UN agencies and supported by a bilateral agency. This involved a multi-stakeholder participatory approach to illuminate selected root causes of conflict and propose ways to tackle them – very much a peacebuilding approach, but

with strong external direction. The UN Resident Coordinator's Office invested heavily in this exercise with fairly good government participation (an incremental aid reward was falsely dangled), but by the time the results and recommendations were formulated the initiating parties had lost interest in the Initiative because of difficulties encountered in two other pilot countries. While this was embarrassing vis-à-vis national participants, the output was useful for the UNDAF work, in particular for the analysis and proposals in respect of land and resettlement issues. The 'Brookings Initiative' resurfaced three years later, somewhat metamorphosed, as the 4R Initiative in Sri Lanka.

Bearing in mind the *conundrum* and the *paradox*, the Rwanda CCA/UNDAF exercise in 2001 probably pushed the envelope quite far under the prevailing conditions by adopting the stratagems and compromises described above. The CCA/UNDAF exercise illustrated that the UN system could look seriously at conflict and peacebuilding issues under sensitive political circumstances. Moreover, this occurred in a context where the authorities still viewed the United Nations in Rwanda through the prism of its well documented failings at the time of the 1994 genocide.

Sri Lanka

In striking parallel to the Hutu-Tutsi tensions and violence in Rwanda, the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka, having been perceived as favoured under the colonial regime, felt increasingly discriminated against by the Sinhalese majority after independence. In the mid-1980s, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) launched a rebellion which continues today. The LTTE effectively controls territory in the north, and to some extent in the east. Sri Lanka's UNDAF 2002-2006 was finalised in 2001, before a change in government suddenly opened up a new round of peace negotiations. Due to political sensitivity in 2001 about bringing the conflict to international forums, the UNDAF limited itself to a brief factual presentation followed by proposals for effective emergency and humanitarian assistance.

However, a change of government and the renewal of peace negotiations resulted in a flurry of initiatives. In 2002, following the government's draft 'National Framework for Relief, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation', the UN system began to consider how to integrate support for the peace process and for peacebuilding with its recently completed UNDAF. With the new government somewhat less sensitive to the involvement of outsiders and looking positively on international mediation, support and financial

In 2002, following the government's draft 'National Framework for Relief, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation', the UN system began to consider how to integrate support for the peace process and for peacebuilding with its recently completed UNDAF.

incentives for the peace process, two initiatives were launched. The first was a *de facto* World Bank-style poverty reduction strategy called 'Regaining Sri Lanka'. This was accompanied by the 'Assessment of Needs in the Conflict-Affected Areas' undertaken by the Multilateral Group (UN system, World Bank and Asian Development Bank), which was jointly requested by the government and the LTTE through a convoluted mechanism. This duality was

necessary in order to access LTTE areas and dialogue with its leaders, but it left a heavy political imprint on the subsequent process. Both these documents came out in the second quarter of 2003 in order to serve as basic material for a Tokyo donor conference in June. Both were supposedly the products of participatory processes, but while some efforts were made, as will be seen below, they were in fact dominated by political considerations and urgency even if professionally executed by a small group of technocrats.

That donor conference was to serve as a linchpin to commit the parties to move towards a final peace agreement while donors would commit to a large aid package. These two documents were the key analytical underpinnings of the conference and they imperatively had to be circulated in early May. In the case of the needs assessment this meant that there was less than four months from the initial consultations on the methodology and work programme to the finalisation of the report. This was extremely tight in view of the time taken not only in political contacts and negotiations but also to recruit and manage some 50 national and international consultants. This multi-agency group, with lead agencies in each sector, was asked to proceed in a consultative way with the local authorities, the representatives of line ministries at various levels, and with community service organisations of the affected populations. On the other hand, they quite naturally experienced considerable parent agency pressures to stay 'on message' in terms of each agency's interests.

In any event the LTTE refused to travel to Tokyo. One of the reasons given was that it had not been a full and equal partner in preparing 'Regaining Sri Lanka', which covered the whole national territory, in principle including that part under *de facto* LTTE control. But it would have been politically impossible for the government to have the LTTE as a partner in its preparation unless it could have found a formula to separate out the areas with an LTTE presence. Instead, this was done under a separate needs assessment. The needs assessment figure of \$1.9 billion for the conflict-affected areas was pledged at the conference, plus additional aid for the non-conflict affected areas. But since the pledges were tied to progress in the peace negotiations nothing much has come of it so far.

The needs assessment was prepared under different political circumstances to the UNDAF, giving it more potential to address peacebuilding. Much of the analytical substance of the needs assessment was similar to that found in UNDAFs, although limited to the conflict-affected regions of Sri Lanka. It was undertaken under the authority of a joint government-LTTE sub-committee (Sub-committee on the Immediate Humanitarian and Rehabilitation Needs in the North & East, or SIHRN) of the plenary committee of the peace negotiations. Formally SIHRN (which in reality was an LTTE-dependent body) was the working partner for the Multilateral Group's management team for the needs assessment. But all major issues required direct and separate contacts with the government and the LTTE, both by the management team and by its directorate, the Multilateral Group troika (the UN Resident Coordinator and the in-country heads of the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank). The complexities in dealing with the protagonists meant that the consultative processes called for in elaborating the needs assessment received limited attention compared to the strenuous efforts devoted to the management of its political context; while supported by both at the strategic level, it became a football in the broader political jockeying between the government and the LTTE.

Several relatively modest needs assessment workshops were held. But in March 2003 there was a major event: a four-day retreat-cum-workshop in Kilinochchi, a town in LTTE-controlled territory which the LTTE considered its capital. Government officials' presence in such a location (in a hall, under the portrait of LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran) was in itself a major breakthrough and a reflection of the optimism in the peace process at that time. The draft needs assessment was vigorously debated and many changes were made. This meeting had the hallmarks of a peacebuilding event, where antagonists met for the first time, had a practical agenda of considerable importance, and debated both technocratic issues and deep-seated perceptions of the history and causes of the conflict.

The workshops were key to obtaining both government and LTTE approval of the needs assessment, albeit with subsequent 'down-to-the-wire' negotiations on sensitive textual

aspects with the management team as broker. This was understandable in view of the overarching goal: the needs assessment was to be the common platform of the two sides at the Tokyo donor conference to show in a practical way their shared vision of a peaceful future and the associated financing needs. The other essential element was to be a road map for political arrangements, which remain a focus of negotiation even today. So in reality the primary purpose of the needs assessment was to serve as a building block for the peace process. That it truly reflected the legitimate aspirations of the conflict-affected communities as identified through consultations became a secondary consideration which was not subjected to much scrutiny.

In early 2004 a high-level initiative appeared from three large UN agencies (later extended to other agencies), the 4R Initiative (repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction) and Sri Lanka was to be a pilot country. This was the metamorphosed 'Brookings Initiative'. Illustrating again the multiple donor-led initiatives touching on peacebuilding, this was both a distraction and of some benefit. The 4R Initiative proved useful to UN staff, who were then undertaking a mid-term review of the UNDAF, by showing the model of transition as one of conceptually overlapping rather than linear phases, from humanitarian relief through to sustainable development. But again, the 4R Initiative served little purpose and confirmed the fragility of top-down inspirations of this kind.

With respect to the *introspection conundrum*, the Sri Lanka experience illustrates that in contested or fragile state contexts, political issues are likely to dominate international aid programming exercises and the United Nations system cannot expect to overtly promote independent root-causes analysis. As for the *marathon sprint paradox*, this

With respect to the *introspection conundrum*, the Sri Lanka experience illustrates that in contested or fragile state contexts, political issues are likely to dominate international aid programming exercises and the United Nations system cannot expect to overtly promote independent root-causes analysis.

experience confirmed that time-constrained outcomes are the rule, whether for UNDAFs or other instruments such as a needs assessment, because the external environment demands it. Here that demand came both from the dynamics of the peace negotiations and from the ultimately mistaken pressure to hold the Tokyo donor conference as planned.

The needs assessment turned out to be not much different from a transition/recovery type UNDAF. It was successful in that the protagonists – who were engaged in guarded and complex peace negotiations – accepted it, and its elaboration included peacebuilding-type processes. But even so, in the face of larger political forces it was ultimately of limited use. Deeper and more empowering consultations with affected communities over a longer time would not, in the end, have mattered very much and might in fact have raised unrealistic expectations.

Having illustrated the conundrum and the paradox, we now return to the issue of process in conflict prevention and peacebuilding as it relates to aid programming.

Process in Peacebuilding

Post-conflict peacebuilding encompasses the daunting challenges of reconciliation, reconstruction, and societal transformation, *inter alia* demonstrating the benefits of non-violent dispute settlement and achieving the institutionalisation of 'good governance'. In this way, 'process-focused' peacebuilding lays the foundations for a democratic culture

and conflict-mediating institutions. To the greatest extent possible, peacebuilding dialogue should aim at the restoration of confidence and trust and national empowerment, so that nationals take responsibility for building the kind of society they want to live in. For this

While the assumption is not that internal actors will always develop better policies, externally driven peacebuilding, much like externally driven development strategies, often generates resentment, inertia and resistance.

to succeed, it is of paramount importance that processes be shaped, driven and owned by internal actors. While the assumption is not that internal actors will always develop better policies, externally driven peacebuilding, much like externally driven development strategies, often generates resentment, inertia and resistance.

Consequently, externally driven peacebuilding is usually unsustainable. This does not mean that external actors should idealise internal actors – rather, they need to understand the diversity of interests at play and the different perspectives and agendas present in the society. The importance of national empowerment and national ownership has become a mantra in policies, documents and international forums, but it is only rarely reflected in reality.

The glaring disconnect between policy declarations and reality was brought out in the Peacebuilding Forum, a year-long consultative process between internal and external actors undertaken by WSP International in collaboration with the International Peace Academy. The conclusions of the forum's high-level conference in October 2004, summarised below, serve to inform this paper in defining the approach to peacebuilding that we seek to better incorporate into UNDAFs and their implementation.

The core finding addressed by the forum was that there are inherent frictions in the relationship between internal and external actors, and the challenge is to understand and manage these frictions so as to achieve the delicate balance between genuine national ownership and effective international partnerships. The main causes of these frictions were identified as follows:

In recent years, the international donor community has developed sensitive and appropriate policies to support conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding (e.g. the OECD/DAC Guidelines on preventing violent conflict), but donor practice on the ground is largely unchanged. The resulting dissonance between policy declarations and practice creates resentment and cynicism in the local population and its leadership, and cynicism or indifference to professed policy among in-country aid managers because they find it too difficult to put into practice.

Dialogue processes are generally of poor quality, overly directed by external actors, often seen as occurring too late, and in fact serving simply to validate and legitimise priorities and strategies already identified. The result is national resentment. Genuine dialogue may experience setbacks, sabotage and even derailments – stoicism and persistence are necessary – and one can never tell how long it is going to take, or indeed how long it will take for facilitated dialogue to become self-sustaining, which is when democratic practices begin to take root.

Giving practical meaning to the notions of national leadership and ownership is difficult given the great imbalance in power between internal and external actors. This is accentuated in post-conflict societies where the polity is fractured and legitimacy can be hard to demonstrate, and where policy decisions with potentially far-reaching implications often need to be taken rapidly – and are often taken *de facto* by external actors. The practical

difficulties of achieving legitimate national ownership are enormous, even for those with the best of intentions. They are due to the fractured and disorganised nature of post-conflict societies, and to the activity-oriented aid systems that require advance planning, timetables and financial frameworks.

In particular the structures, procedures, financing and evaluation criteria of donor organisations are not well adapted to peacebuilding, which needs a flexible and process-oriented approach. In conflict prevention and peacebuilding, process is product. Conflict is inherent in all social organisation; relatively stable, non-autocratic societies have reached a degree of consensus on institutions and processes to mediate conflict without violence, and such consensus will necessarily have evolved from dialogue in some form among interest groups. So transformative dialogue processes are ends in themselves.

This leads to an additional observation: donors cannot expect to establish reciprocal obligations with a non-stabilised post-conflict country whereby mutual commitments can be agreed, i.e. the type of relationship that 'development compacts' try to establish with functioning and legitimate governments. In the early phases of peacebuilding the client is king and the external actor must adapt available tools and resources to the needs of the client population which is trying to take charge of its destiny.

Also, we must recall once again that interventionist peacebuilding initiatives (DDR, small-arms control, establishing police and justice systems, decentralised administration, electoral assistance, anti-corruption initiatives etc.) also have an important place and help internal actors by imposing constraints and parameters through promoting the international normative agenda, and by positively reinforcing forward movement. Such activities also belong in the UNDAF, are easier to treat in the project paradigm, and are therefore not addressed further here.

Final Reflections

First, a word about the legitimacy of an UNDAF addressing sensitive political and social issues in fragile states. The forces impelling this are both the analysts in HQs who quite rightly recognise that causes, not symptoms, should be addressed, and the donors who in seeking aid effectiveness believe that recipients should 'come clean' about their problems. This may be called rational development thinking, which leverages positive change with aid. However, because of the *conundrum* and the *paradox*, the UNDAF is not well adapted to serve as a primary mechanism for the UN system to promote socio-political soul-searching in a fragile society. The UNDAF has moved in that direction by default as the donor community has sought to instrumentalise it as a vehicle to oblige such soul-searching in assisted countries. In today's environment effective and durable post-conflict peacebuilding demands an approach by the international community that is facilitating and supportive of national processes, but not directive and pressured. Therefore the UNDAF should contain proposals to facilitate introspective processes by nationals and national interest groups for their own benefit and not because donors demand outputs from such processes as a condition for aid. These processes, proceeding at a rhythm dictated by local circumstances, should aim to manage conflict by building legitimate and sustainable national mechanisms.

Should it be important for the UN system to engage politically, the Representative of the Secretary-General or the Special Representative of the Secretary-General mechanisms are available; in other cases it is not evidently legitimate to use the pressure of UNDAF preparation to do so. The donor community, and UN agency HQs through UNDGO, should lighten the

pressure for UNDAFs to illuminate sensitive socio-political issues incisively. Only if the major national actors, especially the government, want to use the 'UNDAF opportunity' to do so, then, of course, it can be very useful to take that route. But taking it should not be the main criterion of UNDAF quality.

This article has focused on the preparation of UNDAF-type programming instruments, not their implementation. Nevertheless, implementation issues flow directly from the preceding discussion and should be flagged for deeper discussion. A central challenge for

A central challenge for donors lies in the correlate of national ownership: having external actors on the ground who can loosen their grip on controlling process and outcomes, and still be responsible managers within their organisations.

donors lies in the correlate of national ownership: having external actors on the ground who can loosen their grip on controlling process and outcomes, and still be responsible managers within their organisations. This is far from simple, not least because donor administrative and financial staff will resist vigorously, which will make their political leadership nervous.

There is in fact a double challenge to aid organisations – to have procedures that permit this to happen, and to let it happen while supporting processes rather than projects. But there is a gap in terms of training, sensitisation, and discussion among UN staff on what this means in practice, and certain administrative and financial procedures may need to be made more flexible. Most importantly, experience repeatedly shows that even if 'good policy' were adopted, it would be ineffective without strong and focused efforts to put it into practice. This problem of a disconnect between policy and practice brings us back the *raison d'être* of this article.

TORE ROSE, an independent consultant, was United Nations Resident Coordinator in Rwanda 2000-2002, having previously held the same post in Algeria (1991-1994) and Mali (1995-2000). He was also Deputy and Assistant UNDP Resident Representative in Asian and African countries. During 2002-2004 he was engaged by the Multilateral Group in Sri Lanka as team leader of the Needs Assessment for the Conflict-affected Areas. Since 2002 he has undertaken several other consultancies, including as team leader of the WSP International/International Peace Academy 'Peacebuilding Forum 2004'.

Endnotes

¹ The article develops a note commissioned by WSP International (formerly the War-Torn Societies Project) in mid-2005. I am most grateful for its support.

² Much can depend on whether the present political authorities contributed to the causes of the conflict; an untainted regime may in fact welcome the instrumentalisation of the UNDAF so as to apportion blame, which is delicate but can be helpful.

³ We should note in passing that the UNDAF as such has no direct consequences on the ground – only subsequent programming at the level of each UN agency has such consequences, and this should in principle be coherent with the UNDAF, although there are no real enforcement mechanisms in this respect. But that is another subject, and a big one.

⁴ This raises an important general point: in order to be credible in the donor community, aid programming exercises go to great lengths to involve national actors. But if the resulting 'quality product' promises more than it later delivers – which is unfortunately typical – there will be disillusionment and even cynicism. This is a core issue in the unresolved problem of donor accountability.

References

- Cutillo, A.** 2006, 'International Assistance to Countries Emerging from Conflict: A Review of Fifteen Years of Interventions and the Future of Peacebuilding', New York: International Peace Academy; available at www.ipacademy.org/Programs/Research/ProgReseSecDev_Pub.htm
- Nathan, L.** 2004, 'The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse: The Structural Causes of Crisis and Violence in Africa', LSE/Crisis States Seminar papers, London; available at www.crisisstates.com/Publications/others.htm
- OECD/DAC Guidelines** 1997 & 2001, *Helping Prevent Violent Conflict*, Paris: OECD; available at www.oecd.org/dataoecd/57/55/33920283.htm
- Tschirgi, N.** 2006 forthcoming, 'Security and Development Policies: Untangling the Relationship' in Klingebiel, S. ed. *New Interfaces between Security and Development: Changing Concepts and Approaches*, Bonn: German Development Institute; available at www.die-gdi.de
- Human Security Centre** 2005, *The Human Security Report 2005*, University of British Columbia, Oxford University Press: available at www.humansecurityreport.info
- UN Secretary-General** 2001, 'Prevention of Armed Conflict', Report A/55/985, New York; available at www.un.org; 2004, 'Our Shared Responsibility', Report A/59/565, New York; available at www.un.org/secureworld/report.pdf
- Uvin, P.** 1999, 'The Influence of Aid in Situations of Violent Conflict', OECD working paper, Paris; available at www.oecd.org/dataoecd/33/57/1919902.pdf
- WSP International & International Peace Academy** 2004, final conference document of the Peacebuilding Forum, Geneva & New York; available at wsp.dataweb.ch/wspapplets/data/Documents/Final_Conference_Document.pdf