



## EDITORIAL

---

# Peacebuilding and Development in Transitional Post-agreement Contexts: Improving Macro- and Micro-level Interventions

**MOHAMMED ABU-NIMER  
AND MAIA CARTER HALLWARD**

---

A major theme in this volume is evaluating the impact of foreign aid (from governments and international NGOs), particularly in the context of promoting peace and stability in post-conflict situations. The theme of evaluation and impact assessment was the focus of Volume 2 Number 2 of the *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development*; many of the authors in this issue build upon the analysis and insights developed in that issue. In raising critical questions about the effectiveness of post-agreement interventions where considerable amounts of foreign aid have been invested, the authors note the importance of physical and human security measures as well as the need for capable institutions and a context-sensitive approach. The cases of Sri Lanka, Aceh, Palestine, Afghanistan and the Solomon Islands provide examples of societies that have suffered enormously as a result of civil wars and foreign military intervention. The authors question whether humanitarian aid and development interventions have been successful in supporting societal rebuilding processes and fostering peace.

The answer is both yes and no. The authors point to several explanatory factors for the failures and successes of governmental and non-governmental efforts in addressing societal needs during such transitional periods. These factors include:

- International donors' lack of basic understanding of local cultural and contextual practices resulting in programmes that fail to meet their goals;
- Minimal systematic planning and disproportional amounts of aid pumped into extremely poor areas to the detriment of the country as a whole;
- Lack of coordination among the international NGOs (INGOs) and donors, resulting in a lack of overall coherence and synergy as well as duplication of effort instead of convergence and mutual reinforcement;
- A focus on contact-based and dialogic approaches to peacebuilding in post-conflict settings that do little to change the lived realities of people on the ground in terms of the economy or political incentive structure, which restricts the long-term success of such interventions in improving development outcomes;
- Exclusion or marginalisation of youth, women and other vulnerable sectors from both development and socio-political programmes, which fails to capitalise on the potential contributions of such stakeholders and risks alienating them;

- Failure to provide an overall institutional framework – including judicial, economic, and security affairs – for long-term, sustained development so that people have an indication that the peace process is working. When human security indicators are not met, people lose hope and may revert to conflict behaviour or illicit economic activity. Such reality is perfectly reflected in Afghanistan, Palestine, and Sri Lanka.

*Rebecca Spence and Iris Wielders* critically evaluate the role of the Community Peace and Restoration Fund, which was established to provide a peace dividend to conflict-affected communities in the Solomon Islands through the application of ‘Do No Harm/Local Capacities for Peace’ (DNH/LCP) principles in the delivery of the Fund’s resources. In general, the principles guided the rebuilding of communities at the local level and helped to ensure that aid did not create or exacerbate tensions by funding projects that called for communal cooperation or that would benefit all sectors (i.e. schools and clinics). At the same time, the failure to support income-generation activities (in the name of ‘Do No Harm’ by focusing instead on communal cooperation) resulted in less tangible results in terms of economic improvement. Ironically, although the use of DNH/LCP principles helped local communities to rebuild associational life through cooperation toward super-ordinate goals, lack of cooperation among donors, INGOs and government agencies meant that some peacebuilding opportunities were lost (a problem also highlighted by *Tamer Qarmout* in his briefing on aid in the Palestinian Territories). The authors also note that the lack of a macro-level peacebuilding process meant that micro-level efforts using DNH/LCP principles had little prospect of successfully scaling up, regardless of how good the process was.

While Spence and Wielders argue that the Solomon Islands intervention was planned and implemented in a generally conflict-sensitive manner, *Peter Bauman, Mengistu Ayalew and Gazala Paul* discuss INGO and government conflict insensitivity in their article, ‘Beyond Disaster: A Comparative Analysis of Tsunami Interventions in Sri Lanka and Indonesia/Aceh’. Like other authors in this issue, they call for more coordination among INGOs and foreign governments, greater transparency and accountability in how INGOs, NGOs and local governments spend the funds, and the need to free the development and humanitarian relief projects from the grip of political manipulation. Like Spence and Wielders, the authors use ‘Do No Harm’ principles to evaluate how relief funds can be used as ‘connectors’ for peace (as in the case of Aceh) or as ‘dividers’ which exacerbate conflict (as in the case of Sri Lanka). The tsunami changed the conflict dynamics in Aceh by providing the trapped government and rebels with an opportunity to escape their deadlock. In Sri Lanka, however, tsunami ‘created hope and led to initial cooperation, but both sides believed they could prevail militarily; political factors overcame humanitarian needs and international pressure’. Thus, due to the nature of the conflict, as well as conflict insensitivity on the part of humanitarian actors and a lack of effective coordination, the outcome of the intervention in Sri Lanka was opposite to that of Aceh.

The lack of knowledge among INGO donors and implementers about local contexts and their failure to apply well-documented humanitarian lessons, including those dealing with conflict sensitivity, are major factors cited by the authors affecting the success of the tsunami relief efforts in Sri Lanka. In addition, the authors conclude, ‘the financial power of INGOs, combined with the freedom they enjoyed and low levels of accountability they were held to, frequently resulted in arrogance toward local NGOs, inter- and intra-organisational competition, disregard for government institutions, and inappropriate and ineffective use of resources’. This lack of accountability, and a narrowly conceived definition of ‘relief’, meant that projects were structured more for donor-country priorities and assumptions than for local realities.

In his briefing on the impact of aid policies in the Palestinian Territories since the 1993 signing of the Oslo Accords, *Tamer Qarmout* also raises questions of accountability, strategic planning and the political uses of aid. Like Bauman *et al*, Qarmout criticises donors for policies of aid conditionality, arguing that in many cases aid has been used to achieve specific political goals instead of dealing with the real problems on the ground, i.e. growing unemployment, restrictions on movement and downscaling of productive activities. Qarmout notes that as long as structural issues contributing to the ongoing conflict remain unaddressed (like restrictions on Palestinians' freedom of movement and the lack of a strong regulatory environment), peace will be difficult to achieve. He asserts that a strong economic foundation, particularly one that is anchored in a vibrant private sector, is key to the development agenda and consequently to peace (*Edward Newman and Niklas Keller* make a similar point in their article about the legacy of war economies).

Economic success is important in post-conflict situations partly because of the need to demonstrate a 'peace dividend' to societies in transition. In transitional post-war societies, people search for concrete evidence of success and hope that the new post-agreement reality will eventually affect attitudes and improve the livelihoods of all the people who suffered from the destructive dynamics of war. In his article evaluating the work of the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) in Sri Lanka, *Lee Briggs* provides a typology of grassroots peacebuilding interventions and recommends best practices for programme staff to increase their impact, particularly in the context of a collapsed peace process. He tackles the dilemma of how INGOs and NGOs can affect the minds and hearts of communities which have lived in war zone areas for decades when the reality on the ground continues to be one of severe economic deprivation and insecurity.

Briggs cites many of the problems – such as uneven allocation of resources – noted in other discussions of Sri Lanka in this issue, notably those of Bauman *et al* and *Lori Drummond-Mundal and Guy Cave*. In describing the role of OTI in planning interventions that occur after humanitarian relief efforts, he highlights the importance of *process* in the design and implementation of interventions, specifically 'connecting' processes that bring together 'a diverse group of people to achieve a common purpose', and that result 'in a significant degree of interaction and/or communication'. A similar emphasis on 'process' is found in the article by Spence and Wielders. Briggs questions several Western assumptions about the relationship between resources, interaction and the causes of ethnic conflict, including the assumption that resource scarcity drives conflict and that contact with members of another ethnic group will necessarily lead to stereotype reduction or trust building. Central to his argument is the need for a dual 'process and product' approach that demonstrates the tangible benefits of peace (i.e. through more equitably distributed resources or improved economic opportunities) while also improving societal processes, including the exchange of accurate, balanced information and the building of connections across different levels and sectors. The combined approach that Briggs advocates is really the core methodology of linking peacebuilding and development, and features prominently in other articles in this volume.

Another major theme of this issue is the need to include marginalised populations (like those in the Solomon Islands or Vanuatu) as stakeholders in the peacebuilding and development contexts. In their article examining youth engagement with conflict and social change, *Lori Drummond-Mundal and Guy Cave* make a strong case for the need to actively engage youth, typically the largest segment of Southern societies, in ongoing peacebuilding processes and advocacy for change. Through personal stories of youth in Sri Lanka, the authors illustrate that the concept of peace used in many international reports is elusive and not real for these children who face daily abuse and mortal danger.



Like Noor Johnson in her discussion in Volume 3 Number 2 about the exclusion of Sri Lankan Muslims from the development paradigm of the Sarvodaya movement, Drummond-Mundal and Cave note that actors planning interventions often impose their own world view and assumptions on target populations to the detriment of programmes that are otherwise well-intentioned. To combat this tendency, the authors argue, practitioners should analyse the conflict from the perspective of the youth involved and include an examination of structural challenges such as poverty. Like other authors in this issue, Drummond-Mundal and Cave emphasise the need for tangible benefits of peacebuilding and development interventions that address the human security needs of local people and that are culturally and contextually appropriate. The process of building peace, they argue, must be taken in stages which feel achievable and through which the youth feel the results directly in their lives – ‘the hardness of the school bench, the coins jingling in their pockets, food on their tables, a roof over their heads and the opening of doors of social and economic security through viable institutions’.

*Peter Westoby and Anne Brown* also emphasise the importance of culturally and contextually defined understandings of ‘development’ and ‘peace’ in their study of peaceful community development in Vanuatu in the western Pacific. Studying the role of customary leaders in developing hybrid forms of governance for dealing with conflict and development at the local level, the authors affirm the importance of process as well as outcome. They suggest that by including traditional leaders in the process of defining and debating issues of development and the boundaries of community, societies are better placed to deal with rapid changes and new forms of governance without resorting to ethnic conflict. Furthermore, the authors note, although the visioning work done with Vanuatu customary leaders was ‘conflictual and messy ... it is also potentially profoundly generative work that could complement efforts to support state and other governance structures’.

*Lina Abirafeh* makes a strong case for using a contextualised analysis of gender to achieve greater relevance in aid interventions, arguing that in conflict and post-conflict contexts, this type of analysis can be used as a tool to mitigate violence and support development. In her case study of Afghanistan, she stresses the need to ground interventions in the local context, taking care to engage with historic constructions of both male and female gender roles. Like other authors in this journal, Abirafeh highlights the connection between economic development and other aspects of social change, suggesting that ‘achieving economic stability first is likely to make men more receptive to other discussions’, notably those about gender equality. In an observation that echoes Drummond-Mundal and Cave, she recommends that young males whose lives have been shaped by conflict and poverty also need to be engaged in such interventions.

While most of the authors in this issue agree on the need for ‘conflict sensitivity’ in peacebuilding, humanitarian and development interventions, there are notable differences in the approaches they propose. These differences typically centre on whether they promote structural change (conflict transformation) or dialogic approaches to peacebuilding. Drummond-Mundal and Cave, for example, call for structural changes in post-conflict contexts in a way that suggests that contact-based programmes will not be as effective as Lee Briggs seems to assume in some sections of his article. The former offer a critical approach based on participation and rights-based approaches to development in conflict zones, emphasising that comprehensive and total conflict transformation rather than an attitudinal change based on the contact hypothesis should be the objective of peacebuilding programmes. Spence and Wielders and Bauman *et al* also call for structural change through their emphasis on building connections between social groupings.

In their examination of events in Afghanistan and Bosnia-Herzegovina, *Edward Newman and Niklas Keller* suggest that both micro- and macro-level peacebuilding interventions must address the destructive role of the war economy in post-conflict political and economic development. Because of the continued influence of illegal flows of money and resources, the authors argue, 'it is more useful to think of the conflict and post-conflict phases as two as ends of a spectrum across a network of underlying social, economic and security imbalances and dependencies that need attention for peace to prevail'. While formal top-down peace processes are endorsed, they state, the reality is that social dislocation is not addressed; the concept of 'post-conflict' is questionable. Newman and Keller argue that the legacies of the war economy must be central – rather than peripheral – to international peacebuilding efforts and they suggest that these issues must be squarely dealt with in peace agreements. Much more attention needs to be paid to on-the-ground realities of communities, and the ways in which post-conflict international responses work collaboratively to support the development of alternative livelihoods.

Examining the over-arching themes of this issue, it becomes clear that systematic integration of conflict analysis and conflict mapping in development and peacebuilding programmes is crucial for the success of these programmes for the individual and at the micro level. However, such programmes and the entire enterprise of transitioning the society to a more peaceful and stable situation are subject to failure if the larger macro institutional arrangements are not safeguarded by the substantive negotiated political agreements (the subject of a forthcoming issue, Volume 4 Number 2). Furthermore, peacebuilding and economic development go hand in hand; without tangible results from peacebuilding programmes, people may become disillusioned with 'peace' or resort to illicit activities in order to meet basic needs. Macro-level peace processes, as well as the construction of a peacetime economy, are necessary ingredients in the success of micro-level approaches.

