EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE SYNTHESIS REPORT OF THE JOINT UTSTEIN STUDY OF PEACEBUILDING

Getting their act together: Towards a strategic framework for peacebuilding.

Item 4: ii

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SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The thrust of the agenda established by the development ministers of Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and the UK at their meeting in Utstein in 1999 was not new policy but better implementation of existing policy. Improved implementation is also the goal of the Joint *Utstein* Study of Peacebuilding. The empirical basis of the joint study is an illustrative survey of 336 peacebuilding projects implemented by the four original *Utstein* governments (U4). As well as the survey, studies were prepared of each country's peacebuilding policy and activities. Together with the wider literature on conflict and peacebuilding, that material forms the basis of this synthesis report.

The term *peacebuilding* entered the international vocabulary in 1992 through the UN *Agenda for Peace*. Peacebuilding attempts to encourage the development of the conditions, attitudes and behaviour that foster and sustain social and economic development that is peaceful, stable and prosperous. To this end, it uses a wide range of policy instruments. Some are activities undertaken as projects – discreet, chronologically limited activities, implemented by partner organisations; other policy instruments include diplomatic initiatives and military operations.

Peacebuilding activities are designed to contribute to ending or avoiding armed conflict and may be carried out during armed conflict, in its wake, or to prevent a conflict from escalating violently. The activities fall under four main headings:

- to provide security,

- to establish the socio-economic foundations of long-term peace,

- to establish the political framework of long-term peace,

- to generate reconciliation, a healing of the wounds of war and justice.

This adds up to a varied palette of activities and projects, which can be combined – like mixing paints – to maximise impact.

The U4 cover the full range of peacebuilding activities but concentrate more on work on the political framework, which accounted for one-third of projects in the survey, and the socio-economic foundations of peace, which accounts for a marginally smaller proportion, than on the reconciliation and security dimensions. There are, however, considerable variations in emphasis between the U4. The national studies reveal considerable strengths in the projects of the U4 and growing professionalism.

Peacebuilding must be responsive to context and able to adapt to new conditions and requirements as the context changes. It must also be sustainable: following bitter conflicts, sustainable peace is only available on the basis of sustained effort lasting a decade or more. This does not mean that all

peacebuilding projects have to be sustained for so long, but that the overall strategy sees the process through.

Multi-dimensional policies are required to take on the complex task of encouraging war-torn and war-threatened societies to develop peaceful relations. This emphasis on a broad range of activities is supported by the conclusions of academic research into conflict causation. This approach to policy makes necessary multi-level cooperation between ministries and departments with different institutional cultures.

The study identifies a major strategic deficit in the peacebuilding efforts of the U4. Evidence outside the survey and national studies shows that the U4 are not alone in this strategic deficiency. The problem is visible in the fact that more than 55 per cent of the projects do not show any link to a broader strategy for the country in which they are implemented. Some projects are not linked to a broader strategy because there is no strategy for them to be linked to. In other cases, the broader strategy exists but projects show no connection to it. Various security and socio-economic projects seem 'strategy resistant' as if need no strategic justification because their worth is self-evident. Planning is based on relatively little analysis. And there are important conceptual confusions and uncertainties. There are problems about the timing of financial flows. The influx of resources has unwanted effects in war-torn countries. There is no known way of reliably assessing the impact of peacebuilding projects.

Important lessons learned by the U4 include the multi-dimensional nature of peacebuilding, the inter-dependence of its different parts, and the wide range of different activities that are possible. It has been learned that peacebuilding must be responsive to context and need and must be sustained for the long term. There is recognition of a major need for coordination within and between governments and with IGOs and NGOs. The knowledge of key personnel about peacebuilding issues is improving with experience. The U4 have started to address strategic problems.

Recommendations to correct the strategic deficit fall under three headings – policy, evaluation, and research. Each heading indicates the audience to whom the recommendations are made. It is hoped they will be of interest not only to the U4, but also to Canada and Sweden who are now also members of the group and to other donor governments and peacebuilding actors.

Policy recommendations

Establishing strategic frameworks

There is a need to adopt two strategic frameworks –

- One to assist in formulating peacebuilding intervention strategies in specific countries and regions when need arises;

- The other to assist in formulating a general peacebuilding strategy for donor governments.

These provide the means for correcting the strategic deficit. This work could be initiated jointly by the *Utstein* group. If other governments are interested in joining the work, that would be in tune with the general *Utstein* approach of refusing to be an exclusive grouping and of forming issue-specific coalitions.

The frameworks outlined below draw on general principles of strategic planning. They do not go into the substance of either an intervention strategy or a general strategy but simply outline the elements and the linkages between them that are required in strategic planning for peacebuilding.

A general peacebuilding strategy for donor governments can set the general context of principle and policy for each peacebuilding intervention that is undertaken, can indicate the basis of deciding whether to

undertake an intervention, and can outline how the governments looks after its peacebuilding capabilities. What a general peacebuilding strategy cannot do is specify the purpose and shape of each intervention except in the most general terms. An intervention strategy in a given instance works in the policy context set by the general strategy but cannot be directly derived from the general strategy. Each case requires its own strategy. Moreover, as the intervention proceeds, the strategy needs to be revisited, assessed and possibly modified. An intervention strategy is not a piece of paper but a process.

In order to emphasise the importance of the case-specific emphasis, we turn first to a framework for intervention strategy, and then to a framework for general strategy.

Intervention strategy

In institutional terms, an intervention strategy has to be owned by those who implement it. In many cases, this means country desks in ministries of development cooperation and of foreign affairs. Many conflicts are shaped not only by internal national issues but also by the regional context and this dimension must also be present in strategic analysis and planning, even when it is driven by country desks. Key parts of the analysis and planning can be carried out with local partners. The expertise required to put substance into the strategic framework includes country and regional knowledge, as well as capacity for conflict assessment, knowledge of the peacebuilding palette and especially those parts in which the donor specialises, and familiarity with the donor's general peacebuilding strategy.

The components of a specific peacebuilding intervention strategy should be:-

1. Establish a strategic planning mechanism:

   a) Contact other potential donors to assess initial interest in cooperation on this case;

   b) Agree a strategic planning group.

2. Undertake conflict analysis using an agreed framework:

   a) As to conflict causes, the framework has to encompass four components –

      i. the structural and background causes of war, whether actual or threatened, including regional dimensions;

      ii. the objectives and likely behaviour of the main conflict actors of all sides and of those political actors who genuinely favour accommodation rather than continued confrontation, including regional political influences;

      iii. the potential triggers for conflict escalation;

      iv. the factors that influence how armed conflict is fought out (ranging from terrain and climate to culture of war and the balance of military forces);

   b) As to the history of the conflict, the framework needs to direct assessment towards

      i. analysis of the political and military strengths and weaknesses of the conflict parties;

      ii. the parties' positions parties on peace-related issues, especially their attitudes towards outside intervention;

      iii. any previously attempted external interventions;

c) The analysis must also include the regional context, focusing on aims and capacities of neighbouring states and important non-state groups located in those countries.

3. Intervention assessment: based on the conflict analysis, and reflecting available information on population – needs, casualties, demographics, refugees – and on the economic resources of the country, including available data on the country's likely absorptive capacity, work up

   a) Needs assessment

   b) Feasibility assessment.

4. Derived from the above, and reflecting the basic principles and values in the general peacebuilding strategy, establish the goals of an intervention.

5. Initiate discussion with relevant IGOs and NGOs to establish cooperative relationships for implementing peacebuilding strategy.

6. Assess available means compared to goals and to target country's absorptive capacity.

7. Agree approximate phasing of goals and expected outcomes.

8. Consider how to address cross-cutting priorities in relation to the strategic phases.

9. Establish division of labour with other donor governments, on the basis of each one's assessment of its peacebuilding strengths. Identify any gaps and means to fill them.

10. Establish criteria for selection of activities and projects.

11. Establish mechanism of monitoring, evaluation and assessment.

General peacebuilding strategy

A general peacebuilding strategy for a donor country should cover the following:-

1. Basic principles and goals and the challenges to the achievement of those goals – a simple statement of political principles and worldview.

2. The government's understanding of the concept of peacebuilding and its purpose – a summary of the government's analysis, with emphasis on cooperation.

3. The conditions in which the government will consider whether to launch or participate in a peacebuilding intervention – a statement of criteria that presumably highlights humanitarian and global or regional security concerns and the views of potential partners among other donor government.

4. The importance of tailoring each intervention to the requirements of the case –there is no one-size-fits-all version of peacebuilding.

5. The basic questions that have to be asked and answered in order for an intervention strategy to be developed – the basis on which to tailor peacebuilding to fit the specific case is a needs assessment and a feasibility assessment, building on the conflict analysis.

6. The main techniques used by the government and its agencies and NGOs it frequently supports and preferences for the mode of intervention – within the peacebuilding palette, the activities in which the government sees its particular peacebuilding strengths.

7. The government's approach to strengthening its own capacities for peacebuilding interventions – how it organises its own learning from experience, with emphasis on cooperation with other donors.

Standing arrangements

The evidence is that there are many opportunities for donor governments that are so minded to work together on various components of peacebuilding. Standing arrangements could be a way to take up some of these opportunities. These would build on current dialogues and cooperation among donor governments and make it quicker and easier to work out joint peacebuilding intervention strategies for specific countries when the need arises. Through standing arrangements come closer understandings and quicker cooperation based on established routines, than are available from *ad hoc* cooperation, even if the latter is frequently repeated and working relationships between the officials are good.

These standing arrangements should involve a degree of institutionalisation, but not very much. It is in part to keep the institutionalisation light that the proposal is for standing arrangements in the plural, and not just one single cooperative arrangement. However, the details of the degree of institutionalisation are less important than the substance of cooperation that can be covered. Four areas recommend themselves:

1. Coordination: A standing committee that is activated as needed to coordinate the initial steps in the peacebuilding intervention strategy; it would be the basis for identifying who would staff the planning group;

2. Conflict analysis: A study team focusing on the analysis of conflicts in countries in which peacebuilding interventions might unfold in the near future – a continuing research group;

3. Intervention assessment: A mechanism for quickly recruiting a study team when needed to develop an intervention assessment – a reservoir of regional experts;

4. Strategic evaluation: A centre for strategic monitoring, evaluation and assessment, consisting of teams devoted to specific peacebuilding operations – the most institutional of the four components.

Evaluation recommendations

Strategic impact assessment

The first challenge for the evaluation community is to recognise that impact assessment at the project level is not proving to be viable and to shift it to the strategic level. The next is to communicate the findings of strategic impact assessment to policy-makers on a useful timescale for strategies to be amended if necessary. How to meet these challenges has not been part of the remit of the joint study, so no detailed recommendations are offered here. The study has, however, given the basis on which some indications can be offered.

The recommendation to shift impact assessment to the strategic level necessitates a clear distinction between project outputs and impacts. Output can be evaluated and often measured (numbers of mines removed and hectares returned to farm use, for example, or numbers of people engaged in dialogue activities and evidence of shifts in attitudes). Whether these project outputs have an impact that helps

promote peace is less easy to establish; there are very many other factors at work, so their effects are hard to distinguish, and in any case, what seems *a priori* like a positive impact may generate a negative and violent backlash. Output should continue to be evaluated as part of project evaluations to ensure that best practice is respected, projects are properly managed, and lessons are drawn from both the strengths and the weaknesses of projects. Impact assessment, however, should be removed from project evaluation and explored instead at the strategic level, asking whether the intervention strategy as a whole is working.

What is here called strategic impact assessment is closely related to the policy assessment/evaluation approach that is increasingly in focus already for the international evaluation community. It can be understood as the continuation of the conflict analysis that is the basis of strategic planning, as recommended above. The same analytical framework can be used as the tool to identify key changes and to relate them to different components of the intervention strategy.

One of the main issues to sort out may be the variegated timetable of peacebuilding. For example, achieving an acceptable level of security can usually be done more quickly than achieving political legitimacy, which may often be initially available more quickly than economic improvement. Political legitimacy is likely to lapse quickly if economic improvement is not forthcoming, but may become sustainable political stability on the basis of an economic recovery. Such changes may take up to a decade, while a thoroughgoing change in attitudes where conflict was on ethno-national lines will take even longer. Strategic impact assessment must also pay attention to the fluctuation of expectation and disappointment among the recipient country's population and leaders.

There are also worthwhile procedural questions to explore. There will need to be consideration of the intervals at which assessments should be offered, or whether in fact they should be offered all the time. This implies consideration of whether impact assessment should be thought of in terms of voluminous reports, after the manner of project and programme evaluations, or whether they should be much briefer, and perhaps even primarily communicated orally or in brief e-mails, backed up by a longer documentation that would be available on request. Likewise, there will need to be consideration of how criteria for impact should be spelled out, and of the need for those conducting the impact assessment to be fully familiar with details of the peacebuilding intervention strategy from its outset. It seems likely that there will be great advantage in a cradle-to-grave approach, so that strategic impact assessment is integrated in intervention strategy from the very outset.

The body of experience

The national surveys showed that project documentation is poorly stored. A further challenge for the evaluation community is to take responsibility as the guardian of the body of peacebuilding experience, for without reference to a body of experience there is little chance of learning from experience. This implies among other things that the evaluation community should get involved in discussions about organising and coding of project archives, and equally that it has an interest in the adoption of formal strategic frameworks along the lines of those proposed above.

Joint evaluations

With the aim of promoting strategic coordination and a general sharing of knowledge between donor governments and other major actors in peacebuilding, increased emphasis can usefully be placed on joint evaluations by a group of donors. The focus of joint evaluations could be specific conflicts, or countries, or regions, or themes within peacebuilding such as security sector reform, return of IDPs, dialogue activities, democratic capacity building. Thematic evaluations might provide the greatest potential for looking at experience comparatively and drawing out broadly based lessons, while multi-donor evaluations of specific

conflicts, countries or regions might offer the greatest potential for assessing strategic consistency, coordination and strategic impact.

Research recommendations

The major conclusion of this study is that there is a strategic deficit in peacebuilding. The study has identified it in the U4 but there are strong indications that not only the U4 face the problem. The task for research is to find out what needs to be known in order to correct the strategic deficit.

Theoretical research

There are several specific theoretical challenges for the research community. The first is to take further the work that has already been done on countries' capacity to absorb aid usefully and to see if there could be a methodology for calculating the absorptive capacity. It is important to know that absorptive capacity will peak in years four to seven or eight of peacebuilding effort, but it would be even more useful if there were a way of calculating its highs and lows. Even a rough approximation would be better than the current state of knowledge.

The second challenge is to look again at the issue of project impact assessment. Taking as the starting point that we currently do not know how to assess the impact of individual projects, we can admit failure and put an end to short-term demands to know. The task can now be taken out of the realm of studies that are supposed to report in a few months or at most a year or two, and put into the slower channels of genuine theoretical academic research. Two theoretical fields that ought to be explored here are those of game theory and chaos theory. Both may offer a different perspective from the normal cause-and-effect chain of logic that underpins most attempts so far to solve the problem of impact assessment.

It is likely that this research will need to take forward theoretical understanding of social change, especially to take it into the realm of peace and conflict, and to explore the ways in which external influences work. If such research produced a result it would be tested and, if still found viable, implemented. Though the evaluation literature offers no answers now, that is not to say that looking hard and long will not find an answer in the end. It is a challenge worth taking up.

A third task would be to ask why there is a strategic deficit. Three angles of approach recommend themselves here. First, the problem of conflict and social change could be taken on. It could be asked whether peacebuilding is actually a form of social engineering that faces inherent and perhaps insuperable difficulties. It might be that the complexities of conflict dynamics and the process of a society changing so that its own conflict management capacity increases are beyond the capacity of human organisations to drive and manage. Secondly, the emphasis of research could be placed not on the problem but on the institutions that attempt to solve it. This angle of approach would call on theory of organisations, bureaucracy and management to ask whether current institutions are optimal for the tasks assigned to them. Thirdly, research could be focused towards the intellectual research agenda in donor countries, to see whether the general approach to peace and conflict and to development issues is generating the sort of knowledge that is needed for peacebuilding. If it is, the question would be how to make best use of it; if it is not, the task would be to propose modifications in national research agendas on these key issues.

This third possible line of enquiry about the sources of the strategic deficit in relates to a fourth general task for research, which is to explore the theoretical relationship between development cooperation and peacebuilding. Only in recent years have theoretical frameworks been developed that offer firm foundations for explaining the linkages between development and internal armed conflict. It would be valuable to turn from the negative linkages to a new look not only at the positive linkages, but at the

challenges that arise in the linkages between the social, economic, political and cultural transitions that are implied both by development and by peacebuilding.

Applied studies & methodology

Outside of the realms of theory, two further research tasks are needed in order for the framework for the peacebuilding intervention strategy to be worked out in full.

One task is to look into existing frameworks of conflict assessment and of peace and conflict impact assessment, and assess them both against academic theory and against experience. The next step would be to combine their strengths and, where necessary, address and remedy their weaknesses.

A second task is to explore the meaning of local ownership. This has become a point of principle in development cooperation and receives great emphasis in the policy discourse on peacebuilding. However, this synthesis report argues that in the context of violent conflict, local ownership becomes a more complex concept and needs to be handled with care. Local ownership can unintentionally come to mean ownership by conflict parties, or by the most powerful sectors of society. To take this discussion further and ultimately to provide nuanced guidelines for emphasising local ownership in conflict contexts, a comparative study of experience in promoting local ownership would be the best starting point.

Structure of the report

Chapter 1 sets the background to the study in terms of recent conflict patterns, the agenda of the *Utstein* group, the objectives of the study and the definition of peacebuilding. Chapter 2 outlines how the joint study was implemented, introducing its different components – the national surveys, national studies and synthesis report.

Chapter 3 draws on other studies and established research conclusions to establish a context in which Chapter 4 summarises key findings from the national surveys and studies. These brief sections by no means attempt to reflect the full analysis presented in these studies, but merely to highlight points that are especially relevant for the argument in this synthesis report. The second part of chapter 4 draws on these findings to outline the problem of the strategic deficit in peacebuilding.

Chapter 5 looks at issues that have arisen through the national studies and are exemplified in the project summaries in the national surveys to identify some of the key project and programme issues in the peacebuilding experience of the four donor countries.

Chapter 6 outlines strategic lessons learned, while chapter 7 focuses on the main conclusion of the report – the strategic deficit in peacebuilding and how to address it.