

Integrating Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding into United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks

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Abstract

Conflict prevention and peacebuilding have become more important to aid donors in recent years, and has entered the mainstream of development assistance. In each country where the UN agencies are present, the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) defines a strategy for assistance over five years that must be coherent in itself as well as with national strategies and the plans of other donors. The UNDAF needs to be rethought in respect of addressing conflict prevention and peacebuilding in contested and/or fragile states.

In contested and/or fragile states political issues become particularly dominant in the UNDAF process. This has two consequences that pull in opposite directions: the national government's reluctance to incisively address sensitive issues in the UNDAF context, and the donors' pressure to do so in order to better channel aid to the root causes of instability. Furthermore, a second problem also arises: legitimate and participatory national processes to promote reconciliation and to develop a vision for a better future—an essential precondition for durable peacebuilding and non-violent conflict resolution—are by their very nature fluid. They cannot easily be time-constrained to fit into externally driven programming exercises such as the UNDAF—yet a quality UNDAF needs to draw on the outcomes of such participatory processes (this also applies to the formulation of development strategies more generally).

This paper reviews the nature of the UNDAF, looks at some experiences in Rwanda and Sri Lanka that illustrate the problems presented above, and summarizes the essentials of effective conflict prevention and peacebuilding practice. It then identifies the main issues that need to be dealt with by international assistance actors wishing to support conflict prevention and peacebuilding. The paper suggests a realistic perspective on the UNDAF as mechanism for peacebuilding, and offers some practical suggestions for those situations where it can be useful for that purpose.

The paper emphasises that the real challenge comes later, after the UNDAF's finalization, when conflict prevention and peacebuilding have to be translated into on-the-ground activities. Finding the right approach at that point is of greater importance than presenting a deep analysis of conflict-related impediments to development in the UNDAF document.

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I. The UNDAF

The basic tool of the UN's development assistance system is the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF). This obligatory document attempts to provide a coherent, synergistic and results-oriented framework within which UN agencies are to programme their activities, normally over a five-year period. The World Bank and the regional development banks are voluntarily associated with this approach. The UNDAF exercise is preceded by a Common Country Assessment (CCA), which is the responsibility of the in-country heads of UN agencies led by the UN Resident Coordinator, but should incorporate wide-ranging consultations.

The UNDAF itself should emerge from a more formal consensus between the UN system and the government, while taking full account of national policies as well as 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.

The CCA/UNDAF cycle typically takes 18-24 months from inception to completion, but in practice the formal chronological sequence is not easily respected. However it is essential to respect the end-point because of deadlines vis-à-vis the presentation of the UNDAF to intergovernmental bodies – especially for formal adoption in New York - so earlier slippage will cause a rush to completion.

The UNDAF continually evolves in its methodology, design and substance. It was at first seen (in the mid-1990s) as a collaborative professional-technocratic exercise within the UN System. However, its supposed central role in aid programming, as well as its evolving consultative and collaborative requirements, have necessarily made it as much a political exercise as a technocratic one.

II. Practical and Political Challenges to Incorporating Peacebuilding in UNDAFs

In recent years conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding have taken on higher profiles and have become mainstream issues in international aid programming and in respect of donor funding decisions. Consequently the UNDAF is expected to reflect these concerns in countries with high tensions or open violence. Conflict prevention and durable peacebuilding require time, patience, and 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. This approach is increasingly accepted by development and security-sector actors concerned with contested and/or fragile states, both national and international. That implies that civil society should be properly consulted and the national authorities must agree to the document, and this can present many challenges.

Some of these challenges are practical:

- The UNDAF exercise is in principle bound to a tight calendar, as is all international aid programming because of the management imperatives of donor organizations (in turn imposed by their dependence on political funding decisions).
- In conflict-ridden and fragile countries parallel exercises are bound to occur, such as nationally or internationally driven emergency/rehabilitation/recovery/transition programmes, needs assessments, etc., as well as World Bank-driven PRS/PRSPs. These also have their own dynamics and political dimensions, and some may also be present in “normal” development situations. In addition, bilateral and EU aid programmes can be very important and each have their own logic. UNDAF instructions require that all these programmes be taken into account in order to show the overall coherence of international assistance. Thus the UNDAF exercise—in reality one among several programming instruments—and its follow-through become additionally complex in fragile states.

There is also a profound challenge in managing the political sensitivities of two groups of key stakeholders: the national authorities and the international donors.

The UNDAF must be presented to, and accepted by, the donor community in New York and be of such a “quality” in their eyes that the UN System’s proposed activities in that country attract interest and funding. (Each UN agency is expected to implement at least some aspect of the UNDAF, and maintaining/attracting funding, including country-specific funding, is central to each agency’s survival and to the careers of its country representatives.) What constitutes a “quality” UNDAF in the eyes of donors—which is reflected in the instructions for its preparation—is that it forthrightly examines the fundamental reasons for the identified development challenges and conflict parameters in a country. It should then propose actions—in particular those involving the international community as aid donors—that will address these fundamental causes. The forces impelling this are (a) analysts in HQ who quite rightly recognize that causes, not symptoms, should be addressed, and (b) 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. This is supplemented by the more diplomatic approach which seeks to harness aid in the service of international stability, and which is supportive of the rational approach while perhaps retaining a more jaundiced view of the likelihood of success. Both result in an interventionist approach. In addition, these interventions must generally promote the international agenda as summarized in the MDGs and, in the case of conflict prevention and peacebuilding, be normative in promoting human rights and good governance—including the diffusion of political power in society, political pluralism and democratic practices, etc.

It is self-evident that a government in power in a conflict-ridden and 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. A problem arises when UN agency headquarters and UNDGO (the UN Development Group Office—the coordinating mechanism for the UN Resident Coordinator system) look at draft UNDAFs, because they primarily have donor reactions in mind—along the lines of a wish-list to tick off 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, when they serve at HQ other bureaucratic and institutional survival considerations weigh heavily.) And it is HQ officials who hold the carrots and sticks vis-à-vis UN country representatives, which gives the latter incentives to ensure HQ-responsive content in UNDAFs. So UNDAF drafters—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” vis-à-vis the donor community.

There are two intrinsic elements of successful conflict prevention and peacebuilding that can make it difficult to effectively incorporate peacebuilding into UNDAFs:

The need to present the fundamental roots of conflict and the ways to overcome them, while having the endorsement of the country's political authorities. These authorities will often perceive this as threatening to their interests or at the very least may fear the destabilizing consequences of such openness.

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.

The above problems have come to the fore because of the historical shift from donor-imposed programming to recipient-determined and -managed programming, while ultimate control remains with the holders of the purse strings. This situation necessitates a certain amount of creative pretence. It seems that donors tend to demand more of assisted countries in terms of deep thinking and frankness than they tend to expect of each other.¹ 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 seem to a large extent to have been due to a lack of grassroots participatory involvement and bottom-up vision-building—exactly what we know is needed for successful peacebuilding (and for development strategies more generally). The irony is that a relatively authoritarian state will find it easier to formulate clear and incisive plans than a messy and democratic one, which will have to find woolly compromises. So it may be that donors' demands for “quality” UNDAFs—while desirable in principle and entirely logical—sometimes are not only somewhat unrealistic but can be the outcome of undesirable processes. Or, should an UNDAF really be done per the instructions, 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. This would be a considerable effort indeed in relation to likely modest changes in aid activities and levels.

The result has tended to be that in UNDAFs:

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. (This is further discussed below.)

Participatory processes become perfunctory and limited to the usual suspects while claimed to be thorough, conclusions are rarely validated with participants, and “national” ownership is a chimera except that the national government signs

¹ The UN System does not have the option, available to bilaterals, of working only with countries favoured on certain criteria, while staying away from those not so favoured. This can make UN programming especially difficult since the international normative agenda still applies.

*up in the name of the people it formally represents. The big challenge is to achieve minimally legitimate participatory processes within the UNDAF time-constraint.*²

Indeed, recently 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. After all, the UNDAF in itself has no consequences on the ground—only subsequent programming actions and their execution have. 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. However, an UNDAF that is strategically clear on conflict reduction and peacebuilding is very desirable, as it will give greater legitimacy to subsequent on-the-ground activities.

One way forward could be to inscribe into UNDAFs support for processes that encourage movement towards normative internationally accepted goals, including in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, and to give this process-orientation equal weight to the currently emphasized outcomes-orientation of UNDAFs. The problem is that support for processes runs counter to normal aid practice, which focuses on outcomes and their associated logical frameworks generally required by donors’ organizational imperatives for financial and management controls. This is further discussed below. While a short and incisive UNDAF can very well call for process-oriented activities, this is not realistic unless implementing agencies can cope when the time comes to turn this into on-the-ground practice. More generally, while a programmatic approach has gained wide acceptance in principle, real activities tend to happen within the traditional project paradigm, which has inherent difficulties in supporting relatively fluid processes. So, while “putting conflict prevention and peacebuilding into UNDAF” can in principle be done, the real difficulties come later.

III. Illustrations from Rwanda and Sri Lanka

Some experiences in Rwanda and Sri Lanka will be used to illustrate the above discussion and can shed some light on the openings for, and obstacles to, incorporating insights concerning successful peacebuilding into UNDAFs. These two countries presented different situations. Rwanda in 2001 had a politically strong and dominant government, and both the polity and society remained extremely sensitive to the circumstance, background and consequences of the 1994 genocide. In Sri Lanka in 2003 the two-decades-old civil war was at a stalemate with the LTTE 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 democratic openings into the UNDAF, while in the latter the UNDAF/Needs Assessment were needed as building blocks for peace negotiations.

² Much of the above applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to the development issues that UNDAFs must tackle.

Rwanda

The Rwanda UNDAF 2002-2006 is entitled “Poverty Reduction and Peacebuilding”, and was welcomed by the UNDGO as the first UNDAF to attempt systematically to take account of the legacy of conflict (particularly the genocide of 1994) and to promote peacebuilding in the context of UN System assistance. In setting the stage for the five themes of the UNDAF, it made explicit three critical tensions in society: the tension between stability (i.e. control) and participation (i.e. 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.

Content and constraints

Of the five themes of the UNDAF, one, “Transitional Issues”, addressed immediate conflict-reduction initiatives while another, “Governance and Justice”, addressed more traditional peacebuilding. Human rights were 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. Conceptually this UNDAF design made sense. But working it through presented difficulties, and two major ones concern us here:

Even if the approach met considerable interest and goodwill in most quarters—in particular because it set out to address, already at the CCA stage, the whole spectrum of national challenges and to develop ideas for moving forward—it was always clear that certain politically sensitive but core issues such as the ethnic label-political power nexus and the limits on democratic space could not be adequately addressed. However, the question might be asked whether in fact it is justified to attempt to treat such issues in an UNDAF—is it the function of international development assistance to spotlight difficult political issues that have their natural home in the United Nations Secretariat and bilateral diplomacy? The outcome was that 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” included demobilization and reintegration, as well as sustainable settlement, which were relatively straightforward at the level of generalities.

The consultative process resulted in too much material and too many points of view getting into the drafts, which could then not easily be removed without new cycles of consultation which were not feasible given the time constraint and cost parameters, and 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, realizing but not acknowledging that this would be the document that would be read, rather than the legitimized full UNDAF nearly four times as long. In fact the abridged version slightly exceeded the maximum UNDAF length imposed by the UNDGO. Thus the issue of “a small group of professionals, mostly foreigners” writing the UNDAF—albeit within the constraint of the full version—did to some extent exist, basically in order to get the document processed successfully at agency headquarters, in UNDGO, and in the donor community. The government was pleased with the result and co-signed the foreword of the abridged version.

As concerns the general peacebuilding dimension of the 2002-2006 UNDAF, it was in fact overshadowed by poverty reduction and development proposals (but poverty reduction can have important conflict-reducing effects). The principal peacebuilding element was support for a number of governance initiatives, with the Unity and Reconciliation Commission and the Human Rights Commission being the most significant. The first of these represented the main process-oriented initiative, so essential for legitimate and durable peacebuilding, but we note that the Commission was an organ of government. It promoted the *gacaca* system for judging and punishing the “minor” *genocidaires* in their communities and in the process engendering catharsis and dialogue and, hopefully, some degree of reconciliation.

Parallel programming initiative

During the UNDAF exercise, Rwanda was chosen as a pilot for the “Brookings Initiative” initiated by the High Commissioner for Refugees and the World Bank and supported by Denmark and UNDP.³ Focused on bridging the gap between humanitarian assistance and long-term development, it also involved a multi-stakeholder participative approach to illuminate the 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 (if circumscribed) government participation, but by the time the results and recommendations were formulated the initiating parties had lost interest. While this was embarrassing vis-à-vis national participants, the output was useful for the UNDAF work, in particular in respect of land and resettlement issues. The Brookings Initiative resurfaced three years later, somewhat metamorphosed, as the 4R Initiative (see Sri Lanka, below).

In conclusion

With regard to the two issues that are the theme of this paper, viz (a) the tension between the international governance agenda and the primacy of national authorities vis-à-vis UN development assistance system, and (b) the difficulties in demanding time-constrained outcomes from legitimate participatory dialogue processes (the inherent contradiction between control and fluidity), the Rwanda CCA/UNDAF exercise in 2001 probably pushed the envelope quite far under the conditions then prevailing. It usefully led the way in showing that the UN System could try to look seriously at conflict and peacebuilding issues under sensitive political circumstances—and this in a context where the authorities still viewed the United Nations in Rwanda through the prism of its failings at the time of the genocide.

Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka’s UNDAF 2002-2006 was finalized in 2001, before a change in Government that opened new opportunities for peace negotiations. Due to the level of political sensitivity at the time, the UNDAF did not substantively address the long and serious conflict with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the north and east of the country, other than to factually present it and to propose effective emergency and humanitarian assistance. In 2002, following the government’s draft “National Framework for Relief, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation”, the UN System began to consider how to more explicitly integrate support for the peace process and for peacebuilding into its existing UNDAF.

Political changes, the re-opening of peace negotiations, and less sensitivity within the new government to the involvement of outsiders, allowed a flurry of initiatives.

³ The high-level initiative focused on bridging the gap between humanitarian assistance and long-term development. Initiated in 1999, it became known as the ‘Brookings Initiative’ because the Brookings Institute hosted and chaired the first high-level meetings.

Multiple policy and programming exercises

The first was a de facto World Bank-style Poverty Reduction Strategy document called “Regaining Sri Lanka”. This was followed by the “Assessment of Needs in the Conflict-Affected Areas” undertaken by the Multilateral Group (UN agencies, World Bank, Asian Development Bank), which was jointly requested by the Government and the LTTE through a dual 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.

That Donor Conference was to be a crucial moment to commit the LTTE to move towards a final peace agreement in return for a large aid package. As these two documents were the key analytical underpinnings of the Conference they imperatively had to be circulated in early May. In the case of the Needs Assessment this meant that it had to be done in less than four months. This timeframe was extremely tight, given the need for political contacts and negotiations but also to manage the work of some 50 national and international consultants—who were expected to proceed in a participatory way with the affected populations while being under parent agency pressures.⁴ While both made some effort to consult widely—especially the Needs Assessment—they were in fact dominated by political considerations and chronological urgency even if professionally executed by a limited group of technocrats.

Subsequently in late 2003/early 2004—a time when the future of the peace negotiations was very uncertain—the Multilateral Group prepared an implementation plan for the Needs Assessment in the context of UNDAF (which also served as a de facto mid-term review of the UNDAF) entitled “Preparing the Transition in Sri Lanka: Contribution of the Multilateral Group”. This was inspired by a peacebuilding focus but became largely a codification of each agency’s programme within a unified framework—which is also a characteristic of UNDAF outcomes.

This ‘transition strategy’ exercise in Sri Lanka was in part informed by material coming out of the UN/ECHA (Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs) work then underway on Transition Issues, the report and recommendations of which came out in early 2004. Also, a high-level initiative appeared from UNHCR/UNDP/UNICEF (later extended to other agencies) called the 4R Initiative (Repatriation, Reintegration, Rehabilitation, Reconstruction – a metamorphosed re-incarnation of the earlier Brookings Initiative). Sri Lanka was to be a pilot country. Illustrating again the multiple donor-led initiatives touching on peacebuilding, these were both a distraction and of some benefit. The 4R Initiative provided ideas that could be drawn on by the Multilateral Group’s home-grown transition exercise—it proved useful for many to see the model of transition as one of conceptually overlapping, rather than linear, phases from humanitarian relief through to sustainable development. Peacebuilding as such did not, however, finally have much place in any of these exercises.

⁴ In the event the LTTE refused to travel to Tokyo, for reasons tied to several political issues both national and international but not to the Needs Assessment. They also objected to the fact that ‘Regaining Sri Lanka’ had not involved them. The Needs Assessment figure of 1.9 billion US dollars 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.

Peacebuilding in the needs assessment

For the purpose of this paper, it is more useful to examine the Needs Assessment than the UNDAF since it had more potential to address peacebuilding and tried to incorporate conflict-sensitivity in its analysis. Much of the analytical substance of the Needs Assessment is 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 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 not much more than an LTTE body) was the working partner for the Multilateral Group's management team for the Needs Assessment. But all major issues needed direct contacts with the Government and the LTTE, almost always separately, 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). This meant that the local and community-level participatory processes called for in the course of elaborating the Needs Assessment received limited attention compared to the efforts devoted to the management of its political context: while supported by both sides at the strategic level, the Needs Assessment also 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 (preceded by a one-day preparatory event a couple of weeks earlier) in Kilinochchi, a town in LTTE controlled territory which the LTTE considered to be its "capital", with large and fairly senior participation from the Government, LTTE, and some representatives of civil society. Government presence at such a location was in itself a breakthrough. The draft Needs Assessment was vigorously debated and many changes made. In some ways this event 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. But the light representation of civil society was regrettable (it is hard for people to form an independent "civil society" in LTTE-controlled areas).

The workshops in Kilinochchi were key to obtaining both government and LTTE approval of the Needs Assessment, albeit with subsequent to-the-wire negotiations on sensitive textual aspects with the management team as broker. This was in fact the overarching goal: the Needs Assessment was to be the common platform of the two sides at the Tokyo 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 concerning political arrangements.) So it was more important that the Needs Assessment serve its purpose as an essential element for progress in the peace process, than that it truly reflect the legitimate aspirations of the conflict-affected communities as identified through consultations and dialogue.

In conclusion

In terms of the twin themes of this paper, the Sri Lanka experience confirms that:

In contested and/or fragile states in particular, political issues will tend to dominate international aid programming exercises and the United Nations System cannot expect to promote independent analysis in such a context. Indeed in this case the United Nations System played its most useful role by working within the parameters of political sensitivities. But not being an independent analyst or actor does not mean that a sophisticated understanding of the situation is not important—it is essential.

Time-constrained outcomes are the rule, whether for UNDAFs or other instruments such as a Needs Assessment, because the external environment demands it. In the case of Sri Lanka that demand came both from the dynamics of the peace negotiations and from the (mistaken) pressure to hold the Tokyo Donor Conference as planned.

This examination of the nature of the UNDAF, and the review of some experiences in Rwanda and Sri Lanka, has highlighted two recurring conundrums of the UNDAF, namely national ownership of the diagnosis and the proposed solutions, and donor time constraints. Before looking at possible ways forward in addressing peacebuilding in the UNDAF, it is useful to summarize the essentials of effective international support for conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

IV. Good Practices in International Support for Peacebuilding

Post-conflict peacebuilding encompasses the daunting challenges of reconciliation, reconstruction, and societal transformation. To the greatest extent possible, this requires a restoration of confidence and trust (social capital), and national empowerment (political capital), so that nationals take responsibility for building the kind of society they want to live in. For this to succeed, it is of paramount importance that processes be shaped, driven and owned by internal actors. This does not necessarily assume that internal actors will develop better policies than external actors, but experience shows that external domination generates resentment, inertia and resistance; consequently externally driven peacebuilding is usually unsustainable (as are externally driven development strategies). Nor does this mean that external actors should idealize internal actors—rather, they need to understand the diversity of interests at play, and the different perspectives and agendas present in the society.

The Peacebuilding Forum, a consultative process initiated by WSP International in the summer of 2003 and later conducted in collaboration with the International Peace Academy, culminated in a high-level conference in October 2004 that endorsed a number of important findings concerning practical international support for peacebuilding.⁵ These were transmitted to the UN Secretary-General by its co-chairs (President Martti Ahtisaari and Ambassador Mohamed Sahnoun) and serve to inform this paper in defining the approach to peacebuilding that we seek to better incorporate into UNDAFs and their implementation.

The core issue addressed by the Forum was that there are inherent frictions in the relationship between internal and external actors (due to a number of identified factors), 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. Country surveys feeding into the Forum demonstrated that internal actors continued to be often treated as the problem, or as passive victims, rather than as active and central agents in rebuilding their society.

The main reasons for frequent and fairly persistent frictions are:

In recent years, the international donor community has developed sensitive and appropriate policies to support conflict resolution and peacebuilding (e.g. in OECD/DAC), but their practice on the ground is largely unchanged – for identifiable reasons. 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 policies too difficult to put into practice.

Dialogue processes between internal and external actors are generally of poor quality, overly directed by external actors, and often seen as occurring too late and in fact serving simply to validate and legitimize priorities and strategies already identified. The result is the resentment of nationals. Good dialogue processes require time, preparation, goodwill and confidence; they 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 extremely difficult given the great imbalance of power in the relationship between internal and external actors (financial, managerial/methodological, knowledge access and knowledge creation, technical expertise, personal incentives). This is accentuated in post-conflict societies where the stakes in outcomes can be particularly high, the society is fractured and legitimacy is hard to demonstrate, and policy decisions with potentially far-reaching implications often need to be taken rapidly because of donors' organizational imperatives. Consequently policies insisting on national leadership and ownership of externally supported aid or peacebuilding activities are rarely honoured in practice. The practical difficulties in doing so are enormous, even for those with the best intentions, and are due to the pressures and constraints imposed by activity-oriented aid systems that require advanced planning, timetables and financial frameworks.

*In particular the structures, procedures, financing and evaluation criteria of donor organizations are not well adapted to peacebuilding, which needs a flexible and process-oriented approach. In conflict prevention and peacebuilding, **process itself is a key 'product'**. Setting in place and encouraging national dialogue and vision-building are essential, and indeed these represent the first steps toward better governance and a democratic culture.*

The final document of the WSP International / International Peace Academy Peacebuilding Forum—endorsed by the Peacebuilding Conference in New York on 7 October 2004—draws attention to the issues and problems when good peacebuilding policy and principles are to be put into practice. This analysis is essential reading for internal and external actors who want

⁵ See the conference document “Building Effective Partnerships. Improving the relationship between internal and external actors in post-conflict countries.” (www.wsp-international.org see ‘Peacebuilding Forum’ or http://wsp.dataweb.ch/wspapplets/data/Documents/Final_Conference_Document.pdf) and the report of the New York conference (http://wsp.dataweb.ch/wspapplets/data/Documents/PBF_Conference_Report_NY.pdf)

to put peacebuilding into UNDAFs and ensure that something happens thereafter. The document is even more central to **the thorniest problem, that of designing and implementing on-the-ground activities for durable conflict prevention and peacebuilding once a peacebuilding-sensitive UNDAF is in place.**

There are three main issues for the donor community:

- Getting their officials in the field to really understand what is required and to develop the appropriate mentality—in particular on how to approach and facilitate participatory processes. Having external actors on the ground that can to a considerable extent “let go” of control, and still be responsible managers within their organization, is a central challenge of good peacebuilding practice on the donor side.
- Encouraging an approach that will actually work—information is becoming available on what works, what does not work, and what may seem to work but is not sustained; also, practical guidance must be available to on-the-ground managers on how to apply the appropriate approach.
- Putting in place administrative and financial procedures that allow the “disciplined flexibility” required for in-country aid managers to be process-oriented and to provide facilitation and support without taking control. This is far from simple, not least because donor administrative/financial staff will resist.

V. In conclusion: Realistic expectations about the UNDAF and peacebuilding

The preceding section shows that effective and durable post-conflict peacebuilding needs an approach that is facilitating and supportive of national processes, but not directive and pressured. Bearing that in mind, this paper argues that in the light of practical experience it seems valid to suggest that:

- The UNDAF should not in itself be a mechanism for the UN System to promote socio-political soul-searching in a fragile society. It should rather facilitate national processes aiming for this, in order to attenuate conflict and build peace through national mechanisms. Should it be important for the UN System to engage politically, the Representative of the Secretary-General / Special Representative of the Secretary-General mechanism is available. In other cases it is not evidently appropriate or effective 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 incisively illuminate sensitive socio-political issues. 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 indeed to take that route—but taking it should not be the main criterion of UNDAF quality in the eyes of the donor community.
- That leaves the question of how to encourage a process approach to conflict prevention and peacebuilding in the UNDAF exercise if the relationship between the government and the UN System is adequate enough to do so. There is considerable consensus across the board on good peacebuilding practice, available and easy to draw on, so it is

basically a question of training, sensitization, and discussion. That needs careful design as part of an annex to the UNDAF instructions. Certain recommendations of the Peacebuilding Forum document contain practical proposals in this regard.

- Among other things, such an annex would need to explicitly “authorize” the UNDAF to propose support for processes even if this would, when implemented, need derogations from certain financial and management instructions. To do so would require discussion and inputs from a number of sources, as well as approval at inter-agency level and in the UN Secretariat.
- With the help of knowledgeable practitioners, the draft annex would need some limited piloting before dissemination.
- Once available to UN country teams in contested and/or fragile countries embarking on an UNDAF, the application of such an annex will most likely require temporary help and facilitation. Experience repeatedly shows that good policy can be ineffective without strong and focused efforts to put it into practice. Advisers will need to support the UN team and the government to engage in meaningful and legitimate consultations with groups of national actors so as to obtain a minimal strategic direction in the UNDAF as concerns conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Particular attention must be given to achieving legitimate participatory processes while respecting the UNDAF time constraint. Two key elements suggest themselves: (a) initiate the consultative process as early as possible in the CCA phase, and (b) unless circumstances suggest otherwise, limit the output to strategic directions for the UNDAF, not an in-depth diagnosis and prescriptive solutions.
- When that strategic direction has been given to the UNDAF, the identification of entry-points and the elaboration of specific interventions (projects and programmes) to implement the UNDAF will be more solidly grounded. Also the government—having already been a party to the initial process—may be more open to putting these conflict prevention and peacebuilding processes into operation. As emphasized above, the big challenge will be for the “conflict prevention and peacebuilding UNDAF” to have a significant impact on what actually happens next—on the ground.