



Input to the Review of the Peacebuilding Architecture

A thematic paper on lessons identified in terms of programming

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1. Introduction

The latest review of the United Nations' Peacebuilding Architecture was launched in 2019 and will conclude with the presentation of the report by the SG at the 2020 session of the General Assembly. In the five years since the previous review significant reform efforts have been made to how the UN delivers on its mandate, including the adoption by the General Assembly of "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", the introduction of the Sustaining Peace agenda, and the move towards a single integrated peace and security pillar. The report is "an opportunity to demonstrate the UN's collective work on peacebuilding and sustaining peace, with particular focus on results achieved in the field".¹

This thematic paper aims to contribute to the analysis being carried out by the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) by providing an insight into transferable lessons identified around on-going challenges for security and justice (S&J) programming.

These observations are drawn from assessments, mapping, evaluations and lessons identified exercises carried out by DCAF - Geneva Centre for Security Governance over the past 5 years. They provide insights beyond those gained from engagements carried out by PBSO, the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) and the Peacebuilding Funds (PBF), thus contributing to a more holistic analysis.

The themes of the lessons are not new. Indeed most have already been translated into policies. However, gaps remain in how they are subsequently implemented, so the examples provided offer a degree of granularity aimed at bridging this gap. The paper also provides examples that have demonstrated value and could be used to address some of the UNSG recommendations and better articulate systemic solutions for effective programming, a critical factor for success of any Peacebuilding intervention.

2. Lessons identified

2.1. Broadening the notion of local ownership

The importance of local ownership in enabling impactful and sustainable programmes is well established, yet the strong, positive leading role that local authorities should have is a

¹ CONCEPT NOTE - 2020 Report of the Secretary-General on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace





challenge in many post-crisis environments. Institutions are often weak and/or characterised by a high level of corruption, so the broad national inputs into decision-making that underpin local ownership are frequently absent. This deficit is countered through gathering perceptions and an understanding of needs beyond the inputs provided by local authorities in order to provide a more holistic understanding of the challenges to be addressed and possible solutions. The early involvement of civil society is well understood as key, especially regarding representatives from women and youth organisations. However, whilst these findings are well known and already translated into policy, systematic implementation is often lacking.

DCAF's work in Colombia on addressing violence against women has teased out lessons on how an approach to developing community-engagement strategies embedded in the principle of local ownership can result in far more context-appropriate engagement. Working with a local partner enabled a detailed assessment of women's security needs in five rural areas to which members of the FARC were transitioning. A tailored process was used to focus first on developing a deeper understanding of how women define security and insecurity in a post-conflict context, then on barriers to accessing security through formal institutions. The results of this work are now being used by the Colombian National Police to revise their protocols for responding to violence against women, which were originally designed for urban environments. Equally as important, the process of conducting the assessment provided an opportunity to begin gradually building trust among communities, a local civil society organization, and the police.

2.2. Identifying the problem to be solved

2.2.1. Local dynamics

Another established understanding is that conflicts and crisis are the result of an intricate connexion between historical, ethnical, social, economic, security and political dynamics. In these contexts, identifying where an intervention can have a positive impact on the "human parameters" of conflicts/crisis dynamics and how other risks can be mitigated is of paramount importance. Whatever their motivation, individual and/or collective misbehaviours perpetuate mistrust and disunity, generate tensions and fuel conflicts. In most situations, consolidating Peace requires to ensure appropriate behavioural changes at the level of formal and informal institutions and within populations. The level of understanding required to help move peace processes forward is therefore significant, and many evaluations demonstrate on-going gaps between genuine intentions to design interventions based on a thorough accurate understanding of the situation and the reality





on the ground. Yet a lack of understanding of these local realities may lead to designing interventions that are not fit for addressing the problems faced by the local societies; it may lead to articulating expected impacts that are too ambitious; or it may lead to inadvertently exacerbating tensions. On a positive note, DCAF has seen an increase in the number of Member States who are recognising that assessments require a distinct skillset, including through dedicated organisations well connected to field realities. Programmes would benefit from such expert support before entering in the design and implementation phases.

The support that DCAF has been providing to the security sector in the Gambia highlighted a number of transferable lessons with regard to this challenge. In 2019 DCAF worked with local partners to conduct thorough assessments of the Gambian security institutions (Armed Forces, the Gambian Police Force, the Gambian Immigration Department, and the Gambian State Intelligence), a gender assessment, and a public perception survey. With an explicit approach to avoid deploying without pre-conceived notions of what the problems and solutions were, the team used a systematic approach / methodology of exploring needs and priority issues from different perspectives. After conducting an overall threat assessment, security needs were assessed for each institution together with looking at management and efficiency, internal oversight and accountability mechanisms, operational capability and human resource management systems, thus building up a multi-dimensional picture. One of the key highlights of this approach was that the assessment was carried out as a programme activity in itself, rather than just being a pre-cursor to a subsequent engagement. The findings will provide an essential contribution to strategic discussions on how to redistribute, adapt, right size or develop capacities in the sector, and the public perception survey will help to focus security institutions on the needs of communities, and more broadly to contribute to making government reform a matter of public interest.

2.2.2. Multiple actors and interventions

The profusion of actors with overlapping roles and mandates often creates confusion on the ground and undermines the coherence and effectiveness of the peacebuilding effort. Stronger internal coordination can enhance the capacity to leverage or channel efforts through different state and non-state actors.

A lesson emerging from assessments and programming carried out by DCAF over recent years concerns the usefulness of moving from a rapid appraisal of who is doing what in terms of support, to a more analytical mapping of the different actors and their current and planned interventions, carried out as a discrete activity. This encourages greater





transparency, helps to identify complementary activities, and ultimately fosters greater coherence in support.

An example in case was the mapping of development partner support to Justice and Security Sector Reform in Nigeria carried out for the international community in 2015. This was conducted with full transparency amongst donors both in terms of getting access to the data and in terms of dissemination of the final report. In terms of analytical approaches, the elements of support were organized according to four categories: management reform, accountability reforms, capacity building/training and equipment/infrastructure support, as well as reviewing engagements through a lens of strategic, operational and tactical support. This analysis highlighted that significant number of donor activities were duplicated or overlapped with other donor initiatives. Donor assistance activities were mostly concentrated around Abuja, where most national security, defence and justice institutions are head-quartered, and the northeast and Delta regions. Easily-addressed gaps existed with regard to donor coherence were identified, such as the lack of coordination mechanism for the lead donor agencies supporting various external oversight institutions, including anti-corruption agencies. Drawing from this mapping, in 2017, one donor identified the need for setting-up a new anti-corruption programme. Using the coordination mapping, the donor ensured a proper coordination with other initiatives to ensure coherence. As a result, the future programme included appropriate areas of support such as capacity building, including mentoring of the various anti-corruption agencies. The programme also envisioned to work with civil society on changes of awareness and approach to corruption, ensuring effective preventive measures and systems are in place, and improving the system of sanctions for cases of corruption.

2.2.3. Making the best use of objective assessments

There is a basic logic that findings from assessments, lessons identification processes and evaluations should be taken forward into subsequent decision making and approaches. However, this again is not always the case. The reasons for these situations to occur are diverse, but can include issues of lack of knowledge, lack of access to previous reports, insufficient time built into budgets to analyse previous reports, political agendas, poorly worded recommendations, or recommendations that are difficult to translate into strict implementation mechanisms, etc.

The comprehensive exercise that DCAF supported in 2017 to identify lessons and capture best practices and innovation, providing an objective look at missed opportunities, mandate successes and failures, and to identify strengths and weaknesses in the United Nations





Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) Rule of Law Pillar produced a considerable number of evidence-based findings and lessons both at the strategic and operational level. However, the limited engagement with the recommendations by international partners engaged in support to Liberia meant that subsequent programmes to continue work in these areas fell short of required. More activities and joint political engagement were broadly required for example to assist the Government in factoring-in the recommendations into their national Development Plan and follow-up implementation.

Instead, the conversation post transition, including in the Peacebuilding Commission, became quasi-exclusively focused on economic development and the resources required to shore-up this need. Despite this, some international financial institutions and agencies shifted quickly their financial support from Liberia to other settings in the region. And whilst economic development is an essential aspect to sustaining peace and preventing relapse into conflict following the withdrawal of a long-established UN peace operation, attention to governance, security and justice, was downgraded seemingly compounding new challenges today.² From an institutional perspective a key lesson is the need to ensure that lesson identification exercises involve stakeholders at the strategic level that will have an interest not only to promote the uptake of the recommendations at the country level, but also across the international peacebuilding system.

In 2019, some of the key lessons from the After-Action Review of the UNMIL lesson identification exercise have been factored into the design of the similar support being rendered by DCAF to the United Nations–African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID). A key aspect is the broader engagement, from the start, of partners across the UN, regional and national entities, as well as of international partners. The focus on one key programmatic tool (State Liaison Functions) which aims to operationalise a whole-of-system approach during transition that could be of interest for other peace operations which will enter similar processes is a key aspect of this new lesson identification exercise. In addition, a dissemination and outreach strategy for improved uptake by the UN system and international partners more broadly has been designed. However, the challenge of sustainability of the peacebuilding gains after mission transition, remains a main concern given the contextual limitations of Darfur and Sudan’s own political transition, characterised by unexpected opportunities, but also equally eminent risks.

² See for example <https://allafrica.com/stories/202001150200.html>, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/01/liberians-protest-worsening-economic-situation-200106134145168.html>





2.3. Designing an intervention

2.3.1. Political and technical dimensions

Security and development programmes touch to the sovereignty of a State, meaning here touch to the freedom of the State to decide about issues engaging its own future. They are therefore of strong political nature. On the other hand, because of its direct potential impact on the populations and on the programmes' implementation, the individual decision making over resources dedicated to these programmes is also of political nature. These fundamental political dimensions of security and development programmes must be consistently kept in mind when designing and implementing them.

Tensions can arise between the long-term requirements of the State and the good governance and the short-term decision-making over resources. To mitigate the risk of occurrence of these situations, the decision-making level should keep informed of the programme progress and should be aware of the potential implication of his/her short-term decisions on the long-term interest of the state.

Linking technical programme support mechanisms with the inherently political nature of reform within the security and justice sector is a consistent challenge. Ensuring an effective two-way communication (committees, briefings, etc.) between those implementing the programmes and the decision-making level (political, diplomats) at national and international levels is critical to ensure proper awareness and avoid misinformed short-term decision-making hampering the ability to achieve programmes outcomes. The structures dedicated to this communication should be considered during the design phase to ensure coherence from the very beginning.

This situation generates two main requirements for the team leading a programme. First, team members need to be able to act at the level of activities and outputs but think and communicate at the level of outcomes. There needs to be a balance across programmatic and substantive expertise, experiences in developing strategies and implementation plans, and advising at the strategic level. Second, achieving outcomes in a conflict-affected environment requires a long-term commitment at the political level. This involves the need for consistent and enduring commitment in terms of a human resource to ensure that a team endures with diverse and complementary skills and can carry out a programme during its entire lifecycle.





These challenges were well articulated during the lessons identification exercise that DCAF carried out for the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs Burundi Security Sector Development Programme.

2.3.2. Tempering ambition and understanding the Theory of Change

Many of the evaluations undertaken by DCAF show overambitious expected impacts. These often contribute to raising expectations and subsequently lead to frustrations when these outcomes are not met. Whilst there are strong pressures for programmes to articulate clear results at the impact level, it is rare that one programme alone can have a long-term impact. It will more probably contribute to this impact alongside other interventions carried out by various stakeholders in a given environment.

Developing a solid Theory of Change provides an excellent platform on which to develop programming that can be flexible and better aligned to national priorities and opportunities for success. This needs to be based on a solid conceptualisation of the security and justice deficits to be addressed, potential solutions and how these enable the behavioural changes required to reach the desired outcomes and impact. The different chains of cause and effect that result from this exercise should help to map out the linkages between different planned activities, the outputs and ultimately the outcomes.

The value of a Theory of Change was highlighted in an evaluation DCAF undertook for UNDP in Jordan in 2017 as part of its strategic support to UNDP to help them develop a strategic monitoring framework for their Global Programme on Strengthening the Rule of Law and Human Rights for Sustaining Peace and Fostering Development (2016-2020), which is designed to increase justice, security and respect for human rights in contexts affected by crisis, conflict and fragility. This was the second of up to nine country-level evaluations, including Guinea Bissau, Central African Republic, and Colombia, with additional locations planned, including Haiti). The Jordan project document provided a short Theory of Change that enabled a clear structure and logic to the planned project that reflected the real-world implementation and outcomes.

This conceptual work should raise understanding, help specifying the measures and milestones to show progress and enable regular and realistic outcomes-based reporting. The exercise would finally allow to periodically reassess the Theory of Change to understand what was learnt and thus why and how the programme should evolve. The realistic impact and the clear description of the chain of activities and expected results ensured proper conduct of the programme despite the many challenges. This was especially relevant in terms of funding cuts, when the Theory of Change enabled the management team to





correctly identify the activities and lines of support to be cut because of budget reductions were those that activities that had less chance of contributing to the impact on security and justice outcomes.

2.3.3. Focusing too much on outputs

Overly ambitious expectations are often accompanied by poorly worded outcomes. The poor analysis of desired impact/outcomes often leads to programmes that focus predominantly or exclusively on outputs. Outputs are of course more tangible and short-term which explains the natural attention they capture. This focus on outputs commonly underestimates, or insufficiently considers, the influence of broader system, political, capacity, and/or institutional factors in determining whether the output is appropriately utilised or functionalised. The extent to which increased knowledge, changes to legal frameworks, guidance or new strategies, lead to positive outcomes is often conditional upon a programme addressing at least some of the above-mentioned elements through a more holistic programme theory of change.

Programmes that are overly output focused tend to underestimate the resources and time required to translate outputs into measurable outcomes, rather assuming that a one-off activity is enough. Such programmes tend to have a proliferation of activities. As a result, the resources dedicated to a programme are rarely at the level required to achieve the announced outcomes and impacts, and the disconnect between resources available (financial, technical), the annual budget cycle of most donors and the long-term ambitions, generates frustrations on all sides.

Maintaining a focus on outcomes, (i.e. behavioural changes and organizational transformation) helps fostering sustainability and coherence. It helps to define the required resources. Pairing this with a flexible approach to programming allows partners to adapt activities as needed in the face of changing political and security environments as well as other circumstances - while maintaining a focus on the ultimate goals. An emphasis on outcomes requires a steady commitment over the course of several years that is more likely to produce results in line with the invested resources.

Two recent examples from DCAF's evaluations illustrate these challenges. In the initial years following the end of civil war in Liberia, initial training activities targeting the police had quick and noticeable contributions in allowing the police to perform very basic policing functions. As the 2013 Management and Accountability Review (co-financed initiative between DCAF and PBF) highlighted, however, investments in a wealth of additional policies, trainings, and even infrastructure were failing over time to lead to discernible outcomes, as critical gaps in





the wider internal management and accountability systems within the police were undermining any improvements in capability. Similarly, policies were insufficiently enforced/tracked by senior leadership within the police, leading to them being abandoned.

In Ukraine, probation staff received significant training on risk/needs analysis. This successfully increased their understanding of the concepts and develop skills, but they were only partially able to translate the acquired knowledge into improved performance. In this case, the probation reform process did not address the underlying workload and tasking issues that were inundating staff with bureaucracy and limiting the time available for staff to spend with clients.

2.3.4. Monitoring and Evaluation mechanisms

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) mechanisms are key for a programme, and results chains are now mostly obligatory in programme documents. However, in many instances, the accompanying M&E system is overlooked and starts gaining interest only once the programme is already well advanced. This leads to programme activities that start with no baseline and provide the management with no way to measure any progress, especially if viable indicators have - as is often the case - not been defined. As a result, activities start, generating outputs without clarity or indication on their actual contribution to the progress in terms of outcomes (linked to the aforementioned section). Adapting the programme to changes in the environment becomes near-impossible, as the parameters of change of the programme are unknown.

The level of investment required to develop indicators that allow for a strong accompanying M&E system may often best be ensured by defining it as a discrete activity in itself, rather than a task accompanying the writing of a programme document. As an example, in 2019, the DCAF-led EU Security Sector Governance Facility, funded by the “Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace”, was requested to assist the design of a new EU-funded programme on SSR in Georgia by supporting the identification of outcomes and outcome indicators in the different components of the programme.

In order to ensure a strong adherence to local ownership principles, the team brought together the 30+ Georgian counterparts' institutions (state and non-state) of the up-coming programme to develop the indicators, with consultations and an in-depth workshop. This approach enables a genuine ownership of these indicators. Instead of providing ready-made indicators, the workshops helped the future stakeholders to identify themselves the changes (at the outcome level) their institutions wanted to make with the support of the future EU programme.





The Georgian partners were supported to define the indicators (ideally those that were already used and where data was available) to be used to track the progress towards those changes. By identifying those indicators with the main stakeholders, there is a greater chance of them being properly populated during implementation. This ownership contributes also to ensuring better sustainability. The indicators are connected to their work and thus become the foundation for showing progress towards the desired outcomes. They can help orient the future activities of the programme and inform the engagements with the government, local stakeholders and international actors about the progress of the entire programme. It provides information on the change in behaviours of the main beneficiaries and therefore show real results, and not just the activities carried out (e.g. number of trainings carried out). Focusing on outcome and outcome indicators with the counterparts allow them to take a greater responsibility of the changes they want to make for the population, instead of the training and equipment they want to receive from the international community.

3. Conclusion

The Peacebuilding Architecture Review is about the entire United Nations system and aims at improving the way the international community works at headquarter level as well as in the field. Such improvement requires work at various levels in the entire Peacebuilding Architecture.

The present note builds on the lessons DCAF identified over the 5 past years when conducting assessments, mapping, evaluations and lessons identified exercises in various operational settings. It does not present anything new, but emphasises some of the operational realities of programming that remains enduring challenges. Addressing these challenges in a more systematic manner would likely allow the Peacebuilding community to achieve greater impact. This requires ensuring policies, best practices and methodologies are more systematically used and implemented which relies hugely on the selection of skilful and experienced multidisciplinary teams able to act at the activities and outputs level, but think and communicate at the level of outcomes, very often political.

