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Understanding 'Priority' in Peacebuilding Corridors: Getting Coherence and Coordination Right

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Executive Summary

Following a trending reconfiguration of Africa's security landscape evidenced by the decline in inter-state conflicts, and the increase in fragile states; the peacebuilding environment has been perplexed by challenges around 'pinning down' what priorities to support; which priorities would quell the underlying triggers of conflict resurgence; and which priorities can lead to durable peace. In the last five years of the Peacebuilding Commission's (PBC) operations, strenuous demands on its limited resources have prompted the need to understand how 'priority' is determined.

The concept of 'priority' (in itself) seems to have gained currency against the background that it can be viewed from three principal prisms—the government; people (often times marginalized, hence posing a threat to gains in peace processes); and the resident United Nations (UN) team. Irrespective of how one views 'priority', all three actors (government, people and UN) are pursuing the same goal of resolving structural challenges, which trigger conflicts, ending fragility and attaining resilience. Even more complex in the case of most African states, particularly Liberia and the Central African Republic, is the perpetuating perception that peacebuilding solutions have to come from out of the country or be funded from outside. This perception trickles down the government and civic commitment to own the design, resourcing and collective implementation of the peace agenda. Often times the heavy reliance on development partners; and on the UN creates a misperception that the latter possesses solutions to all 'funding' needs of the states and breeds friction around states expecting the UN to fund certain projects and the UN (from its internal situational analysis) recommending a re-adaptation of the projects or complete overhaul and reconfiguration of the same. Rambles protract and stall quick impact peace processes which can respond to structural socio-economic problems which fan the flames of hunger, unemployment, lack of basic social amenities like access to affordable health care, portable water and electricity. However, in most of these states exist civil society organizations (CSO) and others working by proxy from elsewhere and capable of building citizenry capacity to inclusively work towards resolving the underlying drivers of conflict. Such support begs for an understanding of the term 'priority' so that collectively, the state, its people, the UN and CSOs can amiably work coherently to radically confront fragility.

This brief is premised on the fact that the lack of common understanding of 'priority' albeit state by state has thawed international peacebuilding efforts and needs some form of rapprochement about what the PBC should look out for, and work jointly with the state, CSOs, and the broader peacebuilding community to support a state's onward movement to resilience. This paper tries to identify what priority is, and navigates through the missed opportunities of the PBC and other peacebuilding actors in their drive to propel state recovery and sustainable peace.¹

About the Author

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¹ UN Report of the Panel on UN Peace Operations. 2000. UN doc. A/55/305 – S/2000/809. 21 August: Executive Summary

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Prior to joining ACCORD, Nyuykonge worked as a Human Rights Observer for the African Union Mission in Mali and the Sahel previously known by the acronym AFISMA; and he lectured human rights, international relations and political studies at the universities of the Witwatersrand and Zululand (South Africa). He has also served as a Senior Consultant for the African Union Peace and Security Program at Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia, and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa on issues relating to African peace and security broadly and in particular, mediation and peace agreements.

Disclaimers

The views presented in this Policy Brief are those of the author. They do not necessarily reflect the views of CCCPA or any of its affiliates or partners.

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Understanding 'Priority' in Peacebuilding Corridors: Getting Coherence and Coordination Right

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Introduction

The creation of the United Nations PBC nearly a decade ago came as welcome relief to the international peacebuilding corridor which had been victim of a missing link between the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DKPO), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP); the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) and other United Nations (UN) specialized agencies which were often deployed to peacekeeping missions. While the latter responded to imminent threats to peace and security, the need to build on any of their gains was often handicapped or missing.

This gap was often filled by a handful of development agencies and inter-governmental organizations which had dedicated emergency toolkits and transitional programs to rapidly intervene in post-conflict situations and build from the burgeoning gains of peacekeeping operations. The intervention of these agencies no doubt brought relief to some victims of conflict and fragility; but their uncoordinated nature meant some sectors grossly benefited an inundation of support while others did not. This inextricably meant that lack of coordination was creating a new 'inequality' problem capable of teetering to instability. This conundrum found a voice in the Secretary-General's report entitled "In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All", which in part stated: "We have it in our power to pass on to our children a brighter inheritance than that bequeathed to any previous generation. We can halve global poverty and halt the spread of major known diseases in the next 10 years. We can reduce the prevalence of violent conflict and terrorism. We can increase respect for human dignity in every land. And we can forge a set of updated international institutions to help humanity achieve these noble goals. If we act boldly—and if we act together—we can make people everywhere more secure, more prosperous and better able to enjoy their fundamental human rights."

In larger freedoms lamented the high probability of relapse into conflict due to insufficient and incoherent international support by countries emerging from violent conflict. Albeit gains by the PBC in Burundi, Central African Republic, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Sierra Leone ten years after the PBC's creation on 21 March 2005, problems of coordination still persist with different configurations. There is therefore little doubt why Connolly and Baggerman (2014:2) suggests "the synchronization of objectives, strategies and implementation of programs by relevant actors so that they are all in agreement on the need to pursue common goals."

Notwithstanding the above, the attendant difference in expectation of what should be the bane of a national peacebuilding priority of a state recovering from conflict is often a moot point. In the last decade and prior, administrative and logistic burdens imposed on certain states by a multiplicity of actors have tended to further weaken projects which in some cases ensue from 'inclusive' debates or from political manifestos voted-into

government by the will of the majority of the people in accredited transparent and credible elections. That these impositions slow down the progress of peace processes are in part responsible for the UN's inability to prevent the relapse into conflict of about 50 percent of post-conflict states (UN 2000). The UN Report of the Panel on UN Peace Operations (2000) acknowledged that a concoction of short time frames, limited financial and human resources and equipment, which are either inadequate or incompatible with ground realities, aided the cyclical nature of conflict in fragile and emerging states.

Another dimension is that, government's priorities sometimes are not the priorities of the state but those of a few elites, lobbyists or multinationals who invest in ensuring that policies being developed take their interests into consideration. This quandary becomes the bedrock of fragility and creates a dissonance between the government and its people – thereby begging for a need to understand how the priority debate is at the center of coherence and operational challenges. It is therefore prerequisite to understand what priority is from the prism of multiple peacebuilding actors before proceeding to understanding how it feeds into the coherence and coordination puzzle which continues to preoccupy the PBC.

It is against this backdrop that this policy brief argues that the peacebuilding fraternity's divergence in appreciating what priority is, in some sense is responsible for why solutions to coordination and coherence have yet to be found.

Understanding Priority in Peacebuilding

Although a floodgate of literature exists pointing to coherence and coordination as the missing link in the PBC's ability to meet the globe's peacebuilding challenges, the process and role of priority-setting needs to be reconsidered with the view of ensuring that from the genesis, all actors have the same understanding of priority in each given situation and work together towards responding to it. The current regime, where limited resources prompts peacebuilding actors to retailor government peacebuilding priorities and implement segments of it, creates coordination avoidable challenges. As a result, understanding priority from different angles with the view of contextualizing the causal relationship between missed-priorities or inexistent consensus around priority is critical. Noting that priority differs from state to state and that within states, what governments communicate may not necessarily be the priority of the majority but a small influential elite, and understanding how this plays in donor community's appreciation of priority; and how it differs from the PBC's prioritization is critical in better appreciating why coherence remains the PBC's unresolved puzzle.

Peacebuilding Priority from the Government's Purview

Multiparty democracies have in many cases demarcated the national politics into two broad factions: the ruling party sometimes called ruling elite and the opposition, which sees itself as representative of the marginalized or excluded few whose voices it represents. Such demographic configurations have tended to also divide national priorities with some seeing government programs as solely a reconfiguration of its manifesto, and others seeing it as the demands of lobbyist and elite minority. As a result therefore, government priorities can be seen to be divorced from an inclusive national priority because of their immediate contestation by (a)political groups and

congregations. This immediately creates a caveat to be exploited by multiple actors seeking to intervene and support the process of building peace. For instance in 2010, following Liberia's request to be listed on the PBC agenda, the PBC after receiving support from the Secretary General and the UN Security Council proceeded to, in mutual commitment with the government, create three priority areas:

- Strengthening the rule of law
- Supporting security sector reforms
- Promoting national reconciliation

Although at the time these were holistically national imperatives for Liberia, and are perhaps still very much needed today by the Liberian people who had just recovered from the 14 year long civil war (1989—2003), the imperatives were different: some needed psychosocial support from the hangovers of the conflict; others needed some form of economic restitutions for losses incurred during the conflict; and another significant group needed a guarantee for basic social services like access to education, good portable water, provision of electricity and comprehensive healthcare for all. ²

Furthermore, the agreement between the government and the PBC made for (inter)national news as Liberia became the fifth country on the PBC's agenda. This created a lot of expectations by many Liberians who till this day are scoffed with the perception that the UN and PBC have answers to all their problems. This is even to say nothing of the fact that the Statement of Mutual Commitment between the government and the PBC fell short of detail as to how many people were going to be affected by the support which the government had now won through Liberia's inclusion on the PBC agenda.

Priority for the state can therefore be

- a reconfiguration of political manifesto,
- a response to the wills and demands of lobbyists and elite minority who are willing and able to pay consultants to produce the finest policy documents divorced from majoritarian reality, or
- ad hoc response to a challenge that's threatening the country's national security like Ebola today.

That priority is communicated by government is insufficient for the international donor community of PBC to rally behind same; as the PBC could very soon be seen to be supporting despotic regimes if attention is not paid to the process of developing the priorities.

Peacebuilding Priority from the Peoples' Purview

Quite often, policy makers and persons interested in understanding the underpinnings of conflict have come across writings suggesting that women and children are the most affected in times of conflict particularly because the men flee leaving them at the mercy of predatory armed groups. Whereas, such facts are often well grounded in reality, the

² Connolly L and Baggerman J. 2014. *Getting Coherence and Coordination right: Principles for the peacebuilding policy community*, <http://www.accord.org.za/images/downloads/brief/ACCORD-policy-practice-brief-31.pdf> [November 17, 2014]

extent of some of the damage to the victims is often too graphic to be captured in such mediums. As a result therefore, someone not in direct contact with victims of conflict or who has not been in the combat line cannot very well appreciate the despicable inhumane conditions to which persons trapped in conflict are subjected. And with the lack of such an appreciation, talks about peacebuilding can only at best be superficial and, at worst not reach the victims themselves.

International humanitarian agencies dedicated to respond to such emergencies like the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Merlin and Medicin Sans Frontier (MSF), always often are understaffed, or inadequately resourced to address degenerating health conditions requiring long-term assistance. And so, whereas, they respond to fresh casualties, states' slow recovery process often does not prioritize taking on board terminally ill persons needing urgent medical attention like persons who have been physically assaulted, raped and have lost their source of livelihood and risking death to famine. Intermediate between the state and humanitarian agencies are other UN agencies like the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) who cater for some internally displaced persons and refugees.

Therefore with emergency medical assistance and psychosocial support being peoples' most pressing priority at the dawn of post-conflict, dedicated resources are needed at this phase to restore hope in the people who in many cases believe (and rightly so,) that, the state has some measure of responsibility for the collapse of institutions which exposed them to unquantifiable and (ir)recoverable pain and damage. Examples can for instance be cited of Timbuktu, where in 2012, following the implementation of sharia law, separatists amputated some locals, raped others and left others with bruised bodies, but until April 2014, some had not had access to proper medical care because MSF was not properly habilitated to test amongst others, visible advance cases of cancer. Referrals to Bamako, where patients can get better treatment are often unrealistic as all roads, including the impassable, are littered with improvised explosive devices (IED), and victims are left with no choice other than airlifting, which they can't afford, and the UN agencies with aircrafts are prescribed to serve personnel and not victims or citizens who are not on official mission.³

Thus for victims, the kind of support they need from donor agencies and from the PBF is very often completely different from the government's focus and often even misinterpreted as them desiring compensation for economic losses, which are themselves legitimate needs which, if met can re-stimulate the economy.

It is therefore critical for the PBC and the international peacebuilding fraternity to be more attentive of the fact that while the states desire (largely) to build institutions and return governance to normalcy, the people's needs are in many cases tangent on the search for the very basic to survive – health care, jobs, and a return to school. The lack of these has arguably been fact-proven as a concoction which together with the lack of improved infrastructural development (electricity, water, and good roads), pushes several youths into violent extremism (Krueger and Maleckova, 2002:9).

³ De Carvalho G, De Coning C and Connolly L. 2014. *Creating an enabling peacebuilding environment: How can external actors contribute to resilience?* Policy and Practice Brief #28. ACCORD. February

Peacebuilding Priority from the Development Partners and Donor Agencies' Purview

Fundamental to providing development aid to any state or institution, is the donors' conviction that the promotion of peace and security elsewhere is (in)directly related to their own stability and progress. Thus, support is generally directed at issues which respond directly to their own pre-designed priorities or understanding of the situation to which they are directing resources. In this vein, common to most development partners and donors is the emphasis of ensuring that their dedicated resources contribute to peace, security and stability as well as human rights, democracy and good governance. To them, these are essential elements for sustainable economic growth and poverty eradication.

These agencies, in many cases, have peacebuilding divisions or issue-focused specialized departments or have hired consultants to analytically study and make recommendations on how they can support a state in recovery. As a result, their modus operandi (just like for all peacebuilding actors) is often driven by the need to support programs and initiatives under which recovery can occur.⁴

The emphasis on recovery usually finds solace in building new democratic institutions, supporting the return of the rule of law; and supporting national dialogues or the implementation of peace agreements. The concept of support or priority is often limited to one track and rarely trickles down to the next levels nor involves community participation. And in cases where it does, the community benefits from projects designed elsewhere without an appreciation of their own most pressing 'priorities'.

Peacebuilding Priority from the PBC's Purview

Created by United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution 1645 of 20 December 2005, together with General Assembly resolution 60/180, the PBC was tasked to "coordinate and reinforce the UN peacebuilding architecture." The two resolutions underlined a number of points as guiding principles which clothed the PBC with the mandate of "... preventing conflicts, assisting parties to conflicts to end hostilities and emerge towards recovery, reconstruction and development and in mobilizing sustained international attention and assistance." Supported by the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) and the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), the PBSO is the analytical arm which supports the planning process for peacebuilding operations, conducts best practices analysis, and develops policy guidance. The PBF mobilizes funds from voluntary contributions in order to bridge funding gaps in the crucial time between conflict and recovery. The Fund's initial funding level was set at least US\$250 million and mandated to concentrate on four priority areas:

- activities in support of the implementation of peace agreements;
- activities in support of efforts by the country to build and strengthen capacities which promote coexistence and the peaceful resolution of conflict;
- establishment or re-establishment of essential administrative services and related human and technical capacities; and
- critical interventions designed to respond to imminent threats to the peacebuilding process.

⁴ De Coning C. 2008. *The coherence dilemma in peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction systems*. African Journal on Conflict Resolution, 8 (3), pp. 85–110

These, in a sense are reflexive of donor agency priorities and can be said to be closely linked to priorities of governments such as resource mobilization for the following:

- Implementation of peace agreements
- Reconstruction of destroyed state infrastructure (mainly government offices)
- Training for state officials under the guise of equipping them with necessary skills to respond to ongoing emergency
- Security sector reform to equip new military coalitions with the arsenal to prevent the recalcitrance of the 'bad guy' or 'rebel' or 'terrorist'

That there is little, or no direct, contemplation of the difference between the needs of the people or victims (perhaps in favor of the thought that victim's needs are covered by the state), begs for the PBC to introspect on how government priorities are drawn, and what impact they have in addressing past pain, building confidence for the future, and ensuring collective action towards resilience.⁵

Priority and the Coherence and Coordination Puzzle

The contours of coherence and operational challenges have been x-rayed by previous analysts from various angles much to the exclusion of the specific purview what priority is, and how it's diverse appreciations contributes to conflict relapse. To De Coning, cohesion and coordination are strong imperatives for sustainable peacebuilding in so far as they are responsive to the political context and national realities (De Coning, 2008: 85). This point is further supported by De Carvalho, De Coning and Connolly who argue that coherence and operational coordination will remain elusive as long as stakeholders continue to "operate with varying time frames and with independent goals which do not take into account the linkages between the issues and processes they are working on ..." (De Carvalho et al, 2014). The emphasis on ground reality and issue in this case seems to point to the fact that as long as peacebuilding priorities are locally generated by constitutive authorities of the state, then it is good for consideration. However, it is important for the concept of ground reality to be more broadly appreciative of the vast variety of perspectives inherent in 'national reality.' Connolly and Baggerman, quoting Frauke de Weijer from a seminar, attempt to waterdown the importance of differentiating priority as ensuing from divergent cultures and priority as ensuing from the government (Connolly and Baggerman, 2014:5). By saying "there is no such thing as local' or even national government" because these "variant perspectives may have been part of the conflict," they trivialize the potency of deep drivers of conflict becoming new triggers. Thus recommendation for states to look into the future [and perhaps not the past] should be read cautiously.

Another operational challenge ensues from the misalignment between international acceptance that peacebuilding should be locally conceived, owned and driven; and the acceptance of the same when states propose their peacebuilding projects as ensuing from inclusive national dialogues endorsed by states' legislative assemblies. In many cases Chesterman and Thakur (2005) suggests that "the future direction of a particular country should be in the hands of the people of that country ..." However, whether there is a difference between people and the state or ruling elite is a matrix which (caught in national political dialectics) peacebuilding actors often try to unpack.

⁵ Ignatieff Chesterman and Thakur R. 2005. *Making states work: States failure and the crisis of governance*. UN University Press. Tokyo

Ensuing analysis, diagnosis and prescriptions often vary from institution to institution and lie in what interests the institutions are diversely pursuing. That such analysis primarily has to respond to what donors see as priority and not what states or people contemplate as priority speaks to the heart of the root cause of coherence – and so a mismatch between what the people popularly want and what the elites want as communicated by the state or the exclusive conversion of party manifesto to represent the will of the people is visibly, the bedrock of challenges confronting the peacebuilding fraternity and in particular the PBC. Put simply, if states cannot inclusively articulate the will of the people or misconstrue elitism and party manifestos for same, surely they create gaps which interveners try to manage in a bid to prevent a relapse and in such cases, such preventive action takes the bulk of the resources and the peacebuilding plan is strained.⁶

Variations in government priorities and donor priorities in 2004 prompted Kofi Annan, serving then as UN Secretary General, to create a High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change with the remit of assessing international threats to human security. Amongst others, the panel had to make recommendations on how to improve the efficacy and impact of UN interventions in reversing the prospects of relapse into conflict by states in recovery (Rugumamu, 2009). The Panel found out that peacebuilding initiatives lack cohesion, mostly because of a lack of a coordination framework around which all actors could concert on what was priority and disburse resources to meet them. Part of these fragmentations, the report found out, ensued from within, as well as without the UN system where conflicting goals are legion. Poignant was the realization that with resources being unevenly distributed between peacekeeping and humanitarian response, building sustainable post-conflict institutions continued to lag. As a result, the report recommended that these gaps be best coordinated by the UN whose mandate it is to prevent wars albeit at the time not having any institution which could coach states into transitioning from war to sustainable peace.

Against this background, peacebuilding coherence and operational coordination challenges ensue mainly because of the misalignment of what can be conceptualized as 'common national peacebuilding priority.' With 'priority' meaning different things to different people, the fault lines of intervention worsen the contexture of coordination whether amongst various actors, within bureaucracies of donor agencies or within the UN system where battles for visibility are subtle but real and sometimes ferocious. Investing in well-coordinated inclusive national dialogues which produce a blueprint priority plan acceptable to different community realities and appreciated by the donor community and the PBC is critical in solving the coherence puzzle.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The differences in appreciation of 'priority' are glaring in peacebuilding. Often times, the concept of priority which carries the day is that of the donor who decides what to fund commonly known as "the holder of the purse dictating the tune to which everyone dances." Mixed-understandings of priority have demonstrably been the reason coherence and operational coordination are still listed high on the chart as the greatest challenges of the peacebuilding fraternity where frameworks tailored to respond to states' needs continue to work in parallel with very little conceptual variations. With

⁶ Kofi A Annan. 2005. *In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All*. United Nations Publications, New York

funding already limited to meet peacebuilding challenges, dispersed efforts further have led to “clashing and competing mandates with short-term [objectives] that focus narrowly on achieving donor-required outputs within a predetermined time frame” (Connolly and Baggerman, 2014:11). This therefore excludes a significant constituency often not taken care of by donors’ understanding of ‘priority’.

Amongst others, Resolutions 1645 and 60/180 of the UNSC creating the PBC mandated the latter to “bring together all relevant actors to marshal resources and to advise on and propose integrated strategies for post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery.” This task of marshalling relevant actors can be more broadly interpreted as not just congregating stakeholders around resources, but around agreeing on modalities for validating local ownership in national priorities; and where necessary, convene meetings between governments and key actors in peace process to agree on ‘priorities’ for the state. In so doing, international actors and the PBC streamline their understanding of priority and strengthen a conversation towards a coordinated response which depletes the challenges of coherence and coordination.

This is important in redressing the focus on reconstruction which sometimes trivializes deep drivers of conflict; and under-look the immediate needs of victims still hangover from the effects of the conflict. Resolutions 1645 and 60/180 (Op Cit) mandate the PBC to “focus attention on the reconstruction and institution-building efforts necessary for recovery from conflict and to support the development of integrated strategies in order to lay the foundation for sustainable development.” It is important to note that the foundation to sustainable development is laid on people who would drive the development and not only on institutions which are unmanned or distrusted will not meet the contemplated objectives of the PBC.

It is therefore of utmost importance for the PBC to consider a new people-centered partnership, and to encourage states to do the same, especially for persons badly affected by conflict and fragility. Failing to instill institutional confidence in these persons through programs which take into account their plight is building institutions for which they would have little regard and would become ‘spoilers to a process which disenfranchises’ them as the greatest victims of conflict and fragility. ⁷

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⁷ Krueger Alan B., and Maleckova Jitka, 2002. *Education, Poverty, Political Violence and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?* National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) Working Paper 9074. Cambridge
Rugumane S. 2009. *Does the UN Peacebuilding Commission Change the Mode of Peacebuilding in Africa?* Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Briefing Paper 8. June