Governance for Peace: Strengthening Legitimate Politics, Securing the Social Contract

Jamil Chade

The *New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States* proposes a transformation in the interaction between donor countries and recipients of international aid. A joint initiative of the nineteen fragile countries of the g7+ and the donor community, the New Deal recognizes that fact the most fragile states will not achieve any Millennium Development Goal (MDG) by 2015. Thus, this initiative puts forth a more realistic vision for international engagement in fragile states. But implementing the New Deal will be challenging for all relevant actors, including the wider collective of UN agencies. To address this matter, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform, in collaboration with the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP), hosted an event to launch the latest report of UNDP's Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR) entitled *Governance for Peace: Securing the Social Contract*. Keeping the New Deal at the forefront of its agenda, this report highlights UNDP's support to governance as part of a broader effort to achieve peace consolidation in contexts of crisis and fragility. Indeed, if left unaddressed by national stakeholders and international actors alike, conditions of crisis and fragility could cause further destabilization and erosion of a state's ever-critical social contract.

Due to its insistence on country-led transitions out of fragility, the New Deal has become important for donors who understand the critical need to change patterns of engagement with fragile states to reflect the increasing importance of peacebuilding and statebuilding processes that are owned and operated by national stakeholders.

UNDP's Governance for Peace report lays the groundwork for a new framework for action that helps implement the New Deal

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For Neil Buhne, Director of the UNDP-BCPR Liaison Office in Geneva, the New Deal constitutes both a symbolic and a strategic shift in approaching such initiatives. For the first time, the New Deal "comes from countries themselves," Buhne said, who also noted that seven countries – Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, South Sudan and Timor-Leste – have already volunteered themselves as test cases for New Deal implementation. Referencing the New Deal and BCPR's Governance for Peace report, Dominic Sam, UNDP's Country Director for Liberia, expressed "hope and optimism that we will finally get it right."

Yet, despite these sentiments, New Deal implementation will only work when all relevant actors understand that the work on the ground must be tailored to the individual needs of each state or society affected by fragility in order to foster resilience. As demonstrated by the examples of Timor-Leste, Sierra Leone and Liberia, building resilience in societies must encompass measures to strengthen and promote legitimate politics. This requires not only the formulation of bureaucracies, but also the strengthening of capable institutions that can comprehensively provide services and representation for all segments of society. The New Deal and its provisions for legitimate politics are great principles but "the challenge will be to apply them," said Caty Clement, head of the Conflict and Peacebuilding Programme of the Geneva Centre for Security Policy. This challenge and the understanding of the importance of country-led and owned processes derived from years of UNDP's peacebuilding and statebuilding experience, provide the foundation for BCPR's Governance for Peace report.

Inclusive politics, responsive institutions, resilient societies

In presenting the main findings of the Governance for Peace report, Sheelagh Stewart, Director of the Governance and Rule of Law Group of UNDP-BCPR, spoke of a highly challenging aspect of fostering resilience through peacebuilding: promoting dialogue with *all* relevant actors, including "the difficult ones".

UNDP's vision for governance in fragile states outlines some of the key principles that are necessary in securing a new social contract in a society that has suffered years of violence and divisions. Inclusiveness is a central tenet that applies to all facets of statebuilding. "Inclusive institutions, inclusive economic growth and fair distribution of service delivery are key," Stewart stated. But "inclusive politics must include the difficult people in the conversation for peace to last."

The report underscores that the statebuilding paradigm must shift away from models that posit statebuilding as the mere construction of competent bureaucracies in order to provide a more comprehensive framework to strengthen the social contract between the state and the society it represents. "The concept of a social contract dates back more than 400 years ago but is still alive today," Stewart noted. There is no social contract if only a small part of a given society is consulted in political processes; this is particularly true in countries emerging from armed violence, war, or fragility.

But, as with the New Deal, the Governance for Peace approach goes beyond politics. In post-conflict and fragile contexts, every segment of society must feel socioeconomic gain and the distribution of services delivered by authorities who are responsive to popular demands. Responsiveness in this regard can be evidenced through specific signals sent by governments to demonstrate that privileges will not be given to specific groups or segments of society. Preferential prioritization, if and when it does occur, happens only after specific needs of marginalized groups are transparently identified, and closes the gap from beneath rather than widening it from above. Stewart claimed, for instance, that the impact of effective water distribution systems that reach a maximum number of people could be more powerful peacebuilding result than trying to assure a large number of state services to a few.

Finally, the report highlights that transitions from conflict or fragility rely on more than the state's capacity, and that the resilience of a society to renewed crisis is central to success. "Resilient states are those that bounce back from conflict without resorting to violence," she said. Stewart acknowledged that supporting this resilience is certainly not an easy task, and that much remains to be learned. But its difficulties must be embraced for the sake of securing a lasting and legitimate peace.

Learning lessons

In the Governance for Peace report, UNDP admits that these challenges not only invite governments to change practices, but that UNDP must do so as well. The report states that UNDP has "overly focused on developing and implementing a medium and long term reform and capacity development agenda." According to its own assessment, it is time for the organization to help governments restore service delivery "at the earliest possible stage." The report also emphasizes the need for flexibility in the UNDP approach to supporting governance by adopting "more realistic strategies" for aiding post-conflict recovery and transitions from fragility. Having formulated the document from the results of a substantial information gathering process in UNDP operations around the world, the Governance for Peace report states that "UNDP needs to start targeted and prioritized interventions as early in the political process as possible."

The core of these interventions is based on a new framework for action comprised of the pillars noted by Stewart: promoting inclusive politics, crafting responsive and capable institutions and fostering societal resilience to strengthen governance in contexts of crisis and fragility. Through this framework, UNDP aims to broaden participation of marginalized and vulnerable groups, and provide flexible support to state and non-state institutions alike. Key programmatic areas for the implementation of this framework include promotion of human rights and access to justice, supporting processes of constitution making, aiding in combatant reintegration, and nurturing progressive leadership.

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New partnership for New Deal implementation

The final challenge emphasized by the Governance for Peace report is to answer the call of the New Deal for the formulation of strategic partnerships around its implementation. These partnerships will require participation from all relevant sectors including local actors, elites and powerful groups, and international agencies. As such, there is a need for a fresh dialogue between donors and national stakeholders, including various levels of government and societal groups. This critical issue comprised a key message from many of the event's participants.

Ambassador da Fonseca from the Permanent Mission of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste in Geneva recalled how his country realized that the old approach to recovery was not working following years of working to develop relationships between his young nation and the donor community. As a result, Timor-Leste became a key actor in the g7+, and is leading efforts to engage more effectively in fragile and conflict-affected countries and regions. "We [have] had a major incident of violence and threat to stability every two years," he said. "In 2006, some of us even began believing that in fact every 2 years we must have something wrong happening". Da Fonseca remembered how the government once used a slogan to mark the new phase of the country that became a symbol of irony to many of the country's conflict-weary citizens: "The government came up with the slogan 'Goodbye Conflict, Hello Development'. But many would say 'Goodbye Conflict, see you later.'"

For Timor-Leste, the transformation came when the government and society had the joint courage to propose a new type of relationship with donors. This courage included the adoption of a new attitude toward donors. Those financing development programs needed to assure that funding went to the programmes Timor-Leste needed, and not necessarily to the plans the donors had. "What is different about the New Deal is the acknowledgement of courage. That is the biggest change," he said. "We went from 'donor meetings' to 'development partner meetings.'" Da Fonesca insisted, "We need to change the perspective. We need to change the vocabulary."

The Ambassador pointed out how this new approach has already been part of the dialogue between Timor-Leste and Australia (one of the country's main donors) and will be institutionalized in the New Deal principles. From his point of view, new partnerships to support the construction a responsive, resilient and inclusive state in Timor-Leste will be enhanced as people will feel welcomed to participate in recovery processes and are consulted at important steps ialong the way. "Inclusiveness is central and it is this new behavior that will assure resilience in the future in the country," he concluded.

Recognizing the roots of fragility

Dominic Sam added to the discussion a valuable example of the difficulties peacebuilding and statebuilding processes face in Liberia. Liberia hosts one of the largest UN operations and is, in essence, a laboratory for a vast number of strategically constructed development programs intended to consolidate peace and build capable and responsive state institutions. Sam, however, noted the fact that last year's elections made it evident that, despite these strategies, Liberia continues to exhibit vulnerability. The honest recognition that fragility exists long after the formal end of a conflict is central to rebuilding conflict-affected societies. This, Sam explained, occurred in Liberia, and led UNDP to create a peacebuilding platform for women. As concerns grew regarding election-related violence, this group of women used its legitimacy and grassroots involvement to ease tensions during the election period and to mitigate potential clashes.

Ambassador Yvette Stevens, the Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone in Geneva, pointed out another source of fragility: youth unemployment. "We need to look at how we engage youth more", she stated. "Youth with nothing to do can become really dangerous in times of conflict". Ambassador Stevens, who was the first female engineer in Sierra Leone, insisted that her country is "on a path of transformation and development." "Resources - everything is there. It is just a matter of how we use them," she claimed. "The assumption that 'one size fits all' is not valid. There is clearly a need to address the root causes of a conflict and they are different and unique in each situation," she said. "By addressing the causes of conflict in the first place we'll get there."

Neil Buhne closed the discussion by pointing out that, despite the fact that some of the principles of engagement are indeed "universal," it is clear that "the big fix is not always the solution." Much work lies ahead in implementing the New Deal, and forging the new partnerships necessary to allow this implementation to become a reality on the ground. UNDP's Governance for Peace report succeeds in laying the groundwork for the new framework for action that will be required for the success of such initiatives.

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About this Brief

This Brief is a summary of a lunch-time seminar entitled "Governance for Peace: Strengthening Legitimate Politics, Securing the Social Contract" co-organized by the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform and the UNDP on 20 April 2012 in Geneva. All views expressed in this Brief relate to the interventions made during the event. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the Rapporteur, the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform, or the UNDP.

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About the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform

The Geneva Peacebuilding Platform is an inter-agency network that connects the critical mass of peacebuilding actors, resources, and expertise in Geneva and worldwide. Founded in 2008, the Platform has a mandate to facilitate interaction on peacebuilding between different institutions and sectors, and to advance new knowledge and understanding of peacebuilding issues and contexts. It also plays a creative role in building bridges between International Geneva, New York, and peacebuilding activities in the field. The Platform's network comprises more than 1000 peacebuilding professionals and over 60 institutions working on peacebuilding. http://www.gpplatform.ch.

About BCPR and the Governance for Peace report

UNDP's Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery supports countries to manage conflict and disaster risks, and to rebuild for resilience once crisis has passed. BCPR aims to ensure that UNDP's development efforts, and those of the wider UN system in situations of fragility, incorporate necessary elements of crisis prevention and timely recovery support. This requires a focus on skills and capacities in national institutions and communities – in order to minimize risks of disasters and violent conflict and to secure a foundation for sustainable development.

Governance for Peace: Securing the Social Contract reviews UNDP's experience in supporting governance in crisis-affected, post-crisis and fragile country situations and presents a framework for engagement in these country situations. The report identifies four interlinked objectives that place the Social Contract between states and societies at the centre of recovery. Particularly important to moving forward is UNDP's insistence that this framework contain a unique flexibility to adapt to the specific needs of the various local contexts in which development assistance is given. With that in mind, the Governance for Peace report outlines a holistic process for aiding a society affected by crisis or fragility in securing the Social Contract. The report is available at: http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/crisis-prevention-and recovery/governance_for_peacesecuringthesocialcontract.html