Research Brief

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Overview

In recent decades, international peacebuilding and reconstruction after civil wars have managed to promote stability and contain conflict in many regions around the world, ending violence and enabling communities to rebuild their lives and societies. However, the peacebuilding record indicates that there are problems related to the effectiveness and legitimacy of peacebuilding, especially related to the promotion of liberal democracy, market reform and state institutions. This brief considers these limitations and argues that a new human security-based approach may offer insights for a more sustainable form of peacebuilding.

Written by Madoka Futamura, Edward Newman and Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh

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Towards a Human Security Approach to Peacebuilding

WHAT IS THE RECORD, EFFECTIVENESS AND LEGACY of liberal approaches to peacebuilding in conflict-prone and post-conflict societies? Aside from promoting stability and containing conflict, why does international peacebuilding have a mixed—or even poor—record in promoting welfare, equitable human development and inclusive democratic politics? Have these shortcomings jeopardized overall peacebuilding objectives and contributed to questions about its legitimacy? How might alternative approaches to peacebuilding, based upon welfare and public service delivery, promote a more sustainable and inclusive form of peace? These questions allude to a core concern regarding international peacebuilding: the limitations of existing approaches and the need for greater emphasis upon welfare economics, human development and local engagement.

Peacebuilding in conflict-prone and post-conflict countries—aimed at preventing the resumption or escalation of violent conflict and establishing a durable and self-sustaining peace—has generated a range of academic and policy debates, and controversies. A key element of these debates relates to the nature and impact of liberal peacebuilding: the top-down, institutionalist promotion of democracy, market-based economic reforms and a range of other institutions associated with "modern" states as a driving force for building "peace".[1]

Despite notable successes in promoting stability and containing conflicts, the record in terms of promoting durable peace—based on sustainable economic growth, service delivery, self-sustaining institutions, inclusive democratic practices, personal security, and the rule of law—has been questionable. The reasons for such shortcomings, insofar as the role of the international peacebuilding and development donor community is concerned, may be sought in two areas. One is the rationale behind the peacebuilding agenda, which has increasingly conflated the need for stability in fragile states as an international security imperative. The other is the problems related to the liberal institutionalist models that guide peacebuilding and development programmes, and the implementation of these models in post-conflict settings.

Despite noble intentions, peacebuilding by international actors has often resulted in a heavy reliance on top-down approaches and—according to some observers—a

lack of sensitivity towards local needs and desires. More importantly, although the importance of local ownership has been increasingly emphasized, there is still very limited knowledge of and research conducted on local opinions, perceptions and experiences that shape or react to externally-led peacebuilding processes.

Peacebuilding as International "Securitization"

The first challenge to successful durable peacebuilding concerns the motivations behind interventions in the first place. There is a wide—although not uncontested—consensus that unstable and conflict-prone societies pose a threat to international security and stability. Many analysts—especially after 9/11—now consider these situations as the primary security challenge of the contemporary era. In recent years, international peacebuilding activities in conflict-prone and post-conflict countries have increased not only in number and complexity, but also in scope. Peacebuilding has been increasingly conflated with state-building, based upon the assumption that effective—preferably liberal—states form the greatest prospect for a stable international order. Peacebuilding, and by extension state-building, has therefore increasingly become integral to the security agenda.

Viewing intrastate conflict, weak statehood and underdevelopment as threats to international security has brought much-needed resources, aid and capacity-building to conflict-prone countries in the form of international assistance. This has contributed to a reduction in the absolute numbers of civil wars and the consolidation of peace in many countries.

However, "peacebuilding as securitization" has also raised a number of critical challenges. When stability

becomes a priority, international peacebuilding tends to rely on top-down mediation amongst power brokers and on building state institutions, rather than bottom-up, community-driven peacebuilding or the resolution of the underlying sources of conflict. The peacebuilding agenda itself often becomes an externally (often donor) driven exercise, without a genuine understanding of local political culture, desires or needs. As a result, this approach can be insensitive towards local traditions and institutions, if not intrusive. When reduced to a technical exercise, the implication is that peacebuilding assistance is essentially value-free and does not represent important choices and interests. Yet the apolitical model of peacebuilding can miss the reality on the ground and fail to create conditions conducive to durable stability. In some cases, the process of identifying and addressing the root-causes of conflict can itself become politicized and manipulated.

The mixed record of peacebuilding, therefore, owes a lot to its prevailing rationale to promote strong states and contain conflict as a matter of international security, rather than to resolve conflicts through meeting the everyday needs of citizens in local contexts.

The Liberal Institutionalist Approach to Peacebuilding

The second challenge is the implementation of a liberal institutionalist model in post-conflict situations, disregarding local contexts, experiences and institutional legacies. The liberal institutionalist approach to peacebuilding and development in fragile states is driven by the belief that the principal "problem" with conflict-prone and post-conflict states is the absence of effective state institutions. With this rationale, (re)building viable

institutions—often based on generic, Western models—becomes a priority and an end in itself. The institutionalist view assumes that state institutions are enough to generate material objectives of peacebuilding and concentrates on institutional benchmarks, such as sequences and capacity. This

The liberal peacebuilding agenda emphasizes constrained public expenditure, deregulation and privatization. There is thus an internal contradiction: peacebuilding implies the strengthening (or (re)construction) of the state, yet the liberal economic/social policies that are promoted arguably

"International peacebuilding is motivated by the desire to promote strong states and contain conflict in the interests of international security."

approach often neglects the idea that peacebuilding is fundamentally about social relations, and in particular, trust.

In practice, a wide range of different case studies have illustrated the shortcomings of the liberal institutionalist approach to peacebuilding and development. Externally led state-building based on institutionalist models may undermine traditional indigenous authority structures, raising questions of legitimacy in addition to efficiency. Self-sustaining public institutions often fail to take root. When economic growth is largely unregulated and concentrated amongst the elite, large sections of the population depend upon the informal economic sector to survive—and in turn fail to pay taxes and shun public institutions. Where institutions are not organic and thus not durable in the absence of external support, local ownership is jeopardized. In these circumstances citizens continue to support sectarian political forces which prolong the polarization of society and in the worst cases threaten violence and insecurity. The efforts—and resources—of donor agencies do not fully achieve their goals, aid is wasted, and the society may be prone to the danger of falling again into cycles of conflict.

undermine the state. Furthermore, there is ample evidence that marketization is unhelpful in volatile conflict-prone societies, which have been characterized by inequality and social grievances. Contrary to a liberal economic approach, the evidence suggests that the emphasis should be upon poverty alleviation and employment generation.

Problems and Challenges

While aiming to contain instability and build generic state institutions based upon "external" models, liberal institutionalist peacebuilding often neglects the welfare needs of local populations and fails to engage with indigenous traditional institutions. This approach also fails to grasp the underlying motivations that may be the root-causes of conflict in the first place: social, economic and political exclusion and grievances. If the state-building efforts embodied in the peacebuilding agenda fail to take root in local societies, not only can instability and conflict ensue, but dependency on international sponsorship can become the norm.

The result of institutionalist state-building has been the alienation of significant sections of the populations, who not only fail to embrace the core objectives of peacebuilding, but engage in reactionary practices, such as

About the Authors

Madoka Futamura is an Academic Programme Officer at the United Nations University's Institute for Sustainability and Peace.

Edward Newman is a senior lecturer in the Department of Political Science and International Studies, University of Birmingham.

Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh is co-director of the Human Security Programme in the Master's of Public Affairs, Sciences Po, Paris, and an Associate Researcher at the Peace Research Institute (PRIO), Oslo.

shunning state institutions or turning to extremist forms of politics, which directly endanger not only peace, but also the peacebuilding agenda itself. These patterns are demonstrated in the cases of Kosovo, Timor-Leste, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Bosnia, amongst many others. In such situations, huge investments by international actors may have led to the cessation of conflicts— what can be called "negative peace"—but

shortcomings, neglects the needs of war-torn societies. The critical response, whilst intellectually stimulating, often fails to offer a way forward, beyond problematizing and deconstructing liberal peacebuilding.

Human Security: An Alternative Approach to Peacebuilding?

A human security approach to peacebuilding can offer some solutions

"If state-building efforts fail to take root in local societies dependency on international sponsorship can become the norm."

danger signs are present: the peace dividend is not equitably spread, disillusionment and social exclusion are widespread, reconciliation is obstructed and volatility persists.

The literature on peacebuilding, in addressing the challenges to liberal approaches, has relied on two different responses. One set of scholars emphasize the necessity of having institutions in place before political and economic liberalization are undertaken.[2] However, this problem-solving response is still premised upon the idea of top-down generic institutions as the primary goal of peacebuilding, assuming that development, growth and stability will automatically follow. The second response is provided by more "critical" analysts who are sceptical of the role of markets and formal institutions of democracy in post-conflict situations.[3] Some critical scholars go as far as denouncing the entire international peacebuilding agenda as a hegemonic exercise undertaken at the behest of powerful states, aimed at controlling or exploiting developing countries.[4]

The problem-solving approach, which prescribes institutions to attempt to make liberalism fit the local context and mitigate against its fundamental

to these problems. Human security suggests that public policy must be directed above all at enhancing the personal security, welfare and dignity of individuals and communities. This suggests ways to strengthen the legitimacy of peacebuilding activities, make them more oriented around local needs and conditions, and therefore strengthen local buy-in and support while restoring dignity to post-crisis societies. A number of implications arise from the human security concept.

First, the human security approach is not only centred on people as objects of interventions, including of peacebuilding or development. It provides an "agency" to individuals as subjects, as referents of security and, ultimately, as providers of security. The normative objective is therefore to take into consideration the needs of the populations, their capacities and, fundamentally, their judgement. Change is brought about not because it has been imposed from the outside, or is required to adhere to cosmopolitan values of liberalism, but because communities perceive the benefits of change and assess the trade-offs in terms of local meanings at the everyday level. In practice, it means not just "doing"

peacebuilding for others, or even engaging local populations in a set of formulaic interventions, but allowing for conditions so that responsibility is brought directly to local actors.

Second, the approach recognises the root-causes of conflicts in terms of social and political exclusion, horizontal inequality or structural violence, in addition to power politics and spoiler

duty to protect, care for and empower its citizens.[6] A "failed state" therefore is one that is weak in the eyes of its own citizens primarily and cannot provide for their survival, livelihoods and dignity, as opposed to being seen as a "dangerous" menace to international security. The legitimacy of state institutions comes therefore not merely from its existence, capacity or leadership,

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activities. This recognition therefore requires root-cause analysis, preventive action, early warning indicators, and strategic planning, taking the exercise of peacebuilding beyond a quick impact project with short-term goals. It will also create space for the pursuit of so-called "transitional justice", which seeks to address and redress human rights abuses and war crimes conducted during conflicts. A sense of injustice and unfairness amongst victims is a source of distrust to new governments and even a source of instability. A number of cases show that societies and people after conflict are heavily traumatized, and are willing to address their past sufferings in a range of forms.[5]
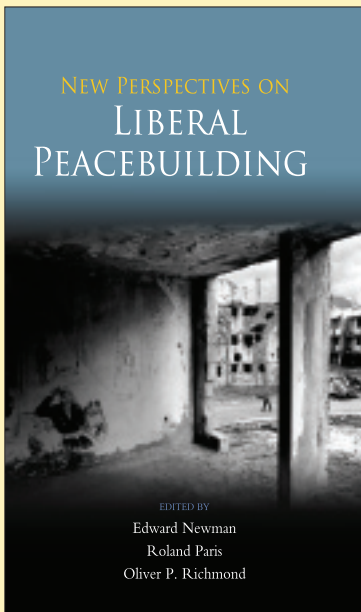
Third, the human security approach does not rely on preconceived institutional benchmarks—such as establishments of state, democracy or the market—as the end goals, but rather as means for protecting and providing for citizens. This is a marked departure from the liberal institutionalist approach which takes externally-driven visions of security, the market and the state as its benchmark. From a human security perspective, a weak state is one which cannot exercise its primary function of social protection and therefore fails in its

but the extent to which populations perceive its capacity and will to distribute justice, basic human needs, public goods and space for participation.

Human Security and the Everyday Needs of Citizens in Post-Conflict Settings

The human security approach therefore provides a number of critical answers for addressing the legitimacy problems of peacebuilding. The more populations and their perceptions of the common good are included, the more difficult it would be to simply impose particular ideals, values or models deemed universally applicable but proven problematic in local contexts. However, this does not mean a mere adherence to the principles of participation or local ownership to improve the success of reforms or to prevent inertia or a hostile local response. Perceptions count because those who are directly suffering in crisis situations have a moral right to freedom from that suffering. This approach to peacebuilding builds upon and is sensitive to—without "romanticizing"—indigenous institutions, and is locally driven.

Such critical assessments of peacebuilding, from the human security

New Perspectives on Liberal Peacebuilding

EDITED BY
Edward Newman
Roland Paris
Oliver P. Richmond

For related discussions, see *New Perspectives on Liberal Peacebuilding*, edited by Edward Newman, Roland Paris and Oliver P. Richmond (United Nations University Press, 2009, ISBN 978-92-808-1174-2). For more details on this book, please visit www.unu.edu/unupress/2009/liberalpeacebuilding.html.

point of view, have a number of problem-solving, practical approaches. When individuals and communities, instead of institutions, are put at the centre of analysis, there are implications for the assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation of peacebuilding initiatives. All these require in-depth knowledge of the situation and context-specific solutions, instead of adherence to external models.

Providing for security and stability may remain as a priority. However, the human security approach also recognizes that meeting welfare goals—ranging from immediate basic needs and public service delivery to job security through employment creation and poverty alleviation—as well as addressing grievances is absolutely essential. A failure to do so, and the alienation and exclusion that results from this, threatens both the legitimacy and efficiency of peacebuilding efforts. The question of sequencing and prioritization, therefore, is not whether security comes first, but how security is provided and what the expanded notion of security really means in people's everyday lives.

Similarly, it also suggests that peacebuilding must go beyond material factors—such as economic growth—and address social relations, in particular restoring or building trust within a broader context of inclusive development and social integration. Because conflicts erode trust, the need to support reconciliation and coexistence cannot be ignored. A human security approach to peacebuilding implies a process of "trust-building", that is, trust and confidence in peaceful community relations and in the national project.

The human security approach to peacebuilding also offers something to the eternal problem of coordination among various actors and sectors involved in post-conflict situations. Ever since the publication of the Brahimi Report on peace operations, there has been emphasis on integration in order to achieve increased efficiency: to avoid duplication and incoherence and to capitalize on potential complementarities with a more efficient division of tasks. However, too often coordination is emphasized among international actors which still tend to focus on individual mandates instead of integration based on coherence and the needs of specific situations. The essence of the human security approach is to recognize the interconnectedness of threats and insecurities which are linked in a domino effect. For instance, the coordination of economic development and the security sector is crucial. In the case of Afghanistan for example, security itself depends on a wide range of factors that cannot be addressed on the basis of military strategies alone. Food aid, for instance, must be coordinated with rural economic recovery and not carried out in vacuum. Economic strategies for the agricultural sector must, in turn, match with mine clearance. The opening up of markets may provide new opportunities for the private sector, but if the political system does not have effective accounting or auditing mechanisms in place, or if there is an inequitable social system in which one group benefits from economic gains at the cost of the rest of the society, market opening could potentially reignite competition and tension between parties in conflict. The human security approach requires peacebuilders to think about these types of interactions and feedback effects, and to analyze how actions in one sector may impact upon actions in other sectors and have unintended outcomes, a process that seems to have been lacking or deficient in past and current

peacebuilding operations. This requires applying an inter-sectorality or externalities framework in the planning, implementation and evaluation of peacebuilding interventions.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, this alternative approach, by suggesting the articulation of local ideas, norms, culture, needs and perceptions in peacebuilding—in contrast to institutional, state-centric frameworks—contributes to improved peacebuilding in theory and practice. It proposes for the politics of peacebuilding to spring organically from the agency of the people involved. A failure to achieve this results in citizens remaining disillusioned, marginalized, susceptible to manipulation by extremist political elites and spoilers, and unlikely to support efforts towards "reconciliation".

Is a human security approach to peacebuilding realistic? Clearly, it is ambitious and rests upon an optimistic assumption of donor motivations and local good will. However, it may be the alternative path to addressing current gaps in peacebuilding that make them unsustainable and exclusive, neither wholly effective nor legitimate.

Notes

1. Edward Newman, Roland Paris and Oliver P. Richmond, *New Perspectives on Liberal Peacebuilding* (Tokyo: UNU Press, 2009).
2. Roland Paris, *At War's End: Building Peace after Civil Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
3. Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh "Human Security and the Legitimization of Peacebuilding", in Oliver P. Richmond (ed.), *Palgrave Advances in Peacebuilding: Critical Developments and Approaches* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Michael Pugh, Neil Cooper and Mandy Turner (eds.), *Whose Peace? Critical Perspectives on the Political Economy of Peacebuilding* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Omar G. Encarnacion, "The Follies of Democratic Imperialism", *World Policy Journal* 22, no. 1 (2005): 47–60.
4. Mark Duffield, "Development, Territories, and People: Consolidating the External Sovereign Frontier", *Alternatives* 32, no. 2 (2007): 225–246; Tim Jacoby, "Hegemony, Modernisation and Post-war Reconstruction", *Global Society* 21, no. 4 (2007): 521–537; David Chandler, *Empire in Denial. The Politics of State-building* (London: Pluto Press, 2006).
5. For the potential and limitations of transitional justice in peacebuilding, see for example: Madoka Futamura "Transitional Justice in the Afghan Peacebuilding Process: The Potential and Limitations", in Yuji Uesugi (ed.), *Toward Bringing Stability in Afghanistan: A Review of the Peacebuilding Strategy*, IPSHU English Research Report Series No. 24 (2009): 101–118.
6. Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh and Anuradha M. Chenoy, *Human Security: Concepts and Implications* (London: Routledge, 2007).

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A human security approach to post-conflict peacebuilding may offer the best chance for long-term recovery, reconciliation and the emergence of sustainable institutions.

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