SUMMARY

This short paper provides an overview of the evidence on why institution-building is central to successful peacebuilding, and aims to stimulate fresh thinking on ideas for improving international institution-building efforts. The international community is moving at a slow pace to improve its performance in this area, despite a range of international commitments to building national institutions and ownership in conflict-affected countries. I argue that the UN could pursue more innovation, especially in the areas of south-south and triangular cooperation, setting norms for institution-building, and sustaining long-term attention to institution-building, as well as championing the development of a wider range of aid instruments and partnerships. Finally, I point to major data and evidence gaps, and suggest generating more north-south knowledge partnerships on the subject as a matter of priority – especially around building national ownership and supporting inclusive institution-building processes.
1. Why does institution-building matter for successful peacebuilding?

The research is unequivocal: Institution-building is essential for successful peacebuilding1.

Quantitative research has found that low accountability and effectiveness of institutions increases the likelihood of countries experiencing violent conflict. Meanwhile, the exclusion of former rebel groups from state institutions and historical discrimination against large ethnic groups have been identified as a significant causal factor in relapses into violent conflict and the onset of civil wars.

Successive qualitative studies come to similar conclusions. Trust between elites is key to the cessation of violence, but the consolidation of peace has required that societies develop consent for the state and confidence in the performance and political legitimacy of institutions, especially arrangements for political accountability, security and justice. Accountable and effective institutions are equally essential for pursuing long-term development, and accelerating institution-building in conflict-affected countries can accelerate poverty eradication.

We also know many of the conditions for successful institution-building. National ownership of priorities and reforms is the sine qua non for building and sustaining accountable and effective institutions. Reform processes must be locally-owned and adapted to each context, but building national ownership involves difficult operational trade-offs. The exercise of national ownership and authority over policies and activities can be limited by post-conflict governments’ low capacity and weak representation of society.

Successful institutional transformations take time because reforms are iterative. They must be synced with the political scope for change in a given context and leaders tend to set modest and incremental objectives because the causes of institutional weaknesses are as political as they are technical. For these reasons, reforms should be expected to be subject to setbacks.

International actors are beginning to grapple with the steps that can be taken to address the trade-offs around national ownership. We know that reforms are always high-stakes and inherently political processes, and as such, early confidence-building measures between elites and between state and society are a pre-requisite for pursuing successful longer-term institution-building efforts. International consensus has also grown around the value of supporting national (government and society) fragility assessments and consultative prioritization exercises, and tailoring capacity development assistance to demand-driven institution-building priorities. (I return in section 4 to gaps in knowledge about national ownership.)

Longer-term institution-building trajectories are seldom linear. Countries that have achieved successful exits from violence have each undergone multiple transitions, building progressively capable and legitimate institutions during different windows of political opportunity for reform. Institution-building trajectories are also much slower than the conventional logic and practice of international/national partnerships have permitted. The World Bank 2011 World Development Report on Conflict, Security and Development underlined that building legitimate institutions takes a generation. The fastest reforming countries in the twentieth century took between 15 and 40 years to achieve basic governance transformations in areas such as civilian oversight of the military and achieving bureaucratic quality, government effectiveness, control of corruption and the rule of law.

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1 Other variables, such as income, appear to play a smaller role. The share of global conflict occurring in the poorest 25% of countries has declined from two thirds in the 1960s to about one third today, whereas there has been some growth in conflict in middle-income countries, most recently in the Middle East. See the Global Peace Index 2014 and quantitative analysis by J.D. Fearon (2010) in, "Governance and Civil War Onset," Background Paper, for the World Bank World Development Report 2011.
Externally-imposed institution-building models have, on the other hand, usually failed because they are too technical and have no local buy-in: they overlook the processes by which leaders build confidence and achieve consent for reforms, and they vastly underestimate the timeframes for building institutions. Despite these realities, there are no internationally agreed norms against which to measure progress in institution-building. I return to this gap in section 3.

We also know that achieving peace and long-term development requires making progress across security, rule of law, political and economic institutions. While there is no definitive list of immediate priorities, comparative research to date suggests that security, justice and jobs are likely to be high priorities for building state’s political and performance legitimacy in the short to medium-term. Yet, there have been significant lapses in the international community’s ability to offer support in these areas because conflict has not been core business for many bilateral and multilateral development actors. In 2008, and again in 2013, CIC identified the most significant gaps to have been:

- A strategy gap in linking political peace agreements to recovery and institution-building efforts;
- A financing gap because aid is insufficiently rapid and risk-tolerant to support early confidence-building opportunities, and is averse to risk and moves slowly to provide aid using country systems to build core government functions; and
- A capacity gap because there is a dearth of international expertise in specialized areas, such as informal justice systems or expanding access to justice in post-conflict settings or fostering inclusive political arrangements.

These gaps have contributed to flawed international efforts, from protracted UN missions (DR Congo), to faltered institution- and peacebuilding efforts (such as Afghanistan), to the redeployment of UN missions after relapses (such as Timor Leste).

2. What is and is not happening in practice in institution-building?

On the basis of these insights, the international community adopted a number of innovations and commitments to improving the quality of institution-building. Despite these commitments and innovations, the gap between the international community’s ambitions and practice in the field is closing very slowly. The UN Peacebuilding Architecture (PBA) has not lived up to expectations, UN commitments to improve civilian capacities in the aftermath of conflict have been only partially implemented, and traditional donors appear to be falling short on their commitments to the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States.

The UN Peacebuilding Architecture (PBA) was agreed in 2005 to resolve the problems of international capacity, finance and strategy lapses. It was proposed to promote international coordination, coherence and resource mobilization behind national peacebuilding plans, and to bridge the strategy gap between peace agreements and recovery and institution-building efforts. However, the PBA’s strategic and capacity functions were stymied during international negotiations on its founding resolutions in 2005. The Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) has since been confined to more limited roles in a sub-set of countries that are undergoing peacebuilding processes. Through its statements of mutual commitments, the PBC has helped to place a spotlight on national institution-building priorities, and the PBC has convened international actors to fill finance gaps in some settings. For example, in 2013, the PBC helped to mobilize a new round of financial commitments for peacebuilding alongside the World Bank and bilateral donors in Burundi. However, the impact of the PBC to date has rested upon the good will and collaboration between the PBC Chair of the Country-Specific Configuration, the host government and the UN leadership. As a non-operational entity, it has struggled to carve out a clear niche in institution-building.
The Peacebuilding Fund has succeeded in filling immediate gaps in finance, for example for confidence-building measures or the provision of capacity, and it has incentivized the UN to collaborate around common peace- and institution-building strategies. A strategic question for the Fund going forward is how it can help to catalyze long-term and scaled-up international financing for national peacebuilding and institution-building plans.

The independent review of Civilian Capacity in the Immediate Aftermath of Conflict proposed the OPEN principles (Ownership, Partnership, Expertise and Nimbleness) as a guiding framework for providing more responsive, timely and effective support to nationally-owned and led plans and institution-building efforts. The major priorities identified by the review included: to expand the pool of expert capacity providers from the north and south and from governmental and non-governmental organizations; to deploy UN civilian expertise more rapidly and flexibly through reforms to the UN’s HR and procurement systems; and to build core government capacities more sustainably by directly funding national institutions, harmonizing international assistance, and removing perverse salary incentives that create brain drains from governments. The review placed an especially strong emphasis on expanding the provision of southern expertise because of the relevant and recent political and technical experience and empathy that southern actors can bring to bear in institution-building.

Between 2011-13, the UN made progress in implementing core recommendations of the civilian capacities review. The UN tested the on-line CAPMATCH system, which was designed to match the capacity needs expressed by countries with registered providers. The UN adopted new guidance on good practices for developing national capacities in the aftermath of conflict. And in 2012, UNDP and DPKO co-located a portion of their rule of law teams in order to facilitate joint approaches to building rule of law institutions in the field. The intention is for the UN to integrate its political, security and development tools into single rule of law strategies.

However, southern deployable capacities remain insufficiently documented and strategically resourced. Smaller southern providers still need more predictable financing arrangements - such as triangular cooperation agreements or pooled funds - in order to deploy civilians more systematically and rapidly. The BRICS are scaling-up bilateral development cooperation on their own terms, but the multilateral system needs to engage them directly in implementation of civilian capacities. Regional organizations and initiatives have also grown in ambition. To name but a few, the African Union’s African Solidarity Initiative was established to build the capacity of African countries emerging from conflict and IGAD has implemented a triangular cooperation model for building civil servants’ capacity in South Sudan. However, regional initiatives also lack implementation capacity and predictable finances for assisting institution-building in the field.

Finally, the UN itself remains too rigid. In particular, reforms needed to make UN deployments more nimble and to procure specialized personnel more rapidly have yet to be adopted. In addition, the UN political, security and development arms are not integrating their support quickly enough behind national plans, beyond the joint initiative in the rule of law.

By 2011, the “traditional donor” community recognized the deep flaws in aid. The World Bank 2011 World Development Report on Conflict, Security and Development argued strenuously for a re-alignment of development assistance to confidence- and institution-building priorities in countries undergoing transitions. In 2011, the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (IDPS) adopted the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States. The New Deal commits to five Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals (PSGs), which are seen as prerequisites for long-term development; framing priorities around country-led fragility assessments and inclusive planning processes; aligning aid to nationally-owned priorities and plans; providing flexible, rapid and risk tolerant aid through country
systems; and exacting mutual accountability for results against the PSGs through “compacts” between the state, citizens and international partners.

Traditional donors have so far fallen short of expectations in implementing the New Deal. “Compacts” have been agreed in a number of pilot countries, but implementation to date has been partial. Donors are moving very slowly to re-align aid flexibly and rapidly to nationally-owned plans. Assistance for security, justice and political institutions remain a particular gap in support – immediate efforts by the UN’s peace and security system are frequently not sustained by long-term institution-building efforts and aid is yet to be re-aligned to the PSGs. By 2012 (the latest available ODA data), just 4% of ODA to fragile and conflict-affected countries was allocated to legitimate politics, 2% to security and 3% to justice. This reflects a continued under-investment in the long-term institutional transformations that the World Bank highlighted in 2011 were so necessary for successfully exiting violence. New Deal negotiation and implementation processes have also continued to focus on technical planning and program designs at the expense of more flexibly supporting local political priorities.

Finally, in 2014, the UN General Assembly’s Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (2014) proposed 17 universal draft SDGs and 169 targets to replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These include a goal to, “provide peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions.” This goal’s inclusion in the draft framework is based on international recognition that the omission of a state- and peacebuilding goal in the MDGs was a missed opportunity to contribute to accelerated progress in poverty eradication in many countries.

3. Ideas for improving international assistance to institution-building

As a result of this slow pace of change among international actors, costly donor technical assistance models remain the prevailing institution-building modality. Closing the gap between international commitments and delivery will require concerted efforts to hold the international system to account for progress and to innovate in the ways that assistance is delivered. The Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) may be able to play a role in improving peacebuilding in three key areas: to set and monitor international institution-building norms; to galvanize south-south and triangular cooperation and the engagement of emerging powers and regional organizations in multilateral delivery; and to increase and sustain international attention to institution-building as a pre-requisite for peace and long-term development.

At the global level, there is a gap in norms for institution-building. The international community has no standards with which to measure progress as countries progress through multiple transitions and loops of reform. As a result, it is hard to gauge countries’ preparedness for UN mission drawdowns, and hard to measure the quality of international institution-building assistance. The PBC was founded in part in order to support these medium-term assessments of progress and gaps in post-conflict settings. It would have a comparative advantage in brokering international agreement on a set of universal standards and norms for post-conflict institution-building because it can engage the full range of emerging powers, conflict-affected countries and traditional donors in setting multilateral policies, standards and mutual accountability for institution-building. The IDPS has already covered significant ground in this area by developing draft indicators for the PSGs upon which the PBC could build.

There is a continued need to fill the international capacity provider gap. South-south and triangular cooperation for institution-building need to be scaled-
up to help meet needs in conflict-affected countries. Three areas of priority action have been proposed. First, the UN could more systematically document southern capacities and make this information available to countries emerging from conflict. Second, countries could establish pooled funds and long-term partnership agreements for south-south and triangular cooperation, which would enable faster deployments of experts from smaller southern economies as needs arise. Third, as the BRICS and other emerging powers scale up their bilateral development and peacebuilding cooperation, they could also consider how to increase their engagement through the multilateral system, for example by providing "experts on mission" at the operational level, or shaping knowledge and norms at the policy level. Aid and civilian capacity investments by the BRICS and other emerging powers have expanded significantly in the last decade. Indeed, China, Turkey and the UAE now rank among the largest development partners in conflict-affected countries. As the global landscape for international assistance continues to shift dramatically, the PBC is an obvious home in the UN system for advancing innovations in international capacity provision.

There is also a significant global gap in sustaining international attention to institution-building. We know that accountable and effective institutions lower the risk of violent conflict and relapses, and that it takes a generation to transform them, yet the UN has no institutional home for monitoring long-term progress in institution-building and no systematic approach to highlighting gaps and risks. The development of the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals, targets and indicators offers one opportunity to build a more systematic approach in the UN to universal monitoring. The review of the PBA in 2015 is an opportunity to consider whether the PBC, or another UN entity, could monitor indicators of institutional risk and resilience across all countries, and champion the UN development, political, security and human rights arms to support countries to fill gaps and to prevent violent conflict and relapses before they flare. CIC developed one such monitoring model around five dimensions of risk and resilience. This model, or another, could be further refined by the international community once the post-2015 development framework is agreed and used to identify countries in need of timely and responsive assistance for institution-building.

Although the PBC is not an operational entity, the 2015 review of the PBA can also propose innovations aimed at closing some of the major gaps between international commitments and delivery in the field. In particular, international actors can pay closer attention to how to:

Fill the strategy gap. No recent international initiative aimed at addressing the strategy gap between peace agreements and recovery and institution-building efforts has succeeded in a systematic way across all countries. This leaves many countries with the least institutional capacity coordinating multiple international peacebuilding efforts by the OECD, regional and emerging powers and UN actors. Implementation of the peaceful societies goal – if adopted in the final SDG framework - will offer another opportunity to better aligning peace agreements, national development and peacebuilding priorities and international support. The 2015 review of the PBA offers an opportunity to make proposals on how the UN can foster greater strategic coherence behind a peaceful societies goal, and whether and how the PBC’s role should be resurrected in this area.

Fill the financing gap for institution-building. Some innovation in this area has occurred, for example, the EC now provides rapid budget support to some countries in times of crisis and transition through new State-Building Contracts, and the African Development Bank has established a Fragile States Facility to provide assistance more rapidly and flexibly. Making further progress will require development partners to make good on their existing aid commitments to national peacebuilding frameworks and plans.

Aid, however, is only one part of the financing solution for countries undergoing transitions. Remittances and foreign direct investment (FDI) now outpace aid in total
financial flows to conflict-affected countries, domestic revenues are growing, and the emerging powers’ investments in infrastructure are growing rapidly. A range of innovative aid instruments can be used to support countries to leverage private and domestic finance for their own priorities. Few are within the competencies and mandates of the UN, but the 2015 review of the PBA could advocate for the development of a menu of more innovative partnerships and aid instruments that align the incentives of public and private actors behind institution-building. For example, the IFIs’ risk guarantees and equity investment instruments can attract FDI into jump-starting economic activity and jobs. Projects can be designed that harness natural resources revenues for institution-building and improving government legitimacy. “Matching funds” models match aid to government funds, rewarding transparent domestic revenue-raising in resource-rich environments.

4. A knowledge agenda: major gaps in institution-building policy and research

Thousands of project-level evaluations are conducted every year by donors without recourse to a consistent international methodology. The UN compounds this problem with a weak culture of self-evaluation. Without a consistent evaluation methodology and comparable evidence, generalizable knowledge about what works in institution-building has remained constrained. Evaluations have tended to focus on traditional donors’ assistance, creating a deep northern bias in international knowledge. Local knowledge and the knowledge of southern partners about what works does not systematically feed into international policy and programming.

Peacebuilding and development communities are starting to build a body of knowledge about more effective program designs. We know that successful programs are accountable to national and sub-national actors (although international headquarters often fail to recognize and formalize this fact). We also know that successful program designs are flexible and adaptable, revising results and priorities over time so that national leaders can test multiple pathways towards building institutions successfully.

Beyond these insights, we have much further to go to understand how to support more inclusive and nationally-owned institution-building processes. We know little about how to involve citizens in building consent and more legitimate institutions, and we suffer from significant gaps in knowledge about supporting sub-national peacebuilding and institution-building processes. We also lack understanding about how to build institutions that can manage and reduce contemporary transnational threats from organized crime, illicit finances and terrorism.

Filling these major gaps in knowledge will require improving the way we learn. Learning could be significantly improved by galvanizing north-south partnerships that apply consistent and comparable methodologies for data collection and evaluation. Potential innovations can also be more rigorously tested before they are rolled out. New ideas – such as technologies for peacebuilding, or innovative multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral partnerships – need financial backing to be piloted, and rigorous standardized evaluation methodologies such as Randomized Control Trials can be more consistently used to test and improve on innovations.

A lightning rod is needed for instigating and pooling north-south learning and knowledge. The PBA was originally intended to fulfill this function, and the 2015 review of the PBA could consider whether the PBC could once again pursue this role, not as a body of experts, but as an intergovernmental body around which north-south knowledge partnerships and experts can coalesce and convene.
ENDNOTES


iii Fearon, Ibid


World Bank, *Ibid*


Chandran et. al. (2008) and Jones et. al. (2013) *Ibid*


Summarized in Hearn, S. et al. (2014)


Available at: https://capmatch.dfs.un.org/Capmatch/


The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), comprising countries in the Horn of Africa, Nile Valley and East Africa/Great Lakes.


Comprised of the g7+ group of conflict-affected and fragile countries, OECD partners and civil society

The PSGs are: (1) Legitimate and inclusive politics; (2) security; (3) justice; (4) economic foundations and (5) revenues and services.


The UN Open Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals Outcome Document is available at: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/focussdgs.html


Further details are available in the UN Secretary-General's progress report on civilian capacities, 2012, Ibid and in Keating et. al., 2012, Ibid and de Coning et. al., 2013 Ibid.


Jones et. al. (2012), Ibid


Parks et. al. Ibid
ANNEX: key readings


