
UNIT 13 PEACEBUILDING – MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE

Structure

13.1 Introduction

Aims and Objectives

13.2 Terminological Distinctions

13.3 Normative and Evolutionary framework

13.4 Multiple Actors and Domains

13.5 Principal Challenges

13.6 Summary

13.7 Terminal Questions

Suggested Readings

13.1 INTRODUCTION

In the past two decades, peacebuilding has emerged as one of the pathways advocated and attempted by both the governments and nongovernment actors for assisting societies in the process of recovering from the effects of violent conflicts so as to avoid return to violence. As a notion, peacebuilding has become a symbol of shared sovereignty between local population and international community. It can also be considered as a successor to the concept of international trusteeship which was invoked to administer dependent peoples and territories after the Second World War. Whereas the trusteeship was in the twentieth century, peacebuilding can be seen as a product of globalisation and global governance aimed to influence and shape domestic governance institutions.

While the term peacebuilding may have been of recent origin, the practice of outside countries assisting war-ravaged societies in reconstruction was evident in the twentieth century history. The United States, for example, took lead in helping the reconstruction of Europe and Japan after the Second World War. Since the end of the Cold War, Afghanistan, Cambodia, El Salvador, Sierra Leone and many other countries attracted attention in the context of post-war peacebuilding strategies at work. Ironically however, there exists a good deal of confusion about what peacebuilding aims at, its nature and scope as also the challenges it is faced with. The questions that are pertinent here are the following: How different is peacebuilding from peacemaking or preventive diplomacy? Would it be true to say that peacebuilding stands by the strategic interests and ideological preferences of the external sponsors of peacebuilding rather than the aspirations of the local communities?

Aims and Objectives

This Unit would enable you to

- Trace the variegated meanings attributed to the term “peacebuilding” by scholars, governments, international agencies and the non-governmental organisations;
- Discuss the main features and characteristics associated with peacebuilding;
- Explain the nature of peacebuilding in terms of its normative underpinnings and its evolutionary dynamics;

- Appreciate its complex aspects with reference to both the internal and external stakeholders and the multiple levels of engagement to make peacebuilding effective; and
- Assess the standards applied to evaluate the reasons for the mixed track record of peacebuilding efforts so far.

13.2 TERMINOLOGICAL DISTINCTIONS

Although peacebuilding is broadly understood as foreign intervention that aims to prevent return of armed conflict in a war-torn country, there are notable differences about the meaning and scope of peacebuilding and the manner of promoting it. Some analysts would like to qualify the acts of external intervention by emphasizing the non-military nature of the external interventions. Tschirgi (2004, p.2), for instance, sums up peacebuilding as “non-military interventions by external actors to help war-torn societies not only to avoid a relapse into conflict, but more importantly, to establish conditions for sustainable peace.” The short-term need to avoid becomes pressing in view of the finding by researchers that 44 percent risk exists of a country reaching the end of a conflict to return to conflict within five years. At the same time, the long-term objective of creating conditions for making peace durable is not to be de-linked from the immediate objective. The understanding offered by the policy practitioners also touches upon both these nuances. Boutros-Ghali was among the first to delineate on the term soon after assuming the post of the UN Secretary-General. According to him, peacebuilding denotes “action to identify and support structure which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid relapse into conflict”.

According to scholars Michelle Maiese (2003), there are two distinct ways to understand peacebuilding: as a particular phase in the long drawn process as contrasted from the expansive and comprehensive concept. The work of the United Nations represents the understanding about peacebuilding as a distinct phase in the long-drawn process of making peace stable. According to the UN, peacebuilding occurs after violent conflict has slowed down or come to a halt. Peacebuilding, in this sense, is contrasted from the more traditional strategies of peacemaking and peacekeeping. Peacemaking is the diplomatic effort to end the violence between the conflicting parties, move them towards nonviolent dialogue, and eventually reach a peace agreement. Peacekeeping, on the other hand, is a third-party intervention (often, but not always done by military forces) to assist parties in transitioning from violent conflict to peace by separating the fighting parties and keeping them apart. Peacekeeping not only provides security but also facilitates other non-military initiatives.

Thus, in the narrow perspective convenient to measurable policy initiatives, peacebuilding facilitates the establishment of durable peace; it also tries to prevent the recurrence of violence by addressing root causes and effects of conflict through reconciliation, institution building, and political as well as economic transformation. This consists of a set of physical, social, and structural initiatives that are often an integral part of post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation. Many non-governmental organisations (NGOs), on the other hand, understand peacebuilding as an umbrella concept that encompasses not only as long-term transformative efforts, but also peacemaking and peacekeeping. In this view, peacebuilding includes early warning and response efforts, violence prevention, advocacy work, civilian and military peacekeeping, military intervention, humanitarian assistance, ceasefire agreements, and the establishment of peace zones. The central task of peacebuilding is to create positive peace, a “stable social equilibrium in which the surfacing of new disputes does not escalate into violence and war” (Maiese, 2003).

The narrow conception need not lead us to the conclusion that peacebuilding has no linkage with peacemaking or peacekeeping. Indeed, the UN believes that peacebuilding complements the organisation's peacemaking and peacekeeping functions, as sought to be demonstrated in several post-conflict theatres like Sierra Leone and Haiti. The essential goal of peacebuilding, as per the 1995 Supplement to an Agenda for Peace, is "the creation of structures for the institutionalization of peace". In other words, peacebuilding is conflict prevention by another name and, therefore, "postconflict" often modifies peacebuilding to distinguish it from conflict prevention (Barnett, 2007, p.42).

Other major players in peacebuilding like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) strike remarkably a different note. Unlike the UN, the World Bank tends to avoid the term "peacebuilding" and the alternative terms like post-conflict reconstruction and post-conflict recovery are in use. In many respects, this preference represents adherence to the original mandate of these agencies, as for instance the salience of reconstruction flowed from the very name given to the Bank and the original mandate given to the Fund to jointly contribute post-War recovery of the European allies. These two major financial organisations continue to rely on the term post-conflict recovery in their joint declaration/statements.

In the usage of various donor governments and agencies too, peacebuilding has acquired different names and nuances. Relevant agencies within the governments of the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, France and Japan use different terms. The defence departments in the UK and the US, for instance, often use the term stabilisation when they refer to peacebuilding activities, reflecting their preoccupation with launching of security missions (although NATO uses the term peacebuilding). At the same time, interestingly, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) focuses on post-conflict recovery and on prevention. In the UK, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development follow the US example, while claiming that peace-related activities like peacebuilding fall within their respective mandates. Canada's Department of Foreign Affairs describes its post-conflict work as conflict prevention, but the Canadian government prefers to use peacebuilding to describe its actions in support of peace operations and economic development. Similarly, Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs uses the term conflict prevention, and the Japan International Cooperation Agency, a lead donor to states recovering from conflict, uses the term peacebuilding (Barnett, 2007, p.43).

Surely these are only differences in emphasis. What is beyond any doubt is the realisation that the special needs of societies emerging from conflict were seen to require hybrid approaches drawn from the flexible, rapid and responsive strategies of humanitarian operations, and the long-term vision of development assistance. As Mark Malloch Brown who has held a range of such important offices in the World Bank, the UNDP and the UN (apart from being deputy foreign minister in Britain), says "post-conflict development is something that defies the exact boundaries of traditional forms of assistance: it is neither sustainable development nor is it humanitarian response" (quoted in Tschirgi, 2004, p.6).

13.3 NORMATIVE AND EVOLUTIONARY FRAMEWORK

Now, we should pay some attention to some of the normative aspects of peacebuilding. Viewed from the "liberal internationalism" prism, peacebuilding goes beyond state-centric conceptions of *realpolitik* or the interests of any single country, bloc or entity even though national interests of countries inevitably often influence the nature of the international response. It was argued that fundamental "re-engineering" of conflict prone societies was essential to prevent their relapse into conflict. External actors began to develop a

peacebuilding template and a package of standard remedies to be applied in different contexts. Security needed to be established through disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of former combatants as well as through security sector reform. Political consolidation required national dialogues, early elections, expansion of political rights, and the establishment of rule of law. Economic reconstruction involved reforms for speedy recovery and rehabilitation. International strategies for conflict prevention and peacebuilding increasingly converged, becoming part of what has come to be known as “liberal internationalism” (Paris, 2004; Tschirgi, 2004, p.5).

No doubt, the popularity of peacebuilding is due to the strong interest among the external and also domestic actors to help the war-ravaged states recoup from the multifarious effects. Just as domestic actors look for international assistance in a variety of areas, international actors look at peacebuilding as useful to their humanitarian and international peace and security agenda. To ensure that these diverse actors join in a common effort, peacebuilding needs to skirt divisions and differences over how to handle the post-conflict challenges. In this respect, it becomes a political symbol so that different constituencies can support without shared perceptions about the substance (Barnett, 2007, p. 44). Almost all agree that building peace after war is a good thing but may entertain different explanations as to why it is a good thing (i.e. because it alleviates human suffering, generates regional stability, or creates conditions for long-term development efforts to take root). To illustrate the point, the Bush administration in the US viewed peacebuilding as an opportunity to prop up market-friendly democracies, while for the UNDP it was a step leading to not only economic development but also strong presence of civil societies committed to a culture of nonviolent dispute resolution. Peacebuilding helps these actors mask their divergent expectations and work in a loose partnership (Barnett, 2007, p.44).

Another dynamic of peacebuilding is the piecemeal nature of the evolution of international response without a single institutional home. In the first half of 1990s, the advanced countries viewed peacebuilding as a temporary need; therefore, some among them like the United States, Canada, and Netherlands designated specific units to attend to the institutional and policy void between humanitarian assistance and development aid. The UNDP and the World Bank took the cue and established respectively an Emergency Response Division and Post-Conflict Unit in 1995-97. Afterwards, the OECD compiled “Guidelines on Conflict, Peace and Development Cooperation” in 1997. Although this met the short-term goals of these governments and organisations, it was clear by the end of 1990s that peacebuilding was proving to be a complex and continuing task, needing action at the global level to provide institutional coherence and policy coordination. In the opening years of the new century the quest for founding an institutional home in order to fill the institutional void started. The former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and the high level panel on threats to global security piloted the idea of creating a special body within the United Nations. Those efforts culminated in the creation of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) in 2005-06. However valuable is the institution of the PBC, its work profile is modest confined to relatively minor peacebuilding theatres in Burundi, Central African Republic and other countries in Africa. Major efforts launched in Afghanistan and Iran in the first decade of the twenty-first century have remained effectively outside the domain of the PBC.

A recent study usefully discusses three phases – particularly from the point of view of the American policy engagement – international action towards post-conflict reconstruction. The first phase concerned the US assistance to the allied countries in the immediate aftermath of the World War II during 1946-56. It was entirely single handed show by the United States given its economic and military pre-eminence those days. The second phase surfaced after a

lapse of four decades when the US-USSR Cold War was formally brought to an end in 1990. The unsettling post-conflict situations after civil wars in Africa and Latin America (and Asia) prompted UN-authorised interventions to restore and stabilise peace and state structures. Some of them were part of the UN peace operations as in Angola, El Salvador, former Yugoslavia, Haiti, Mozambique, Namibia, Somalia and so forth, with the support of the United States both in symbolic and substantial terms. The third phase has begun after the September 2001 terror attacks against the United States, the fall out of which was the peacebuilding has come to be seen increasingly from national security interests. The consequences of controversial military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq have paved the way for major peacebuilding endeavours under the American watch (Orr cited in Tschirgi, 2004, p.18).

Finally, given the fact that peacebuilding by nature is a long drawn process, it is not easy to evaluate its success. Mozambique, Namibia and El Salvador are cited among the more fruitful exercises in peacebuilding in the early 1990s, whereas Angola, Kosovo and Western Sahara represent relatively exhausting endeavours (Bertram, 1995). Researchers adopt a minimalist standard, i.e. avoidance of a return to violence, whereas equally appealing would be the maximalist method to evaluate peacebuilding based on evidence of structural transformation of the economic, social and political factors that had led to war in the first place (Tschirgi, 2004, p.11). Guided by the minimalist standard of evaluation, Roland Paris (2004) examined eleven episodes of peacebuilding. And he observes: "In most of the eleven cases, the process of political liberalization, or economic liberalization, or both, produced destabilizing side effects that worked against the consolidation of peace. The approach to peacebuilding that prevailed in the 1990s was, it seems, based on overtly optimistic assumptions about the effects of democratization and marketization in the immediate aftermath of civil war." On the whole, the conclusions from these multi-country studies demonstrate that peacebuilding has a mixed track record.

13.4 MULTIPLE ACTORS AND DOMAINS

Michelle Maisie (2003) brings out three levels at which peacebuilding could and should be put at work. At the structural level, it should address the root causes, i.e. social conditions that foster violent conflicts. That is to say, stable peace must be built on social, economic and political foundations that serve the needs of the people. Establishment of democracy and rule of law along with creation of conditions for economic development are integral to this dimension. The next level relates to reducing the effects of war-related hostility through the repair and transformation of damaged relationships. The relational dimension of peacebuilding centres on reconciliation, forgiveness, trust building, and future imagining. It seeks to minimise poorly functioning communication and maximise mutual understanding. And finally, the personal dimension of peacebuilding centres on desired changes at the individual level. If individuals are not able to undergo a process of healing, there will be broader social, political, and economic repercussions. The destructive effects of social conflict must be minimised, and its potential for personal growth must be maximised. Corresponding to these three levels, peacebuilding strategies should integrate wide range of agents: national and foreign authorities collaborating at the top, social and economic elite of the society as also voluntary organisations working at the middle level, whereas individuals and their groups or communities are drawn in at the bottom tier.

Significantly, peacebuilding activities are governed by a few operational principles. Foremost to be noted is that peacebuilding is a multi-dimensional enterprise with several pillars that include political, social, economic, security and legal dimensions. Although multi-faceted,

prioritisation or sequencing of steps becomes unavoidable in line with the specific needs and political dynamics of a given country. In that sense, it is possible that peacebuilding prioritises political (defined in terms of creation of legitimate political authority and improvement of security) over economic pillars. Equally imperative is the multiple response levels – at the local, national, regional and international levels. At the local level, for instance, the people of the war-torn society must be actively involved in setting the agenda and leading the process. However, given the frail situation in the native societies wanting to emerge from war, support from external actors becomes undoubtedly helpful. It should be acknowledged at the same time that external assistance is never neutral. External actors come with multiple agendas and motivations which may not be compatible with the ground situation. Hence proper mechanisms need to be established to ensure that external and internal actors work with a coherent strategy, establish priorities and mobilise necessary resources. Moreover, such mechanisms could institutionalise the principle of accountability to ensure that external actors do no harm. And finally, adequate, predictable and flexible funding is essential (Tschirgi, 2004, p.9).

To turn to the sectoral domains of peacebuilding, three tasks are critical according to former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan (2001). They are furtherance of internal and external security; facilitating revival or inception of political institutions and governance structures; and fostering economic and social rehabilitation and transformation. Consolidating internal and external security involves the deployment of peacekeepers and/or military observers to ensure security or negotiate access to the affected people and then extending to initiating other measures like mine clearance and capacity-building for mine action and also security sector reform stretching from creation of a neutral police force broadly representative of the community to the, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of armed groups. The other functional sectors would have a bearing on strengthening political institutions and promoting good governance. This would require the creation or strengthening of national democratic institutions, political parties and other participatory mechanisms including the media, capacity-building and training programmes for civil society groups as well as for human rights protection; organisation of various forms of electoral assistance, including the development of electoral law, a code of conduct, and electoral councils; and support for the corruption-free administration. Promoting economic and social rehabilitation and transformation is the third core sector in peacebuilding that involves fostering conditions for resumed economic and social development; sustainable return and reintegration of displaced persons and refugees; confidence-building measures conducive to national reconciliation; attention to the needs of youth and women, especially young men; providing social services (health education, water and sanitation); job creation, microcredit schemes and the promotion of income-generating activities; reconstructing roads, bridges and railways to provide access to war-devastated areas for resettlement and agricultural production; and psychosocial trauma counselling for the victims of war.

13.5 PRINCIPAL CHALLENGES

Peacebuilding faces many challenges to overcome. They range from the temptation to provide quick fix solutions, as also the urge to impose economic and political systems without ascertaining the wishes of the target states and peoples, the bureaucratic politics within and among the variety of actors, to the resource short-fall. Failure to address them effectively could mean undoing of the idea of peacebuilding. We shall elaborate some of these challenges below.

It is true that peacebuilding so far has focused on the immediate underlying causes of conflict – to the relative neglect of deep-seated factors for both political compulsions and financial constraints. There are important differences in how various actors see the complex task of peacebuilding and the many priorities it entails. The quick-fix nature of response by external actors engaged in peacebuilding is possibly a reflection of belief that liberalisation, largely defined as the movement toward democracy, markets, and the rule of law, is the best way to develop a positive peace in poor countries. One should be watchful about the particular version of peacebuilding that is being institutionalised. The question as to how to implement peacebuilding in particular areas must not be settled solely by the external players without paying attention to the concerns of the recipient states themselves. International actors could best advise and cannot impose their priorities and prejudices (Barnett, 2007, p.36).

The peacebuilders' ability to build institutions for peace and democracy in divided societies is inherently limited by several structural and political constraints. Fundamentally, the ability of the UN to achieve its objectives in peace building depends on (i) the political will of member states, (ii) the interests and incentives of the major actors on the ground, and (iii) the structure and capacity of local institutions. Peacebuilding - whether by the UN or outside it - cannot create the conditions for its own success; these conditions must already exist or evolve. Success thus depends in part on peace builders' ability to read the politics of a particular conflict, and to recognize where and when the necessary conditions for peace building obtain or can be fostered –and where and when they do not exist (Bertram, 1995, p.401). Again, the bureaucratic politics could become a challenge for effective peacebuilding. As noted already, notwithstanding broad agreement on what peacebuilding implies in the UN for example, there continues to be considerable variation in the meaning of peacebuilding because bureaucratic organisations in the UN or within governments are likely to adopt a meaning of peacebuilding that is consistent with their already existing mandates, worldviews, and organisational interests. The result is that while everyone might support the idea of building peace, they will operate with considerable differences of interpretation regarding the meaning and practice of peacebuilding (Barnett, 2007, p.53).

Unfortunately, much of the interest we see in peacebuilding is at the level of rhetoric and not at the level of resources. It receives little meaningful financial and political support relative to the costs of renewed conflict. For example, the Post-Conflict Fund of the World Bank disbursed a total of 66.7 million dollars during 1997-2004. The 2004 budget of the USAID Office of Transition Initiatives was 54.6 million; in 2005 it was \$48.6 million, which means that it received only 3.5 percent of a total USAID budget of \$9.1 billion. Similarly the peacebuilding fund at the disposal of the PBC of the UN is approximately \$270 million meant to be utilised in numerous countries that are growing.

13.6 SUMMARY

The concept of peacebuilding in the 1990s became “more expansive”, combining conflict prevention, conflict management and post-conflict reconstruction. It is no longer an exact term; it often needs the qualifier “post-conflict” peacebuilding to refer primarily to the non-military or civilian dimensions of international efforts to support countries emerging from conflict – even though it might accompany or succeed military operations. Furthermore, peacebuilding straddles different departments across governments and organisations.

Peacebuilding will continue to require international assistance in the coming years and decades, despite multiple shortcomings and weaknesses. If the UN and other external actors

who were in the forefront of post-conflict peacebuilding of the 1990s decide that peacebuilding is too important an enterprise to give up, they face a dual challenge. They need to learn from and further improve upon the innovative but modest gains made to date in peacebuilding policy and practice. Although never divorced from state interests, peacebuilding represented a collective international project. The international commitment to peacebuilding is under threat from three main sources. Firstly, to the heightened urgency of security threats posed by terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the new arms race among states. When confronted with “hard” threats to their national interests, states inevitably re-order their priorities, diplomatic energies and financial resources. Peacebuilding needs are sidelined as an international concern with lesser priority (Tschirgi, 2004, p.17). Second, post-conflict peacebuilding assumes the essentiality of domestic ownership while external actors need to play a supportive role. However, since 9/11, peacebuilding has been conflated with a new discourse of “nation-building”, “regime change,” and “stabilization and reconstruction” which is predicated on the necessity of forcefully securing the stability of weak or failing states to avoid the negative fall-out from state failure. Such thinking, driven primarily by external actors, is likely to undermine the basic agreement that peace, security and stability cannot be imposed from outside but need to be nurtured internally through patient, flexible, responsive strategies that are in tune with domestic strategies. Third, the post 9/11 “stabilization” agenda is cast in the same terms as the peacebuilding agenda of the early 1990s, with a call for holistic, joined-up approaches to avoid state failure and state collapse. In other words, the drivers of stabilization agenda are the national security interests of dominant external actors – regionally and internationally (Tschirgi, 2004, p.17).

13.6 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Define peacebuilding. How do you differentiate between peacekeeping and peacemaking on the one hand and peacebuilding on the other?
2. Ambiguity may not necessarily be bad for the effectiveness of peacebuilding. Do you agree?
3. Analyse three chief tasks of peacebuilding. Is it possible to suggest a hierarchy among them?
4. Examine the major dimensions such as multiple pillars and multiple levels and multiple actors associated with operationalisation of peacebuilding strategies.
5. Discuss three major impediments to peacebuilding.

SUGGESTED READINGS

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