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## UNIT 14      APPROACHES TO PEACEBUILDING

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### 14.1    INTRODUCTION

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Peacebuilding, today, is one of the well-established sub-fields of international peace operations and has become especially interesting as it has had the distinction of being located in a so far uncharted terrain of post-conflict activities i.e. when guns have stopped firing and there is a tacit or explicit ceasefire agreement between parties to the conflict. This is where conventional UN peacekeeping would normally come to an end and the UN forces would depart leaving parties to conflict to resolve their conflict using political processes. It is in this process of strengthening peace after end of violence that a ceasefire agreement has come to be the watershed point from where peacebuilding emerges as a specialised enterprise.

The foundations of the contemporary concept of 'Peacebuilding' were laid formally in 1992 in UN Secretary General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali's report, *An Agenda for Peace*. This UN report defined peacebuilding as "actions to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict." Even though the UN peacekeeping forces had been engaged in similar responsibilities since the early 1960s, this new mandate has since made peacebuilding both a specialised field as also an integral part of international peace and conflict resolution thinking and practices around the world.

As of now, peacebuilding does not yet have a precise agreed definition other than that it locates itself in the unique 'post-conflict' context where the traditional peacekeeping was expected to come to an end. Nevertheless, even at the end of conflict, peacebuilding seems to comprise of a rather expansive mandate that involves a whole range of activities associated with capacity building, reconciliation, and societal transformation all aimed at building and strengthening norms, behaviours, and institutions for sustaining post-conflict

peace. This makes peacebuilding a rather long-drawn process that begins when violence, in a given conflict, either ends or at least begins to slow down, allowing these efforts to be made for establishing a lasting post-conflict peace.

### **Aims and Objectives**

This Unit aims to help you to

- Appreciate that peacebuilding is a long-time effort that requires diligent designing and painstaking execution from different perspectives;
- Learn the main proponents of different approaches and their chief arguments;
- Recognise that various approaches highlight different dimensions of peacebuilding – political, social, economic, administrative, structural, or transformative; and
- Appreciate the emphasis these approaches place on values like justice, national ownership, and international commitment

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## **14.2 CONCEPTIONS OF PEACEBUILDING**

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One reason for the ever expanding interest in peacekeeping paradigm to ‘stay on’ even when a violent part of conflict has ended and ceasefire agreement is signed came from the fact that most post-Cold War conflicts of 1990s were not inter- but intra-state conflicts. First, such conflicts often arose from and often dissipated gradually into sporadic and low-intensity violence obscuring a distinct break between war and peace situation. Second, this also made equations between parties to conflict very asymmetric which attracted larger involvement of civil society actors and external agencies like the UN to ensure that state was not allowed to renege from its agreed commitments in their ceasefire agreement. Finally, what made the NGOs as also other civil society actors and agencies active players in academic discourses on and practices of peacebuilding was their conviction in favour of a wider conception of peacebuilding; much wider than what was adopted in *An Agenda for Peace* as also by the other agencies of the UN.

Academic protagonists of peacebuilding propagate a wider definition and treat it as an umbrella concept that includes traditional as well as expanded peacekeeping responsibilities. At the least, this implies long-term engagements of peacebuilding operations. Several of them seek to include various specific tasks like setting up mechanisms for early warning, violence prevention, advocacy, intervention, humanitarian relief, ceasefire and establishment of peace as part of peacebuilding efforts. Even the so-called narrower definitions of peacebuilding involves addressing the root causes of conflict which make repatriation, rehabilitation, reintegration, reconciliation, as also institution-building and socio-economic (if not political) transformation of the conflict zone a central task to it. In the wider kinds of definitions, peacebuilding is seen as aiming at creating ‘positive’ peace which does not limit itself to simple ‘absence of physical violence’ but extends to attending to sources of invisible or ‘structural’ violence.

The definitions lying in the middle ground of these two extremes emphasize how peace to become sustainable requires a stable social equilibrium. This is to ensure that new

disputes are not allowed to sprout and escalate into another violent conflict. This means that these peacebuilding efforts must go beyond conflict prevention or conflict management and try and 'fix' the underlying root causes that lie in the patterns of socio-political behaviours reflected through institutional if not norm-building efforts for conflict-resolution. This line of thinking underlines the need for conflict transformation which requires parties to conflict to move away from confrontation and work towards participation in joint peaceful transactions that are aimed at evolving a relationship of harmony and interdependence. This however remains an extremely ambitious, almost idealistic, proposition.

The only point on which broad consensus has emerged amongst scholars is that peacebuilding is considered clearly a post-conflict activity. Further area of agreement is the inevitable need to address 'underlying causes' and not just the visible effects of a violent conflict. Beyond this premise, peacebuilding remains still a highly contested paradigm. But evolving from these broad contours of its core responsibility area it has been gradually evolving through its actual operations. This is also because, in actual practice, peacebuilding has become fairly regular and acceptable activity in international relations. From that perspective, it continues to be often used as a catch-all term to describe all the actors and elements of post-conflict stabilising and rebuilding efforts that may include preventive diplomacy, institution building, engaging and empowering local populations, ensuring local ownership, capacity building which makes it almost akin to nation-building. No doubt Roland Paris says that 'scholars have devoted relatively little attention to analyzing the concept of peace-building itself, including its underlying assumptions' which places peacebuilding at best etymologically at its adolescence.

Given these aforesaid limitations, one comprehensive definition of peacebuilding is provided by Rebecca Spence in her chapter on "Post-Conflict Peacebuilding: Who Determines the Peace" in Bronwyn Evans-Kent edited volume on *Transformative peacebuilding in post-conflict reconstruction: The Case of Bosnia and Herzegovina* (2001). To quote her, peacebuilding includes –

...those activities and processes that focus on the root causes of the conflict, rather than just the effects; support the rebuilding and rehabilitation of all sectors of war-torn society; encourage and support interaction between all sectors of society in order to repair damaged relations and start the process of restoring dignity and trust; recognize the specifics of each post-conflict situation; encourage and support the participation of indigenous resources in the design, implementation and sustainment of activities and processes; and promote processes that will endure after the initial emergency recovery phase has passed.

In recent years there has been a trend in favour of adopting multi-faceted, multi-agency, system-wide approaches to peacebuilding. These approaches have common aspects and are convergent in nature, while it is true that experts seek to privilege one or the other specific element in presenting their favoured approach as more viable than others. While there have been multiple ways to categorising approaches to peacebuilding some of the well-known approaches to peacebuilding include the following.

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### **14.3 INTEGRATED OR WoG APPROACH**

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A few governments have begun to realise that post-conflict security sector reforms, as the foremost sector of peacebuilding, needs an integrated or Whole of Government (WoG) approach in order to align development agencies with military, intelligence agencies, police, prisons and civil society. This approach has lately become popular and has come to be defined as one where a government actively uses formal and informal networks across different agencies for effective coordination of both the design and implementation of the peacebuilding agreements. The focus clearly remains on greater 'coordination' amongst various governmental agencies, both in the theatre of post-conflict operations as also amongst donor governments and other international agencies.

Establishment of inter-departmental organisations in major states like United Kingdom and United States in 2004 characterises this approach. The UK had set up the Post-Conflict and Reconstruction Unit (PCRU) which is now known as Stabilization Unit. Similarly in the US, the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS) was created within the State Department. Similarly, Australia too adopted this approach in 2006 through a White Paper on its Aid Programme and inception of Office of Development Effectiveness. However encouraging these initiatives are, the promise of the WoG approach might be severely tested in fragile and unstable states where no formal structures and clear division of labour exist.

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### **14.4 POLITICAL DEMOCRACY APPROACH**

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One lesson learnt from the experience of peacekeeping operations in the past two decades concerns the value of local-level governance and related institutions in sustaining peace after ceasefire has been signed. Democratic validation of peace agreements between authorities and rebels and later by masses has come to be seen as essential for peacebuilding. But, at the same time, both democracy and peacebuilding remain intrinsically political in nature and do have possibilities of leading to a zero-sum relationship. This means that not all gains for one imply gains for the opposite side. It is this complex relationship of democracy and peacebuilding through mechanisms like political participation and governance that forms the core of political democracy approach.

Charles Call and Susan Cook in their book *Reconstructing Justice and Security after War* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2007) examine this 'political democracy' approach. After studying experiences of post-conflict democracy and peacebuilding in places like Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan, they conclude that 'patience' must be the hallmark of both peacebuilding and good governance processes. This approach is also called war-to-democracy approach to peacebuilding.

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### **14.5 PEACE VERSUS JUSTICE APPROACH**

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There are some who conceive peacebuilding in terms exclusively of either 'peace' or 'justice' driven approaches. The 'peace' driven approach puts emphasis on 'saving lives' and allows accommodation, even appeasement, of aggressor to swiftly achieve cessation

of hostilities and violence in a conflict. Elizabeth Cousens calls it 'political peacebuilding' which seeks to create authoritative and eventually legitimate mechanisms which may empower the polity to handle conflict without violence and to apply established procedures for resolving rival claims and grievances. Though this approach is normally effective in ensuring negative peace, they lack the appreciation of 'victim's perspective' since the protagonists of the peace approach tend to treat victim and aggressor as equals. Furthermore, this approach could threaten to fuel the aggressor's appetite for more conflict.

On the other hand, the 'justice' driven approach to peacebuilding sees building 'negative peace' as job only half done which may not go far in building a sustainable peace. This approach seeks to go beyond cessation of violence and explore issues of reconciliation, truth and justice. So, in addition to hard-nosed bargain for mutual benefits it seeks to evolve provisions that appeal to the sense of fairness in the eye of parties as well as their respective support bases and therefore worth honouring. In the context of peacebuilding, justice for them embodies four components: truth, fairness, rectitude and retribution/requital. While truth involves an accurate understanding and recording of the causes of conflict, fairness implies impartiality without any undue pressure on either of the parties to conflict. Similarly, rectitude relates to a sense of integrity and righteousness, whereas and retribution/requital means compassion for victims and punishment for aggressors.

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#### 14.6 RECONSTRUCTIVE VERSUS TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES

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Prof. Bronwyn Evans-Kent in his book *Transformative peacebuilding in post-conflict reconstruction: The Case of Bosnia and Herzegovina* dwells on peacebuilding strategies – which he identifies as 'reconstructive' in approach – as applied in multilateral initiatives under international institutions like the UN. As opposed to this is the 'transformative' approach often adopted by the civil society actors and NGOs as part of their bottom-up initiatives. According to Kent, both these sets of approaches are two sides of the same coin and complement each other if balanced appropriately. Hence, too much focus on one is not going to be effective, as for instance excessive focus by the UN on reconstruction activities has undermined its transformative capacities.

Reconstructive approaches concern themselves with more tangible aspects of peacebuilding such as addressing infrastructure needs like roads, communications, healthcare and public institutions where benefits and outcomes are immediate and easily measurable. Usually the UN post-conflict reconstruction involves (a) monitoring ceasefire, (b) disarming and demobilising rebels and ensuring their reintegration through security sector reforms, and (c) supervising or conducting elections. But given this 'tool-kit' of peacebuilding, it often begins to become too rigid and therefore vulnerable to donor agencies' expansive reporting processes and preferences. Instead, these need to be locally rooted, intensive and contextualised. Moreover, these efforts of the UN peacebuilding have often been accused of being driven by major powers' desire to implant democracy and free-market economy.

Transformative approach, on the other hand, seeks to address exactly these lacunae i.e. less focus on physical reconstruction and more focus on transforming social relationship within

and amongst the given conflict-prone communities. As the very first thing, their outcomes remain less measurable and its processes normally time-taking. But then transformative approach seeks to address not only manifest but also latent triggers of conflict that impel the conflict protagonists to see violence as only means of redress. It also believes that parties to conflict are not necessarily homogenous social entities. Therefore, the focus would be on addressing both the manifest and the felt needs for recognition of respective collective identities - and doing so in such a manner that this recognition does not appear to threaten other parties.

Lisa Schirch in her book *Rituals and Symbols in Peacebuilding* (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2005) believes that rituals and symbols may be useful for reducing direct violence. Rituals and symbols, she says, are widely used either to symbolically communicate commitment to nonviolence or to heal trauma or to transform relationships. However, it may be noted that symbols and rituals are not the mainstay of peacebuilding but only complement real tools and processes of peacebuilding like dialogue or mediation. On their own, rituals and symbols cannot adequately address conflict and peacebuilding.

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#### **14.7 TOP, MIDDLE AND GRASSROOT APPROACHES**

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Taking cue from the three-level model identified with one of the most respected scholars in the field, John Paul Lederach, Luc Reyhler and Thania Paffenholz in their book *Peacebuilding: A Field Guide* have classified approaches to peacebuilding as top, middle and grassroots level approaches.

At the top level, peacebuilding normally involves a top-down approach which has the following salient features. First, it normally involves very eminent and influential yet singular personalities. These are people with a visible public profile, working as peace-builders or norm-entrepreneurs, and who operate as intermediaries or mediators. They often have strong backing from governments of major powers, important international agencies as also from the parties to the conflict. Second, it usually involves very high-level leaders from amongst parties to the conflict and these peace-builders generally act on their own to facilitate a dialogue between these high profile protagonists of the given conflict. Such negotiations are normally arranged by these high-profile peace-builders at some neutral venue and they also help facilitate setting up the tone (sometimes even agenda) for a successful mutual bargaining amongst major protagonists in the given conflict.

At the middle level, there remains a whole range of middle ranking leaders (including identifiable policy- and opinion-makers). If integrated properly, these mid-ranking leaders can provide key to creating 'infrastructure' or atmospherics for achieving an effective peacebuilding by the top level. There are several practical and professional approaches that are applied in this category of interactions amongst mid-ranking protagonists of conflict. These include (a) problem-solving workshops, (b) conflict resolution training programmes, and (c) setting up of peace commissions and/or truth and reconciliation commissions. These approaches have been particularly emphasized in conflict-resolution discourses as an addition; these mid-ranking protagonists may also become useful contact point to reach out to the wider masses that form the core of grass-root approaches to peacebuilding.

The grassroot approaches remain distinct as they focus not on protagonists but on victims of a given conflict and these normally involve massive numbers. Grassroot approaches deal with only those protagonists who may be working with local (victim) communities and can facilitate peacebuilders' access to the masses. At this level, issues in survival-mode, such as providing them with food, shelter and safety, assume the top priority. From this perspective, although their miseries flow from an unresolved larger conflict, conflict resolution efforts might appear to be a diversionary luxury. Guided by the immediate needs and priorities, the grass roots approaches could often remain focused on *ad hoc* fire-fighting rather than evolving long-term planning which is the essence of peacebuilding.

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#### **14.8 CIVIL SOCIETY OR TRANSFORMATIONAL APPROACH**

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The civil-society or transformational approach to peacebuilding and conflict resolution involves the development of an interactive, interdependent web of activities and relationships amongst elite and grass roots to build, what Louis Kriesberg calls 'culture of peace'. It is widely accepted that non-governmental organisations are a prominent component of the civil society.

As Jonathan Goodhand notes, non-governmental organisations further the goals of peacebuilding in both indirect and direct ways like supporting local leadership, human rights monitoring and protection, facilitating good governance, constitutional reforms, local capacity building, and development of alternative livelihoods. While activities that could have direct bearing on peacebuilding include conflict monitoring, mediation, security sector reforms, advocacy, education and building peace constituencies, those of indirect category tend to mainstream peacebuilding into ongoing activities.

Thania Paffenholz and Christoph Spurr, in their monograph *Civil Society, Civil Engagement, and Peacebuilding* (Social Development Paper No. 36, October 2006), suggest the need for a holistic and comprehensive approach to relate civil society to post-conflict peacebuilding. At the same time they caution us against expecting miracles from the civil society's role. Among the points made in this regard are the following: (1) Civil society comprises of not just non-governmental organisations but other bodies which together have important roles to play in peacebuilding. (2) The acknowledgement of the importance of civil society does not mean that state is any less important. (3) Enthusiasm over support to the civil society role has to be based on a full understanding of its imprecise character and composition. (4) It may not be accurate to assume that all civil society functions are equally effective in all post-conflict phases. (5) For a critical assessment of the civil society's impact on peacebuilding, the timing and sequencing of various civil society functions need to be borne in mind.

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#### **14.9 FEMINIST APPROACH**

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Feminists regret that feminist approaches have been underutilised in peacebuilding at community, national and international level. Women are often seen as aping the mainstream (read malestream) as an easy way to be accepted and to make contributions to peacebuilding. Feminists believe that in spite of women's continued marginalisation in international peace and security discourses, their work in actual peacebuilding has been



substantial in almost all societies, and that its importance is being increasingly recognised across the world. They call for gendering of peacebuilding approaches and strategies and urge for inclusion of women's skills and capabilities into peacebuilding, especially in projects like healing, reconciliation, reintegration and demilitarisation.

McKey and Mazurana, for example, bring out in their book *Women & Peacebuilding* (Montreal: Rights & Democracy, 2001) as to how women pursue different and largely nonviolent approaches to social change. Women are relevant in peacebuilding process involving relationship building, cooperation, networking, psychological and spiritual processes and above all reconciliation and human relationships.

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#### **14.10 SUMMARY**

It is clear from the discussion so far in this Unit that there is no single approach that is either universally accepted or uniformly applicable across a wide spectrum of conflict situations. Each conflict is unique in its own way; therefore a right mix of approaches would be naturally necessary. We have learned that scholars and thinkers have come up with a variety of approaches to highlight different aspects in peacebuilding. For example, the top, middle and grassroot approaches identify the interlinkages among the three levels at which peacebuilding needs to be pursued for the best possible results. On a different note, another approach emphasizes the need to adopt an integrated, coordinated approach for peacebuilding. The clear choice to be made between peace and justice is the essence of another approach. Similarly, the role and relevance of civil society and/or non-governmental organisations have become the prime concerns of some other approaches. It is remarkable that the feminist theory too has important perspectives to offer on the promise women hold in transforming attitudes so that peace becomes sustainable. Notably, however, these approaches have much in common amongst them. Hence, it may not be advisable to stress only one approach and reject other approaches.

In the end, two things distinguish peacebuilding from other similar activities. Firstly, it is an activity located in post-conflict context. Secondly, it seeks to address deep-rooted, underlying causes of conflict rather than deal only with the visible violence. An effective peacebuilding approach, therefore, has to be grounded on deeper understanding about the parties to conflict. This requires peacebuilding effort to be sensitive to, and show an understanding towards, the feuding parties' history and society as also their political and strategic culture. At the same time, successful peacebuilding requires national ownership on the one hand, and a clear division of labour between national and international actors and agencies. Given its evolutionary nature, it also needs to be innovative to keep evolving in the face of real time challenges. This requires huge staying power in terms of commitment and resources as also patience; peacebuilding processes will continue to be really long-drawn and piecemeal as they seek to ensure building a sustainable peace.

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#### **14.11 TERMINAL QUESTIONS**

1. Discuss the main characteristics of top, middle and grassroot levels approach and contrast this approach from other approaches.



2. Which are the approaches, in your understanding, that question the conventional wisdom that peacebuilding is the responsibility of political and national leaders alone?
3. Highlight the salient points of reconstructive versus transformative approach and peace versus justice approach.
4. What advantages and disadvantages do the civil society actors have in the context of peacebuilding and conflict resolution?
5. Do you agree that there can be no single and universally reliable approach to peacebuilding? Give reasons.

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