

**Peacebuilding and Linkages
with Humanitarian Action:
Key Emerging Trends and
Challenges**

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. In 2006, the General Assembly created a robust peacebuilding architecture, including the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) and the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), to improve the effectiveness of the United Nations in peacebuilding. They work through political support and advocacy (PBC), funding (PBF) and policy coordination and leveraging of knowledge (PBSO).

2. The implications of the peacebuilding architecture for humanitarian assistance in the immediate aftermath of conflict,¹ are beginning to unfold. This OCHA occasional paper tries to explore the linkages and differences between humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding, in order to create a platform for more effective cooperation. It seeks to begin a conversation around the question: *how can humanitarian assistance support peacebuilding while protecting its principles?*

II. OVERVIEW OF PEACEBUILDING AND HUMANITARIAN ACTION

Peacebuilding

3. Peacebuilding encompasses a non-linear blend of conflict prevention, political, security, humanitarian and development activities, tailored to the particular context.² There is no single template for peacebuilding, or even a consensus operational definition, however there is a clear shared goal: to reduce the risk of lapse or relapse into conflict.³

4. The role of the international community in peacebuilding is to support the restoration or renewal of a social contract, and the return of stability, through supporting national capacities in 5 key areas: (i) safety and security; (ii) political processes; (iii) basic services; (iv) core government functions; and (v) economic revitalization.⁴

5. In the United Nations, peacebuilding happens through the work of DPKO, DPA, UNDP and the agencies, funds and programmes which have field presences. The role of the Peacebuilding Support Office is to provide analysis and support to these actors. The PBSO also administers the Peacebuilding Fund, which provides financing for peacebuilding activities that:

- Respond to imminent threats to the peace process and initiatives that support peace agreements and political dialogue, and/or,
- Build or strengthen national capacities to promote coexistence and peaceful resolution of conflict, and/or,
- Stimulate economic revitalization to general peace dividends, and/or,

¹ Defined as “the first two years after the main conflict in a country has ended.” (A/63/881-S/2009/304)

² See, for example, United Nations, 2010. *UN Peacebuilding: an Orientation*.

³ Decision of the Secretary-General’s Policy Committee, May 2007.

⁴ *Peacebuilding in the immediate aftermath of conflict*, 11 June 2009 (A/63/881-S/2009/304), para. 17.

- Reestablish essential administrative services.
6. Additionally, the PBSO supports the Peacebuilding Commission, which:
- Brings together relevant actors to marshal resources and advise on strategies for post conflict peacebuilding and recovery;
 - Helps ensure predictable financing for early recovery activities and sustained financial investment over the medium to long-term;
 - Develops best practices on issues in collaboration with political, security, humanitarian and development actors.
7. The role of peacebuilding in the immediate aftermath of conflict is complex. While it may be important to deliver an early and visible peace-dividend to maintain a fragile political settlement, peacebuilding itself is a long-term process and – as shown in the recent World Development Report⁵ – will take decades. Peacebuilding also recognizes that a long-term and sustainable peace can only be built by national actors – including central governments, civil society, local governments, the private sector and individual citizens.

Humanitarian action

8. Humanitarian assistance, broadly defined, seeks to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity in response to need. Humanitarian assistance is guided by the core principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence endorsed by the General Assembly.⁶ The Humanitarian Code of Conduct reiterates these principles, stating that humanitarian aid “priorities are calculated on the basis of need alone” and “will not be used to further a particular political or religious standpoint.”⁷
9. These principles matter – they separate and protect humanitarians, under law and in reality.⁸ Any organization and any assistance that is delivered on the basis of political (or other) priorities, rather than on the basis of need, contravene these principles. Therefore, neither the organization, nor the assistance, can be considered humanitarian.

III. PEACEBUILDING AND ITS HUMANITARIAN IMPLICATIONS

10. Any organization that delivers assistance that is not based on needs, but based on political priorities is in contravention of these principles – and therefore cannot claim to be delivering humanitarian assistance.
11. Peacebuilding often has an explicitly political alignment, in support of national strategies. Humanitarian action is neutral, independent and guided by need. These distinct

⁵ *Conflict, Security and Development*, World Development Report, 2011

⁶ A/RES/46/182 endorsed humanity, impartiality and neutrality; A/RES/58/114 endorses independence.

⁷ *Principles of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Response Programmes*.

⁸ International Humanitarian Law provides protections, though with unclear definitions, for humanitarian assistance providers

operating principles and objectives can create tensions between humanitarianism and peacebuilding.

12. Yet there is some common ground. Humanitarian actions often aim to build resilience at the community level; peacebuilding aims to build resilience at the societal and political levels. Humanitarians seek to assist national actors in developing the ability to cope with current and future crisis – as do peacebuilders. Humanitarian assistance providers, after addressing core needs, focus on building the capacity to cope with future humanitarian emergencies. DPKO, DPA, UNDP and others focus on preventing reversion to violence – which can be a trigger of humanitarian crisis.

13. In these shared goals of resilience, and of seeing stable communities cope more effectively with crises, there is room for better cooperation.

Its Risks...

14. Yet partial commonality of purpose is also set against a difficult backdrop. In recent years, humanitarians have worked in countries where the lines between political, security, development and humanitarian activities have blurred. At the same time – and in the same places – the lines of humanitarian activity are also blurring, as humanitarian actors take on larger and more long-term projects – building schools and wells – that are not, strictly based on humanitarian needs.

15. A primary reason for this problem remains the time lag between humanitarian action and peacebuilding. Humanitarian financing instruments have scale, flexibility and speed that peacebuilding instruments lack. Rather than using development instruments to support peacebuilding activity, humanitarian financing has been stretched and expanded. Humanitarian actors have also willingly expanded into peacebuilding activities, and in doing so, blurred the distinction between humanitarian action, development and peacebuilding.⁹ This has placed their ability to be perceived as impartial, neutral and responsive to need at risk.

16. This has also exacerbated the tension between humanitarianism and peacebuilding. If humanitarian instruments are financing humanitarian actors to perform peacebuilding activities, then the concept of humanitarian space starts to lose meaning.

17. As well as this general problem, there are four particular areas where the overlap in time and geographic space of humanitarian action and peacebuilding generates risks:

- Humanitarian dialogue: As support to the peace process and political negotiations increase, the risk of conflation of humanitarian dialogue and peace negotiations increase. Humanitarian negotiations must be kept separate from political processes.

⁹ This is a long-term problem – see, for example, Duffield “*NGO relief in War Zones : Toward an Analysis of the New Aid Paradigm*”. Basingstoke UK, 1998.

- **Targeting:** Peacebuilding initiatives explicitly target groups on the basis of political imperatives – which is contradictory to the humanitarian imperative of targeting solely on the basis of need. This may raise challenges for actors who work in both humanitarian and developmental spheres.
- **The humanitarian cliff:** The cessation of large-scale humanitarian funding as an emergency winds down, can cause a massive drop-off in externally provided services. If government is unable or unwilling to step in and provide these services, this can lead to increased tension and stoke further conflict. This remains a troubling question for humanitarians – at what point does withdrawal become a conflict trigger? This must be balanced against the question of when does staying too long create dependence and become developmental work?
- **Distraction from core tasks:** Humanitarian actors have a difficult core task – the delivery of aid to those in great need, in often increasingly hostile environments. To accomplish this task takes focus. To try and take on the complex burden of peacebuilding and early recovery may easily lead to a loss of focus, and less effective performance

... and its operational opportunities

18. There are also several points where humanitarian activities can serve as useful entry points for peacebuilding. Cooperation, however, requires clarity. Strict humanitarian action cannot have peacebuilding or statebuilding objectives. Activities that look humanitarian, but are not delivered on the basis of need and compliant with the humanitarian principles are not humanitarian. Given these rules, there are opportunities where more effective humanitarian action can contribute to a more sustainable peace without compromising its principles:

- **Building capacities:** As stated, humanitarian interventions seek to leave behind communities and state capacities that can better cope with future crises. These capacities are inherently useful to peacebuilding and the long-term health of the social contract. Essentially, if humanitarian capacity building is more effective, it will generate more capacities upon which development actors can build.
- **Greater conflict sensitivity:** Humanitarian action in the aftermath of conflict can easily become more sensitive to its long-term implications without compromising its principles. The idea of do-no-harm is critical here – humanitarian activities (and actors) are obligated to ensure that their actions do not harm communities. A concrete first step might simply be to employ or leverage the services of conflict advisors during planning and assessment phases.

19. The most effective defense against a future conflict-driven humanitarian crisis is no more conflict. It is therefore imperative that humanitarian programming be based on

good conflict-analysis, and not only “do no harm” to long-term peacebuilding efforts, but support them – while adhering to humanitarian principles.

IV. IMPLICATIONS FOR OCHA

20. There are concrete steps that could improve the ability of humanitarian assistance to protect its principles and support peacebuilding.

21. First, humanitarian actors should incorporate conflict-sensitivity into programme design. This could be accomplished through training on conflict-sensitive approaches – drawing on the World Bank, DOCO, and other relevant expertise. OCHA should mandate the inclusion of conflict analysis into its work, reaching out to DPA/DPKO as needed. OCHA should also mandate a formal conflict-sensitivity / sustainability review process for projects in CAPs/CHAPs.

22. Second, OCHA and its partners should formally review their capacity building programmes to improve their sustainability. Again, this could draw on expertise from development partners. To improve the sustainability of capacity building is to improve the effectiveness of programming, and this is a logical priority. It is also congruent with OCHA’s internal strategic framework for 2010-2013.¹⁰

23. Third, OCHA, DOCO, and their donors and its partners should develop more formal and rigorous transition mechanisms and agreements. This would help ensure that when handover occurs, it is smooth, and that the cessation of humanitarian funding does not lead to increased conflict risk.

24. Fourth, OCHA and the PBF should begin conversations as to how the Peacebuilding Fund and/or other non-humanitarian funding instruments, such as the Human Security Trust Fund, can help address the humanitarian “cliff.” The drop-off in services that follows the withdrawal of humanitarian funding is dangerous. OCHA should work with the peacebuilding architecture to find ways to avoid generating additional conflict drivers through well-intentioned assistance. These arrangements should look to ensure that early humanitarian capacity building efforts, in communities and in governments, can be built upon.

¹⁰ See goal 1.4 “humanitarian response...underpinned by integrated analysis and rigorous learning”