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Summary

LESSONS LEARNED REVIEW OF UN SUPPORT
TO CORE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION FUNCTIONS
IN THE IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH OF CONFLICT



FOR OVER 50 YEARS, THE UNITED NATIONS HAS SUPPORTED PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES. FROM HELPING NEWLY INDEPENDENT COUNTRIES IN AFRICA AND ASIA TO BUILD ESSENTIAL PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS IN THE 1950S AND 60S, TO RUNNING TRANSITIONAL ADMINISTRATIONS IN KOSOVO AND EAST TIMOR, THE UN HAS UNDERSTOOD THAT CORE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION CAPACITY IS ESSENTIAL FOR DEVELOPMENT AND INDEED STATEHOOD.

Overview

But, as the Secretary General recognised in his 2009 report on 'Peacebuilding in the Immediate Aftermath of Conflict', appreciation of the critical role of "core government functions, in particular basic public administration and public finance" has faded. This is true not only within the UN, but within the broader development community. ODA to peacebuilding and statebuilding, for example, increased from 2005 to 2009, except for ODA to strengthen core public sector management systems and capacity' (OCED 2011). Although the UN has produced important reports and policy on the rule of law, gender equality, and other post-conflict challenges in the decade since Report of the Panel on UN Peace Operations (the Brahimi Report), very little has been produced on public administration in fragile environments.

The UN Lessons Learned review rectifies this gap and captures the experience of the UN System in working on public administration in post-conflict environments. Reviewing external and internal literature as well as seven case studies it provides recommendations for more predictable, efficient and timely UN support in this area. The findings and recommendations focus on the immediate aftermath of conflict, defined as the first two years after the conflict has ended. The report is not to be seen as the conclusion of a comprehensive research initiative but rather as the first step in a process of re-directing the UN's work on post-conflict public administration, in collaboration with recipient countries and other development partners.

The review is focused on 'core' or 'basic' public administration functions, as opposed to service delivery functions.¹ This builds on the Secretary General's Report on Civilian Capacities in the Aftermath of Conflict, which identified five core functions: policy formulation and public financial management, managing the centre of government, civil service management, local governance, and aid coordination as essential for government ownership of the political and development process.

Five countries were visited by the team (Burundi, Guinea-Bissau, Kosovo, Liberia, and Timor-Leste), while two countries (Afghanistan and Sierra Leone) were covered through desk reviews. In addition to the country case studies, the lessons learned review situates UN experience in the wider policy and 'lessons learned' context. Undertaken as part of the preparation of this report, there are three main sources of lessons the review has drawn on: (1) the practice of state and peacebuilding over the past decade or so; (2) the much longer tradition of public administration reform (PAR); and (3), recent academic research into governance and institution-building.

These sources highlight a number of important lessons, in particular:

- the centrality of the 'political settlement' to peace and statebuilding, notably inclusion and national ownership;
- that governance deficiencies need to be understood as political in origin as much as technical;
- that the translation of forms of administration from one context into another rarely leads to corresponding function, and thus it is important to work for 'good fit' and not 'best practice';
- and, finally, successful PAR requires strong domestic leadership and objectives that are modest, focused and incremental.

¹ The World Bank describes these as 'upstream' rather than 'downstream' functions, the latter being the mandate of line ministries and focusing on the delivery of services (World Bank, 2011).

THE REVIEW HAS TWO MAIN FINDINGS

The first finding is that the UN, along with the wider international system, is simply not doing enough to support core public administration functions post-conflict given their importance. Core administrative functions do not in themselves deliver services, but the review is clear that these are a necessary requirement for doing so. The case studies also highlight that these functions are the **key mechanisms through which countries own the wider process of peace and statebuilding**, in particular the political process of raising revenue, setting development outcomes, and the planning and execution of budgets. And the character of the public administration, notably its level of inclusion, can be a key instrument for deepening the political settlement and reducing conflict.

The review concludes that whilst the correct level of focus is a matter of judgment not science, given the significance of these administrative functions to wider peace and statebuilding, the **current UN-wide level of focus and capacity for supporting core public administration functions in the immediate aftermath of conflict is insufficient.** There is, for example, currently no agreed approach for conducting a rapid assessment of core public administration functions. There are also serious problems with funding in the early days after conflict as support to the public administration is often classified as development not humanitarian; there are also challenges with the provision of qualified specialists. Coordination between agencies, the World Bank, and donors in the field is often late, ad hoc and inadequate. Finally, there is insufficient collaboration between missions and agencies, in particular with regard to the political analysis of public administration reform and its likely impact on UN peace and statebuilding objectives.

The second major finding is that the current approach to support core government functions in the aftermath of conflict has often been unsuitable. There has often been too strong a push for systemic reforms, and, partly as a result, not enough focus on rapid support to restoring basic functionality based on existing systems. Since its inception, the UN, along with the World Bank and many donors, has promoted a 'best practice', technical, merit-based model of public administration rooted in modern western approaches. The prevailing 'theory of change' is that, using the opportunity of the post-conflict moment, widespread reforms based on best practice will lead to more efficient and effective public services which will in turn lead to more peaceful and stable states.

However, the experience of the case studies conducted as part of the review, as well as the wider literature, demonstrate a number of problems with this approach. The review of the literature highlights that industrialised countries developed merit-based civil services some time into their development trajectory. This model has nevertheless been applied to post-conflict countries with little modification, with the justification that the post-conflict moment both permits and demands wider systemic reforms to public administration. Most post-conflict situations are, however, extremely politicised, and high levels of unresolved conflict between political leaders, often results in political attention being on the wider political rules of the game, rather than on reform of administrative systems or even on development. Capacity is often low due to neglect, destruction, or migration, as is trust in government by both citizens and new political leaders. Such environments, with a nascent and evolving political settlement, are usually not conducive to systemic reforms.



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First,

FOLLOWING ON FROM THESE FINDINGS, THE REPORT HAS THREE MAIN RECOMMEN- DATIONS:

... the UN needs to approach and understand support to public administration as a political as much as a technical exercise. Public administration is not just a mechanism for delivering services, but a key arena within which the political settlement is negotiated. This is a process that more often than not will look muddled, but is an improvement over bargaining through violent conflict. This means, for example, that the UN needs to ensure that key governance and public administration issues are discussed during peace processes and included in peace agreements - the Arusha accords for Burundi and the Nepali peace process, for example, both contained considerable provisions on inclusion and the public administration that were key to the wider peace process. Local government is also often a key part of peace processes and the UN requires specialist advisory input when it supports peace negotiations involving these issues. It means the UN should support and sponsor discussions on systemic public administration reform, and inform these discussions with the provision of options and experience from other countries, rather than bringing in experts with single 'best practice' recommendations. The UN should also consider providing discrete support to new political leaders on public administration issues, many of whom in post-conflict contexts have no such experience at all.

Given the long time it takes for public administrations to improve outcomes and results, the UN should help post-conflict governments generate 'process legitimacy' in the short-term through, for example, supporting vetting of public officials, and developing grievance redress procedures. The UN also has a particularly important role in promoting the inclusion within the public administration of women and excluded groups, both for its impact on sustaining the political settlement but also for its potential to make service delivery more responsive to the needs of different groups. This is particularly important for women. And lastly, the UN needs to be careful to monitor conflict within the public administration, with special attention being paid to public service labour disputes; evidence from the case studies shows that labour disputes can get out of control, de-stabilising an already volatile situation, or can reflect wider emerging conflict in society.



Second,

Third,

... the UN needs to improve its provision of fast, flexible and appropriate support to restoring the basic functionality of core systems as soon as possible after conflict. If new governments are to assume ownership and control of the peace and statebuilding process they need administrative functions restored as soon as possible, in particular the budget process. Contrary to the current approach, which tends to address only very narrow needs through 'early recovery' and then wait for longer-term transitional support, rapid support to core systems should be a priority in the early days after conflict alongside security and humanitarian needs. This means doing better and faster joint assessments of core administrative functions with the World Bank and the IMF, for which currently there is no agreed approach or protocol. In some contexts the first task may be rapid action to stop the 'haemorrhaging' of funds (as was the case of the Governance and Economic Management Programme established early on in post-conflict Liberia).

In order to help new governments restore core functions, the UN needs to focus on existing systems, introducing new ones only where absolutely necessary, avoid 'whole of government' approaches as they often fall foul of political rivalries, and work primarily with individual ministries. For accountability systems, the UN needs to focus first on strengthening internal controls, such as internal audit, rather than eye-catching new external systems whose effectiveness usually depends on internal controls being in place anyway. Anti-corruption is a key element of support to core functions, with, for example, oversight and control over licences and concessions being essential as early as possible. But the main contribution of support to anti-corruption is laying the foundations for more systemic efforts later on, notably ensuring core systems are functioning.

In terms of plans and budgets, there are many examples of over-complexity driven by foreign consultants, the key in the immediate aftermath of the conflict is simplicity and focus on service delivery through a few key national programmes, not multi-year plans and budgets. Practical support to local government is often neglected, despite the fact that most services are delivered at the local level; but again the focus in the immediate aftermath of the conflict needs to be on functionality, not yet on complex policy development for political and fiscal decentralization. In terms of providing support, the UN could make much more use of South-South linkages, such as the administrative staff from governments in the region now being provided to the new government of South Sudan. Finally, as has been argued in many other places, the UN and the wider international system, need to avoid actively doing harm through establishing parallel systems and taking qualified staff away from government. This also includes avoiding the deployment of advisors and advice from different administrative and legal traditions.

... the UN needs to undertake a range of internal measures to improve its capacity to support core government functions in post-conflict countries. Given insufficient attention, fragmentation at the field level, and the unusually high degree of cross-UN discipline required to support administrative functions, the review recommends a short policy guidance note to be developed by the UN Working Group on public administration, with responsibility for implementation in the field entrusted to the RC/HC.² This policy guidance note should explicitly use statebuilding as its starting point, rather than just peacebuilding. Support to government functions also needs to be included as routine in integrated planning frameworks between the UN agencies and special political/peacekeeping mission, most importantly the Integrated Strategic Framework (ISF) and the Integrated . Mission Planning Process (IMPP). Mandate drafters and mission planners need to be encouraged and able to access specialist advice on public administration to do this.

Analytical capacity also needs to be improved, and to this end an approach and protocol for rapid assessment of core public administration functions needs to be agreed between the concerned UN agencies and the World Bank. Guidance should be produced for better analysis of the political economy of support to the public administration, through better coordination and knowledge sharing between special political and/or peacekeeping missions and UN agencies. Producing a 'guide to government' containing a basic description of all levels of government and intended to educate the UN and wider international system should be standard practice for the UN. The UN also needs to improve its ability to deploy specialised public administration specialists as opposed to governance generalists. The UN needs to improve learning through in particular establishing a 'knowledge and learning' portal. And finally the UN needs to ensure financing for restoring functionality of critical systems is available immediately after conflict and that action in this field is not delayed by questions as to whether responsibility belongs to the peacebuilding, development or humanitarian sectors.

For any meaningful work on the public administration to be considered a minimum of political order and commitment from political leadership needs to be in place. Perhaps the most difficult operational question for the UN is to assess continually to what extent the necessary order and commitment is in place, and to gauge the level of UN support accordingly. This assessment needs to bear in mind that an overly cautious approach may lead to the very problems the UN is trying to avoid, but an overly confident approach could be wasteful at best. This is a very complex judgment that depends on a careful analysis of context, but the overall approach of this report as laid out above should help the UN avoid being either too cautious or too confident.

² The Policy Guidance Note should build on principles as well as the key recommendations contained in the Lessons Learned Review Report. The Note will provide practical guidance to the field and to HQ on how to address the immediate restoration of core government functionality.



STUDY COMMISSIONED BY THE
UN WORKING GROUP ON PUBLIC
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OF THE UN SECRETARY-GENERAL'S
POLICY COMMITTEE

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Background

THIS REPORT IS SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL'S DECISION TO COMMISSION A 'LESSONS LEARNED REVIEW OF COUNTRY EXPERIENCES IN POST-CONFLICT PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION'. THIS FOLLOWS FROM THE 'REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON PEACE BUILDING IN THE IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH OF CONFLICT', WHICH IDENTIFIED SUPPORT FOR 'CORE GOVERNMENT FUNCTIONS, PARTICULARLY BASIC PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND PUBLIC FINANCE,' AS REPEATEDLY REQUESTED FROM THE UN IN POST-CONFLICT COUNTRIES.

The objectives of this report are to provide 'recommendations to ensure the UN system is capable of providing effective, cohesive, integrated and strategic support to improve the capacities of post-conflict public administration at the national and sub-national levels.' The production of the report was supervised by the UN Working Group on Public Administration, chaired by UNDP with representation from DOCO, DPA, DPKO, OCHA, OHCHR, PBSO, UNCDF, UNDESA, UNDP, UNICEF, UNV and UN Women. These, as well as staff in agencies and missions in the case study countries, gave generously of their time and support to this initiative.

Whilst the primary audience of the report is senior UN policy makers in the field and Headquarters, the report is also intended to inspire debate amongst a wider group of interested member states, policy experts and donor institutions.

This summary reproduces in a condensed form the arguments presented in the Lessons Learned report and makes the central conclusions of the report available to a wider audience. It is not intended to summarise the case studies.

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