2. Executive Coordination at the Centre of Government
Disclaimer

This redacted and revised version of “Rebuilding Core Government Functions in Fragile and Conflict Affected Settings” is an Exposure Draft being released for public interest and consideration. The thinking on core government functions is continuing to evolve, and this paper is one of several efforts at engaging on this topic. The principles and guidelines explored here will be tested over the next few years, and a revised version will be produced subsequently in light of the lessons learned. It does not reflect the views and opinions of the World Bank Group or its Board of Directors, nor of the United Nations.
Preface

This report forms part of a response to growing calls for the United Nations, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to engage more systematically and coherently in fragile and conflict-affected contexts and indeed in major crises affecting security and development. In 2013, the Secretary-General’s Policy Committee called on these institutions to develop a joint approach and methodology to assess needs and improve the provision of support to core government functions in the immediate aftermath of conflict. This was echoed recently by the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations in 2015 and falls within the scope of the Partnership Framework Agreement for Crisis-Affected Situations signed in April 2017 by the UN Secretary General and the WB President.

In the immediate aftermath of conflict, understood as the first three years after the cessation of widespread violence, the short-term objectives of assistance are usually focused on stabilization: to provide a minimum level of security, set in motion the beginning of an economic recovery and lay the initial foundation for long-term institutional development. The importance of restoring core government functions has been repeatedly identified as critical to sending confidence-raising signals to the population in the aftermath of conflict, to both project the authority of the state and for the delivery of services that improve development outcomes.

The lessons learned over the past decade emphasize the importance of incorporating a political economy approach to building core government functions, the need for flexibility and adaptation to changing political and security circumstances, the management of risk and the importance of staying the course in the face of crises and temporary reversals. Rather than adopting comprehensive reforms or entirely new business processes, it is about building on existing institutional legacies, adapting existing systems and working in an incremental manner. Tradeoffs between introducing the basic building blocks of public financial management, and understanding the need to distribute rents that create stability will need to be recognized and addressed. A key requirement for a durable recovery is a political settlement that is sufficiently inclusive of the major elite coalitions with the capacity to mobilize organized violence. Partnerships between the United Nations and the World Bank can enable greater flexibility in providing support, through enhancing the areas where one partner has a comparative advantage, whether it be geographical access, depth of technical expertise or an explicitly political mandate.
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Chapter 2. Executive Coordination at the Centre of Government

2.1 Objective

Few tasks are more important for the effective functioning of government than leadership and coordination from the top of the executive branch. When the centre functions effectively, collective expertise from across the public sector can be mobilized and brought to bear on the most pressing decisions confronting the country. Once policy decisions are taken, the executive office oversees and monitors their implementation. In post conflict settings, reality often diverges from this ideal.

The general goal is to progress from an environment where decision making is largely deals-based, ad-hoc and based upon personal relationships and opaque processes towards one in which the decision-making process is more rule-based, structured, routinized and predictable.

2.2 Executive coordination in a post-conflict setting

At the end of conflict, new governments may be formed on the basis of power sharing arrangements, or drawn from military or rebel organizations. Government leadership may not previously have had experience in public administration, and the skills necessary to successfully lead or defeat an insurgency may not readily translate into the management of the public sector.

Furthermore, executive coordination at the centre of government sits at the intersection between the political and administrative elements of governing. As in other areas, it can be difficult to identify whether apparent dysfunctions in the policy coordination process are rooted in low physical and human capacity, or reflect the incentives of policymakers. Typically, political authority is concentrated in individuals, who rely upon personal and patronage relationships to wield authority. Business is conducted directly and orally, and by way of personal deals rather than rules. Issues are addressed in an ad-hoc and informal manner as required. Advisors are chosen for personal loyalty, and trained administrative staff are present in modest numbers or absent altogether.

Even in settled countries, decision-making procedures and approaches can vary significantly depending upon the style of the chief executive. Some heads of state prefer strict protocols and information flowing through dedicated formal channels; others prefer a more informal approach and multiple flows of information. Some prefer back channels and relying upon a small coterie of informal advisors; others prefer a broader and more consultative style.

In governments of national unity, or transitional administrations, allocation of responsibilities is generally driven by the politics of accommodation and reconciliation, rather than on the optimal managerial distribution of functions. This may undermine the possibility of cabinet solidarity around decision-making. Ministers may be former combatants with primary allegiance to select constituencies; notions of the national good may be abstract and not widely shared.

If elections or constitutional consultations are imminent, ministers may avoid the cabinet and seek instead to use their offices to favor various regional, ethnic, or religious constituencies. Political competition during the interim is likely to be intense, and there are usually only weak frameworks for regulating such competition with the “rules
of the game” only emerging over time. Holding a formal political position can be an important legitimizing tool in the struggle for power, as well as an opportunity to accumulate wealth and patronage which are often essential for electoral campaigning.

2.3 Principles

The following principles normally guide the strengthening executive or cabinet offices; in a post-conflict situation, these need to be applied flexibly in a manner consistent with the political and security situation:

- **Building a commitment to discipline.** Cabinet decisions need to be collectively binding upon all actors or the efficacy of the institution will erode. This can be particularly challenging where a post-conflict cabinet is composed of former opponents or competing factions during the conflict.

- **Cabinet processes need to be transparent,** if not to the general public than at least to ministers and the senior members of the government administration. In its simplest form, this requires proper management of cabinet papers and the production of cabinet minutes that are properly disseminated and archived.

- **Cabinet processes need to be participatory.** At a minimum, it is essential that the ministries directly involved or affected by a particular decision be consulted prior to its adoption.

- **Cabinet decision-making should be consistent and in line with existing laws and policy guidelines.** Erratic or inconsistent decisions will create confusion within the administration and hesitancy among the broader public and other interested parties, including donors and investors.

While international experience on this aspect of core government functionality is limited, a few suggestions can be advanced to help create or restore an effective decision-making and coordination function at the centre of government in this particular context:

- **Recognize that major political struggles over roles and responsibilities will be ongoing.** Executive coordination is not a technocratic exercise, but one that at its core one is fundamentally political.

- **Function over form.** There is no one “optimal” approach to structuring decision-making at the apex of government. Countries with effective and well-coordinated public sectors utilize a variety of different approaches to achieve the same outcomes. Countries emerging from conflict should focus on performing the key functions, rather than replicating specific organizational forms and structures from other countries.

- **Base reforms on evidence, wherever possible.** Before attempting any reforms, it is first essential to identify whether existing structures are “fit for purpose.” To the extent that data permits, the analysis should try to capture the existing institutions and flow of decisions before cabinet. It is particularly important to understand the source of the more dysfunctional practices, and whether they are linked to a lack of capacity or to broader political dynamics.

- **The use of delivery units.** There has recently been a proliferation of interest in the use of delivery units. However, the use of such mechanisms ought not to be viewed as a “silver bullet” for injecting performance and
accountability into public sectors that confront fundamental challenges in the delivery of basic services. To be effective, the heads of such units need to be close to the president or prime minister and speak with his or her full authority. They need to be staffed with individuals who understand the various sectors in which they are working and have first-hand experience regarding the constraints confronted by line departments. Trade-offs associated with staffing and empowering delivery units at the expense of line agencies would need to be considered as well.

- **Start with the basics.** The more basic functions must be established before attempting more elaborate tasks. The immediate need is to establish a small but efficient office of the head of government to support the needs of the executive and cabinet, regulate the traffic of proposals, and ensure dissemination of meeting agendas and the communication of decisions to the main stakeholders. It is important to avoid creating parallel structures that will conflict with ministries, and building up an independent capacity for policy advice and analysis should be left to a subsequent phase.

- **Keep cabinet documentation straightforward and organic.** Cabinet manuals should build upon current decision modalities, perhaps tweaked and improved where possible, so that they are organically linked to existing administrative structures and practices. Documentation should be simple and accessible to ensure that it is read, digested and internalized. The temptation to design elaborate structures and processes based on notions of international “best practice” should be resisted.

- **Manage expectations and focus upon transitions over time.** In many circumstances, it will be unrealistic to assume that processes that may have historically been largely ad-hoc, secretive and informal will quickly become predictable, transparent and rule-based. The focus of the transition should be upon areas where early progress is possible, either because they are less contested or because no existing structures or personnel exist to resist progress.

### 2.4 Priorities

#### 2.4.1 Executive coordination functions

Three basic capacities will typically need to be restored: the capacity to structure decision-making at the centre of government; the capacity to manage government records; and the capacity to communicate to the administration and the population.

**Structured decision making** - A structured decision-making process performs at least five basic functions: (i) provide upstream information to ensure that government concerns and strategic priorities are identified and addressed in a timely manner; (ii) ensure that the key participants in the policy process are consulted and have adequate time to review and prepare, and that meeting agendas have been prepared and disseminated in advance; (iii) ensure that the cost of proposals is estimated, their legality ascertained, and viable alternatives are explored; (iv) record and disseminate the decisions, and archive them in a readily accessible database; and (v) monitor their implementation.

**Records management** - To disseminate and monitor the implementation of decisions, the preservation, protection and retrieval of proposals and documents are required. Indeed, adequate records management is essential in all core government functions. A senior person within the cabinet or president’s office should be assigned responsibility and the office should adopt policies and procedures to guide the records management function. The responsible person or entity needs to have the influence and authority to assure that all government agencies follow the records
management rules and to have access to all records repositories and systems, especially if there is some division of control of agencies along ethnic or political lines. For this reason, in a post-conflict situation, it may be appropriate to place responsibility for records management within the central executive office or in one of the core entities of public administration close to the centre of government. A fuller discussion of records management is included in Chapter 4 on public administration.

*Communications and dissemination* - Strategic messaging can play an important role in forging a stable political settlement and building the new government’s legitimacy. It is therefore important that a communications capacity in the executive office should be established quickly. This can promote coherence in government messaging; help to dispel potentially destabilizing rumors; and raise the public profile and visibility of the nascent government. Care also needs to be taken to ensure that such a communications capacity does not simply become a propaganda tool for the regime.

### 2.4.2 Political roles

Beyond these basic functions, the executive’s office may be given an analytical role, or be asked to help coordinate between the executive branch and the legislature. It could be given responsibility for overseeing strategic priorities, and for monitoring performance in areas of particular importance to the government. Eventually, it can play a role in supporting the development of a national strategy, which can provide a common vision of development.

*Multiple paths to the same destination* - While effective policy coordination is grounded on the functions articulated above, there is no optimal approach to achieving them. The composition of the cabinet and the conduct of cabinet meetings can vary significantly, and will influence executive coordination structures. A manual and rules generally define the business that goes before the cabinet, but these vary in their level of guidance. Sub-cabinet committees can be used to identify and resolve contentious issues, develop policy recommendations, or oversee and coordinate implementation. Such committees can be formal or informal, as well as permanent or ad-hoc, with the latter typically being constituted to address one-off issues. Cabinet secretariats also vary considerably from very small, providing secretarial and administrative support, to those with a large policymaking role and many support staff.
Annex: Diagnostic Questions

A.2 Executive Coordination at the Centre of Government

Broader legislative and policy framework and cultural context:

• What formal system of executive government has historically existed in the country (i.e. Westminster, Presidential, Continental, Soviet, Monarchical or other)? Will these traditions serve as a point of departure for the post-conflict regime?

• What style of executive coordination existed during the conflict - in rebel groups, political parties, in regions administered by competing groups?

• What does the peace or ceasefire agreement say about the centre of government, power-sharing arrangements, electoral timelines, etc.?

• What is the background of key counterparts within the government? How much previous experience do they have within government or in running other large organizations?

• Is there a document that sets out a comprehensive national vision, such as a national development plan or strategic compact? If so, when and how was it developed? How much political and social buy-in does it enjoy?

• Does the peace agreement include provisions for reforming the functionality of the centre of government and executive coordination? If yes, do these include provisions for gender equality in public institutions?

• Does a clear structure for the public sector exist? Are the roles and responsibilities of line ministries and departments carefully structured? Are the reporting relationships of subordinate agencies and state owned enterprises clear?

Political structure and timeline

• What is the political system underpinning the centre of government? Are there multiple political parties, a single party or no parties?

• Is there a political roadmap agreed upon between the parties? What are the major milestones (i.e. national dialogue, constitutional convention, other)? What is the electoral timeline?

Institutional framework at the centre of government - general background

• Are there any existing offices or units that perform core government functions, including cabinet support, ministerial coordination, policy or legal coordination or strategic communications?

• What staff are currently performing core functions at the centre of government? What are their capacities? Are donors supplementing any of these key functions?
• It is particularly important to understand the roots of any particularly dysfunctional practices surrounding operations at the centre of government. Are they linked to capacity constraints or to broader political resistance?

• Who are the main advisor of the president/prime minister?

**Nature of decision-making at the apex of government**

• Do regular formal meetings exist for the president/prime minister and his or her cabinet? Or is most decision-making informal or ad-hoc?

• Are there other ministerial decision-making and/or coordination bodies in areas such as national security or economic policy? What is their relationship with the cabinet?

• Are there laws, regulations or executive orders that guide the work of the executive offices (i.e. interim regulations, codes of conduct, religious or customary law)? How widely are they promulgated and understood by the relevant parties?

• Is there an existing cabinet manual that sets out the processes for running the cabinet and making decisions? Is there a cabinet submission template that ministries must use in order to submit issues to the cabinet for decision?

**Cabinet or Supreme Council meetings**

• How many decisions flow to and from cabinet for decision each month? Is the workload manageable?

• How frequently do these formal meetings take place? How long do they last?

• Who chairs the meeting? Does the chair rotate or stay constant?

• Who participates? Is it principals only, or are staff allowed? Are informal advisors present?

• Is an agenda prepared for cabinet meetings? If so, who prepares it?

• Is the agenda circulated beforehand? Do ministries, agencies and departments have a chance to comment on it and propose changes?

• Are all ministries with a stake in a particular issue consulted beforehand?

• How seriously is the agenda taken? Can ministers introduce items that were not on the formal agenda? Does this happen frequently?

• Are proposals before the cabinet with financial implications adequately reviewed and costed? Is their consistency with the constitution and other laws reviewed? Are they checked for consistency with established policy?

• Are minutes prepared that record the decisions taken at the meeting? Are they circulated? Are they archived and retrieved later on?
Cabinet offices and other coordination bodies

- How large is the office that supports the cabinet? Who does it report to, and how is it structured?

- Does the office serve as a source of independent technical advice? Or does it simply manage the workflow?

- Does the office follow up on the implementation of cabinet decisions? How are they monitored or followed up?

- Are there other mechanisms for policy coordination (such as interagency working groups) at the sub-cabinet level? How effective are they?

- Who handles communications for the senior executive?