



Looking Ahead: The 2020 UN Peacebuilding Architecture Review

Meeting Note from Expert-Level Discussion

Introduction

On 29 January 2020, the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP), the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), and the International Peace Institute (IPI) co-organized the eighth meeting in a series of roundtable discussions exploring the operationalization of Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace. The meeting focused on the 2020 Review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture (hereafter, the 2020 Review), with an aim to provide experts from the UN, Member States, and civil society with a space to share their expectations of the Review, provide updates on their planning for activities and inputs, and exchange ideas on how different actors can best support each other throughout the process.

In November 2019, the Peacebuilding Commission formally launched the 2020 Review, with two phases. First, an informal phase of the Review will last until June or July 2020. This includes a) a series of thematic discussions within the Peacebuilding Commission; b) an Independent Eminent Persons (IEP) panel; c) regional and thematic consultations; and d) official thematic submissions. The findings of these informal tracks will be transmitted to the Secretary-General as an input to his 2020 report on peacebuilding and sustaining peace, and to the Presidents of the General Assembly and the Security Council as an input to the second, formal phase of the review. The formal phase is expected to start in June 2020, under the leadership of Member States. However, the format of the process, as well as the expected outcome of the Review is yet to be agreed upon by Member States. As part of the informal phase, the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) will host four thematic consultations: on operational and policy coherence; financing; transitions; and Women, Peace and Security (WPS).

Roundtable participants used the discussion to reflect on planning for the 2020 Review and share their expectations for and perspectives on the process. The following is a short summary of the discussion as well as recommendations raised.

Expectations for the 2020 Review

The 2020 Review is mandated by the 2016 resolutions and stipulated to happen during the 74th session of the General Assembly (UNGA). The participants agreed that they view the 2020 Review as a stock-taking exercise and an opportunity to assess progress on the implementation of the UN reforms and the recommendations of the 2018 Secretary-General's Report on peacebuilding and sustaining peace, rather than an attempt for further conceptual rethinking. Recognizing the continued relevance of existing frameworks, the 2020 Review should aim to provide an adequate assessment of the implementation of peacebuilding and sustaining peace with a focus on country level, and provide actionable, forward-looking recommendations to enhance this implementation efforts moving forward.

Key Areas of Focus:

During the roundtable discussion, participants provided recommendations to address key challenges to peacebuilding:

The need to strengthen policy coherence

The outcome of three Global Reviews that took place in 2015 - including the Review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture (the AGE Report), the Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on UN Peace Operations (the HIPPO Report), and the Global Study on implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security - along with the 2018 Secretary-General's Report on peacebuilding and sustaining peace provide the point of departure for assessing the UN action on advancing operational and policy coherence. All these resources jointly identify some cross-cutting issues that remain a priority for peacebuilding and sustaining peace, including the principles of inclusivity, local ownership, and complementarity across the work of the peace and security, human rights and humanitarian, and development pillars of the UN. The starting point for mobilizing action on coherence were the UN reforms, which in addition to peace and security and development, included administrative and management structures and processes. The impact of these reforms is yet to be seen since their launch in January 2019. Participants identified specific areas in which action on coherence can be strengthened:

First, participants suggested standardizing information-sharing processes and greater clarity on the implementation of management reforms in relation to sustaining peace to break down silos, including those that exist between the UN presence in New York and Geneva. Member state's permanent missions have a key role to play in strengthening coherence, and should develop or strengthen the channels, structures and resources in place to support cross-sector strategic engagement and collaboration. Member states also should provide the necessary resources and commitment to addressing the persistent issue of fragmentation.

Second, learning from experiences at the local level can be helpful to improve operational and policy coherence, as local peacebuilders often work across different operational and policy frameworks and possess expertise to identify which areas and risk factors at the local level remain under-prioritized. Support for local peacebuilding requires a coherent and flexible employment of tools from across the three pillars of the UN, which the international community still needs to improve.

Consolidated Action on Sustaining Peace and Development

The roundtable discussion raised many issues related to the links between sustaining peace and development, human rights, and public health, and the imperative to move from the rhetorical recognition of these links to strengthening coherence in practice and at country level. In this context, participants underscored that economic development and poverty eradication are essential but long-ignored drivers of peace. They also emphasized the importance of the UN Development System reforms for operationalizing sustaining peace – which had been discussed in more detail in previous roundtable discussions. Some voiced concern about the risks of securitizing development, a perception which may hinder Member States' engagement in efforts to bring these pillars closer together. The UN Development System reforms have ushered in several changes in how the UN operates at country level, including the new generation of UN Country Teams (UNCTs), with roles and profiles better tailored to enable a comprehensive and integrated context analysis, as well as more robust lines of accountability.¹

Expanding a Regional Approach

Participants noted that increased efforts to move towards more regional approaches – in analysis, partnerships, and programming – are critical to respond to transnational threats and to build stability across broader regions. An important element of the dual resolutions

¹ See more here: <https://reform.un.org/content/development-reform>

reiterated in the Secretary-General's 2018 Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace Report was the recognition of regional organizations as important stakeholders to sustaining peace. The challenges of preventing and addressing violent conflict require closer strategic and operational partnerships among the United Nations, and the outcomes of taking a regional approach should remain in focus during the 2020 Review Process. UN cooperation with regional and sub-regional organizations is not only critical to conflict prevention, but it is also in line with Chapter VIII of the UN Charter.

Recognizing Regional Efforts in the Sahel

During the discussion, the Sahel region was used to highlight current efforts to promote a regional approach. As discussed at the 2019 Annual Meeting of the Peacebuilding Commission focused on the situation in the Sahel and Mano River Union², the UN and African Union (AU) worked closely with relevant partners to develop the UN Support Plan for the Sahel, which targets 10 countries with the overarching goal to scale up efforts to accelerate shared prosperity and lasting peace in the region, and to foster coherence and coordination for greater efficiency. The Plan supports ongoing efforts and initiatives by governments, international and regional organizations, such as the AU's Agenda 2063. Under this framework, macroeconomic conditions for the Sahel have become stronger than the continental average, and six out of ten countries in the region improved their ratings in the Human Development Index. The UN Support Plan was also able to offer some key emerging lessons, such as the need to diversify sources of development assistance in order to stimulate investment, and better strategies to attract private sector engagement to leverage the vast opportunities and potential within the region. The UN Support Plan, highlighting a specific region and in coordination with regional organizations, was able to offer new avenues of innovation and coordination for more integrated collective action.³

Stronger Role of the Peacebuilding Commission:

Participants discussed the role of the PBC, and how the Review can be an opportunity to address concerns that it remains a misunderstood and underused institution within the wider UN system, recognizing that substantial progress has been made since 2015. Several recommendations were made, including more inclusive decision making, and a greater advisory role for the UN Security Council (UNSC on peacekeeping operations and special political missions) and to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). There was recognition of the Secretary General's preference to keeping UN bodies' mandates and structures unchanged, focusing rather on how to strengthen working procedures and greater information dissemination to raise the profile of the PBC's work within the UN system.

Reconciliation as an underutilized tool:

Another theme raised by participants was how to integrate reconciliation more systematically in peacebuilding processes and programmatic efforts, recognizing its importance to help societies heal after conflicts. Reconciliation is explicitly mentioned in the dual resolutions but often overlooked in discussions on peace and security and in strategies to prevent the relapse of violence. The resolutions stress that a comprehensive approach to transitional justice, "including promotion of healing and reconciliation" is critical to peace and stability. Strategies for reconciliation that are inclusive and locally owned should be included in the 2020 Review as another facet of meaningful engagement.

² See more: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2019/psc134.doc.htm>

³ To see the entire report on the UN Support Plan for the Sahel, follow this link: https://www.un.org/africarenewal/sites/www.un.org.africarenewal/files/English%20Summary%20Report_0.pdf

Critical importance of financing for peacebuilding:

Financing was identified as one of the areas where the least amount of progress has been made on taking forward recommendations in the AGE report as well as the 2018 and 2019 Secretary-General's Reports. Financing for peacebuilding remains inadequate, unpredictable and unsustainable. Participants discussed the need for the UN to provide platforms for dialogue about how to advance opportunities for and to address concerns about increased peacebuilding financing. Participants also suggested that funding mechanisms provide greater support for prevention initiatives, and strengthen operational partnership with key donors, including the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

Ensuring clarity of mandates:

Counterterrorism efforts were highlighted as an area of effort that has a potential negative impact on the operationalization of sustaining peace. Some participants brought up concerns about the push to have the Peacebuilding Fund support counterterrorism projects. They noted that the perceived involvement of some peace operations with counterterrorism efforts may be undermining their impartiality and credibility and compromising their ability to promote peace, development, and human rights. For example, the UN Independent Review team that assessed the political situation in Mali concluded that the majority of human rights abuses by state actors took place as part of counterterrorism operations, and the proximity of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in its support role and in cooperation with security and counterterrorism forces, had contributed to local public perceptions that the mission was engaging in counterterrorism actions.⁴ Thus, the Peacebuilding Fund may not be suitable to support projects that could be perceived to support counterterrorism.

Meaningfulness of engagement:

The nature of the 2020 Review processes itself would benefit from further meaningful engagement of and partnership with relevant stakeholders. The terms of reference for the 2020 Review encourages the engagement of all relevant actors at different levels to organize regional consultations. In reality, however, these processes have proven to be quite difficult for civil society to engage in, especially at the local level. Ensuring inclusive and meaningful engagement with relevant actors at the sub-regional, regional, and international levels can better establish creative and innovative approaches moving forward. The flexibility of these approaches as well as the actors involved is integral in the support of sustaining peace.

Conclusion and recommendations

Participants at the roundtable agreed that the 2020 Review provides an opportunity to create more synergies between human rights, development and peacebuilding efforts, and provides spaces for experts within the UN, Member States, and civil society to strengthen implementation of the Sustaining Peace resolutions at all levels, while addressing ongoing challenges in system-wide reforms, resourcing, and capacities.

The following key recommendations can be formulated based on the discussion:

- 1) The 2020 Review should be used as an opportunity to take stock of progress and challenges to implementation of the UN's work on sustaining peace, with a holistic view that includes the ongoing system wide reforms.
- 2) Member States should develop or strengthen structures, processes, and resources to support cross-sectoral strategic engagement and collaboration on peacebuilding as

⁴ On the role of MINUSMA and counterterrorism in peacebuilding efforts, see for example United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in Mali, June 6, 2018 via <https://undocs.org/S/2018/541> and Larry Attree and Jordan Street, "Should UN Peace Operations Get Off the Counter-Terror Bandwagon?," IPI Global Observatory, September 12, 2018 via <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2018/09/un-peace-operations-should-get-off-counter-terror-bandwagon/>

well as ensure that the necessary resources are available for addressing the persistent issue of fragmentation.

- 3) The consultations that will provide input to the Review provide an opportunity to engage development, humanitarian, human rights and security actors, especially at the local level, reinforcing coherence and the inherent nexus between these different efforts.
- 4) The 2020 Review should reaffirm and seek to strengthen the peace-development-humanitarian nexus, by moving beyond recommending conflict sensitivity as part of a “do-no-harm” approach, and propose concrete strategies for more integrated analysis, planning and practice.
- 5) The UN should continue to recognize regional organizations as important stakeholders in sustaining peace, and UN cooperation, with regional and sub-regional organizations as not only critical to conflict prevention, but also in line with Chapter VIII of the Charter. The PBA review can contribute by identifying examples of where and how regional actors have demonstrated their value and lessons for other contexts.
- 6) The 2020 Review should be used by UN entities, including agencies, funds and programmes as well as by Member States as an opportunity to explore strategies for reconciliation as part of broader peacebuilding plans, learning from country-level examples and ensuring inputs from local peacebuilders.
- 7) The Review should be an opportunity to promote future discussions on options for more robust peacebuilding financing. A stronger financing model should adopt a more preventative approach and increase partnerships with key international financial institutions.