

# Conference Proceedings

**Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Peacebuilding:  
Towards Change in Concepts and Approaches**  
24–25 March 2010, Oslo, Norway

Cedric de Coning, Johanna Jansson, Walter Lotze and Stina Torjesen



Norsk Utenrikspolitisk Institutt  
Norwegian Institute of International Affairs

**NUPI Report**

Publisher: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs  
Copyright: © Norwegian Institute of International Affairs 2010  
ISBN: 978-82-7002-285-4

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**The conference was organised jointly with the Norwegian  
Peacebuilding Centre**



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The conference was made possible in part by grants from Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Norwegian Council of Research (POVPEACE programme). The conference also benefited from financial support from the Norwegian funded Training for Peace in Africa programme at NUPI. The statements made and the views expressed are solely the responsibility of the authors.

## Executive Summary

The seminar *Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Peacebuilding: Towards Change in Concepts and Approaches?* was hosted by the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) and the Norwegian Peacebuilding Centre (Noref) from 24 to 25 March 2010 in Oslo. The seminar took place against the backdrop of the 2010 Review of the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission (UN PBC) and the strategic assessments currently being made in many peacebuilding circles. The seminar sought to create a space where peacebuilding policy-makers, researchers and practitioners could come together for critical reflection and dialogue. As a starting point for discussion, the seminar asked whether the current liberal peacebuilding approach is ethically, conceptually and structurally flawed.

The seminar assessed peacebuilding on the basis of its actual practices and impact. Major flaws in contemporary peacebuilding practice that were highlighted include the tendency to overemphasise technical institution-building rather than social and political considerations, a focus on efficiency rather than effectiveness, and the lack of meaningful local ownership despite principles and policies to the contrary. Moreover, donors need to acknowledge that they themselves play an active part in reinforcing many of the downsides of today's peacebuilding practices. The way in which funds are channelled to peacebuilding countries may seriously undermine the very national institutions they are intended to support. Large-scale waste is also associated with the disbursement of donor funds. Finally, a central conclusion of the Oslo seminar was that peacebuilding should be reformed to allow for a more human-centred social justice approach, as opposed to the current focus on institutional efficiency.

The 2010 review of the UN PBC should serve as an opportunity to better define and, perhaps, circumscribe the role and agency of the PBC. Clarification is needed of the PBC and its relationship with the United Nations, the Security Council and other UN bodies. The most important comparative advantage of the PBC is that it is perceived as being more representative of the global South. The Commission should capitalise on this point to stimulate the development of a new, non-Western dominated approach to peacebuilding.

An important reason why coordination remains a challenge in peacebuilding is that the actors, both internal and external, strive to strengthen their own agency within the system. These are natural dynamics that should be acknowledged. The system needs to be realistic about the degree of coordination achievable in any specific context. Moreover, the UN might well consider further simplifying its own systems and procedures.

Local ownership remains a key challenge in peacebuilding. The international community needs to accept that local ownership implies that it will not be able to control the outcome of the peacebuilding process. The legitimacy of the local actors involved and of the peace process as a whole is at risk if local ownership is perceived as securing agency for local actors that are closely associated with the interveners.

Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) is currently being revised and reformed, particularly at field levels. A more comprehensive focus on community, rule of law and human security is gradually being included and adopted in programming – heralding a shift towards second- and third-generation DDR. Seminar participants also stressed the need for a more rigorous approach to the challenges of creating livelihoods and economic empowerment of ex-combatants and communities, an approach in which concepts of social justice for broad segments of society should be made central. Indeed, if the reintegration component of DDR processes is to effect lasting change, economic development – notably employment creation and livelihoods – must be placed at the centre of DDR efforts. Moreover, it was emphasised in seminar presentations and discussions that full-scale collection of weapons from combatants was never the central aim when the DDR concept was first designed. Given the realities on the ground, collecting weapons from armed factions during insecure transition periods will at best yield symbolic results. ‘Disarmament’ is therefore more aptly described as ‘effective weapons management’, since the best outcome to be hoped for in relation to the Disarmament phase of DDR is to place weapons beyond use. A simplistic focus on the numbers of weapons collected is unlikely to provide indications as to how well a DDR programme has performed.

The way donor funding is disbursed to conflict-ridden countries can bring long-term damage to the countries in question and is characterised by large-scale waste. Lack of oversight, superficial record-keeping and inadequate transparency among donors make critical assessment difficult. Major donors tend to lack full oversight over how much and to which

sectors they are funnelling financial resources for peacebuilding. This undermines strategic vision and accountability.

States receiving an influx of peacebuilding funds find their best-educated and skilled staff poached by international organisations; the influx of funds drives up inflation; and, importantly: the flow of money bypasses the government – depriving national institutions of power, relevance and oversight. State-building is difficult when the money flowing into a country for that very purpose works systematically to sideline states structures. International organisations typically hold full control over the whole chain of disbursement and programming, with local NGOs serving as low-level implementers. International organisations also skim off a major share of the funds flowing into peacebuilding countries, thereby causing large-scale waste of resources. There have been few systematic and comparative studies of this, but a recent OECD DAC meeting concluded that, of the funds pledged to one key country emerging out of conflict only 18 per cent had reached the intended end-beneficiaries.

A cognitive shift within peacebuilding is required. Social justice, diversity in programming, meaningful local ownership and sustainable economic empowerment must become the guiding principles for the future. Peacebuilding endeavours need to become more context-sensitive: and to this end, greater openness to conceptual innovation on the part of donors is essential.

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# List of Acronyms

AU	African Union
CSO	civil society organisation
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
EU	European Union
INGO	international non-governmental organisation
NGO	non-governmental organisation
Noref	Norwegian Peacebuilding Centre
NUPI	Norwegian Institute of International Affairs
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PBC	(United Nations) Peacebuilding Commission
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
WoC	Whole of Country
WoGa	Whole of Government



# Introduction

The seminar *Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Peacebuilding: Towards Change in Concepts and Approaches?* was hosted by the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) and the Norwegian Peacebuilding Centre (Noref) from 24 to 25 March 2010 in Oslo. The seminar took place against the backdrop of the 2010 Review of the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) and the strategic assessments underway in many peacebuilding circles. The seminar sought to create a space among peacebuilding policy-makers, researchers and practitioners for critical reflection and dialogue. As a starting point for discussion, the seminar asked whether today's liberal peacebuilding approach might be flawed – ethically, conceptually and/or structurally.

Key facets of peacebuilding were examined, including the UN peacebuilding architecture, the role of donors and the way in which money-flows structure peacebuilding efforts. 'Liberal' in this context was taken to be the emphasis on democratisation and free market policies, with the related assumptions that these measures serve to create self-sustaining, stable institutions that can promote long-term development.

The organisers, with additional support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Research Council of Norway, sought to enhance the exchange of ideas and create a space for further original and critical thinking on peacebuilding concepts and approaches. One key aim of the seminar was to pool resources from 'northern' and 'southern' perspectives – as well from practitioner, donor, academic and host country approaches – to identify, acknowledge and analyse some of the shortcomings of contemporary approaches to peacebuilding. This included taking stock of the key actors, instruments and policy tools often involved in peacebuilding initiatives – the UN system, the PBC, the European Union (EU), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the donor community and NGOs. Special emphasis was also placed on the central roles and responsibilities of key peacebuilding donor countries in acknowledging potential conceptual and structural flaws in current approaches, and the need for donor-initiated change.

Discussions focused on identifying key issues of concern and highlighting potentially promising foci of innovation and reform in peacebuilding approaches. This report summarises the key outcomes of the discus-

sions. For the sake of coherence, contributions have been presented thematically where appropriate, and do not necessarily represent the actual order of discussion at the Oslo seminar.

# Session 1:

## Rethinking Peacebuilding Assumptions

Major flaws in current peacebuilding practices include the use of approaches that favour institution- or state-building rather than nation-building, reconciliation and social concerns in a post-conflict setting, a focus on efficiency rather than effectiveness when designing peacebuilding interventions, and the lack of meaningful local ownership of transformation processes despite principles and policies to the contrary. Peacebuilding efforts must be reformed to allow a more human-centred social justice approach, as opposed to the current focus on institutional efficiency.

International interventions in conflict situations are designed to bring violence to an end and to facilitate a process whereby conflict can be solved through political means. Generally, the formal cessation of hostilities provides an environment where international peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations can function. However, conflict interventions alter processes of social change, primarily by enabling elite bargaining processes. Peacebuilding efforts aimed at ensuring sustainable conflict transformation emerge as a consequence of this.

### **The Importance of Social Dynamics in Peacebuilding**

The social and political dimensions of conflict are often ignored in the current institution-building approach, which sees support to social recovery, justice and reconciliation as of secondary concern. Particularly in Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) processes, the emphasis has been on efficiency (number of individuals trained for possible participation in the formal economy) as opposed to sustainable transformation (ensuring meaningful livelihoods outside of the conflict cycle for former combatants). The social dynamics of reintegration, including community reintegration, often emerge as after-thoughts and 'lessons learned', rather than forming the basis of planning, monitoring and evaluation of interventions.

Against this backdrop, and the fact that technical state- and institution-building discourses have increasingly come to dominate peacebuilding work, the seminar critically assessed current peacebuilding practice, generally arguing for a more human-centred approach based on social justice, local ownership, gender equality and the developmental state.

## Session 2:

# UN Peacebuilding and the 2010 Review

In the context of the 2010 review of the UN PBC, it can be noted that while some progress has been made since the inception of the Commission, the linkages between conflict resolution, peacebuilding and sustainable/equitable development still need to be strengthened. It is imperative that peacebuilding work be more context-specific and that local ownership be strengthened.

### **The Role of the PBC in the UN System**

The rationale for the PBC's existence, as well as its role and agency in relation to other UN organs, should be assessed during the 2010 review. The agency of the Commission has to date been limited, and the strategic and coordinating roles of the Commission require further clarification. A key strength of the Commission has been its membership, drawing representation from across a broad geographical scope and providing a platform for countries from the South to engage meaningfully in the UN system on matters of peace, security and development. However, should the role and work of the Commission not be clarified and strengthened, the Commission risks losing relevance in conflict transformation, as well as credibility in the South.

The function of the Commission as related to the Security Council as well as with the specialised agencies of the UN should be reviewed. Peacebuilding efforts should be initiated as early as possible – but the international community often misses opportunities for early action. This challenge cannot be meaningfully addressed without greater clarity on the role and work of the PBC.

### **The PBC and Regional Organisations**

The 2010 review must consider developing strategies for the PBC to engage more directly and substantively with regional and sub-regional organisations. This is important since regional organisations provide valuable expertise and because conflicts almost always involve regional dimensions. National-level peacebuilding interventions that are not sensitive to regional conflict dynamics will have limited impact in the long run. Engagement with regional and sub-regional organisations can also contribute to building long-term regional capacity for conflict manage-

ment and transformation, critically lacking in many regions. In particular, closer collaboration between the Commission and the Conflict Management Division of the African Union through the AU's Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development policy framework could result in value-added in the design and implementation of peacebuilding efforts in Africa.

### **The PBC and Civil Society Organisations**

As further discussed in the section on local ownership, it is imperative to strengthen local capacity in order to build a peace that can last also after the international community has left. To date, there has been little or no engagement between the PBC and civil society organisations (CSO), whether in-country and more broadly. This is a component of the Commission's work that needs to be strengthened.

## Session 3: Planning, Coordination and Evaluation: Can We Improve Peacebuilding with Innovative Tools and Techniques?

### **The Coherence and Coordination Dilemma**

While there has been considerable innovation in terms of the planning and coordination of peacebuilding interventions, important challenges remain. There are many competing interests in the heterogeneous group of donors that fund peacebuilding activities and within donor governments. Indeed, there is not even a common and consistent definition of the term 'peacebuilding'. In addition, local actors may not be driven by the ambition of securing sustainable peace, but may be seeking to maximise their own power and influence. Such contradictions in fact are understandable, given that peacebuilding is a political and not a technical process, and challenges keep the system dynamic. In view of this, it is time for the peacebuilding community to consider the degree to which it is reasonable to expect coordination to succeed. Instead of continuously striving to improve tools for coordination, the peacebuilding community should come to terms with the fact that the tools currently available might well be as good as they are likely to be. The goals for collaboration may need to be adjusted to avoid a sense of failure.

It is not always possible or even desirable to divide efforts between the political and the technocratic. The ultimate aim must always be to find common ground and shared agendas through a smoothly crafted interplay between the two. For example, the process of formulating technical tools such as Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) has at times come to serve as a platform to find common ground on political issues. The donor community still does not employ technical tools such as the Whole of Government (WoGa) and Whole of Country (WoC) approaches as much as it could to improve coordination between donors and within donor governments, which in turn means that major challenges remain for peacebuilding work on the ground.

The current deficit in local ownership represents a missed opportunity for coordination, since a more vocal and affirmative host government might ensure more coherence and a better division of labour. Furthermore, capacity building has a role to play in improving coordination.

Cases of conflicting action within the international community (such as concurrent disarming and rearming efforts) might be the result of competing interests – or they could stem from inadequate coordination, capacity and leadership. Various different forms of capacity building may be needed to ensure that the common political ground that has been found does not get lost in the implementation phases.

### **The Call for Context-Sensitivity**

The discursive gap between headquarters and the staff working in the field represents a great challenge to coordination within humanitarian organisations, donor governments and the UN. The high-level policy rhetoric used in the headquarters of Northern capitals, where peacebuilding policies tend to be developed and adopted, does not seem to have absorbed the language used by the staff working with programme implementation in the field. A great deal of knowledge and potential synergies gets lost – but, even worse, some of the policies adopted may not be practically applicable on the ground. To counter this challenge, the peacebuilding community must develop locally adapted styles of working incorporating local culture as the main guiding principle. Where possible, practitioners should take the lead in terms of conceptualising peacebuilding efforts. They can liaise directly with local actors – CSOs as well as state actors – thus ensuring context-sensitivity, the promotion of local coordination capacity and the establishment and maintenance of partnerships for formulating of common goals.

This approach also includes giving due consideration to local community practices and the specific historical circumstances of each local context. Local cultural elements, in combination with economic development and employment creation, are crucial in enabling a culture of peace to take root in violent communities. Despite their self-evident nature, such suggestions are not easy to implement, especially if local cultural practices seem incomprehensible or even totally unacceptable to the international community. Here we might recall the voodoo ceremonies for peace in Haiti as a case in point, although less controversial cultural expressions such as music and sports could also be used to a much greater extent in peacebuilding work. It seems difficult to get donor organisations to recognise the importance of cultural activities. The international community, the donors in particular, will need to broaden the own cultural frame of reference and be more receptive to the importance of local cultural elements in peacebuilding work.

## Session 4: Strategic Frameworks and Local Ownership

### **Local Buy-In versus Local Ownership?**

The concept of local ownership is an oft-touted yet poorly understood principle in peacebuilding. Whilst consistently advocated, it remains challenging to implement in a consistent and sustainable manner. Local ownership has often been reduced to local *post-facto* buy-in, as a process of legitimisation for external actors or, in extreme cases, as an exit strategy for the international community. Furthermore, the principle of local ownership can also be both an empowering and a disempowering one, since it is by and large the international community that decides which forms of local ownership are desirable and which are less so, as well as what constitutes the 'local' aspect. In Afghanistan, for example, the international community for several years deemed the Taliban an undesirable local actor, one that could not be meaningfully engaged within the peace process. Recognition that the Taliban would have to be included as a part of a broader process of stabilisation and recovery came relatively late. Certainly the international community cannot legitimise actors that are engaged in criminal behaviour or commit human rights atrocities, but the political dynamics of local ownership, and of empowerment and disempowerment processes, need to be better understood. If peacebuilding processes continue their practice of legitimising and reinforcing the interests of actors closely aligned to the West, their ability to succeed in bringing about sustainable and just peace will be in doubt.

### **The Role of Civil Society in Strategic Frameworks**

Many local CSOs are brought on board in the implementation of peacebuilding efforts in their countries. This needs to be done to an even greater extent, while the way in which the engagement takes place needs rethinking. Today, local CSOs are mainly involved in project implementation, with limited clout when it comes to setting the agenda for peacebuilding work. This structural deficit must be addressed – and that will require political will, time and resources on the part of the international community.



### **Efficiency versus Effectiveness**

Current structural approaches to peacebuilding impact negatively on local ownership. The emphasis on efficiency and the tight timelines imposed on peacebuilding programmes result in a bias towards engaging with urban-based local organisations with previous experience of working with the international community. It takes time to identify local actors that may not have the capacity to engage on the international community's terms and that have not previously made their voices heard. This is one of several reasons why the current approach of the donor community needs to be amended to include context-specific social aspects more qualitative in nature.

Furthermore, the international community should not wait for the 'perfect' post-conflict environment, with peace agreements signed, to start identifying local capacity. Opportunities for promoting local ownership exist even in the midst of live conflict; and the earlier such efforts begin, the more successful are they likely to be. However, while speed in interventions is desirable, it should not be the guiding principle of peacebuilding, but must be balanced against the risk of institutional substitution. It is imperative to find out which capacities are available locally, before starting to deploy expatriates into countries. Today, external capacity is often sent in to cover all needs, whereas in many cases there are local capabilities to draw upon. If too little time is allocated to the planning of missions, peacebuilding efforts will continue to be characterised by the inability to identify local capacity and adapt efforts to the specific local circumstances. This is one of the main reasons why peacebuilding, despite its liberal intentions, often results in illiberal outcomes. Furthermore, mission planning needs time to ensure that the UN's personnel group is gender-balanced and includes capacities from the global South.

## Sessions 5 & 6: DDR – Challenges, Innovations and Trends for the Future

### **Conceptual Remarks**

Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) is in the process of being revised and reformed, in particular at field levels. A more comprehensive focus on local communities, rule of law and human security is gradually being included and adopted in programming, heralding a shift towards second- and third-generation DDR. Seminar participants also stressed the need for a more rigorous approach to the challenges of creating livelihoods and economic empowerment of ex-combatants and communities – an approach where concepts of social justice should be made central. In order for the reintegration component of DDR processes to bring about lasting change, it will be imperative to place economic development, notably employment creation and livelihoods, at the centre of DDR efforts. Seminar presentations and discussions further emphasised that, when the DDR concept was first designed, full-scale collection of weapons from combatants was never the central aim. Given the realities on the ground, collection of weapons from armed factions during insecure transition periods can at best yield symbolic results. Since the best outcome to be hoped for in relation to this D phase is to place weapons beyond use, ‘disarmament’ is here more aptly described as ‘effective weapons management’.

### **The Role of Donors**

Practitioners that drive programme innovation at the field level report various difficulties in relation to donors. There is a bias towards the well-recognised DDR project, which is seen as a tangible and tested project intervention in critical post-conflict phases. This contributes to a static interpretation of the concept and to path dependency in DDR work. Impediments to conceptual innovation are problematic since DDR work should ideally be adapted to each specific post-conflict context. Donor organisations may be aware of these challenges and be prepared to take risks to fund innovative projects: however, from their perspective there must also be a balance between risk and accountability.

**Economic development crucial to successful DDR**

In order to make DDR work, economic development, notably employment creation and livelihood issues, must figure at the top of the peacebuilding agenda. The R – reintegration – component cannot succeed if ex-combatants return to communities where jobs opportunities are scarce. The political economy of post-conflict societies is complex, and economic development does not simply take off as a result of completed DDR programmes. Measures to promote economic development should not be postponed until peacebuilding efforts are finalised, but need to be incorporated in all stages of peacebuilding work. Since economic challenges often have regional implications, and relevant regional economic forums should also be engaged in the process. However, it is not reasonable to expect this to be a task for DDR practitioners. Responsibility for engaging in long-term issues relating to economic development should be assumed by UN agencies and donor organisations jointly. This is discussed further in the next session.

## Session 7:

# Follow the Money – Role and Responsibility of Donors in Peacebuilding

### **Lack of accountability and oversight**

Lack of oversight, superficial record-keeping and inadequate transparency among donors make critical assessment, or ‘following the money’, difficult. Seminar presenters stressed that major donors tend to lack full oversight over how much and to which sectors within peacebuilding they are funnelling financial resources. This undermines strategic vision and accountability.

The way donor funding is disbursed to conflict ridden countries contribute to long-term harm to the countries in question and is characterised by large-scale waste.

### **Long-term harm caused by disbursement flows**

States receiving an influx of peacebuilding funds find their best-educated and skilled staff poached by international organisations; the influx of funds drives up inflation; and, importantly: the flow of money bypasses the government – thereby depriving national institutions of power, relevance and oversight. It is difficult to build states when the funds flowing into a country for that very purpose are instead systematically sidelining state structures. International organisations typically hold full control over the ‘vertical’ value chain of budgeting and programming, with sub-contracted local NGOs assisting in lower-level implementation. There are indications that problems riddling the disbursement of development aid are mirrored in the disbursement of peacebuilding funds: in development contexts, only 5.5 per cent of the total money-flows from donors are funds where national governments are in full charge and can make decisions. In the UN Peacebuilding Fund all resources thus far have gone via UN organisations, with some 80 per cent channelled via UNDP.

### **Large-scale wastage of funds**

Government departments, international organizations, NGOs, consultants and local representatives each skim off a share of the funds flowing

into peacebuilding countries, thereby causing large-scale waste of resources. There have been few systematic and comparative studies of this, but a recent OECD DAC meeting concluded that of the funding pledged to Sudan only 18 per cent had reached the intended end-beneficiaries.

A breakdown of the sectors receiving peacebuilding funds reveals that over 60–70 per cent goes to international military forces, 15–25 per cent to economic measures and 4–5 per cent to politically-related initiatives such as support for elections and police reform.

### **Destabilising effects of liberalisation**

Seminar presenters and commentators emphasised that the priority placed on free markets, privatisation and general economic liberalisation in the economic policies underlying peacebuilding had destabilising rather than stabilising effects on countries emerging from conflict. These economic policies are central elements when states are being (re)built. Aside from their direct and immediate effects, they also create important frameworks that structure how initiatives in other sectors are designed and implemented.

### **Whole of *country* – not whole of *government***

The tendency to marginalise state institutions in the disbursement of funds has important implications for the debate about ‘whole of government’ approaches. Seminar participants indicated that a good way forward would be a ‘whole of country’ approach where the national policies of the country in question could serve as a platform for coordination.

The discussion brought out the point that while lack of accountability is indeed a central and unfortunate shortcoming in peacebuilding, some forms of accountability might serve to undermine peacebuilding efforts. Local responses and initiatives that are appropriate and meaningful in some peacebuilding settings – like the use of traditional or religious ways of encouraging societal healing and collective action – may risk being halted if ‘the people back home’ in donor countries become aware of them. It is important that ideological preferences of the donors’ domestic constituencies do not overly dominate or dictate what can serve as constructive peacebuilding measures.

## Session 8:

# Critiques of peacebuilding – Do academic assessments capture the full scale of peacebuilding challenges?

### **Strengthen research capacity in the South**

There is a great need to strengthen local ownership of peacebuilding research and to ensure greater participation of scholars based in the South. The scholarly discourse on peacebuilding remains dominated by the North, although greater diversity is seen among authors of peacebuilding literature that is not purely academic. The real or perceived absence of local counterparts to engage in research on peacebuilding issues is a serious challenge in terms of improving the quality of research and making it more relevant to local actors and practitioners. Further measures should be taken to identify and support local research centres, providing funding for local students and scholars to be active in the South rather than solely allocating resources for them to develop their research at universities in the North. Furthermore, journal editors should not underestimate their roles as agents of discursive change and promoters of voices from the South.

It is also important to support local research capacity in specific post-conflict contexts. As peacebuilding is an *ad hoc* activity, it is challenging to predict in which areas to build up long-term strategies. However, it is at least clear that promoting local research capacity should be included in planning in areas where there are prolonged peacebuilding operations.

### **Practical use of peacebuilding research**

The findings of academic research are not always easy for practitioners and policy-makers to access. Nor do they always find practical use, although many scholars work hard to that end. The influence of peacebuilding critiques on policy and practice has been limited to date. To counter this, avenues should be created for greater networking and engagement among academic, policy-making and practitioner communities. Efforts to put forward scholarly conclusions by means of practitioner tools and practical policy recommendations should also be reinforced.

Practitioners often have ideas on how to improve peacebuilding efforts, but may lack the capacity needed to influence actual programme build-

ing. Closer consultation and increased information flows between experienced practitioners and scholars is needed. This would be useful also in view of the fact that few scholars based in the North have in-depth understanding of the empirical realities of peacebuilding. This is a challenge in terms of producing rich contextual research that is relevant to the practitioner community. At this stage in peacebuilding research, more empirical investigation and less theoretical work is what is needed. It is also necessary to conduct more anthropological and sociological research pertaining to post-conflict societies as social spaces.

Lastly, it is imperative to maintain the distinction between research findings and political advice. Scholars entering a policy debate to give recommendations need to ensure that convincing evidence supports their arguments, since they are ethically responsible for the advice provided. If the researcher is not convinced that the policy suggestions are solid, then it is sufficient to present the conclusions, which can then be further considered and applied by others.

# Conclusions

The aim of the Oslo conference was to provide a platform for reflection where stakeholders from a range of milieus could deliberate and critically assess current conceptual, ethical and methodological approaches to peacebuilding. The overarching theme of the discussions, the individual suggestions and the issues debated during the conference – all gave support to the view that it is time for a cognitive shift within peacebuilding. Today's structural, institution-building focus needs to be reformed and replaced with a human-centred approach with social justice as its guiding principle. Intangibles like local context, nation-building, social capital and the social contract must be placed at the centre of future peacebuilding efforts, a change which will require significant adjustment. It will no longer be feasible to plan and implement peacebuilding work solely on the basis of quantifiable output and strict timelines. Over the course of the conference, a great many innovative, practical suggestions were made as to how current peacebuilding approaches could be reformed to focus on social justice and genuine local ownership.

Peacebuilding must become more context-specific. To this end, greater flexibility and openness to conceptual innovation in the donor community are of paramount importance. In order to promote genuine local ownership, elements of local culture – notably spiritual practices, customary procedures for reconciliatory justice and gender equality – should be brought to the fore in peacebuilding practices. Many practitioners have considerable experience in this regard and could be instrumental in conceptualising such efforts. However, many of these elements are not acknowledged by the donor community, making such activities difficult to fund.

Sustainable economic revival remains the single most important variable for successful peacebuilding. Without employment creation and sustainable livelihoods, DDR and other peacebuilding efforts cannot succeed. The international community needs to work harder on measures to promote economic development. Decisive measures need to be taken to halt institutional substitution and the creation of parallel structures in-country. Donor organisations should be encouraged to move beyond the liberal free-market assumptions of the past. They need to recognise the importance of supporting sustainable and context-specific economic policies that meet the needs of the local people, not those of the international private sector.



Stakeholders from the global South should have a much greater say in all aspects of peacebuilding work. The capacity of researchers active in the South must be strengthened, local stakeholders should be accorded a greater role in conceptualisation and coordination efforts in-country, and the timelines and evaluation tools of donors need to be adjusted to provide the space needed for greater involvement of local CSOs in peacebuilding work. Regional organisations should increasingly take the lead in peacebuilding efforts. If they are not yet fully able to take up the task, capacity building must be made a priority. Finally, in the interest of strengthening voices from the South, the 2010 review of the UN PBC should give consideration to bolstering the position of the PBC position in the UN system, as regards the Security Council in particular.

# Annex Conference Program



## Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Peacebuilding: Towards Change in Concepts and Approaches?

NUPI & Noref

24 - 25 March 2010 Oslo, Norway

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### 1. Theme

This seminar creates space for a critical discussion on the question of whether the current mainstream peacebuilding approach is conceptually and structurally flawed. The seminar takes a broad look at peacebuilding by identifying key issues of concern and highlighting potentially promising foci of innovation and reform.

### 2. Purpose

In 2010 the UN Peacebuilding Commission will be under review and strategic reassessments are also currently being made of peacebuilding more broadly. Considerable rethinking is undertaken in a range of milieus, including among experts from host countries, practitioners and scholars. [The Norwegian Institute of International Affairs](#) (NUPI) and the [Norwegian Resource Centre for Peacebuilding](#) (Noref), with the additional assistance of the [Carnegie Corporation of New York](#) and the [Research Council of Norway](#), seek to enhance the exchange of ideas among representatives of these groups and create a space for further original and critical thinking on peacebuilding concepts and approaches. A key aim is to pool insights from 'northern' and 'southern' perspectives – as well as from practitioner, donor and academic approaches – to identify, acknowledge and analyze some of the shortcomings of the contemporary approaches to peacebuilding. This includes taking stock of key actors, instruments and policy tools that often form part of peacebuilding initiatives (the UN system, Peacebuilding Commission, EU, OECD, donor community, civil society etc.).

At the Oslo seminar special emphasis will be placed on the central roles and responsibility of key peacebuilding donor countries, such as Norway, in acknowledging potential conceptual and structural flaws in present approaches to

peacebuilding and the need for donor initiated change. There will be a follow up event to the Oslo seminar in New York in fall 2010, with a view to sharing some of the insights generated in Oslo with the UN Peacebuilding community as part of the 2010 review process.

### 3. Outputs

- (1) The Oslo seminar will bring together a select group of critical perspectives, facilitating a cross pollination of ideas and further developing our understanding of some of the shortcomings of contemporary peacebuilding and how that can be addressed.
- (2) A conference proceeding note summarising the discussion will be issued shortly after the seminar in order to ensure early and timely dissemination of key ideas from the discussions
- (3) The papers presented at the Oslo seminar can be published as NUPI Working Papers to share this critical thinking with a wider audience
- (4) Two journals, *Global Governance* and *The Journal of Peacebuilding and Development*, will each devote a special edition to this theme, and papers from the seminar will be considered for publication in these special issues.
- (5) The New York seminar will share the insights gained from the Oslo Seminar with the UN peacebuilding committee, with a view to contributing to the UN Peacebuilding Commission review process. A few papers will be selected and presented to the New York community in the form of a one day seminar.

### 4. Participants, Venue and Format

The seminar intends to spur exchange and debate among leading scholars, practitioners and donor representatives. The idea is to keep this a low-key event where we aim for intimate and in-depth discussions among the participants. We hope that participants can shape and inform each other's views and contribute to a larger common perspective on the state of peacebuilding practice in 2010. Participants to the seminar will include representatives from a broad range of peacebuilding actors. Participation is drawn from the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office, the United Nations Development Programme, Ministries of Foreign Affairs, non-governmental organisations, research institutes, development agencies, and the diplomatic community in Norway, and includes representation from Africa, Asia, Europe, North America and South America. Approximately 70 participants will attend the seminar.

The seminar venue is *Sem Gjestegård* (<http://www.semgestegard.no/>), a hotel situated in a picturesque location on the outskirts of Oslo (near airport express train stop 'Asker'). The seminar will take place in a welcoming and relaxed setting, with opportunities to go hiking or, possibly, skiing/sledging. There is a chance there could still be some snow in late March.

The presentations listed below will last 10-15 minutes and serve primarily as opening thoughts for a broader discussion among all participants. Each presentation will be followed by one discussant that will comment on the presentation and make one or two more points (5-8 minutes). Each session will have over one hour for discussion and interaction.

## 5. Seminar Programme

***Wednesday 24 March 2010***

**1100-1130 Tea and Coffee**

**1130-1200 Opening Session**

Moderator: Cedric de Coning, Research Fellow at ACCORD and NUPI  
Jan Egeland, Executive Director, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI)  
Tone Faret, Senior Adviser, Norwegian Resource Centre for Peacebuilding (Noref)

**1200-1315 Session 1: Rethinking Peacebuilding Assumptions**

Moderator: Vasu Gounden, Executive Director, African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD)  
Presentation: Roger MacGinty, Reader, University of St Andrews  
*Can Peacebuilding Overcome its Liberal Peace Prejudices?*  
Discussant: Astri Suhrke, Senior Research Fellow, Chr. Michelsen Institute

**1315-1430 Buffet Lunch**

**1430-1545 Session 2: UN Peacebuilding and the 2010 Review**

Moderator: Necla Tschirgi, Visiting Scholar, University of Ottawa  
Presentation: Kwesi Aning, Director of Research, Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Center  
*Key Considerations for the 2010 Peacebuilding Commission Review*  
Reidun Otteroy, Peacebuilding Support Team Coordinator, United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office  
*Implementation of the Secretary-General's Report on Peacebuilding: Looking Towards the 2010 Review*  
Discussant: Eli Stamnes, Senior Research Fellow, NUPI

**1545-1700      Session 3: Planning, Coordination and Evaluation: Can We Improve Peacebuilding With Innovative Tools and Techniques?**

Moderator: Pierre Schori, Former Special Representative of the Secretary General for Côte d'Ivoire

Presentation: Cedric de Coning, Research Fellow at ACCORD and NUPI  
*Moving Beyond the Technical: Facing up to Peacebuilding's Inherent Contradictions*

Discussant: Sarjoh Bah, Senior Fellow, Center for International Cooperation, New York University

**1800-2000 Welcome Dinner**

*Thursday 25 March 2010*

**0900-1015      Session 4: Strategic Frameworks and Local Ownership**

Moderator: Khalid Medani, Assistant Professor, Political Science Department and the Islamic Studies Institute McGill University

Presentation: Rubem Cesar, Director, Viva Rio:  
*Why is There a Local Ownership Problem in Peacebuilding and What Should be Done About it?*

Discussant: Monica Juma, Executive Director: Research, Africa Institute of South Africa

**1015-1045 Tea and Coffee**

**1045-1200      Session 5: DDR Challenges and Innovations in a Broader Peacebuilding Context**

Moderator: Mark Taylor, Deputy Managing Director, FAFO

Presentation: Stina Torjesen, Senior Research Fellow, NUPI:  
*Is DDR Counterproductive? Reflections on DDR and its Broader Potential*

Discussant: Erin McCandless, Adjunct Faculty, New School, Graduate Program in International Affairs and Editor: Journal of Peacebuilding and Development

### 1200-1315 Buffet Lunch

#### 1315-1430 Session 6: DDR: Future Trends

Moderator: Daniel Ladouceur, UNDP Kenya

Presentation: Desmond Molloy, Special Research Fellow, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies

*From Marginal to Mainstream? DDR in Non-Conventional Settings – Sri Lanka and Beyond*

Discussant: Cornelis Steenken, Coordinator United Nations Inter-Agency Working Group on DDR

### 1430-1445 Tea and Coffee

#### 14450-1600 Session 7: Follow the Money: What is the Role and Responsibility of Donors in pushing Peacebuilding Innovations?

Moderator: Stephen del Rosso, Director: International Peace and Security, Carnegie Corporation of New York

Presentation: Susan Woodward, Professor of Political Science, City University of New York *Rethinking Peacebuilding – Assessing Money Flows and Donor Leverage*

Discussant: Neil MacFarlane, Lester B Pearson Professor of International Relations, University of Oxford

#### 1560-1715 Session 8: Critiques of Peacebuilding: Do Academic Assessments Capture the Full Scale of Peacebuilding Challenges?

Moderator: Susanna Campbell, The Fletcher School, Tufts University

Presentation: Owen Greene, Research Director, Department of Peace Studies, University of Bradford

*Scholars and Peacebuilders: a Stocktaking of Academic Contributions to the Peacebuilding Agenda*

Discussant: Kristoffer Lidén, Research Fellow, PRIO

### 1715-1730 Closing Session

*Friday 26 March 2010*

**0900-1200**     **DDR Follow-on event**

Discussion meeting for researchers and practitioners on DDR

*What can we do to improve analysis and programming on DDR?*

**Chairs:** Des Molloy and Stina Torjesen



# Annex List of Participants



## Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Peacebuilding: Towards Change in Concepts and Approaches?

NUPI & Noref

24 - 25 March 2010 Oslo, Norway

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