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# Issue Brief: Perspectives on the Peacebuilding Commission and Mutual Accountability

NOVEMBER 2009

This issue brief was prepared by Jenna Slotin, Senior Program Officer, as part of IPI's work on peacebuilding and state fragility. This work is generously supported by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. It also fits within IPI's umbrella program, *Coping with Crisis, Conflict, and Change*, which is generously supported by the governments of Denmark, Finland, Greece, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

IPI's work on peacebuilding focuses on identifying gaps and promoting reform in peacebuilding policy, and on supporting the functioning of the UN's peacebuilding architecture by facilitating informal dialogue among member states and UN officials on peacebuilding issues.

IPI's work on state fragility provides policy analysis to enhance understanding of state fragility and improve international engagement with fragile states.

*The founding resolutions of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) (A/60/180, S/Res/1645) call for a review in 2010. As member states gear up for this review, IPI has prepared issue briefs to offer perspectives on aspects of the PBC's role. While there are several procedural issues that member states will want to address, the review provides an opportunity to reflect more broadly on the role of the PBC. These briefs are offered in that spirit. They are not intended to cover all aspects of the PBC's role, but rather to put forward food for thought on some elements of the PBC's comparative advantage.*

Mutual accountability has become one of several principles that underpin the PBC's work. The commission has facilitated the articulation of mutual commitments as part of the peacebuilding frameworks developed in Burundi, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, and the Central African Republic. This has begun to fill an important gap. But, the PBC has so far not fulfilled the full promise of this principle: to serve as a forum where national and international actors can hold each other to their commitments. This brief reflects on the PBC's experience with mutual accountability and puts it into a broader context to highlight why it is an area where the PBC can potentially add value.

## Filling a Critical Gap

With the guidance of the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), the PBC was quick to realize that postconflict countries often have several plans and strategies in place. Early efforts were made to acknowledge, build on, and complement these existing documents. The peacebuilding frameworks for each of the four countries on the PBC's agenda take note of these documents and encourage ongoing support for the activities they contain. However, as a recent PBSO paper notes, the PBC's country-specific meetings (CSMs) got bogged down in overly detailed discussions and negotiations on peacebuilding priorities.<sup>1</sup> As a result, the process of preparing peacebuilding frameworks became a burden rather than a benefit for national authorities and PBC members. Discussions are underway on how to make this process lighter in future countries.

Notwithstanding the process problems, the peacebuilding frameworks do offer something different as compared to the plethora of strategies and documents in each country: an articulation of the mutual commitments of national and international actors and the expectation of a regular review of progress against them. By way of comparison, Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), which were present in all four countries when the PBC's

<sup>1</sup> Peacebuilding Support Office, *Improving the Country Specific Meetings: New Approach for the New Countries Coming on the PBC Agenda*, October 1, 2009.

engagement began, provide a detailed discussion of priorities and activities and contain a very ambitious agenda of programs and reforms. Yet, experience suggests that one of the major challenges faced by postconflict countries is the slow, short-term, unpredictable, and opaque nature of external support on which they depend to implement these ambitious agendas.<sup>2</sup> This makes it extremely difficult for governments to plan, and it undermines their ability to assert ownership over peacebuilding and development processes. While PRSPs envision a monitoring and evaluation framework to track national authorities' implementation progress, these documents do not identify donors' or other domestic and international stakeholders' roles or commitments in support of PRSP implementation. Donor pledges are often articulated at separate roundtable meetings, but there is rarely, if ever, a framework for systematically reviewing whether donors are turning these pledges into concrete commitments and timely disbursements.

By adopting mutual accountability as a core principle of its engagement, the PBC has facilitated an articulation of the mutual commitments of national and international actors, and encouraged a review against those commitments at regular intervals through biannual reviews. This has created the impetus to track aid flows with strong support from the PBSO and called attention to the need to strengthen domestic capacity for monitoring and aid tracking.

However, the PBC has not so far taken these important steps to their logical conclusion. In Burundi, for example, pledges at the 2007 donor roundtable exceeded the initial appeal, but, a year later, only 30 percent of these pledges were disbursed.<sup>3</sup> Although the gap between pledges and disbursements was noted in a resource mapping document prepared by PBSO in advance of the first biannual review in June 2008,<sup>4</sup> it was not further

examined by the PBC as part of the review process.<sup>5</sup> By monitoring national and international progress against commitments, the PBC could provide the space needed to examine the shortcomings in both national actions and donor support that may be contributing to slow or uneven progress.

## Mutual Accountability in a Broader Context

Efforts within the PBC coincide with the global movement to improve the aid relationship. In the context of the Paris Declaration (2005) and the Accra Agenda for Action (2008), donor and partner countries have committed to several measures to make aid more effective. One element of this is to reorient the aid relationship to promote a greater spirit of partnership. A key element of this is mutual accountability, defined as

a process by which partners hold one another responsible for the commitments that they have voluntarily made to each other.<sup>6</sup>

It is expected to contribute to improved results by encouraging partner countries to strengthen their systems and policymaking on the one hand, and encouraging donors to increase aid, align their support with country-owned policies and rely more on country systems for aid delivery on the other hand.

Experience suggests that there are three key elements for a mutual accountability process: (1) generating a shared agenda, including mutual commitments; (2) monitoring and reviewing commitments and actions; and (3) ongoing dialogue and negotiation to facilitate (1) and (2). Sustained results, in the form of behavioral change, enhanced national ownership, and impact on the ground, are most likely if all three elements are linked in an iterative process.<sup>7</sup>

2 Michael Carnahan and Clare Lockhart, "Peacebuilding and Public Finance" in *Building States to Build Peace*, edited by Charles T. Call and Vanessa Wyeth (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2008), pp. 73-102; Rahul Chandran, Bruce Jones, and Natasha Smith, with Yoshino Funaki and Gigja Sorensen, "Recovering from War: Gaps in Early Action," (New York: NYU Center on International Cooperation, July 2008).

3 UN Security Council, Meeting on the Situation in Burundi, UN Doc. S/PV.5966, August, 2008

4 Peacebuilding Support Office, Mapping of Resources and Gaps for the Implementation of the Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding in Burundi, June 23, 2008.

5 General Assembly / Security Council, Recommendations of the Biannual Review of the Implementation of the Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding in Burundi, UN Doc. PBC/2/BDI/L.2, June 19, 2008.

6 OECD-DAC, "Issues Brief 1: Mutual Accountability," June 2009, available at [www.oecd.org/dataoecd/32/19/43408716.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/32/19/43408716.pdf).

As difficult as this is to achieve in most developing countries, it presents unique challenges in postconflict countries where the capacity of national authorities to implement reforms, and coordinate, monitor, and track assistance is severely limited. Yet, the concept of a compact has been promoted in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Timor-Leste—places where the challenges seem almost insurmountable.

## What Does the PBC Have to Offer?

In many ways the PBC has been a pioneer in this area. Early discussions surrounding the PBC's role and comparative advantage emphasized the idea of a compact and the principle of mutual accountability,<sup>8</sup> and the commission has begun to translate this into practice.

When seen in the broader context of aid effectiveness, the PBC is ideally placed to facilitate the mutual accountability processes described above. There will always be other fora that have important roles to play in each country, whether it be strengthening domestic accountability between the government and its citizens, or improving transparency between the government and the subgroup of donors that provide budget support. But, the diverse composition of the PBC and the flexibility of its CSMs provide a unique forum for ongoing dialogue at the international level by leveraging attention among donors and bringing nongovernmental actors and regional players into the discussion. The commission has demonstrated that it can facilitate the articulation of a shared agenda and mutual commitments, and the biannual review process offers a space to monitor progress against these commitments.

An area of unexploited potential is the possible role of the Organizational Committee in drawing policy lessons regarding mutual accountability from across the cases on the PBC's agenda and feeding these into global debates on aid effective-

ness, in particular the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding. The International Dialogue was a product of the Third High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Accra (2008). It seeks to examine bottlenecks to and good practices in effective international support in a range of fragile and conflict-affected countries. Ultimately, it aims to reach consensus on a set of objectives and principles that should help focus national and international efforts at the country level.<sup>9</sup> Drawing on its experience, the PBC has much to offer these discussions.

## Conclusion

The PBC has begun to serve as a forum to articulate mutual commitments and monitor progress against these commitments in the countries on its agenda. This links up with global efforts to promote a spirit of partnership between donor and partner countries to produce better development results. The 2010 review offers an opportunity to build on what works and focus the PBC's attention on those areas where it has been able to demonstrate the potential for real added value. Staying focused on the articulation of mutual commitments around priorities and plans developed in-country, and putting more critical appraisal behind its reviews of progress against those commitments, will enable it to do just that.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> International Peace Academy and NYU Center on International Cooperation, "Meeting Note: Seminar on Integrated Peacebuilding Strategies," March 1, 2007; Amy Scott and Vanessa Wyeth, *rappoteurs*, "Putting Decisions into Practice: How Will the UN Peacebuilding Commission Fulfill its Mandate?" Report on Wilton Park Conference WPS06/2, April 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Forty donor governments, partner countries, and international organizations have joined the dialogue. It is co-chaired by the United Kingdom and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. For more details, see [www.oecd.org/site/0,3407,en\\_21571361\\_43407692\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/site/0,3407,en_21571361_43407692_1_1_1_1_1,1,00.html).

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