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UTSTEIN STUDY FOLLOW-UP: TWO CONCEPT PAPERS

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UTSTEIN STUDY FOLLOW-UP: TWO CONCEPT PAPERS

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Introduction

The joint *Utstein* study of peacebuilding experience was conducted during 2002-3 and presented at an international seminar in Oslo in December 2003. The overview report of the joint study was published by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2004.*

The study was based on a survey of 336 peacebuilding projects conducted by Germany, Netherlands, Norway and the UK. Its main finding was the existence of what it characterised as a 'strategic deficit' in peacebuilding. The overview report's recommendations for correcting this deficit were fell under three headings – policy, evaluation and research. Each heading indicated also the audience to whom the recommendations could be of particular interest.

- Policy recommendations in the *Utstein* study concerned the benefits of
 - stablishing strategic frameworks both for a general approach to peacebuilding and for specific peacebuilding interventions,
 - establishing institutionally light standing arrangements to encourage and enhance cooperation among donor governments.
- Evaluation recommendations concerned
 - the advantages of shifting the effort to assessment of peacebuilding from the project level to the level of peacebuilding strategy,
 - the need to improve the archiving of project information, and the benefit of conducting multi-donor joint evaluations of peacebuilding.
- Research recommendations set some challenges both for theoretical research and applied research:
 - challenges for theoretical research lay in

* *Towards a Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding: Getting Their Act Together: Overview report of the Joint Utstein Study of Peacebuilding* (Evaluation Report 1/2004) Oslo, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2004.

- establishing techniques absorptive capacity,
- attempting to develop a viable method for project impact assessment,
- the explanation of the roots of the strategic deficit in peacebuilding;
- tasks for applied research were identified in
 - comparing models and methodologies of conflict assessment,
 - examining the meaning of local ownership.

The *Utstein* group is a loose association of six donor governments – Canada, Germany, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the UK* – with a commitment to promoting increased coherence, coordination and cooperation on various issues including those activities variously characterised as conflict prevention, conflict management and peacebuilding. The group’s approach is to encourage coalitions among donor governments on specific issues; it is not necessary to be a member of the *Utstein* group in order to join such coalitions, nor is it obligatory on the group’s members to join all such coalitions. The group is, therefore, a forum that may be appropriate for launching various initiatives, especially those in which coherence, coordination and cooperation are keynotes.

In keeping with this approach, proposals for following up the *Utstein* study’s findings and recommendations imply no more than an offer of potential cooperation among interested donor governments. Among the recommendations in the overview report, two are selected here for a discussion of their follow-up potential:

- A multi-donor peacebuilding evaluation – which is explored in the form of an initial draft of possible Terms of Reference;
- The issue of local ownership – which is explored in a thinkpiece on research possibilities on the issue.

Throughout, the definition of peacebuilding is the same as in the *Utstein* study:

Peacebuilding attempts to encourage the development of the structural conditions, attitudes and modes of political behaviour that may permit peaceful, stable and ultimately prosperous social and economic development. Peacebuilding activities are designed to contribute to ending or avoiding armed conflict and may be carried out during armed conflict, in its wake, or as an attempt to prevent an anticipated armed conflict from starting.**

* The joint study covered four of the six current *Utstein* government’s peacebuilding projects, because Canada and Sweden has not joined *Utstein* at the time the study was initiated.

** * *Towards a Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding: Getting Their Act Together*, p.20.

CONCEPT PAPER 1: MULTI-DONOR EVALUATION

FIRST DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE

Objective

The objective of the multi-donor evaluation will be to contribute to improving support to peacebuilding by donor governments and agencies. This objective will be fulfilled by a study that looks at the peacebuilding activities of several donor governments in a single country and evaluates the results, the degree of strategic coordination of the various governments' activities, and the relationship between coordination and results.

Key issues and questions

The Brahimi Report of 2000 pointed out in vivid detail the demanding nature of peacebuilding, with specific reference to the cases of Kosovo and East Timor:

‘These operations face challenges and responsibilities that are unique among United Nations field operations. No other operation must set and enforce the law, establish customs services and regulations, set and collect business and personal taxes, attract foreign investment, adjudicate property disputes and liabilities for war damage, reconstruct and operate all public utilities, create a banking system, run schools and pay teachers and collect the garbage – in a war-damaged society, using voluntary contributions, because the assessed mission budget, even for such “transitional administration” missions, does not fund local administration itself. In addition to such tasks, these missions must also try to rebuild civil society and promote respect for human rights, in places where grievance is widespread and grudges run deep.’*

The perspective in this quotation is on a single operation. However, in general, albeit to different degrees, peace operations are not unitary. In most cases it is somewhat misleading to talk of a peace operation in a particular country; rather, there are several peace operations going on at once. So while this passage from the Brahimi report reflects the challenges of peace operations, it actually under-states their complexity.

There is a multiplicity of actors, differentiated along several dimensions: for example, different governments, inter-governmental organisations, major non-governmental organisations, local non-governmental organisations, units or representatives from international armed forces, private companies. The dividing lines

* *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*, chaired by Lakhdar Brahimi, August 2000; available http://www.un.org/peace/reports/peace_operations/docs/ – para 77.

– civilian/military, national/ international, governmental/inter-governmental/non-governmental, public-sector/private-sector – all imply at least the potential of major differences in ways of working and organisational culture. Moreover different organisations that fall in the same category when viewed along those cross-sections fall into different categories if viewed on others, such as the actors' national origins.

Coordination of the activities of such a variety of actors is, self-evidently, a complex task. Taking a peacebuilding intervention as a whole, it is likely that some parts are carried without any effective coordination between the different international actors, while in some parts there may be quite significant degrees of coordination. Some components of the overall peacebuilding intervention may be particularly conducive to coordination – for example, some large programmes involving multiple donors, such as Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) and Security Sector Reform (SSR). On the other hand it is equally possible that some components are particularly difficult to coordinate, such as those activities dubbed 'strategy-resistant' in the overview report of the *Utstein* study – especially DDR (again), humanitarian mine action and some socio-economic projects; these three categories of peacebuilding seemed often to be treated as if their strategic purpose were self-evident.* It is also possible, of course, that projects are coordinated without there being a coordinated strategy, simply on the basis of a convenient division of labour.

A multi-donor evaluation could be a way to assess coordination as well as results in a complex peacebuilding intervention, and to consider the outcomes of these two lines of enquiry alongside each other. There are, therefore, three sets of questions at the heart of the evaluation:

1. What components of the donors' overall assistance to the peacebuilding effort show
 - a. Strategic coordination among donors?
 - b. A lack of strategic coordination among donors?
2. What is the identifiable impact or effect within the general peacebuilding effort of
 - a. Strategically coordinated decisions and actions by donors?
 - b. Strategically non-coordinated decisions and actions by donors?
3. In a comparison between the impact and effect of strategically coordinated and non-coordinated decisions, what differences can be traced to the degree of coordination?

It is the aim of the multi-donor evaluation to answer these questions as they apply to a specific peacebuilding effort.

* *Towards a Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding: Getting Their Act Together*, p.53.

Activities

The *Utstein* study took as its starting point a focus on two levels of donor government activity – stated policies and projects supported in the name of those policies. The major part of the empirical research and the basis for comparative findings was a survey of 336 peacebuilding projects. A major finding of the study was that, between the policies and the projects, there was a strategic deficit.

The objective of the multi-donor evaluation refers both to coordination and to results achieved, as well as to the relationship between them. The starting point for the study, therefore, is a twofold focus on the stated strategies of donor governments and on activities carried out, including projects supported, in the name of those strategies. To specify further:

Donor governments' strategies: These are to be found in official statements of strategy whether in the form of strategic documents (which may be published or internal), or speeches by ministers or key senior officials. Where strategy has to be inferred from activity or from the aggregate of a number of official statements that incompletely set out strategic perspectives, it may be that an explicit strategy exists but has not been publicised as such. This is unlikely to be so, however, when the different sources permit contradictory inferences to be drawn. And even where the inferred strategy is consistent, the lack of publicised strategic statement may make strategic coordination difficult.

Projects: Discrete activities funded by one or more donor governments or agencies, that may be carried out over a variable time-period with a consistent aim and objective. Differences of terminology between donors and implementing agencies sometimes lead to confusion over what is a project and what is a programme. The evaluation study should set its own vocabulary and use it consistently.

Other activities: Donor governments are active in peacebuilding in other ways in addition to funding projects – direct budget support, political and diplomatic activities, trade promotion, etc. These should also be included within the scope of the evaluation.

Impact

In the multi-donor evaluation, as in all peacebuilding evaluations, a key challenge is determining how to assess the impact of activities. The overview report of the *Utstein* study argued that there is no reliable way to assess the impact of individual projects (though their results and outcomes can be assessed) and that impact assessment should therefore be shifted to the strategic level. The ability to do so, however, presupposes that there is a strategy (or are strategies) in place, providing benchmarks against which progress can be measured. The multi-donor evaluation provides an opportunity to test the feasibility of the proposal to focus impact assessment on the strategic level. The evaluation should focus in the first place on the donor

governments' strategic goals – whether explicit or inferred – and assess progress towards meeting them. This will necessitate a threefold analytical process, looking

- first at changes in the situation in the country where peacebuilding is being implemented,
- second at whether and how those changes reflect progress towards the goals of individual donors,
- and third at whether and changes in the conflict context reflect progress towards the overall goals of the donor community as a group.

Tasks in the evaluation

In order to meet the objective and aims set out above, the evaluation will need to accomplish the following tasks among others:

- Evaluating the cogency of the donor governments' strategic goals themselves – that is to say, asking whether they are the right goals and whether they appear to be adequately grounded in a contextual analysis;
- Evaluating the strategic fit between activities and goals and thus the consistency of the donor governments' peacebuilding efforts;
- Evaluating the strategic fit between the goals of the various donor governments, and thus consistency between their efforts;
- Identifying and assessing the utility of the methods or forms of coordination in use among the donor governments in planning, in aligning strategic perspectives, in assuring coherence, and in assessing outcomes and impacts – are they explicit or implicit, formal or informal modes of coordination (e.g., joint statements, minutes of meetings, shared understandings, etc)?
- Identifying the locus and depth of coordination: how deep does it go; is it field coordination or between capitals or both; does coordination at upper levels produce consistency throughout the effort?
- Identifying how success is measured in the donor governments, and the degree to which the perception and definition of success are the same in the field and in the donor capitals as well as among the different donor governments;
- Analysing changes in the situation of the recipient country in terms of its prospects for conflict escalation or sustaining peace;
- Identifying and analysing whether changes in the situation are related to peacebuilding activities;
- Identifying and analysing whether peacebuilding effectiveness is related to the degree of strategic coordination among donor governments.

To accomplish these tasks and any others that the study team identifies as essential to meeting the objective and aim of the multi-donor evaluation, the team will

need to establish an agreed empirical base of the donor governments' expressions of strategy and their activities. For ease of implementation, the study team should focus its attention on larger-scale efforts on larger-scale projects and programmes.

Scope, study team and timetable

The evaluation study will evaluate the peacebuilding activities directly implemented, financially supported and/or promoted and facilitated by a group of donor governments in a single recipient country (see next section).

The evaluation study will look at the activities only of the donor governments participating in the multi-donor evaluation. However, the assessment of these activities must self-evidently be located in the context of the recipient country, and analysis of that context is an integral part of the work of the evaluation. Thus, the effects of the activities of other donor governments along with other actors including the recipient government and political, corporate and NGO actors will necessarily be included in the study.

The study team for the evaluation will be constructed along the same lines as the joint *Utstein* study team –one coordinating centre as lead contractor, plus one research team from each participating donor country. Care should be taken to establish an alignment of methodologies among the national research teams as the first step in the process. The study will be overseen by an international reference group made up of representatives of the participating governments. The role of the reference group is to facilitate the study, which is an independent evaluation conducted under standard evaluation norms.

The estimated time to complete evaluation is fifteen months from the time that the last participating donor government to join the study confirms the financial allocation for its participation. The period is estimated as follows:

- Three months set-up,
- Nine months study,
- Three months write up.

The conclusions will be presented at a multi-donor meeting.

Country selection

Criteria for selecting a recipient country on which to focus the multi-donor evaluation are that

- Peacebuilding activities are implemented/supported by several donor governments;
- The peacebuilding activity is current or very recent;
- The peacebuilding activity has been going on for at least two years at the time the evaluation commences.

The first criterion is self-evident; it is perhaps worth noting that the fact the recipient country must be one where several donor governments are active in peacebuilding means it will likely be a high profile case. The second is required because it is noted in the *Utstein* overview report that peacebuilding is field that is both new and developing, and evaluation results therefore risk being of purely historical interest unless the work evaluated is current or very recent. The third is required because it is extremely difficult to assess the results of peacebuilding in a shorter time frame; even so, findings about impact must be provisional and conditional – as in fact they would need to be even if the time frame were much longer.

In addition there are political criteria that will figure in case selection. Donor governments will likely not want cases they find particularly sensitive to be included in a multi-donor evaluation of which they are part. For this reason, five options are advanced here, with comments:

- **Afghanistan:** Potential donor sensitivity; otherwise an excellent case – a wide range of activities, a difficult environment and enormous task, with intertwined problems of warlordism and criminality, destruction and underdevelopment. There are multiple donors and INGOs and a relatively strong local actor in the form of the Kabul government. The elections mark an important landmark after three years, creating a feasible and worthwhile timeframe for the study. The differing degrees of security and development progress in different parts of the country make it an especially effective choice.
- **Angola:** Possibly less effective choice because of limited range of donors; otherwise an interesting case – brutal warfare with severe consequences, enormous needs and natural resources that could be the basis of meeting them effectively. But general conclusions may be hard to draw not only because of the transition straight from a war of independence to civil war in 1975, but also because combat ended following the victory of the government rather than by agreement.
- **DR Congo:** Excellent choice if there is no issue of donor sensitivity – a country in which peace and stability are far from assured, and in which the problem is not only due to internal spoilers and conflict lines but also grows from the ‘bad neighbourhood’ in which DRC finds itself. Daunting problems of enormous scale in an impoverished but potentially rich country, suggesting maximum need for strategic coordination of donor efforts. The time it is likely to take to agree and prepare a multi-donor evaluation suggests it will begin only after the date for elections in June/July 2005; if held (and even if not held), the election date offers an appropriate landmark that will aid impact assessment.
- **Sri Lanka:** An in principle excellent case that may be difficult due to sensitivities, both because of the peace process and because of regional geo-

politics. Development policies have first needed to deal with protracted conflict, and then have had to adapt to a new and uncertain situation created by the ceasefire. The argument over interim authority for the LTTE in the north and north east leads to a particularly sharp politicisation of issues surrounding development assistance for peacebuilding.

- **Nepal:** Excellent case that may be marred by donor sensitivity because of local and regional resistance to the idea of third parties in the peace process; this may spill over into responses to an initiative of this sort. Otherwise, there multiple donors, intractable conflict, a stalled peace process, an incapable local political elite and an intransigent adversary, in an underdeveloped country in which transport and basic communications remains exceptionally difficult. Development assistance has had to adjust to changing conditions following the outbreak of war and the growing authority and self-confidence of the insurgents.

Various other possible cases were screened out for a variety of reasons. For example, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo are well-ploughed ground, as is Cambodia; in other words, further studies at this point would not add much to current knowledge. In the case of Sudan and of Liberia, the issue is one of timing, while in the case of Guatemala the problem may be that it is not so current and with not such a wide range of donors as some other cases.

On balance, Afghanistan, DR Congo and Nepal appear to be the most promising cases. This is, however, subject to further enquiry and verification.

CONCEPT PAPER 2: THE MEANING OF LOCAL OWNERSHIP

OUTLINE RESEARCH NOTE

The problem

Local ownership is generally perceived as a positive in development circles. It takes development assistance away from possible tendencies towards a top-down approach, the cult of the northern expert come to solve this or that country's problems, or the foisting of northern (and, *a priori*, inappropriate) models of development on poor countries. The concept of local ownership takes development assistance towards respect for local partners, cooperation rather than aid, the value of local knowledge and the importance of responding to it, and likewise the necessity of local legitimacy. In all these ways and others, the concept of local ownership is extremely important – indeed, an essential part of modern development cooperation – and nothing in what follows is meant to detract from it.

Local ownership is a complex concept at the best of times, and when conflict is looming, active or recent and with a high risk of return, that is not the best of times. In the context of peacebuilding, the concept of local ownership may require very different treatment.

On the positive side, in peacebuilding, it is particularly important to ensure that a wide range of actors are empowered and encouraged to take part in the peace process. It is impossible to mount effective programmes of Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration without social buy-in, which can only be achieved by mobilising civil society organisations. Likewise Security Sector Reform requires a considerable degree of social buy-in, for which, again, NGOs are the best vehicle. If there is a local private sector, it can be brought into activities that help to re-establish a viable economic basis for development and local private companies can and should be the contractors in physical reconstruction of the economic infrastructure, housing, hospitals, schools etc. To establish a well-ordered state based on democratic governance, the roles of the independent media and NGOs are essential, and the NGOs and religious organisations are called on to play a key role in some of the reconciliation and healing work that is a necessary part of a broader peace process. For all of these activities, local ownership is essential; it can be developed over time because the conditions for local ownership may not exist during war or in its immediate aftermath – but to get to the point where the peace process is locally owned by a wide variety of actors is an essential ingredient for success.

There is, however, also a negative side. The key issue here is that of resources. Development cooperation brings either resources or resource multipliers into a region,

country or district. Whatever the geographical framework, those resources are valuable assets that can themselves become the focus of political rivalry. In peacebuilding, the conflict context (whatever stage the conflict has reached) is likely either to have destabilised power relations or to be the consequence of a destabilisation of power relations that occurred by some other means (economic crisis, political transition, assassination of a leader, death of a long-term leader, effects of regional war, etc). Whatever the source of the unstable power relations, it is in that context more than normally important for the contenders for power to take control of as much of the incoming resources as possible. In other words, the conflict context sharpens rivalry for power and control of resources and makes development cooperation funds a particularly tempting target.

One way in which this may happen is under the mask of local ownership – through national governments, municipal governments, companies and NGOs in which corruption allows the rechannelling of resources from the donors' purpose to sectional political advantage.

Where this does happen, local partners of one kind or another who are engaged in rechannelling resources from one purpose to another and wholly contrary goal can be regarded as spoilers in the peace process. They may be macro-spoilers – national political leaders, power-brokers and local warlords – or micro-spoilers, politically influential at a district or community level, leaders of small NGOs, etc. At best, rechannelled resources are not used for the peace process; at worst, they are used directly against it to support criminality, extremist politics and worse.

Research direction

There are many ways in which the meaning of local ownership could be taken on for research proposes and many ways in which it could get almost completely out of hand. A comparative study of the sorts of organisation that become local partners, for example, would seem like a convincing starting point for a bottom-up study. However, in any given country there at least several hundred and often many thousands of actors that could be included in the scope of such a study. It would make for a more orderly – and therefore quicker – study to take international NGOs as the starting point and to look at their experience, their own lessons learned, and their ways of selecting viable local partners who do (or will) assume local ownership.

This would, in other words, be a study aimed at producing best practice guidelines, based in experience, on how international NGOs with a record of involvement in peacebuilding, select local partners. It would be conceptually neat and would increase the utility of the study if it were large enough to include a further comparative element, by assessing local ownership in a broader development context; to this end, either an international NGO with no peacebuilding experience, or one which is active both in peacebuilding and in broader development, should be included in the study.

The study would aim to identify how choices are made about engaging with local partners. Thus, international NGOs who have natural partners, such as the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement, for example, or faith-based organisations working within their own denomination, would not be the right candidates for studying. For purposes of comparison, it would be useful to take four international NGOs from four different home countries – three engaged in peacebuilding and one not (or a total of three international NGOs, two engaged only in peacebuilding, and one engaged both in peacebuilding and broader development).

The focus of study would be

- The general approach of the international NGO to partnership and local ownership;
- A case study in each NGO.

It will be most effective if the case study is of the NGO's engagement in a given country, in which its activities should be of such a size that it has multiple partners.

The empirical basis and method of the study would be as follows:

- Statements of policies and interviews with senior managers, to elicit the general approach;
- Project documentation, interviews with implementation managers and, if possible, interviews with funders to elicit the basis of choices made in the engagement in a particular country;
- Interviews with representatives of local partners to identify whether their sense of ownership accords with that imputed to them by the international NGO;
- Further background study and interviews to evaluate the degree to which any analyses made by the international NGO as a basis for its choice of local partners are shared by others knowledgeable about the particular country;
- In cases where the international NGO does not make a conscious choice about local partners, how else does it safeguard the integrity of its activities and the best use of money entrusted to it?

Depending on the number of cases chosen and their scale, such a study could be satisfactorily completed in a 9-12 month period.