

Happily ever after

How UN member states can ensure sustainable peace

Amanda Lucey, Gustavo de Carvalho and Sibongile Gida

Key points

Member states should urgently consider the following:

- 1 Which peacebuilding mechanisms can be used to increase coordination among, and provide guidance to, UN entities.
- 2 How peacebuilding objectives are decided on and monitored, especially in the context of peacekeeping mandates.
- 3 What preventative criteria and indicators should be used for deciding when to intervene in fragile countries.
- 4 How partnerships with regional/sub-regional organisations can be strengthened.
- 5 Which mechanisms would ensure a better transition from a peacekeeping mission to a UN country team.
- 6 Which mechanisms would ensure predictable and stable peacebuilding financing in the UN.
- 7 What should be included in a UN resolution on sustaining peace.

Summary

The United Nations (UN) 2015 peacebuilding review makes a number of recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of its peacebuilding responses across different UN entities. One of the key messages in this review relates to the core role of conflict prevention in sustaining peace. This policy brief examines how member states can respond to the recommendations made in the review, with a view to enhancing conflict prevention in particular.

PEACEBUILDING IN THE United Nations (UN) is at a crossroads in its efforts to be more relevant and effective. In 2014, the UN General Assembly and the Security Council called for a review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture (UNPBA). A group of seven global peacebuilding experts was appointed to carry out this task and their report was released on 29 June 2015.

The report made a number of peacebuilding recommendations aimed at different entities across the UN system, including through the three components of the UNPBA – namely the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) and Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) – and through other structures such as the General Assembly, Security Council and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

The 2015 peacebuilding report provides a number of key messages, focusing on what needs to be done within the UN system if peacebuilding is to be successful. One of the principal points in the report relates to the need for a more holistic approach to peacebuilding, looking in particular at the core role of conflict prevention. While this point raises a number of important conceptual issues, how the member states choose to respond will determine the relevance of this report, and how successful peacebuilding is in the future.

With member states in the General Assembly and Security Council expected to conduct the next round of discussions in September/October under the 2015 UNPBA

review, this policy brief unpacks the concept of conflict prevention across the UN system, from its inception to the current review's notion of 'sustaining peace'. The brief situates the peacebuilding arguments in the context of other ongoing processes such as the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) review and global study on the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on women, peace and security. Most importantly it presents some considerations that member states will have to make in the next phase of the review.

A normative shift: from post-conflict to prevention

The concept of peacebuilding has evolved since it was first described in the 1992 report, an *Agenda for Peace*.¹ In this initial description, peacebuilding was defined as part of a seemingly linear process that occurred in the post-conflict phase, following preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peacekeeping actions.² During subsequent years, peacebuilding responses were developed in the UN system as an afterthought, which can be exemplified in how the 2000 Report on the Panel of Peace Operations – otherwise known as the Brahimi report – described peacebuilding as 'activities undertaken on the far side of conflict to reassemble the foundations of peace'.³

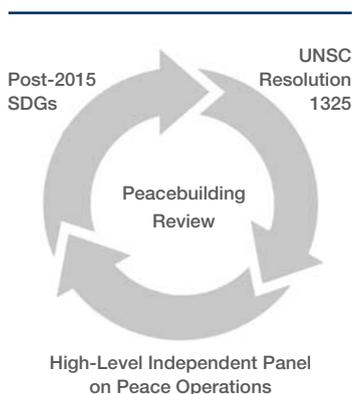
The current peacebuilding definition the UN uses dates back to 2007 and describes peacebuilding as 'a range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and to lay the foundations for sustainable peace and development. Peacebuilding strategies ... should comprise a carefully prioritized, sequenced, and therefore relatively narrow set of activities aimed at achieving the above objectives'.⁴

An emerging political discourse within the UN has incorporated the idea that it is necessary to address the root causes of conflict

In principle this concept integrates peacebuilding in pre- and post-conflict situational analysis, but maintains it in decision making as part of a sequence of actions. However, an emerging political discourse within the UN has incorporated the idea that it is necessary to address the root causes of conflict, and acknowledges that peacebuilding strategies should also contain preventive elements.⁵

In April 2013 a debate was held in the Security Council on prevention of conflicts in Africa. At this gathering, the president of the Security Council stated: 'The Security Council recognizes the importance of a comprehensive strategy comprising operational and structural measures for prevention of armed conflict and encourages the development of measures to address the root-causes of conflicts to ensure sustainable peace'.⁶ In 2014 a discussion on causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa led the Security Council to adopt a resolution that affirmed its commitment to using UN tools to ensure early warning and prevention.⁷

Yet, as noted by the HIPPO report, despite the need for a culture of prevention, this has failed to materialise, with resolutions and recommendations often not being implemented.⁸ The term *conflict prevention* has also been particularly controversial among the Permanent Five (P-5) members of the Security Council. Some countries



PEACEBUILDING ARGUMENTS SHOULD BE SEEN IN THE CONTEXT OF OTHER ONGOING PROCESSES

also see conflict prevention as an opportunity for intervention in fragile states without the consent of local parties.⁹

The concern is particularly related to the fears that preventive action could potentially lead to pre-emptive action.¹⁰ For example, China has stated that, while it advocates addressing the root causes of conflict, particularly through economic and social growth, ‘the international community should fully respect African choices and refrain from arbitrary interventions or the imposition of ideas on others.’ Similarly, Russia has noted that the primary responsibility for the prevention of conflicts lies within the affected countries themselves, and that international partners should not impose solutions. This is juxtaposed with France’s position, which has argued that the international community must act to stop atrocities or otherwise risk being complicit.¹¹

In the current review, peacebuilding is seen through the optics of ‘sustaining peace’, where prevention is an integral part of peacebuilding and would not be confined to post-conflict scenarios. Sustaining peace becomes a lens through which peacemaking and peacekeeping are viewed. Peacebuilding must therefore be the common principle flowing through all UN engagements.

From a point of view of definition, the report provides an important shift for ongoing responses, which includes a change in the understanding of conflict prevention, and the provision of coordination. It highlights the need to deal with conflict prevention and rapid responses (i.e. mediation processes, peacekeeping operations, etc.) in the context of addressing root causes of conflicts, which tend to be longer-term issues.¹²

Thus, it is clear that the advisory group expects peacebuilding to become an umbrella concept that brings together different elements of conflict resolution. It is the core trying to make the UN think and act more holistically, avoiding the fragmentation and the silo approaches that still dominate the institution. Reinforcing a key conclusion of the HIPPO report, the peacebuilding review argues that unless such fragmentation is addressed through a combination of conceptual clarity, political understanding and structural adjustments, the UN system’s response to threats to international peace and security will continue to be ineffective.

Understanding prevention in a changing UN system

UN peace operations have become progressively multi-faceted, and often include peacebuilding-related tasks, namely supporting state-building processes, governance and

economic development activities.¹³ Over the past 20 years, UN multidimensional peacekeeping has also played an important role in the early stages of peacebuilding efforts and setting the scene for implementing preventive measures.¹⁴

Yet, the UN has consistently lacked major institutional capacity to deal with prevention. This was reflected in the 2002 establishment of the underused¹⁵ ad hoc working group on Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa.¹⁶ Following a report from the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change, the UN created the Peacebuilding Commission in 2005, an intergovernmental body mandated to support countries recovering from conflict. In addition, the PBF and PBSO were set up to financially and technically assist the UN’s peacebuilding endeavours. However, there has been widespread agreement that the UNPBA has not lived up to expectations.¹⁷

Peacebuilding must be the common principle flowing through all UN engagements

This is particularly visible in the area of prevention. For example, in 2011 the engagement of the PBC with Guinea, a country that was not on the Security Council agenda, should have positioned the Commission to exercise its advocacy and accompaniment function as part of broader efforts to prevent Guinea from lapsing into full-scale violent conflict. After more than four years, and aside from a fairly active PBF portfolio in the country, it is difficult to point to the impact of the PBC’s political engagement with Guinea.

Recognising that the UNPBA had not been as effective as it had been hoped, a comprehensive review was undertaken in 2010. This process was co-chaired by South Africa, Ireland and Mexico, and unlike the current review, the 2010 process did not appoint a group of experts. The review report stressed the complexity of peacebuilding.

It criticised the way that peacebuilding was sequenced; in other words, in a linear way and often carried out – with marginal finances – as an afterthought, mainly at the conclusion of peacekeeping operations rather than accompanying them from their inception. It cited the need for the Commission to work preventively and for adequate resources to be allocated to peacebuilding activities.¹⁸ However, it has been noted that the recommendations made in the 2010 review received limited follow-up.¹⁹ The current review, marking the 10th anniversary of the PBC, PBF and PBSO, is therefore another attempt to situate

the three components within the broader effort to improve the effectiveness of peacebuilding within the whole of the UN system.

Concurrently with the peacebuilding review, a number of other UN entities have also wrestled with their role in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Besides the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, already previously highlighted UN special political missions, overseen by the Department of Political Affairs, have also grown in number and scope, providing not only good offices functions,²⁰ but also contributing directly to the advancement of inclusive politics, building institutions and laying foundations for sustained peace. In the same manner, UN agencies, funds and programmes have become more sensitive to the political nature of their work and its relevance to conflict and fragility.²¹ In particular, the role of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) should be mentioned, which has promoted efforts to support ‘national and local institutions and leadership in their efforts to prevent violence, manage conflicts constructively, and engage peacefully in political transitions and rapid change processes.’²² All of those engagements show a degree of complementarity – and at times overlap – of functions among different arms of the UN system.

Taking a preventive view of peacebuilding has a number of important implications for the way that member states engage with various UN organs

In addition, this peacebuilding review takes place in the context of, and is aligned with, a number of inter-related and significant reviews and cannot be seen in isolation. In particular, the HIPPO report recommends that missions move from reaction to prevention.²³ Furthermore, the Millennium Development Goals have expired and the newly proposed post-2015 SDGs that are set to replace them recognise the need for sustainable peace. SDG 16 specifically seeks to ‘promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels’.²⁴ Discussion on UN reform is also gaining traction. With new centres of power and a growing emphasis on south-south cooperation, equal participation of the developing world in decision-making processes has become very important in current debates.

The rapidly changing international landscape has unavoidable consequences for the UN. The current peacebuilding review takes stock of the coalescing of these various reports and processes, emphasising the holistic nature of peacebuilding and moving beyond silos into coherent structures. What does this mean in practice?

Practical implications for member states

Taking a preventive view of peacebuilding has a number of important implications for the way that member states engage with various UN organs, and specifically for the way that peace operations are planned, implemented and reviewed. Some of these implications are easier to address than others, but all are important.

Conceptually, the 2015 UN review calls for an abandonment of the terms ‘post-conflict peacebuilding’ and ‘peacebuilding architecture’. Member states should therefore embrace a shift in terminology that is more reflective of the preventive nature of peacebuilding, and an understanding of the term ‘sustaining peace’. What



THE THREE COMPONENTS OF THE UN PEACEBUILDING ARCHITECTURE ARE:

- THE UN PEACEBUILDING COMMISSION (PBC)
- THE UN PEACEBUILDING SUPPORT OFFICE (PBSO)
- THE UN PEACEBUILDING FUND (PBF)

does ‘sustaining peace’ actually mean? Put simply, it means that peacebuilding must be the principle that flows through all UN engagements, thus linking the security, political and developmental pillars in a holistic policy and operational framework.

Its holistic nature means that peacebuilding cannot be relegated to the activities of the PBC, PBF and PBSO alone. Member states should rather begin to recognise the Security Council as the principal peacebuilding actor, in closer partnership with the General Assembly and ECOSOC, with the PBC acting as an advisory bridge. To initiate such changes, member states should consider mechanisms to increase coordination between the principal UN organs, as well as with UN operational entities at headquarters and in the field. It is also essential to put in place practical regular mechanisms to identify objectives and monitor progress. While that might take some creative thinking and hard work, it is critical that member states support the UN in making these changes.

One potential mechanism is the UN Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Reviews (QCPR), through which the General Assembly assesses the effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and impact of the UN development system’s support to national efforts of developing countries to pursue their priorities and meet their development needs. Member states should insist that the next QCPR process – facilitated by the secretary-general – considers in depth the implications of a ‘sustaining peace approach’ for the role and capacities of the UN development system.

At the same time, the PBC, PBF and PBSO should be better equipped in terms of financial and human resources. For example, it will be necessary for member states to discuss how the PBSO can be strengthened technically and financially to exercise a more effective role in convening operational UN security and development actors, in order to support greater internal coherence as well as the PBC’s advisory bridging role to the principal UN organs. Member states also need to consider how the PBC’s structure and working methods can be made more flexible and diverse, with a focus on conflict prevention.

The PBC should also be enabled to engage with a more varied array of countries and regions through smaller country-specific meetings with more directly engaged participants. At the request or with the consent of the countries concerned, it will be important to activate the different methods of referring countries to the PBC’s attention, such as through recommendation from the secretary-general or ECOSOC.

In this respect, it will be important to debate the criteria for the PBC’s engagement in countries, understanding that it may also be invited to engage with a country at risk of outbreak of conflict

based on credible early warning signs. Member states will also have to take more responsibility to ensure that the PBC’s work is effective. This will require stronger accountability mechanisms for chairs of its country-specific meetings and more active participation in its deliberations, and continuous engagement from the membership.

Emphasising the notion of sustaining peace and the role of the Security Council as the primary peacebuilding actor will affect the way it operates. Chapter Seven of the UN Charter states that ‘the Security Council shall determine the existence of any threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression and shall make recommendations, or decide what measures shall be taken in accordance with Articles 41 and 42, to maintain or restore international peace and security.’²⁵

Understanding that responding to conflict is not enough and that, rather, the Security Council also needs to actively address emerging threats and root causes will require greater deliberation on the timeliness of interventions – ie as a preventive rather than reactive measure – and different modalities for engagement. Sustaining peace will have to become a wider focus of Security Council discussions with greater emphasis on the advisory function of the PBC. As a consequence, resources for peacebuilding components in peace operations need to be allocated more amply than they have been to date.

Member states should begin to recognise the Security Council as the principal peacebuilding actor

Member states will therefore have to consider the point at which a situation becomes a threat to international peace and security by using indicators that focus on long-term warning signs rather than the outbreak of conflict. Such a mindshift may be contentious among some member states, and raise questions over sovereignty and involvement in other countries’ affairs. At the same time, these concerns would be appropriately addressed through dialogue and national consent.

To provide unbiased expert advice, the PBC should therefore play a more active role in informing the Security Council and other organs on a regular basis of threats to sustaining peace. This can include analysis and expert advice on early warning signs, as well as discussions ensuring sustainable peace mechanisms are included in the formulation of mission mandates, and regular briefings on countries that are no longer considered a threat to international peace and security.

In planning peace operations, peacebuilding must be considered as a thread running through all aspects and time periods of UN engagement, with a clear benchmarking process as an integral feature. As a result, attention must be paid to the transitioning of UN operations, especially the handover of functions from a peacekeeping mission to the agencies and funds that compose a UN country team.

Member states must also enhance peacebuilding through their engagement in the General Assembly. The UN 2015 peacebuilding review recommends that SDG 16 should form the basis against which to assess global- and country- level progress towards sustaining peace. Countries should prepare national reports to be monitored by a General Assembly/PBC joint mechanism on a regular basis.

For peacebuilding to have the greatest reach and impact, the UN needs to partner with regional and sub-regional organisations

Moreover, planning for holistic complex peace operations and peacebuilding efforts will necessarily require more and sustainable funding. In this way, the General Assembly must collaborate with the Security Council to ensure adequate resources are given to peacebuilding activities. Member states will therefore need to consider how to ensure the predictability of peacebuilding funding.

To set an agreed policy framework for member states' engagement in the UN, the Security Council and General Assembly should consider a joint resolution to set norms and standards for national and international approaches and activities in sustaining peace from a holistic preventive vantage point. This should draw on key existing analyses and instruments, including the 2015 UN peacebuilding review, the report of the High-Level Panel on Peace Operations, the UNSCR 1325 global study, and the deliberations on the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

It is important to note that, despite efforts to enhance financing for development and peacebuilding efforts, there are still funding shortfalls. For example, while the PBF recorded degrees of success in providing catalytic and risk-tolerant funding, it is still relatively small, with limited impact on incentivising greater coherence and in catalysing critical peacebuilding initiatives in the countries concerned.

On 23 June 2015, at the PBC's annual session on predictable funding, the Commission concluded that flexible funding that

allowed for risk taking would enable more effective international support for building and sustaining peace. In this context, the PBC called for multi-year funding commitments to the PBF that would enable it to leverage its comparative advantages, including rapid support, filling gaps, incentivising integration across the UN system and taking risks. It also called for channelling larger portions of funding through national systems of post-conflict countries to help enhance sustainability and contribute to long-term capacity building and national ownership.²⁶

At the UN Financing for Development Conference held on 13 and 14 July in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, attempts to develop plans for a global tax body, thought to be the best way of ensuring predictable financing, resulted in little concrete action.²⁷ Member states need to continue discussions on the best ways to ensure an early and flexible release of development funds and to ensure that funding is driven by principles rather than political agendas.

Finally, for peacebuilding to have the greatest reach and impact, including strengthening more practical preventive engagement, the UN needs to partner with regional and sub-regional organisations, including civil society actors. Such organisations are often thought to have a better understanding of context, similar political, social and economic interests, and the ability to respond to crises more quickly because of their geographic location.

Member states should therefore encourage these organisations to progressively incorporate peace and conflict prevention activities into charters and foundational documents. Similarly, partnership with the World Bank needs to be further expanded in terms of quality and scale, strategic and operational linkages and current efforts on prevention. Member states should encourage revision of the 2008 cooperation framework for this partnership, with a view to developing options for a more strategic partnership.

Questions for member states to ask

In sum, if peacebuilding is to be successfully transformed into sustaining peace, the following questions are useful for consideration:

- What are the mechanisms that could be used to increase coordination among UN entities?
- How should joint peacebuilding objectives be identified and how could progress be monitored?
- What early warning and/or preventive criteria/indicators should be used for deciding when a situation becomes a threat to international peace and security?

- How could entities such as the PBC and the ad hoc Working Group on Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa play a more active role in informing the Security Council?
- How could partnerships with regional/sub-regional organisations be strengthened, and what role should the PBC play to ensure greater attention to regional perspectives in Security Council deliberations and decision making?
- What mechanisms would ensure a better transitioning of UN operational formats, especially the transition from a mission to a UN country team?
- What benchmarks related to peacebuilding could be applied to peace operations' mandates?
- What mechanisms should be developed to implement predictable and stable peacebuilding financing and how are these linked to financing for development discussions?
- What should be included in a Security Council/General Assembly resolution on sustaining peace?

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About the ISS

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