

Editorial

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Since the beginning of the 1990s, peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction efforts have moved to the forefront of the international development agenda. The collapse or disintegration of states—from Africa and Asia to the Caribbean, Europe, and the Middle East—as a result of civil war, internecine violence, and/or international intervention has confronted the international community with the challenge of how to address the difficulties posed by civil unrest and state failure. These violence-prone countries have become the focus of attention in donor-led strategies to work more effectively with what have been variously identified as ‘fragile states’ (DFID and USAID, for example), ‘low income countries under stress’ (‘LICUS’) (the World Bank), and ‘difficult partnerships’ (OECD/DAC). The World Bank estimates, for example, that 75 per cent of LICUS countries are beset by armed conflict, affecting approximately 375 million people.¹

This issue of *Development in Practice* engages in the ongoing debates surrounding post-conflict (re)construction by focusing on a key question: how can states that have been torn by violent conflict be rebuilt—and by whom?

As defined by Kofi Annan (cited in Paris 2004:2), peace building entails ‘creat[ing] the conditions necessary for a sustainable peace in war-torn societies’. The overall objective is, then, to prevent the recurrence of deadly conflict long after international peace-building missions have left. How this is done involves a variety of steps and tasks, including the disarmament of combatants and their reintegration into society, the establishment of mechanisms, such as truth commissions and international war crime tribunals, intended to achieve the fine balance between justice and reconciliation, and the revitalisation of the economy, to name just a few. Above all, however, as both **Ana Cutter** and **Kirsti Samuels** discuss in their respective contributions to this issue, post-conflict reconstruction is an inherently political endeavour that involves the creation and strengthening of institutions that are capable of resolving conflict through a negotiated political process rather than through violent means.

While it has been widely agreed that the establishment of democratic systems offers the best hope of rebuilding societies and bringing about sustainable peace, it should not be assumed, as many in the international aid community have been bound to do, that the task is easy and unproblematic. As **Roland Paris** highlights in his interview, unleashing the forces of political (and economic) liberalisation before the institutions capable of channelling such competition have been put in place can be destabilising, and more often than not the strategy of holding elections quickly before other important conditions have been properly addressed has led to the renewal of conflict rather than its end. The experiences of Rwanda and more recently Iraq come to mind, as does that of Liberia, which **Mike McGovern** analyses in detail in his contribution.

A long and growing—and not entirely successful—history of donor involvement in post-conflict reconstruction settings has yielded important lessons that have been identified, if not

fully assimilated. Donors, for instance, have had to confront the fact that post-conflict reconstruction, which entails nothing short of state building, is a complex endeavour that cannot be accomplished overnight but rather requires commitment over the long term. This is a lesson emphasised by many of the authors in this issue. Analysing the patterns and purposes of post-war aid, **Astri Suhrke** and **Julia Buckmaster** find that, contrary to arguments made by the World Bank, donors do not always ‘frontload’ their aid and then rapidly proceed to scale it back, but rather tend to ‘stay a much steadier course when it comes to actual disbursements on the ground’.

However, the call for the sustained engagement of donors in post-conflict reconstruction situations may itself be a double-edged sword. There is an uneasy tension between prolonged external intervention on the one hand and the need to build indigenous capabilities for citizens to become fully responsible for the (re)construction of their country on the other. Unless the reconstruction project is ‘owned’ by the country itself, efforts by the international community may generate undue dependence on the presence of outsiders to maintain the peace, and the reconstruction process will fail to take root.

This need to promote country ownership in post-conflict reconstruction raises another crucial question: who should ‘own’ the process? Mixed donor experiences with such efforts may reveal another important lesson. As Samuels argues, broad public participation must be encouraged in seeking solutions to the conflict and giving shape to the new political system if peace is to endure and a new, legitimate state is to be built. The contrasting experiences of Afghanistan and Iraq are revealing. Comparing post-war reconstruction efforts in both countries, **Katia Papagianni** argues that the prospects for sustainable peace over the long term are much greater in Afghanistan than in Iraq, mainly because the Afghan process was more successful in allowing negotiations and consultations among Afghans on a routine basis, while in Iraq political and civil society actors had few, if any, meaningful forums to influence the shape of the future Iraqi state and its political system. Further reading and other resources on post-war reconstruction and related issues are included in the Annotated Resources List prepared by **Alina Rocha Menocal** and **Deborah Eade**.

With this issue of *Development in Practice*, I also say goodbye to the journal after more than three years as its Reviews and Deputy Editor. I am grateful to the members of the Publishing Team at Oxfam GB for providing a wonderful environment in which to grow and learn, and I feel especially lucky to have worked alongside Caroline Bastable, Liz Cooke, and Kate Kilpatrick, and to count them as my friends. Liz Eades at Taylor & Francis was also always eager to lend a helping hand, and I thank her for her patience and flexibility. Most of all, I would like to thank Deborah Eade for her dedication, vision, and commitment. She was a source of boundless enthusiasm and ideas, and she provided me with constant inspiration and support. It has been a privilege to have her as a mentor, colleague, and friend. Over its 15 years in existence, *Development in Practice* has positioned itself as an unrivalled resource of intellectual engagement and practical learning in the field of development. I am proud to have been part of that effort over the past three years, and I know that the journal will continue to thrive in the future. Good luck and best wishes!

Note

1. More information on the LICUS initiative is available on the World Bank website: www.worldbank.org

Reference

Paris, Roland (2004) *At War's End: Building Peace after Civil Conflict*, Cambridge: CUP.

Apology

An unfortunate error occurred in the final sentence of the paper by Tim Coward and James Fathers, 'A critique of design methodologies appropriate to private sector activity in development', published in Volume 15, Numbers 3&4, pp. 451–462. The sentence should have read: '... contributes to models of sustainable employment in the developing just as much as in the developed world'. We offer our sincere apologies to the authors, and to our readers, for this mistake.