The Most Urgent Priorities in Post-Conflict Reconstruction

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Introduction

In post-conflict reconstruction there are many tasks that need to be accomplished. Immediate, medium-term, and long-term priorities need addressed by multiple national and international stakeholders, all wanting their interests satisfied. This situation poses a question "what are the most urgent priorities in post-conflict reconstruction?" Based on non-discrimination, proportionality, and impartiality, to bring about stability, humanitarian and governmental organization should decide what priorities are most urgent.

In formulating the priorities, organizations, in the planning stage of reconstruction, within their working groups, can determine their task list by deciding what are the essential tasks that must be executed to accomplish the mission, whereas failure to complete the essential tasks results in mission failure (FM 5-0, 2010). This is not to imply that other tasks are not important or vital. There are four such urgent priorities, or essential tasks, in post-conflict reconstruction: Establishing Security, Humanitarian Assistance and Social Well-Being, Economic Development, and Restoration of Government. Establishment of these four priorities will set our context on a glide path to success in reconstruction.

Establishing Security

It is arguable that the job of reestablishing basic security is the first priority in post-conflict settings (Agborsangaya-Fiteu, 2009). When talking about security, it should be understood as people centered, in contrast to making a hard structure secure. It should also be understood as an action that is proactive and preventive rather than reactive. One cannot be secure if the act of security is done in reaction to bad actors or bad things. "Human security is 'people-centred'; it focuses the attention of institutions on human individuals and their communities worldwide.

Human security shifts that focus to persons, regardless of gender, race, religion, ethnicity, citizenship, or other distinguishing characteristics" (Alkire, 2003). Establishing security is physical protection of a community in safety, well-being, free from violence and physical harm.

Establishing security is priority number one. The big budget, global news worthy options, such as using multi-national armed forces, either in war fighting or peace keeping modes, is definitely an option when a security role is needed. In terms of a failed or fragile state where the government is no longer in control, this option has been used, though some would suggest with marginal results, while forces are on the ground, and dismal results, once forces leave. In countries such as Afghanistan, NATO forces have stayed, going on towards 19 years, partly out of lack of measurable results, and partly out fear of what happens after armed forces leave.

"When governments fail to provide basic security to their citizens, people develop a high level of distrust toward the state, and in different spheres of their lives cobble together alternate strategies for meeting their needs" (Agborsangaya-Fiteu, 2009). Just as in community-based protection strategies, local communities need to be part of establishing security processes, both in the planning and execution stages. This can be done by communities building capacity, for example, within their police forces or local militias. Seeking community input and finding out what they need, in ways of security, places power back into the hands of local people and lessens the demand for external partners and multi-national forces. "Security sector reform (SSR) aims at improving safety through enhancing the effectiveness and accountability of security institutions controlled by civilians and operating according to human rights and the rule of law" (United Nations, 2007). SSR includes the following priorities (Agborsangaya-Fiteu, 2009):

- Strengthening the professionalism of the security services, which encompasses doctrinal and skills development, technical modernization, and understanding of the importance of accountability and the rule of law;

- Developing capable and responsible civil authorities to establish and manage security policy;

- Fostering a capable and responsible civil society that can monitor performance and provide input;

- Establishing the rule of law;

- Developing regional approaches to the security problem;

- Placing a high priority on human rights protection;

- Increasing transparency, meaning access to basic information about security policies, planning, and resourcing; and

- Conforming with international and internal law.

In terms of stability and post-conflict reconstruction, this sets parameters for security efforts that can be best accomplished by community populations and away from outside stakeholders and organizations. It also sets the tone of respect towards the community, preventing them to become marginalized by outside stakeholders and organizations who assume they know what's best. In addition, it sets the community up for success by working with outside stakeholders and organizations using best practices learned elsewhere. This combined effort affords SSR to be successful in theory and in practice, ensuring that establishing security does not have to have to be a trade-off between the practitioner of or consumer of security.

Humanitarian Assistance and Social Well-Being

In the realm of human security, another set of topics arise. Though in the previous section we looked at human security in light of physical protection of a community as in safety, well-being, free from violence and physical harm, human security can also be associated with shelter, food, water, health, and education. The second priority after establishing security, physical protection, humanitarian aid organizations should focus on humanitarian assistance and social well-being.

In post-conflict reconstruction we aim to bring the communities to a reality that their basic needs can be taken care of as they go through this rebuilding phase in their lives. This includes access to education and health care and ensuring that each individual has opportunities, availability and choices to fulfil his or her own potential (Alkire, 2003), while acquiring the basic necessities such as food and shelter. This builds human development within the individual and community, rebuilding a sense of purpose and well-being. Fewer things are better to know than that these basic elements are being taken care of. Shelter and with privacy and appropriate sanitation with special consideration toward gender specific needs should be provided. Temporary shelter with the aim towards permanent shelter can be a specified task.

"Humanitarian kits that respond to cultural practices and the needs of the population in terms of food, kitchen, home and cleaning should be developed. Support programmes for nutrition should be designed according to cultural requirements relating to food and the nutritional needs of women, girls, children and targeted populations" (Human Rights Council, 2014).

During the 1998 Famine in Sudan, which was brought about by drought and civil war, intense competition for limited resources created a strain to the monetary costs and logistical issues to relief efforts. This small illustration show that cost and time needs to be taken into account, but

that is a constraint that can be managed rather than ignored. While a magnitude of people could be in need of medical care, both basic and extreme, preventative humanitarian relief aid need to continue to develop best effective strategies for delivery of health care as well as cost, storage and security of supplies and facilities.

One last topic within this category is education. Bertrand Ramcharan suggests that education is more than just learning reading, writing and arithmetic. It is a community's effort to pass knowledge back and forth within the community, to share the knowledge, insights and awareness that each individual possesses bringing about liberation, and peace (Ramcharan, 2004). Becoming educated in a traditional sense isn't discounted but expanded into concepts such as legal and rights awareness, how to resolve a dispute, what justice looks like and how it can be received, rule of law, legal education and judicial training (Samuels, 2006).

Education also consists of rebuilding infrastructure such as schools for elementary education, colleges, technical, or vocational training. Community centers can also fall into this category for teaching religious-based education, protection and reconciliation training, or gender and aged based community learning. Education can be as broad as the community desires. The goal is to afford the community support and resilience during post-conflict reconstruction.

<u>Economic Development</u>

Economic development helps a nation or community move towards growth. Economic development deals with employment and business creation. There are a few key points to bring out about employment. The first is that employment sets the community moving towards stabilization. Employment reduces or eliminates the fear and stress of making ends meet and

financially care for one's family. Generating employment is a top priority for sustainable post-conflict economy. (Zuckerman and Greenberg, 2004).

Second, employment creation can be short or long-term. Short-term employment can be successful for youth or as one trains for long-term employment such as part time jobs while going to school. It can also benefit individuals or families transitioning from internally displaced person (IDP) status to incorporating themselves into the new fabric of the urban context or environment. Long-term employment brings about a more stable situation and can be looked at as either starting a micro-business, or working within another's business, either short or long-term. Economic advancement can be achieved work with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to establish the employment training or opportunities.

The third point to bring out is that employment should be looked at without discrimination to gender. Stereotyping men's work or women's work ignores the reality that in a post-conflict environment, women may have picked up the lion's share of work and employment opportunities while men were off fighting the war. That is in itself could be an over generalization since there are women soldiers. However, if that generalization is correct, it could be assumed that if most men fought, then a good portion could have been killed or infirmed due to war. The major take-away from this is, as reconstruction takes place, the context of the environment trumps preconceived ideas of what gender should do what kind of work. Choice and opportunity should run hand in hand.

In the continuation of economic development topic, another aspect is the re-creation of markets. Economic development can run hand in hand with rebuilding infrastructure, for example, factories may not be able to run without electricity, or telecommunications. Delivery of goods and services

can be hampered by impassible roads. In the big picture, cost and resources analysis needs to take place in determining how to get business back in business. For example: the essential task is to develop the economy, the specified task is to rebuild a factory, and the implied task for this project is to ensure electricity is available and roads are passible. Assumptions should be turned to facts or discarded and constraints recognized, with courses of action identified to overcome the constraints.

We addressed employment earlier but economic recovery and development starts with a willing and ready work force. Marketable skills are utilized to foster growth. NGOs, governmental organizations, and outside partners or stakeholders should caution themselves so not to artificially grow the economy through their own purchase power, whereas when those agencies complete their tasks, there is not enough internal capacity built to sustain the community or area.

Industry is not the only area to build capacity and recovery. "Rehabilitating the agricultural sector and enabling landowners to grow the right crops, process them, and get them to market are key steps in economic recovery" (Guiding Principles for Stabilization and Reconstruction, 2009). Agriculture and businesses related to farming can be gender neutral, building self-sustaining food production, thus leaving their communities less dependent on food aid. Recovery in employment, industry and agri-business moves the community towards reestablishment of a market economy.

Restoration of Government

Restoration of government is the fourth urgent priority in post-conflict reconstruction. Establishing a transitional government with the intention of forming a permanent government should be the objective. A transitional government sets the stage for accountability, for both the rule of law and economic policy. It also sets the ground for new government employees, either

executive, legislative, judicial, or local, to learn their roles and responsibilities, while under the mentorship from those partnering in the restoration process.

The Potsdam Conference in 1945 set the grounds for a transitional government in Germany. From 1945 – 1949, Germany worked through remaking it's society from an authoritarian regime, back to a legitimate parliamentary government.   New processes and procedures were learned, discriminatory laws removed, political parties re-established, legitimate judiciaries revived, local authority recognized, and new economic policies instituted.

This practice fits well with what Kristi Samuels points out 61 years later. She says that rule of law programs for conflict-affected countries can be broken down into the following five categories: 1) human security and basic law and order; 2) systems to resolve property and commercial disputes and the provision of basic economic regulation; 3) human rights and transitional justice; 4) predictable and effective government bound by law, and 5) access to justice and equality before the law (Samuels, 2006). Presently, there are countries that still struggle with making this a reality rather than a wish list, but these five categories are the building blocks to start restoration of government.

In another sphere, the World Bank, NGOs, and international partners can assist the restored, or restoring government, to create good national financial policy and trade agreements. With oversight and mentorship, the government can: spur economic recovery; foster economic competition and growth for goods and services; reallocate resources from one place to another; work toward resolving inequities in commerce with marginalized groups, reintegrating them into the national economic fabric; improve poverty reduction; and encourage and support economic goals in nonviolent ways. In addition, it can use its national platform to improve customs and

export processes at the border which can also benefit international trade and economic development in the long-term.

Setting priorities will be one challenge of the restored government. Sequencing is aligning policies of political, social, and economic governance to create a change process that is both effective and sustainable. Governance objectives can be broken down into immediate priorities, medium-term priorities, and long-term priorities (Agborsangaya-Fiteu, 2009). As mentioned in the economic development section, over-dependence on outside stakeholders, even in governance, can bring collapse when those partners leave.   Setting the right priorities, in the right time frame, will be dependent on the context. No one set policy or program fits every situation.

Lastly, a few words about elections. In restoration of government, government may have to be top down at the beginning. As an US Army friend of mine asked me after coming back from Afghanistan, "How can they vote when they don't understand voting in general, or the process, let alone what the policies the candidates are talking about?" A bottom up approach is the goal, but moving to that step may take top down guidance to start.

Conclusion

Though every country and context is different, there are few principle take-aways on the urgent priorities in post-conflict reconstruction. The first is that security is king.   Bad actors, such as terrorist, aim to do bad things and disrupt reconstruction, so establishing security must be deliberately and proactive to identify against threats. Second, conflicts, such as war, put stress on people, the environment, and resources, so it is essential to provide humanitarian assistance and social well-being as early into reconstruction as security allows. Third, economic development is the engine that runs a society, so through employment strategies and economic infrastructure,

development within the country can begin to look again at economic self-reliance. Lastly, restoration of government, the rule of law, and well managed economic policy brings stability back to the country and region.

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