



Conclusion

Terence McNamee and Monde Muyangwa

The challenge of how to rebuild society following conflict has not become easier over time. On the face of it, this might seem surprising since peacebuilding has been near the top of the global agenda for a quarter of a century. Money spent on peacebuilding activities—from conflict prevention, to conflict management, to post-conflict reconstruction—by the UN, member states, and countless organizations worldwide has grown year after year. Decision-makers and practitioners can now access a vast literature on peacebuilding policy and experiences, including case studies, lessons learned, and best practices. The reasons why societies relapse into conflict are well known. So why is it still so difficult to prevent it from happening?

T. McNamee (✉)

Global Fellow, Africa Program, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, DC, USA

e-mail: terence.mcnamee@wilsoncenter.org

M. Muyangwa

Director, Africa Program, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, DC, USA

e-mail: monde.muyangwa@wilsoncenter.org

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The 2011 World Development Report (WDR) found that 90 percent of civil wars since 2000 occurred in countries that had experienced a civil war in the previous thirty years.¹ Ten years on from the WDR report, the challenge of peacebuilding is less associated with a return to all-out-war—though it still happens, as South Sudan sadly illustrates—than outbreaks of violence and lingering instability and fragility. In other words, a failure to overcome inertia and put peace on a sustainable footing.

Part of the reason is the sheer complexity of the task at hand. There are no easily transferable templates for peacebuilding. And nothing is ever linear. The strategic, operational, and policy environments in which peacebuilding occurs comprise a mosaic of different actors. The issues at stake are rarely straightforward, but instead interconnect with local, national, and international interests, which are almost never in sync. Even in post-conflict states where tangible progress is evident—such as Sierra Leone, Rwanda, and Mozambique, to name only a few of the countries examined in this volume—the metrics to determine when a peacebuilding effort has been successful are not always clear or reliable. This ambivalence is alternatively expressed in the peacebuilding literature in terms of “positive peace” and “negative peace.” The latter entails a return to stability, which permits people to get on with their lives and allows society to recover from war. But the underlying causes of conflict are not addressed, potentially storing up trouble for the future. Positive peace, on the other hand, requires societies to undertake fundamental changes that increase their resilience and enable them to address differences and conflicts without violence. Often the perspectives of governments and elites—that is, those responsible for signing and implementing peace agreements—differ from locals and communities, especially in the peripheries. It is here that unresolved tensions can simmer beneath the surface for years before igniting once again.

If there is an endpoint to peacebuilding, rarely is there consensus on what it looks like. Broadly speaking, there is agreement that peacebuilding is a long-term process, which involves changes in attitudes, behaviors, and norms. An end to the process requires, at a minimum, the restoration of public safety and people being able to live without fear or threat of violence. If there is a widely held view in society that its “security” problem(s) has been converted into a “political” problem(s) that, too, might constitute an endpoint in people’s minds.

There is less consensus on other signifiers of peace. Equal rights for all—regardless of ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and

so on—would be an important barometer of peace in many countries, but not all. Similarly, the ability of all citizens to participate equally in holding government accountable and contributing to political life would be deemed essential in some but not others.

This contestation is especially pronounced in Africa. Colonialism bequeathed Africa's newly independent states countless triggers for disunity—contested lands, fragmented ethnic groups, and ungoverned territories. The integration of different peoples into a single nation did not develop organically from their shared foundational experiences—decolonization and liberation—as many had assumed. Without the social underpinning to the new political dispensation, building common values and constructing a robust national identity has been a very slow work-in-progress for many African states. Consequently, and notwithstanding the failings of some of its leaders, Africa's first post-independence generation was not exactly primed for peace and democracy.

Yet since the end of the Cold War, the Western liberal ideal has been the main lens through which peacebuilding in Africa is understood. Peacebuilding interventions tend to be defined and assessed—by donors, the UN, Western governments, if not African governments themselves—on that basis. The result, some scholars have argued, is a concept or idea of peace that does not always accord with African realities or values.

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The nearly two-dozen chapters in this book affirm that more work needs to be done in three common areas of concern in peacebuilding worldwide.

The first—understanding the context—is no less important for being restated time and again. Unless you get to the root causes of a conflict—why people fought in the first place—then whatever tools and interventions are tried, they will not secure peace in the long term and probably not in the short to medium term either. This is not a simple research task. Identifying the complex relationships of power and competition in any state—say between rival leaders, ethnic groups, or different regions—and how they have evolved over decades or even centuries takes time. International actors are not known for taking their time in peacebuilding contexts; more often, they are accused of rushing in before grasping the true nature of a conflict they are meant to help resolve. And far too often, there appears to be a tendency to focus on the symptoms of conflict and

insecurity, while not investing enough or for the long term, in addressing the root causes and drivers of conflict, and amplifying the facilitators for peace.

The second is local agency, ownership, and leadership. Without accountability to governments and people within the conflict-affected country, peacebuilding will fail. External actors can be helpful at the margins but rarely are they the drivers of change. Yet, as several chapters in this book have illustrated, too often external approaches and priorities on critical issues such as peace and justice, DDR, and the role of the state are at tension with those of the local community. As Israeli scholar Asher Susser once wrote of foreign mediation in the Middle East, “all those involved should make it their business to study the limitations, constraints, desires, aspirations and red lines of the players and make their best effort to help them get to where they would like to go.”² Historically, peacebuilding in Africa has been too often beholden to the interests and timelines of outsiders, who provide the lion’s share of funding support and also possess the technical expertise to implement programs, which locals may lack or be perceived to lack. Peace cannot take root if the agency of local communities (including what peace means to them and how it manifests) is not respected or they are not empowered to own peacebuilding.

The third is collaboration, particularly vital in the search for the more elusive “positive peace.” In some cases, this entails local, national, regional, and international actors all working together. In others, the most critical forms of cooperation are between civil society organizations, governments, regional bodies, and the private sector. Collaboration can take the form of sharing information and analysis; deciding on planning and assessment tools; building electoral frameworks or active citizenship initiatives; improving justice systems; introducing peace education in curricula and across society; and creating a more inclusive economy that gives people meaningful livelihood options.

Complementing these general observations on peacebuilding, some recommendations put forward by the various contributors to this book—aimed at both policymakers and practitioners—bear repeating. Some are notable for how frequently they arise, in one form or another, in ostensibly very different peacebuilding environments; others are specific to their context.

Concerns over funding fall into the former category. Although funding for peacebuilding has risen significantly since the end of the Cold War, it

pales in comparison to the economic cost of violence worldwide—estimated to exceed US \$14 trillion per annum or 12.6 percent of global GDP, according to the World Humanitarian Data and Trends report by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).³ Given these staggering numbers, it makes economic sense to invest more in peacebuilding—but which areas promise the greatest return? And to whom should funds be directed to best deliver that effect in Africa?

One constant that runs through the thematic chapters in this book—from DDR, early warning systems and elections through to regional and continental mediation and post-conflict reconstruction efforts—is the mismatch between the pan-African ideal of self-reliance and the heavy dependency on external (non-African) funding. This renders key national and local initiatives vulnerable. The African Union (AU)’s capacity and resource constraints are a strong brake on its bold ambitions across the range of peacebuilding activities, not least in peacekeeping. But as Paul Williams argues, while the UN system of financing its peace operations functions relatively well, there is no comparably effective system for African-led missions, which have struggled to find adequate funding. The failure of many AU member states to adequately finance their regular budgets amplifies the need for external support. An African proverb—“Borrowed waters do not quench one’s thirst”—has been invoked by one scholar in decrying his continent’s reliance on former colonial powers and other external forces.⁴

As Paul Melly observes, the regional nature of conflicts in the Sahel, the Horn, and the Great Lakes regions all point to the necessity of investing in conflict prevention and early warning systems. Yet as the chapter on the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding cautions, international donors are the only reliable source of funds for it to continue its early warning programs, and their funds are typically short-term and limited in scope, and tied to results that are expected within unrealistic timeframes. Similarly, DDR programs have in the past relied heavily on the World Bank and other donors—but their support has rarely been as adequate, timely, and predictable as was required, especially, as Anatole Ayissi suggests, for the “reintegration” component, which remains the Achilles heel of DDR programs.

Solutions to the funding dilemma are not readily apparent. The local private sector could and should be more engaged in peacebuilding in Africa. But, thus far, they have not been key players.

Another major theme is that of overloaded mandates for peacebuilding, particularly peace support operations. In many cases, peace support operations are given a laundry list of tasks, often without the requisite resources including finances, personnel, and equipment. As a result, the desired peace outcomes are unattainable.

Along with conflict that it has endured, Africa has also witnessed some successes and progress in peacebuilding in Africa. This book has sought to highlight and draw key lessons from some of those experiences. Sierra Leone's success is compellingly described by Adekeye Adebajo in this book as something of a mystery—the post-conflict country that contains all the ingredients for a relapse into war, yet for nearly twenty years and counting it has been largely peaceful. Adebajo attributes this success to many factors, but warns that, like a beaten-up car, Sierra Leone remains fragile and in constant danger of breakdown, requiring frequent care, resourceful innovation, commitment and close attention in order to keep it running. In some ways, this description speaks for all African countries emerging from conflict. We hope that the lessons and policy recommendations offered in this book can help fragile and conflict-affected African countries find the road to peace and keep on it into the future.

NOTES

1. See <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/4389>.
2. Asher Susser, "Israel, Jordan and Palestine: Linked Fates, Hard Realities," in *On the Fault Line: Managing Tensions and Divisions Within Societies*, Jeffrey Herbst, Terence McNamee, and Greg Mills (eds.) (London: Profile Books, 2012), 228.
3. See <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/01/conflict-costs-global-economy-14-trillion-a-year/>.
4. Siphamandla Zondi, "African Union Approaches to Peacebuilding: Efforts at Shifting the Continent towards Decolonial Peace," *AJCR* 2017/1, <https://www.accord.org.za/ajcr-issues/african-union-approaches-peacebuilding/>.

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