Conceptual framework on Development Under Crisis Conditions

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CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION 3

II. DEVELOPMENT AND CONFLICT PREVENTION 4

III. DEVELOPMENT AND ON-GOING CONFLICT 6

IV. DEVELOPMENT AND POST-CONFLICT TRANSITIONS 13

V. CONCLUSIONS 24
I. Introduction

Different conflict phases lend themselves to different types of development strategies. Disaggregating conflicts into pre-conflict, conflict, and post-conflict phases allows for a better appreciation of the development challenges faced by implementers and national authorities during these different phases. It also helps highlight best practices and lessons learned from undertaking development work under crisis conditions.

In this paper, a distinction is made between humanitarian relief/emergency aid and sustainable development under crisis conditions:

- Humanitarian relief and emergency aid designates socioeconomic (and other) programs initiated to address short-term priorities in conflict contexts.
- Sustainable development under crisis conditions refers to the ability to develop a holistic long-term developmental strategy that promotes short-term socioeconomic growth without forsaking other long-term objectives.

Another distinction is made between conflict and crisis:
- Crisis refers to short-term, violent political and military dislocations.
- Conflict refers to protracted conditions of political instability. In other words, a conflict is a protracted crisis.

This paper examines development challenges in different conflict situations and during different phases to identify best practices and lessons learned in comparative perspective. It opens with a discussion of the role of development strategies in ameliorating objective socioeconomic or political tensions during the pre-conflict phase. The sensitivities of this process are highlighted to ensure that development agencies and national actors help rather than complicate pre-conflict contexts.

The paper then interrogates critically development practices hitherto deployed in the conflict phase. It offers a range of recommendations culled from practical comparative experiences aimed at alerting development agencies and national actors of past pitfalls and best practices in the conflict phase. The objective of this exercise is to help development agencies and national actors foresee potential implementation problems, adapt to changing conflict contexts, and prepare the institutional infrastructure necessary for the post-conflict phase. The paper then turns to a discussion of best development practices during the post-conflict phase. By examining lessons learned from past development experiences it provides development agencies a road map for viable programs in the post-conflict phase. This allows them to tailor their programs in a manner that ensures the implementation of the peace accord and securing a viable and self-enforcing peace. The items catalogued in this section are vital for assembling a proactive development program in any post-conflict context, and deserve close scrutiny. Finally, the paper closes with a summary of the main findings reached in this study.
II. Development and Conflict Prevention

In the pre-conflict phase, development strategies aim at ameliorating objective tensions and frustrations, whether these are rooted in social, economic, or political causes. Best practices in development work are those that take into consideration a number of sensitivities:

*The Political Ramifications of Development Work:* Most successful programs are those that are optimized to reduce socioeconomic and political tension and promote not just growth, but equitable, sustainable growth. Whenever possible, development projects should thus be as inclusive as possible, and should be sensitive to local contexts and interests. This imbues development efforts much needed legitimacy; it also promotes a culture of participatory bottom-up decision-making and implementation, thus empowering citizens and civil society organizations. In cases where donors do work with national level institutions, they should not be blind to the political economy questions involved, and ensure that their programs are based on the real needs of communities and not the short-term political needs of the host governments and civil society. The latter may have negative long-term implications for the stability of the country. Most crucial in this respect is a long-term vision focused on achieving sustainable growth.

*The Role of International Development Programs in the Pre-conflict Phase:* Two especially important tasks stand out.

1. They *assist governments in formulating development goals* that address points of tension in the country, and they *help generate local community input in formulating development plans.* Absent the support of local communities for development projects, governments will be faced with public mistrust and resistance to government development plans. With community involvement, the development planning process gains a legitimacy and sense of ownership that is frequently lacking in top-down planning. This is particularly true of marginalized groups that have not had been included in development planning by the central government.

2. *Conditionality in Development Assistance:* Another important element of development under conflict pertains to the utility of conditionality in development assistance. Given the potential for development aid to be either misallocated or alternatively used to pursue policies that are harmful in the long run, aid agencies have become increasingly stringent in enforcing conditionality in their assistance. Bilateral aid is increasingly tied to reforms in governance or targeted at sectors that are at least partially determined by the donor.

*The Perils of Conditionality:* Although both the World Bank and IMF intend for their assistance to reduce poverty, increase socio-economic growth and generally promote peace and stability, their programs contain their own unique set of risks. Some governments are not receptive to the idea of bilateral aid being contingent on reforms toward good governance. Reform packages incorporated into donor lending are occasionally met with protests by host countries and accusations of sovereignty violation.
There are a variety of reasons why conditionality is not popular within countries receiving assistance.

1. **Political Incompatibility of Reforms**: In many cases, reforms mandated by international bodies, while perhaps economically rational, are not politically viable. Subsidies on basic food products or on fuel, albeit a favored target of World Bank and IMF economic restructuring programs, have a very high political cost. Dramatic reductions in basic food or fuel subsidies are an almost guaranteed formula for widespread protests, threatening regime stability. Thus while the reforms may be economically rational, they can be politically disastrous and may even generate open conflict.

2. **Impact on Patronage and Corruption Networks**: Another unfortunate reason for governments to resist conditionality as part of donor assistance is that the mandated reforms are successful in disrupting networks of official patronage and clientalism. In the most extreme cases, accusations of violations of national sovereignty are used as political cover for attempts to protect the political clout the leadership exercises through the control of economic resources. Reforms targeting poorly managed state owned enterprises or bloated bureaucracies often strike at the core of vast neopatrimonial networks.

3. **Living with Erroneous Prescriptions**: Finally, host countries are apprehensive of conditionality in donor assistance because on more than one occasion international agencies prescribed the wrong medicine. Critics have argued that the IMF has opaque decision-making, is unresponsive to criticism and often uses a cookie cutter approach to policy formulation, no matter how different the causes of the crises.\(^1\) It is thus not without reason that national governments are often suspicious of international interventions into domestic policy making.

**Other Development Considerations in the Pre-Conflict Phase:**

*Misallocation of Resources*: In the worst cases, governments deliberately misallocate resources for the sake of patronage, political interests and ethno-sectarian loyalty. But not all governments operate purely out of cynical self-interest and many struggle to accommodate a blend of competing interests. Alternatively, in countries emerging from, or still governed by, authoritarian or semi-authoritarian forms of rule, governments are used to top down planning with little public input into the decision-making process. Decisions on development policy are typically reached within a small circle of government advisors. If the development policy fails to deliver on its promises, it builds resentment within society against the government and fuels mistrust.

In these cases, international development programs can assist partner countries in a number of ways. A first step is to assist governments in formulating development goals that address points of tension in the country. However, prioritizing these goals alone is not enough. Countries that are either ruled by authoritarian regimes or are emerging from them have little modern history or experience in participatory development and decision-making.

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making. This is an area where international development agencies can play a pivotal role. Without buy-in from local communities on development projects, governments will be faced with public mistrust and resistance to development plans. Involving local communities in the decision-making process ensures broad public support to development projects.

*Altering Popular Perceptions:* Even when development planning is tilted to favor the underrepresented or economically marginalized, perceptions of injustice often persist due to poor communication strategies by the government. Development agencies can help governments develop more effective communication strategies to multiply the impact of government programs through increased visibility. Support programs can involve everything from helping the government interact more effectively with the press, to holding “town hall meetings” with select constituencies.

Efforts to help governments communicate more effectively their ideas often need to begin by improving communication within the government itself. There is often abysmal communication between various government agencies and sometimes a complete breakdown in communication between the central government and regional representatives. This failure to effectively communicate development goals and plans particularly weakens regional representatives who may consequently appear as either incompetent or politically impotent (or perhaps both). Helping governments formulate a strategy to improve communication can also initiate a process where local government officials provide feedback on the proposed development plans to the central authorities, a small step towards empowering them in decision-making.

**III. Development and On-Going Conflict**

Development organizations involved in conflict resolution need to be realistic vis-à-vis their impact in an on-going conflict, and develop their strategies accordingly. Different types of conflicts – for example, occupation, inter-ethnic, or inter-state – lend themselves to different development strategies. Development projects that may prove viable in inter-ethnic or inter-state conflicts may prove difficult to implement under occupation. Context is thus paramount in devising and implementing development programs.

Be that as it may, development assistance cannot ignore addressing the deep socioeconomic and political variables contributing to conflict. These variables are often multiple and overlapping. Depending on context and historical experience, they may include any or a combination of the following factors: past ethnic grievances inherited from the colonial period, resentment to ethnic or sectarian-based allocation of economic resources, demands for the recalibration of unbalanced representation in political and security institutions, or demands for greater territorial autonomy and self-rule. By addressing these variables in the conflict phase, development assistance can contribute to founding the institutional bases for sustainable conflict resolution in the post-conflict phase.
Operating in conflict zones presents enormous operational challenges to aid agencies. However it also presents real opportunities to support inclusive decision-making and much needed political, economic and social reform, particularly as countries move away from authoritarian systems of government to more democratic ones. Instability offers opportunities to support dialogue around indigenous reform efforts as new leaders emerge in the country.

The determination of how and when to pursue development programs in conflicts will likely be the product of four determinants: Relevance, security, an organization’s mandate, and community needs. Where there is a confluence of these four factors, an organization is most likely to achieve its greatest impact. Beyond the arbitrage of these four factors, there are two other important considerations for development agencies working in conflict zones: tying humanitarian relief more effectively to long-term development goals, and ensuring that aid does not inadvertently harm those it purports to help.

Relevance: A fundamental tenant for well-run organizations with limited resources is to use their resources to maximum advantage and for the greatest possible impact. Since achieving socio-economic growth in countries suffering from open warfare is difficult, a priority for all development actors should be to help end the conflict. Development assistance is most complex in conflicts involving foreign as well as domestic combatants, as in the cases of Iraq and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Political negotiations and military battles are far more likely to resolve these conflicts than development projects. However, in complex emergencies development assistance can play an important role in addressing grievances that may be contributing factors to the conflict. And, just as importantly, development assistance will play a key role in reconstruction when major elements of the conflict have been resolved and the task of rebuilding begins.

Security Challenges: Organizations working in volatile environments, beyond ensuring the safety of their staff and partners, need to ensure that their programs have the ability to function in the midst of insecurity. Given the speed with which conditions in conflict zones change, organizations must have some form of contingency planning to ensure that their programs are prepared for different operating environments. In many environments, the security situation seriously circumscribes the types of activities that can be done. In Iraq, for example, where kidnapping and murder are real threats for both Iraqis and foreigners, it is extremely difficult for international agencies to maintain a visible presence in the country.

Security Options: There are a variety of options for organizations working in extremely insecure environments.

1. In the most difficult contexts many organizations maintain their offices outside the country and only visit the field sporadically. However this makes close oversight and monitoring of the program almost impossible; it makes it difficult to identify appropriate responses to new challenges.
2. National government agencies, however, have no choice but to operate during the conflict. As recent experiences in Iraq and, to a lesser extent, in the Occupied Palestinian Territory suggests, improving the quality of police and security forces is an urgent priority because without a rudimentary level of law and order, it will be impossible to achieve any significant socio-economic growth. Helping empower local governments is also often a high priority as it lends credibility and legitimacy to the government. It is important to emphasize the role of local leaders as government officials (as opposed to their other possible roles as tribal or sectarian leaders). Without making this distinction, national governments or international agencies working with local leaders can inadvertently reinforce parochial interests over those of the state.

3. In areas where violence is episodic and does not specifically target international organizations, there is more room for operations, but programs are subject to the same risk of interruption and delay due to surges in conflict and closures. In these environments, such as in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the key challenge for international agencies is developing a mechanism that enables organizations to anticipate when and where violence might occur and then hedge against these upsurges in violence and closures. Several organizations have attempted to develop such early warning mechanisms, with mixed results.

4. Program responses to intermittent violence depend a great deal on the type of project being pursued. Programs focusing on rehabilitation efforts have little choice other than to wait out the upsurge in violence. However, capacity building programs can hedge against potential violence by conducting the trainings in areas where there is a minimal chance of violence. In some cases, episodic violence may prevent an international organization from working in an area due to security restrictions, but work may be viewed as acceptable by a local organization and has a better understanding of the security situation. In these cases, working through local proxies can be an effective way of continuing work despite crisis conditions.

Organizational Mandates: An organization’s mandate and comparative advantage will determine largely what activities it will implement in any given conflict. An organization that focuses on health care, for example, will not focus on mediation efforts no matter how urgent the need. However, even if an organization working in a conflict zone is not working directly in the political arena to support peace efforts, their assistance should not be blind to the political ramifications of their work. This is necessary both so that their work doesn’t inadvertently contribute to the conflict and, additionally, so that it is part of a larger effort to support a peace process. If the primary development need of every conflict-afflicted country is peace, than even organizations that focus on sustainable development should direct their assistance to in some way work towards that goal. This can be done in different ways:

1. Coordinating assistance with other donors to minimize overlap and maximize complementarity. This ensures that aid is not wasted through programmatic
overlap, and it enables organizations to use their assistance to complement the work being done by others thereby achieving a greater impact than if they were operating on their own. Coordinating assistance also ensures that organizations do not lose sight of the big picture that their assistance operates within. The CCA-UNDAF (Common Country Assessment-UN Development Assistance Framework) program implemented by UN-ESCWA is one such model of coordination.

2. Tying humanitarian aid to development – international organizations that provide some form of direct service, whether healthcare, education or otherwise, can exponentially increase the reach of their work if they leverage their assistance as a means of developing local capacity to carry out the same programs. Developing the capacity of local organizations is beneficial for a number of reasons:

- First, it achieves long-term development goals while fulfilling necessary short-term needs.
- Second, it ensures the sustainability of service provision beyond the tenure of the international organization.
- Third, it makes economic sense as international organizations typically have high operational costs since they need to pay international staff and include some provision for headquarters’ operational costs. This money can go even further if it is channeled through local organizations with lower overheads.
- And finally, in areas with long-term episodic violence, it ensures a more balanced provision of service. When there are spikes in violence, international organizations tend to withdraw staff, which causes interruptions in service. Local organizations have nowhere to go and so could provide more reliable service if their organizational structure and human resources are strengthened.

Community Needs: Given the overwhelming needs that are often found in conflict zones, it is necessary to step back and think strategically about how to prioritize those needs. As already noted, it is not enough for an organization to merely identify one need among many and develop a program around it. It must identify all potential needs, analyze which programs addressing these needs have the greatest potential impact in the pursuit of peace and, among these, which are feasible in the current security environment.

For organizations whose mandate is centered on helping countries pursue long-term development goals, there is an additional challenge. It is difficult for organizations to maintain their focus on long-term goals when their attention, and that of their national counterparts, is consumed with never-ending short-term crises. Even when they do manage to focus on long-term goals, events on the ground change so rapidly that long-term development planning is quickly undermined by events on the ground.
There are a number of devices to address these challenges. The first is to develop a series of short-term programs that address long-term strategic goals. Segmenting programs into shorter but related goals ensures that these goals can be adapted rapidly to an evolving security situation. Short-term initiatives focusing on strategic issues such as educational or financial reform can prepare the ground for larger and more long-term efforts once peace arrives. These efforts can be done with limited financial resources and at low risk to participants in the programs.

When a peace process is finally initiated, much of the groundwork would have been completed. Networks of concerned members of government agencies, civil society organizations and educators will have already been created. Social capital, in terms of trust between different actors, would have also been accumulated. Having strong networks from a cross-section of society on any given issue helps speed the decision making process when peace arrives and it becomes opportune to initiate longer-term development planning.

_Tying Humanitarian Aid to Development:_ There are a number of ways to use humanitarian assistance as a means of pursuing long-term development goals and reduce the negative effects associated with dependence on humanitarian assistance. The first is to use local markets and businesses as much as possible to source materials to ensure that funds stimulate economic activity locally. Reducing dependence on imports by developing local capacity to produce simple but necessary items also ensures that the value of the money spent extends beyond the cost of the purchased items. Developing this capacity reduces unemployment and has added value in terms of social capital.

Additionally, international development actors can play an important role in building up the capacity of national NGOs to implement relief projects. International NGOs often partner with national NGOs during the implementation of relief activities, but these activities rarely include a formal capacity building component for the local NGOs. International organizations funding relief efforts can help reduce dependency on international NGOs by including capacity building for local organizations in their work plans. Particularly needed are trainings around such issues as financial management, organizational structure and project development/proposal writing. The inability of national NGOs to comply with international accounting procedures is frequently cited among donors as one of the reasons for working through international NGOs rather than local ones.

Another key strategy for development work in conflict environments is to tie relief efforts more closely with long-term development goals. International relief agencies typically excel in responding to crises by providing timely relief in the form of food aid, shelter, other non-food items and health care. While these relief efforts are tenable in the short term, they become increasingly unsustainable in conflict zones. In protracted conflicts, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, long-term relief can actually have negative side
effects both economically and socially. Receiving free handouts provides a disincentive to work and can prove to be generally demoralizing for the recipients.²

Development organizations should plan for all kinds of disfunctionalities in conflict situations, whether these are spikes in violence, occupations, or the disruption of economic and social activity through closures and the destruction of infrastructure. The Occupied Palestinian Territory is instructive in this case.

Palestinian economic activity is largely agriculturally based, but almost entirely dependent on the Israeli market. Consequently, development projects should work towards a diversification of marketing away from Israel. If produce is being lost due to closures, then international assistance should focus on a diversification of the agricultural sector to non-perishables or into value added food processing. If the food processing facilities face the prospect of destruction in attempt to undermine Palestinian economic activity, efforts should be made to diversify into several smaller facilities rather than one large one and so on. Creativity in development planning is crucial.

This is merely meant to serve as an example of how scenario planning should be incorporated into development planning. And while one wants to hope for the best, we should prepare for the worst, and proactively plan how to overcome the unique challenges faced in development under conflict conditions. Governments operating under difficult circumstances, such as those found in Iraq or the OPT, should also go through a process of evaluation, analyzing the circumstances they are in, taking into consideration the human resources they are working with, and then set realistic goals for development projects that will be able to operate even in the midst of conflict.

_The Risks of Aid in Conflict Zones:_ While organizations should be thinking about their assistance in conflict zones as part of a larger strategic political initiative to pursue peace, in practice they rarely do. Many international development organizations arrive to conflict zones with their particular toolbox of programs, and try to paste them onto the current conflict. Even organizations that have proven more flexible in responding to volatile environments, such as those working in the field of humanitarian aid, have been traditionally reluctant to tie their assistance to any political processes. Humanitarian assistance, it is argued, should operate outside of politics.

There are good reasons to avoid the politicization of humanitarian and development assistance by tying it too closely to peace process or other political initiatives. International organizations rightly worry that if their assistance is politicized, they will lose their neutral status and be viewed as participants in the conflict. However, there is a fine line between studied neutrality and inaction. It is unrealistic to think that all parties in a conflict will ever view humanitarian or development assistance provided in the midst of conflict completely neutrally. This is the case for many reasons.

Frequently, conflicts take place in poor countries with limited resources, and humanitarian organizations assume the role as primary providers of food, shelter and health. As such, humanitarian aid becomes a tempting target for rebel movements and armies that frequently divert aid away from civilian populations to feed their soldiers. The fact that combatants often seize humanitarian aid raises the uncomfortable question of whether the aid merely serves to prolong or ameliorate the fighting. Development planners are thus faced with unenviable choices, but these are necessary choices nevertheless.

There is often a profound lack of clarity in the moral calculus of providing assistance when there is a high chance that combatants will divert it for their own use. For example, during the brutal civil war between the Sudanese government and the southern rebel movement, the Sudan People’s Liberation Army, aid intended for civilians was diverted by the SPLM to feed its soldiers. Even though relief organizations were aware of it, they continued their operations. Some felt the desperate condition of people in southern Sudan warranted the continued relief operation even though some of the aid did not reach its intended target. To stop aid was to sign the death warrant for untold numbers of civilians through starvation and disease. Others continued their operations because they felt some sympathy for the SPLM, which was fighting against a repressive regime.3

The dilemma exists today as well in the current conflict in Darfur, where the rebel movements Justice and Equality Movement and Sudan Liberation Army routinely carjack aid shipments to feed their soldiers. Is this merely prolonging the conflict? Without the aid, however, potentially thousands more Darfurians could die from malnutrition and disease. The tipping point between helpful and harmful is by no means a black and white picture, but rather a gray scale.

In some cases, the moral picture was clearer, but the international community was slow to grasp what they were confronting. This was the case in Rwanda, where the UN and international humanitarian organizations set up a massive relief effort in eastern Zaire for Rwandan refugees fleeing across the border. The refugees, however, were comprised largely of Rwandan Hutus including the Interahamwe who carried out the genocide. The Interahamwe used the refugee camps and humanitarian assistance to mount attacks back into Rwanda after being driven out by the Tutsi-led militia, the Rwanda Patriotic Front. Thus, the international community inadvertently found itself in the unenviable position of playing host to perpetrators of genocide and even unintentionally providing them with support to launch more attacks.4

In post-Saddam Iraq, the insurgency routinely targets organizations working on development or reconstruction efforts to stifle any visible signs of progress in the country. The incentive for the insurgents is to slow the rebuilding process and undermine the legitimacy of the central government. Even relatively innocuous development assistance, such as new schools or health clinics, can become part of a larger political

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dynamic. Thus organizations working in conflict zones that ignore the political context in which their development assistance operates do so at their own peril.

IV. Development and Post-Conflict Transitions

The process of targeting development programs for post-conflict environments entails many of the same challenges found in conflict zones. The post-conflict period is marked by a great deal of uncertainty, volatile politics and sometimes violence. The key distinction between the two phases is that typically in the post-conflict period there is some form of peace process or larger political compromise to implement. But institutional engineering alone is not sufficient to protect against a reversal to conflict. Development planning in this phase should be tailored to eliminate the deep socioeconomic causes of conflict.

Post-conflict environments are typically marked by the overwhelming need for rehabilitation of key infrastructure, including roads, educational facilities, government offices and health care facilities. Beyond physical infrastructure, post-conflict environments also suffer from weak to non-existent institutional capacity, severely deteriorating public services such as education and health, along with heavy damage to private homes, farmlands and businesses. Long years of conflict often result in the deterioration of human resources through death, exit, and destruction of educational facilities. These challenges have to be addressed in post-conflict development planning. Nor should positive practices developed during the conflict phase – such as decentralization of state institutions and services – be discarded in the post-conflict phase.

Development Assistance in Post-Conflict Settings: Research into development policy and conflict has highlighted the role of development assistance in post-conflict environments. World Bank research has suggested that countries emerging from civil conflicts have an unusually high chance of returning to conflict in the first decade after the conflict has ended.\(^5\) The research also indicates that post-conflict countries have an atypically high need for aid, roughly double that of other countries, and that this aid is more productive in post-conflict contexts than other situations.

The low absorptive capacity of host countries immediately following the cessation of hostilities constrains the effective use of aid.\(^6\) While typically donors and international aid agencies deliver the majority of their resources in the year or two immediately following the end of the conflict, this does not amount to the best strategic use of aid.

Countries suffering from conflict inevitably suffer losses in terms of their human resources, whether through death, emigration or destruction of educational facilities, as


well as government infrastructure and institutions. The immediate years following the conflict typically see a gradual improvement in capacity and infrastructure as people return or are trained, and infrastructure is rebuilt. Thus aid, particularly bilateral aid, should be incrementally increased in the first five years after the conflict, allowing time for improvements in the country’s absorptive capacity. After that period, it can be tapered down once again to normal aid levels.

Given the varied and overwhelming needs found in post-conflict environments, and given the sense that they are all crucial, it is easy to be daunted by the scale of the tasks ahead. Nevertheless, decision-makers and international organizations working in the post-conflict environment should think strategically about how to partner in the reconstruction process. There are several key considerations in identifying which issues or sectors should be targeted during the post-conflict environment:

1. Lynchpins of the Peace Process: A key first step in post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation is identifying the lynchpins of the peace process, and directing development assistance to support them. Often this process has been completed since peace treaties state explicitly what are the conditions for peace. Typically some form of power sharing and security realignment is part of the peace process, but often the peace treaties set out specific development goals as a condition for the peace process. In cases where development goals are not made explicit in the peace treaty, international development agencies need to work in partnership with national-decision makers to prioritize development planning.

In Sudan, for example, the UN and World Bank worked with government officials to conduct a Joint Assessment Mission (JAM) that laid out the framework for relief and development efforts after the end of the civil war between the North and South. Besides laying out development priorities, these large assessments can also provide useful political cover for international and national organizations, particularly in places where the government has traditionally been mistrustful of the intentions of international and national NGOs. They are not without their disadvantages, however. These documents can be so exhaustive and all encompassing, that they are not of particular use to small international organizations as they initiate their own strategic planning. And the Assessments themselves can take a long time to conduct, compile and then receive approval. Smaller international organizations typically have the comparative advantage of speed and may not want to wait indefinitely for larger processes to be complete before they begin their activities.

In other cases, there may not be any clearly stated development map that is part of the peace process, and international organizations may have not conducted a joint assessment mission with the host government. In such cases, international organizations will have to do more work on their own to analyze what are the key factors of the peace process and develop a strategy accordingly. Their evaluation process needs to include discussions with a broad swath of the society they are trying to help, including national and local government officials, community leaders, members of the press, members of religious
organizations and so on. These discussions should inform international organizations about the crucial efforts that must be completed if the peace process is to move forward.

If, for example, a key component of a peace process is the redrafting of a constitution or conducting elections, development agencies should devote their resources first and foremost to these activities to ensure they are successful. Should these processes fail, other reconstruction activities will also be doomed. Given the wide range of international and national actors that are involved in post-conflict reconstruction, there obviously needs to be a division of labor to ensure that not every agency is working on the same issue. However, development agencies, both national and international, need to keep in mind what the priority areas are for the peace process and tie their assistance as closely as possible to the support of these areas.

2. Peace Dividends: Another key aspect to successfully working in post-conflict environments is to show rapid results on the ground. Following the cessation of hostilities, there are high expectations within the population that things will change for the better and will do so rapidly. For ex-combatants, there are often incentives to return to fighting; they need to see visible positive changes to accept the irreversibility of the peace process. Otherwise “spoilers” will sabotage the war-to-peace transition. While it is often difficult to match people’s expectations in the post-conflict phase, showing some form of “peace dividend” can help build support for the peace process and provide disincentives for people to return to fighting.

Given the urgent need to demonstrate rapid results, it is often a good strategy to begin with small, easy to implement projects (“low-hanging fruit” or “quick wins” are the terms used in development discourse). Launching the post-conflict phase with a large and complicated problem, no matter how important it is, threatens to paralyze national and international efforts and raise serious doubts in the beneficiary community about the ability of national and international agencies to deliver on their promises. Starting with easy projects, with high visibility or highly symbolic value, provides communities with a sense of progress, no matter how small, and thus builds support for the peace process.

In cases where people do not feel their lives have significantly changed as a result of a peace process, the seeds for a return to violence are planted. This was the case of Palestinians after the Oslo Peace Accords in 1993. Consequently, conflict and violence re-erupted in 2000. It was also the case in East Timor in the 1999-2006 period. Even when significant financial resources are devoted to improve living conditions, it may not change popular perceptions that ‘nothing has changed”. This phenomenon needs to be considered carefully by national and international development entities alike. One means of countering this problem of perceptions is to be realistic from the beginning about the long hard road ahead and not make grandiose promises that clearly cannot be fulfilled. Governments also need to be transparent about what is being done and how much money is being used to do it. This involves a clear communication strategy and also engaging community leaders as much as possible in the planning process.
3. Process Driven Reconstruction and Civic Groups: During reconstruction and rehabilitation, the process is often as important as the results. Broad community participation, at all levels, in the decision-making process ensures that the reconstruction process will have increased legitimacy. Projects for community rehabilitation that are initiated from afar, and that are based on the priorities of either central government officials or donors, without consultation with the beneficiaries, are less likely to enjoy the same level of support as those initiated by the communities themselves.

Furthermore, the process of community decision-making in prioritizing development needs is an important first step in connecting citizens to their governments. Top down development during the reconstruction process will pave the way for top down institutionalized development later. Devolving decision-making downwards, to as close to the beneficiary community as possible, will ensure not only that development will reflect the real needs of the community, but will also decrease the danger of waste and corruption that frequently hampers large reconstruction projects. The reconstruction process thus can become a massive capacity building exercise for citizens in collective decision-making, project planning, community mobilization, transparency and financial accountability.

Process driven reconstruction also helps foster the development of an active and responsive civil society. Civil society, whether in the form of NGOs, religious groups, community groups, trade organizations or other professional associations, can play a key role in helping formulate development planning. In process driven reconstruction they can form an additional source of critical input into the government’s rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts, and even help mobilize local communities to get involved. Similarly, with buy-in from civil society, these groups can help the government diffuse any tension that might arise in the implementation phase, as they are often closer to local communities and have more credibility than local governments. This is especially the case in those contexts where governments have been rendered dysfunctional by protracted crisis.

It should be noted, however, that NGOs vary widely and wildly in ability and seriousness. Civic organizations tend to multiply like mushrooms in the presence of foreign funding, and many have little to no capacity to implement projects, nor do they command much in the way of legitimacy. While there are many quality civic organizations dedicated to helping their constituencies, there are also many that are either rent seeking or acting on behalf of political parties or individuals. There are many NGOs that are serious about their development responsibilities, but lack much in the way of skills or capacity. Thus international donor agencies need to be careful in who they select; they should also be aware of the various local NGOs track records.

In the Middle East there is an additional complication in sorting through community-based organizations since many of the most effective civic groups, with the widest reach and greatest legitimacy, are Islamist in ideological orientation. There has been reluctance on the part of Western donors and NGOs to engage Islamist civil society organizations due to the perceived differences in their social and political choices. Among the issues
most frequently cited as reasons for avoiding cooperation are the Islamists’ uncertain commitment to democracy and the conservatism of their social agenda.\textsuperscript{7} Western donors have felt more comfortable engaging secular NGOs more in tune with Western thinking on reform and social freedoms. However the latter lack the widespread legitimacy Islamists have earned through their own social programs and services. Be that as it may, deciding how to engage Islamist civic groups is one of the most important questions for development agencies in the Middle East, and remains the subject of much debate.

Finally, every peace process has its spoilers, those actors who have greater incentives to work against peace than for it. National and international organizations need to identify potential spoilers of the peace process and determine best strategies to involve them in the process. In the best-case scenarios, inclusive power-sharing arrangements provide incentives for potential spoilers to join the political process and disincentives to resume fighting. These can sometimes be political programs, such as including potential spoilers in the government or providing a general amnesty to former fighters not involved in war crimes. In other cases, the process involves specific development programs targeting former combatants to ensure that they have political, social and financial incentives to demobilize and reintegrate into society. These DDR programs (Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration) usually involve a component of job training, small loans to start businesses or land for farming provided to ex-combatants as incentives to reintegrate into mainstream society again.

4. Operational Flexibility: Working in post-conflict environments requires both a long-term strategic vision as well as the ability to respond to events as they unfold on the ground. National and international agencies working on long term development issues typically have the former but find themselves hard pressed to provide the latter. There are a number of reasons why this has proven to be the case.

Problems begin at the planning stage, where traditionally large international development agencies can spend months in program planning. Program assessments are often subject to several rounds of editing and only receive final approval for actions months from the time the assessment was carried out. By the time the assessment document is approved and a course of action determined, events on the ground have changed to a point where the information in the assessment is largely irrelevant. While these processes may be useful and necessary in more traditional forms of development planning, there are major obstacles to effective programming in post-conflict environments.

Time-consuming planning processes reflect a fundamental problem with many institutions and organizations operating in post-conflict development. National agencies may not be equipped to deal with the situation; on the other hand, international organizations are often more concerned with satisfying internal or donor-sponsored planning requirements than in developing effective and timely assistance.

This reflects a key theoretical clash between traditional forms of development planning and planning for conflict and post-conflict environments. In traditional long-term development planning, the longer the research, the more people interviewed, the better the assessment. There is no doubt that careful planning and thoughtful analysis of a country’s needs are important, but in conflict zones there is a tipping point in the assessment process where more research actually yields less useful information. In non-conflict environments, social and political change often occurs slowly and may only be visible over many months or even years. In conflict or post-conflict environments, however, the time horizon for social and political change is often extremely short, sometimes only a matter of days. The assessment process for new programs needs to reflect this unique characteristic. The program goals, the assessment process, and the programs themselves, should not be viewed as fixed items, but rather as moving targets.

The changes needed to make national and international agencies more flexible vary greatly depending on the agency and its operating style. For government agencies, one key to improving speed is devolving the decision-making to lower level government. There is often concern that in doing so, one is merely devolving corruption and inefficiency. The concern is a valid one and there is no guarantee that decentralized decision-making will yield better results. But empowering local leaders to prioritize their own development needs, and giving them the financial and technical resources to do so improves greatly the speed with which projects are implemented. Similarly, when there is corruption or mismanagement, local communities are often much more aware of it and able to monitor and react to it when it occurs at the local rather than national level. The price of accountability is always high at the local level.

For many NGOs, whether national or international, the greatest obstacle to speed in responding has traditionally been securing funding and achieving donor requirements. International NGOs, such as Oxfam, who rely more on private donations and community-based fundraising than on government or donor funding, have been subject to fewer restrictions in this regard. Consequently, the speed of their response is not restrained by donor requirement. In recent years, many other international NGOs have made an effort to broaden their funding base and decrease their reliance on unilateral sources of funding, such as USAID. This has enabled them to respond faster, and to be more creative in their programming options since they do not have to follow donor-mandated program designs. National NGOs can similarly achieve faster results if they develop successful plans to more effectively secure funding and channel in-kind contributions from local communities. This is a better alternative than relying on international donors or national government agencies for funding.

Donor organizations and bilateral aid bodies have also started adapting to conflict and post-conflict environments. Organizations such as USAID were challenged in the speed of their response by financial reporting requirements. International and national NGOs that received USAID funding had to first undergo an audit and meet financial reporting

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requirements. While these were easily managed by international organizations, local civic groups faced problems meeting this requirement and were thus either excluded from funding, or were subject to delays of six-months or longer while the audit took place. The length of the process severely curtailed the ability of USAID to utilize the knowledge and initiatives of local organizations at the time when they were needed most: during conflicts or in the critical window after the conflict had ended.

To improve the quality of their performance, USAID created an office specifically tasked with working in transitional countries and created a new mechanism to address specifically the needs of this environment. Grants within this office are awarded almost exclusively to local civic groups, and are administered through a contracting partner who satisfied US financial accountability requirements through an in-kind grant mechanism. Groups receiving grants would not receive cash directly, but rather would receive all contributions in-kind from the contractor.⁹

The office with USAID also shifted its mandate from long-term development considerations to short-term socio-political goals. The theoretical basis for this shift is that socio-political considerations are often a higher priority to the stability and long-term welfare of the country in the period immediately following the cessation of hostilities. The types of projects that are supported reflect this mentality shift. The priority is for projects that advance the political process – without pushing a specific outcome – and democratic openings. Grants are also very short term in nature – three months being the maximum duration – to reflect the speed with which events unfold on the ground. Speed of response is not a guarantee of success, however. Even short-term efforts need to feed into a larger political process, and eventually development planning must shift from short-term imperatives to longer term planning as the country stabilizes.

5. Regional Cooperation: Local conflicts are almost always exposed to regional influences, whether ideological or material. Consequently, the regional dimension can play an instrumental role in protecting against the resumption of conflict. Joint ventures between non-state actors at the sub-state level help promote thick cooperation, increasing the cost of conflict resumption, serving as a disincentive against a return to conflict. International development agencies should thus reserve a place for region-wide projects in post-conflict planning. Regional commissions such as UN-ESCWA, play an important role in such initiatives as they are perceived as neutral actors, have links with governments and civic actors across the region and can foster inter-state cooperation to help solve regional problems.

V. Conclusion

Development efforts in Western Asia are inevitably affected by regional instability and conflicts. The war in Iraq and the Israeli-Arab conflict are the most prominent sources of instability at present and the repercussions of these conflicts are felt across the region. The volatility generated by these conflicts, whether in the form of rising extremism or increased ethno-sectarian tensions, is further exacerbated by poor development policies in many other countries in the region. Low levels of education, high levels of unemployment, the unequal distribution of wealth and stagnant economies have plagued many countries, leading to the marginalization of large portions of their populations. Even in relatively wealthy countries, lack of reform in governance and the unequal application of the law leads to resentment and unrest, fueling further instability.

These conditions have proven a huge challenge to national and international development efforts in the region. Long-term development plans frequently find themselves overtaken by the rapid pace of change on the ground. Political volatility has also led to erratic government and donor policies that have frustrated development efforts. In places with open conflict, like Iraq and occupied Palestinian territory, the security of both staff and beneficiaries is an overriding concern and acts as the primary constraint on development programming. In other countries in the region, government restrictions deter international development efforts and curtail the scope and effectiveness of their activities.

Despite the many challenges of working in conflict and instability, international and national development agencies should not wait until the conflict has ended before beginning work. Rather, development agencies need to better adapt their programs to conflict zones through creative, innovative and rapid responses. Development policy on its own may not end occupations or insurgencies, but it can play a pivotal role in building the groundwork for any future settlement or peace process and can provide some alleviation for the suffering of the citizens in these countries.

Development agencies also should not ignore the effect of their development policies on instability in countries free from conflict. Incorporating a sensitivity to conflict into development programs will ensure that they do not inadvertently harm the people they seek to help.
Summary of Main Points

The main claims and conclusions of this paper can be summarized in the following points:

Regarding the Pre-Conflict Phase:

- Unequal socio-economic growth in multiethnic and multi-religious countries threatens to plant the seeds of ethno-sectarian conflict if one group is perceived to be disproportionately benefiting over another.
- Bottom-up decision-making in development programs can reduce tension by increasing legitimacy and community buy-in.
- Improving socio-economic growth and reducing domestic sources of tension in the long run is exceedingly difficult without linking these efforts to improvements in governance and the rule of law.
- Effective communication of development policies and programs is a central component of conflict prevention strategies, and should be introduced first in government institutions.
- National and international development agencies need to integrate a conflict-prevention strategy into their development planning process to ensure that development efforts do not add to existing tension and instability.
- Imposing conditionality on development aid can either reduce tension through improvements in governance and the rule of law, or increase tension by mandating reforms that are either socially or politically unviable.

Regarding the Conflict Phase:

- All relief and development efforts in conflict zones should be aware of, and tailored to, the larger political context in which they operate.
- Successful development projects in conflict zones hinge on a number of variables: relevance, security, community needs and an organization’s mandate.
- Successive short-term projects operating within a larger strategic framework are often more successful in conflict zones than long-term projects that cannot be adapted to changing circumstances.
- Humanitarian assistance in protracted conflicts should be tied more closely to development efforts.
- International development projects in conflict zones should include a specific component to empower local partners through technical assistance or capacity building to ensure the sustainability of development efforts.

Regarding the Post-Conflict Phase:

- International and national development agencies, plus national actors, should work together to formulate a joint recovery strategy for countries emerging from conflict.
• Both international and national efforts should focus on supporting “lynchpins” to the peace process.
• Direct and visible signs of progress in the post-conflict phase are crucial to prevent a return to fighting. International and national development agencies should work with local actors to provide these “peace dividends”, choosing high impact and high visibility projects that are relatively easy to implement.
• Reconstruction efforts should be process-driven: broad participation in the reconstruction effort is almost as important as the results of the reconstruction effort itself.
• National and international agencies need to improve their speed and efficiency in responding to conflict emergencies.
• Development agencies normally focused on long-term planning should have specific departments with streamlined operations to ensure a faster, more flexible approach to development in conflict.
• International development agencies should promote regional projects that make a return to conflict expensive for all actors.