

Lessons Learned from the Peacebuilding Commission's Work: The Impact of Political Accompaniment at the Country Level

In-Person Discussion | 16 June 2023

Summary Note

The 2022 peacebuilding architecture review (hereafter, the 2020 review) concluded on 21 December 2020 with the adoption of dual resolutions on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace by the UN General Assembly (A/RES/75/201) and the Security Council (S/RES/2558). The resolutions call on Member States, the UN, and other stakeholders to “continue to take action to implement the resolutions on peacebuilding and sustaining peace, and to advance efforts to bring greater coherence to peacebuilding efforts” (S/RES/2558, OP1). In line with this call, the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation (DHF), the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP), the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) and the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) are continuing a series of roundtable discussions to examine strategies and pathways towards the operationalization of the 2016 resolutions on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace.

This roundtable discussion explored the impact of the Peacebuilding Commission's (PBC) work at the country level. Specifically, the discussion focused on how the political accompaniment role of the PBC can support national peacebuilding processes through its unique position within the UN system. Reflecting on the role of the PBC's work in specific country contexts, peacebuilding experts from Member States, the UN and civil society explored good practices and lessons learned and highlighted opportunities for strengthening the PBC's political accompaniment role for greater impact at the country level.

The following are the key takeaways from the discussion:

The twin resolutions on peacebuilding and sustaining peace passed in 2016 reaffirmed the main purposes of the PBC as an intergovernmental advisory body, having as one of its main functions “to bring sustained international attention to sustaining peace, and to provide political accompaniment and advocacy to countries affected by conflict, with their consent” (S/RES/2282 and A/70/262). The extent to which and how the PBC impacts peacebuilding processes across the system and at the country level remains ambiguous and undocumented. Therefore, it is crucial to support the call by PBC Member States to improve efforts to measure the success of peacebuilding interventions “in terms of impact rather than outputs” (A/74/935–S/2020/645, p. 3).

There are a variety of ways in which the PBC's impact can be measured and evaluated. For instance, measuring specific steps in peacebuilding action or prompt analysis of high-risk investments by regional development banks that result from PBC engagement. To optimize the PBC's impact, it is important to identify areas with a proven track record and to channel resources accordingly, considering the PBC's limited capacity.

One good example where the PBC has effectively played its role is in supporting the peacebuilding transition in Liberia. Sweden has served as the configuration chair providing leadership in the accompaniment provided to Liberia since 2012. Per its mandate, the PBC helped maintain international attention on the situation in the country and complemented the UN Security Council's (UNSC) work in the country in supporting national stakeholders in

developing a forward-looking and inclusive peacebuilding plan, with the support of the Resident Coordinator's Office. This peacebuilding plan has helped address financial challenges by mobilizing donor support. The success of this plan inevitably relied on the consent and commitment of the country. Without national ownership and trust, the PBC cannot take action in its political accompaniment role.

- *There is a need to address the disconnect between expectations and the mandate of the PBC.*

The scope of the mandate of the PBC needs to be very clear to Member States both for those who are members and for those who plan on engaging with the Council. It is positive that the PBC works closely with the Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) to identify the key peacebuilding priorities in countries discussed in the PBC. The PBC can also offer Member States an opportunity to engage with regional development banks and international financial institutions (IFIs), experts and civil society to mobilize financial and political support for their peacebuilding priorities. At the same time, the expectation that PBC support should directly contribute to financing national peacebuilding priorities is misguided. The PBC is not a platform for fundraising and has no implementation mandate, tools or capacity to act as such. As the example of the PBC's engagement in Liberia demonstrates, the PBC can encourage and facilitate donor engagement following and in line with the development of a clear peacebuilding strategy by national actors.

- *The stigma of engaging with the PBC must be avoided.*

The second area where the impact of the PBC can be traced is in facilitating learning and improving peacebuilding policy and programming globally. However, the sense that being "on the PBC's agenda" reflects poorly on a Member State continues to discourage countries from engaging with the PBC. This perception of "being considered to be in trouble" undermines the PBC's ability to facilitate effective learning and exchange to benefit all Member States. An example identified to indicate that this might gradually be shifting was the 19 June 2023 PBC Meeting on Indigenous Peoples, Peace and Reconciliation in which Canada, Colombia and Norway, shared their experiences in addressing indigenous issues, reconciliation and promoting indigenous voices.¹ Such conversations showcase the PBC's strength as a platform for diverse actors to focus peacebuilding conversations on root causes and prevention in line with the universality principle in the New Agenda for Peace.

- *PBC's advisory role to the UN Security Council and other UN bodies requires strengthening.*

A third area where the PBC's impact can be explored is in its advisory and bridging roles vis-a-vis other UN intergovernmental bodies to support the integration of peacebuilding across the work of the UN system. The PBC is expected to raise awareness and advise other UN intergovernmental bodies on essential elements of sustainable peace. A good example of effective coordination between the PBC and the UNSC could be seen in a recent situation facing Burkina Faso. There, PBC senior experts engaged country officials in the development of the Recovery and Peacebuilding Assessment (RPBA), which offered a prevention-based rather than a securitized approach to analyzing security threats and played a crucial role in supporting a comprehensive assessment of the prevention and peacebuilding needs in the country,

¹ UN Web TV. (2023, June 19). Peacebuilding Commission: Ambassadorial-level meeting on Indigenous Peoples, peace, and reconciliation in Canada, Colombia and Norway | UN web TV. United Nations. <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1x/k1xd6h0iog>

particularly in the most insecure regions. The UNSC was actively involved in all stages of this process and their request for PBC advice gave space for the Commission to inform a more holistic national peacebuilding plan. While the work in Burkina Faso is a good example of efficient collaboration, it remains difficult to measure the impact of the PBC's advice to the UNSC. The UNSC provides little feedback on how advice provided by the PBC is used in its deliberations or decisions.

- *The PBC's effectiveness depends on how it is used within the broader system of UN actors, not on its actions as a single entity.*

When looking at the impact of UN peacebuilding initiatives at the country level, the PBC must serve as one tool in a larger toolbox that is used in a coordinated manner. Effective peacebuilding actions require a reconfiguration of the UN system. As the PBC's methods are changing, avenues for other UN bodies' complementary and efficient action are emerging. There is a movement away from country specific configurations to those that are regional and/or thematic, and the PBC is diversifying its engagement through other roles. In this process, other actors can reinforce the PBC's engagement according to their mandates and strengths. For example, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Crisis Bureau can enhance its engagement with the PBC, and the Peacebuilding Support Office's (PBSO) critical hinge function can more effectively facilitate the connection between the PBC and the rest of the UN system. The PBSO is particularly well situated to support the monitoring of impact by helping Member States identify impact metrics and conduct monitoring action.

Based on the key takeaways from the discussion, the following recommendations are offered:

- *PBSO can work to strengthen monitoring of the PBC's impact (or at least outcomes), rather than outputs.* The 2025 peacebuilding architecture review presents a key opportunity to strengthen the understanding and application of the PBC's role in providing political accompaniment. In addition to ensuring internal monitoring of impact, annual reports of the PBC should highlight, beyond outputs and activities, the key lessons learned from the work of the PBC. It is critical to step up measures to gauge the impact of the PBC to ensure the effective balancing of capacities, especially in the context of increased attention to the PBC's work and potential.
- *Vice-Chairs of the PBC should take a more active role in strategizing and advancing PBC engagement.* The capacities of the PBC Chair often depend on the capacities of the mission. As the attention to the PBC grows, it becomes more complicated for the PBC to think about the impact strategically. The PBC Vice Chairs should act beyond organizing meetings when the Chair is not available and support strategic areas of PBC engagement.
- *PBC Member States should establish a clear mechanism for diverse civil society engagement, including women and youth, to hear diverse perspectives on the contexts being discussed.* As the PBC works to determine avenues to measure its impact, it is essential that local peacebuilding actors are consulted to ensure that the PBC's work is people-centered and context-specific. Capitalizing on the presence of groups like the New York Peacebuilding Group (NYPG) and the Civil Society-UN dialogue initiative can ensure civil society inputs are taken into consideration in the PBC's deliberations. Requests for civil society input should be shared in advance to fairly account for the limited capacity of many civil society organizations. Further, the PBC could establish more frequent field visits and meetings with civil society networks and coalitions operating at the country level, given appropriate protection measures are in place.