Global Accountability and Local Peace-Building

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Over the past two decades, international peace-building has become entrenched in the rules-based international order established in the aftermath of World War II. This entrenchment has taken two forms: one, peace-building, inclusive of peacekeeping, has become a primary response to civil war and political violence; and two, peace-building has relatedly become a focus of many intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs), and states that are central to the liberal world order. With the recent populist surge in the United States and Europe, the survival of the liberal world order and its institutions is under increasing threat, and with them the international peace-building capacities embedded within.

Despite their commitment to saving the lives of the most vulnerable populations, the core institutions of the liberal world order—IGOs, Western INGOs, and Western donors—have been widely criticized for serving global elite interests, not those of impoverished populations.[1] The scholarship on international peace-building has been at the forefront of these critiques.[2] The United Nations, an IGO, has been criticized for its preoccupation with member state political processes, which inhibit the organization's capacity to work effectively with conflict-affected populations.[3] Elsewhere, Western donors have strengthened state institutions at the expense of society and failed to make peace-building central to their development cooperation.[4] INGOs, in turn, are often preoccupied with competition and donor priorities instead of responding directly to the local populations they claim to transform.[5] In other words, all of these institutions have been widely criticized for their inability to support effective peace-building at the local level.

Improved peace-building success is unlikely to result simply from reinforcing these global institutions through top-down approaches. Instead, success will likely come from crucial innovations that better enable these organizations to respond to the local-level institutions that they aim to transform. And such local-level accountability results from what might be characterized as bad behavior of individual country office staff who bypass the formal, upward accountability mechanisms to establish informal local accountability with critical domestic stakeholders and institutions.

CONCEPTUALIZING PEACE-BUILDING

Even though most civil wars today have international dimensions, they happen at the local level.[6] Civil wars most affect local populations that have little power in the global system. International peace-building aims to address this domestic inequality, transforming the institutions that caused a civil war into those that can sustain an equitable peace. Successful international peace-building "is a counterrevolutionary or revolutionary event. A civil war revolutionizes the polity, society, economy, and culture. . . . To create a self-sustaining peace, peace-building has to reverse all that."[7]

Peace-building is an umbrella term that describes various interventions in countries affected by political violence. Peace-building interventions aim to prevent violence and relapse into violence after

conflict, and to create conditions for sustainable peace.[8] Peace-building occurs at the local level. Local, as used here, is synonymous with domestic or subnational and refers to activities or institutions that occupy a specific geographic or cultural space within the conflict-affected country.

Over the past few decades, international peace-building has become big business for many global governors.[9] Global governors are those "who exercise power across borders for purposes of affecting policy," such as IGOs, INGOs, states, and multinational corporations.[10] Since then UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali introduced peace-building in the early 1990s, the number of IGOs, INGOs, and bilateral donors in the space has grown rapidly.[11] Many organizations that were founded to do development or provide humanitarian assistance now count peace-building as a core objective.[12] Private companies are also increasingly focused on international peace-building, either as subcontractors for international donors or as part of a commitment to corporate social responsibility. Even militaries now do significant peace-building work in the name of counterinsurgency or "winning hearts and minds."[13]

Under the umbrella of international peace-building sits a broad range of potential activities. Because the causes of civil war and large-scale violent conflict are multifaceted and reverberate through all institutions in a state and society, almost any type of activity implemented in a war-torn country has the potential to qualify as a peace-building activity, given the appropriate spin. Rebuilding roads, constructing schools, training judges, building local courts, equipping police forces, providing seed funding for small businesses, establishing truth and reconciliation commissions, launching military attacks, developing taxation offices, and training leaders in conflict resolution techniques all qualify as peace-building activities. The implementing organization simply has to claim that its activities address a specific driver of conflict or peace in the country in which they are implemented.[14]

Although a broad set of activities could qualify as international peace-building, a standard set of supply-driven activities has emerged as the field has grown.[15] Standardization, professionalization, and measurement have taken over. These activities focus on reform of the security sector, including the police, military, and intelligence; reform of the judicial system and development of conflict resolution capacities; development of mechanisms to address crimes committed during the war (transitional justice); development of representative state institutions (promoting good governance); and creation of economic development at all levels of society through macroeconomic reforms.[16]

WHEN THE GLOBAL MEETS THE LOCAL

In countries where the government is strong, represents the majority of the population, and delivers social services throughout its territory, the state and society can enable local-level change. But these strong democratic states are not where the majority of peace-building happens. Peace-building most often takes place in countries where the governments are not strong enough to ensure that international mandates and goals address the particular causes and manifestations of the country's conflict. In these contexts, global governors often respond primarily to the preferences of states and global elites, often ignoring the perspectives of civil society, local communities, or opposition parties. What is needed is local accountability beyond the host state to enable global governors to be relevant to the needs, capacities, and preferences of the specific local institutions that they aim to transform.

Informal local accountability is realized when the country office of an intervening organization delegates authority to local actors that represent the diversity of interests in the organization's peace-building intervention(s). Like informal governance mechanisms, informal accountability can manifest

in different ways.[17] The important distinction is that informal local accountability gives local actors authority to sanction the intervening organization for failing to achieve its aims in the country context. For example, the Integrated UN Office in Burundi was able to achieve its peace-building aims when it established these informal local accountability mechanisms. Its Cadre de Dialogue project—which facilitated dialogue among Burundi's political parties between 2007 and 2009—established a monitoring group made up of individual participants who represented the diversity of the political spectrum.[18] Through this informal local accountability mechanism, the UN Mission in Burundi was able to ground part of its globally derived mandate in Burundi's local reality.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BAD BEHAVIOR

When country offices create informal local accountability, they do so because individual staff take the initiative to do so.[19] Delegating authority to local stakeholders, however, inevitably requires that these individuals bypass standard operating procedures that were created to ensure the country office's accountability to the organization's headquarters and its principals, not local stakeholders. As a result, the success of international peace-building relies in part on the willingness of individual agents to contravene the formal routines established by their superiors to hold them accountable.[20] In other words, seemingly bad behavior is necessary for good performance. As a *New York Times* op-ed by a former UN staff member argued, "Too often, the only way to speed things up is to break the rules."[21]

In the face of decreasing support for international aid, multilateral organizations, and nongovernmental efforts, it is particularly important to support efforts to create informal local accountability and to better understand the seemingly bad behavior that enables it. By circumventing the standard operating procedures, innovative staff are able to give authority to local stakeholders in conflict-affected countries to hold the global governors accountable for local outcomes. Nonetheless, not much is known about who these rule breakers are and what enables them to build effective informal local accountability mechanisms. Other questions pertain to which type of rule-breaking behavior enables effective peace-building and which type undermines it, whether particular personalities are likelier to innovate than others, and if social networks facilitate or undermine rule-breaking behavior.

Understanding innovations in peace-building thus requires further study of the individual staff who enable global governors to perform positively. Top-down policy approaches only reinforce the hierarchical formal accountability of global governors. Instead, efforts should be made to understand and support innovative individuals who make these global organizations responsive to the local realities that they aim to transform.

ENDNOTES

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5. Campbell, *Global Governance and Local Peace*; Alexander Cooley and James Ron, "The NGO Scramble: Organizational Insecurity and the Political Economy of Transnational Action," *International Security* 27, no. 1 (2002): 5–39; Alnoor Ebrahim, "Accountability in Practice: Mechanisms for NGOs," *World Development* 31, no. 5 (2003): 813–829.

6. Séverine Autesserre, "Hobbes and the Congo: Frames, Local Violence, and International Intervention," *International Organization* 63, no. 2 (2009): 249–80; Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

7. Michael Doyle and Nicholas Sambanis, *Making War and Building Peace: United Nations Peace Operations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

8. "The Challenge of Sustaining Peace: Report of the Advisory Group of Experts for the 2015 Review of the United Nations Peacebuilding Architecture"; Michael Barnett, "Building a Republican Peace: Stabilizing States after War," *International Security* 30, no. 4 (2006): 87–112; Roland Paris, "Saving Liberal Peacebuilding," *Review of International Studies* 36, no. 2 (April 2010): 337–365.

9. Deborah D. Avant, Martha Finnemore, and Susan K. Sell, eds., *Who Governs the Globe?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

10. Ibid.

11. Michael Barnett, Hunjoon Kim, Madalene O'Donnell, and Laura Sitea, "Peacebuilding: What Is in a Name?" *Global Governance* 13, no. 1 (2007): 35–58.

12. Several humanitarian organizations, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and Doctors Without Borders, have refused to pursue peace-building aims, preferring to focus on life-saving humanitarian assistance and other similar activities that they believe allow them to claim political neutrality. Most of the other big humanitarian organizations, however, consider themselves to be multi-mandate organizations and conduct peace-building activities as well as humanitarian and development work.

13. Barnett Rubin, "What I Saw in Afghanistan," *New Yorker,* July 1, 2015, http://newyorker.com/news/news-desk/what-have-we -been-doing-in-afghanistan.

14. CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, *Reflecting on Peace Practice (RPP): Participant Training Manual* (Cambridge: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, 2008).

15. "Peacebuilding: What Is in a Name?," 35–58.

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18. Susanna Campbell with Leonard Kayobera and Justine Nkurunziza, "Independent External Evaluation: Peacebuilding Fund Projects in Burundi," March 2010, http://unpbf.org/wp-content/uploads/Independent-Evaluation-Burundi.pdf; Campbell, *Global Governance and Local Peace.*

19. While most country offices are told to build some local ownership for their activities, there are no formal guidelines for how this ownership should take place.

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