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Name Daniel Biau

Re-building communities in post-conflict situations

By Daniel Biau, Deputy Executive Director, UN-HABITAT

1. Throughout the past decade, the nature of conflict has changed fundamentally. Close to one hundred conflicts have erupted, though only a handful of these have been between states. By the year 2000, no region had been spared. The impact upon least developed countries has been particularly severe. Twenty-two of the world's thirty-five poorest countries were either in, or emerging from civil war, most of these in Africa. What is more distressing is that, in recent conflicts it is ordinary civilians, especially women and children who suffer the most. Whereas in the First World War, civilians accounted for 10 percent of casualties, in Mozambique, 95 percent of casualties were civilians. Cumulatively, the forced movement of civilian populations because of conflict has led to more than twenty million people having to flee their homes.
2. Rehabilitation and reconstruction activities now amount to billions of dollars annually. However, increased levels of relief aid have occurred not as a result of increased sources of bilateral aid, but at the expense of development activities. Nor is this aid evenly distributed. In 1999 the UN appeal for Kosovo received government pledges which amounted to \$207 for every person in need, while those in Sierra Leone received \$16 and in the Democratic Republic of Congo, little over \$8. These inequities have made the legendary continuum "from relief to development" appear unattainable as ever. UN-HABITAT has been involved in some of the world's most volatile regions including in Afghanistan, Somalia, Guatemala, Rwanda, Iraq, Kosovo and the Middle-East. From these varied experiences, a number of important lessons have been learnt that can lead to a more sustainable and secure future.

3. Although the number of war-torn societies that have been involved in rehabilitation has grown rapidly since the late 1980s, the *concept* of rehabilitation has remained largely the same. Borrowing from experiences gained in rehabilitation following natural disasters, post-conflict reconstruction has focussed principally on architectural and engineering considerations in rebuilding housing and infrastructure at the same time as providing for the basic needs of victims. While natural disasters are increasingly resulting in massive physical damage, governance structures and livelihoods are usually only temporarily curtailed. In short, natural disaster reconstruction is about rebuilding what was destroyed using existing communities, political authorities and legal systems.
4. In a post-conflict environment, however, the situation is significantly different. Prolonged ethnic and political rivalries tend to decay the most robust social, political and economic institutions.

Fundamental questions must first be asked not only about what to reconstruct, but also about how to do so in order not to recreate the unsustainable environment that originally created the conflict. Even more imperative is the rehabilitation of governmental legitimacy and its ability to ensure the rule of law and the delivery of basic services.

5. Reconstruction in this case requires a far more innovative approach. Firstly, all interventions should start with a careful analysis of the root causes and the dynamics of the conflict. Humanitarian crises must be seen as far more than simply a shortage of material goods, but rather as crises of economic, political, and social systems. The failure to recognise the importance of political restoration is one of the main reasons why successful reconstruction is often more of a hope than a reality. There is a need to reconsider reconstruction by moving beyond a relief-oriented, supply-driven approach to rehabilitation. In countries where the state was contested, such as Rwanda and Angola, or has collapsed such as Somalia and Afghanistan and indigenous institutions have re-emerged, we must think beyond conventional models of the nation-state. Political rehabilitation in these societies could take the form of helping to rebuild traditional institutions rather than imposing "modern" structures of the type that had collapsed. In Kosovo, UN-HABITAT worked with local government experts to fill the vacuum left by Serbian Officials. By combining a team of local and international experts, basic administrative and political structures are built reflecting local needs and practices

while being based upon commonly accepted norms of Good Governance.

6. Complex emergencies, such as the case of Afghanistan, generally have no clear beginning or end. UN-HABITAT is currently working to re-build housing and infrastructure during this period of uneasy peace, characterised by a highly unstable environment. In such contexts, it is often difficult to identify whether conditions are appropriate for serious rehabilitation work. Yet the timing of rehabilitation, the seizure of a 'window of opportunity' is crucial. Its weakness or robustness may make the difference between consolidation of peace or return to conflict.
7. Civil conflicts undermine and destroy the social fabric of society, weakening the capacities of communities by increasing their vulnerability and undermining their chances of recovery. Conflicts do not affect all groups equally. Vulnerable groups, including ethnic minorities, women and children usually bear the brunt of conflict. Rebuilding social capital and livelihood systems in such circumstances is therefore more complex and far more difficult than restoring physical infrastructure after natural disasters. It involves redefining and reorienting relationships between political authorities and citizens, strengthening relationships between different ethnic groups, re-creating a civil society, promoting reconciliation, and, reforming economic policies and institutions. In Northern Iraq UN-HABITAT is implementing a settlements rehabilitation programme with activities in excess of US\$ 400 million. Most projects of this scale tend to consider only technical and contractual parameters, with the bulk of the work undertaken by large multi-national firms. In this case, care has been taken to ensure that local authorities are equal stakeholders in the reconstruction process. Consequently rather than relying upon foreign companies, over 40,000 Kurds are currently employed by local firms. Of the 30,000 of houses built to date, over 50% have been constructed with labour contributed by the beneficiaries.
8. Gender issues are central to post-conflict rehabilitation. One of the consequences of conflict has always been the transformation of women's role in society. Existing gender inequalities change during a conflict. In Rwanda, a substantial majority of those killed in the war were men. In some parts of the country, women form up to eighty percent of the adult population and became the prime instigators of rebuilding livelihoods. In other countries such as Sudan and Somalia, it appears that displacement has actually

worked to empower women. Clearly, in order to be successful, post-conflict rehabilitation needs to take into account the new roles of women. In Hargeisa, Somalia, UN-HABITAT has been working with local authorities to institute cost-recovery mechanisms in parallel with the expansion of water infrastructure. Women have been recruited to manage public fountains and collect user fees. This has not only enabled the water company to operate in a more sustainable manner, but has also provided these women with an important source of income.

9. How can rehabilitation be best linked to relief and development? Most definitions of rehabilitation used by international agencies describe it as activities that are of limited duration undertaken following a disaster. Such definitions are narrow considering the range of activities that rehabilitation after conflict should cover. In practice, most NGOs do not normally include macroeconomic and political issues as components of rehabilitation. This partly explains why most rehabilitation interventions in post-crisis environments consist of individual construction programmes that are implemented with few links with other types of activities. Rehabilitation initiatives have been criticised for lacking a coherent strategic framework needed for creating sustainable livelihoods. Part of the problem is the absence of mechanisms to link donors with in a national planning policy, combined with the inclination of many agencies to implement their activities using un-integrated relief approaches rather than those of development.
10. Strategic approaches for involving stakeholders in the reconstruction of their own community is essential for ensuring sustainable peace and development.

Likewise local reconstruction programmes need to be integrated at regional and national levels, addressing the underlying causes of conflict while promoting good governance. Rehabilitation assistance should provide the framework for reviving livelihoods and civil institutions with the aim of strengthening the local capacities of stakeholders to participate in the reconstruction process. In post-conflict environment, local authorities are often regarded as an unwelcome bureaucratic layer by many international agencies. However, active engagement with local governments can ensure that local people are represented and have a sustainable mechanism for participating in the re-development of their community. This is particularly important in post-conflict situations as a means of fostering political reconciliation among diverse

interests. Local authorities also have an important contribution to make by delivering basic essential services and thereby providing a much-needed feeling of normality among the local population.

11. Early on in the post-conflict rehabilitation process, a significant portion of aid is naturally targeted to meet the urgent humanitarian needs of the affected population. Reintegration and livelihood rebuilding requires a minimum level of food and rehabilitation actions targeted at water, health, and educational amenities. In order to meet these diverse needs local, national and international capacities are required. Because of their inherent complexity, the formation and implementation of urban rehabilitation strategies are often weaker than their rural counterparts. While urban livelihoods include both formal and informal sectors, rural livelihoods tend to be focussed upon subsistence activities. Tools developed to restore basic services, infrastructure and access to markets in simpler rural contexts are not appropriate in more complex towns and cities. This knowledge gap needs to be bridged if the overall efficiency and effectiveness of urban programmes are to be improved.

12. In conclusion, UN-HABITAT's experience has repeatedly shown that rehabilitation can only be successfully undertaken within a cross-sectional political, economic and social framework which makes the link between relief and development, including:

- Re-establishment and improvement of infrastructure and housing through sustainable participatory mechanisms.
- Restoration of law and order through accountable and efficient local government structures based on the norms of good urban governance.
- Enhancing economic opportunities for households, small producers and small/medium enterprises by improving access to credit and providing security of tenure.
- Enabling recovery of household livelihoods and income-generating opportunities through labour intensive infrastructure re-building.

16. Rehabilitation cannot be restricted to re-creating the pre-war environment, since perceived inequities within and among

various groups underlie the causes of conflict and social and economic relations, such as an increase in female-headed households, change because of conflict. The institutional and political architecture needed to ensure long-term security and peace always differs from the pre-conflict situation. It should not be designed in a rush by international agencies. On the contrary it must be elaborated patiently, at the local level, by involving a variety of social and economic partners. Re-building communities and their living environment requires in fact a non-emergency approach.