



Building strong institutions for sustainable development in conflict-affected countries*

Summary

The pandemic is likely to exacerbate existing challenges in conflict-affected countries and increase pressure on already struggling institutions. The proactive leadership of governments is key to the recovery from the pandemic and the development of vaccines should be free of political considerations. Efforts are also needed to address sexual and gender-based violence which has increased due to the pandemic. Clear, verified information backed up by evidence is essential to overcoming challenges related to fake news and mistrust of government. Local leaders and civil society organizations on the ground remain critical partners both in terms of peacebuilding and aiding vaccination programmes that rely on trust and legitimacy. Partnerships at the global level and support in peacebuilding and financial aid from the international community continue to be critical in the recovery process from the pandemic in conflict-affected countries.

Recommendations

The Committee recommends that the Council welcome the continuing work of the Committee on building strong institutions for sustainable development in countries affected by conflict, and look forward to the Committee's further engagement in promoting effective governance for sustainable development in such situations and its

contribution to the work of the Peacebuilding Commission. (Paragraph 13)

► See [ECOSOC resolution 2021/12](#)

* Excerpt from Committee of Experts on Public Administration, Report on the twentieth session. See Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2021, Supplement No. 24 ([E/2021/44-E/C.16/2021/7](#))

Discussion

Impact of the pandemic

The Committee observes that conflict-affected countries tend to have weak governance, poor-quality or partial institutions, contested sovereignty or violent conflict, as well as mistrust of Governments that have frequently failed to deliver high quality – or sometimes any – services. Conflicts reduce GDP by an average of 2 per cent per year, and affected populations are less likely to be educated, have access to basic services and enjoy sustainable livelihoods. Lack of capacity in public administration and governance of institutions in conflict-affected countries remain a challenge.

The pandemic has exacerbated such challenges and increased pressure on already struggling institutions. Violent conflict itself tends to intensify the spread of infectious diseases in the absence of medical service provision, in contexts in which sanitation is often difficult and where there is rapid movement of displaced persons. Such outbreaks severely threaten already stretched public services, affect some of the poorest and most vulnerable populations and could reverse their progress in development.

There are also opportunities for authorities and security services to become more oppressive, while at the same time there could be opportunities for non-State armed groups to take advantage of reduced attention or capability on behalf of government forces. For example, the closure of border crossings during lockdowns could provide a chance for Governments to increase control in fragile border areas, while at the same time providing an opportunity for informal border crossings controlled by non-State groups to emerge.

The reduction in the effectiveness of local peace approaches, including inclusive approaches to conflict resolution and justice, has been

underscored during the pandemic. The restrictions on international travel and movement during the pandemic have created the need for better and more effective support to local management of peace processes. Local leaders and civil society organizations on the ground remain critical partners both in terms of peacebuilding and in terms of aiding vaccination programmes that rely on trust and legitimacy.

The Committee underscores that the proactive leadership of governments is key to the recovery from the pandemic, for example in the enforcement of restrictions on movement to reduce transmission of the virus, provision of health care, economic support and that the development of vaccines should be free of political considerations and respect international human rights and privacy norms.

Financing for mass vaccination efforts is urgent. The Committee suggests that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) could play a key role, for example by opening a vaccine financing window into the existing IMF rapid financing facility, through which countries could access funds for advance vaccine purchase. For successful distribution of vaccines, budgetary flexibility, transparency and accountability in the process and effective coordination among health authorities and other public institutions are indispensable.

The Committee underscores that enhancing the quality of public administration and the technical capacity of public servants should remain a priority in conflict-affected areas. Taking a conflict-sensitive approach, specifically not further exacerbating the exclusion of specific groups that might already be marginalized and whose conditions might have

worsened during the pandemic, is critical to successful public sector involvement. Building trust between government and citizens, which will also be indispensable in rolling out mass vaccination

programmes and reducing future grievances, is central to conflict sensitivity.

Building strong institutions to end violence against women and achieve gender equality

Sexual and gender-based violence have increased owing to the pandemic, including in some conflict-affected countries where security forces are empowered and have the opportunity to abuse their position. Greater attention could be given to building strong institutions to end violence against women and achieve gender equality in such settings and to ensuring that all vulnerable groups are protected.

The Committee notes the observation by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) that violence against women constitutes a shadow pandemic. Women are not only the hardest hit by the pandemic, they are also the backbone of recovery in communities. Conflict spurs much higher rates of sexual violence, renders women vulnerable to poverty, the loss of jobs, the destruction of assets such as homes and low-quality health services.

Recognizing that gender equality is a foundation of a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world, the Committee stresses that efforts to achieve gender equality and address the serious impact of violence and discrimination on women and girls, including internally displaced persons, refugees and

indigenous women, goes hand-in-hand with the building of strong institutions for sustainable development in such settings.

The Committee takes note of the case of Liberia, which has taken steps to combat gender-based violence by strengthening enforcement of a law on the punishment of perpetrators of domestic violence, designating a special prosecutor to handle cases of gender-based violence cases and setting up a national sex offender registry. The Committee further notes that the Government has created a national security task force to handle sexual and gender-based violence. The national action plan on women and peace and security and the Spotlight Initiative are among other frameworks aimed at protecting women's rights and promoting empowerment. The Committee also notes that a bottom-up approach to gender-based violence has been taken, whereby a small group of women has organized themselves into an advocacy group called Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace, which has grown to become a political force against violence. The group has embarked on a sustained protest that has contributed to building peace.

Role of the media and fake news

The Committee underscores that information is an area in which Governments can play an important role. Clear, verified information backed up by evidence is the key to overcoming challenges related to fake news and mistrust of government. Fake news

undermine trust in the State and institutions, notably in areas where access to the Internet is limited and there are few opportunities to consider alternative sources of information. Three crucial factors could be considered in building trust:

effectiveness in the delivery of accurate information, inclusiveness, and engagement of all stakeholders; and accountability that ensures transparency and integrity.

Partnerships

Partnerships at the global level and support in peacebuilding and financial aid from the international community continue to be critical in the recovery process from the pandemic in conflicted-affected countries. The Committee notes that the Peacebuilding Commission recognizes the need to prioritize institution-building. It has also created space for national Governments to seek opportunities for South-South and triangular cooperation and for local level institutions and civil society organizations to present challenges in building and sustaining peace.

Institutionalizing partnerships between the Commission and regional and subregional

organizations, which often constitute key entry points for engaging with local, national, and regional actors for peace, is important.

The Committee notes that the Peacebuilding Fund supports countries to strengthen national and local institutions, including in areas of security sector reform, the rule of law, transitional justice, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, political dialogue, democratic governance, State capacities and extension of State authority.

The Committee concludes that further study of the governance and public administration dimensions of these important areas of activity could be a relevant contribution.

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