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REFORMING PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN POSTCONFLICT SOCIETIES IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE

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INTRODUCTION

Rebuilding public administration is a crucial reform for governments in countries recovering from civil war, insurgencies, or external military incursions. Restoring effective governance is at the crux of postconflict reconstruction. In many postconflict countries, re-establishing the government's legitimacy depends on the ability of political leaders to gain the support of diverse and sometimes still hostile constituencies, rebuild a shattered economy, and extend or reestablish the authority of the central government over an entire national territory. But sustaining the peace also depends on the capacity of public administration to restore service delivery, reconstruct infrastructure, and reintegrate those who have participated in or suffered from conflict into a more unified polity.

Although reforming public administration is a crucial aspect of postconflict reconstruction, it is also one of the most complex and difficult aspects of restoring governance and rebuilding wartorn societies. The success of public sector reforms has been mixed, even in countries with legitimate, stable, and mature governments. Restructuring bureaucracies and reforming the civil service has usually been a politically contentious long-term process, frequently moving by fits and starts, achieving some objectives and failing at others. In both developing and Western countries, more often than not public administration reforms end in disappointment for those advocating systemic change.¹

If public administration reform is difficult in countries with advanced economies and stable governments, the complexities are compounded in postconflict societies. Many postconflict governments are either still struggling to establish their legitimacy and support or are focused on regaining stability. They are always challenged with urgent and fundamental tasks of maintaining sometimes fragile peace agreements and unifying diverse political factions. Taking on politically contentious changes such as public administration reform often falls to the bottom of their list of priorities. However, when the civil service is bloated, ineffective, incompetent, corrupt, or lacking in the resources to extend and improve public services and implement national policies, reunification and reconstruction become far more difficult and uncertain.

DIVERSE NEEDS FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM IN POSTCONFLICT SOCIETIES

As crucial as public administration is in implementing the government's policies and programs, conventional reforms usually prescribed for governments in more advanced economies and politically stable countries are unlikely to be appropriate or feasible in many developing countries. Reforms must be tailored to the conditions in and the needs of conflict-torn societies. Often, the feasibility of interventions is limited by the social, political, economic, and military conditions in the country and by the weak absorptive capacity of the government. In order to succeed, proposed changes have to focus on increasing the capacity of public administration to perform those roles and functions that are most urgent during a five-to-ten year (or longer) period of reconstruction and transition. Once the country has recovered from conflict and has become more economically and politically stable and the legitimacy of government better established, political leaders can begin to think about more extensive changes to the administrative system.

Indeed, it may be useful to think about public administration reforms in postconflict societies in three distinct but related stages. Each may require different types of administrative capacity and government personnel:

1. The *immediate postconflict reconstruction period*, often lasting from five to ten years, in which the government must address fundamental and urgent issues of maintaining peace and security, reestablishing governance, redeveloping the economy, and reintegrating society.
2. A *transition period* of an additional five to ten years, in which the government stabilizes the country's economy and governance structure and the civil service moves toward performing the types of functions usually carried out in more stable political systems and societies.
3. A *period of stabilized governance* beyond transition, in which government approximates in its functions and the civil service performs those roles normally identified with growing economies and institutionalized governance.

Each of these periods requires of public administration somewhat different functions and responsibilities. Each may also require cadres of public servants who differ as well in their orientations, perceptions of the roles of government, competencies, and support systems. The implications of this assumption are that not only will conventional public administration reforms prescribed in Western countries with stable governments and mature economies not likely be appropriate in the first two stages of reconstruction in postconflict societies, but that the types of civil servants will have to change at each stage of progress toward greater government stability. The most appropriate ways of strengthening public administration may be through gradual but progressive transformations to meet emerging needs and challenges as postconflict societies go through a process of reconstruction, transition, and stabilization.

Assessing the need for public administration reform in postconflict societies is further complicated by the fact that these countries differ substantially in the status of government after the cessation of hostilities. In countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan, and Timor Leste, an entirely new government based on new constitutions had to be created, along with partially or wholly new civil service systems. In countries such as Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina, a new state had to be fashioned during a transition from a UN trusteeship or externally controlled governing authority, requiring the recruitment of new government officials and the transfer and reorientation of officials working for the previous governing authority. In Cambodia, a coalition government had to be formed from opposing factions, sometimes requiring a balancing of the civil service by recruiting new public officials from dissident groups. In Ethiopia, an existing government had to be strengthened to establish its legitimacy with and extend its authority to territories or groups who militarily opposed the ruling regime. Each country required a different set of public administration reforms.

Moreover, in many postconflict countries, the government—whether it is constituted anew, in transition from an externally controlled governance authority, reorganized to include additional political groups, or strengthened to extend its legitimacy and authority over the national polity—is often required to transform from a totalitarian, authoritarian, dictatorial or elite-controlled system to a more representative one. To sustain and reinforce a more participatory governance system, that transformation must often be accompanied by the reorientation of the civil service.

The types of public administration reforms that are needed may also be affected by the status of postconflict situations. Three types of postconflict situations require different responses by government:

- *cessation of hostilities*, brought about by a decisive victory by one side that creates a self-enforcing peace (for example, Timor-Leste and Eritrea)
- a *mediated conflict cessation*, agreed to by two or more warring factions, but not including other dissident groups or some elements of society that are unable to participate or voice concerns (for example, Cambodia and Mozambique)

- *conflicted situations*, in which one side achieves military victory without a comprehensive peace settlement (for example, Rwanda and Afghanistan)²

In a self-enforcing situation, government can often focus more quickly on reconstruction and restoration activities and transition to a more stable governance system. In mediated and conflicted situations, the government may have to focus more intensely on building trust and legitimacy, providing security, dealing with intermittent outbreaks of violence, peace building, and integration of dissident groups into the governance process, all of which can delay both reconstruction and transition to stability.

APPROACHES TO PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM

Just as the conditions in postconflict societies are varied, the public administration reforms that are needed or that are possible are likely to differ. Some countries require and can support a comprehensive approach to restoration of the public service. Others may only be able to support narrower interventions that build capacity to carry out specific functions or address critical deficiencies.

No matter whether public administration reform begins more broadly or more narrowly, in each stage of the postconflict period, it is likely to be tied to larger issues of governance and especially to public sector institutional or structural changes. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) refers to public administration reform as changes in the “aggregate machinery (policies, rules, procedures, systems, organizational structures, personnel, etc.) funded by the state budget and in charge of the management and direction of the affairs of the executive government, and its interaction with other stakeholders in the state, society and external environment.”³ Over the longer run, public administration can rarely be reformed in any country without addressing changes in institutional arrangements and organizational structure and rethinking the roles and functions of government. In the short run, however, as the UNDP points out, public administration must be capable of “the management and implementation of the whole set of government activities dealing with the implementation of laws, regulations and decisions of the government and the management related to the provision of public services.”⁴

If public administration reform can only be carried out through more focused and gradual changes, it is likely to be in those areas that the World Bank defines as “interventions that affect the organization, performance, and working conditions of employees paid from central, provincial or state government budgets,” that is, civil service reform.⁵ The World Bank points out that governments in postconflict countries need to address a basic set of issues concerning the management of public personnel including:

- (1) the statutory basis under which civil servants function, including their rights and duties; (2) the scope and comprehensiveness of the civil service; (3) its management; (4) the composition of categories and grades; (5) salary structure and benefits; (6) recruitment and promotion; (7) disciplinary procedures and termination; and (8) the appropriate boundary between the political and administrative spheres.⁶

Yet, even in this narrower sense of civil service reform, focusing on improving government personnel’s ability to manage the delivery of public services and implement national policies, the executive branch must also develop the capacity to work with the private sector and organizations of civil society and to coordinate the resources of numerous international aid organizations that often flood into a postconflict country in the early periods of transition.

The ways in which international assistance organizations have responded to the need for public administration reform in developing countries have changed over time.⁷ In the 1980s, they emphasized downsizing government, reducing the size of the civil service and of the public wage bill, and getting government out of activities that could be carried out more effectively by the private sector or NGOs. During the 1990s, public sector reform was seen as a precondition for structural adjustment and market liberalization following the principles of the “new public management.” The reforms called for making government more market-oriented, and for the civil service to be more innovative, customer-sensitive, and performance-driven. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, donors provided assistance for strengthening governance, shifting the roles of public managers from providing services to facilitating them, using information and communications technology to extend access to government services more widely to citizens, and targeting government activities more strongly on poverty reduction.

The Institute on Governance’s review of donor-supported public sector reform programs in developing countries notes that they have focused during the past 20 years on four major areas:⁸

1. *administrative capacity building*, including organizational restructuring and renewal; strengthening of coordination among government agencies; staff training and recruitment; employee performance management; wage incentives, job classification, and personnel systems
2. *strengthening policy capacity*, including rationalizing and standardizing policymaking and improving the flow of policy-relevant information
3. *institutional reform*, including civil service codes of conduct and public procurement safeguards, and strengthening institutions and procedures for improving accountability
4. *public service downsizing*, workforce reductions and wage reforms that cap, freeze, and monetize non-cash allowances and benefits

The variations in specific conditions and needs in postconflict societies, however, often render conventional prescriptions for public administration reform inappropriate. Solutions to public management problems must be tailored—at least in the short-run—to the types of tasks and functions that governments must perform in order to reconstruct wartorn societies and rebuild an effective system of governance. Specific types of institutional and organizational changes required will likely differ during immediate postconflict reconstruction, transition to representative and legitimate governance, and stabilization of governance.

ISSUES FOR INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM

This report reviews the state of knowledge and conditions in several postconflict developing countries to derive lessons of experience for restoring effective governance and competent government and the prospects for reforming public administration. The focus is on the need for and challenges of public administration reform, primarily in the executive branch of government, during the first stage of progress after conflict resolution—or at least temporary cessation of hostilities—and in the early years of the second stage, when a country is undergoing a more perceptible transition to stable governance. The report seeks to answer six questions:

1. What types of administrative capacities need to be developed in the public sector to promote political stability and development during the early phase (first five years) of transition?
2. What steps can be realistically taken to improve the effectiveness and accountability of public administrators in a postconflict environment?

3. What measures can be taken to ensure that public administration has access to essential material and human resources?
4. In cases where the civil service has grown too large to be effective, what steps can be taken to reduce the size of public bureaucracy so that it does not create additional unemployment or political problems for a fragile government?
5. Are there basic principles that should inform public administration rebuilding efforts in postconflict societies?
6. What kinds of assistance should the international community provide to postconflict governments to rebuild and reform public administration, and how can such assistance be channeled most effectively?

Drawing on studies by international assistance and NGOs working in postconflict societies, the professional and scholarly literature on postconflict reconstruction, and evaluations of projects or programs for postconflict redevelopment, this report addresses each of these issues.

ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITIES NEEDED IN POSTCONFLICT SOCIETIES

One of the consistent lessons of experience in attempting to implement plans and programs for reconstructing postconflict societies is that the roles and functions of government—at least during the first stage of reconstruction after cessation of hostilities—will be very different from many of those that governments perform in nonconflict countries. The roles and functions also differ in the first stage of transition from those that government will have to perform later within the same country. During the early years of transition, the civil service must often recruit personnel who can implement the tasks of postconflict reconstruction and make progress toward a more stable system of governance. The most urgent tasks on which government must focus in the immediate postconflict and transition periods define the essential functions of public management and the types of administrative capacity that the government needs to carry them out.

Most postconflict societies face similar tasks in the reconstruction period, but often differ significantly in their needs and the conditions under which the civil service must perform its functions. The types of challenges facing governing authorities—whether they be newly constituted or existing national governments, UN trusteeships, or temporary international governing organizations, are summarized by the U.S. Department of State's Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization.⁹ As figure 1 indicates, postconflict societies generally must have or be able to develop quickly the administrative capacity to perform five essential roles:

1. establish safety and security
2. strengthen governance and participation
3. stabilize the economy and provide infrastructure
4. provide for emergency humanitarian needs and social welfare
5. strengthen justice and reconciliation organizations

Not only is each of these sets of government functions crucial in its own right, but all are related and affect each other.¹⁰

Figure 1. Essential Government Tasks in Postconflict Reconstruction



The importance of these functions is widely reflected in the assistance provided by international organizations to Balkan countries in the aftermath of hostilities during the 1990s. Carl Bildt, former prime minister of Sweden, the first UN high representative to Bosnia, and the UN envoy to the Balkans, noted that the urgent priorities for reconstructing the postconflict states that emerged from the former Yugoslavia included securing the environment quickly in order to protect minorities and cease hostilities, determining the appropriate form of the state, and creating programs for strengthening the state. In Bosnia, Kosovo, and the Balkans, it was essential to create a strong economic framework for currency, customs, and taxation systems, debt restructuring, accessing international capital markets, strengthening commercial law and the banking system to achieve economic growth.¹¹

STRENGTHENING GOVERNANCE AND PARTICIPATION

Effective reconstruction requires governments to create a strong state quickly and in such a fashion as to strengthen the capability of the governing authority, not only to provide security, eliminate violent conflict, protect human rights, generate economic opportunities, but also to extend basic services, control corruption, respond effectively to emergencies, and combat poverty and inequality. The UNDP points out that “in postconflict situations, such as in Sierra Leone or Somalia, establishing some form of credibly representative government that can provide essential services is increasingly seen as an essential part of the first stages of postconflict reconstruction.”¹² A fundamental problem in Cambodia, for example, was that although external aid was crucial in preventing a weak government from collapsing entirely, donor efforts to generate economic growth during the postconflict period were undermined by the government’s weak absorptive capacity.¹³ Especially constraining were the government’s weaknesses in infrastructure, human resources, domestic financial resources, and administrative capability. A failed state pervaded by corruption and an unstable political system ridden with factional tensions made establishing a sound governance system and initiating reconstruction activities difficult.

Past experience suggests that what is most needed is some degree of political stability and legitimacy and respect for law, which requires not only strengthening the legislative and judicial systems, but the executive branch as well. An important requirement in restoring governance in postconflict societies is to create or strengthen mechanisms for widespread participation in governance and public decisionmaking. In many postconflict countries—such as Nicaragua, El Salvador, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Mozambique—civil servants had to prepare quickly for elections in order to establish a legitimate government and expand participation in a democratic process.¹⁴ In some countries, this came through early elections; in others, it came by creating or extending institutions for participative local and regional decisionmaking through some form of decentralization, federation, or power-sharing. In reviewing its reconstruction efforts in Uganda during the late 1980s and early 1990s, for example, the World Bank concluded that its economic rebuilding efforts could have been improved by giving more attention to consensus building and wider participation in decisionmaking.¹⁵ It found that political leaders and civil servants must take into consideration in reconstruction activities the dynamics in surrounding countries and the need for cooperation with neighboring governments. Where ethnic, religious, or other identities were factors leading to conflict, government officials have to consider the impact of their postconflict programs on these groups.

Deliberately or inadvertently ignoring any important segment of society in the postconflict reconstruction process can easily undermine government’s legitimacy or the ability of the civil service to extend needed services and infrastructure. The alienation of Pashtun ethnic groups from the first interim government in Afghanistan, despite the fact that President Hamid Karzai was himself a Pashtun, weakened its legitimacy and authority outside of Kabul. The perception of their

lack of representation in the Cabinet provided Pashtun regional warlords with further motivation to consolidate power in their provinces and pursue their own interests, ignoring the central government.¹⁶

Among other important tasks that public administrators are called on to carry out in postconflict societies are strengthening public information systems, stabilizing fiscal management, and reestablishing basic government services in all parts of the country. Local governance and administrative systems may have to be created, restored, or reorganized, and local government or subnational administrative units may have to be staffed or restaffed.

ESTABLISHING SAFETY AND SECURITY

In most postconflict countries, the government must have public administrators who can move quickly to secure the peace and provide protection and safety.¹⁷ Experience in Iraq and Afghanistan illustrated that unless the governing authority can quickly ensure security and a peaceful settlement of conflict, little progress can be made on establishing a strong national government, reconstructing infrastructure, and creating the foundation for economic growth.¹⁸ In the aftermath of the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, continuing guerilla warfare, terrorism, lawlessness, and ethnic and political conflict slowed plans for nation building and undermined the legitimacy of the interim occupation organizations and of the fledgling transition authorities.

The difficulties of establishing security were just as complex in the Balkans. The United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) continually struggled to establish public order, rebuild the judicial system, and demilitarize competing political and ethnic groups.¹⁹ After a decade of nation-building assistance, the UN Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (UNMIBH) still had not been able to create a police force that could protect security and enforce laws effectively.²⁰

Afghanistan's post-Taliban experience suggests that a strong but politically neutral army is especially important where existing military power is divided with independent local warlords and dissident elements. Institutional devices as well as training programs are needed to keep military organizations out of the hands of ambitious political aggressors. Ensuring security involves not only building effective military and police forces that act neutrally toward former conflicting factions on behalf of the new national government, but also entails recruiting or training civil servants who can manage programs for or coordinate the activities of NGOs seeking to demobilize former combatants.

In countries such as Sierra Leone, where UN peacekeeping forces played an important role in maintaining internal security and ending the civil war, governments must quickly build up their own capacity to protect their citizenry through reforms of the civil service, police and civil defense forces, and justice systems.²¹ In Liberia and Sierra Leone, government had to strengthen its capacity, not only to pursue disarmament and the demobilization and reintegration of fighters, repatriate refugees, and improve security, but also to protect civil rights and prevent criminal capture of the economy.²²

In some postconflict countries, the government must recruit personnel who can not only assist with demobilization and disarmament of dissident groups and reconstruct the armed forces and intelligence services, but also work with groups involved in demining and protection of public facilities and infrastructure.

PROVIDING FOR EMERGENCY HUMANITARIAN NEEDS AND SOCIAL WELLBEING

Crucial functions of government that fall heavily on public administrators, either directly or in conjunction with NGOs in many postconflict societies, are providing for emergency humanitarian needs, resettling ex-combatants and internally displaced persons, and providing basic social services throughout the country. In many postconflict countries, the civil service may have to play a strong temporary role in reintegrating ex-combatants and returning migrants into the economy and society in order to reduce social tensions and prevent future outbreaks of hostilities or rampant crime and violence. The experiences of the International Labour Office (ILO) in the wartorn countries of Mozambique, Liberia, the Congo, Sri Lanka, Sierra Leone, and others led it to conclude that the employment options in the years following cessation of conflict are limited for ex-combatants and that those who are reintegrated find employment most often in micro and small enterprises.²³ Government has a vital role in creating the conditions that allow expansion of small enterprises and in preparing ex-combatants and displaced migrants to participate in income-earning activities.

Public administrators often must design and implement programs that reintegrate ex-combatants and migrants or coordinate the assistance projects of international donors and civil society organizations. The ILO concluded that the most effective interventions integrate ex-combatants into ongoing government programs for skill development aimed at the general population. Government officials must often work with civil society organizations in establishing retraining programs in mosques, churches, temples, and schools in local communities and help relocated or migrant ex-combatants with housing, land, medical care, and credit, as well as psychological assistance to overcome mental trauma.²⁴

As the World Bank found in its assistance programs for reintegrating ex-combatants into the economy in postwar Mozambique, the government often needs to develop programs that concentrate on informal-sector apprenticeship training and provide grants to master craftsmen and small and microenterprise employers for equipment, salaries, and materials.²⁵ Sustaining the retraining and employment programs for ex-combatants in Mozambique was closely linked to access to markets, transport, and credit and to weaning beneficiaries off grant dependency quickly so that they developed a self-reliance mentality.

To succeed in postconflict reconstruction and development, government must strengthen its administrative capacities to develop human capital, reduce poverty, promote social equity, and alleviate social problems, while at the same time strengthening the economy and rebuilding the state. Although Uganda is often cited by international assistance organizations as a model for postconflict reconstruction, the World Bank acknowledges that structural adjustment and economic growth policies would have been more successful had the Bank and the government given more attention to health sector reforms and found ways of improving the efficiency of educational investment.²⁶ In its postconflict macroeconomic reform program for El Salvador, the Bank more clearly recognized the need to address the needs of the health and education sectors in order to develop human resources and support economic growth policies.²⁷

The Asian Development Bank's experience in postconflict reconstruction suggests that when economies begin to grow governments must adopt social protection programs to reduce poverty and vulnerability among segments of the population that may not be able to benefit immediately, especially in areas suffering most severely from past or continuing intermittent conflict.²⁸

STABILIZING THE ECONOMY AND PROVIDING INFRASTRUCTURE

Stimulating economic growth and rebuilding infrastructure—for the country as a whole and especially for areas where hostilities were most intense—have been essential functions of government officials in postconflict societies. Nearly all government ministries and agencies must rebuild or replace the physical infrastructure through which they deliver services, and public administrators must work with the private sector in situations where government alone does not have the technical, managerial, or financial resources to provide infrastructure effectively.

Governments in postconflict countries also face myriad challenges in restoring destroyed or damaged economies. They must often restore confidence in their currency, strengthen fiscal policies and revenue collection, reform tax administration, and reestablish financial institutions. Creating capacity for debt management and effective resource allocation, liberalizing trade policies, and revising legal and regulatory frameworks to make doing business easier are preconditions in many postconflict countries for stimulating economic growth.

Strong economic growth in El Salvador in the postconflict period, for example, contributed significantly to the government's ability to implement the peace accords in the 1990s.²⁹ Inflows of foreign aid and private capital, along with some international debt forgiveness and exchange rate reforms, helped to stabilize El Salvador's economy and mobilize resources for rapid reconstruction. Economic growth policies in Central America focused on comprehensive macroeconomic adjustment and structural reforms that reduced hyperinflation in Nicaragua in the late 1980s and early 1990s and lowered inflation in other countries in the region, including El Salvador and Guatemala, from an average of 27 percent in 1991 to about 6 percent in 1999.³⁰

Experience in Afghanistan underlines the importance of strengthening the capacity of public officials in the national government to deal with all aspects of the economy, including such dysfunctional elements as the warlord economy, the black market, smuggling, drugs, and the subsistence sector.³¹ General economic progress is retarded by the proclivity for violence and proneness to plunder and looting in closed systems that can inhibit production and destabilize livelihoods and entrepreneurial opportunities. Export and other foreign trade opportunities and tariff reform are often more important initially than other forms of assistance to the private sector.³²

STRENGTHENING JUSTICE AND RECONCILIATION ORGANIZATIONS

The ability of government in postconflict countries to establish safety and security and provide for humanitarian and social needs depends heavily on its ability to strengthen justice and reconciliation organizations. Among the varied tasks facing such governments are creating, strengthening, or expanding indigenous police forces; establishing or enhancing the criminal justice system; and protecting human and property rights. In some countries where minorities were persecuted or fighting factions brutalized the population, governments must establish war crime courts or establish truth and reconciliation organizations.

Often, in postconflict countries, public administrators must focus specifically on protecting the rights of women and providing services that help make them productive members of society and active participants in community-development decisions. Governments in postconflict Rwanda, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Cambodia faced complex challenges in responding to the need to increase the economic, social, and political participation of women and women's organizations.³³ Gender-based programs of assistance in most countries have been especially beneficial in the rural sector and to the poorest elements of the population. In helping organize women's groups, these

programs provided support to microfinance services that improved conditions for a local population, opened educational opportunities for females of all ages, and supported equal-opportunity standards in employment and promotion in both the public and the private sector.

IMPROVING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN A POSTCONFLICT ENVIRONMENT

Improving the effectiveness of the civil service in postconflict environments is urgent because of serious weaknesses in the capacity of public administration either to carry out government policies or to deliver public services efficiently and effectively. The weaknesses in public administration are similar across postconflict countries in different regions of the world. But, given the varieties of circumstances and needs in postconflict societies and the differences in functions that governments must carry out, it is unlikely that any standard set of reforms will be applicable and feasible in all of them. Two examples—Cambodia and Tajikistan—illustrate the range of public management weaknesses that face postconflict countries.

In Cambodia, the civil service performed poorly in the years following the cessation of hostilities. It had weak capacity to deliver public services, and the services that it did deliver were of poor quality and uneven distribution. Although the Cambodian civil service was not extraordinarily large, it suffered from ineffective deployment of government officials to priority sectors and rural areas and from understaffing in social services such as health and education. Indeed, the government did not even have an accurate census of the number of civil service employees or accurate information on grades, functions, or assignments of government officials. The World Bank points out that the performance ranking of Cambodia's civil service was poor even among comparable low-income countries. Many civil servants had little or no education or training. Because of low salaries, many took external employment, resulting in high levels of absenteeism from government jobs and poor job performance.³⁴ The civil service system was plagued by high levels of rent-seeking and corruption, and the government had little financial management capacity. The ability to recruit and retain the types of government personnel needed to provide even basic services during the postconflict period was hampered by political patronage appointments, deviations from the formal merit-based recruitment requirements, inflexible and constraining staff categorization, automatic progression to higher grades based on time in service rather than on job performance, and weak incentives for career development.

Tajikistan still struggles after more than 20 years of reconstruction with deficiencies in public administration, having gone through conflicts associated with its independence from the Soviet Union in the mid-1980s and a civil war in the early 1990s. A new constitution was adopted with the cessation of hostilities, but Tajikistan continued to face incursions by renegade commanders, confrontations with former warlords, corruption, inefficient administration in government, and economic deterioration.³⁵ Weaknesses in public administration capacity arise from structural and managerial problems, including a lack of transparency that allows high levels of corruption; confusion about the roles of central and line ministries, local governments, and self-governing bodies; and lack of accountability for strategic planning, budgeting, and financial management. Tajikistan has both a civil service system and a public service system, leading to confusion about recruitment and ineffective career management for government personnel. Despite a formal labor code, many public and civil servants continue to be hired through personal networks and political patronage. The Asian Development Bank points out:

The performance of the public sector is poor, resulting from a combination of systemic factors and a lack of management skills. There is a shortage of capacity and skills in the civil service and a lack of motivation. Pay is well below the poverty line, and civil servants may resort to rent-seeking activities to

supplement their meager pay. Devolution of accountability and decisionmaking is very weak.³⁶

Because political, economic, and social circumstances differ widely among countries emerging from conflict, the pathways to strengthening public administration are likely to be divergent. Thus the means of improving capacity to carry out essential government functions should be customized to the existing and future requirements for recovery or reconstruction in each country.

Although there may be no standard set of public administration reforms that fit all postconflict societies, experience suggests that there is a widely-shared perception of the characteristics of a public management system that are needed in order to perform essential government functions in the immediate postconflict and transition periods.³⁷ These include

- professional administrative and managerial capacities and competencies
- accountability to legitimately selected political officials who represent the broad interests of the citizenry
- transparency and integrity of government personnel and administrative processes
- efficiency and effectiveness of organization and procedures
- professional recruitment and career management
- adequate compensation and remuneration
- access to adequate resources and materials for performing assigned responsibilities
- appropriate civil service size and public wage bill costs

Although these needs for public management improvement are fairly common among postconflict countries, reforms must be tailored to their stage of transformation from immediate reconstruction and on the status of their governments. Therefore, international assistance for reform should be preceded by careful diagnosis and assessment.

DETERMINING THE FEASIBILITY OF INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE INTERVENTIONS—DIAGNOSIS BEFORE PRESCRIPTION

Determining the most feasible ways of improving the administration of governments in postconflict societies, especially in the period immediately following the cessation of hostilities and in the transition from reconstruction, is through rapid assessment of country-specific conditions. Careful diagnosis of requirements and needs for government personnel to perform recovery and reconstruction tasks is essential for designing feasible reform policies and successfully implementing them. Prescriptions for public administration reform should be based on a sound diagnosis of at least three sets of factors:

1. *Strategic conditions and needs within postconflict societies*, including the challenges that governments face, their strengths and weaknesses in meeting those challenges, the most critical tasks and functions that governments must carry out in a five- to ten-year timeframe, and the deficiencies in civil service systems for providing services and implementing government policies.
2. *Potential obstacles to reform*, including the potential for overcoming or preventing the most frequent bottlenecks or hurdles to effective public administration reform.
3. *The possibility of providing sound and sustainable aid*, including the ability to implement an assistance program that meets all or most of the donor's principles for sound development and reconstruction assistance.

Assessing Strategic Conditions and Needs

Diagnosis of the weaknesses of the executive branch in carrying out essential tasks and functions in postconflict societies is essential before committing to international assistance. International assistance organizations are increasingly basing their technical and financial aid for postconflict countries on comprehensive analyses of the conditions under which reconstruction and recovery must be carried out, the challenges and tasks facing governments during the postconflict transition period, and the types of government personnel needed to perform essential functions and tasks.³⁸

In Afghanistan, for example, the UNDP used such analyses to focus its immediate recovery assistance on seven areas where the new government faced weaknesses: governance, community empowerment and participation, the return and reintegration of refugees and internally displaced populations, the capacity of women's organizations to participate in political and social activities, drug control, peace building and conflict prevention, and human rights. The UNDP assumed a coordinating role in bringing UN assistance to nearly all of the activities identified in the preliminary needs assessment. Creating an effective governance capacity was seen as a fundamental condition for carrying out other assistance programs in Afghanistan. The UNDP noted that "effective governance is built on sound economic policy, transparent and accountable public institutions, a free media, robust and independent legal frameworks and judicial mechanisms which, *inter alia*, protect and promote the rights of all citizens."³⁹

The World Bank's analysis of conditions and needs in Afghanistan suggested that external assistance to its new government should focus in the short-term on supporting agricultural recovery and food security; providing basic services and small-scale development programs in communities; generating livelihoods for returning refugees and displaced people; rehabilitating main road networks; providing public works programs for generating short-run employment; restarting and expanding education and health programs, especially for girls and women; building human capacity in areas of social service delivery, infrastructure development, and public administration; and expanding the program to remove land mines.⁴⁰

Assessing Potential Obstacles to Reform

Decades of experience with public sector reform in both conflict-ridden and non-conflict developing countries reveal myriad potential obstacles to effective implementation of reform policies.⁴¹ The most frequently reported obstacles include

- failure to adequately and effectively assess country conditions and needs prior to proposing reforms
- use of technocratic prescriptions that view public administration reform as organizational engineering rather than as a political issue
- insufficient public pressure or support for public administration reforms
- lack of ownership by the government of externally prescribed reforms or weak political commitment to implement them
- unwillingness or inability of ministries and agencies to implement the changes needed to make public administration reforms effective
- "silo" mentalities among officials in bureaucracies that prevent them from sharing information or cooperating with each other across organizational boundaries
- inappropriate transfer of Western management concepts and practices in reform prescriptions to developing countries
- failure to link public administration reforms to improvements in government service delivery

- lack of or weak mission-driven public service culture within government
- opposition to reform from those benefiting from corruption or political privilege in the current administrative structure
- undermining of reforms by those subject to downsizing or civil service reductions
- ineffective performance evaluation or assessment procedures to determine how responsibly and competently public administrators are carrying out their duties
- poor quality of technical assistance provided by donors for public administration reform and implementation

The World Bank's evaluation of its civil service reform (CSR) assistance during the 1990s found that only about one-third of the interventions achieved satisfactory outcomes and noted that four factors undermined its efficacy in developing countries:

- (i) the poor quality of information on CSR performance; (ii) the limited role afforded to strategic management and cultural change; (iii) the absence of checks and balances on arbitrary action; and (iv) a failure to appreciate key contextual constraints.⁴²

In his assessment of the failures of public administration reforms in both Western and developing countries, Palidano emphasizes, "they do not fail because, once implemented, they yield unsatisfactory outcomes. They fail because they never get past the implementation stage at all. They are blocked outright or put into effect only in tokenistic, half-hearted fashion."⁴³ He points out several reasons for the disappointing results of civil service reforms in developing countries: lack of political commitment and bureaucratic support, attempts to undertake too many changes simultaneously, attempts by donors to push reforms on recipient governments or to transfer inappropriate reforms adopted in Western countries to developing countries, and limited absorptive capacity within countries. Often, governments that do pursue reforms run into problems arising from conflicts among ministries and agencies with different objectives and bases of power. The reforms may lack a sufficient number of "champions" within government to sustain the momentum, officials in different units of government fear losing personnel or budgetary resources, and there may be widespread inertia because no organization within government has overall coordinating responsibility for implementation of reforms.

Reviews of donor-supported public service reform programs in Africa over the past three decades conclude that generally they failed because they were not focused specifically on improving government service delivery and they were often aimed at reducing the size of the civil service or freezing recruitment, and that undermined operational capacity to deliver services more effectively and efficiently.⁴⁴

In many postconflict countries, the civil service is a haven for privileged political factions or groups and is seen as an opportunity for self-aggrandizement. As one observer noted of Sierra Leone, for example, "Too many of the people entering politics and the civil service in Sierra Leone do so in order to make money. Personal gain, or loyalty to family, tribe or party, is put before national interest."⁴⁵ Rent-seeking, personal privilege, and favored treatment for family or friends undermine any motivation on the part of many political leaders and civil servants to implement civil service reform.

International assistance organizations should analyze these and other potential obstacles to public administration reform carefully before supporting projects or programs in postconflict countries. Either the obstacles need to be overcome prior to embarking on reform projects or they need to be taken into consideration in the design of the reforms and in plans for their implementation.

Assessing the Possibility of Providing Sound and Sustainable Aid

An international assistance organization should support public administration reforms only when they meet the donor's criteria for sound technical and financial assistance. The diagnosis should assess both what the substantive needs are of a government in a postconflict country to carry out the immediate and transitional tasks outlined and whether it has the ability to meet most or all of the donor's criteria for sound development assistance. This aspect of the diagnoses should attempt to respond to the following questions:

- *Commitment and support.* At the highest level, are there political and bureaucratic leaders willing to take ownership of public administration strengthening programs? Do they have the resources and commitment to successfully implement the programs? Is there sufficient leadership in key ministries and agencies to support and willingly participate in reform activities? Is a large enough group of personnel in the civil service willing to accept reforms and abide by changes in the system?
- *Feasibility.* What conditions affecting public administration reform are likely to change over the next five years? What potential changes in the country are likely to create new opportunities for reform? What potential changes within or outside the country are likely to threaten the feasibility of reform? What contingency plans do donor organizations and governments need to address these threats or opportunities, should they arise? How should donors respond to risks and opportunities in reform policy and program implementation?
- *Potential for capacity building.* Which public agencies and ministries most need strengthening to carry out government policies and programs and deliver services that are most urgently needed in the immediate postconflict and transition periods? How effective is the executive branch in carrying out these tasks? What types of personnel are needed to increase capacity? What types of managerial and technical skills need to be developed?
- *Durability.* How should public administration reforms be designed to ensure that their impact endures? What political, economic, social, and administrative factors will determine the sustainability of the reforms? What conditions need to be established to support and sustain the reforms after implementation? What are the short- and long-term goals and objectives of reform? What resources will be needed to achieve these goals? How will progress and performance in achieving the goals be measured? How can poor performance in achieving reform goals be reversed or improved?
- *High priority.* In which areas of public administration are the priorities highest for reform? In which ministries or agencies are the needs the greatest over the next three to five years? In which ministries or agencies is commitment to reform the strongest?
- *Diagnostic requirements.* What types of studies, surveys, and research are needed to determine the conditions under which public administration reform is most likely to succeed? How can best practices from governments in similar situations be adapted to local conditions and needs? How would the design of reform programs ensure compatibility with local conditions and needs?
- *Potential for collaboration.* What types of collaborations are needed between international assistance organizations and the government in order to promote public administration

reforms? What types of partnerships between government, local communities, NGOs, the private sector, and other organizations are likely to make the design and implementation of reforms more effective and sustainable?

- *Monitoring and assessment.* What types of accountability systems need to be created to ensure the proper use of donor funding for public administration reform? How can transparency be built into the aid package to ensure effective use of external and internal resources for reform and guard against diversion of funds for other purposes or corruption? What types of monitoring and evaluation should donor agencies require to maintain government accountability in the reform process?

INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE TO POSTCONFLICT GOVERNMENTS FOR REFORMING PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Both the diagnoses of country-specific conditions and needs in postconflict countries and the experience of governments and donors in rebuilding public administration yield lessons that can guide international assistance in the future. The lessons listed below are among the most important.

- *Public administration reform in most countries, but especially in postconflict societies, is a complex, difficult, often politically contentious, process that requires a long time horizon and persistent political leadership.*

Postconflict reconstruction depends on recreating a strong state quickly, but international assistance organizations often fail to realize (or they choose to ignore) that this process can take a long time and requires sustained political commitment by both donors and the government to succeed. After more than a decade of UN supervision of the postconflict transition in the Balkans, the Center for European Policy Studies pointed out that government in Bosnia and Herzegovina at the state level in 2004 remained underdeveloped, and public administration reform had just begun.⁴⁶ Despite the fact that the former Yugoslavia disintegrated nearly 15 years before and that Macedonia was able to control ethnic and factional conflicts, the European Commission reported, “many challenges still lie ahead, whether on decentralization, good governance, reform of the security sector, or the rule of law. Implementing the reforms will also imply strengthening administrative capacity, by transforming the public administration into a modern and accountable public service.”⁴⁷

In the final stages of transition from a UN protectorate to an independent state after more than a decade under the supervision of an external governance authority, Kosovo still experiences strong ethnic tensions between the Albanian majority and the Serb minority, the provisional institutions of self-government and public administration are still weak, ethnic differences impede the creation of a state structure acceptable to both the Albanians and Serbs, and the civil service still needs substantial strengthening.⁴⁸

Postwar assistance in the former Yugoslavia, Central America, and Afghanistan all testify to the need for continuing, long-term assistance in helping governing authorities to find ways of reconciling ethnic or religious conflicts, protecting human rights, generating economic opportunities, extending basic services, controlling corruption, responding effectively to emergencies, and combating poverty and inequality, all at the same time.

International assistance for public administration reform must be planned and committed on a long enough time horizon to ensure that what inevitably turns out to be a slow and complex process receives sufficient financial, technical, and political support.

- *Different types of public administration reform are needed in the immediate postconflict reconstruction and early transition periods than are usually required in more stable governance systems.*

Postconflict countries that are in the immediate stages of reconstruction after hostilities cease or in transition from reconstruction to more stable governance may need different types of public administration reforms than countries with more mature government systems, and the types of

reforms that they need are likely to change over time. International assistance organizations should be willing and able to tailor their support to the specific needs of each postconflict country that requests help in undertaking public administration reform.

As noted repeatedly, the types of reform appropriate for postconflict countries may not be the same as those frequently prescribed in countries with more advanced economies and more stable governance. The ideal of a merit-based career public administration system that characterizes many Western countries, for example, may not meet the needs of governments in early stages of recovery from conflict. Position-based civil service systems may offer more flexibility to recruit officials who can perform urgent functions (such as those described in this report) and to replace them later with others more skilled in providing routine services. Decisions based on specific conditions within postconflict countries can determine whether career-based, position-based, or hybrid systems are more appropriate at different stages of transition; whether the civil service should be managed at the central level or be decentralized; and whether pay and remuneration should be based on position, performance, or a combination of both.

To take another example, the prescription that reforms should make public administration more depoliticized, objective, and neutral in carrying out policies and providing services is often inappropriate in countries plagued by conflicts among ethnic, religious, cultural, or ideological factions. To achieve peace and maintain the cessation of hostilities, the civil service may have to balance recruitment among different factions and even provide preferential treatment to members of groups who had been discriminated against or precluded from government positions in the past. Decisions must be made about the appropriate combination of merit-based and political appointments, on the criteria for recruitment and appointment for those not selected entirely by merit criteria, and on means of preventing corruption or abuse in appointments to political patronage positions.

The issue of downsizing or “rightsizing” public administration must also be examined in the context of postconflict environments. Although inappropriately large civil service systems can be downsized by consolidating or eliminating redundant departments, not filling vacant positions, offering incentives for early retirement, or by reductions in force, it may be politically difficult to reduce the size of the civil service in many postconflict countries still suffering from economic instability. The World Bank’s experience in nine postconflict countries—Afghanistan, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of Congo, Kosovo, FYR Macedonia, Sierra Leone, Timor Leste, and Serbia-Montenegro—led to the conclusion that although reform in many countries must eventually find ways of downsizing the public service, in postconflict countries governments often have too few staff with appropriate skills, training, and competencies.⁴⁹ Indeed, in Cambodia, the World Bank pushed for downsizing the civil service despite the fact that the peace accords that ended the conflict required the political coalition that ran the country to expand the size of the civil service in order to absorb more functionaries of the incoming parties. This led to the realization later that “the Bank’s position was not politically realistic from the outset.”⁵⁰

In more stable governance systems, public administration reforms often focus on civil service wage adjustments, fractured grading systems, vertical wage compression, and salary supplements. In postconflict societies, wage reform must address the problem that salaries are usually not adjusted during conflict and fall below subsistence levels. But it is difficult either to downsize the civil service or to raise wages in postconflict countries without knowing how large public administration should be and what functions the government will have to perform after returning to a more stable situation.

- *Because one size does not fit all, international assistance for public administration reform in postconflict societies must be based on strong assessments and diagnoses of country needs, political conditions, and implementation feasibility.*

As this report has emphasized, one of the enduring lessons of experience is that international assistance for public administration reform can succeed in postconflict societies only if it meets indigenous needs; fits national economic, social, and political conditions; and has the support of “champions” among political and bureaucratic leaders. Assessing experience with public administration reform in Ethiopia, for example, Berhanu points out that “if the necessary political support for the reform initiative can not be speedily mobilized, it will not be possible to reconfigure the civil service in a manner that will prepare it to innovatively deal with the complex challenges of the 21st century.”⁵¹ Personnel reforms in Ethiopia in the 1990s were made before structures and regulations could be changed and fell victim to a proliferation of parallel structures, political patronage, and the replacement of experienced officials with inexperienced new recruits and party functionaries. Failure to assess the conditions under which civil service reforms could be implemented effectively in Ethiopia led not only to disappointing results but to unanticipated negative consequences.

Diagnosis and assessment should focus at least on the three sets of issues described earlier: (1) strategic conditions and needs within postconflict countries, depending on their stage of transition, the status of government, and the conditions of cessation of hostilities; (2) potential obstacles that could weaken, undermine, or block implementation of reform programs and policies; and (3) principles of sound and sustainable aid.

Stakeholder analysis is especially important in public administration reform because changes in institutions, organizations, and personnel systems inevitably create both winners and losers, within government and outside. The potential winners from the reforms may not always see the benefits clearly enough to support changes, and the potential losers may be able to mobilize strong opposition to them.

- *Public administration reforms should focus first on building capacity to carry out critical reconstruction and governance functions and gradually enhance managerial capability throughout the government as it gains more stability and legitimacy.*

Because strengthening public administration often requires difficult and complex changes that may take a long time to implement, initial efforts should focus on those management capacities needed for reconstruction and basic governance functions related to postconflict stabilization. The basic sets of functions described earlier—establishing safety and security, strengthening governance and participation, providing for emergency humanitarian needs and social wellbeing, stabilizing the economy and providing infrastructure, and strengthening justice and reconciliation organizations—are usually the areas of public administration that most urgently need enhanced capacity.

From its experience with support of reform in places such as the West Bank and Gaza, Kosovo, and East Timor, the World Bank discovered the importance of keeping a strong emphasis on affordability to avoid creating management and financial burdens on governments with limited absorptive capacity. It sees public administration reform as an iterative and evolutionary process, rather than as a rapid comprehensive program of change, and focuses on the basics of sound administration—the nuts and bolts of management needed for postconflict reconstruction—rather than on sophisticated human resource practices that governments may not have the capacities to implement.⁵² Despite the fact that public administration reforms were urgently

needed in Cambodia, for example, the government's plan focused on gradual approaches to increasing civil service salaries as more resources became available, decompressing the wage structure over time and, as conditions allowed, increasing the competitiveness of civil service recruitment.⁵³

The World Bank's experience with postconflict reconstruction warns of the dangers of overloading governments with too many or too complex reforms and of the need to approach even urgent reforms gradually. Its evaluation of operations in postconflict societies led to the conclusion that weak implementation capacity and the "political environment in which a new postconflict government finds itself may still be very fragile and unstable, limiting its ability to win acceptance of a reform program that goes beyond stabilization."⁵⁴

In Lebanon, the ability of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to assist the postconflict government's efforts to reform financial administration progressed because it helped officials sequence reforms according to country priorities, which led to stronger government ownership and facilitated implementation.⁵⁵

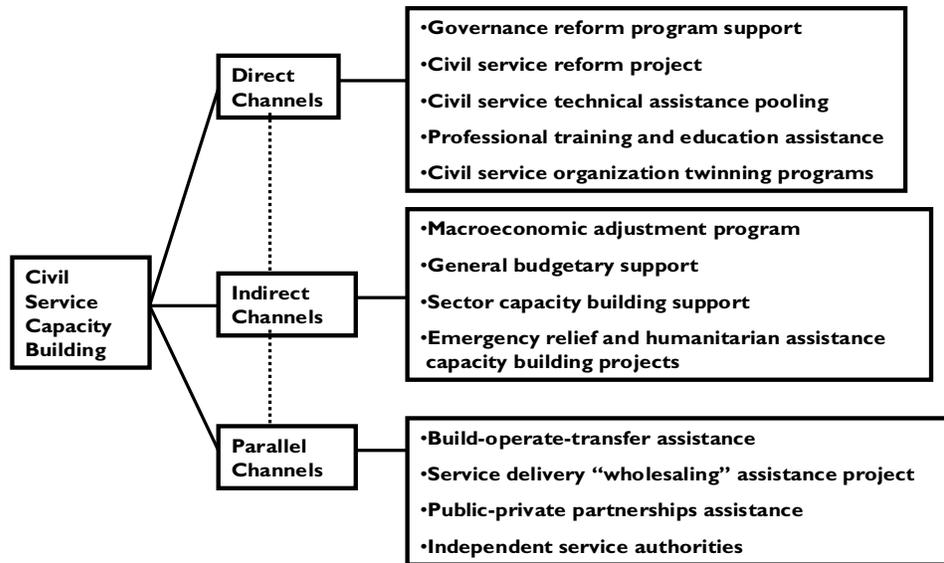
Donors should assess not only the administrative capacity within governments receiving aid, but their own technical and administrative capacity as well. The British aid agency discovered that even holistic or comprehensive reforms in the security and justice sectors were not possible in Nepal, Afghanistan, and Sierra Leone. Although the UK Department for International Development (DFID) made partial progress in all three countries in police and justice reform projects, many of the reforms in each of the countries were simply not carried out or were undermined by unanticipated obstacles and problems that were often exacerbated by "lack of capacity among the people deployed as project managers, consultants, trainers, and other experts to guide such an approach on the ground."⁵⁶

At least in the initial stages of reconstruction and during the transition to more stable governance, public administration reforms should be preceded by donor assistance to selective agencies and ministries that have the highest potential to absorb and implement personnel and organizational changes. These can become models to demonstrate the benefits of change. Attempting to make comprehensive changes in bureaucracies that do not have the capacity to carry them out is futile and perhaps destructive, since the attempts will be seen as failures that other units of government will not want to emulate.

- *Because of the flexibility needed to make aid relevant in varying postconflict conditions, donors should consider a variety of assistance approaches and channels in order to customize their interventions to the needs and capabilities of the country.*

Reforms focused on improving the capacity of public officials and managers to carry out the functions and responsibilities of government in postconflict environments will require a choice among—or a combination of—direct, indirect, and parallel aid instruments illustrated in figure 2. DFID's experience in Nepal, for example, shows the importance of being flexible and fluid in the use of aid instruments for countries in conflict or postconflict recovery. As circumstances change, a mix of approaches may be needed, including grants, sector support, and assistance to NGOs.⁵⁷

Figure 2. Alternative Approaches to Delivering Civil Service Reform Assistance in Postconflict Societies



Donors often support public administration reform in postconflict countries through direct channels of assistance—technical and financial aid in a standalone civil service reform project; a governance reform program; pooling technical and financial assistance with other donors to achieve the government’s administrative strengthening objectives; offering professional, technical, or managerial training and education; or financing the twinning of the country’s civil service ministry, agency, or commission with one in another country.

But public administration in some postconflict countries can best be assisted through indirect means, such as general budget support (GBS), comprehensive macroeconomic adjustment programs, or programs or projects aimed at building capacity in a particular sector, such as health, education, or finance. The opportunity to assist with operational capacity building within government and to affect the way in which the executive branch operates may also be possible, in conjunction with donor assistance for emergency relief or humanitarian assistance before and after the cessation of hostilities.

GBS can be an effective way of providing more flexible funding to assist government in providing the equipment and supplies needed by ministries and agencies to carry out their functions, make financial management more efficient, focus resources on high priority service improvements, and increase the capacity of public servants to do their jobs more effectively without the constraints that often come with donors’ project assistance.⁵⁸ GBS can provide the resources needed to prepare for, design, and implement public administration reforms. However, experience suggests that GBS should only be used in postconflict societies if donors believe that government has adequately skilled staff to manage the infusion of financial resources effectively, has adequate financial management systems to ensure that external resources will not be wasted or diverted to nonproductive uses, and can assure financial integrity and control of corruption.⁵⁹

Parallel expansion of administrative capacity outside of government through civil society organizations and the private sector can leverage limited public administration capacity in the early stages of reconstruction. Although there are well-known dangers of using technical and financial

assistance projects to bypass a weak government in pursuing a donor's objectives, using parallel channels may be the only feasible way in some circumstances of assuring that financial assistance is directed to crucial reconstruction tasks. Care must be taken, however, to build in transition procedures whereby functions are transferred back to the government as its capacity becomes stronger. Institution-building and training for government officials should be an integral part of implementation plans for using independent or autonomous organizations.

Assessments of reconstruction efforts in East Timor, for example, found that international assistance that used an appropriate balance of approaches was essential to progress after hostilities ended. Rohland and Cliffe found that in East Timor, "a focus on community-driven reconstruction and the deployment of private sector and NGO capacities in the initial stages can achieve rapid results on the ground while the capacity of the public administration is building up."⁶⁰

In countries with weak administration, it may be more effective to increase capacity for service delivery by encouraging a "wholesaling" arrangement, in which public administrators develop the ability to implement broad service and infrastructure policies and supervise and coordinate actual provision through what Collier and Okonjo-Iweala call "retail organizations"—that is, local governments, local NGOs, ethnic or religious organizations, civil society, or private firms.⁶¹

Because of limited government capacity and financial management skills in Mozambique during the late 1990s and early 2000s and the need to pursue improvements in customs and fiscal management, the IMF used a "build-operate-transfer" approach to capacity building. A private organization undertook customs management in Mozambique in 1997 and, as systems and procedures improved, gradually handed over operations to Mozambican staff in the early 2000s. Similarly, because of virtually no financial management capacity in Timor-Leste to staff the Central Fiscal Authority, the IMF provided assistance to staff it with international experts, while the government at the same time began to recruit and train Timorese nationals to take over from the international personnel as the local staff's capacity increased.⁶²

By outsourcing or working in partnership with the private sector, governments in postconflict societies can benefit from strong incentives for private firms to keep costs down.⁶³ Often, private firms can avoid the bureaucratic problems that plague government agencies, and they can experiment with new technology and procedures. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) allow a government to extend services without increasing the number of public employees or making large capital investments in facilities and equipment. Private firms can often obtain a higher level of productivity from their workforces than can civil service systems: they can use part-time labor, where appropriate, and less labor-intensive methods of service delivery. Partnering with the private sector gives local governments the ability to take advantage of economies of scale. By contracting with several suppliers, governments can assure continuity of service. By contracting competitively for services, they can determine the true costs of production and thereby eliminate waste.

Cooperating with the private sector also allows governments to adjust the size of programs incrementally as demand or needs change. Partnerships that partially or completely displace inefficient state enterprises and can help reduce government subsidies or losses and relieve fiscal pressures on the national treasury. Compared with public agencies, PPPs can usually respond more flexibly to market signals, more easily procure modern technology, and develop stronger capacity to maintain infrastructure. Public-private sector cooperation can also generate jobs and income while meeting demand for public goods and services.

To make parallel channels work effectively—and especially those that rely on partnerships between governments and the private sector or civil society organizations—public administrators should have or be able to develop quickly the capacity to design and manage contractual arrangements effectively. Government must have procedures for transparent contracting and procurement and mechanisms for preventing abuse and corruption.

In some low-income, postconflict countries with weak public administrations that cannot be strengthened quickly, it may be necessary—temporarily at least—to use independent service authorities or semiautonomous social funds to ensure that essential functions are carried out until public administration capacity can be built.⁶⁴ One lesson of the World Bank’s experience in postwar Mozambique was that “during the transition from war to peace, given the weak state of local institutions, the use of NGOs, community-based groups, and other private sector intermediaries to assist implementation while simultaneously building counterpart capacity is a critically important strategy.”⁶⁵ Such approaches only work well, however, when there is a built-in mechanism for transition to government operation after the civil service develops the capability to take over operations. In 1991, the UNDP established the CARERE program in Cambodia, for example, as a joint UNDP/UNHCR social fund, using an area-based decentralization program of social and economic recovery, repatriation, and reintegration to overcome the lack of government capacity to carry out these essential functions. CARERE worked with local organizations, developing the capacity of local governments and civil service personnel to assume many of these functions, and enabling the Cambodian government to assume leadership and ownership of the program by 2000.

- *International assistance for public administration reform should be coordinated among donors and to the extent possible integrated into management structures that do not place difficult administrative and financial burdens on governments.*

Both multilateral and bilateral international assistance organizations face a dilemma in most postconflict countries: they see the urgent need for financial and technical assistance on the one hand, but on the other hand can impose heavy burdens on a weak civil service in managing aid programs and implementing aid projects. Managing technical and financial assistance for civil service reform—or for any of the myriad reconstruction and restoration challenges that postconflict countries face—requires precisely the types of administrative and technical capacities that are often weakest in those countries.

As happened in Mozambique after the peace settlement in 1992, a postconflict country can become dependent financially on foreign assistance, and the tasks of managing it further fragment an already fragile government, imposing significant burdens on a still weak public administration. Wuyts points out that, in the early 1990s, Mozambique’s Ministry of Health alone had to manage 405 donor-funded projects, all with different management and budgeting requirements, conditions, and reporting protocols. This imposed both high administrative costs (30–40 percent of project funds) on the ministry and stretched its limited staff, while at the same time attracting away the most skilled civil servants into higher-paying project consultancies for the donors.⁶⁶

In East Timor, the complexity of development assistance and aid financing mechanisms in a country with low absorptive and administrative capacity “created barriers to national ownership of the reconstruction planning process in the initial period, and prevented the integration of all funding sources into the national budget,” Rohland and Cliffe point out.⁶⁷ Of notable concern were the difficulties in “synchronizing infrastructure rehabilitation and service delivery with the recruitment of civil servants to manage and maintain these facilities and services.”

In postconflict countries, donors should plan, coordinate, and manage their assistance activities in ways that do not overburden weak administrative capacities, divert the government's scarce technical, financial and managerial capabilities from meeting essential reconstruction needs to managing external assistance programs, or entice capable officials from government service to consultancies or positions in international assistance projects. Countries such as the United States that provide aid to postconflict countries should coordinate their aid programs, internally and with other donors, to lessen the burdens on recipient countries.⁶⁸

CONCLUSION

Although rebuilding or reforming public administration is usually an essential part of restoring legitimate and representative government in postconflict societies, it is often a complex and difficult process in the periods immediately following the cessation of hostilities. At the same time, without efficient, effective, and competent public administration in the executive branch, governments face equally difficult challenges in carrying out essential reconstruction activities, implementing policies needed to strengthen governance and stimulate the economy, deliver social services, and extend infrastructure.

International assistance organizations can play an important role in assisting governments in postconflict countries with strengthening administrative capacity. The record of success in implementing public administration reforms, however, has been limited in developing countries and especially in postconflict societies. To be effective, donors must help government design and implement reforms in ways that will increase the chances for success. In the often fragile, unstable, and changing circumstances in which governments in postconflict societies find themselves, donors must resolve several dilemmas that make the success of reform uncertain.

Donors first face the “push-pull” dilemma. Although external analyses may indicate the fundamental importance of public administration reform, supply-driven assistance accompanied by aid conditionalities may be far less effective and more prone to failure than assistance that responds to indigenous demand for strengthening administrative capacity. Governments that undertake reform because donors push them into it, or because financial and technical assistance are available, are far less likely to implement it successfully than governments that seek assistance from donors because they are committed to strengthening administrative capacity. International assistance organizations may need to be more selective in providing technical and financial aid to those countries where reform is being driven by pull factors, rather than push factors.

Second, donors face another dilemma: their impatience for quick results within a two- or three-year budgeting time horizon versus the reality that public administration reform is a complex, politically sensitive, long-term process that may need a decade or more to accomplish. Programs, projects, or support for public administration reform in postconflict countries must be designed flexibly, and through instruments that recognize the inevitably slow process of change.

Donors must be sensitive to a third dilemma: building capacity requires capacity. As noted earlier, uncoordinated aid for reform by multiple donors that places heavy administrative, financial, or technical burdens on already weak government ministries and agencies is unlikely to succeed in most postconflict societies.

Fourth, international assistance organizations must face a dilemma uncovered by a growing body of research: the effectiveness of foreign aid requires effective government policies. Studies by the World Bank and other organizations have found that governments use foreign aid ineffectively or inappropriately, or divert it through misallocation or corruption, unless there is a strong and effective policy environment.⁶⁹ This “chicken-or-egg” dilemma is especially crucial in postconflict countries that desperately need foreign assistance, but where the policy framework for good governance and economic growth are weak and absorptive capacity is low.

Finally, aid agencies must struggle with yet another dilemma: although public administration reform is unlikely to have significant impacts unless it is systemic, many governments in postconflict countries may have neither the resources nor the motivation to adopt anything but

focused interventions that address a few specific weaknesses in administrative capacity and resist comprehensive reforms that require strong political commitment.

For all of these reasons, international assistance organizations should engage in careful and detailed diagnosis and assessment of the conditions and needs of each postconflict country, the potential obstacles to implementation, and the ability to provide assistance using sound principles of engagement as a precondition for providing technical and financial aid and as the basis selecting appropriate reform prescriptions and aid instruments.

ENDNOTES

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