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Peacebuilding and Service Delivery

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I. Why service delivery matters for peacebuilding

Peacebuilding is concerned with the long-term consolidation of peace in countries that have experienced conflict, with a view to building resilience. Peacebuilding has been defined by the United Nations as ‘a range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict, to strengthen national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and to lay the foundations for sustainable peace and development’.ⁱⁱ While ‘national capacities’ is intended to be understood broadly to include governments, civil society and the private sector, in practice peacebuilding has largely been operationalized by donors as statebuilding.

Statebuilding, as defined by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), is ‘purposeful action to develop the capacity, institutions and legitimacy of the state in relation to an effective political process for negotiating the mutual demands between state and societal groups’.ⁱⁱⁱ The logic of

‘peacebuilding as statebuilding’ is that by improving public perceptions of the state, state legitimacy and state-society relations will improve, in turn leading to a more peaceful society. Indeed, since 2007, statebuilding has largely defined the terms of engagement between OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) members and fragile and conflict-affected countries.^{iv} For instance, as part of its Building Peaceful States and Societies Approach, the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID) has set out that ‘states need to respond to public expectations in order to maintain legitimacy and stability’.^v

A number of contributors to statebuilding discussions draw on Hurd’s description of legitimacy as ‘the normative belief by an actor that a rule or institution ought to be obeyed. It is a subjective quality, relational between actor and institution, and defined by the actor’s perception of the institution’.^{vi} Numerous contributors^{vii} contend that an additional consideration for legitimacy is ‘the degree to which the state is seen as the natural provider of core goods and services’.^{viii} It is thus widely

believed that a key way to improve public perceptions of the state is by enabling it to be seen as a provider of effective services that meet citizen needs, with a particular emphasis on security, health, education, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). This relationship between service delivery and peacebuilding is considered all the more important in conflict-affected states, where service delivery tends to be worse compared with other developing countries not affected by conflict. In addition, predictions now suggest that future global poverty will be concentrated in places affected by fragility and conflict, underlining the importance of supporting improvements in such contexts.^{ix}

By engaging in ‘development as statebuilding’, donors work on the assumption that supporting local and central governments to deliver services translates into legitimacy gains for those public authorities, and thus builds peace. In other words, service delivery is expected not only to generate orthodox development outcomes, such as improving school attendance and educational attainment or keeping populations healthy, but has also come to be seen as an instrument for building more legitimate and peaceful states. This idea – that services have a ‘transformative potential’ – has entered into donor thinking and practice over the last decade, becoming conventional wisdom in some policy circles.^x

However, some critical voices have emerged in response to this framing of service delivery as a means of enhancing state legitimacy to build peace. Several authors have highlighted the weak evidence base,^{xi} with Gordon going as far as to describe the model as a ‘house built on sand’.^{xii} Others have argued how, despite seeking to ensure that service delivery leads to greater state legitimacy, efforts to improve services are often treated as technocratic processes of linear progress rather than as deeply political and contested processes of change.^{xiii}

The question of whether better service delivery creates more legitimate and peaceful states is thus far from settled. Better understanding of this relationship – its plausibility as well as the causal mechanisms through

which it might occur – matters not only conceptually, but also because of the substantial international investments made each year in service delivery in conflict-affected areas (approximately USD 20 billion in 2013).^{xiv}

II. The state of play: what’s happening in practice?

MODALITIES OF DONOR SUPPORT TO SERVICE DELIVERY

Post-conflict situations typically attract large investments in service delivery from donors who work through a number of modalities, with varying degrees of engagement with formal state actors. These methods range from working directly through existing state structures to supporting parallel service delivery systems run by local non-state actors, such as NGOs and civil society organisations. There are trade-offs and challenges associated with each.

Given the limited capacities of fragile states, it has become common for non-state actors^{xv} to be the primary providers of basic services, leading some to conclude that social service provision by non-state actors is a ‘universal feature of developing countries’.^{xvi} Indeed, in some cases, the population may no longer see service provision as the responsibility of the state, but may rather see the role of the state as *facilitating* the delivery of services by non-state actors. Yet, some observers contend that non-state service providers can establish parallel structures that weaken the capacity of the state and erode its legitimacy by weakening the image of the state as a service provider.^{xvii} Rocha Menocal argues that non-state service provision ‘can also reduce the incentives to build national systems and to invest in strengthening local capacity over the long term.’^{xviii}

In contrast, aid agencies sometimes work more directly with the state. For example, in the Urban Water and Sanitation Program in Afghanistan, donors worked through existing state structures on the premise that this would improve state legitimacy. However, this resulted in a three-year delay in rolling out services.^{xix}

Best practice in post-conflict service delivery is commonly thought to resemble a stewardship approach, sometimes referred to as 'contracting out', whereby aid agencies, inter-governmental organisations (INGOs) and NGOs operate under the general purview of the government. As domestic capacity accumulates, the role of external agencies should taper off, ultimately becoming redundant as capable and legitimate states take shape.^{xx} This represents a compromise between working through non-state actors and directly through government systems. Some research suggests that this model may help demonstrate state capacity, in turn generating a degree of performance-based legitimacy.^{xxi} However, this ideal model is often neglected in practice, depending as it does on a minimum level of state capacity to begin with, as well as the right mix of incentives to secure political commitment. Subsequently, donors often end up working through more direct channels of provision, sometimes bypassing the state altogether. Therefore, the practice in many post-conflict settings is a complex web of state, non-state and private actors, forming a multi-stakeholder model of service provision.^{xxii} Donors support various models of delivery but often not in a very well-coordinated way.

HAVE INVESTMENTS IN SERVICE DELIVERY IMPROVED SERVICES AND DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES?

Investments in service delivery have contributed to some substantial improvements in people's access to basic services and development outcomes, although we know that donor support plays an important but limited role in facilitating this. For example, in part owing to significant donor investment in education in Kenya, expected years of schooling (school life expectancy) increased by a third in the last decade, from 8.4 years in 2000 to 11 years in 2009.^{xxiii} Similarly, in Mozambique, under-five and infant mortality rates have decreased by over 50% since 1990.^{xxiv}

Such achievements are important in enabling citizens to play a productive role in society. In post-conflict contexts where state services might previously have been disrupted (or non-existent), this can represent a valuable peace dividend.

However, progress has also been highly unequal both within and among countries, with recent data suggesting that while Liberia is on track to achieve universal access to improved water sources by 2030, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) will not be able to do so until 2100.^{xxv} Similarly, while Mozambique is on track to see 100% of children completing primary education by 2030, at the current rate of progress Uganda will not achieve this until 2100.^{xxvi}

Even where stewardship approaches – the current prevailing practice – have apparently been followed, evidence of their effectiveness is not universally positive. Afghanistan is often cited as the best example of this model, where the contracting out of frontline health services to NGOs occurred at a scale never before seen. Indeed, since 2001 a 'public health service has been created almost out of nothing ... with massive donor support'.^{xxvii} Early signs were encouraging, as health coverage grew exponentially across the country. However, longitudinal research suggests more limited utilization of public services than initially believed, a perceived lower quality of government health service relative to that provided by private actors and frequent exaction of unofficial fees on users.^{xxviii}

Generally speaking, evidence on the effectiveness of different service delivery modalities beyond the short-term can be hard to find, with limited longitudinal data available. This is in part connected to the wane in donor support to most countries once they are several years out of conflict.^{xxix} Writing in relation to health provision in conflict-affected situations, for example, Witter notes that most research tends to focus on the immediate post-conflict period, with little consideration for what happens later.^{xxx}

HAVE INVESTMENTS IN SERVICE DELIVERY LED TO IMPROVED STATE LEGITIMACY AND PEACEBUILDING?

There is less evidence when it comes to the question of whether better service delivery makes societies more peaceful and states more legitimate. The lack of evidence for this proposition has been flagged extensively and in relation to multiple sectors.^{xxxi}

In an effort to address this gap, the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC) – a multi-year, cross-country research programme led by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) – is directly examining relationships between improved access to services and state legitimacy across five conflict-affected countries (DRC, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Uganda). Through a two-wave panel survey in these countries, SLRC is exploring whether and how improvements in people's access to and experiences of a range of basic services influences their perceptions of formal state actors (at both local and national levels). These surveys are generating longitudinal quantitative data at scale, providing a bigger picture than most qualitative data are able to produce.^{xxxii}

The second wave of this survey will be implemented in late 2015. However, analysis of the baseline data from the first survey round in 2012 through early 2013 has revealed a number of insights into the 'transformative potential' of services. In all five countries, no apparent relationship exists between people's access to health or water services and their perceptions of either local or central government.^{xxxiii} That is, those with better access to these services do not tend to be any more likely to have better perceptions of the government compared to those with worse access. Respondents' levels of satisfaction with services similarly do not appear to influence their perceptions of the government.^{xxxiv}

In addition, findings suggest that there is no apparent relationship between people's perceptions of local or central governance and whether it is the state or non-state service providers that deliver their water, health or educational services. This challenge to conventional wisdom highlights the fact that citizens' perceptions of state legitimacy and the identity of service providers are not as clear-cut as has been portrayed.

On the other hand regression results from Nepal,^{xxxv} Pakistan,^{xxxvi} Sri Lanka^{xxxvii} and Uganda^{xxxviii} show that the more problems experienced with a service, the worse respondents thought of the government. Other research finds a similar pattern. In Sierra Leone,

for example, Sacks and Larizza study the effects of decentralization and service delivery on citizens' trust in government. They suggest that the devolution of power is not itself a necessary condition for increasing citizens' trust of local authorities, but that 'bureaucratic honesty combined with the quality of service provision is what really matters to citizens' (emphasis added).^{xxxix} This is an important contribution to understandings of the relationships between service delivery and peacebuilding, as much of the policy emphasis is on positive performance as a driver of peace, with less attention paid to poor performance as a driver of grievances.

The strongest findings to emerge from the SLRC survey data vis-à-vis service delivery and state legitimacy have to do with participation and accountability. First, in three countries (Nepal, Pakistan and Uganda), respondents were likely to think more positively about the government when genuine and functional mechanisms to make complaints or address grievances were embedded within the instruments of service provision. Indeed, it does not even seem to matter whether respondents actually used them; their presence alone accounts for the effect. Second, there are strong statistical associations between levels of civic participation – attending a community meeting or being consulted about local service provision – and people's perceptions of government. This relationship holds for all countries apart from the DRC. A separate cross-country study by the Peace, Security and Development Network into multi-stakeholder processes^{xl} finds a similar pattern – the impact on state legitimacy was 'determined more by their throughput (the multi-stakeholder process) than by their output (improvement of service delivery)'.^{xli} This suggests legitimacy is garnered as much by process as by ultimate performance.

Emerging evidence thus suggests that improvements in services do not appear to shape perceptions of state legitimacy in a simple, linear way.^{xlii} But a relationship does appear to exist: poor experiences of service quality tend to lead to declining perceptions of the state,

while inclusive participation and mechanisms to raise grievances appear to have a positive effect. This more nuanced relationship was similarly found in relation to the delivery of water services in Iraq, where Brinkerhoff and others conclude that:

The process of legitimation is an iterative one, where cycles of citizen experience and engagement with government around service delivery, security, and political participation and accountability promote increases in legitimacy when that experience and engagement are positive, and decreases when they are negative.^{xliii}

Such findings are in keeping with academic literature, which has long conceptualised public services as a channel of interaction between citizens and political authorities, as a space where the state can be 'seen'.^{xliiv} It is also in line with the recognition that there are multiple drivers of legitimacy.

III. Where now? Ideas for the future of peacebuilding and service delivery

A number of questions and ideas emerge from the current data on service delivery and its relationship with peacebuilding. Below we set out four possible directions for future attention.

START WITH THE IDEA THAT PEACEBUILDING AND LEGITIMACY ARE MULTIDIMENSIONAL

Peacebuilding and statebuilding have tended to be viewed through the lens of capacity. As such, policy makers often work on finding the best ways to build the capacity of states to perform their core functions (provide services, enforce the rule of law, protect rights, consolidate their monopoly over violence, etc.). But statebuilding is about more than the capacity to perform key state functions. It is also about building functional relationships between citizens and service providers, as well as between service providers and local and central governments. This has emerged as critical in SLRC's research on state capacity to address

malnutrition in Sierra Leone where, despite significant support to improving technical skills and knowledge, interactions between governmental health personnel and citizens remain a binding constraint on delivering better services.^{xliv} This suggests that strengthening state capacity is not just about improving technical know-how but also about improving citizen experiences through improved relationships and channels to facilitate those relationships (such as grievance mechanisms and platforms for exchange). It also suggests that capacity and legitimacy are far from distinct, but rather influence each other. In Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia, state responses to the Ebola outbreak have been undermined by widespread lack of trust in government institutions.^{xlvi} Illegitimacy can thus limit the capacity of authorities to deal with public needs.

Much less attention has been paid to the question of legitimacy, and in particular to how it can be accrued.^{xlvii} Legitimacy is a complex issue and can be approached in different ways. For example, some see legitimacy as an output- or performance-based product, which emerges when political authorities deliver tangible outcomes to populations (such as services, economic opportunities or security). Others see it as a function of process, which can refer to how inclusive the government is throughout the process of policy making and resource distribution.^{xlviii} The research discussed here suggests that these are not competing sources of legitimacy, but are in fact complementary: the quality of what gets delivered matters (performance), but so too does the way in which programmes are implemented (process). This means moving beyond a narrow conception of peacebuilding, statebuilding and legitimacy to a more multidimensional understanding.^{xlix}

FOCUS BROADLY ON THE 'HOW' OF SERVICE DELIVERY

The latest evidence on the links between service delivery and legitimacy suggests that understanding the process of service provision can provide insights into the transformative potential of public services. This is a fruitful area for further investigation, and necessitates a closer analysis of how the detail of implementation and provision of services influences wider governance dynamics.

To illustrate, drawing on deskwork and empirical fieldwork from DRC and South Sudan, Wild and Mason suggest there are five possible aspects of WASH programming that may shape peacebuilding and statebuilding efforts.ⁱ These include visibility (who is seen to deliver), collective action (who is involved in provision), inclusion (whether marginalized groups get equitable access), accountability (which providers are responsive), and opportunity (whether programming creates obvious chances for dispute resolution). However, very little empirical research has set out to test these or other programme characteristics. In short, a better understanding of the specific causal mechanisms through which service delivery might affect people's perceptions of the state will help move this debate forwards.

This is particularly important in contexts where communities might not view the state as the primary service provider. The presence of non-state providers, as well as the tendency for donors to claim credit for aid investments can mean that the state is not seen by citizens to be the source of any improved services. This result was apparent in relation to WASH services in South Sudan,ⁱⁱ and has been seen as a challenge to security and justice services in Sierra Leone, where traditional authorities are often viewed by communities as the greatest determinant of such services. The diversity of providers also raises questions about the causal relationship that donors are hoping to build between improved services and increased state legitimacy. This can be particularly acute in conflict-affected contexts, where communities have often developed alternative governance arrangements in the absence of the state.ⁱⁱⁱ

BRING THE POLITICS BACK IN AND DO NO HARM

When it comes to the transformative potential of service delivery, the elements of participation and accountability appear important. However, these qualities do not emerge in a vacuum. How a state acts on the ground, in the everyday, is a function of a much broader political settlement. That is, the formal and informal bargains and agreements that determine how

power is organized across a given territory. It is unlikely that the state will accrue more legitimacy from effective service delivery if it continues to have a poor reputation more broadly. This idea is borne out in the experience that efforts to create community policing units within police services lead to little improvement in overall perceptions of the police more broadly when other units continue to use excessive force, extract bribes or perform poorly.ⁱⁱⁱⁱ In SLRC's work in Uganda, victims of serious crimes committed by the government and/or rebels over a 20-year war, for which there has been almost no remedy for victims, had the most negative perceptions of both local and central governance in the region.^{liv} In short, services cannot be divorced from the wider performance of the state.

Understanding service delivery as deeply political is also important for ensuring that 'do no harm' principles are adhered to. There is a danger that improving service delivery in only some parts of a country can exacerbate inter-group tensions and fuel conflict. This is especially important because service delivery improvements are likely to first occur in more accessible parts of the country, where conflict is less intense, infrastructure is better, and partner governments can be more interested in securing investments. In order to avoid doing harm, it is therefore important that service delivery improvements do not exacerbate inequalities within fragile countries, as South Sudan's return to conflict all too clearly highlights. Ensuring that approaches to service delivery explicitly recognise their political nature will help to generate a more conflict-sensitive contribution to peacebuilding.

MANAGE EXPECTATIONS

It is important to remember that the primary purpose of service delivery is to improve citizen wellbeing by keeping people healthy, getting children into good quality schooling, and so on. These are fundamentally important ends in themselves. As one commentator cautions, 'The primary objective of health provision should remain the enhancement of health outcomes'.^{lv} In an effort to see what other implications service delivery might have – such as lending legitimacy to

states and supporting peace – one should not lose sight of the more limited goods it can produce. There is a danger of saddling service delivery with too many ambitious agendas, which can mean it ends up delivering none of them.

In addition, raising expectations about what is realistically achievable through service delivery in post-conflict contexts risks disappointment in places where dissatisfaction is already rife and expectations of a peace dividend are high. Until more is known, such relationships should be treated tentatively. Expecting service delivery to contribute to peacebuilding and statebuilding in short- to medium- timeframes is hugely ambitious, given that historical experience suggests this process can take centuries.

IV. Policy and research gaps

Better and more nuanced information is required about the complex relationships between service delivery and peacebuilding, particularly in relation to the causal mechanisms that enable strengthened peace and legitimacy. Four questions in particular require further analysis.

First, given the important role that grievance mechanisms appear to play in positive experiences of service delivery and perceptions of the state, it would be useful to explore the various forms these mechanisms take, whether some are more effective,

how people use them and how this changes over time. This will help to identify more precisely the triggers for positive attitudes towards the state.

Second, emerging research suggests poor experiences of service delivery impact on people's views of the state more than positive experiences. Further research could usefully explore how channels of responsibility for both good and poor performance are understood, as well as examining the extent to which poor service delivery experiences impact on the durability of peace.

Third, the finding that who delivers services does not appear to effect perceptions of the state suggests potentially useful avenues of research that explicitly compare different service providers and the different kinds of legitimacy that they accrue in the eyes of service users. The sources of legitimacy for government, customary, NGO and private sector providers are likely different. Teasing these nuances out will help improve understandings about different forms of legitimacy, in turn enabling a clearer understanding of how they are weakened or strengthened.

Finally, while peacebuilding has largely been operationalised through statebuilding to date, this overlooks other avenues for building peace and risks treating peacebuilding as a technical exercise of capacity building. Statebuilding does not necessarily provide a technocratic short-cut to the political complexities of building peace and alternative approaches merit further research.

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