NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

CENTER ON INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Strategic Planning in Fragile and Conflict Contexts

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Table of Contents

Strategic Planning in Fragile and Conflict Contexts

Table of Contents

Strategic Planning in Fragile and Conflict Contexts[1]

Executive Summary

Strategic planning is commonly defined as a process undertaken to articulate an organization's expected results within a certain timeframe and identify the strategies and resources required to achieve those results. In fragile and conflict-affected states (FCAS), this process constitutes a foundational moment in the recovery or peace consolidation effort. The way in which nationally led plans are developed and the priorities they yield convey powerful signals of government intentions, the future of state-society relations, and the overall potential for peace. International planning processes present an opportunity to clearly articulate value added and redefine the nature of the engagement with a range of local actors.

The strategic planning phase is fundamentally political and often a microcosm of FCAS characteristics. At the national level, it illustrates in particular the **contested legitimacy of the state**, which can be further weakened or strengthened through a planning exercise, **the limited capacity to perform core state functions, the high expectations** on the part of many stakeholders, and the **political economy's many distortions** with which local and international actors must contend.

At the international level, the strategic planning process also brings into sharp focus a range of tensions, including a **highly fragmented and compartmentalized planning reality,** with significant transactions costs for national actors, **a lack of situational awareness,** reflected in limited integration of political analysis and the persistence of pre-crisis, business-as-usual approaches, and **a recurring gap between the rhetoric and the practice**, especially in relation to internationally agreed commitments to strengthening national ownership.

These tensions reflect how complex strategic planning is in FCAS. Thus, it should not be left solely to strategic planners, who face a range of challenges, including uneven leadership support, the need to reconcile different

if not competing agendas, and institutional constraints to flexible, context-driven planning. At the same time, the analysis points to a set of opportunities that strategic planners can exploit, such as the space available for new approaches to be tested and new constituents to be brought in and the leveraging of international attention to build consensus, support national capacities, and strengthen or reset relationships. To manage these challenges and seize these opportunities, the paper highlights the need to factor in a number of prerequisites. They include:

1. **Clarifying and communicating the purpose of the planning process:** While the benefits of clarity are mostly political (e.g., buy in, more realistic expectations), a plan also serves fundraising, coordination, and capacity-building purposes.

2. **Ensuring strong and consistent leadership engagement from the very beginning, to articulate the vision and manage tensions**: This engagement is often uneven, yet it is an essential condition for successful technical planning work.

3. **Designing and implementing strategic stakeholder engagement approaches:** While not every actor needs to be included at all times (nor at all costs), inclusiveness and clarity about what is expected are primordial in ensuring buy-in and strengthening the legitimacy of the exercise.

4. **Establishing sufficient capacities and adequate structures:** Support to national planning cells has proven to be an effective approach in strengthening the sense of national ownership and building capacity in a core state function. Evidence shows that adequate planning capacities are also in short supply within international organizations.

5. **Getting the planning parameters (trigger, timeframe, and plan duration) right:** All three speak to issues of transparency and responsiveness to local conditions. International planning processes continue to be hampered by corporate considerations, which drive decisions that should be made locally to allow plans to

be meaningful, notably as they pertain to planning cycles and budget allocations.

At the assessment phase, while the strategic planning community now enjoys access to a range of tools and methods, the challenge lies in their appropriate use to integrate different perspectives and build consensus around conflict factors and needs. Recovery plans too often appear uninformed by political realities. For international responses, **the link between the assessment findings with the selected priorities and programmatic choices remains weak.**

Increased attention to comparative advantage remains confined to the level of theory and intentions. Few plans, notably on the international side, reflect a rigorous application of the comparative advantage concept, which is often restricted to mandate and habit. Deconstructing the term "capacity" to include a range of dimensions such as access to stakeholders, strategic clarity, and back-office systems, and emphasizing its "comparative" dimension allow for clearer choices to be presented to leadership for prioritization and sequencing. This requires honest self-examination efforts for any organization involved.

The convergence of needs, comparative advantage ,and stakeholder support offers a useful framework for selecting priorities and deciding on sequence. The country reviews uncover evidence of persistent incoherence and redundancies in choices made, which carry significant transaction and opportunity costs in FCAS. Greater use by senior leaders of filters such as relevance to conflict factors, feasibility, and peer support would alleviate such distortions to some extent.

The planning process often struggles to formulate results and develop meaningful implementation strategies. Operational considerations such as resource requirements and security assessments provide useful reality checks on the choices made and the expectations generated. Initiating operational planning before the end of the strategic phase is a good practice that is rarely implemented.

Finally, the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) dimension of strategic planning remains its weakest link. There is little doubt that a rigid application of Results Based Management (RBM) to peacebuilding is impractical, if not counterproductive. Yet it is increasingly evident that national and international actors remain ill equipped to properly assess performance of FCAS engagement. The challenge is one of political will, leadership support, capacities, and methodologies.

Strategic planning processes rarely make or break peace consolidation efforts, but their relevance to fragility and conflict factors calls for five key policy messages:

1. Early investment of time, resources, and leadership in planning exercises is effective peacebuilding work: It builds core government functional capacity and saves transaction costs for all over time.

2. Enhanced training in planning skills, including political acumen and coordination, is required for both national and international organizations.

3. To be effective in FCAS, planning cycles and processes must be flexible. This applies in particular to international organizations where development type requirements, defined by headquarters-level structures, must give way to field-based decisions on what makes sense for a particular crisis situation.

4. Recent efforts at integrated planning (whole of government, UN integration) must stay the course and receive increase political, financial, and technical support.

5. While the plethora of plans is at times inevitable given the need for differentiated approaches in most FCAS, **an immediate priority should be to strengthen and harmonize common early warning systems** that provide reliable information on a range of risk factors and unaddressed needs to inform those plans.

In addition, **a number of knowledge gaps exist,** among which the most salient are:

1. The mechanisms through which strategic planning processes build state legitimacy (including for international strategic responses), identifying in particular the "pivotal moments" and the type of messaging that impact how the population assesses both the integrity of the exercise and the intentions of the state.

2. The effectiveness and impact of various stakeholder engagement strategies throughout the planning process, based on decisions related to timing, content, sequencing, and facilitation support, including external mediation.

3. The most appropriate ways to strengthen the M&E component of national and international plans, taking into account the inherent constraints and fault lines in applying RBM approaches too rigidly in FCAS.

Introduction

Strategic planning in fragile and conflict-affected states: definition and relevance

Strategic planning is commonly defined as a process undertaken to articulate an organization's expected results within a certain timeframe, and to identify the strategies and resources required to achieve those results.

In fragile and conflict affected states (FCAS), this process usually includes the definition of a vision or end state out of conflict, the articulation of the various pathways to reach it, the formulation of key principles and/or rules of engagement that underpin this vision or end state. Therefore, above and beyond its strategic, managerial, and operational dimension the planning process is eminently political, as it touches upon the core values, interests, and aspirations of various stakeholders that have been involved in and/or have suffered from conflict.

An effective and credible strategic planning process is particularly relevant in FCAS, due to the following characteristics:

1. In any fragile and conflict-affected state, the immensity of needs, combined with limited resources and competing agendas, requires difficult decisions. **The strategic planning process constitutes a legitimate, organizing framework for choices to be made**, on the basis of commonly identified needs and mutually agreed allocation of resources.

2. The low margin for error in post-conflict recovery is well documented. Legitimately high hopes by many for quick improvements in the political, security, and economic situation are often a source of tension and renewed conflict. **The strategic planning process therefore seeks to clarify and manage expectations** by articulating and communicating realistic goals and clear roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders involved.

3. Strategic planning requires a range of skills that are often in limited supply in fragile and conflict-affected states. **A planning process with international support represents an opportunity to (re)establish national capacities**, with direct spillovers into other core government functions such as aid coordination and policy management, as called for in the Independent Report of the Senior Advisory Group on Civilian Capacity in the aftermath of Conflict (February 2011).

4. The planning process can be as important as the planning outcome: **A credible, inclusive planning exercise can support reconciliation among warring parties and signal new state-society dynamics** whereby the state can re-establish trust and demonstrate responsiveness to citizen concerns and needs. Similarly, the strategic planning process can help define new, healthier forms of engagement with the international community.

Audience and purpose of the report

The primary audience for this research paper is the strategic planner in FCAS, understood broadly as any actor involved in either the formulation of national priorities to mitigate or recover from conflict, or the design of international strategies to support such priorities.

While mainly technical and methodological in nature, the paper explores the tensions and tradeoffs incurred throughout the planning process on a range of engagement principles, including national ownership, prioritization, and sequencing.

Surveyed planners in each of these positions reiterated the "art" of their craft, and thereby the need for each planner to avoid template planning structures. As such this paper neither seeks nor claims to provide a comprehensive checklist for planners, but rather it aims to serve two purposes: **i)** provide a broad concept of key elements of planning and **ii)** identify key recommendations for engagement as well as policy and capacity gaps in the international community's support of strategic planning processes.

Structure of the report

The report is structured around four main sections.

1) The first section offers **general considerations related to i) the tradeoffs and tensions inherent** to strategic planning processes in FCAS, **and ii) the challenges and opportunities that planners face**, as a means to set the context and rationale for the guidance and recommendations presented throughout the paper.

2) The second and third sections discuss the **prerequisites for and the actual steps of the strategic planning process**, with a focus on current practice and its range of tradeoffs and tensions, including challenges in formulating results for greater accountability and issues related, inter alia, to ownership, prioritization, and funding.

3) The **conclusion presents a summary of findings, along with key policy recommendations** drawn from the analysis and the case studies, as well as suggested areas where further research could strengthen the international community's capacities to support strategic planning processes.

Note on terminology

The terms "peacebuilding" and "post-conflict recovery", as used in this report, are to be understood broadly as encompassing a range of processes and activities carried out by national and international actors in the aftermath of conflict, including in, but not limited to, the areas of security- sector reform, DDR, macroeconomic management, state institutional strengthening, civil society support, social service provision and economic revitalization. The authors acknowledge the epistemological and definitional challenges associated with those terms, including the overlap between the different phases that they signify. That complexity is brought into sharp focus during the planning phase, as emphasized later in this report.

Typology of planning processes in fragile and conflict contexts

There is often confusion among the various plans developed in post-crisis contexts. In an effort to emphasize linkages and interconnectedness, the literature on strategic planning processes leads at times to comparisons between products of vastly different nature, developed for different purposes. **The main source of confusion lies between national plans**, which are often developed with international support, **and the international strategies** designed to articulate where and how external actors contribute to national priorities.

National plans: Developed by host governments, often with the support of the international community, they present nationally defined peacebuilding, recovery, and development priorities for the country (or in some cases, for specific regions): These include Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS), Peacebuilding Strategic Frameworks (pioneered in collaboration with the Peacebuilding Commission in Burundi, Sierra Leone, and the Central African Republic), Compacts (Afghanistan, Timor Leste), and sector-based strategies. In many cases, governments chpose to develop and implement simultaneous plans that target either different regions in the country or different purposes and timelines (for example, with a peace consolidation strategy focusing on core state and peacebuilding requirements in a limited timeframe and a longer-term plan focusing on development needs).

International strategies: Members of the international community develop their own country-specific responses, which articulate their respective contributions to national plans and national priorities. These strategies are often negotiated with the host government. They include the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UN-DAF), the Country Assistance Strategy (CAS) for the World Bank, and similar country plans for donors and INGOs. These different strategies coexist, even if some actors have at times chosen to merge or combine their respective frameworks, as was the case in DRC with the Country Assistance Framework, originally a combination of the UN-DAF and the World Bank's CAS, and later adopted

by a number of donors. As with national governments, members of the international community often have multiple strategies developed and implemented at the same time, usually in response to region-or theme-specific needs. As such, in addition to statebuilding or development responses, many actors, including the UN and INGOs, participate in the Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP) as the overarching framework for prioritizing humanitarian needs and coordinating humanitarian interventions.

Examples of National Plans

- Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS)
- National Development Plans
- Compacts
- Peace Consolidation Strategies
- Post-Conflict Needs Assessments (PCNA)

Examples of International Strategies

- United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), for UN Country Teams
- Integrated Strategic Frameworks[2] (ISF), for integrated UN missions
- Country Assistance Frameworks, for the World Bank
- Country Programs / strategies, for bilateral donors
- Consolidated Appeals Processes (CAP), for the international humanitarian community (with national NGO participation)

One must be aware of these typologies and avoid referring to them interchangeably. In discussing, reviewing, and analyzing a planning process, it is important to clarify its nature and ownership (national plan or international response), its purpose (statebuilding, development, humanitarian) and its geographical scope (countrywide, specific region).

Country reviews

The analysis and recommendations presented in the paper derive, in part, from the review of country cases– **Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Timor Leste, and Uganda** – undertaken in the second half of 2010. Four strategic and four operational criteria were used to evaluate the planning processes:

(1) At the **strategic level,** this review looked at the form and goals of the planning processes focusing on how they support building the **i)** legitimacy, **ii)** capacity, and **iii)** national ownership of a state and **iv)** how they articulate statebuilding and peacebuilding priorities.

(2) At the **operational level**, the review assessed planning processes according to their relevance in achieving four distinct goals: **(i)** prioritization and sequencing; **(ii)** international harmonization and alignment; **(iii)** flexibility; and **(iv)** mutual accountability.

While this paper covers both national and international planning processes, the focus of the country cases is primarily on national frameworks with references to select international responses. Cases were shown to reflect diversity in terms of context, size, distance from conflict, nature of international engagement, and type of planning tools. For a comprehensive overview of the findings of each case, please refer to the country annexes.

I. General considerations

a. Tradeoffs and dilemmas

Describing his experience with a recent national planning process, a surveyed planner from the country cases indicated that the exercise itself had provided a brief summary of the broader challenges that the country is facing. This observation is corroborated, if not so explicitly, by the other country cases and recent literature. As an organizing process to articulate a common vision and priorities and decide on resource allocation, strategic planning brings into sharp focus a number of tensions and dilemmas, reflective of the many characteristics of FCAS.

National level

At the national level, the strategic planning process highlights in particular the following critical elements:

1. **The contested legitimacy of the state**, which can be further weakened or strengthened through a planning exercise, depending on the degree of participation and the outcomes. In FCAS, most governments initiating a planning process face high levels of suspicion on the part of the populations as to their intentions. The struggle to (re)establish credibility with a range of constituents is often a regular feature of the process and comes with significant but necessary transaction costs.

	DRC	Haiti	Liberia	Sierra Leone	Timor Leste	Uganda
Nature of research	Field	Desk	Desk	Desk	Field	Desk
Objective	Stabilization	Disaster recovery and development	Poverty reduction and development	Poverty reduction and development	Poverty reduction and development	Poverty reduction and development
National plan reviewed	STAREC	PARDN	PRSP-II: "Lift Liberia"	PRSP-II: "Agenda for Change"	NPP; National Vision 2020	PRSP-II: The National Development Plan
Selected international plan*	ISSSS (UN + donors)	ISF (UN)	UNDAF (UN)	UN Joint Vision (UN)	International Compact (donors +) and ISF (UN)	UNDAF (UN)

*Each international partner (UN, World Bank, donors, etc.) usually develops its own strategic plan or framework to articulate its contribution to national priorities. As such, a number of international plans coexist with the ones, mostly UN led, selected for this review.

Strategic Planning in Fragile and Conflict Contexts

2. The limited capacity to perform core state functions receives prominent, albeit unwanted, visibility throughout the planning process. Skills in the areas of assessment, analysis, coordination, consensus building, and drafting are in short supply and high demand.

3. The high expectations on the part of large segments of the population are usually given explicit recognition and expression during the planning process. They can either be channeled to mobilize support for the process itself and its outcomes, or they can further handicap it by substituting politically convenient considerations ("let's promise them the maximum") for realistic analyses and decisions.

4. The political economy with its many distortions, including client like relationships and imbalanced bargaining processes, hardly escape coverage from a rigorous and inclusive planning exercise. The unmasking of vested interests, often in support of the status quo at the origin of conflict, appears at all stages of the planning process, as discussed in subsequent sections.

International level

At the international level, planning processes, undertaken either through participation in national exercises or as internal strategic responses, are often very revealing of the level of adherence to agreed engagement principles. The tensions and dilemmas inherent to those principles are ineluctably expressed in country, including:

1. A highly fragmented and compartmentalized planning reality, evident in a plethora of frameworks, comes with significant transactions costs for national actors. As the report argues throughout, while some level of fragmentation is inevitable (and at times desirable), opportunities for consolidation and coherence remain greatly underexplored.

2. A lack of situational awareness, reflected in a poor integration of political analysis and guidance in programmatic frameworks, results in the persistence of pre-crisis, business-as-usual approaches. Those approaches then combine a range of pitfalls, including unrealistic expectations, inadequate appreciation and preparation for volatile conditions, and insufficient resource and procurement flexibility.

3. The gap between the rhetoric and the practice, notably in the area of national ownership and the commitment to plan and implement through national processes, is at its widest in FCAS. At best, this gap reflects significant shortcomings in donor risk management systems, insufficient HQ engagement and oversight, and capacity limitations. At worst, it reflects a reliance on traditional and exclusionary state-centrist modalities, and the maintenance of, or preference for dependency, on asymmetrical relationships rather than "equal" partnerships.

b.   Challenges and opportunities for the strategic planner

Challenges

The case studies and interviews for this paper all confirm that planning occurs within a complex environment in which planners face serious political, logistical, and institutional constraints that all affect to various degrees the strategic planning process and its outputs.

1. The complexity barrier: First and foremost, there are inherent intricacies in peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery work, with genuine disagreements at various levels over drivers of conflict and end states, leading to legitimate differences in approaches, responses, and methods. Post-crisis planning brings into sharp focus competing agendas, both in the domestic arena and at the international level. A decision to circumvent or ignore those agendas may allow the process to move forward and deliver a "plan", but it will reduce the chances that all relevant actors adhere to the plan's commitments and implementation.

→ **The planning process gives expression to such differences**, and often produces more difficult questions than definitive answers.

→ In FCAS contexts, one should not expect complete clarity from a strategic planning process, even if designed and managed according to best practices.

2. Multidimensionality: Even when there is agreement on the endstate, the nonlinear, overlapping nature of peacebuilding and recovery means that the strategic planning process must bring together different approaches (development, humanitarian, security, political), each with its own time horizon and modalities, expressed in different "languages" and supported by different institutional cultures.

→ **The planner(s) must be attuned to such diversity and have the capacity to navigate through and eventually reconcile tensions.**

→ **Recognizing such epistemological and idiomatic divergences and managing them in a manner that reduces cacophony is a challenge with high transaction costs.**

→ **This constraint points to the need for planners to be equipped with a broad range of skills and knowledge**, including political acumen, coordination, communication, and mediation/facilitation.

3. Limited capacity and institutional support: In addition, human resources are often limited in terms of numbers of planners and the need to dedicate talented staff toward delivery in addition to planning. This applies to both national entities, including governments, and international partners, for whom the frequent use of the term "strategic" is often a poor substitute for a real planning culture and solid planning capacities. For example, the United Nations' focus on the strategic planning function is only a few years old, with efforts now under way to institutionalize it throughout the organization's integrated peacekeeping and peacebuilding offices and provide increased training opportunities in the various components of the post-conflict planning process, including needs assessments, facilitation and coordination, and results-based management.

→ **Strategic planning needs in FCAS have received greater academic and theoretical attention at the policy level than actual support in the field.**

→ **For many field-based planners, the lack of institutional support reflects both the inherent complexity of the process and weaknesses in the accountability structures, and in evaluation practices for peacebuilding interventions in particular** (see section on M&E).

Opportunities

At the same time, a post-conflict strategic planning process can benefit from and uncover a number of opportunities. These include:

1. A moment of greater international attention by the international community, with the imperative to get it right. This often translates into increased resources and political support for interventions that do not fit neatly within traditional categories of assistance.

2. A fluid environment that allows for new actors to be mobilized and new implementation modalities to be tested or adopted. While the stakes are high, a strategic planning process can be structured in a manner that encourages innovative thinking and behavior.

3. The time to redefine, for the better, the nature and the effectiveness of relationships both within the planning organization, government, or partner, and between the planning organization and external actors. Such relationships, which will have been tested and often undermined during a conflict, can be transformed by a quality strategic planning process, as illustrated by some of the case studies.

4. The internal space and framework to define common positions and agreed rules of engagement with key stakeholders, particularly with those whose legitimacy and acceptability are questioned. In other words, a plan is not just about the "what" but also about the "with whom and how," which, in FCAS, are often ignored as too difficult or risky to address.

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Critical Challenges and Opportunities

Planners face a number of challenges, including:

A complex situation in which to plan

Multiple actors, different understandings

Multiple actors, competing agendas

Institutional constraints

Limited capacity and uneven leadership engagement

Yet the planning process is also the opportunity to:

Leverage strong, albeit temporary, international attention

Build consensus both internally (government, international organization) and among different actors

Support national capacities

Bring in new actors, including marginalized groups

Strengthen, if not reset, relationships

Clarify rules of engagement

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II.   Prerequisites for effective planning in FCAS

As stated previously, the strategic planning process can play a critical part in strengthening the trust between various actors, including between the state and its citizens and between the state and the international community. In this context, process decisions are key factors that ultimately determine the legitimacy of the exercise and the probability that it will be implemented. However, planners repeatedly noted that often their most challenging task was balancing political realities and constraints, on the one hand, and the design of a sound planning process on the other.

To navigate such complexity, a number of prerequisites should be factored in, which all involve a set of challenges and tensions inherent to the FCAS context.

a.   Clarifying goals and functions of the planning exercise

Planning exercises in post-conflict situations serve different goals, operate under different timelines, and speak to different constituencies. Many try to satisfy multiple ends. The goals and functions of a planning process determine process design, including who should be involved, as well as content.

At the national level, strategic plans can:

- Support the institutionalization of an emerging political settlement

- Define a long-term vision and overall strategies to achieve such a vision, as with the National Vision 2020 in Timor Leste

- Outline medium-term social and economic targets for the country, as with poverty reduction strategies

- Assess needs following conflict or natural disaster and initiate, within a shorter timeframe, early recovery interventions.

National planning:
The multiple benefits of clarity

As the case studies demonstrate, clarity on the plan's goal and functions, including the formulation of the end state, vastly improves a planning process's ability to serve the following purposes:

(i) As a **political instrument**, the process of planning and setting priorities can build national consensus and ownership and facilitate ongoing mediation between national stakeholders.

(ii) As a **tool for** *increased attention* **on statebuilding and peacebuilding imperatives, including for external actors.** Previous analysis indicates a dearth of plans that explicitly focus on peacebuilding and statebuilding needs,[3] with many geared solely towards economic growth and poverty reduction.

(iii) As a **platform for fundraising and aid coordination**, particularly in countries where resources are likely to come from external sources. A national plan's degree of clarity on priorities and sequencing determines its impact on coordination of external assistance and the degree of external alignment. The experience in Haiti and other fragile states indicates that **it is at times too easy for the international community to adhere to the agreed principle of alignment, at least at the strategic level**, since few planned interventions usually fall outside the scope of national plans.

(iv) As a **capacity-building vehicle**, through the provision and acquisition by civil servants of tools and skill sets that may then spill over to other government functions, including policy design and management. In Timor Leste, the National Priorities Process, which has been undertaken annually since 2008, has contributed to strengthened planning and monitoring skills among government officials.

Some national planners also noted that the increasing use of Medium-Term Expenditure Frameworks in PRSP contexts, which links plans with budgets, can contribute to improved result-based management culture within state institutions.

Strategic plans for the international community should articulate the organization's contribution to national peacebuilding, statebuilding, and/or recovery priorities. As such, the plan should demonstrate adherence to the principles of engagement with fragile states, notably as they relate to ownership, alignment, mutual accountability, and managing for results.

→   In many ways, **the value of the strategic planning process lies in the substantive conversations** that must be held, both within the organization and with other partners, over what the organization does in a given context, what it should be doing, and, as important, what it will not do.

Strategic planning and identity:
The opportunity for international partners to define who they are

Many post-conflict situations are characterized by a large number of external actors offering assistance to the state and its citizens, resulting at times in significant transaction costs but more fundamentally in increased confusion about who brings what to the statebuilding and peacebuilding process. In this competition for space, which occurs also within international organizations, many are tempted to see the internal planning process as the moment to list and reserve resources for their planned interventions.

As a result, plans are often a consolidation of various department or unit outputs and projects, when they should in fact first and foremost be the **opportunity for the organization to define** *the organization's identity* **and what is unique about its presence** by

presenting a clear and coherent explanation and demonstration of the organization's goals, capacities and actions to external stakeholders, in a manner that secures their buy-in for successful implementation.

In this regard, the international plans reviewed for this paper offer a mixed record.

b.   Leadership engagement

The country reviews and other evidence from the field amply demonstrate the **centrality of securing strong leadership from inception to maneuver the various obstacles and tensions inherent to the planning process,** especially in post-conflict settings. Fostering leadership capacity early on is critical for meaningful engagement in the planning process, as the lead actor has the greatest incentives to buy in, and to generate buy-in, to the process. The highest authority can play a significant role in communicating a vision, mediating between competing interests, and ensuring that priorities are based on a genuinely participatory process. Repeatedly highlighted by planners was the importance of an individual or office with the authority and incentives to "say no." Without a final arbiter, plans often include an unrealistic number of activities, decreasing the likelihood for implementation and reducing the legitimacy of participating actors in the process. While consultations and participation are of utmost importance, legitimate authority to steer the process of prioritization is equally key. In Timor Leste, for example, there was increasing ownership over the National Priorities Process implementation as a result of strong engagement of the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Finance and concerted efforts in monitoring progress.

Similarly, for international partners, senior leadership engagement makes or breaks the planning process, regardless of the technical planning capacity in place. Reviews of the UN-DAF process show that the Resident Coordinator (often the highest UN official in country, in the absence of a peacekeeping or political mission)

is instrumental in the UN's ability to design collective responses that are then adhered to by the various agencies on the ground. Initial feedback on the ISF, used in post-conflict settings, also points to the role of the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) in guiding the process and ensuring that every other part of the system actually makes use of the plan by participating in its design, implementation, and monitoring.

→ **National senior leadership should be encouraged, supported**, **and times mentored** to provide strong guidance to the national planning process.

→ **At the international community level, senior managers, including political leadership, should be fully trained, supported, and required to participate actively in strategic planning processes.**

c.   Stakeholder participation in the planning process

Since they involve politically informed judgments about where the country should be and how it is going to get there, **planning processes have the potential to reveal the various institutional incentives** and vested interests, both within the planning entity (government or international partner) and between the planning entity and partners, including those best served by the status quo. Decisions over the allocation of limited resources will likely generate winners and losers.

Whole of society approach

An inclusive planning process, especially the degree to which it brings in previously marginalized groups, sends a **powerful signal of new state-society relations** and acts as a legitimizing factor that extends beyond the issue of support for implementation of the plan itself.

The Liberia experience with the Poverty Reduction Strategy provides a vivid illustration of the planning process's capacity to consolidate legitimacy gains through extensive consultations and presidential engagement. The government promoted public engage-

ment at the local level, through, for instance, billboards encouraging citizen participation. In Sierra Leone, bringing in parliament members in the elaboration of the plan has given them a greater stake in its outcome. The *Agenda for Change* was also supplemented by an "attitude change" plan to orient the public towards the achievement of its goals.

Strategic planning and expectations management

Stakeholder engagement processes that make false claims raise expectations beyond what can realistically be delivered or that give short shrift to consultation run the risk of losing real buy-in.

In Timor Leste, the consultation process for the long-term Strategic Development Plan included Prime Minister visits to each subdistrict in the country, but observers noted that the promises of the consultations may be difficult to deliver. Positively, however, the consultations also provided momentum for local development programs in response to the repeated requests heard during the public meetings.

In the case of the stabilization plan in eastern DRC, limited consultation with stakeholders and beneficiaries in the affected provinces at the onset has placed challenges on implementation and led to follow-on efforts to include provincial level authorities in the decision-making and prioritization process.

National ownership and involvement of the international community

For national governments, this process brings into sharp focus the **tension between national ownership and sovereignty** and the need to **secure legitimacy as well as political and financial support from both national and international actors**.

For members of the international community, their own planning process should signal renewed engagement with the state. The degree of participation by the national government and local actors in the design of response frameworks will reflect the degree of adherence to a range of accepted international principles (as articulated in the Paris Declaration and the Accra commitments, the OECD/DAC policies, and the Dili Declaration), with due consideration for – and communication on–the need, in many instances, to plan expeditiously.

The principle of national ownership and alignment with government priorities implies that planning frameworks should be negotiated and result from an explicit agreement with national governments. The preferred engagement strategy is a political decision, reflecting the degree of legitimacy accorded to the government by the international partner. Even in countries where the government enjoys a high degree of legitimacy and international recognition, some members of the international community may opt for a light engagement strategy, in particular as it pertains to the development of humanitarian plans, which must conform to the principles of independence, neutrality, and, impartiality. How light the engagement on such plans is will obviously vary, depending on the context. In places such as Liberia, consultation with government on outstanding humanitarian responses is now common practice to avoid duplicating efforts with an increasingly responsive state and undermining a legitimate government. Such conditions are not always present.

Strategic engagement options

For both national plans and international strategies, senior leaders and strategic planners should therefore **seek to build incentives and spaces for other actors to participate.** The planning entity (national or international) must identify the key external partners that need to participate, in one form or another, in the design of the plan, determine their underlying interests, and design effective strategies to secure their constructive participation.

In post-crisis settings, stakeholder participation in the design of a plan is rife with challenges and opportunities. It may require difficult decisions about how far to engage with actors that may not share the state or the organization's values and goals. It can also provide the space and forum for both symbolic and substantive signs of change through the recognition and inclusion of previously marginalized constituents, women in particular. It also represents, as the case studies outline, an opportunity in itself for capacity building and knowledge transfer.

Determining who should participate in the planning process must itself be strategic and undertaken with strong leadership engagement. Not every actor needs, can, or should participate at the same level. Depending on the actor's ability or willingness to engage, its substantive contributions, its exposure to the plan's potential impact, and the degree to which its participation will determine future support for implementation, the engagement can range from information sharing, where little feedback is sought from the presentation of information on the plan, to negotiation, where an explicit agreement is required for the plan to be adopted, with consultation and consensus building as intermediary options. The strategic planning function should determine which engagement strategy is best suited for each relevant stakeholder.

In developing their own strategic plans, **international partners should make use of the full range of engagement strategies with a wide range of actors, beyond their interaction with government.** This can prove particularly challenging for processes occurring in immediate post-conflict environments, given logistical and security challenges. However, even in these environments limited consultations with representatives of constituent groups, supplemented at later stages by the gradual inclusion of wider constituencies, can ensure a broader base of support and buy-in for implementation efforts. For the UN, the development of the UN-DAF in Uganda, to contribute to national development priorities, the CAP in DRC to plan for humanitarian interventions, and the ISF in Haiti to articulate critical statebuilding support programs have each involved information sharing, consultation, and consensus building with donors, national and international NGOs, and other authorities including religious and community leaders.

Whole of organization approach

Stakeholder engagement also has an internal dimension, especially within the framework of whole of government approaches (for host government, donors) and integration (e.g., UN, AU, NATO, EC), whereby various pillars ranging from development, political, military/police, human rights, and humanitarian must coordinate strategies, tactics, and resources to maximize the overall impact of the organization's response. The strategic planning function must therefore also identify and address the various interests, constraints, and capacities from these different "internal" constituents and design effective engagement strategies, based on relevant incentives and with adequate senior leadership support.

→ A number of international organizations make limited use of integrated planning approaches, whereby various components (political, security, humanitarian, development) inform one another to form a coherent strategy. Development plans and political strategies are designed and implemented in isolation, and synergies between those instruments are underexplored.

d. *Planning structures and capacities*

As previously noted, planning skills and capacities are often in short supply in post-conflict settings, both at the national and international levels. This gap has received increased global attention, featuring prominently in the UN Secretary General's 2009 report on peacebuilding in the immediate aftermath of conflict.

Within national governments, **limited capacity to take on planning and coordination functions has resulted in limited ownership** over the process and its implementation. For national and international actors alike, political, technical, and financial support for developing strong planning capacities in agencies, missions, and other entities involved in post-conflict recovery should be a priority.

Structures and staffing should be allocated to the different functions of planning, including communication, coordination, monitoring, and assessment. Adequate initial investment in those functions and support from senior leadership will significantly reduce transaction costs and other obstacles further along in the process.

For national plans, a strong nationally led secretariat, often backstopped by international support, was repeatedly cited as critical to driving the planning process and increasing the likelihood of implementation. A well-staffed secretariat can also strengthen national ownership of the process and serve as an important clearinghouse for data. The case studies demonstrate that this is an area where international technical assistance, in the form particularly of staff secondment, has a demonstrated impact. In the DRC, the Stabilization Support Unit is a dedicated international structure in the UN integrated office that provides support to the national secretariat and coordination structures of STAREC. In Timor Leste, international advisors funded by the World Bank are hired by and report to the Ministry of Finance.[4] However, these secretariats are too often plagued by staffing issues (including delays in recruitment, as is the case in the Stabilization Support Unit in the DRC or the IHRC Secretariat in Haiti, still largely vacant one year following the earthquake), limiting the positive contribution these units can provide to a planning process.

For international partners, deficient planning capacities on the ground, tasked with either supporting a national planning exercise or coordinating the organization's own strategy planning process, should consider the inclusion of actors from headquarters or capitals in two key respects. First, headquarters-based planners were positively included in a number of the planning processes studied here, leveraging their technical planning skills and understanding of the holistic needs of a planning process with the political weight of a close link to headquarters. Second, they can provide key political and substantive support at critical junctures in the planning process. For instance, while the development of the 2007 Country Assistance Framework (CAF) in the DRC was largely an in-country exercise, the inclusion of periodic decision points with headquarters representatives of the UN, World Bank ,and bilateral donors ensured donor engagement with the plan and provided headquarters-level political pressure on international partners on the ground for necessary progress on difficult or sticky issues.[5]

Capacities of the strategic planning function

Based on the case studies, interviews, and other evidence, the research identifies the following capacities expected of the strategic planner:

Shaping and drafting analysis:
- Conflict drivers and needs assessment
- Agency comparative advantages
- Potential priorities for intervention

Coordinating:
- Stakeholder engagement
- Process design
- Process management

Convening, facilitating and mediating:
- At working level
- At leadership level

e.   Triggers and milestones

The strategic planning process, whether undertaken by national or international actors, can be either triggered by changes in condition on the ground (e.g., coup, earthquake), which are often unpredictable, or designed in anticipation of an identified milestone or benchmark (e.g., elections held) whose occurrence and consequences will lead to new programs or revised priorities. However, as the examples of Sierra Leone and Liberia indicate, unlinking national plans, both in terms of timeframe and overall content, from electoral outcomes can also indicate increased stability.

Therefore, **clarity on the trigger and/or the milestone is important**, as it will influence both the design and the content of the plan. Such clarity must be communicated to external partners in order to manage expectations, secure buy-in, and initiate engagement.

The country cases and other relevant field experience reveal **three significant issues** affecting the legitimacy and effectiveness of the plans. These relate overwhelmingly to the international side of strategic planning in FCAS.

1. Despite increased rhetorical commitments to the principles of alignment and harmonization, triggers and milestones often remain linked to domestic budgetary considerations or governance requirements. For various United Nations agencies, funds and programs in particular, the triggers for process initiation are governed by executive board timelines, resulting in situations where country assessments are undertaken and finalized 18 months before a plan is scheduled to be implemented. In FCAS, these timelines yield products of limited value on the ground.

2. There is still limited dialogue across international organizations on synchronizing, harmonizing, and, where relevant, merging planning processes that are linked in order to reduce transaction costs. In some cases, multiplicity is inevitable: In Southern Sudan, planning for the new, post-independence UN mission coincides with national preparations for independence,

which include a statebuilding agenda and a national development plan, the review of the humanitarian response, and donor assessments. In other places, such streamlining is possible. In DRC, the development of a single framework for the UN, the World Bank, and over 20 donors, while difficult in itself, reduced many costs for the government and points to significant coordination efforts and capacities on the part of the planners involved.

3. Finally, in the case of United Nations interventions, benchmarks are increasingly used to initiate the planning for gradual withdrawal of Security Council–mandated missions. Recent experiences in Nepal or Timor Leste point to the importance of increased dialogue and coordination across planning actors (national, international) to ensure that individual frameworks take into consideration the direction of partner planning exercises. In other words, if a large peacekeeping mission is planning to withdraw, how does that affect national or donor plans?

→ **Triggers for strategic planning exercises should be determined by the situation on the ground.** Thus, for many international organizations, the field-HQ relationship needs to be reversed: the timing of initiation (as well as timeline and duration, as explained below) should be determined by senior management on the ground, with HQ justification required if those field decisions need to be reversed.

→ **Field-based decisions on triggers (for instance, to adjust plans) require strong early warning capabilities.** Efforts currently under way to strengthen early warning systems, both at the national levels and within the international community, should be viewed as essential strategic planning requirements and supported accordingly.

f.   Timeline: "How long should the planning process take?"

A planning process timeline can speak to issues of ownership, inclusiveness, harmonization, and flexibility. Often these criteria are crowded out by a number of competing pressures – the temptation for

a technically sound document, the pressures for plan completion, and institutional regulations, as well as the need to meet urgent peacebuilding or early recovery priorities, all create incentives for a fast and closed design phase.

At the national level, the timeline should also be informed by the nature of the plan under development. Haiti's recovery plan following the 12 January 2010 earthquake, the PARDN, was justifiably designed in a very short timeframe, given the immensity of the needs and the concomitant urgency to present a framework for donor financial support. Longer-term poverty reduction measures such as PRSPs, which present a vision and priority interventions that articulate the future of the country, require a longer incubation period, especially as they entail extensive and in-depth consultations countrywide to claim legitimacy.

→ While many surveyed planners saw the need for adequate time to secure greater buy-in and link the plan(s) to budget cycles to facilitate ownership and implementation, **there is an inherent tension between the "process is as important as output" approach and the need to deliver quick dividends on the ground based on strategic choices.**

→ As articulated in the upcoming World Development Report (WDR 2011), **the need for speed should not be misconstrued for precipitation**. Conversely, the need for consultation should not be an excuse for prevarication and delays to the detriment of implementation of vital interventions.

For international *partners*, the post-conflict reality usually requires a shorter timeline for plan design. Beyond the need to maintain momentum in-house for a process that is often perceived as cumbersome, international organizations are usually expected by national actors, including governments, to swiftly articulate how they will respond to needs on the ground, especially if those have been formulated in a national plan. In Uganda, delays by the UN in formulating and communicating a recovery strategy for the North to follow

up on the humanitarian response were severely criticized by the government and NGOs alike.

→ **The design of a plan should therefore include clear timelines and deadlines for the various planning steps**, which should be shared early on with all partners involved in in the plan's development.

→ **Changes to the timeline are almost inevitable, if not expected, in fluid and volatile post-conflict settings.** What is important is to communicate and explain such changes, in a manner that further strengthens confidence and participation in the planning process.

g. Timeframe: "What is the duration of the plan?"

The timeframe of the plan is often a function of a range of factors beyond upcoming milestones. For national governments, the development of long-term plans under the banner of a "vision" (e.g., Sierra Leone) is often used as a symbol of restored legitimacy and capacity and to indicate the country's graduation to normal development phase. For international partners, the duration of a plan can reflect commitment as well as perception of the country's stability. While development frameworks usually have a timeframe of at least three years, the horizon of post-conflict strategies is often much more limited.

The experience of Timor Leste demonstrates the utility of shorter planning cycles, at least on an interim basis, for demonstrating improved ownership and planning capacities while also allowing for increased plan flexibility to incorporate new events or information into the planning process. A shortened planning cycle is not without disadvantages, however, and donors noted that their operating cycles (typically three- to five-year cycles) do not allow for such rapid changes, limiting alignment and harmonization.

→ **As noted below, the duration of international plans should be determined by senior managers on the ground.** In FCAS, the standard horizon for in-

Strategic Planning in Fragile and Conflict Contexts

ternational plans should be one year, with field-based authority to decide on extensions and expansions based on conditions on the ground.

Finally, the intended duration of the plan has a significant impact on the content. A twenty-to-thirty year visioning exercise is unlikely to include, for example, an implementation plan, while a one-year plan is much more likely to include specific timelines, cost, and delineation of roles and responsibilities.

III.   Formulating a strategic plan in FCAS

The formulation of a strategic plan involves the following steps:

- Defining **needs** on the basis of a rigorous conflict analysis.

- Determining an effective **division of labor** by determining respective comparative advantages.

- Ensuring **broad support** for planned interventions.

 - **Articulating results** in a manner that ensures clarity and accountability, based on solid monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

- **Preparing for implementation.**

Before delving further into the challenges faced for each these steps in a FCAS context, two key points should be stressed.

1. First, **planning must respond and adapt to the fluid and rapidly changing environment characterizing fragile and conflict-affected states.**   Therefore, this is a dynamic process where reassessment of decisions and realignment of responses should be continuous, demonstrating the importance of effective monitoring and decision-making structures.

2. **Second, the experience of a number of cases studied here demonstrates the importance of early success in planning processes.** Small wins demonstrate the utility of a framework to internal and external stakeholders, and can garner additional resources – human and financial – for the process. In Timor Leste, early success in the handling of Internally Displaced Persons after the crisis in 2006 improved national and international actors' opinion of and buy-in to the National Priorities Process. In the DRC, the second round of Phase II planning is focusing on delivering achievable targets to show early results of the STAREC planning process.

a. Conflict analysis and needs assessment

As highlighted earlier in this paper, plan design should be informed by robust and ongoing assessments that include a political economy analysis of the greatest needs, a thorough conflict assessment, a review of the (political) incentives of key stakeholders for participation in the country's peaceful recovery from conflict.

A number of conflict-analysis and needs-assessment tools now exist, including DFID's *Strategic Conflict Assessment*, SIDA's *Power Analysis*, and the UN/World Bank's *post-conflict needs assessment* (PCNA). As reiterated by surveyed planners, the international community does not suffer from a lack of instruments and methodologies to conduct rigorous conflict analysis and needs assessments. Opportunities for training on the use of those tools are also in increasing supply. The case studies and other evidence from the field point, however, to different sets of challenges:

1. Many of these instruments suffer from the **inherent tension between inclusiveness and selectivity**, whereby a desire to include inputs from a large numbers of actors and perspectives results in lengthy and impractical lists of factors and needs, with little clarity about relevance and prioritization.

2. **Difficulties and/or reluctance to combine lenses (security, socio-economic, political, etc.) remain**, mostly due to structural and institutional obstacles within organizations and the absence of cross-dimensional capacities. For instance, development plans by international actors are still insufficient informed by political analysis of actor interests, while political or security planning (e.g., in the case of peacekeeping missions) should incorporate a broader set of issues (e.g. socio-economic) in the early warning and threat-assessment systems that inform strategic decisions.

3. In a fragile or conflict setting, **the identification of "spoilers" (or "dividers" that also include events and decisions likely to threaten stability) must extend beyond their immediate positions and seek to un-** derstand their underlying interests. Many planners indicated that the presence of spoilers can at times reveal significant flaws in the existing political settlements. In other words, "spoilers" exist for a range of reasons, and some of them may be legitimate.

4. **This contextual analysis requires significant and dedicated capacity that is not always available** in planning processes and is notably absent in some of the cases analyzed in this report. In Timor Leste, however, this type of assessment was conducted for the 2002 National Development Plan, resulting in the "State of the Nation" report, which provided both the contextual and policy basis for the plan, though it was reported that more in-depth political-economy analysis would have strengthened the report. In Haiti, the PARDN was developed on the basis, inter alia, of a comprehensive post-disaster needs assessment undertaken with the support of the UN, the World Bank, and the Organization of American States (OAS).

5. **The relevance of conflict or needs-analysis findings to any organization's strategic planning process is often undermined by limited dissemination of results** and lack of rigorous translation of needs into programming decisions.[6] Many organizations revert to "business as usual" regardless of what the conflict analysis and needs assessments yield.

6. **A missing methodological step often observed in the field involves the definition of critical paths to peace** through the use of tools such as problem trees, whereby government, local, and international partners agree on the links among the various causes of conflict and determine the most realistic and effective ways to address them. Such a step would allow each partner to design interventions on the basis of objectively defined needs and solutions, as opposed to mandate and habit, which at times continue to drive UN and donor decision-making.

b. *Comparative advantage analysis*

The significant emphasis placed on conflict analysis as the foundation for effective strategic planning is now being progressively matched by an increasing focus on the notion of comparative advantage and "agency" capacity.

→ **The research undertaken for this paper suggests that this focus is still more theoretical than real.**

→ **There is lack of shared understanding about what constitutes a comparative advantage**, which is too often reduced to mandate or habit.

The concept of comparative advantage aims at defining the priorities and challenges, among the many that need to be addressed in post-conflict contexts, that the organization should focus on. In environments characterized by immense needs, limited resources, and high stakes, determining one's comparative advantages is a necessary and difficult exercise. It involves a willingness for critical self-examination, including thorough feedback from external partners. It also constitutes the link between the conflict and needs assessments, which indicate what needs to be done, and the division of labor, which determines who should or will do it.

Post-crisis settings bring into sharp focus issues of sovereignty, legitimacy, and international intervention, which can be contested or welcomed. As such, a recognized mandate, accorded through an SC mandate, an international convention, or an agreement with the host government, is necessary, as it signals at the very least one source of acceptance of one's presence. It is not sufficient, however. Too often, organizations cling to mandate to justify interventions, despite limited capacity and dubious track records.

→ **A comparative advantage is defined by three key factors:** a mandate to act, a capacity to act, and a unique positioning to act.

→ **A claim to comparative advantage must be context/country specific**, as success in one conflict or post-conflict context does not guarantee success in another. It must also be validated by external partners, which may harbor very different perceptions. In this instance, the UN has developed a number of techniques and approaches to solicit external feedback on its effectiveness, including through the use of web-based questionnaires in Haiti.

Capacity to act in FCAS

In addition to mandate, an organization must be able to demonstrate a capacity to act, which includes the following elements:

1. **Strategic clarity** as to rationale and goals of the intervention. (E.g., reintegration of soldiers as part of a long-term local development approach, or as short-term stabilization? Microfinance to provide cash handouts or to build an inclusive financial system?)

2. **Availability of resources**, both financial and human. (Can the right resources be mobilized in time to respond to the need?)

3. **A track record** in this area of intervention, in this country. (Do we have the legitimacy with the target beneficiaries? Do we have relevant contextual experience to offer?)

4. **Adequate back-office capacity,** including logistics. (Do we have the administrative systems and capacity to implement quickly?)

5. **Access to key decision makers.** (Do we have the influence required to enact change?)

6. **Effective partnerships** with high capacity actors. (Do we have reliable implementing channels and contacts to achieve results, especially in difficult areas?)

7. **Ability to monitor**, evaluate and share results. (Can we be accountable for the use of resources?)

A claim to comparative advantage also implies that the agency is best or uniquely positioned, in relation to other actors, to respond to the identified need. This requires a solid understanding of what others, including government, are doing, where, and how well they are doing it. For example, in an effort to strengthen coordination and reduce transaction costs, an organization may choose not to intervene in disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR), despite its mandate and capacities, if other actors already provide support in more effective and meaningful ways. This requires the strategic planning function to consolidate information on what other actors are doing and the extent to which a planned intervention would duplicate others, with no discernible effectiveness and efficiency gains.

Finally, while the use of comparative advantage as a filter for strategic priority setting is most appropriate for international partners seeking to define their contribution to national efforts, it is also salient for national governments, as it informs highly sensitive issues of prioritization and sequencing of interventions, national capacity development efforts, and division of labor (including with the private sector through privatization).

c.   Stakeholder support for implementation

Post-crisis responses have the potential to disrupt or challenge a number of established power dynamics. The country cases and the current literature have identified a number of areas where peacebuilding support threatens elite structures, from, inter alia, governance and electoral reforms to macroeconomic adjustments and land redistribution. If not identified and addressed, these vested interests represent a significant obstacle to successful implementation.

The strategic planning process, whether national or international, provides an opportunity to map out the stakeholders whose support is critical for the implementation of the planned interventions. Support extends beyond the financial and includes the technical and the political. The existence of financial support is often viewed as the only type of stakeholder assistance necessary for implementation. In fact, nonfinancial support from actors such as the government, state institutions, religious authorities, community leaders, beneficiaries, and donors is critical.

→   **For national planning processes, the identification of relevant stakeholders and their inclusion in the implementation phase constitutes another step in strengthening state-society relations and building trust.**

→   **For international actors such as the UN and regional organizations, political acceptance is too often assumed**, based on a conflated view of the importance of mandate.

d.   Strategic priority setting for peacebuilding and recovery

The state of play

As previously noted, without dedicated efforts to prioritize and sequence, the planning process can result in seemingly unlimited and unstructured "wishlists" of needs and responses and the replication of pre-crisis "business as usual" approaches. As the 2010 Strategic Review notes of the ISSSS in eastern DRC, the activities included in the plan represent "a patchwork of activities that reflect a number of priorities of MONUSCO, UN agencies, donor governments, and Congolese authorities at the national, provincial, and local levels. These activities are not underpinned by a strategic assessment of how best to promote security and stabilization under prevailing conditions in the east or how to prioritize among the various priorities of the different actors."[7]

In addition to a lack of meaningful prioritization, a number of plans provided limited evidence of successful sequencing even if some distinguish between broad phases of plan implementation.[8] Without clear prioritization and sequencing, and without clear risk mitigation strategies, plans struggle to adapt to limited funding and absorptive capacity. While being mindful of the transaction costs associated with additional planning exercises, it must

be recognized that prioritization and sequencing often occur through subsequent planning or decision-making processes during plan implementation phase.

Even in the most nationally led process, international partners play a critical part of plan implementation through choices on alignment and harmonization. While international actors recognize the need for alignment and harmonization, field research encountered a number of donors who admitted that **while their strategies explicitly reference national strategies, their programming had not been significantly affected or altered by the articulation of a national planning framework.**

This was attributed to a number of factors: In Timor Leste, some donors argued that the annual planning cycle was too rapid in comparison to three- to five-year donor cycles. **More generally across the cases, some donors acknowledged that aid strategies had to first be responsive to donors foreign policy priorities.** While few mechanisms exist for national governments to hold donors accountable, Sierra Leone provides an important example. The 2009 Aid Policy outlined key roles and relationships for the international community, emphasizing the mutual commitment of government and donors to aid delivery.

Prioritization approaches

Aside from the foreign policy trump card, there remains **significant scope for greater prioritization at the strategic level, particularly for international partners** who, unlike national governments, are not expected to respond to all identified needs. In international planning processes, the convergence of the three aforementioned factors–need, comparative advantage, and external support – should represent a high strategic priority. The post-crisis reality rarely offers such a perfect scenario, as the cases of DRC, Haiti, and others illustrate. Instead, international partners are often faced with three other scenarios, as described in the framework below:[9]

Framework for Priority Setting
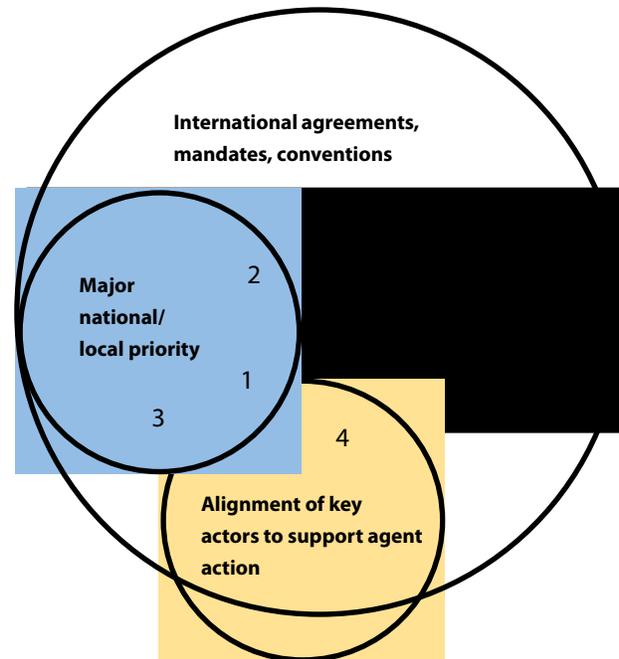
1. Top strategic priority
2. Potential high priority: use negotiation/consensus building to see alignment
3. Potential high priority: draw on regional/global capacity, partner, or step aside
4. Lower priority: withdraw, or review needs analysis

The strategic planning process should clarify those scenarios and lay out the choices and options available, marking the shift from the technical aspect of the exercise to its political dimensions, whereby leadership must make difficult decisions. Practices from the field point to three important issues:

→ **To navigate through these difficult choices and further filter options, leadership can make use of objective criteria**, such as impact and catalyzing effect, as informed by the conflict and critical-path analysis; feasibility, as determined by capacities and timeframes; and sustainability, as defined by the probability of follow-up interventions in the same area in the future.

23

→ **Prioritization choices and options should always be supported by an awareness of other actors' interventions**, with the aim of arriving at an effective division of labor that reflects the convergence of needs and comparative advantages. The Timor Leste case offers the example of a division of labor exercise between European Union members. Such efforts have also been initiated in countries such as Nepal, where the UN is leading a harmonization and coordination process to divide up tasks and responsibilities in support of the Peace and Development strategy.

→ **If and when programs that do not focus on agreed priorities cannot be avoided, they should *at least be implemented* in a manner that supports broader recovery and peacebuilding objectives** (e.g., fostering greater interethnic synergies, building multipurpose, cross-sectoral capacities).

e. Results formulation and operational planning

Once the strategic priorities have been agreed upon, the next step consists of formulating the actual results and deliverables to be achieved under each priority. The formulation of the results chain establishes the **link between strategic planning**, when priorities are selected, **and operational planning**, when the planners match those priorities with activities, inputs, and resources.

These various elements provide a critical reality check on the selected priorities and strategies. Are the resources available to rapidly implement? Is the security environment sufficiently conducive to undertake planned activities? They point to the importance of bringing in a range of capacities at various stages of the planning process, including security, administrative, and operations staff.

In fragile and conflict situations, the operational planning phase must also include considerations related to staff security, deployment and positioning of assets, and programmatic contingencies (based on the worst-case scenario).

They also reflect the need to initiate operational planning before the end of the strategic planning phase, to ensure that strategies are grounded in a realistic understanding of present and future capacities to implement.

f. Monitoring, evaluation, and benchmarking

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

As in any other context, strategic planning in FCAS must include robust M&E systems, both at the output and the outcome/impact levels, to assess progress towards planned results.

At the political level, M&E provides an additional opportunity to strengthen state legitimacy and trust, by incorporating key stakeholders, linking consultation and communication to plan evaluation and subsequent assessment. The inclusion of civil society in monitoring structures can strengthen the relationship with the public as seen in Timor Leste, where the Working Groups in the NPP incorporated designated civil society representatives to participate in monitoring and reporting.

There have been increased efforts to measure performance of engagement in FCAS, including initiatives to strengthen the evaluation components of preventive diplomacy. These efforts reflect increased pressure to demonstrate value for money through the application, inter alia, of the results-based management (RBM) approach that has been used in the traditional development sphere.

→ As the country reviews demonstrate, the M&E practice constitutes one of the weakest components of the strategic planning process in FCAS, beset by a range of challenges.

These challenges partly reflect a reluctance to adopt a "purist" RBM approach, often viewed as oversimplifying the issues and the interventions.

At the same time, weaknesses in formulating results, as shown in the case studies, are problematic for reasons of **clarity, communication, and accountability**. The ratio-

nale for using RBM is to not over-simplify what is essentially a nonlinear, complex, unpredictable, and very often volatile situation. In a FCAS context, characterized by high expectations and urgent needs, and where difficult choices need to be made, the formulation of results in the strategic plan can either clarify or confuse the results for which organization claims responsibility (often described as "outputs") and those that also require contributions from other actors and for which responsibility is thereby shared (often described as "outcomes"). A more rigorous use of risks and assumptions in the formulation of results provides the link between these different levels of results and accountability, while signaling the recognition that peacebuilding and recovery results cannot be scientifically and bureaucratically delivered.

→ **National and international actors alike remain ill equipped to monitor and evaluate their engagement in FCAS contexts.** Current initiatives should be further supported.

→ **The push for strengthened M&E systems should not ignore, however, the fact that engagement in FCAS is a combination of art and science, with little automaticity.** The international community should therefore accept not just a high level of risk, but also a certain degree of "epistemological uncertainty" regarding causal patterns and attribution.

→ **Such a push, including the application of core RBM concepts, should focus on increased accountability and transparency.** Improved M&E systems should result, at the very least, in greater integrity of each intervention, by clarifying the scope and assumptions, offering a reality check to claims, and highlighting the broader context, needs, and requirements in which the intervention is taking place.

Benchmarking

Post-conflict strategic planning exercises now frequently include the use of benchmarks to broaden the context in which interventions are evaluated and to strengthen mutual accountability between host governments and the international community. Reflecting the current consensus on the nature and imperatives of peacebuilding, benchmarks now usually cover a broad spectrum of priorities, from security-sector reform to governance, reconciliation, human rights, livelihoods, and the provision of basic social services. As such, they constitute the substantive core of the peacebuilding frameworks and compacts developed in places such as Timor Leste, Burundi, and Sierra Leone. They are also increasingly used in Security Council mandates for UN missions to inform, inter alia, the timing and pace of withdrawal.

→ Experience to date suggests that such exercises should always **clarify whether benchmarks are designed to assess an organization's performance or the country's path towards stability or otherwise defined goals.** This clarification is essential to ensure proper levels of accountability and inform decisions on levels and timing of support from international partners, including UN missions.

g.   Implications for funding

The impact of funding mechanisms on plan implementation is well documented and has received increased attention in recent years. While an analysis of funding tools remains outside the scope of this report, the case studies confirm recent findings pointing to the need for increased funding flexibility, non-earmarking, and higher risk tolerance.[11]

In many ways, the challenges identified in the recent OECD/DAC report, including clarity on tradeoffs, expectation management, government participation, use of various funds to meet common objectives, and risk management can be solved through the strategic planning process that these funding mechanisms are meant to support. Indeed, various funding instruments, such as Multi-

Donor Trust Funds, suffer from a lack of strategic purpose and clarity.

→ **The key message drawn from the case studies and other recent experiences is that strategic plans, drive funding, and not the other way around.** In this regard, strategic plans that encompass all dimensions of FCAS engagement can better inform funding options (which part of the plan should be funded from which instrument?) and make greater use of synergies and complementarities between various financing mechanisms.

→ **For international partners, the need for short planning timeframes (sometimes one year) should be supported by flexible and rapid budgetary allocations**, combined with arrangements for long-term funding commitments. As called for in the Report on Civilian Capacities, leadership on the ground should have authority to manage resources in flexible and needs-driven ways.

Conclusion

Evidence from the field, as captured in recent literature and the country reviews undertaken for this report, demonstrates that the strategic planning process brings into sharp focus a number of characteristics of FCAS, a reality that presents both significant challenges and interesting opportunities, including the opportunity to strengthen the legitimacy of the state and improve partnerships with the international community.

To manage those challenges and capitalize on those opportunities, the overarching message that emerges from the report is that **strategic planning cannot be left to strategic planners**. As a fundamentally political exercise, it requires strong leadership engagement and support, especially in FCAS when the stakes are so high and difficult choices about priorities and resource allocations need to be made. Strategic planning processes can help stakeholders better understand, and therefore better manage, risks, yet despite their bureaucratic dimensions, notably through the use of RBM techniques, they cannot remove all uncertainty that is inherent to fragile and conflict-affected environments.

A number of findings derive from this general observation.

Strategic planning in FCAS: main findings

Strategic planning processes often produce more difficult questions than definitive answers but can yield multiple benefits, including strengthened state-society relationships, greater clarity on organizational contributions to priorities and division of labor, effective expectations management, lower transaction costs,and increased integrity of accountability claims.

Leadership engagement is key, yet uneven.

Both national and international actors suffer from limited capacity and skills to carry out effective strategic planning processes, including in the areas of assessment, coordination, and political acumen.

Donor agendas and institutional imperatives continue to drive planning decisions related to timeframe, duration, priority setting, and sequencing. A corollary finding is that plans are not adjusted to or reflective of changing conditions on the ground. This is further exacerbated by weak information-gathering systems, which feed planning decisions.

Insufficient attention is placed on stakeholder engagement, comparative-advantage analysis, and proactive communication, when all three dimensions provide useful reality checks in contexts of political uncertainty, security volatility, overwhelming needs, and limited resources.

Inevitable tradeoffs often go unacknowledged (or unreported). Politically more expedient decisions to ignore or paper over such tradeoffs undermine the legitimacy of the process and of the actors involved.

Despite recent efforts, planning remains too often one-dimensional, with little coherent integration of political, security, and socio-economic approaches and analysis into common strategic planning products.

Monitoring and Evaluation remains one of the weakest links in the process, due in part to the complexity of the issues, but also to limited staff capacity, political constraints, and the lack of sensitive tools and techniques that meaningfully inform discussions on organizational performance.

The analysis undertaken for the report also points to a number of specific policy recommendations. **These all rely on the prerequisite to approach an exercise of priority setting and resource allocation as an opportunity, for national governments and international organizations alike, to strengthen their identity, which impacts a number of dynamics, including the nature of their relationships with other stakeholders and the effects of policies and programs on the ground.**

Therefore, while the paper does not claim that strategic planning processes make or break peace consolidation efforts, their relevance to a range of fragility and conflict factors calls for **five key policy messages and actions:**

(1)   **Early investment of time, resources, and leadership in planning exercises is effective peacebuilding work.** It builds core government functional capacity and saves transaction costs for all over time.

(2)   **Enhanced training in planning skills**, including political acumen and coordination, is required for both national and international organizations.

(3)   **To be effective in FCAS, planning cycles and processes must be flexible**. This applies in particular to international organizations where development-type requirements, defined by HQ-level structures, must give way to field-based decisions on what makes sense for particular crisis situations.

(4)   **Recent efforts at integrated planning (Whole of Government, UN integration) need to stay the course** and receive additional political, financial, and technical support.

(5)   While the plethora of plans is at times inevitable given the need for differentiated approaches in most FCAS, **an immediate priority should be to strengthen and harmonize common early warning systems**, in order to ensure that all plans derive from a shared and enriched understanding of risk factors.

In addition, the research undertaken for this paper has identified a **number of knowledge gaps,** among which the most salient include:

(1)   **The mechanisms through which strategic planning processes build state legitimacy**, identifying in particular the "moments" in the planning process and the messaging that have the most impact on how the population assesses both the integrity of the exercise and the intentions of the state.

(2)   **The effectiveness and impact of various stakeholder engagement strategies** throughout the planning process, based on decisions related to timing, content, sequencing, and facilitation support, including external mediation.

(3)   **The most appropriate ways to strengthen the M&E component** of national and international plans, taking into account the inherent constraints and faultlines in applying RBM approaches too rigidly in FCAS.

Endnotes

[1]This report was written by Marc Jacquand, based on research by Megan Gleason, Nealin Parker, and Gigja Sorensen. Funding for the report was provided by the UK Department for International Development.

[2]The UN Integrated Strategic Framework (ISF) was initially developed as a tool to improve the effectiveness of integrated missions through clearer division of labor between the mission and the UN agencies on the ground. In some instances, such as in Haiti and Liberia, the UN has chosen to merge its ISF and its UN-DAF. In others, the ISF remains an internal document, used by management to increase the programmatic effectiveness of the system.

[3]CIC/INCAF, *Background paper on strategic frameworks for the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding, 2010.*

[4]This positive assessment of the role of international advisers is tempered by the acknowledgement that this form of technical assistance is expensive and can run the risk of crowding out capacity development of nationals. However, targeted assistance through international advisers with limited in-line functions can positively impact the planning process and capacity development.

[5]This was highlighted as best practice in Dwan, R., Bailey L., and Siblot, J-L, The DRC's Country Assistance Framework: a Big Tent Built from Big Ideas?, *Joint UN-Bank Review of the DRC CAF*, May 2008.

[6]Cf. research carried out by Haider and Rao, namely "Political and Social Analysis for Development Policy and Practice."

[7]Tamagnini et al. Strategic Review of the ISSSS for Eastern DR Congo, pp. 16-17.

[8]For instance, the forthcoming Strategic Development Plan in Timor Leste distinguishes between the first decade of the plan, which will focus on creating the basic conditions for development and the second decade ,which will build on these foundations to improve Timorese quality of life. Government of Timor Leste, Strategic Development Plan Summary, p. 13.

[9]The following scenarios derive from the strategic priority setting framework developed by the Consensus Building Institute (CBI), and used in various UN Strategic Planning workshops and trainings.

[10]See the UN Peacebuilding Benchmarking handbook, among other references.

[11]OECD/INCAF Guidance on Transition Financing: Building a Better Response.

Annex: Summary of Country Reviews

Methodology

The conclusions in this report were based on primary and secondary source documents and more than sixty interviews in Timor Leste and DRC as well as with headquarters staff of the UN in New York, and with World Bank staff and the US State Department's planning team in Washington. In some cases staff conducted more than one interview – with, for example, key staff in the secretariats supporting STAREC in DRC and the NPP process in Timor Leste. Every case study, whether a desk study or field-based, was reviewed by country experts or someone involved in the planning process at country level.

Criteria:

The cases were chosen to include a range within the following categories:

• **Geographic region:** Latin America, Africa, and Asia

• **Size, population, and GDP of country:** In size, range from DRC (12th largest country in the world, 68 million people) to Timor-Leste (36th smallest country in the world, 1.13 million people); in GDP from 38 billion USD (Uganda) to 558 million USD (Timor Leste)

• **Reason for and type of planning process:** National development strategies, stabilization and early recovery

• **Type of UN support:** UN Peace Operations (peacekeeping and special political missions), UN Peacebuilding Commission with Peacebuilding Fund resources, UN Country Team

• **Distance from violence/stability:** From current violence to 20 years of stability, with regional pockets of instability

	Democratic Republic of Congo	Haiti	Liberia	Sierra Leone	Timor Leste	Uganda
Geographic Region	Southern Africa	Latin America and the Caribbean	Western Africa	Western Africa	Asia/Pacific	Eastern Africa
Size	Large	Small	Medium	Medium	Small	Medium
GDP and population	$10.7 billion; 68 million	$6.69 billion; 10 million	$876 million; 3.95 million	$1.94 billion; 5.7 million	$558 million; 1.13 million	$38.1 billion; 32 million
Type of UN support	UN Peacekeeping Mission	UN Peacekeeping Mission	UN Peacekeeping Mission (now on the PBC agenda)	UN Special Political Mission. PBC country	UN Peacekeeping Mission	UN Agencies
Country has engaged in PRSP I - III	II	II	II	II	I	II
Donor dependence ranking*	2	1	4	3	5	6
Type of process analyzed (national)	Stabilization Plan	Post-Disaster Recovery	Poverty Reduction Strategy	Poverty Reduction Strategy	Annual planning; and 20-year visioning	Poverty Reduction Strategy
Type of process (internat.)	ISSSS; MONUSCO	UN ISF; MINUSTAH	Multi-donor interface with national plan; UNMIL	Multi-donor interface with national plan; UNIPSIL	Multi-donor interface with national plan; UNMIT	Multi-donor interface with national plan
Distance from violence	Remaining in regions	Pockets remaining	7 years	Large scale - 9 years, small scale 1 year	Large scale - 2 years	Approx. 20 years with pockets remaining
Stability	Signed peace agreement; national elections 2006; continued violence	Both violence and humanitarian disasters continue; National elections 2005/2010	Peace agreement 2003; national elections 2005	Peace 2002, elections 2002 and 2007; violent relapse in 2009	Timorese independence in 2002, continued crises with significant episodes in 2006 and 2008	Generally stable with continued violence in north

*Based on % of national budget covered by donors

DRC

The contextual constraints for planners in this case study allowed testing of the degree to which conclusions from other cases would hold true in a large state with active violence, and a political divide between the region of focus and the capital. The current national transitional strategy for eastern Congo is the Stabilization and Reconstruction Plan for war-affected areas **(STAREC)**, launched in June 2009 and extended until June 2011. Both STAREC and the international plan to support it, the ISSSS, were designed as **internal processes**, developed in the capital with limited participation of key stakeholders. As such, the focus was tilted significantly toward output delivery over joint participation in the process of design and implementation – ultimately resulting in **low buy-in** from governmental and international partners alike. Following the realignment, however, a shift occurred towards a more **inclusive planning process** with stronger involvement of national and provincial authorities. In a bid to create greater momentum around the stabilization plan, the UN Stabilization Support Unit, is investing efforts in **increasing incentives** for all stakeholders, including UN agencies and bilateral donors, to commit to the STAREC/ISSSS.

Haiti

Haiti provides an illustration of a **post-disaster recovery** and reconstruction planning process, in a country facing longstanding fragility and a tenuous political settlement. The 2010 Action Plan for National Reconstruction and Development (**PARDN,** in French acronym) is intended to serve two primary functions: first, to provide a sound **technical assessment of needs** ahead of a large donor conference; second, to articulate a **vision** for rebuilding Haiti on a new foundation. While the plan served as a successful basis to **frame donor pledges** and respond to immediate recovery needs, it has proven a less efficient framework for promoting national consensus and coordinating assistance around clearly defined statebuilding and peacebuilding goals, given the limitation to the consultative process and the failure to translate identified statebuilding challenges (including legitimacy considerations) into

operational priorities. The case study also demonstrates how the UN, can through its internal planning process (ISF), help ensure that security and political objectives receive the necessary attention in an early recovery context. Finally, it also provides an example of how **capacity constraints** are addressed (or displaced) through the establishment of a new architecture for plan implementation.

Liberia

This case study focuses on the current PRSP, "**Lift Liberia,**" which builds on the government's plan for its 150 first days in office and the interim PRSP. The case is notable for its planning process being rooted in broad-based consultations and benefiting from strong governmental leadership and fulfills many of the criteria established in Phase I. The process **strengthened the legitimacy** of the government, **increased national ownership,** and promoted buy-in from international partners. The strategy includes **a strong focus on peacebuilding** and addressing root causes of conflict. But capacity gaps and **lack of prioritization and sequencing** continue to pose challenges for implementation. The Liberia Reconstruction and Development Committee (**LRDC**) in charge of overseeing the plan's implementation has served as a relatively effective **monitoring, coordination,** and decision-making body. This role, in addition to the one of the Ministry of Planning and UNDP, was instrumental in allowing for a **refocus on capacity-building objectives.**

Sierra Leone

This case study gave an opportunity to contrast UN and donor relationships to a national planning process in a country on the Peacebuilding Commission's agenda. The analysis is focused around "**An Agenda for Change,**" Sierra Leone's second PRSP (2008-2012), which represents a significant move towards **government ownership** of the development and peacebuilding processes. In addition to the "Agenda for Change," in 2009 the government of Sierra Leone released a support document known as the comprehensive aid policy. Together, these two documents provide a framework for development and peacebuilding activities in Sierra Leone, **aligning donor assistance to**

a government-owned plan. International actors have taken important steps to align their assistance to the PRSP-II. The PBC's Peacebuilding Cooperation Framework has been revised to support implementation of the PRSP-II.

Timor Leste

Timor Leste, was a case study on transition – both in terms of planning processes and the UN presence. At the time of research, Timor Leste was finalizing a medium- to long-term development strategy to follow the interim annual National Priorities Process. The UN presence was also planning for a 2012 drawdown and withdrawal, with the process of resumption of policing authority ongoing. The National Priorities Process demonstrated the utility of **shorter planning cycles**, lessons in prioritization, a gradual assumption of **national ownership,** and improvements in **planning capacity**. It also demonstrated some of the difficulties for international development partners in terms of **alignment and harmonization**. This case also illustrated the importance of joint planning and coordination between actors during periods of **transition**.

Uganda

Not typically considered a fragile state, Uganda was included as a case study to provide lessons in the transition from a first to a second planning process, here a Poverty Reduction Strategy, and the opportunities for **incorporating lessons learned**. It also provided an example of strong efforts toward international **alignment and harmonization** on the part of national and international actors. New approaches, including joint assistance strategies and joint budget support mechanisms on the part of donors, are supplemented by the articulation of Partnership Principles and a forthcoming Partnership Policy by the Ugandan government, which will institute more formal mechanisms for **mutual accountability**. Finally, instability and continued crisis in the north and regional insecurity necessitate a conflict-sensitive development approach that incorporates peacebuilding and statebuilding objectives, as laid out in the region-specific Peace and Recovery development plan.

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