

Wicked Problems in Peacebuilding and Statebuilding: Making Progress in Measuring Progress Through the New Deal



Erin McCandless

*Peacebuilding and its relatively new partner in international policy discourse and practice—statebuilding—are moving in increasingly larger circles with the recognition that business cannot be done as usual in fragile and conflict-affected states where 1.5 billion of the world’s population resides. With rising prominence comes ever greater scrutiny about their nature and means for their practical realization. This article reflects on a question central to this scrutinizing that has befuddled scholars, practitioners, and policymakers alike over the past decade—how should progress out of fragility and conflict, or toward peacebuilding and statebuilding, be measured? Investigating a related question—are we making progress on this profoundly challenging task?—the article considers how international actors are endeavoring to make right on their promise to put national actors at the helm of these projects, which is increasingly assumed to be the primary driver for success in both. Examining these questions in light of scholarship, practice, and a topical policy dialogue case—the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding—the article argues that, while the process and emerging outputs are messy and challenge established norms of what constitutes good assessment, they are manifesting profound changes in policy and practice, with potentially radical implications for the ways that peacebuilding and statebuilding are measured and aid decisions are undertaken. **KEYWORDS:** international dialogue on peacebuilding and statebuilding, fragility, resilience, monitoring and evaluation, aid effectiveness, international dialogue, policy development.*

THERE IS NOW OPEN RECOGNITION THAT POLICIES AND PRACTICES THAT FRAME action in countries emerging from war have been dominated by Northern actors, and that this needs to change. Through this evolution of awareness, peacebuilding, statebuilding, and the various activities they encompass have been roundly critiqued for being Northern and template-driven, liberally rooted processes. Critiques have focused on how these agendas have not adequately responded to the priorities, interests, and traditions of local actors. This recognition has prompted a search for approaches that better respond to a local context and build national ownership over process and products. The International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (ID)—a major policy effort since 2008 of fragile states, international part-

ners, and civil society—reflects this shift, as it aims to put fragile and conflict-affected states in the driver's seat to conceptualize and map strategy for how countries can transition out of fragility and aid should be implemented to promote this. Through the process, eighteen fragile and conflict-affected states have come together to form the "g7+," which endeavors to support "state-led transitions from fragility to agility" and place powerful demands on the international aid system to improve aid mechanisms, relevance, and results.¹ This will involve transforming the post-2015 development agenda—dominated for the past fifteen years by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)—to recognize the realities faced by conflict affected and fragile states, and to incorporate a wider set of concerns.

The lofty challenge of how to measure progress in peacebuilding and statebuilding lies at the heart of the g7+ as well as wider efforts of the ID. In June 2011, five Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals (PSGs; outlined below) were agreed on in Monrovia, setting the framework for the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States (New Deal). This was endorsed at the Fourth High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan in November 2011 by over forty countries and international organizations. To measure progress, the New Deal set out two strategic tools: (1) a set of indicators for each of the five PSGs that would be developed by the ID to track progress at the global and the country levels; and (2) a fragility assessment with a diagnostic tool—the "fragility spectrum"—to assist fragile and conflict affected states to assess and map their way out of fragility. This would be developed by the g7+ and supported by international partners.²

In this article, I critically reflect on these processes and products with two normative questions in mind: How should progress out of fragility and conflict, and toward peacebuilding and statebuilding, be measured? Is progress being made toward this goal, in identifying an agreed process and set of tools that will advance our understanding and practice in this area? Key debates and trends on the question of how to measure progress in these areas are first examined. Next, I describe my case study on the ID, illustrating how the most globally participatory effort to date is seeking to grapple with these questions intellectually and operationally within varied contexts, with a goal of producing global insights that can affect wider policy and practice. Then, processes, tools, and politics underlying and influencing the shape and outcomes of the process are examined. Finally, lessons are drawn for theory, policy, and practice. The analysis no doubt benefits and suffers from my role as an insider in the ID process.

In short I argue that, while there is insufficient consensus on concepts, tools, and processes to measure peacebuilding and statebuilding, there is a growing convergence of thought at the global policy level about what is important. Much of this, however, is based on various untested assumptions and on learning about what has *not* worked. The evidence that these assumptions and theories of transition are right will need to manifest over time.

On the question of progress, the answer is a cautious yes, recognizing that any response is embedded in theoretical assumptions about how progress is conceptualized and measured, for example, by: no return to violence; achievement of more positive peace; achieving shared goals; developing shared concepts and indicators; national ownership of the process; levels and types of participation achieved in the process; perceptions of fairness; good performance. Here, the cautious yes is associated with criteria that relate to both process and substance. On the former, processes are becoming more endogenous and less Northern and template driven. On the latter, a more holistic notion of the end states of peacebuilding and statebuilding are emerging—one that recognizes security, political, and developmental requirements. However, the results of these shifts cannot yet be known.

Underpinning the arguments is a recognition that the challenges, with new sets of actors and unfolding rules of the game, constitute a messy terrain with many uncertainties and unknowns. Here, I use the concept of wicked problems to describe the challenge of measuring progress in peacebuilding and statebuilding. As the first published report of Horst Rittel's idea describes, *wicked problems* are a "class of social system problems which are ill-formulated, where the information is confusing, where there are many clients and decision makers with conflicting values, and where the ramifications in the whole system are thoroughly confusing."³ Design theorists and practitioners are using this notion to move beyond linear models of design thinking based on determinate problems that have definite conditions. I suggest, however, that peacebuilders and statebuilders can benefit from acceptance that there is a fundamental indeterminacy in the conditions at hand when grappling with complexity of peacebuilding and statebuilding across contexts.⁴

Setting the Scene

As a background to this case study, I examine the broad contours of the ideological and institutional debates around how to measure peacebuilding and statebuilding. While there is extensive literature that spans decades and disciplines, I focus on a selection of key texts that situate and illuminate the debates at hand. Emphasis is placed on UN and international donor approaches, given the topic of inquiry, which is interrogating the evolving learning in policy and practice at the global level, between international institutions, fragile and conflict affected governments, and civil societies.

Measuring Progress in Peacebuilding

Debates surrounding the measurement of peacebuilding start with how the very concept of peace is understood—whether in minimalist (stabilization) or maximalist (addressing root causes) terms, or as commonly referenced in

scholarly terms—*negative* or *positive peace*. Attributed to Johan Galtung, “negative peace” refers to the cessation or absence of violence while “positive peace” suggests structural changes to address social injustices that may be a cause of violence and the adoption of core social and political goods.⁵ Measuring progress in peacebuilding logically flows from these concepts and the ambitiousness of their goals. Other conceptual debates that influence discussions of measurement include: whether peacebuilding applies to all phases of a conflict or only postconflict; whether it is primarily political or developmental in nature; whether it should be broad or targeted; how to deal with issues of sequencing; and whether and how it relates to conflict prevention.⁶

While efforts to measure peace have a long history and continue to proliferate globally, Chuck Call’s “Knowing Peace When You See It: Setting Standards for Peacebuilding Success,” offers a useful typology that broadly captures the dominant thinking underpinning a good deal of practice. Call identifies four common standards for measurement—security, social, political, and economic—that build on these debates.⁷ The first two represent the minimalist and maximalist perspectives described above. The “security perspective” measures peace around the notion of war recurrence—the most “salient marker of peacebuilding failure” according to Call, and a commonly accepted as necessary but insufficient indicator of peacebuilding success.⁸ The social or “root causes” perspective he suggests is illustrated by Roland Paris’s view that a serious evaluation of peacebuilding effectiveness requires consideration of why civil violence erupted in the first place, and whether the peacebuilding efforts have ameliorated the conditions that gave rise to this violence in the first place.⁹ The third, “political perspective,” takes two forms—that of “legitimate regimes” in terms of participation and democratization, and that of “effective states” in terms of whether they can carry out minimal functions of the state.¹⁰ The fourth and final standard is economic recovery. While Call argues for what might be viewed as a mainstream Northern institutional line—for a minimalist+ approach, that is, the absence of high levels of political violence with minimal political institutions capable of resolving social conflicts peaceably—Southern actors globally tend to push for more economic- and development-based conceptions of peace and standards of measuring them. This is of course a generalization—even within the UN, the debate about the political/economic foundations of peacebuilding has seen key departments and agencies taking sides. While Call is dismissive of economic recovery for insufficient evidence, the wealth of literature on conflict-development linkages supports the historic scholarship and policy advocacy from the global South that suggests that peace cannot be delinked from some measure of economic recovery.¹¹ Call is also dismissive on root causes that he sees as setting unrealistic standards, although he argues that addressing the causes is more likely to achieve success than addressing the symptoms. Civil society and scholar-practitioners of

peacebuilding globally have long advocated this perspective, and the UN has increasingly adopted it at the highest levels.¹²

On the technical side, there are extensive bodies of knowledge and practice that relate to assessing states of conflict and peace, and, increasingly, fragility and resilience. Problematically, however, many of the technical indexes that inform development aid decisions tend to be at odds with the stated principles underpinning peacebuilding and statebuilding.¹³ First, they tend to embody externally led, top-down, and templated approaches to capturing and analyzing data. What too often emerges is static, narrowly conceived, and not particularly trustworthy data that is not contextually rooted and does not capture the dynamism of relationships and interactions of issues and variables. The suitability of such data for policymakers in an era of widespread agreement—that context must be the starting point for analysis and intervention—deserves deep questioning.

The UN: Benchmarking for Transition, Exit, and Peace Consolidation

The entry point for the UN in thinking about peacebuilding success has historically been tied to the questions of when international peacekeepers can and should leave a host country—when it can be assumed that nationals will fully own and continue to consolidate their peace without external assistance.

In the early 1990s, a UN peace operation “exit” was tied to the successful holding of elections—a practice consistent with liberal assumptions.¹⁴ But as this criterion proved insufficient, measures shifted to reflect the multidimensional peacekeeping mandates that were being created with the recognition that sustaining peace required more.

Over the past decade, the UN has begun to employ the notion of “benchmarking” in the context of “transitions,” with Security Council requests to link progress in peace operations against clearly defined benchmarks for peace consolidation.¹⁵ In 2010, the UN’s Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) published *Monitoring Peace Consolidation: A UN Practitioners Guide to Benchmarking*, the first attempt to provide a common resource for practitioners across the UN system engaged in measuring peace consolidation.¹⁶ The handbook maps the state of practice, outlining three main approaches that are being used for benchmarking—strategy-, sector-, and process-based frameworks—outlined in Table 1.

Most UN benchmarking exercises to date reflect strategy- and sector-based approaches, often linked to UN mandates and strategic goals found in national development strategies. These two approaches overlap, as strategies are often built around sector priorities in both government (i.e., Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, or PRSPs) and UN prioritization and planning frameworks (i.e., Integrated Strategic Frameworks, or ISFs; and UN Development Assistance Frameworks, or UNDAFs). The use of process-based

Table 1 Three Approaches to Benchmarking

Approach	Advantages	Drawbacks
Strategy-based	Offer well-defined goals and objectives that support coherent benchmarking.	Can be a result of political processes rather than clearly defined methodology. Tend to focus on achievements rather than results and effects, and often overlook negative or unexpected results and impacts.
Sector-based	Provide useful framework for organizing overall system objectives.	Assume that achievements in a number of sectors will add up to a systemwide effect; no consideration of interaction.
Process-based	Consider interactions and synergetic efforts of processes, sectors, activities, and benchmarks.	Complex and dynamic, requiring attention be paid to the more fundamental drivers and processes of conflict in a given country.

concerns embedded within the last approach remain weak and underdeveloped, despite long recognition that peacebuilding is not likely to be successful simply through sector-based approaches.¹⁷ Increasing attention is being given to conflict analysis in setting out strategies, mandates, and planning frameworks, but these remain poorly understood and practiced somewhat ad hoc throughout the system.

In grappling with the thorny issue of how to ensure peace is sustained, UN (and wider international) discourse and practice has increasingly called for national actors to be in the driver's seat, seemingly recognizing the critiques that externally driven interventions do not ultimately work. The broadened use of the term *peace consolidation* to describe a self-sustaining peace and the transition or exit on the part of international actors illustrates this. While peacekeeping drawdown accompanies shifts in priorities, that is, from stabilization and humanitarian relief to reconstruction and development, the critical question of where in transition the economic recovery issues need to be addressed remains unanswered.

The UN Peacebuilding Support Office and its Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) are enhancing their thinking and practice around the development side of the peacebuilding equation. Although the Secretary-General's 2009 report on "Peacebuilding in the Immediate Aftermath of Conflict" had promisingly identified these issues as two of the five recurring priorities for peacebuilding in the first few years following conflict, little had been done to shift UN practice in ways that responded. Moreover, the PBF's support to programming in the first seven years of its engagement was very limited in these areas, compared to security and politically focused activities. In 2012, however, the PBSO produced a study on the role of social and admin-

istrative services in peacebuilding, and the PBF is now increasing its financial support in this area.¹⁸

Progress is somewhat slower on the more political side of the UN's peacebuilding architecture—the intergovernmental advisory body, the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC)—as it considers the criteria for its departure from countries that it is engaged with.¹⁹ Early efforts to try to develop criteria led some of the PBC chairs of its country-specific configurations to make the case that objective criteria could not capture the more intuitive and consensus-oriented processes, effectively requiring political judgments within particular contexts that inevitably lead to decisionmaking around these issues.²⁰ Although in principle this appears sensible, in practice it may be problematic if the priorities and activities of focus on the PBC's agenda do not reflect the spectrum of key drivers of conflict and fragility in society and if they are not identified through sufficiently participatory processes that engage actors representing the whole of government and civil society. Increasingly however, there do appear to be promising signs of the need for youth employment, natural resource management, and other economic- and social development-related concerns coming into the statements of mutual commitments between the PBC and the PBC-agenda countries that articulate country peacebuilding priorities.²¹ The SG's 2012 report *Peacebuilding in the Immediate Aftermath of Conflict* identifies institution building and inclusivity as prominent priorities for peacebuilding success, illustrating a rising trend in thinking within the UN system.²²

Measuring Progress in Statebuilding

Statebuilding has a longer history, both theoretically and as a dominant policy and practice guiding the development of states. In recent years it has seen a revival, and there is a policy consensus that statebuilding is “an endogenous process to develop capacity, institutions and legitimacy of the state driven by state-society relationships.”²³ This departs from older notions of statebuilding and associated concepts of the state that prioritized its authority, institutional presence, and territorial boundaries and, in general, focused on institutions.²⁴ Newer understandings recognize the centrality of the social contract between state and society as well as the challenges in building state legitimacy, particularly in fragile and postconflict settings. The shifting thought around the meaning of statebuilding reflects similar currents of thought and action in peacebuilding. Statebuilding has suffered the same critiques as peacebuilding—an agenda accused of being top down, template driven, and externally led.²⁵ This is one reason it is likely often conflated, conceptually and operationally, with peacebuilding.

Measuring progress in statebuilding, as understood in its current form, is thus a new project, built upon arguably untested (but felt to be normatively important) assumptions. Surveying the literature, it can be assumed

that progress depends on the ways in which contestations over power and wealth are handled—in particular, the quality and legitimacy of mechanisms used for this purpose. Three prominent lines of thinking are emerging, which may pave the way for the development of new tools.

Amidst its proliferating work on fragility, the DAC of the OECD has produced *Policy Guidance: Supporting Statebuilding in Situations of Fragility*, which argues for the need to “measure and assess progress in terms of statebuilding outcomes over the medium to longer term” and that approaches need to be developed that are based on analysis and appropriate to context.²⁶ These should include: measures of how sectoral programs advance statebuilding objectives; measures of transition from fragility to resilience, or violent conflict to positive peace; and indicators relating to the three dimensions of the statebuilding process (the political settlement, the capability and responsiveness of the state, and the broad social expectations and perceptions).

The World Bank is building its work agenda in this area based on its 2011 World Development Report *Conflict, Security and Development*, which argues that strengthening legitimate institutions and governance to provide citizen security, justice, and jobs is crucial to breaking cycles of violence.²⁷ In situations of conflict and fragility the key priorities need to be focused on transforming institutions in order to restore people’s confidence in the state, then gradually expanding to a wider scope of activity as institutional capacity grows. The report suggests that a mix of outcome indicators (which will vary depending on context), process indicators, and perception indicators are needed to monitor the impact of program intervention and that additional indicators are needed to assess areas more directly related to the three main areas.²⁸

Last, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) has recently engaged the debate through its report “Governance for Peace: Securing the Social Contract,” arguing that the more traditional approach to statebuilding, while critical to long-term stability, will fail if the “immediate needs and complex state-society relations that characterize fragile and conflict affected societies” are not accounted for.²⁹ Securing the social contract needs to occur through four objectives: investment in responsive institutions; fostering inclusive politics; improving the resilience of society to conflict; and engaging in partnerships as a means of operationalizing the first three.

Each of these prominent institutional approaches recognize the importance of moving away from recipes and templates, and toward a greater valuing of local context and needs. UNDP rightly observes that fragility is not a fixed state, but rather a continuum, which has serious implications for measuring progress. At the same time, the assumptions that drive the theories of change underpinning these approaches arguably require greater evidence. The 2011 World Development Report, for example, assumes that citizens’ security, justice, and jobs are the primary priorities for all countries emerging

from conflict and that, together, these priorities will transform institutions and build the state and peace. The DAC of the OECD and UNDP assumptions relating to the social contract—that more inclusive processes will necessarily lead to better results—also require further testing, development, and nuance. None of the three approaches seriously interrogates the conceptual distinctions between peacebuilding and statebuilding and the implications that this has for measurement. This is an ongoing source of concern for civil society actors globally, who believe the distinctions are critical, particularly when it comes to addressing sources of conflict and promoting drivers of peace, which often lie above and beyond a focus on the state.³⁰

* * *

In sum, it is clear that consensus has not been achieved on how to measure peacebuilding and statebuilding, although common trends in thinking and practice are evolving. Arguably, the theories, policies, and practices are driven as much by ideology and institutional mandates than evidence. However, it is also the case that new thinking and practice is driven by awareness of what has not worked (i.e., minimalist notions of peace and sector-based approaches to peacebuilding not rooted in strategy) and, promisingly, on increasing awareness of the need for analysis of what causes fragility and violent conflict.

The New Deal: A Twin-track Approach

Overview of the Process to Date

The New Deal and its institutional drivers—the ID, made up of international partners organized through the International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF) and the g7+—emerged within a context of the growing critiques targeted at the aid architecture and its inability to effectively respond to the problems of fragility and conflict. Efforts to strengthen the response were manifested in the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the 2007 OECD-endorsed Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations. However, these did not bring commitments and results on the scale needed. This is likely because they were efforts led by donors (effectively top-down reform efforts) and were perceived as such (a continuation of outsiders diagnosing the problem and prescribing solutions).³¹

Representatives of fragile and conflict-affected states began to voice and share their concerns during this period. They were unhappy with the rules of the game—being evaluated by donors through frameworks and criteria that did not reflect their conditions, with aid being inappropriately tar-

geted or withheld as a result.³² Initially, a group of seven countries in particular was active—Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Côte d’Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, Sierra Leone, and Timor-Leste.

In 2008 at the Third High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Accra, Ghana, the push for a more comprehensive and embracing response came to fruition. The ID was established, and it was formally launched later that year. The first formal meeting of the ID took place in Dili, Timor-Leste, in April 2010. The day before, the grouping of fragile and conflict-affected states led by Timor-Leste’s finance minister Emilia Pires met and formed the g7+.³³

The first meeting of the ID, comprised of the g7+ (with nineteen member states at the time) and international partners (including donor countries and regional and international organizations), produced the Dili Declaration.³⁴ The declaration began from the recognition that conflict and fragility are major obstacles for achieving the MDGs, and that members “urgently need to address conflict and fragility by supporting country-led peacebuilding and statebuilding processes.” It committed the ID to take “immediate actions and develop an International Action Plan on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding.”³⁵

The Second Global Meeting of the ID took place in Monrovia in June 2011, where the set of five PSGs was agreed on:

- Legitimate politics—foster inclusive political settlements and conflict resolution;
- Security—establish and strengthen people’s security;
- Justice—address injustices and increase people’s access to justice;
- Economic foundations—generate employment and improve livelihoods; and
- Revenues and services—manage revenue and build capacity for accountable and fair service delivery.

The five PSGs were then officially outlined in the New Deal at the Fourth High-Level Forum in Busan. In the document it was agreed that, in order to strengthen and promote the PSGs as a framework for engagement at the global and country levels, “a set of indicators for each goal will have been developed by fragile states and international partners, which will allow us to track progress at the global and the country levels. These indicators will combine objective measures with measures to understand the views of people on results achieved.” The goal was to have the indicators ready to present to the General Assembly in September 2012.³⁶ It was also agreed that, to support country-owned and -led pathways out of fragility, a “periodic country-led assessment on the causes and features of fragility and sources of resilience” would serve as the basis for one vision and one plan. The assess-

ment would include key national stakeholders and nonstate actors and build on a harmonized methodology, including a fragility spectrum, “to be developed by the g7+ and supported by international partners.”³⁷

To carry forward these tasks two working groups were developed: an Implementation Sub-working Group and an Indicator Working Group. The former is responsible for supporting countries overall in implementing the New Deal while the latter is tasked with development of indicators and engagement with the fragility assessment process.

Global and Country-specific Tasks:

Two Tracks, Tensions, and Efforts to Align

The Indicator Working Group, comprised of representatives from the g7+, international partners, and civil society and chaired by the UN’s PBSO and Democratic Republic of Congo, was immediately confronted with difficult challenges: how to reconcile two major work objectives with overly ambitious time lines running on two tracks driven by different sets of actors that had a yet undefined but clearly critical relationship—the undertaking of fragility assessments and the development of the global indicators. Additionally, various processes and activities being undertaken by other groups in the overall ID process presented deeper challenges for coordination and sequencing of efforts.

Early in the process, tensions arose around the development of indicators. This was unsurprising given that how countries would and should be evaluated was in fact the reason the g7+ evolved with its demands in the first place. Even prior to the Indicator Working Group’s formation, tensions had arisen with the first attempt to present indicators against PSG goals. At the ID’s second meeting in Monrovia, there was some concern among the g7+ that it was too early to be concerned with discussions of indicators; rather, it was a priority for donors to illustrate they were genuinely willing to take more risk in their funding patterns and to release new funding streams that better targeted issues underlying and driving fragility.³⁸

International partners, with a mandate provided by the document stemming from this meeting, “The Monrovia Roadmap on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding,” forged ahead in the development of indicators. In September 2011, an Expert Workshop on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Indicators was held at the World Bank in Washington, DC. It brought together over forty experts and representatives from intergovernmental and non-governmental institutions and the g7+ to review a long list of draft indicators. This had been developed by consultants and international experts working across the five thematic PSG areas. While the meeting resulted in a new list of indicators, the process was critiqued for being insufficiently consultative and unclear in its goals.³⁹ Problematically, there was poor g7+ participation in the event. When the document that emerged from the event

was presented by the World Bank at a g7+ retreat in Juba, South Sudan, in October 2011, there was strong pushback from the g7+ around substance and process: in essence, it did not want externally generated, expert-driven lists of indicators. One minister reportedly stated, "I'm a statistician, and I don't even understand this."⁴⁰

In the months that followed, the g7+ began to pursue another task mandated by the Monrovia Roadmap—the development of a methodological tool for assessing fragility and sources of resilience to formulate the basis for national strategies. The fragility spectrum, as it would become known, was divided into five PSG areas across ten phases of the spectrum. These phases were reduced to five: crisis; rebuild and reform; transition; transformation; resilience. The g7+ populated the twenty-five boxes with a series of assumptions thought to represent the status of a certain PSG at a certain stage. From early on, the g7+ envisaged that indicators would emerge from country-level processes—not from an externally generated, international expert-driven process. The two parallel processes met for the first time in a structured, official way at the first meeting of the Indicator Working Group, which took place in Copenhagen in March 2012. The fragility spectrum in its populated form was introduced alongside the various lists of indicators that had been developed. An analytical framework was developed by the group at this meeting, effectively a template reflecting the logic of the fragility spectrum, through which broad dimensions and subdimensions of the PSGs were identified that would serve as a bridge between the parallel efforts. It was generally expected that indicators would then be developed within and through this analytical framework, although questions of by whom and through what process were left unanswered. Parallel processes continued to unfold. International partners proceeded to develop the analytical framework, populating it with indicators and employing the skills of highly regarded international consultants.

Increasing pushback from g7+ on all questions of indicators came to a head in Nairobi in July 2012. On process issues, g7+ chairwoman Pires stated in no uncertain terms that development of global indicators to measure the PSGs must wait: the fragility assessments within pilot countries should happen first. Then, a set of shared indicators could be drawn from these pilots, laying the basis for a small set of global indicators. There was now an emerging sense that this could not all occur before September 2012, although the pilot countries believed they could conduct their fragility assessments by then.⁴¹

There was also pushback against the new version of the analytical framework, meant to assist country teams in conducting their fragility analysis and filling out their fragility spectrums. The document, now fifteen pages and some 200 questions (embedded in dimensions and subdimensions) to guide indicator development, was felt to be too long and unmanageable for

these fragile processes, with questions too narrow and specific and too leading in their nature—potentially another template of assessment ill-suited to their needs. Representatives of the g7+ wanted a more open-ended set of questions with room for countries to self-articulate the nature of their fragility predicament. There was also concern expressed over the notion of perception-based indicators, which some g7+ members felt were too easily manipulated. On the other hand, there was strong support by INCAF members and civil society across the board for a balance of objective- and perception-based indicators to support triangulation of data. The process for undertaking the fragility assessments was also discussed and more pushback came against the notion of sharing any official menu of indicators with countries for them to draw on as they developed their fragility spectrums. The meeting ended early without explanation, as the g7+ members attended a private lengthy lunch meeting facilitated by Pires, sending a clear message that trust in the process was lacking.

Both in the Nairobi meeting and in its aftermath, concern over these developments on the part of the international partners was palpable. There was a general concern about the levels of commitment to the notion of global indicators as well as more specific concerns anticipating technical and political challenges of trying to create global indicators out of country-level processes that were not guided by frameworks that would conceivably create the basis for shared measures. Increasingly, however, the recognition grew that there was not an alternative. And from this a transformation began to take place.

The process slowed and international partners began accepting their role as one of listening, and facilitating the sharing of experiences and building of consensus across national settings. At the third meeting of the Indicator Working Group in New York in September 2012, the first effort was made to collectively assess the commonalities across the fragility assessments emerging from the pilot countries. From this, a set of common areas for measurement was developed for pilot countries to take back to their national settings, and to reflect and report on, alongside their specific country indicators. A “South-South Knowledge Exchange on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Indicators” was then held in October 2012 in Nairobi to provide opportunity for g7+ countries to share experiences in developing their country lists and to build ownership and consensus around the process and product of the emerging shared list of indicators. This brought g7+ representatives from bureaus of statistics, ministries of finance, focal points of the ID process, and civil society together from eight g7+ countries. The agreed list of 64 indicators was then shared at a November meeting in Haiti for g7+ ministers, and the list was circulated for feedback through the ID community at large, but also to a range of new experts globally, and in particular in the Global South. The consultation feedback was presented at the fourth meet-

ing of the Indicator Working Group in Nairobi in January 2013, and after several days of deliberation a streamlined list of 34 indicators was agreed upon. This list will next go through a final round of consultations. If all goes as planned, it will be formally adopted and begin to guide national assessment, planning, and decisionmaking efforts.

Implications for Theory, Policy, and Practice

The ID process constitutes the most global, participatory effort to date to develop consensus around methods and tools to measure peacebuilding and statebuilding. Through the process, a number of implications for theory, policy, and practice can be identified.

Goodbye Templates, Welcome Messy Processes and Wicked Problems

The recipients of aid in fragile and conflict-affected countries have delivered clear messages in the forums and meetings throughout the process, such as “we do not wish to be measured and held accountable to externally developed criteria” and “keep it simple; we need tools we can understand and use in our own contexts, that speak to our realities.” These calls compliment critiques by scholars over the past decade—that it is time to move beyond templated, top-down, externally driven approaches.

The ID process is thus engaging a profound challenge faced by international actors globally: how to move away from template approaches while trying to agree to a basic set of measures across contexts to guide the support and monitoring of efforts to move out of fragility and conflict. This not only is profoundly technically challenging, as any social scientist would agree, but it is also politically challenging. As in many policy processes, political challenges include: the interests of institutional actors vying to promote their interests as a revolution of sorts is taking place; the personalities of individuals, and their relationships, alliances, and approaches to fostering change or maintaining the status quo; the role of history and its meaning for different actors; and the particular contexts and forces that are shaping competing social processes that interact with the process at hand.

The notion of wicked problems provides a reality check and, perhaps, some solace and hope that the ends may well eventually justify the means. It reminds us that certain, deeply complex problems facing humanity are not going to be solved through templated approaches resting on positivist and often unchecked assumptions. Contexts of transition—from conflict, fragility, or both—are each entirely unique. And the vast range of variables at play logically demands that these challenges and their solutions must lie in processes, but ownership needs to lie with those affected.

*Working Toward Genuine National Ownership
and International Accompaniment*

Repeatedly, the messages have come through the ID process that “we want a bottom up process; we are our own experts.”⁴² Who can argue with this? Even the international community has moved in increasing lockstep over the past decade in its verbal recognition that peacebuilding must be nationally driven and owned, and that statebuilding must be endogenous. My analysis has illustrated one practical way in which this is occurring, with its requisite and expected politics, forward- and back-stepping, and accompanying contradictions.

While books are being written on the topic of national ownership, a few key points deserve mention. First, there is much work yet to be done to enhance truly national ownership of these processes. This requires attention to genuine inclusion of stakeholders across society in meaningful ways. It assumes that there is capacity and political will on the part of governments to both foster inclusive processes and for stakeholders themselves to have the capacity to meaningfully participate. To date, five pilot countries have undertaken their fragility assessments with varying degrees of engagement with their respective societies. The initial rush to have their assessments ready to present in September 2012 in various fora in and around the General Assembly was problematic, although, as the date neared, the g7+ recognized the issue and slowed the process. Nonetheless, to some degree the national processes of outreach, participation, and inclusion did suffer. For these processes to become illustrative of the claim to national ownership, and for the theory around state-society relations lying at the heart of the social contract driving statebuilding to be realized, more attention and time will be needed to nurture these processes over time. In particular, fragility assessments should not be seen as onetime events, but rather ongoing tools to engage state and society around analysis and strategy, to build societal consensus over tough decisions around sequencing and prioritization, and ultimately to ensure that policy and programming serves peacebuilding goals in ever changing contexts.

It is important to underscore that civil society actors—broadly understood as organized societal stakeholders—have participated both at global and national (g7+) levels in this process. As actors operating both within g7+ countries and at the global level, civil society thickens the pot of “wicked” problem analysis, blurring the simple national/international distinctions. In this process there have been significant efforts by civil society to constructively engage at both levels, and the ensuing results in terms of creating entry points to substantively and procedurally impact the process are considered by civil society to have been (so far) significant. At the same time, there are critiques and concerns—that in some cases there was insuf-

ficient time, space, and opportunity for civil society, particularly at national levels, to meaningfully engage with their governments in the development of fragility assessments.

While a key focus must remain on cultivating genuine national ownership, international actors still have an important place in supporting peacebuilding and statebuilding processes and outcomes. Importantly, the ID process includes INCAF, a body that must agree upon and approve the indicators for them to ultimately become a guide for aid support. At perhaps a deeper and more normative level, however, alongside the demands for national ownership are repeated calls for technical support and quiet accompaniment in varied forms to these processes at all levels. Internationals are heeding this quiet call and arguably need to hone their skills in learning how to *accompany* national actors more effectively, which they have begun to do in this process.

Political Inclusion Is Not Enough:

The Need to Embrace the Political and the Developmental

The increasing international attention to the notion of political inclusion as a key priority for peacebuilding success is a welcome development that moves attention beyond security-oriented standards of measurement. It does not, however, go far enough. A focus on inclusion and exclusion too easily suggests that the process alone will suffice (i.e., include more actors and certain substantive results will manifest). This is not certain. Further, the notion of political inclusion is too often unhelpfully used in ways that serve to maintain ideological parameters of what is “political” versus “economic” or “developmental,” undermining our ability to understand the complexity of factors that drive violent conflict and fragility.⁴³ It is worth highlighting the fact that exclusion and inclusion are not new issues; organizations (e.g., Minority Rights Group in London) have for decades sought to address horizontal inequalities—key drivers of violent conflict and structural violence—as they manifest in political, social, and economic realms and have done so in evidence-based ways that steer clear of these limiting ideological parameters.

The g7+ and wider Southern perspective historically has consistently emphasized a notion of peacebuilding and statebuilding that balances political and developmental concerns. Despite the 2009 Secretary-General’s report on peacebuilding that emphasized similar concerns, progress toward realizing operational frameworks has not fully manifested, reflecting entrenched divisions within the system on these issues. The UN appears to learn lessons rather slowly in this regard; even with the most developed infrastructure and policy resting on more than a half-century of experience, it is this g7+-led process that is spearheading the realization of an equal appreciation of political, security, and developmental concerns into one operational framework for peacebuilding and statebuilding. Of the five PSGs, two represent economic development-related concerns—economic

foundations with a focus on employment and improving livelihoods, and revenues and services with a focus on revenue management and capacity building for accountable and fair service delivery.

Valuing the Political and the Technical in Measuring Progress

Another duality that obfuscates reality and arguably does not serve peacebuilding and statebuilding is the political and technical categorizations. While inarguably there are technical tasks with little political content, leaving measuring peacebuilding and statebuilding to political actors alone for example, would unlikely bring the technical rigor needed to achieve meaningful results. On the other hand, technical problems usually have an answer, with a clear, endpoint solution. Wicked problems, by nature, are unlikely to be “solved”; both political and technical approaches will be important in making progress, with these aspects interacting in subtle yet important ways.

Taking the example of context analysis and, in particular, conflict analysis and political economy analysis, there is wide agreement that these are central to more effective aid delivery and to making better programming and policy choices. This analysis is technical and political and, while there is an admonishing of templates, there is an ongoing demand for tools that assist in doing better analysis. National actors and international actors recognize their need and desire for greater capacity in this area. Importantly, the ID has adopted the reasoning that conflict and fragility analysis is the start of better programming. The technical tools to do this well are still in development and it will take time to test, refine, and effectively apply them. Importantly, the Indicator Working Group and pilot country efforts to promote and adopt a conflict analysis lens in their fragility assessments—reflecting the “process” approach to benchmarking—marks an important achievement, given that even the UN has been unable to systematically do this.⁴⁴

Suggesting that peacebuilding is purely or primarily political—a common refrain in many parts of the UN—often infers that this trumps the technical, a view requiring ongoing scrutiny. Peacebuilding is political and technical, and the technical is arguably needed to produce better political results. The ID process has brought together the technical and political—the interdisciplinary scholars and practitioners who work on peacebuilding—across society, state, and international partners. This has produced deeply engaging and reflectively demanding debates, forcing the out-of-the-box thinking needed to address wicked problems.

Conclusion

Returning to the questions driving my study—How should progress out of fragility and conflict, and toward peacebuilding and statebuilding, be measured? And is progress being made to advance our understanding and practice in this area?—some final conclusions can be drawn.

While the process of agreeing on how to measure peacebuilding and statebuilding, illustrated through the ID, is undeniably messy, fractured, and mired in politics at many levels, this is inevitable given the complexities involved as new sets of actors become involved and rules of the game transform. This is essentially a revolutionary exercise to tackle a wicked problem. Recognition of the complexity of the exercise therefore must constitute the starting point for any assessment of progress.⁴⁵

Politically, the move to genuinely transition the ownership and responsibility of assessment mechanisms and processes to the fragile and conflict-affected countries themselves is finally occurring. While the rhetoric of the UN has long been about national ownership of peacebuilding and statebuilding, the mechanisms, processes, and frameworks to realize this goal have been somewhat ill suited—focused on measurement of mandate fulfillment for peacekeeping exit. This process is a catalyst for needed change. At the same time, it is clear that national processes are and will continue to be greatly affected by international tools, knowledge, and experience. The notion of accompaniment needs to be cultivated to ensure that this sharing does not undermine endogenous traditions that may be better suited to support peace consolidation in a particular context.

Technically, the process is about going into uncharted and turbulent—but necessary—waters. The ideologically weighted theories and tools for measuring peacebuilding have not supported the growing demand for locally and nationally relevant measures. Neither have they moved the global community forward in finding consensus on the end state or type of peace and the means to get there. This ID process is grappling with both the demand for grounded, locally relevant measures and positivist demands for global indicators, requiring deep levels of engagement and, simply put, creativity on those engaged in the process. While certain issues remain uncomfortably ambiguous for the more social science minded; that is, not having an agreed end state or shared criteria for measuring progress in the fragility assessments, this qualitative, contextually rich approach will undoubtedly bring important insights into what is possible to measure across cases.

Returning to the start of this story, these findings amount to the cautious yes to the question of whether progress is being made. This argument follows the irrefutable reasoning that context must be the starting point; that templated, top-down approaches do not work; and that there must be far greater national ownership over the design, implementation, and monitoring of peacebuilding and statebuilding efforts. Substantively, the ID process and policy and practice results also illustrate, finally, a movement to capturing the political, security, and developmental requirements for peacebuilding and statebuilding that have too long been constrained to lip service. While this theory of change (that developmental concerns are required to sustain peace) will also need to manifest evidence, for the first time the issues are

captured coherently in one framework. And if supported by the international aid structure and governments themselves in meaningful ways, this will allow evidence to be gathered. A challenge here for national actors lies in process—moving beyond sector or pillar approaches toward the genuine development and implementation of a strategy that brings these goals together in a meaningful way, ensuring that challenging issues like sequencing and prioritization are done with state *and* society, building ownership around agreed means to create resilience and consolidate peace. This will require greater attention to the drivers of fragility and conflict and a commitment to mainstreaming these concerns across the goals and the strategies for implementing them. 🌐

Notes

Erin McCandless sits on the International Dialogue's Indicator Working Group and the core group that drives the work of this larger group, on behalf of Interpeace. She also serves as the focal point for this process within the Civil Society Platform on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding, supporting pilot country civic representatives in this process. She is chief editor of the *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development*, teaches part time in the New School's Graduate Program in International Affairs, and consults widely with international organizations on issues of peacebuilding and development.

The author would like to thank Henk-Jan Brinkman, Frauke de Weijer, and Necla Tschirgi for their insightful comments on the manuscript.

1. For information on the g7+, their history, and mandate, see www.g7plus.org. For the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding, see www.oecd.org/international%20dialogue.

2. See www.newdeal4peace.org.

3. West C. Churchman, "Wicked Problems," *Management Science* 4, no. 14 (December 1967).

4. Design theorists have been engaging with the notion of wicked problems since the 1960s. Richard Buchanan, "Wicked Problems in Design Thinking," *Design Issues* 8, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 5–21.

5. Johan Galtung, "Cultural Violence," *Journal of Peace Research* 27, no. 3 (1990): 291–305.

6. Debates on peacebuilding concepts referenced in Erin McCandless, "Lessons from Liberia: Integrated Approaches to Peacebuilding in Transitional Settings" (Pretoria, South Africa: Institute for Security Studies, 2008).

7. Chuck Call, "Knowing Peace When You See It: Setting Standards for Peacebuilding Success," *Civil Wars* 7, no. 1 (June 2008): 26.

8. "Report on Wilton Park Conference 965: Exit Strategies and Peace Consolidation in State-Building Operations," 13–15 March 2009, p. 9, http://cis.politics.ox.ac.uk/materials/WP965_report.pdf.

9. Call, "Knowing Peace When You See It," p. 26.

10. He cites Doyle and Sambanis as offering the most serious quantitative effort to date measuring success beyond war recurrence. They cite a 69 percent failure rate for 125 civil wars that took place between 1945 and 1999. They use minimalist measures for participation, assuming failure if war or significant violence occurred within two years, if sovereignty was divided, or if the independent "polity" data set scored a

regime as extremely authoritarian or repressive. Michael Doyle and Nicholas Sambanis, *Making War, Building Peace* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

11. For a review of this literature, see www.peacebuildinginitiative.org/index.cfm?pageId=1907. Critical pieces by Southern authors include Ravi Kanbur, "Poverty and Conflict: The Inequality Link" (New York: International Peace Academy), www.ipacademy.org/publication/all-publications/year/2007.html; Emmanuel Hansen, "Introduction to Africa: Perspectives on Peace and Development," in Emmanuel Hansen, ed., *Africa: Perspectives on Peace and Development* (Tokyo: United Nations University; London: Zed, 1987).

12. For example, the 2009 *Report of the Secretary-General on Enhancing Mediation and Its Support Activities*, S/2009/189.

13. In a background review for this study, I looked at a number of well-known and utilized indexes, including Country Indicators for Foreign Policy Index (CIFP); Failed and Fragile States Index; Risk Assessment, State Fragility Index; Failed States Index; and Global Peace Index.

14. William J. Durch, Victoria K. Holt, Caroline R. Earle, and Moira K. Shananhan, *The Brahimi Report and the Future of UN Peace Operations* (Washington, DC: Henry L. Stimson Center, 2003).

15. In recent years, the discourse of "transitions" has overtaken "exits," thought to better recognize the dynamic and process nature of peacebuilding, with less emphasis on the role of international actors.

16. The handbook was developed in partnership with the Oslo-based Fafo Institute for Applied International Studies and the Norwegian Peacebuilding Centre, with funding provided by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, www.un.org/peace/peacebuilding/pdf/Monitoring_Peace_Consolidation.pdf.

17. The important Ustein Study, undertaken on behalf of a group of donor governments, concluded that sectoral peacebuilding, in the absence of strategy, was not bringing desired peacebuilding results. "Towards a Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding: Getting Their Act Together: Overview Report of the Joint Ustein Study of Peacebuilding" (Oslo: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway, 2004).

18. The report argues that such services constitute drivers of conflict in pre- and postconflict settings and makes the case for stronger support to these areas in the interests of sustaining peace. Erin McCandless, "Peace Dividends and Beyond: Contributions of Administrative and Social Services to Peacebuilding" (New York: UN Peacebuilding Support Office, 2012), www.un.org/en/peacebuilding/pbsso/pdf/peace_dividends.pdf.

19. The PBC was developed to address challenges in countries emerging from conflict that peacemaking and peacekeeping efforts were proving unable to meet. To date it has been engaged in Sierra Leone, Burundi, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Central African Republic, and Liberia.

20. Key informant, interviewed by the author, e-mail communication, September 2012.

21. Guinea, for example, has youth and women's employment as a priority area. See www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=PBC/6/GUI/3.

22. See www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2012_746.pdf.

23. Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, "State Building in Situations of Fragility," 2008, p. 1, www.oecd.org/development/incaf/41212290.pdf.

24. This older concept of statebuilding drove international support to post-colonial states in the 1950s and 1960s.

25. See, for example, Necla Tschirgi, "The Security-Politics-Development Nexus: The Lessons of Statebuilding in Sub-Saharan Africa," European Report on Development, (Ottawa, ON: University of Ottawa, Center for International Policy Studies, 2009).

26. OECD, *Policy Guidance: Supporting Statebuilding in Situations of Fragility*, DAC Guidelines and Reference Series, www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/supporting-statebuilding-in-situations-of-conflict-and-fragility_9789264074989-en.

27. World Bank, *World Development Report: Conflict, Security and Development* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2011), p. 2.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 260.

29. UN Development Programme, "Governance for Peace: Securing the Social Contract" (New York: UN Development Programme, 2012).

30. Written statements by the CSO Platform on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding have repeatedly emphasized these points, some of which can be found on Saferworld's website, www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/view-resource/717.

31. Vanessa Wyeth, "Knights in Fragile Armour: The Rise of the g7+," *Global Governance* 18, no. 1 (2012): 7–12.

32. Francesca Bomboko, Ministry of Planning, Democratic Republic of Congo, interviewed by the author, New York, 21 February 2012.

33. The name emanated from the initial seven countries that dubbed themselves the g7, but added the + as new countries expressed interest prior to its formation in Dili.

34. Institutions include the African Development Bank, the African Union, the European Union, the Asia Development Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the United Nations, and the World Bank. Donor countries include the United States, Canada, the Netherlands, Denmark, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand.

35. Members of the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding, Dili Declaration, www.g7plus.org/news-articles/2010/4/10/dili-declaration.html.

36. "A New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States," 2012, www.g7plus.org/new-deal-document.

37. *Ibid.*

38. Key informant, interviewed by the author, email discussions, September 2012.

39. Notably the thematic working groups that were meant to drive the process had not been activated, and requests for feedback to drafts prepared by consultants typically came with a far too short time line for response. "Expert Workshop on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Indicators. 27–28 September 2011. A CSO Feedback Report," www.interpeace.org/index.php/policy.

40. Representative of the g7+ secretariat, interviewed by the author, New York, 19 July 2012.

41. Analysis based on author participation in July Nairobi meeting, observation, and discussions with other participants.

42. Emilia Pires and members of the g7+ secretariat have made such statements regularly in meetings of the Indicator Working Group.

43. Charles Call, for example, suggests that his findings on political exclusion challenge prevailing theories that economic factors, especially poverty and a decline in economic growth, cause war recurrence. In making this argument, he contrarily recognizes that political decisions that exclude certain groups occur in different realms, including economic. Charles T. Call, *Why Peace Fails: The Causes and Prevention of Civil War Recurrence* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2012), p. 6.

44. While this was done to varying degrees, there is a growing commitment to the notion that it needs to be done. DRC went the farthest.

45. Similar discussions are taking place among complexity theorists. For an informative discussion on this topic, see Frauke de Weijer, “Approaching Fragile States from a Complexity Perspective,” European Centre for Development Policy Management blog, 9 March 2012, www.ecdpm-talkingpoints.org/fragile-states-complexity-perspective.