

INTRODUCTION: SUSTAINING RECONSTRUCTION

The growing international concern over the problems of responding to complex emergencies of internal conflict has encouraged study of the particular priorities for rebuilding war-torn societies. This issue area, of interest to policy-makers, non-governmental actors, and academics alike, is often referred to as *peace-building*. While the recent growth of analysis has produced a number of different definitions of "peace-building" (and even different terminology such as "peace development" and "civilian peacekeeping"), there is an emerging consensus on the goal of post-conflict reconstruction: reestablishing the institutional framework and supporting political culture for a self-sustaining, stable, and inclusionary democracy. There is also a widely perceived need for donor coordination in order to make reconstruction interventions timely and effective.

The objective of this roundtable consultation was to identify specific institutional responses that will support *sustainable reconstruction* at the local level. Thus the broad policy approach is to support local capacity-building for long-term reconstruction and stability, the foundation for effective peace-building. This sustainable foundations perspective differs from past approaches to rebuilding war-torn societies, which tended to focus on the institutions and structures of the state. It seeks to place policy initiatives at the level of the *basic human security needs* of local peoples and communities emerging from war.

Recent research on post-conflict reconstruction has also highlighted two important realities which analysts and policy-makers must keep in mind. The first is that it is neither useful nor correct to presume that conflicts are comparable from one case to another, as generic phenomena - they are highly *context-specific* and vary widely in their defining characteristics. Such considerations as origins, scope, final settlement, quality of leadership, role of external actors, geopolitical situation, and political system will all be very different from one case to another. It follows that the lessons learned from one case may not be applicable to another.

Having noted this need to be aware of contextual variation in conflict situations, it must be argued that reconstruction is a *distinct phase* in the life of societies, which requires a distinct set of analytical tools as well as appropriate policy responses. It cannot be understood as a broadening of humanitarian relief, nor as a gradual return to development work as usual. There is as much chance for a return to violence at this stage as there is for a firm advance towards peace.