

What We Have Learned

We have learned several critical lessons since the inception of the Canadian Peacebuilding Initiative in October 1996.

First, peacebuilding is a long-term process which depends on the willingness and capacity of local populations to become engaged. One must avoid the presumption that ready-made solutions or models can be imported from outside and imposed on local populations. External participation in peacebuilding activities should consist first and foremost of supporting locally-defined efforts and actions aimed at eradicating the causes of conflict and building peace on long-lasting foundations. Both women and men need to be involved in the local definition and implementation of peacebuilding activities within communities.

Second, we must increase our conflict prevention efforts. It is

not enough to focus all energies on post-conflict reconstruction. The cost in terms of human suffering and the enormous resource demands involved in rebuilding societies after they have been torn apart by war underline this imperative. Multilateral and regional organizations have an important role to play in this respect.

Third, collaboration with multilateral institutions with a proven track record in conflict resolution and peacebuilding increases the effectiveness of international efforts to deal with highly complex and dangerous conflicts. The UN and regional organizations, such as the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the Organization of American States (OAS), the

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Commonwealth and La Francophonie, are increasingly carving out a role for themselves in conflict prevention, and Canada is working closely with them in supporting peacebuilding initiatives.

And *fourth*, mobilizing and deploying Canadian and other nations' experts and skills for peacebuilding takes time. It requires an investment in building domestic capacity for peacebuilding. Knowing what skills are available, and who has them, is a critical first step toward sharpening one's ability to respond quickly and creatively to new challenges and opportunities.



CIDA Photo: Roger LeMoynes, Bosnia.