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## Analytical Article

# Insights from International Post-Conflict Reconstruction Experiences

Since the conclusion of World War II, numerous reconstruction initiatives have been implemented in conflict zones worldwide, varying in their duration, mechanisms, and levels of success. Nevertheless, these initiatives served to highlight a fundamental truth: reconstruction is an indispensable mechanism to prevent relapse into conflict once again.

In this light, this analysis aims to examine several significant post-conflict reconstruction experiences and highlight the key lessons learned.

## Indicative International Reconstruction Experiences

Significant numbers of post-conflict reconstruction programmes have been initiated and executed, especially in the post-Cold War period, revealing the expanding range of beneficiary countries to include those that endured the consequences of international conflicts, witnessed civil wars, or were affected by the activities of armed rebel organizations. Despite the multitude of recent reconstruction initiatives, Western Europe's recovery from World War II continues to be widely regarded as the most successful.

Contrary to the common belief, the unmatched success of Western

Europe's reconstruction experience did not result from the financial aid allocated to reconstruction; rather, it was the swiftness and sustainability of the economic recovery that followed, beginning with immediate reconstruction efforts in the months following World War II's conclusion. As an illustration, Bosnia and Herzegovina received reconstruction aid estimated at approximately \$1,400 per capita subsequent to the Bosnian War in the mid-1990s, whereas Germany received reconstruction aid estimated at approximately \$200 per capita.

Following the signing of the Dayton accords in 1995, which ended the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the country's reconstruction encountered numerous obstacles. As a result, the World Bank took the lead in coordinating reconstruction efforts, implementing a two-track strategy. The first track entailed offering immediate support to efforts aimed at mitigating the aftermath of the war and the second entailed normalizing Bosnia and Herzegovina's status as a newly independent, sovereign state, that is a member of the World Bank and qualifies for aid as per the organization's regular protocols.

The assistance delivered via the initial track served as a solid foundation for the Bosnia and Herzegovina reconstruction program, as it resulted in the establishment of a special trust fund with assets totaling \$150. The reconstruction program prioritized the agricultural, energy, and transportation sectors. A total of 180 kilometers of roads were restored, and several railway lines were reinstated, with particular emphasis on those connecting to the capital, Sarajevo. Additionally, automobile fuel prices were subsidized by approximately \$33 million, water purification plants and heating networks were restarted, and schools were rehabilitated.

Notwithstanding the crucial nature of the international community's reconstruction effort in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the reconstruction process unveiled an implicit issue: the substantial and expeditious infusion of reconstruction aid established a structural reliance of the Bosnian economy on foreign aid, which went beyond merely meeting the pressing need to rectify the harm inflicted by the conflict. In other words, this reliance has evolved into a durable characteristic of the country's economy, which runs counter to Germany's post-World War II reconstruction experience, which benefited from the US Marshall Plan in rebuilding a robust and independent economy.

The Liberian case served as a compelling illustration of the challenges that are inherent in the process of reconstruction. Liberia endured a protracted conflict spanning over fifteen years, commencing in 1989 and consisting of intermittent periods of relative pacification between waves of fighting that impeded the implementation of substantial reconstruction programs, which were postponed until the conclusion of the 2005 elections, after which Ellen Johnson Sirleaf assumed the presidency of the country in early 2006. Consequently, prolonged conflict in Liberia posed a major challenge to reconstruction efforts due to the complex interplay between addressing urgent issues like infrastructure rehabilitation and resettlement of displaced persons and the need to improve overall economic performance indicators.

With substantial support from both official and unofficial entities of the international community, Liberia managed to relocate approximately 87,000 displaced people; however, over 300,000 displaced persons are still living in camps because there is not enough money to repair homes in the villages that were hit by the conflict. In addition, UNICEF assisted in the rehabilitation of numerous schools, particularly those located in rural areas. In the long run, the President of Liberia connected her reconstruction program to her economic revitalization program, which was primarily based on reducing the country's external debt and sustaining a substantial rate of GDP growth for several consecutive years.

## Five-Stage Reconstruction Model

Field experiences in reconstruction in conflict zones across sub-Saharan Africa, the Balkans, and South Asia identified common factors contributing to success and failure of these experiences, yielding valuable lessons. Among these, the following stand out as the most significant:

- The critical significance of prompt involvement in reconstruction endeavors without delay and the avoidance of drawn-out discussions before deciding on the extent and nature of involvement.
- The substantial influence of having

representatives from organizations involved in field reconstruction in conflict zones to accurately assess the actual needs based on current priorities.

- The imperative of utilizing suitable instruments to execute reconstruction initiatives while permitting some leeway in the combination of diverse methods to attain identical objectives in accordance with the constraints of the existing context.
- Integration of mechanisms for coordinating and executing reconstruction efforts into treaties and agreements pertaining to the transition from conflict to peace, in order to prevent reconstruction efforts from becoming a point of contention between the disputing parties and ensure that these efforts are legally protected with the agreement of the parties involved.

In light of these insights, international donor institutions (led by the World Bank) devised a five-stage framework to address reconstruction requirements throughout the different phases of the conflict without having to wait for the conclusion of combat operations between the parties to the conflict in order to prevent increasing the cost of reconstruction operations. This five-stage model encompasses the following:

- **Phase One:** This phase entails evaluating the situation of the country in question that is experiencing severe conflict to amass adequate information that guarantee a prompt and efficient response by analyzing various quantitative and qualitative indicators and consulting a variety of domestic and international bodies that have direct communication capabilities with the affected regions to ascertain the true reconstruction requirements.

- **Phase Two:** This stage is dedicated to the development of a transitional support strategy. Its main objectives are to establish crucial tasks to be carried out in the conflict zone and to identify areas of convergence between the strategy of the international organization and the national recovery plans that are collaboratively implemented by governments, local communities, national and international civil society organizations, relief organizations affiliated with international entities, such as the United Nations, and continental and sub-regional organizations.

While the conflict may continue into this second phase, World Bank strategies frequently link early reconstruction efforts to peacekeeping and violence-cessation mechanisms. Typically, the second phase culminates in the formulation of an elaborate strategy comprising a precise operational framework that elucidates the World Bank's obligations, risk assessment, engagement mechanisms in reconstruction endeavors, and operational recommendations for regional and national entities tasked with strategy implementation.

- **Phase Three:** This phase encompasses preliminary endeavors to execute reconstruction operations, which entail an immediate reaction to the most critical requirements. At this stage, the element of speed assumes heightened significance. On the one hand, this phase shows the initial indications of a tangible reaction in conflict-affected regions in an effort to facilitate reconstruction. On the other hand, these preliminary endeavors are regarded as the foundational stones of subsequent endeavors to achieve peace and dissuade the involved parties from intensifying hostilities.



In operational terms, this phase is characterized by the operational restoration of critical infrastructure and fundamental facilities to ensure life can resume in the most impacted regions. This involves the restoration and operation of hospitals, schools, and the headquarters of organizations entrusted with providing public services, as well as the reconstruction and upkeep of clean water, energy, and communications infrastructure that has been damaged.

Additionally, during this stage, measures are taken to eliminate any potential hazards to residents' lives, such as mines, explosives, and military waste. Furthermore, refugee and displaced camps are rehabilitated to ensure their temporary stability and prevent

the emergence of new patterns of random population movement, which could disrupt early reconstruction endeavors. Operationally, reconstruction efforts at this stage focus on providing assistance to public institutions in carrying out their responsibilities. This includes rehabilitating or establishing security services, reorganizing local governance structures, and enhancing their abilities to address challenging situations.

- **Phase Four:** Initiatives for reconstruction in this phase commence subsequent to the cessation of military operations and direct hostilities between the warring factions, subsequent to the actual conclusion of the conflict. It signifies the initiation of a potentially fruitful process to bring peace between the parties. Protecting civilians in their areas of concentration and ensuring they have access to basic necessities is not enough at this phase; long-term planning is also required to ensure that substantial reconstruction operations commence as part of economic and social recovery endeavors.

The aim of this phase is to establish connections between the conflict-affected regions and their wider geographical environs, either within the state or, in the case of border regions, beyond it, so that ties and connections between surrounding areas and communities are restored in order to create a broad network of interactions that guarantee the availability of exterior support for security, stability, and reconstruction efforts, taking advantage of the generally stable circumstances in the immediate neighborhood.

- **Phase Five:** During this phase, normalcy is restored to its pre-conflict trajectory, and a stable outlook is established, providing feasible prospects for consistent and sustainable economic expansion.

**In conclusion,** the aforementioned insights and the integrated framework they generated for reconstruction in conflict zones constitute a valuable body of knowledge that can be applied to a variety of future situations involving the critical necessity and urgent requirement of reconstruction efforts to establish peace and ensure their long-term viability, given their proven generalizability that goes beyond the particulars of individual cases.

