

# All Reconstruction is Local: Using Local Governance to Bring Peace to Postconflict Countries

by Elizabeth Royall

Establishing democratic governance in postconflict countries is the trillion-dollar-challenge of the twenty-first century. The international community has no shortage of attempts at democratic governance but few success stories. However, the accumulated conventional wisdom of rapid-fire elections and propping up a national government with massive aid and Western-style institutions has not worked. Rather than promoting stability, democracy, and effective governance in postwar countries, it creates a rentier state rife with corruption. Instead, local governance mechanisms should be shaped around existing cultural structures while providing democratic accountability. Whether or not capable governance can take hold in postconflict countries will determine whether civil wars and failed states continue to proliferate.

## Why does Postconflict Policy Matter?

Perhaps no international endeavor (other than war itself) has been so costly and had such paltry results as postconflict reconstruction.<sup>1</sup> The United Nations (UN) alone has spent an estimated \$69 billion on 64 peacekeeping operations since 1948.<sup>2</sup> That number is dwarfed by the amount that the U.S. government's reconstruction expenditures between its military and civilian agencies. The U.S. Departments of Defense and State/USAID spent \$421.1 billion for FY2003-2011 in the "postconflict" period of Afghanistan.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, amid thousands of casualties and billions of dollars in assistance, postconflict states largely remain fragile. Half to two-thirds of postconflict countries revert to war within a decade.<sup>4</sup> The results are not compatible with the expectations or expenditures. Because most civil wars are actually continuations of previous conflicts, keeping the peace in postconflict countries would be the single most effective way of reducing civil war.<sup>5</sup> The track record of creating democratic governments in postconflict countries, a major goal of international reconstruction, is even more uneven. Of the nineteen major peacebuilding operations since 1989, only two were liberal democracies within five years of the

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<sup>1</sup> Postconflict or postwar (used interchangeably in this paper) reconstruction is used to describe reconstruction efforts in countries after the peak of civil or international war. A level of violence or conflict may still be present, but the thrust of the effort is on winning the peace rather than winning the war. While "postconflict" or "postwar" is a bit of a misnomer, it is meant to eliminate reconstruction efforts following natural disasters or those done simply for humanitarian reasons.

<sup>2</sup> "Peacekeeping Fact Sheet," United Nations Peacekeeping, May 31, 2011, Accessed July 20, 2011.  
<http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/resources/statistics/factsheet.shtml>

<sup>3</sup> Amy Belasco, "The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11," Congressional Research Service March 29, 2011 (Accessed July 17, 2011), p. 17  
<http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL33110.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Paul Collier, *War, Guns, and Votes: Democracy in Dangerous Places*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 2010), 75; Severine Autesserre, "Hobbes and the Congo: Frames, Local Violence, and International Intervention," *International Organization*, 2009: 249-280, 250.

<sup>5</sup> Collier, *War, Guns, and Votes*, 75.

missions' start. Nine countries did not meet any definition of democracy.<sup>6</sup> Why have such sincere, wide-ranging, personnel and fiscally-expensive operations had such a dismal track record?

This paper will first examine the postconflict reconstruction paradigm and its flaws, then address common challenges facing postconflict reconstruction efforts and the relative merits and failings of national and local governance in these contexts. Somaliland will be examined as an alternate model of radical decentralization and indigenous self-governance in postwar conflicts, and finally, recommendations for future postconflict reconstruction efforts will be presented.

Much of the terminology used in the subject of this paper are steeped in connotations and loaded meanings that lead to misreadings. In this paper, democracy will be defined as a government that is responsive to its citizens' needs and contains elements of balance of power and checks and balances as well as the capability to induct or remove a leader by popular consent. Reconstruction, likewise, is defined as promoting peace and self-reliance through building and facilitating governance mechanisms and practices that address underlying tensions.

## **The Reconstruction Paradigm**

The United States, the UN, and others in the business of postconflict reconstruction have developed standard operating procedures over the past two decades: a national conference to form a negotiated peace settlement, write a constitution, and select an interim leader; elections for national office within a year or two; defense institution building and security sector reform (military, police and judiciary); and ongoing efforts to consolidate democracy. These steps and expertise assume a national focus—the State Department's 2005 Post-Conflict Reconstruction Essential Task document outlines 54 essential tasks, of which only one focuses on sub-national governance.<sup>7</sup> The mixed success rate of establishing democracy is attributed to failures to provide sufficient commitment, money, and/or soldiers and trainers rather than a faulty strategy. However, a more careful analysis of postconflict reconstruction efforts identifies problems beyond resource levels.

## **Problems with the Reconstruction Paradigm**

This well-meaning model has not performed better because it relies on 1) faulty assumptions, 2) external actors' ability to understand a country's unique situation, 3) an almost exclusive focus on national-level leaders and institutions, 4) elections as a cure-all, 5) a dismissal of the normative and religious underpinnings of the rule of law, and 6) problematic aid and development strategy. These problems have conflated to undermine reconstruction efforts.

*Flawed Assumptions.* The postconflict reconstruction paradigm's assumptions do not stand up to careful scrutiny. First, the international community believes that Western national institutions can be replicated in postconflict countries; second, that indigenous and external actors share a common view of the situation and the way forward; and third, that the international community has the money, personnel, and attention span to rebuild and sustain countries until they are self-sufficient.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Christoph Zurcher, "Building Democracy While Building Peace," *Journal of Democracy*, 2011: 81-93, 81.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of State. "Post-Conflict Reconstruction Essential Tasks." Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization. April 2005. Accessed July 22, 2011 at <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/161791.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Pierre Englebert and Denis M. Tull, "Postconflict Reconstruction in Africa: Flawed Ideas About Failed States," *International Security*, 2008: 106-125, 118.

In many countries, the type of institutions promoted by reconstruction efforts never existed or was never anything more than a hollow shell. Even if such institutions did exist, oftentimes (particularly in Africa) they are colonial institutions that contributed to state failure and conflict. Furthermore, peace settlements often bring all the combatants together in power-sharing agreements, reversing Clausewitz's dictum and creating a political environment that is a continuation of war by other means. Finally, postconflict reconstruction assumes ambitious, long-reaching goals without the political will, ability, or resources to accomplish those objectives. The international community comes in with a full-throated stump speech and leaves with a whimper, quietly claiming a limited victory and withdrawing.

*Misunderstanding the Country.* The second problem with the conventional wisdom is that it depends on a set of standards can be applied to a wide variety of postconflict situations. The model may be a set of ideal conditions, but they often do not address the roots of the problems and the unique history of the country. The problem comes when international actors attempt to mold the country's institutions and society into an imitation of themselves, ignoring how foreign and disparate the juxtaposition may be.

*An Exclusive Focus on the National Level.* Within weeks of the start of a reconstruction mission, the capital city is flooded with soldiers, military and government advisors, humanitarian workers, reporters, and contractors of every flavor setting up command centers, hooking up generators, and ratcheting up rent and hotel rates. The mission and aid may not be felt outside the capital for years, if at all. The international community deals with the national government and institutions almost exclusively, regardless of whether the national government is the best actor to accomplish the goals of reconstruction. Most contemporary conflict sources are domestic, so treating violence as a national problem rather than an escalation of local and regional conflict misses the root of the problem, especially because the causes and level of violence can vary greatly across areas.<sup>9</sup> Only looking at one level of analysis and negotiating with one national leader provides simplicity for which international actors are so desperate and the postconflict situations are so bereft, yet it distorts the situation and the proposed solutions.

*Relying on Elections as a Cure.* Elections provide a great success story, photo opportunities of purple thumbs, a clear winner, and reams of data to analyze and pick apart. However, elections in postconflict countries rarely provide the legitimacy, happy ending, and popular consensus that they are designed to produce. Elections are inherently divisive. In postconflict countries, there is so much at stake that the losers may not accept the outcome and fight back—with press conferences or guns.<sup>10</sup> Elections become a continuation of and an impetus for conflict, not a solution. This is not to dismiss democracy, but to argue that elections are not the solution, but the fruit of the solution; the solution is security and political order.<sup>11</sup>

A subset of this problem is reconstruction's dependence on transformational leadership. The international community looks for a George Washington or Nelson Mandela figure that will unite the country and selflessly and fearlessly enact the West's laundry list of reforms. This all too often leads to disappointment and disillusionment, both among the indigenous population and the

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<sup>9</sup>Autesserre, "Hobbes and the Congo," 260.

<sup>10</sup> Department of the Army, *Stability Operations FM 3-07*, (Washington, D.C.: Army Field Manual, 2008), 1-18.

<sup>11</sup> Eric Patterson, *Ending Wars Well: Order, Justice, and Conciliation in Contemporary Post-Conflict*, (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, forthcoming), 24.

international community. While visionary leadership is important, leadership should create nations—not personas—crafting a shared identity with a hopeful future.

*Misunderstanding the Normative Values of Governance.* Political institutions—and especially rule of law—are grounded in normative beliefs informed by indigenous religious and cultural values. While scholars are quick to use childbirth metaphors to describe new countries, the development of law and political institutions is far closer to evolution: it is measured in centuries rather than months. This process can rarely be cut short. “One of the great problems with trying to import modern Western legal systems into societies where they did not exist previously, in fact, is the lack of correspondence between the imported law and the society’s existing social norms. Sometimes the importation of legal rules can speed up a process of social change,” writes political scientist Francis Fukuyama. “But if the gap between law and lived values is too large, the rule of law itself will not take hold.”<sup>12</sup> Sadly, in Africa and the Greater Middle East, where much postconflict reconstruction takes place, the West has more often undermined rule of law than supported it, further separating law and lived values. The two must be fused for the rule of law to be real.

*Aid Creates Perverse Incentives.* The nature of aid distorts the incentives to become independent and fiscally responsible. Money pours in during the first year, when the indigenous government is largely unable to deal with such hefty sums or lead large development projects. Lack of indigenous capacity encourages many donors to funnel the aid into contractors, NGOs, and Western military forces to attempt large projects quickly (and at great cost) instead of the host government. In Afghanistan, 75% of aid is routed outside the government budget.<sup>13</sup> Finally, aid frequently has what Frederik Galtung and Martin Tisne call the “potlatch effect,” where resources are provided with little consideration of what the indigenous country wants or can absorb, making corruption and waste all but a foregone conclusion.<sup>14</sup> While there are frequently short-term gains achieved by a quick influx of cash and hastily-constructed projects, the pattern of corruption and sidelining the indigenous government backfire a few years later in reconstruction, when the states institutions are tested, corruption becomes apparent, aid drops, and high expectations are frustrated.<sup>15</sup> Financial accountability and other standards are usually inconsistently—if ever—enforced, further disconnecting aid from performance.<sup>16</sup> Finally, the amount of external money dwarfs whatever tax revenue the country is able to secure, making the government answerable to donor countries rather than their citizens.<sup>17</sup> The two groups frequently have different interests and priorities.

## **The Role of Local Governance in Postconflict Countries**

After expounding upon problems facing postconflict countries, the time comes to begin digging out of the hole of failed policies and good intentions to more productive policies. The role of local governance in postconflict countries has only limited scholarship to pick apart, with only asides or an anecdote or two about a local leader or town outperforming the rest of the country in most books and papers on reconstruction, development, democratization, and/or conflict resolution.

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<sup>12</sup> Francis Fukuyama, “Transitions to the Rule of Law,” *Journal of Democracy*, 2010: 33-44, 37.

<sup>13</sup> Fredrik Galtung and Martin Tisne, “A New Approach to Postwar Reconstruction,” *Journal of Democracy* 2009: 93-107, 96-97.

<sup>14</sup> Galtung and Tisne, “A New Approach to Postwar Reconstruction,” 96.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>16</sup> Dombisa Moyo, *Dead Aid: Why Aid is Not Working and How There is a Better Way for Africa* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009), xix.

<sup>17</sup> Moyo, *Dead Aid*, 103.

Most of the expertise exists among NGOs, who are inclined to work with grassroots and local government organizations but are short on scholarship. Sadly, external actors tend to see local or informal organizations as too far “in the weeds” to understand or to be effective.

However popular movements and support are far more likely to come from the ground up than top-down by forming a concrete foundation for political accountability and popular representation.<sup>18</sup> National government naturally involves abstractions that local governments can better avoid. Most government services that affect the day-to-day lives of citizens and communities are (or can be) provided by local or district governments, such as education, health, police, justice, real estate, and road services.<sup>19</sup> The difference is that local and district governments are stuck enforcing or implementing national policy. The alternative is granting local governments with the power and the resources to decide policy as well as administer it.

Small-scale governance reforms and programs (sometimes called “small-g” programs) can better work with the grain of society, encouraging a participatory discourse that keeps citizens invested, informed, and involved in their communities’ deliverance of public goods.<sup>20</sup> Brian Levy writes:

More participatory local governance, which may in turn promote greater accountability for the quality of local service provision...can, for one thing, show a society the benefits that come from choosing collaboration over conflict. As such, small-g programs may serve as steppingstones to a politics that centers on programs and the public interest rather than the jockeyings of cliques and clientele. Nor should we underrate the degree to which progress at the small-g level can help to sustain the forward momentum of inclusive, labor-demanding economic growth.<sup>21</sup>

By keeping money, government, and projects local, supply is better matched to demand for government services, thus increasing flexibility, accountability, and service delivery.<sup>22</sup> People can better see where their tax money is going and express their opinion (through town councils or elections) about whether money is being spent effectively on the right projects.

Local governance has particular benefits for postconflict countries. Decentralization divides up power and resources throughout a country, which results in less contact and conflict among groups from different areas while also giving more groups a “piece of the pie” and thus incentive to accept the existing order rather than returning to violence. Strengthening subnational sources of power can help to accommodate diverse local demands and different visions of the postconflict state while investing larger numbers of participants in the political system and enhancing responsiveness. Because local government has better information about the specific nature of local conflict, they can do a better job preventing, managing, and solving problems through local norms. Finally, if local government can be more responsive to the constituents’ needs and give people recourse to voice their grievances, it will reduce the need for rebellion in the first place.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Englebert and Tull, “Postconflict Reconstruction in Africa,” 128.

<sup>19</sup> Kaplan, *Fixing Fragile States*, 55.

<sup>20</sup> Brian Levy, “The Case for Principled Agnosticism,” *Journal of Democracy* 2010: 27-35, 32.

<sup>21</sup> Levy, “The Case for Principled Agnosticism,” 34.

<sup>22</sup> U.S. Agency for Development, *Democratic Decentralization Programming Handbook*, Government Handbook. (Washington, D.C.: USAID, 2009), 25.

<sup>23</sup> USAID, *Democratic Decentralization Programming Handbook*, 21.

However, local government does not exist in a vacuum. Its effectiveness is highly influenced by its relationship with higher levels of government. Poorly decentralized states create local governments that remain pawns of the national governments. For example, if the national government cannot exert its power across the entire country, it may rely on local governments delivering the support and acquiescence of its populations to the national government in exchange for resources. In this case, the decentralization is subject to national-government meddling and politicization that will undercut the benefits and effectiveness of local government.<sup>24</sup> As such, local autonomy (of power and money) is necessary for decentralization to achieve its potential.

While efforts thus far have been rather limited and not well-publicized, there have been some important and illustrative successes. Uganda and Somaliland have both exhibited relatively strong indigenous institutions at the local level. While far from perfect societies or countries, such indigenous efforts have done better than their externally-sponsored efforts by focusing on social contracting and building substantive foundations.<sup>25</sup> In Uganda, decentralization gave substantial power to local councils. However, most funding was appropriated from the national government, undercutting local council autonomy and opening the councils up to national meddling and election tampering. Projects that involved the population in a more active role had greater success: a community-monitoring program that provided residents in 50 communities how their village ranked in child mortality figures and informed citizens what health services to which they were entitled. Within a year, child deaths declined 33%.<sup>26</sup> The information allowed people to have a voice to demand more from their local councils and national government.

Local government must be responsive to its citizens and citizens must have the ability to voice their approval or disapproval of various policies. In postconflict countries, this is best done in a non-confrontational approach that encourages effective, legitimate rule rather than destabilizing the community. For example, a Timor-Leste community monitoring program included a forum for citizens and local officials to review and discuss findings, providing feedback on the integrity and quality of services while giving officials the opportunity to respond and make changes.<sup>27</sup> Feedback and governance mechanisms need not be a part of a formal institution so long as it has enough societal support that local officials cannot simply disregard it without consequence. Informal linkages can provide flexibility when necessary, present an alternative when formal authority disappoints, and encourage better institutional performance. Even if local officials are appointed, accountability can work through complaint adjudication boards, citizen report cards, or local civil society groups.<sup>28</sup>

Resource constraints are a common problem for local governments; national politicians have little incentive to give money to local governments. But without sufficient funds or autonomy the potential for development will be undercut and decentralization efforts will largely be symbolic.<sup>29</sup> As such, aid (at both the national and subnational) levels should be tailored to reinforce taxation. Taxes perform an important role in democracies—by “buying-in,” citizens have a motivation to care how the government spends its money. States that do not depend on taxation (funding itself through

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<sup>24</sup> Gina M.S. Lambricht, *Decentralization in Uganda: Explaining Successes and Failures in Local Governance*, (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010), 67.

<sup>25</sup> Englebert and Tull, “Postconflict Reconstruction in Africa,” 135

<sup>26</sup> Levy, “The Case for Principled Agnosticism,” 32.

<sup>27</sup> Galtung and Tisne, “A New Approach to Postwar Reconstruction,” 104.

<sup>28</sup> USAID, *Democratic Decentralization Programming Handbook*, 27.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

resources like oil, for example) do not need their citizens for money or approval, encouraging autocracy. Postconflict states have a similar predicament—aid makes them dependent on the international community, not their citizens, for approval and money.<sup>30</sup> Money should be given on a matching basis, encouraging the nation to develop capacities to levy, collect, and manage taxes so that indigenous countries remain dependent on their own people for financial support. Aid and tax money that is intended for local programs or costs should be raised or given at the local level, reducing its vulnerability to corruption, mismanagement, political power plays, and overhead costs.

While this section has encouraged the primacy of local governance mechanisms, this is not to say that the national government is unnecessary or unimportant. A dysfunctional or too-weak national government will inhibit local governance's success. First of all, the national government must be strong enough to counter and/or remove a local leader or government that becomes parasitic, corrupt, or authoritarian. Likewise, it must enforce the constitution and other national laws that the local governments work within, including protecting civil liberties and human rights.<sup>31</sup> The national government must be able to guard the border and provide external security (with international assistance, if necessary), pursue international negotiation when needed, and can provide an information clearinghouse of best practices across the nation.

Finally, part of the promise of local governance is its reliance on indigenous solutions in self-government. Nations cannot be fundamentally changed from outside—they must rely on their indigenous population to be sustainable. Robert Kaplan argues:

International action should be first and foremost about facilitating local processes, about leveraging local capacities, and about complementing local actions, so that local citizens can create governance systems appropriate to their surroundings. States work effectively when they are a logical reflection of their underlying sociopolitical, historical, geographical, human resource, and economic environments, and when they are deeply integrated with the societies they purport to represent, able to harness the informal institution and loyalties of their citizens....Countries must be built bottom-up, for they will rarely succeed top-down...Helping underdeveloped countries should not be about propping up the state, but rather about connecting it—and making it accountable where possible—to its surrounding society.<sup>32</sup>

Reliance on indigenous solutions requires a greater amount of trust and faith in postconflict countries than the international community's paternalistic attitude and policies have demonstrated, but it is necessary for indigenous self-reliance.

### **The Unlikely Success Story of Local Governance in Somaliland**

The territory of Somaliland has everything against it. Yet it found an endogenous solution to common postconflict problems. Meanwhile, between 1991 and 1995 there were seventeen foreign-led efforts at national reconciliation—none were successful<sup>33</sup>—“the world's foremost graveyard of

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<sup>30</sup> Kaplan, *Fixing Fragile States*, 52.

<sup>31</sup> USAID, *Democratic Decentralization Programming Handbook*, 26.

<sup>32</sup> Kaplan, *Fixing Fragile States*, 50.

<sup>33</sup> Kaplan, *Fixing Fragile States*, 143.

externally sponsored state-building initiatives.”<sup>34</sup> While the internationally-supported transitional government in Mogadishu (ING) cannot exercise authority over more than a few neighborhoods of the city, other areas of Somalia are pushing for more autonomy and self-government. These regions, and Somaliland in particular, consolidated alternate governance and largely disregarded the internationally-recognized government in Mogadishu.

When Major General Siad Barre’s authoritarian regime collapsed in 1991, the formerly British protectorate Somaliland declared independence. Upon secession, the Somali National Movement and Council of Elders handed power over to a civilian administration and facilitated a consensus-based and inclusive process of dialogue. Conferences were organized and paid for by local and diaspora Somalilanders. Composed of elders representing all of the main Somaliland clans and concluding on January 26, 1991, the conference announced a cease fire between three rebel organizations, declared independence from Somalia, and established a set of principles to avoid future conflict.<sup>35</sup> The agreement dictated that each clan was responsible for policing its own area, returning prisoners and undamaged property, and “forgetting” grievances from the war.<sup>36</sup> The conferences and dialogue continued throughout the fits and starts of conflict that lasted through 1996, when the new administration took power with widespread support and legitimacy.<sup>37</sup> It was initiated and led by Somalilanders and ignored by the international intervention and the rest of Somalia. No country, then or now, has recognized Somaliland as an independent state.<sup>38</sup>

Somaliland’s system of governance can check the international community’s status quo approach to postconflict assumptions. Communities are not passive victims of government failure—when necessary, they will create arrangements to provide basic security and services to minimize risk and increase predictability in a dangerous environment.<sup>39</sup> Somaliland has successfully navigated a 2001 constitutional referendum, 2002 local elections, 2003 presidential campaign, 2005 legislative elections (with 246 candidates and 1.3 million ballots, the 700 domestic observers, and 76 foreign observers declared the election “the freest and most transparent democratic exercises ever staged in the Horn of Africa”), and a 2010 presidential election.<sup>40</sup> When President Egal died in 2002 while abroad, power passed peacefully to Vice President Dahit Riyale Kahin. Riyale won the 2003 presidential election with a margin of only 80 votes out of 500,000 ballots, and after the court appeal failed, the results were accepted peacefully.<sup>41</sup>

The level of government producing the most amount of governance—with the least amount of external aid—is the municipalities and neighborhoods through informal and overlapping groupings of elders.<sup>42</sup> While Somaliland has experienced violence between subclans, fights are shorter and less lethal than previously due to clan elders’ intervention to resolve conflict and limited public support for fighting.<sup>43</sup> Both violence and crime have decreased significantly, particularly when compared to

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<sup>34</sup> Ken Menkhaus, “Governance Without Government in Somalia: Spoilers, State Building and the Politics of Coping,” *International Security* Winter 2006/7, 74.

<sup>35</sup> Michael Walls, “The Emergence of a Somali State: Building Peace from Civil War in Somaliland,” *African Affairs*, 2009: 371-89, 379.

<sup>36</sup> Walls, “The Emergence of a Somali State,” 382.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Coyne, *After War*, 142.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>40</sup> Kaplan, “The Remarkable Story of Somaliland,” 150

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>42</sup> Menkhaus, “Governance Without Government in Somalia,” 85.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.



Mogadishu and southern Somalia. Governance is based on town meetings where all adult males are entitled to speak and decisions are made by consensus—demonstrating a high degree of egalitarianism that evokes stories of ancient Athens. Processes of adjudication, mediation, negotiation, and consensus building are emphasized and are based on transparency and good faith. This local governance in Somaliland is largely been invisible to external actors that continue to focus solely on the central government in Mogadishu.

Somaliland's governance success has much to recommend it to other countries and to challenge peacebuilding's assumptions. While acknowledging the important role of clans in Somalilanders' lives, the constitution encourages consensus by requiring political parties to have significant support in all six regions of Somaliland. Their first president—Mohamed Haji Ibrahim Egal—negotiated state control of port revenue, rebuilt government buildings and civil service, reopened the central bank and established a new currency, incorporated militias into a national army, and cracked down on illegal roadblocks and fees. In addition, Somaliland made its own license plates and airline while fostering a booming economy. The private sector provides electricity, water, education, and healthcare; three new universities have been built and private hospitals and schools are rapidly multiplying; telephone charges are among the cheapest in Africa.<sup>44</sup> Kaplan expounds:

The public feels it has a strong stake together with a robust sense of national identity and patriotic pride. It has produced an unprecedented degree of interconnectedness between the state and society. . .in stark contrast to the past when previous regimes received enormous infusions of external assistance without which they could not survive, and as a result became completely divorced from the economic foundations of their own society...Although many of its governing structures need work and many of its politicians, bureaucrats, and judges lack experience, Somaliland has already passed a number of democratic milestones that few states in Africa and the Middle East have reached.<sup>45</sup>

These impressive results were achieved despite holding some of the lowest development indicators, including a life expectancy of only 42 years, a child mortality rate over 25%, and adult literacy under 20%.<sup>46</sup> Somaliland stands in contrast to attempts at Western-style governance in Mogadishu, what Kaplan calls “one of postcolonial Africa's worst mismatches between conventional state structures and indigenous institutions.”<sup>47</sup> The demonstration of conflict resolution and state building exhibited by the conferences are an example of consensus-based democracy that resolved some deeply divisive conflicts and settled complex political decisions.<sup>48</sup> The Somaliland budget is relatively small, at \$20-30 million a year, but built functional ministries, a public school system, a respected police force, and municipal governments that are among the most responsive and effective administrative units in all of Somalia.<sup>49</sup> While the local governance systems are fragile, they are widely respected and a source of pride, unlike many international efforts at governance in Somalia.

The international community should refocus on leveraging traditional indigenous governance forces rather than trying to squeeze countries into inappropriate Western models of what a country should

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<sup>44</sup> Kaplan, “The Remarkable Story of Somaliland,” 149-50.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>48</sup> Walls, “The Emergence of a Somali State,” 389.

<sup>49</sup> Menkhaus, “Governance Without Government in Somalia,” 91.

look like, acknowledging that external assistance may have little effect on whether a postconflict state succeeds or fails. Postconflict efforts should focus on harmonizing a national government to existing local systems of governance.<sup>50</sup> As much as possible, international involvement should be limited to foster self-reliance, self-confidence, and national identity.

### **A New Model of Postconflict Reconstruction**

A different approach to postconflict reconstruction should follow a drastic localization and devolving of governance basic services. The high level of participation required by local governance will allow citizens to have a stake in the new order and give them valuable experience. While playing lip service to promoting indigenous self-reliance, many reconstruction and development plans are unwilling to actually let indigenous communities take the lead. Unless they do so, the arrangement will not last. Decentralization can encourage civil society growth and political participation by lowering the barriers to entry and increasing the ability to influence outcomes. “It has become increasingly evident that citizens need a stake in their government for democratic consolidation to happen,” concludes USAID’s analysis of decentralization. “Citizens who value their participation in subnational government are less likely to support non-democratic regime changes at the national level.”<sup>51</sup> Likewise, subnational governments can train residents in the political system, impart skills, and hone leadership while also checking the power of a national government should it overstep.<sup>52</sup> In addition, studies have shown that people are more willing to pay taxes that will benefit people they have kinship, ethnic, or religious ties to rather than paying taxes that will benefit those different from themselves—even if they are countrymen.<sup>53</sup> Human nature as such encourages the bulk of taxation to be at the local level because then citizens would more directly benefit themselves and their neighbors.

An example of this radical localization at work is the World Bank’s National Solidarity Program in Afghanistan. The initiative organizes elected councils that vote to determine spending and development priorities, providing a forum for communities to play a role in development and work out their differences in the open while getting citizens actively involved in governance. Communities are required to draw up a project budget, manage the funds, and contribute to the project (usually by providing free labor and/or locally-available supplies). A Human Rights Watch report determined that NSP-built schools were less likely to be attacked by the Taliban than other schools and the NSP promotes community accountability.<sup>54</sup> The success of NSP has been such that it has spread to two-thirds of Afghanistan’s approximately 24,000 villages and could expand in size and scope.<sup>55</sup> These councils can adapt and evolve along with the skills and ideas of the people it serves, both using and renewing the public good of human capacity.

Taking what works in the NSP and in Somaliland’s experience and expanding it to give indigenous communities more responsibility to take ownership and steer reconstruction, ultimately make them more connected to indigenous norms and more likely to be accepted while being less resource-intensive on donor countries. The goal should be to 1) empower and enfranchise communities, 2) provide governance, and 3) complete projects to secure confidence in a better future. Additionally,

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<sup>50</sup> Menkhaus, “Governance Without Government in Somalia,” 106.

<sup>51</sup> USAID, *Democratic Decentralization Programming Handbook*, 23.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Collier, *Wars, Guns, and Votes*, 59.

<sup>54</sup> Galtung and Tisne, “A New Approach to Postwar Reconstruction,” 103.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 103-4.

radical localization allows for natural variation to accommodate a country's subcultures and ethnic groups. Each village would have a leader who would be chosen customarily or elected. Each village would also have a council—with women and minorities—that may be elected, appointed, or voluntary, depending on the community's norms and culture. Experience with quotas of women in government shows that while in the first round of elections, women candidates are less qualified and respected than their male counterparts, such problems often fade by the second and third rounds of elections.<sup>56</sup> Each council would be given seed money from which to develop the first village budget, initiate the first reconstruction project(s), and draw up a taxation plan. The vast majority of tax revenue will be collected, managed, and disbursed locally. Decisions will be made on a consensus basis, using negotiation and consultation to build support and agreement. Councils could apply for grants from donor countries (out of a common pool) for specific projects that tax revenue will not be able to cover; aid will be given on the strength, feasibility, and necessity of the project and the village's track record on previous aid and projects. The village leader or council will also appoint or elect representatives of the town for the district, province, and national government. Depending on the amount of business before the representatives at the various levels, this may be a part or full time job (with corresponding payment).

For projects/issues that require district, state, or national involvement, villages will have to decide how much of their money to devote to municipal, district, state, and national capabilities. Such funding decisions will act as a de facto vote of confidence in the various levels of government, providing them incentive to perform well and invest in capacity-building to gain tax and grant money. For example, if a village wants to build a road from their village to another, they could either negotiate funding/project design between the two villages or request the district, state, or national government administer and complete the project. Upper-level governments would likely have additional resources (such as a cement mixer, engineers, etc.) that would speed up the project, lower the cost, and/or improve the quality of the project. After the cost of the project was determined, the money for the project would be given to the relevant level of government plus an additional percentage of the project to pay for administration costs. Local governments would also be encouraged to build capacity so they can do more projects on their own and not pay the administrative fee. If a level of government is corrupt or inefficient, it will get less money, creating an incentive for good governance. The higher-level governments will likely languish and remain under-funded for awhile, but more centralized institutions and governance will evolve on an as-needed basis to tackle larger projects and problems. Upper-level governance will increase as it 1) proves its value, 2) invests in capacity, and 3) earns the faith of the people.

This process may start out rather undemocratic and local governments may fall victim to warlords or various strongmen. However, the democratic processes put in place, as well as the need to secure funds, will help limit bad behavior. Government and history tends to have heavy path dependence, so once a process and incentives are put in place and closely guarded, positive developments are likely to continue in a virtuous cycle.<sup>57</sup> A strongman may be able to dominate the local council and impose taxes that are his to squander, but he will be unable to get grant money due to his bad behavior and he will risk popular unrest and dismissal by the council. Particularly if one village is languishing while a neighboring one succeeds, popular disapproval can have a real effect, as the

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<sup>56</sup> Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression Into Opportunity For Women Worldwide*, (New York: Random House, 2010), 212.

<sup>57</sup> David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 143.

Ugandan child mortality monitoring project demonstrated. Not every destructive behavior can be prevented, but some safeguards can be put in place.

As for the role of the national government and the international community, the national government will draw up a constitution protecting basic human rights (e.g. nondiscrimination, freedom of speech and religion) and national laws that lower-level governments will have to work within. Any gross violation will result in dissolution of the council/leader and/or intervention. However, this model is much less external-resource intensive. The onus of governance and funding is on the indigenous population. The international community may be needed at the onset to do basic training and help organize the local governments, but the local government is designed to imitate basic tribal institutions already in place and establish the minimal laws of the land. Some advisors will be necessary to supervise towns and districts for misconduct and provide additional guidance as necessary. As villages and councils develop a positive track record, the number of international supervisors will be reduced. Grant money may be made available on a case-by-case basis (particularly in the first years), but the international community will not be committed to funding basic services indefinitely. Furthermore, the model will address the common problem that countries are unable to build local and human capital and as such, development is not sustainable.

No one should expect an easy or simple transition to a new system of governance, particularly in postconflict countries. Most new democracies go through a period of confusion, crime, and corruption before recovering, and this will likely occur with the mediated state and local governance model. However, this model puts its emphasis on the inherent merit and capacities of people, not a set formula of institutions. As such, it attempts to use informal institutions already in place in many postconflict countries. The institutions are there to foster values, practices, and experience that will hopefully lead to a more consolidated democracy that is in line with the culture of the country. Success does not require fully mature or established institutions, only that their seeds are planted and their development encouraged. “The essence of state building,” write Pierre Englebert and Denis M. Tull, is to “foster state formation, that is, interaction and bargaining processes between government and society. Doing so would be a key element in the promotion of local ownership and the construction of a viable political order in postconflict countries.”<sup>58</sup> However, the disquieting truth is that successful reconstruction and democracy is not in the international community’s hands—it will depend on the indigenous people. As such, external actors’ humility and faith is needed in postconflict reconstruction.

Such a model is designed to support—rather than undercut—the cultural and religious underpinnings of rule of law and governance. “Where tacit beliefs align with the formal constitution and rules of society, most individuals will already be following the rules,” writes Christopher Coyne, “and the need for coercion to sustain the political, economic, and social orders will be minimal.”<sup>59</sup> Likewise, history suggests that small, more limited governance and rule of law set precedents that will have greater effects as the society develops the capacity to expand them, even if they are based on customary or informal rules and institutions.<sup>60</sup> Such informal social mechanisms work best in cohesive societies, but small communities can create a cohesive group within a larger, fragmented country and reap the benefits of cooperation, trust, reciprocity, civic engagement, and collective

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<sup>58</sup> Englebert and Tull, “Postconflict Reconstruction in Africa,” 138.

<sup>59</sup> Coyne, *After War*, 58.

<sup>60</sup> Fukuyama, “Transitions to the Rule of Law,” 41.

well-being.<sup>61</sup> An example is Mozambique, which after a long civil war both sides agreed to a democratic power-sharing agreement with wide-spread popularity because both parties realized that sharing power was the only way to end the war.<sup>62</sup> Likewise, opposing groups in postconflict states across the world can forge a new path just as long they see a cooperative future and governance system.

Postconflict reconstruction can prove more successful by better tying new governments to local conditions to develop legitimacy, improve competency, encourage investment and the rule of law to build a sustainable indigenous democratic process. It cannot—and should not—be imposed from outside. Local skills and supplies should be used as exclusively as possible, which will make them more sustainable, accepted, and appropriate. Gains, while initially small, will build on each other; in contrast to externally-imposed orders that tend to lose steam over time. “The hard truth is that outsiders are not necessarily more proficient than locals at building political institutions, no matter how many experts and resources they may send into a failed state,” conclude Englebert and Tull. “External reconstruction assistance, including development aid, is not always ill spent, but there are limits to what it can achieve.”<sup>63</sup> The emphasis should be on small communities, in all their beautiful and confusing complexity, providing accountability and training in the political process, building trust and consensus, and a more solid foundation for democracy and reconstruction.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

- *Intervene in postconflict countries sparingly, carefully, and with a modest agenda.* Postconflict countries can rarely create successful democracy in the West’s likeness. When the international community does intervene, it should engage indigenous leaders (at all levels) to develop productive political strategies and responsive, adaptive governance systems with a special focus on local governance and programs.
- *Start small and get local indigenous elites on board.* Moving slowly does not mean putting off difficult and important changes, but rather introducing reforms in a way that does not threaten communities yet creates a process of self-sustaining change that makes democracy and peace beneficial to indigenous leaders so that they have a stake in the future.
- *Expand economic and political opportunities across the population.* Efforts to improve the economy should work to benefit all levels of society. The economy’s success should be judged on the well-being of the weakest citizens, pursuing several policies to spread political and economic power while improving the lives of all citizens and preventing spoilers.
- *Demonstrate consistency.* Rather than withdrawing as soon as is feasible, the international community should do less for longer—remaining involved as mediators and advisors to be called upon when necessary. They should provide a security guarantee to protect against neighbors threatening the indigenous country and to discourage the indigenous country from spending money on external defense.
- *Involve citizens in monitoring corruption from the beginning.* Community-monitoring programs should be utilized alongside external observers’ analysis of likely problems to stem corruption. Preventative measures will be far more effective than trying to root out corruption once it has begun.

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<sup>61</sup> Kaplan, *Fixing Fragile States*, 40.

<sup>62</sup> Zurcher, “Building Democracy While Building Peace,” 90.

<sup>63</sup> Englebert and Tull, “Postconflict Reconstruction in Africa,” 137.

- *Let the indigenous country lead and utilize existing modes of governance and cultural endowments.* Indigenous communities should be relied upon to lead and inspire reconstruction efforts and to hold their own government accountable.

All of this is a very delicate balancing act, as is all of postconflict reconstruction.

Even if the proposed model and all of the policy recommendations are followed to the letter, postconflict reconstruction efforts will often fail and efforts at democracy will languish or return to autocracy. Yet the guidelines of encouraging small-scale, local governance and indigenous ingenuity will likely lead to more successes than any well-meaning institutional design devised and enforced by foreigners. The realization that all politics (and governance) is local has largely been absent from literature dealing with postwar or developing countries. With flexibility, faith, and trust in indigenous communities, governance and reconstruction will evolve and adapt to whatever curveballs the future holds.