Divergent systems development in post conflict countries[i]

Abstract: In this brief we aim to summarise some of the typical development challenges faced by a country in a post conflict situation, where we argue that the "rush" towards development can create a number of problems. These however can be avoided, and we spell out some of the key elements to be considered. The brief is based on experience of DAS advisors, and is particularly relevant for countries and regions such as Somaliland, Puntland, Liberia and South Sudan. Although the emphasis is placed on Africa, the solutions proposed could be applied elsewhere.

1. The issues: unintended consequences of a supply led development push

Country context: By their very nature, post-conflict countries' administration structures tend to be either largely antiquated, as a consequence of a protracted conflict, or inadequate to meet the needs of the changed reality of the role of State within a modern developing country context. Building a state's institutional capacity both for delivery of public service and for increasing transparency and accountability can go some way to building State legitimacy within the country and with the donor community. However, the very systems that are being implemented and supported within post conflict countries also have the potential of undermining the effectiveness, transparency and ultimately the legitimacy of the State. They can also exacerbate resource allocations tensions within the country that may have been the route of the original conflict.

Long-term conflict and instability within a country can degrade the human capital and experience available to a reforming government as a result of the breakdown of formal education systems and human capital flight, such as the case of countries like Southern Sudan and Somalia. This results in limited knowledge and experience in public service management, especially at the policy level, once a country is able to start a process of stabilisation and rebuilding. The fragility of the understanding of the mechanics of public service within a newly formed post conflict government combined with the pressure for reform and support from the donor community can result in a supply-led reform agenda that neither fits with nor supports stability and conflict mitigation within the country. Compounding this, the early stages of governments in transformation are generally characterised by an emphasis on the political and security stabilisation of the country at the expense of the development of institutional structures and systems that are fit for purpose. This lack of both experience and developmental direction can lead to governments effectively abdicating some of their responsibility for decision-making and planning to organisations they see as better placed for this.

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i This is one of a series of short pieces from KPMG DAS Advisors designed to show the practical application of development experience. The series covers Fragile States, Private Sector Development, Governance, and Organisational Development and Performance Improvement. This piece is written by Allan Duncan, KPMG DAS Associate Director and Head of the Fragile and Post-Conflict States unit and edited by Julio Garrido-Mirapeix, Head of DAS and Kate Hargreaves, DAS Advisor.

An Advisor's experience on the ground:

"New 'officials' were often rural people with very limited skills but anxious to make good on the years of fighting and suffering. Progress towards getting a clear direction and strategy for the government was slow. As with all other post conflict countries the levels of ability of the civil servants within a broad range of government institutions required significant support and training to establish a functional system that was so desperately needed by the citizens of the country. Out of Juba everything was destroyed – there were no services or resources so there was urgent pressure on the government to show action and results. We helped ministries organise themselves quickly for example to build hospitals, supply basic kits for health centres to get drugs to the people, and to be accountable to citizens."

Allan Duncan, DAS Project Director, South Sudan

Donor responses. Administrative structures within post-conflict environments are generally under greater stress to establish service delivery and to secure significant donor support as part of conflict mitigation and delivery of 'peace dividends' to a marginalised country. This emphasis on quick impact, in terms of reform and delivery agendas, can result in public service delivery mechanisms that take little account of the long term development and viability of the government institutions as a whole.

This causes tension between the lack of articulation and understanding within the legitimate government institution in defining the direction and prioritisation of systems development on one hand, and the pressure on donors to support a transforming government and to 'be seen to be doing something'. It can place extraordinary pressure on host governments to accept technical support at the very early stages of their development and relies on limited strategic thinking or planning by any of the parties involved. This situation leads to a high "supply push", both from donors as well as implementing companies, on largely inexperienced and overwhelmed civil servants, rather than a demand-driven approach to development.

Systems development and technical capacity support from donors and contracting agencies is no doubt well-intentioned. However, the lack of overall planning and strategic oversight of the development of the government can lead to the adoption of systems that are not compatible or able to communicate across Ministries once installed. Although the lack of compatibility of systems within a post conflict country may not appear to be as high a priority as getting the Ministries functional and delivering services, the lack of ability to communicate and integrate can have significant effect on the institutional culture. Decision-making and lines of authority within the government will be compromised and that will have implications well beyond the functionality of individual government departments.

Poor communication and the development of silos of decision-making within individual government Ministries, Departments and Agencies can reinforce inappropriate power and command structures. Uncoordinated and incompatible systems can contribute to personality-centred power bases that increase tensions and ethnic or political manipulation and ultimately work against a conflict mitigation strategy from government and donors.

2. Possible solutions: In the middle of complexity, keep it simple

Experience shows that many of the issues raised above are usually not considered in the post conflict "rush". Here KPMG DAS aims to spell out some of the basics to avoid that, which could be particularly relevant to countries that might be getting out of the conflict in due course, e.g. Somalia and Southern Sudan. In some other cases it might be necessary to "take a breath", go one step back to get the basics right. This is based on our experience advising the transitional government in South Sudan and managing the donor Capacity Building Trust Fund.

Slow down before you start: The prospect of slowing down the support to post conflict countries in the wake of a peace agreement signing may seem like an anathema to the opportunities and immediate needs of a country in crisis. However, standing back from the immediate short term priorities

Recognising the importance of the institutional culture that is being developed and supported within individual government institutions and the government as a whole is critical to building a secure and stable country within the short to medium term.

of service delivery and pressure from donors to be seen to be supporting the new government, can allow for building greater clarity and strategic direction both for the government as well as more importantly for the donor community.

Taking time right at the start of the process to define and agree on overall frameworks for support and broad technical parameters for systems development will ultimately create a more cohesive and functional institutional environment for development within the country as opposed to flooding advice and systems into the country. Supporting the new government to develop and agree on the overall direction of the government strengthening and building and development agenda will enable them to identify what systems and policies they see themselves most aligned with. It will therefore empower host governments to direct the donors more effectively in where they place their funds and how they provide support. There are opportunities for small-scale donor governments to play a pivotal role within this process with the provision of key high level advisors to the transitional government at the outset of the process. This can provide the much needed impartial technical support to a government institution that is lacking either through time or experience constraints that are not hedging the direction of the advice on securing longer term contracts of technical support paid for by the donor government.

Defining what is acceptable and what is needed. All countries are able to define their spheres of influence, that is what they most closely associate with both politically and institutionally, and the type of government systems and processes they are most likely to adopt. The spheres are obviously a potentially fluid process such as the case for Rwanda that shifted from being influenced by Francophone to Anglophone countries. For South Sudan and potentially for Somalia, the influence and most valuable likely lessons may come from South Africa, with its experience of the massive transition from a colonial system to a post-apartheid federalist system of government. Recognition and acceptance of these spheres by the donors can go some way to helping define acceptable systems development and technical support that will build on the internal cultural and political identity of the country and build greater cohesion in the supply and demand of the support within the country.

It is not argued here that total acceptance of the current political and economic spheres of influence for a country should be adopted without question. Support to the government for understanding and defining medium and long-term political changes and economic opportunities that will open to the country can go some way to re-engineering the spheres for the country. The situation of Somalia, where the current influence is seen as the Middle East, and the Southern Sudan where the influence can be characterised as dominated by the Republic of South Africa and the USA, both may develop government systems that are complimentary and defined by these countries of influence. However, the medium-term opportunities for both of these countries will be defined by the increasing political and economic integration being undertaken with the East African Community and the potential support to the development of an Africa wide trading block.

Co-ordination. Although coordination – both between donors and across governments - has been emphasised as crucial to success for almost all donor funded development programmes, there has been remarkably little progress made on the implementation practices on the ground within fragile and conflicted states.

There is no easy answer to how the co-ordination of donor programmes can be improved. However, focusing on the technical capacity and the understanding of a fragile state's institutions to articulate and define the support agenda can go a long way to forcing much need donor integration. There is again a significant opportunity for small-scale donor governments to effectively 'punch above their weight' by focusing their support on providing trusted long term advisors to fragile states governments who are able to support decision making and control in an open, transparent and most importantly impartial manner. Technical advisors can also help new governments and donors to coordinate their efforts in support of the aid effectiveness agenda. But the key thing is for them to advocate for what the host government, not what the donor governments, want.

To sum up, if the post conflict state is to develop and be supported effectively and to avoid a supply-led process, some of the key points to consider are: the definition of an overall development strategy with building blocks; the understanding of the local and regional political dynamics, as well as the international influences; the provision of strategic and neutral technical assistance at the onset of the process, including possibly programme management support; the definition of a long term capacity building programme; and the setting up of systems for donor co-ordination.

DAS working with ethnic quotas in post-conflict South Sudan: ensuring conflict mitigation in practice

As in many post-conflict situations, the allocation of official posts in new state institutions was potentially an area of conflict in the immediate post war situation. Ministry posts were allocated to ensure an ethnic balance, resulting in very variable individual capacity at senior levels across the ministry, reflecting the inequitable provision of basic education across the country – officials from the Upper being the least educated, the Dinka tribe being the best equipped to contribute effectively. For Advisors, the skill in working to achieve a challenging set of state-building objectives was therefore to remain as inclusive of officials as possible. If those with limited capacity felt side-lined in their work in the Ministry and in state building the risk would be that word would get back to their communities, damaging how their people perceived the peace process and the legitimacy of the new state institutions. Whereas the practice of ethnic quotas was a necessity for peace building– making it actually happen required considerable flexibility in programme management practice and was crucial for maintaining that peace and for state building.

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