PEACEBUILDING ?

How is peacebuilding interpreted in meaning and practice? To what extent has it been institutionalised? Peacebuilding is generically defined as external interventions designed to prevent armed conflict. This article, published in Global Governance, surveys twenty-four governmental and intergovernmental bodies that are active in peacebuilding. It analyses how they conceptualise and operationalise their peacebuilding mandate, along with mapping areas of potential concern. It finds that most programmes have focused on the immediate or underlying causes of conflict, to the relative neglect of state institutions.

Peacebuilding is increasingly institutionalised across the international landscape. An impressive number of organisations use the concept to frame and organise their post-conflict activities. However, there are critical differences among actors regarding the conceptualisation and operationalisation of peacebuilding. There are even greater divisions regarding the specific approaches that may achieve it.

Different agencies use a wide variety of terms related to but not necessarily synonymous with peacebuilding. Some use the same term, peacebuilding, in slightly different ways:

- Different groupings clearly emerge: the United Nations (UN) Secretariat, UN specialised agencies, European organisations and member states.

- Although there are various reasons for differing priorities, organisational mandates and networks are important parts of the explanation. This will heavily influence an organisation's reception to, definition and revision of the concept of peacebuilding.

- Organisations are nested in structured relationships; those that are linked have tended to converge on a consensus definition.

- Different interpretations over the operationalisation of peacebuilding lead to different strategies and priorities. The growing number of international structures whose mandates include peacebuilding might easily mask essential differences regarding the concept's meaning and practice.

There are three dimensions of post-conflict peacebuilding: stability creation; restoration of state institutions; and addressing the socioeconomic dimensions of conflict. To date there has been more focus on the kind of the state (the organising principles that structure the relationship between state and society) being built, than the degree of the state (its capacity to control society):

- Some have argued in favour of a more sequenced and strategic peacebuilding project that emphasises the establishment of security and stable institutions before seeking liberalisation and democracy.

- Agencies must focus more on creating state institutions that can deliver basic public goods in an equitable manner. Although the state is not the only institution that underpins stability, pursuing peacebuilding without an institutional foundation is a recipe for failure.

- How peacebuilding is implemented must be settled by recipient states themselves, with support from international actors, rather than by bureaucratic and political power.

- Much of the interest in peacebuilding is at the level of rhetoric rather than resources. There is a