

# WHAT'S THE UN'S FUTURE IN PEACEBUILDING?

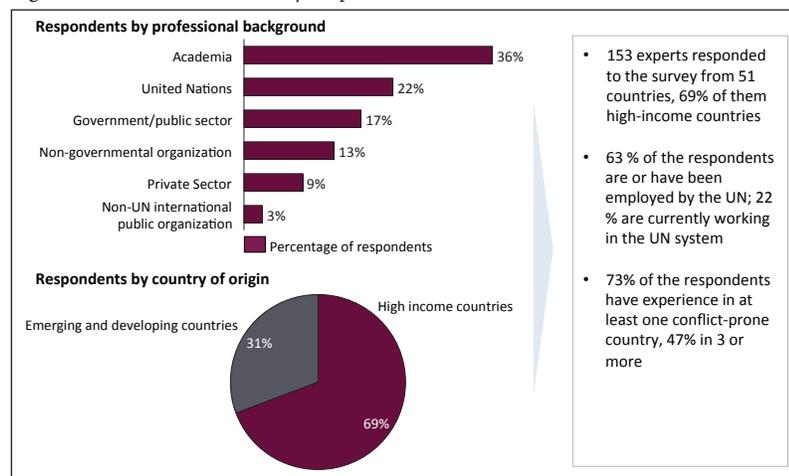
## RESULTS OF THE DECEMBER 2014 EXPERT SURVEY

Stephen Browne and Thomas G. Weiss

In preparation for the March 2015 workshop in Geneva—*Pulling Together the UN System in Conflict-Prone States: Problems and Prospects?*—the Future UN Development System (FUNDS) Project devoted one of its expert surveys to soliciting views about the perceived performance of the United Nations system in fragile and conflict-prone states. The goal of the survey was to learn lessons for the post-2015 era in order to help identify the UN's comparative operational advantages and disadvantages. A common theme in much of the Project's previous research and surveys was the need to reflect on the past and future roles (political, security, and humanitarian as well as social and economic development) of the organization in transitions from armed conflict to development.

The profiles of some 150 experts are found in Figure 1. Perceptions are perceptions, but the extensive exposure of this elite set of voices is hard to dismiss in identifying weaknesses and strengths in the pivotal 2015 year.

Figure 1: Characteristics of Survey Respondents, November-December 2014



### OVERALL PERCEPTIONS OF UN EFFECTIVENESS

The United Nations was found to be effective by 57 percent of the sample taken. There was little variation in these perceptions among those with greater or lesser work experience of the UN in conflict-prone states. The former's views, however, were far more positive—over two-thirds—than those who had no work experience (39 percent).

### THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DELIVERING AS ONE (DAO)

Since 2006, the UN has been experimenting with and promoting the Delivering as One initiative to encourage various organizations within the system to work more closely together in the field. The initiative took place, however, essentially in more stable developing countries. The eight initial pilot countries have now been joined in the initiative by an additional 36 countries. Only a striking minority (27 percent) of respondents found the DaO to be effective,

while far more (38 percent) found it ineffective, including 10 percent very ineffective. Perceptions differed little between those with and without UN experience; but those with more experience in fragile and conflict-prone states were actually more negative about the DaO initiative than those with less.

The following are representative comments:

*“Where the UN has strong resident coordinators, the joint work is much better than it was. However, still too much my-agency-first thinking.”*

*“Effective in some countries, ineffective in others.”*

*“There is still a lot of competition for resources among agencies”*

*“Many employees do important work, but it is too individualized; fragmentation, overlap and lack of strategic coherence among UN actors in peacebuilding hampers impact.”*

*“DaO has to be more than just an exercise in efficiencies, but about ensuring a more coherent policy and operational approach.”*

### UN EFFECTIVENESS IN SELECTED FUNCTIONS

Respondents were asked to comment on the relative effectiveness of the United Nations in three areas: humanitarian aid and human rights; security and peacekeeping; and peacebuilding and development. Humanitarian aid and human rights was the area in which by far—almost three-quarters of respondents—the UN was considered the most effective (73 percent), and peacebuilding and development the least (52 percent). However, the numbers appear worse when taking into account exposure: those without UN experience were more positive about the UN’s peacebuilding role (63 percent) than those with UN experience (48 percent); and those with most experience in armed conflicts were less positive about the UN’s peacebuilding role (47 percent) than those without such experience (61 percent).

The following are representative comments:

*“Effectiveness of the UN varies greatly from situation to situation. Much depends on local UN leadership and the degree of support of member-states.”*

*“Of the three areas, peacebuilding is the least well-funded.”*

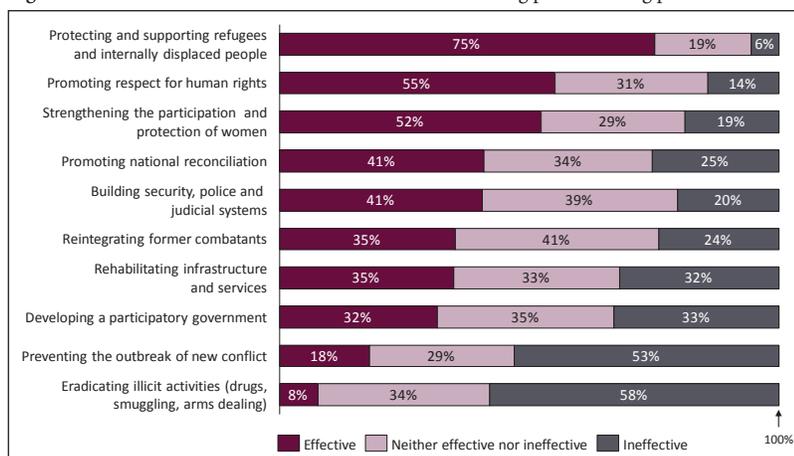
*“The mandates on security and peacekeeping have often been unclear leading to lack of effectiveness.”*

*“There does not seem to be the level of commitment—or good staffing—for peacebuilding effectiveness.”*

### UN EFFECTIVENESS IN DIFFERENT PEACEBUILDING PHASES

Figure 2 depicts the perceptions of the three most effective peacebuilding functions: fully three-quarters put protecting and supporting refugees and internally displaced people at the top of the list, which was followed by promoting respect for human rights (55 percent) and strengthening the participation and

**Figure 2: How effective is the United Nations in the following peacebuilding phases?**



Note: The category “No opinion” has been excluded. “Effective” is a grouping of answers “Very effective” and “Ineffective” is a grouping of answers “Very ineffective” and “Ineffective”.

protection of women (52 percent). The least effective functions were seen to be preventing the outbreak of new conflict (18 percent) and eradicating such illicit activities as drugs, smuggling, and arms dealing (8 percent). These percentages, in contrast to earlier findings, were substantially lower among those without UN experience. Differences were negligible across levels of experience in armed conflicts.

### THE UN PEACEBUILDING COMMISSION (PBC)

Like perceptions of DaO, the survey reveals very negative views about the PBC’s performance, which was found to be ineffective or very ineffective by 38 percent of respondents and effective by a mere 20 percent (almost half of the respondents were neutral). Significantly, no one judged the decade-long experiment to be “very effective.” Those with UN experience were only slightly less negative than those from outside. Respondents who were more experienced with armed conflicts and more knowledgeable about the PBC, gave the most negative views.

The following are representative comments:

*“Its major contribution has been to allow for additional support in cases where major international investments had ceased, following a peace agreement and the conclusion of a peacekeeping phase, or where no peacekeeping presence took place.”*

*“The PBC has supported some valuable programmes in a limited number of cases and at a limited level of resourcing...PBF works quite well.”*

*“Effectiveness has varied substantially across countries.”*

*“Overall, the still limited ability to ensure coordination and collaboration between the PBC, the Security Council and the Human Rights Council is a disappointment. There has been a good deal of churn within the PBSO.”*

*“The political reality is that the main show in NY is the Security Council (SC). Unless the SC devolves the peacebuilding portfolio fully to the PBC more resources will not add value.”*

*“Distance the PBC from the SC.”*

*“The problem is operational and the PBC does not have an operational capacity, so why give it more resources?”*

*“It has not worked as intended. So few countries on the PBC agenda; in-country competition and mistrust between PBC and UN missions. Local levels and civil society not involved enough.”*

*“The PBC duplicates a number of pre-existing organizations and its value added is not easy to demonstrate.”*

*“If it is going to be the chosen vehicle, it needs serious leadership in New York and really good people on the ground. Not clear it has either.”*

*“The PBC on a wrong footing from the beginning...too New York-centric.”*

*“The work of the PBC urgently needs to be reinforced with prevention activities along the whole UN portfolio, including understanding and spreading knowledge on how countries corruption could lead to conflicts and strongly spreading core values to the general public and in house.”*

### UN ENGAGEMENT WITH DIFFERENT ACTORS

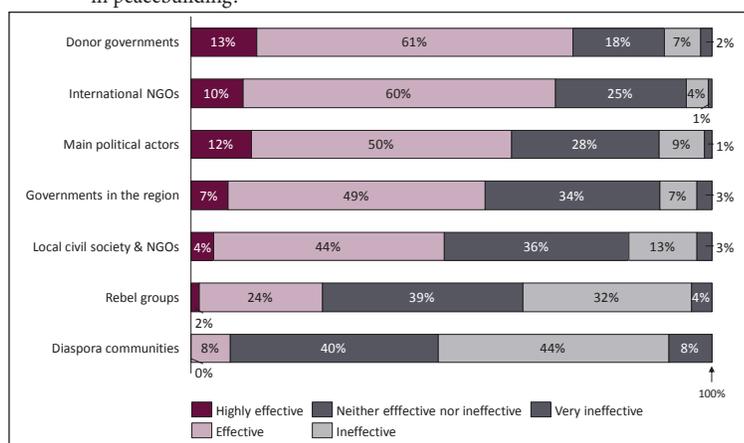
Figure 3 illustrates the extent to which respondents were extremely positive about the UN’s record of engaging with donor governments and international NGOs; and they also were positive about contacts with local governments, NGOs, and governments of the region. At the same time, they were overwhelmingly negative about the UN’s engagement with rebel groups and diasporas. Those with the widest experience in armed conflicts were slightly more positive about contacts with rebel groups.

The following are representative comments:

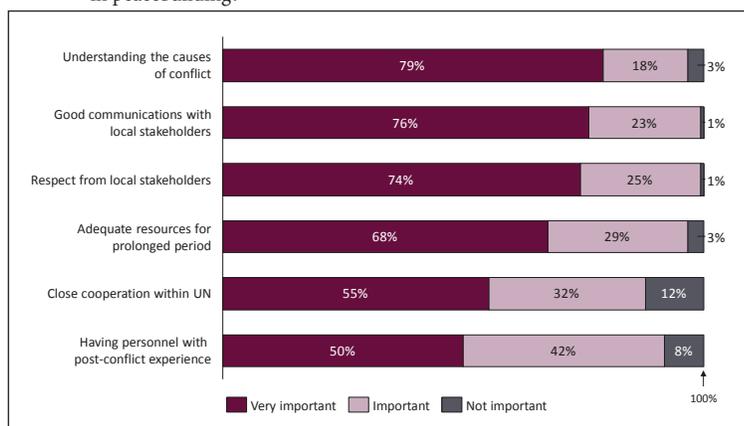
*“More involvement with women who have to rebuild societies from the ground up.”*

*“Truly integrating women at all levels in all discussions, design and implementation of programmes, nationally and within UN teams.”*

**Figure 3:** How effective is the United Nations at engaging the following actors in peacebuilding?



**Figure 4:** How important are the following for the effectiveness of the United Nations in peacebuilding?



*“Provide open space for dialogue among the key stakeholders, including civil society, public opinion, ability to bring in other partners from the region, international, diaspora, private sector, etc.”*

*“Cultural understanding and support for genuine civic society initiatives for change would hugely improve effectiveness.”*

*“Respect from stakeholders is something you earn through tangible results.”*

*“To be effective, politics needs to be recognized, and the building of ‘social contracts’ promoted in conflict-prone countries.”*

### FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO UN EFFECTIVENESS IN PEACEBUILDING

Figure 4 depicts the survey’s findings about at least three essential factors that explain UN effectiveness in fragile and conflict-prone states: understanding the causes of armed conflict; communicating with and gaining the respect of local stakeholders; having adequate resources over a prolonged period. Responses were consistent across kinds of work and field experience.

When asked about possible reforms, virtually every respondent (98 percent) considered that closer cooperation among the political, security, development, and humanitarian activities of the UN system in-country was “indispensable” or at least “desirable.” A similarly high proportion (96 percent) backed better coordination at the headquarters level as well. The appointment of a single UN head with delegated powers was endorsed by four out of five respondents whereas almost three-quarters supported more authority and resources for the PBC and almost two-thirds supported a smaller and more focussed UN country presence.

The following are representative comments:

*“With all the areas of expertise we have in the UN, one area sorely lacking is expertise in understanding the root causes of conflict and the ways a given community/society/context ‘ticks,’ how do societies negotiate power relations, take decisions, who are the change agents.”*

*“Build the capacity and competence of the international civil service to analyse conflict and to engage fully in executing the tasks formally set out in huge volumes of UN policy recommendations.”*

*“Have a genuine unity of command with a single set of instructions from HQ rather than multiple chains of command.”*

*“A smaller and more focused UN presence is highly desirable, but not very relevant to a peacebuilding context.”*

*“A single head is not necessarily feasible as one expects too many qualities in that person.”*

*“Closer cooperation among different UN actors at local level if a strong Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) is in place.”*

*“In the effort to have closer UN collaboration, we must maintain space for independent humanitarian action.”*

*“More use of local capacities in staffing UN presences. Greater delegation of authority combined with robust oversight and accountability mechanisms. Increased openness to ongoing ‘client’ feedback and quality improvements.”*

*“The UN should address short-term need for building local leadership committed to national interest as well as long-term need for building governance systems based on democratic values and rule of law.”*

## RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE SURVEY

In light of the work of the two high-level panels (on peace operations and peacebuilding) and the ongoing conversations about the shape of the post-2015 UN development system, the survey makes clear the following recommendations for operations in fragile and conflict-prone states:

1. The UN should, as an absolute priority, re-examine its field presence, including the nature and composition of a more unified country presence, leadership, the selection and training of suitable staff, provision of resources, and clear and unified delegation of authority from New York and Geneva.

2. The operational United Nations requires a far more in-depth understanding of the potential and actual causes of conflict; ways to engage more effectively with local actors, and women’s groups in particular; and more effective and unitary communications strategies.

3. The PBC is far less effective than it should be. Its continued operation necessitates the clarification of its mandate and role, relationship to the Security Council, and position among the many New York- and Geneva-based UN organizations.

4. If it is to be maintained, the Peacebuilding Fund should have additional and more reliable resources for both emergencies and prolonged crises.

5. If the UN development system increasingly concentrates on fragile and conflict-prone countries, there will be a requirement for more staff with familiarity with symptoms of instability and the causes of armed conflicts.

6. To be successful, the DaO initiative should foster more policy harmonization rather than merely joint programming; special efforts and modalities will be required for UN operations in such countries.

---

**Stephen Browne** is Co-director of the Future of the UN Development System (FUNDS) and Senior Fellow of the Ralph Bunche Institute for International Studies, The Graduate Center, The City University of New York and former Deputy Executive Director of the International Trade Centre, Geneva. He is the author of several books on development and the UN, including *United Nations Industrial Development Organization* (2012), *The United Nations Development Programme and System* (2011), and co-editor with Thomas G. Weiss of *Post-2015 UN Development: Making Change Happen?* (2014).

**Thomas G. Weiss** is Presidential Professor of Political Science and Director Emeritus of the Ralph Bunche Institute for International Studies at The City University of New York’s Graduate Center; he also is Co-director of the FUNDS Project and of the Wartime History and the Future UN Project. Past President of the International Studies Association (2009-10) and chair of the Academic Council on the UN System (2006-9), his most recent single-authored books include *Governing the World? Addressing “Problems without Passports”* (2014); *Global Governance: Why? What? Whither?* (2013); *Humanitarian Business* (2013); *What’s Wrong with the United Nations and How to Fix It* (2012); and *Humanitarian Intervention: Ideas in Action* (2012).

