

NEW ISSUES IN REFUGEE RESEARCH

Research Paper No. 224

Refugees and the peacebuilding process

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November 2011



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ISSN 1020-7473

Introduction

Recent peacebuilding discussions have recognized the growing significance of sub-regional and cross-border factors that can reinforce or undermine peacebuilding. These discussions, stemming from the 2009 *Report of the Secretary-General on peacebuilding in the immediate aftermath of conflict*¹ and the recent review of UN's peacebuilding architecture,² have highlighted the need to develop a clearer understanding of particular cross-border dynamics that affect peacebuilding and how these factors may be more predictably and systematically addressed. In response, the purpose of this paper is to consider how the prolonged presence of refugees in neighbouring countries poses both challenges and opportunities for peacebuilding in the country of origin.

This paper outlines how the prolonged presence of refugees in neighbouring countries is one cross-border dynamic that may affect peacebuilding in the country of origin in both positive and negative ways. The importance of these connections is heightened given that the majority of refugees in the world today are to be found in some of the world's poorest and most unstable regions and originate from some of the world's most fragile states, including Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia. Just as conflict and instability in these countries of origin have become protracted, some two-thirds of today's refugees are in situations of prolonged exile. In fact, the average duration of a refugee situation now exceeds 17 years.³

While there is increasing recognition that international security planners must pay closer attention to conflict management and peacebuilding in these fragile states, it is also important to recognize the benefits of integrating refugee issues more systematically into responses to long-standing conflicts. The importance of this link is heightened by the porous nature of these countries' borders and the tendency for conflict in these regions to spill-over into neighbouring states. In this context, refugee movements are not only a consequence of conflict and state fragility, but may also exacerbate conflict or frustrate efforts to find peace if the needs of refugee populations and the aspirations of the displaced are not effectively addressed.

Recent discussions on peacebuilding have not included a sufficiently systematic consideration of how the prolonged presence of refugees in neighbouring states may affect peacebuilding in the country of origin. Specifically, peacebuilding discussions have incorporated the question of refugees only insofar as the return and reintegration of refugee is taken to be a barometer of the success of peacebuilding efforts. This narrow understanding is problematic, especially as refugee-populated areas in neighbouring countries may harbour elements that seek to undermine peacebuilding efforts. It would therefore be problematic to assume that refugees simply remain passively in exile, awaiting the opportunity to return.

Given these challenges, this paper outlines how the presence of refugees in the region may undermine peacebuilding through the presence of 'spoilers' in refugee populated areas, pressure on fragile institutions and services caused by early and mass repatriation and the potential politicization of refugees in exile, thereby undermining reconciliation upon return.

¹ UN Doc. A/63/881-S/2009/304, 11 June 2009.

² UN Doc. A/64/868-S/2010/393, 21 July 2010.

³ UNHCR, Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme (ExCom), "Protracted Refugee Situations", Standing Committee, 30th Meeting, EC/54/SC/CRP.14, 10 June 2004.

More generally, however, the paper also considers the potential contribution that refugees can make to peacebuilding in their country of origin if they benefit from skills training and self-reliance while in exile. In particular, refugees may be trained with a range of skills and qualifications that could help address specific gaps in the provision of basic services in their country of origin, especially relating to health and education. Likewise, peace education programmes for refugees in exile could enhance prospects of reconciliation and conflict resolution upon return, while the inclusion of refugees in peace negotiations, elections and peacebuilding planning would enhance the legitimacy of these undertakings and help ensure that such initiatives are more fully representative of the broad spectrum of war-affected populations.

Building from earlier research in this area,⁴ this paper argues that peacebuilding actors should engage with refugee populations prior to repatriation. It is further argued that a more systematic engagement with these populations could contribute to a more effective response to the five core peacebuilding priorities identified by the Secretary-General, including support to: basic safety and security; political processes; provision of basic services; restoring core government functions; and supporting economic revitalization.⁵

These links to peacebuilding are in addition to the significant challenges relating to the return and reintegration of refugees who have been in exile for decades, including resolving land and property issues, addressing shelter needs, ensuring access to basic services, reinforcing the rule of law, and the facilitating reconciliation.⁶

To this end, this paper presents a more systematic understanding of the relationship between the prolonged presence of refugees in neighbouring countries and peacebuilding in the country of origin and how engagement with refugees prior to their repatriation could contribute to better peacebuilding programmes. While the focus of this paper is on the practical and policy implications of these links, the final section of the paper outlines the direction of future research to enhance our conceptual understanding of the relationship between refugees and peacebuilding.

Cross-border dynamics of peacebuilding

A striking feature of discussions on conflict management in recent years has been an emerging consensus on the importance of peacebuilding. As illustrated by cases as diverse as Afghanistan, Burundi, Liberia and Somalia, conflict has the potential to re-emerge and become more protracted if active steps are not taken to ensure stability in countries previously affected by conflict so as to prevent a slide back into war.⁷

⁴ See: J. Milner, "Refugees and the regional dynamics of peacebuilding", *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, Vol. 28, no. 1, 2009; G. Loescher, J. Milner, E Newman and G. Troeller (eds.), *Protracted Refugee Situations: Political, Human Rights and Security Implications*, Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2008.

⁵ UN Doc. A/63/881-S/2009/304, 11 June 2009, paragraph 17.

⁶ See: V. Tennant, "Return and reintegration" in V. Chetail (ed.), *Post-conflict Peacebuilding: A Lexicon*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

⁷ See: C. Crocker, F. O. Hampson and P. R. Aall (eds.) *Leashing the Dogs of War: Conflict Management in a Divided World*, Washington: US Institute of Peace, 2007; R. Paris, *At War's End: Building Peace after Civil Conflict*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004; and T. M. Ali and R. O. Matthews (eds.), *Durable Peace: Challenges for Peacebuilding in Africa*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004.

The significance of these activities was highlighted by the UN Secretary-General who, in his 1992 report *An Agenda for Peace*,⁸ identified peacebuilding as an important area of UN activity, along with preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peacekeeping. Since then, there have been numerous conceptual and institutional developments, including the establishment of the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) and Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) in late 2005.⁹

The early work of the UN's new peacebuilding architecture, however, focused almost exclusively on peacebuilding activities within the country in question, with very limited attention paid to the sub-regional nature of conflict and the cross-border dynamics that could potentially undermine peacebuilding activities. This gap was striking given the demonstrated potential of intra-state conflict in the global South to frequently 'spill-over' into neighbouring states, thereby regionalizing conflict.¹⁰ For example, conflict in Burundi and Sierra Leone – the first two countries on the agenda of the PBC – not only affected these two countries but other countries in the Great Lakes region of Central Africa and the Mano River Union in West Africa as a result of the proliferation of small arms and the movement of armed elements across borders. These aspects of conflict have the ability not only to spread conflict to neighbouring countries, but also to undermine conflict management and peacebuilding activities in the country of origin.

The need to address this gap was recently highlighted in the 2009 *Report of the Secretary-General on peacebuilding in the immediate aftermath of conflict*, which stated: "Given that many conflicts have cross-border dimensions, neighbouring States as well as regional and sub-regional organizations play a critical role and have commensurate responsibilities in supporting peacebuilding processes."¹¹ Likewise, the 2010 review of the UN's peacebuilding architecture noted that "there is ample evidence of the potential for cross-border spillover, which can create or exacerbate conflict and frustrate peacebuilding efforts."¹²

Refugees and peacebuilding: challenges and opportunities

The prolonged presence of refugee populations in neighbouring countries is a significant cross-border issue that should be more systematically considered by peacebuilding planners. As noted by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, "the return of refugees and internally displaced persons is a major part of any post-conflict scenario... Indeed it is often a critical factor in sustaining a peace process and in revitalizing economic activity."¹³

⁸ See: UN Secretary-General, *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace-keeping*, Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to the statement adopted by the Summit Meeting of the Security Council on 31 January 1992, A/47/227, 17 June 1992.

⁹ For an overview of the mandate and activities of the PBC and related bodies, see: <http://www.un.org/peace/peacebuilding>, accessed 31 October 2011.

¹⁰ See, for example: M. Ayoub, *The Third World Security Predicament: State Making, Regional Conflict and the International System*, Boulder: Lynne Reiner, 1995; and B. Buzan, "Third World Regional Security in Structural and Historical Perspective", in B. Job (ed.), *The Insecurity Dilemma: National Security of Third World States*, Boulder: Lynne Reiner, 1992.

¹¹ UN Doc. A/63/881-S/2009/304, 11 June 2009, paragraph 13.

¹² UN Doc. A/64/868-S/2010/393, 21 July 2010, paragraph 60.

¹³ K. Annan, address to the Executive Committee of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Geneva, 6 October 2005.

The importance of engaging with refugee populations prior to their repatriation is heightened by three factors. First, the need to find a solution to the plight of refugees has long been recognized by the international community, and is a central element of UNHCR's Statute; incorporating refugees into peacebuilding activities will further this objective. Second, as refugees spend longer periods in exile, refugee-hosting states come to see the prolonged presence of refugees as a burden and a security concern; incorporating refugees into peacebuilding activities would provide support to these refugee-hosting states. Third, there is a growing recognition that unresolved refugee situations may undermine peacebuilding in neighbouring countries; incorporating refugees into peacebuilding activities could therefore further both humanitarian objectives and broader peacebuilding objectives.

In fact, cross-border dynamics associated with refugee populations present both challenges and opportunities to meet the core elements of peacebuilding identified by the Secretary-General, including support to: basic safety and security; political processes; provision of basic services; restoring core government functions; and supporting economic revitalization.¹⁴ This paper will now consider the links between these five core elements of peacebuilding and the presence of refugees in neighbouring countries.

Support to basic safety and security

Ensuring basic safety and security in the immediate aftermath of conflict is a paramount yet broad peacebuilding objective. Activities in this area range from disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) of former combatants, security sector reform, reinforcing the rule of law, mine clearing programmes and possibly the deployment of international or regional peacekeepers.

While many of these activities are concentrated in the country in question, there are important cross-border elements of this priority area. One of the most significant challenges relates to the presence of so-called 'spoilers' in refugee camps or in refugee populated border areas. Spoilers, understood as "groups and tactics that actively seek to hinder, delay, or undermine conflict settlement,"¹⁵ are closely associated to the problem of so-called 'refugee warriors'.¹⁶

In recent years, the presence of spoilers in the refugee populated areas of neighbouring states have frustrated peacebuilding efforts in conflicts as diverse as Burundi, Liberia, Afghanistan, Myanmar and Sudan. As recognized by UN Security Council Resolution 1208 (1998), more effective responses to these populations in exile would make important contributions to security in the country of origin, refugee-hosting states and within refugee populated areas, in addition to the security of refugees themselves.

More generally, there are several ways that more proactive engagement with refugee populations in exile may support basic safety and security in the country of origin. First,

¹⁴ UN Doc. A/63/881-S/2009/304, 11 June 2009, paragraph 17.

¹⁵ E. Newman and O. Richmond, "The Impact of Spoilers on Peace Processes and Peacebuilding", United Nations University Policy Brief, No. 2, 2006. See also: S. Stedman, "Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes", *International Security*, Vol. 22, no. 2, Fall 1997.

¹⁶ See: A. Zolberg, A. Suhrke, and S. Aguayo, *Escape from Violence: Conflict and the Refugee Crisis in the Developing World*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 275-8.

UNHCR's experience with peace education programmes in several asylum countries suggests that such programmes can provide refugees with better conflict resolution and mediation skills. Such programmes, which have been implemented in refugee and returnee camps in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Liberia, Guinea, Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire, have been found to contribute to the learning and practice of peacebuilding skills in the camps and to the reduction of conflict. For example, peace education programmes in the Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps in Kenya in the early 2000s was one of several factors that contributed to a reduction of violence in these camps.¹⁷ Similar benefits were observed as a result of participation in 'coexistence programmes' in cases such as Bosnia-Herzegovina, Liberia and Timor-Leste.

Second, a more systematic engagement with youth within refugee populations can also contribute to peacebuilding. Specifically, the provision of livelihood and vocational training targeting youth leaving secondary school could help address the tendency for unemployed youth, especially males, to be susceptible to recruitment by armed groups and to engage in activities that are either illegal or undermine peace. These tendencies are heightened if they repatriate without livelihood skills that are in demand in their country of origin. For example, addressing such concerns prior to repatriation could have contributed to peacebuilding in Sierra Leone, where youth education and employment has remained an important peacebuilding priority.

Support to political processes

A strong link also exists between engagement between refugees in neighbouring countries and support to the political process in the country of origin, which includes the planning and holding of elections, developing conflict management mechanisms, the promotion of inclusive dialogue, and the broader process of national reconciliation.

In fact, refugees in exile often remain engaged in the political process in their country of origin. Where opportunities for political participation are not ensured, refugees can frequently become politicized or radicalized while in exile, especially during prolonged exile, when refugee populations are under the control of 'states in exile',¹⁸ and where alternative forms of participation in the country of origin are not provided. Examples of such dynamics may be found in the rise of PALIPEHUTU and other groups within the Burundian refugee population in Tanzania in the 1970s and 1980s,¹⁹ in addition to similar dynamics within Rwandan and Afghan refugee populations.²⁰

A wider range of cases, however, demonstrate that allowing refugees to be directly involved in the peace process and the planning of the subsequent peacebuilding programme can reduce refugee radicalization, enhance the legitimacy of the outcomes of negotiations, and ensure that refugees are committed to supporting the subsequent peacebuilding process.

¹⁷ See: A. Obura, "Peace education programme in Dadaab and Kakuma, Kenya: Evaluation summary", Geneva: UNHCR, March 2002.

¹⁸ See: S. K. Lischer, *Dangerous Sanctuaries: Refugee Camps, Civil War and the Dilemmas of Humanitarian Aid*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005.

¹⁹ See: L. Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

²⁰ See: Lischer, 2005.

More generally, recent research has outlined the importance of refugees being actively involved in post-conflict elections and referenda in situations as diverse as Angola, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cambodia, Guatemala, Mozambique and Nagorno-Karabakh.²¹ While refugees have the right to participate in elections,²² these and other cases illustrate how the involvement of displaced populations in post-conflict elections plays an important role in the peacebuilding process as it provides a direct opportunity for the victims of conflict to participate in the selection of their post-conflict leadership.

Notwithstanding this important political and symbolic contribution to peacebuilding, the participation of refugees in post-conflict elections is frequently hampered by a number of constraints that could usefully be addressed by peacebuilding actors. As detailed by Grace and Mooney, these constraints include:

- the planning of electoral districts in the country of origin;
- voter registration requirements, especially relating to the possession of identification documents by voters in exile;
- voter eligibility requirements relating to residency, especially in cases of prolonged or multi-generational exile;
- logistical challenges relating to voter registration and out-of-country voting; and
- logistical and security concerns relating to campaigning and the distribution of voter information in refugee camps.²³

In addition, refugees in exile can contribute to the political process in their country of origin through a number of confidence-building measures, peace education programmes, and through contributions to the difficult work of truth commissions and war crimes tribunals, as in the cases of Rwanda and the Former Yugoslavia.

Finally, more systematic engagement with gender mainstreaming initiatives in refugee camps, especially support to refugee women's organizations and the inclusion of women in refugee leadership structures, can significantly further the objectives of enhancing the role of women in peacebuilding processes, as outlined in UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000).

Support to basic services

One of the most recognized links between refugees and peacebuilding relates to the opportunities to train refugees in exile to help provide basic services in their country of origin, including health and primary education. For example, teacher training programmes in the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya have been found to help address the significant shortage of teachers in South Sudan. Likewise, Liberian refugees repatriating from Ghana have been able to return with a range of skills acquired in exile that can contribute to a range of public services in Liberia. Closer collaboration between peacebuilding actors and UNHCR could further integrate such opportunities into the peacebuilding process.

²¹ See: J. Grace and E. Mooney, "Peacebuilding through the electoral participation of displaced populations", *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, Vol. 28, no. 1, 2009; and P. Johansson, "Putting peace to the vote: displaced persons and a future referendum on Nagorno-Karabakh", *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, Vol. 28, no. 1, 2009.

²² See: Article 25 of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*.

²³ See: Grace and Mooney, 2009.

More generally, however, the Secretary-General recognizes that the return and reintegration of refugees remains a significant challenge and a potential strain on the ability of a country emerging from conflict to provide basic services for its citizens. The scale of this challenge is magnified in situations of prolonged conflict and prolonged exile.

While the return of refugees may be seen as an indicator of successful peacebuilding, this process is especially difficult following a protracted conflict where physical infrastructure, homes and social services have been destroyed. As such, it is important for peacebuilding in such contexts to address a wider range of issues affecting returnees, from justice and reconciliation, housing and property rights, enhancing the rule of law, to the provision of livelihoods in war-torn economies.²⁴

Specifically, issues of access to land and reintegration into the local economy may be complicated due to prolonged exile. For example, Afghan refugees who have been in exile since 1979 have experience difficulty reclaiming land following repatriation. The challenge of reintegration in rural areas of Afghanistan is compounded for many refugees who were born in exile and raised in urban areas, such as Peshawar and Karachi. Language can also be an important issue, as is the case for many Burundian refugees who have repatriated from Tanzania after more than 35 years of exile, speaking English and Kiswahili, not French and Kirundi. These challenges are compounded by the scale of repatriation: more than 3.5 million Afghan refugees have repatriated since 2002, while 6% of Burundi's population has repatriated since 2002.

Given the scale of these challenges and their potential impact on peacebuilding, UNHCR has received support from the PBF for its return and reintegration programmes in a number of countries. For example, PBF support has reinforced the work of the *Commission National de Terres et Autres Biens* (National Land Commission) (CNTB) in Burundi and projects relating to strengthening the rule of law in Liberia.

Many of these challenges, however, can be compounded in situations of early and mass repatriation before the necessary conditions and structures exist in the country of origin. These concerns are heightened if host states believe that the costs associated with granting asylum are not being adequately shared and consequently push for repatriation, placing fragile institutions in the country of origin under significant strain. Early repatriation also frequently leads to renewed displacement if root causes are not addressed, as seen in cases as diverse as Liberian refugees in Guinea, Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and Afghan refugees in Pakistan. To prevent such challenges, it is important to ensure that donor interest does not rapidly shift to peacebuilding in the country of origin at the expense of refugee assistance programmes in neighbouring countries and support to refugee-hosting states.

Given these challenges of repatriation, it is also important to consider other possible solutions for refugees and their potential contribution to peacebuilding in the country of origin. For example, in 2007, the Government of Tanzania announced its willingness to consider the naturalization of some 220,000 Burundians who had been in exile in Tanzania since 1972. One factor that contributed significantly to Tanzania's decision to pursue naturalization as a solution for this group was the desire to contribute to peacebuilding in

²⁴ See: S. Ogata, "Introduction: Refugee Repatriation and Peace-Building", *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, Vol. 16, no. 2, 1997; and B. S. Chimni, "Refugees and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: A Critical Perspective", *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 9, no. 2, Summer 2002.

Burundi. In fact, this strategy has been recognized and supported by peacebuilding actors in Burundi, with the Executive Representative of the Secretary-General in Burundi offering in August 2009 to mobilize additional resources from the international community for the local integration of refugees in Tanzania through applying to the PBF.²⁵

As other states in Africa, including Liberia and Sierra Leone, consider naturalization and local integration as a solution for protracted refugee situations, it will be important for peacebuilding actors to consider how support to countries of asylum, including local integration initiatives, may contribute to peacebuilding in the country of origin.

Support to restoring core government functions

Many countries emerging from prolonged conflict face significant challenges relating to basic public administration and public finance. In addition to training refugees in exile to help address these functions upon return, a number of activities may be undertaken in neighbouring countries to ease the demands on core government functions as refugees return. These activities include the adjudication of land claims and the issuance of key government documents, including birth certificates, citizenship papers and other documents that establish identity and credentials.

As noted above, the issue of land is a significant issue affecting return and reintegration and one that can place a significant strain on core government functions. For example, it was estimated that 70% of cases before Burundi's courts in the mid-2000s related to land issues, and that some two-thirds of returnees to Burundi in 2008 had limited or no access to land. Likewise, repatriation to Afghanistan since 2002 has witnessed a wide range of land-related concerns, including illegal occupation and disputes relating to loss or destruction of documents.

While UNHCR has sought to address this issue through support to the CNTB in Burundi and the Special Land Courts in Afghanistan, these functions continue to place a burden on the limited financial and human resources of these two countries. In Burundi, the mandate of the CNTB has been to mediate cases of occupied land and to arbitrate solutions to ensure that returnees could find a destination for return and reintegration as soon as possible. As of August 2009, the CNTB had ruled on approximately 5,600 of 12,000 cases received. To ease pressure on these institutions, and to further the principles of property restitution,²⁶ peacebuilding actors could engage with refugee populations prior to repatriation to begin the process of land arbitration.

Likewise, closer integration between peacebuilding actors and UNHCR could ensure that refugees repatriate with key government documents, including birth certificates, citizenship papers and other documents that establish identity and credentials. This is an especially important task as a larger proportion of refugees are born in exile, and risk becoming stateless without proper documentation, and for refugees who are educated in exile and require documentation for their credentials to be recognized.

²⁵ "Joint Communiqué of the 14th Meeting of the Tripartite Commission Concerning the Situation of Burundian refugees living in Tanzania", BINUB Headquarters, Bujumbura, Burundi, 21 August 2009.

²⁶ See: Principles on Housing and Property Restitution for Refugees and Displaced Persons (Pinheiro Principles), adopted by the UN Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, Resolution 2005/21, adopted 11 August 2005.

Support to economic revitalization

Finally, engagement with refugees while in exile can make a significant contribution to economic revitalization in the country of origin as a result of skills and training they received in exile. In a statement to the UN Security Council in January 2006, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees noted that “refugees return with schooling and new skills...Over and over, we see that their participation is necessary for the consolidation of both peace and post-conflict economic recovery.”²⁷

More generally, UNHCR has noted that “people who have benefited from education, skills training and livelihood opportunities during their time as refugees, and who have been able to attain a degree of self-reliance while living in a country of asylum, retain their hope in the future and are better placed to create and take advantage of new economic opportunities after their return. While living in exile, long-term refugees also have an ideal opportunity to acquire valuable skills in areas such as leadership, advocacy, mediation and conflict resolution, which will again enable them to contribute to the rebuilding of their communities once return becomes possible.”²⁸

The potential for refugees to make these kinds of contributions to economic revitalization in their country of origin will be enhanced through closer cooperation between UNHCR and peacebuilding planners. Specifically, language training, vocational training, professional development and a range of other programmes could usefully be implemented for refugees in exile to specifically respond to gaps and opportunities in the country of origin.

Policy implications

This paper has argued that the prolonged presence of refugees in neighbouring countries is one cross-border dynamic that may affect peacebuilding in the country of origin. In fact, cross-border dynamics associated with refugee populations present both challenges and opportunities to meet the core elements of peacebuilding identified by the Secretary-General, including support to: basic safety and security; political processes; provision of basic services; restoring core government functions; and supporting economic revitalization.

Given these diverse links, this paper has argued that engagement with refugee populations in exile can help advance peacebuilding priorities in the country of origin. The paper has also identified specific areas where peacebuilding actors can cooperate with UNHCR to more fully incorporate refugees into peacebuilding programmes

Such an approach should be premised on a more collaborative approach between UNHCR and key peacebuilding actors, including the UN Security Council (UNSC), the PBC, the PBF, the PBSO, the UN Development Programme’s Bureau of Crisis Prevention and Recovery (UNDP/BCPR), the World Bank and regional organizations, reinforced by the leadership of the UN Secretary-General (UNSG).

²⁷ Statement by A. Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, to the United Nations Security Council, 24 January 2006.

²⁸ UNHCR/DPC/2008/Doc. 02, 20 November 2008.

Future research

While this paper has focused on the implications of the prolonged presence of refugees in neighbouring states for the policy and practice of peacebuilding, it also suggests that a more systematic and rigorous understanding of the relationship between refugees and peacebuilding may yield wider conceptual lessons. In fact, given the range of links between refugees and peacebuilding, outlined above, it is striking that there has not been a greater focus on refugees in the peacebuilding literature, notwithstanding some important recent contributions.²⁹

This tension is indicative of a gap in both the peacebuilding and refugee studies literatures. As outlined above, the peacebuilding literature focuses primarily on activities and dynamics in the country in question with little consideration of cross-border dynamics. In contrast, Salehyan and Gleitsch observe that “although the vast majority of refugees never directly engage in violence, refugee flows may facilitate the transnational spread of arms, combatants, and ideologies conducive to conflict; they alter the ethnic composition of the state; and they can exacerbate economic competition.”³⁰ These dynamics clearly compound a number of the peacebuilding challenges outlined in this paper.

Likewise, the refugee studies literature largely treats refugee movements as a consequence of conflict and instability, not as a potential cause. As noted by Morris and Stedman, “refugee movements are all too often seen only as a by-product of conflict, with limited attention paid to the various ways they may cause conflict, prolong conflict, or frustrate efforts to resolve conflicts.”³¹ They further note that “despite a few exceptional attempts to bridge the gap between the study of refugees and the study of international security and conflict management, there remains a deep chasm between these two topics.”³² This gap has important implications both for our conceptual understanding of peacebuilding and our wider ability to formulate and implement effective peacebuilding programmes.

While there is increasing awareness of the importance of these links, especially at the field level,³³ our understanding of the relationship between refugees and peacebuilding remains disparate and anecdotal. The nature of this relationship needs to be more systematically interrogated in light of recent cases and developments in the peacebuilding literature.

To help respond to this gap, a research project on refugees and peacebuilding has recently been launched at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada, to examine the conceptual and

²⁹ See: K. Koser, “Introduction: Integrating displacement in peace processes and peacebuilding”, *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, Vol. 28, no. 1, 2009; R. Belloni, “Peacebuilding at the Local Level: Refugee return to Prijedor”, *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 12, issue 3, October 2005; and K. B. Harpviken, “From ‘Refugee Warriors’ to ‘Returnee Warriors’: Militant Homecoming in Afghanistan and Beyond”, Working Paper no. 5, Global Migration and Transnational Politics, Centre for Global Studies, George Mason University, March 2008.

³⁰ I. Salehyan and K. S. Gleitsch, “Refugees and the Spread of Civil War”, *International Organization*, Vol. 60, issue 2, Spring 2006, p. 335.

³¹ E. Morris and S. Stedman, “Protracted refugee situations, conflict and security: The need for better diagnosis and prescription”, in G. Loescher, J. Milner, E Newman and G Troeller (eds.), *Protracted Refugee Situations: Political, Human Rights and Security Implications*, Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2008, p. 69.

³² Morris and Stedman, 2008, p. 69.

³³ See: J. Vorrath, “From refugee crisis to reintegration crisis? The consequences of repatriation to (post-) transition Burundi”, *L’Afrique des Grands Lacs Annuaire 2007-08*, Paris: Harmattan, 2008.

practical links between refugees and peacebuilding. The project, directed by the author and funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), asks when, why and how the prolonged presence of refugees in neighboring countries can undermine peacebuilding in the refugees' country of origin. More specifically, the project seeks to explain variation between cases and to understand how different refugee situations have affected peacebuilding programmes in different ways in different regions.

This work has started by examining peacebuilding programmes in 16 African countries³⁴ and associated refugee populations in neighbouring countries.³⁵ Using process tracing, the project is now considering how variations in the type of refugee situation, type of peace, policies of host states, experience of exile and institutional responsiveness may help explain variations in the relationship between refugees and peacebuilding.³⁶ Similar research in other regions could significantly expand our understanding of the relationship between refugees and peacebuilding.

Conclusion

Peacebuilding has become a central feature of discussions on the theory and practice of conflict management. These discussions have, however, focused almost exclusively on the country in question and have paid little attention to the sub-regional and cross-border context. This is striking given that conflict in the global South has the demonstrated ability to “spill over” into neighboring states through the spread of small arms, the movement of armed groups and the policies of neighbouring states.

This paper has outlined how the prolonged presence of refugees in neighbouring countries is one cross-border dynamic that may affect peacebuilding in the country of origin. The paper detailed how cross-border dynamics associated with refugee populations present both challenges and opportunities to meet the core elements of peacebuilding identified by the UN Secretary-General, including support to: basic safety and security; political processes; provision of basic services; restoring core government functions; and supporting economic revitalization.

In particular, the paper outlined how the prolonged presence of refugees in neighboring countries can have a negative impact on peacebuilding if there are armed elements within the refugee population opposed to peace, pressures from the host country for early and unsustainable repatriation, and if refugees are politicized while in exile. At the same time, refugees can make an important contribution to peacebuilding if they benefit from training and skills development while in exile. Given these diverse links, this paper has argued that early engagement with refugee populations in exile can help advance peacebuilding priorities in the country of origin.

While these findings are important, our understanding of the relationship between refugees and peacebuilding needs to be more systematically interrogated in light of emerging

³⁴ Angola, Burundi, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Liberia, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia (Somaliland), Somalia (Southern), Sudan (Darfur), Sudan (South), and Western Sahara.

³⁵ The author wishes to thank Martha Chertkow, Ajay Parasram and Michael Spaeck for their invaluable support as Research Assistants in the early stages of this research.

³⁶ Details of the project, its methodology and initial findings, are available from the author.

peacebuilding research and contemporary cases. In particular, the paper has argued for a more systematic understanding of when, why and how the prolonged presence of refugees in neighboring countries can affect peacebuilding in the refugees' country of origin and to explain variation between cases.

Conceptually, it is important to understand how the cross-border dynamics of conflict affect peacebuilding. Practically, it is important to understand the implications of this link for the scope and scale of peacebuilding activities. As the PBC engages with a growing number of peacebuilding programmes, and as a range of states invest additional time and resources in peacebuilding and refugee programs, it is important to ensure that these efforts address the full range of issues that could both support and undermine peacebuilding, including the prolonged presence of refugees in neighbouring states.