



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
24 January 2022

Original: English

Committee of Experts on Public Administration

Twenty-first session

4–8 April 2022

Item 5 of the provisional agenda*

**Issues of governance and institution-building in
conflict-affected countries**

Institutions and State-building in conflict-affected settings: the case of Afghanistan

Note by the Secretariat

The Secretariat has the honour to transmit to the Committee of Experts on Public Administration the paper prepared by Committee member Paul Jackson in collaboration with fellow Committee members Augustin Fosu, Louis Meuleman, Katarina Ott, Aminata Touré and Najat Zarrouk.

* E/C.16/2022/1.



Institutions and State-building in conflict-affected settings: the case of Afghanistan

Summary

Government and governance are at the heart of States, and achieving success in those elements is critical to peacebuilding in the long term as envisaged in Sustainable Development Goal 16. States do not always look the same, and building State institutions is very difficult. Historically, State-builders have been good at developing laws, rules and guidance, but rebuilding institutions in post-conflict settings in such a way that they function effectively may call for fundamental changes in the political order as well as political legitimacy and support. A lack of political legitimacy can be exacerbated by corruption and incompetence.

While the United Nations remains active in the country and committed to supporting the people of Afghanistan, the final withdrawal of foreign troops in August 2021 provided a timely opportunity to examine the process and the positive and negative effects of 20 years of State-building efforts in very difficult conflict conditions. The goal of building a stable and well-functioning State was not achieved. However, the experience offers significant lessons for actors engaged in similar projects elsewhere in the world, as well as for future efforts.

Several issues occurred in Afghanistan that were related to the overall framework and approach applied, including the underestimation of the time required to build a State; the lack of sustainable approaches to institution-building; a failure to understand or work with existing local structures and political forces, which led to instability and a lack of political legitimacy; ongoing insecurity; and a top-down approach to governance. That approach was reliant on international support, which led to external dependency and undermined the long-term sustainability of institutions. Despite those challenges, progress was made in several areas, including gender representation, health care and education. The author aims to answer the crucial question as to whether those small successes could indicate a potential way forward for the further development of State-building approaches, using the principles of effective governance for sustainable development as a crucial point of reference.

The author concludes with a set of policy recommendations. The building of inclusive, accountable and sustainable institutions remains crucial in conflict-affected settings. Interventions are more likely to succeed if a bottom-up approach is followed that is contextually appropriate, with the clear acknowledgement that the causes of conflict are different because each society is different. A focus on processes and institutions is important to ensure that functions are prioritized over form and are designed with consideration of national and local political dynamics. This approach involves working with local norms and political realities and requires incremental change over longer timescales than those often applied in accordance with existing best practices.

I. Introduction

1. In 2020, at its nineteenth session, the Committee of Experts on Public Administration discussed critical challenges that made effective public administration difficult to achieve in conflict-affected areas. The concluding observations of that session remain valid and are taken as a starting point in the present paper. One such observation is that challenges such as threats of insecurity and violence, and legacies of injustice and mistrust are inherently difficult to overcome. Governments may also lack sufficient capacity to cope, especially with the additional impacts of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic (see [E/2020/44](#), chap. III.C).

2. Public administration and institutions play an important role in developing integrated approaches to long-term development objectives amid the multiple challenges faced by countries emerging from conflict, not least in balancing the short-term need for security with the longer-term requirements of sustainable development. Power exists in structures that can serve to reconfigure governance and the finance that goes with it, and the exercise of that power in the absence of legitimacy or contested sovereignty can be problematic if coalition-building, diplomatic or other political skills are weak.

3. There can be tensions between State-building and peacebuilding, and between bottom-up and top-down approaches to both that are related to the establishment of institutions and policies. These tensions require a political balance. Afghanistan is a clear example of such tensions in practice.

4. The international community identified weak institutions and a lack of democracy and individual freedom, together with corruption, as instrumental in the emergence of terrorist organizations in Afghanistan. To prevent a recurrence of those circumstances, it decided in 2001 to marshal its resources and influence for the purposes of State-building and the democratization of the country, including the establishment in Afghanistan of a broad-based, multi-ethnic, politically balanced, freely chosen Afghan administration that was representative of the people's aspirations and at peace with its neighbours. These and related efforts ultimately led to the formation of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in 2004. Over a 20-year period, State-building efforts in Afghanistan were subject to a raft of different approaches, including several Security Council mandates on institution-building.¹

5. Twenty years after the first intervention, the Taliban undertook a rapid offensive, with insurgent forces sweeping across the country and into Kabul on 15 August 2021. This resulted in the temporary collapse of the country's institutions. On 30 August 2021, the last troops of the United States of America left the capital (see [A/76/328-S/2021/759](#)).

6. Since then, the United Nations has remained committed to helping the people of Afghanistan by providing urgent humanitarian assistance and supporting long-term assistance for the country's social and economic reconstruction and rehabilitation. The Resident Coordinator, who heads the development pillar of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), is responsible for the coordination of the work of a team comprising 20 agencies, funds and programmes with offices in the country. Most recently, in January 2022, the United Nations and non-governmental organizations launched joint response plans aimed at delivering vital humanitarian

¹ See, for example, Security Council resolutions [1378 \(2001\)](#), [1383 \(2001\)](#), [1386 \(2001\)](#), and [1401 \(2002\)](#).

relief to 22 million people in Afghanistan and supporting 5.7 million displaced Afghans and local communities in five neighbouring countries.²

7. Although the early goal of building a stable and well-functioning State was not achieved, the experience entails significant lessons with regard to State-building for programmes that are currently engaged in similar projects around the world, as well as with regard to future efforts. The situation in Afghanistan exists not in isolation but alongside other past examples of State-building interventions, such as those in the Balkans, Iraq and Sierra Leone.

8. The present paper contains a brief analysis of the intervention in Afghanistan and the lessons that can be drawn therefrom about State-building in conflict-affected countries. It contains a discussion of the elements of the strategy in Afghanistan that may have been underestimated. In the paper, it is argued that government and governance are at the heart of States and that getting those elements right is critical to peacebuilding in the long term as envisaged in Sustainable Development Goal 16. The intention behind the paper is not to attempt to promote a specific model of State-building, but rather to seek to suggest recommendations based on the practical application of the principles of the Committee regarding effective governance for sustainable development (see annex).

II. Twenty-year review of State-building in Afghanistan

9. In August 2021, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction of the United States published a 20-year review of the role of the United States in the country. While the analysis in the present section focuses on the United States as a lead agent in Afghanistan, it is important to point out that the International Security Assistance Force, led by NATO from 2003 and in operation from 2001 to 2014, and the much smaller UNAMA³ were also involved in State-building efforts. The executive summary of the Special Inspector General reads, in part:

“The U.S. government has now spent 20 years and \$145 billion trying to rebuild Afghanistan, its security forces, civilian government institutions, economy, and civil society. The Department of Defense (DOD) has also spent \$837 billion on warfighting, during which 2,443 American troops and 1,144 allied troops have been killed and 20,666 U.S. troops injured. Afghans, meanwhile, have faced an even greater toll. At least 66,000 Afghan troops have been killed. More than 48,000 Afghan civilians have been killed, and at least 75,000 have been injured since 2001 – both likely significant underestimations. The extraordinary costs were meant to serve a purpose – though the definition of that purpose evolved over time. At various points, the U.S. government hoped to eliminate al-Qaeda, decimate the Taliban movement that hosted it, deny all terrorist groups a safe haven in Afghanistan, build Afghan security forces so they could deny terrorists a safe haven in the future, and help the civilian government become legitimate and capable enough to win the trust of Afghans. Each goal, once accomplished, was thought to move the U.S. government one step closer to being able to depart. While there have been several areas of improvement – most notably in the areas of health care, maternal health, and education – progress has been elusive and the prospects for sustaining this progress are dubious.”

² Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “UN and partners launch plans to help 28 million people in acute need in Afghanistan and the region”, press release, 11 January 2022. Available at <https://www.unhcr.org/neu/74237-un-andpartners-launch-plans-to-help-28-million-people-in-acute-need-in-afghanistan-and-the-region.html>.

³ See <https://unama.unmissions.org/mandate>.

10. This is an extraordinary balance sheet for a 20-year intervention, from which much can be learned about State-building in practice. Several conclusions are drawn in the report of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction and can be analysed in a number of ways, but the main points include the following:

- (a) There was no consistent overall strategy or overarching aim, and the short-term aims changed over time;
- (b) The amount of time required to build institutions was consistently underestimated, with priority given to short-term programmes involving significant spending, which in turn increased corruption and reduced effectiveness;
- (c) Many of the institutions that were built, including the military and the police, were unsustainable;
- (d) There were significant tensions between civilians and military personnel working together, even before differences appeared in the approaches taken by the foreign forces, on the one hand, and local authorities, on the other;
- (e) Insecurity remained a persistent problem and significantly undermined reconstruction efforts;
- (f) A lack of understanding of existing local institutions and their value systems, as well as insufficient or ineffective monitoring and evaluation, led to actions not being adapted adequately or at all over time.

11. However, there was some progress, for example in the areas of health care, maternal health and education, as indicated in the report. It is important to determine how such progress was made, given that the overall framework was failing, and whether those small successes indicate a potential way forward for the further development of State-building approaches.

12. Further analysis of the spending figures revealed that almost the entire \$946 billion invested by the United States between 2001 and 2021 went towards security, with less than 2 per cent of the overall budget used for basic infrastructure or poverty-reducing services.⁴

13. In the report of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, it is confirmed that the establishment of democracy in conflict contexts is extremely difficult, and such efforts seldom succeed. Yet the international community is continuing its peacebuilding and State-building activities, including a focus on political reform, in countries as diverse as Burkina Faso, Haiti, Mali, Somalia, Ukraine and Yemen. While it may be easy to dismiss Afghanistan as just another example of such a country, the State-building effort is part of a wider system of approaches currently being employed internationally, and related lessons are important.

III. The impact of mission creep on security

14. It is easy to forget that the initial military aim in Afghanistan was relatively constrained. However, what started as a targeted military operation later transformed into a full-scale liberal State-building intervention. The Afghanistan operation itself suffered from mission creep that contributed to the lack of strategic direction.

15. Interventions by foreign forces have sought to determine how a terrorist organization was able to thrive in Afghanistan and how such a situation could be prevented in the future. One of the explanations suggested was that weak States might

⁴ Jeffrey Sachs, "Blood in the sand", Project Syndicate, 17 August 2021.

lack the ability to deal with transnational security threats, which developed into a contemporary liberal international approach based on State-building and democratization as solutions.⁵

16. Having achieved initial military success against the Taliban, the foreign forces did not negotiate with the group. In a recent analysis of the war, this decision is attributed by some to a lack of understanding of the nature of the movement, which, like many insurgent political and military organizations, was present in both the formal and informal governance spheres simultaneously, making the reality on the ground unclear and difficult to manage.

17. Mission creep affected the overall military operation, in particular before 2015, once the initial aims had been fulfilled. An important military operation began to develop that demanded ever more resources and sometimes undermined the morale and political will of those running it because of its unclear direction and end, with the Taliban not just waiting in the wings but also reacting in certain situations. Helmand is an interesting example, as it was neither part of the ancestral home of the Taliban nor strategically important, yet it was invaded in 2006. Against all expectations, the Taliban threw resources at the province, creating a military quagmire. The targeting of poppy farmers further alienated the local population in the absence of alternatives. As a result, Taliban support grew, and more resources were committed to a province that initially held little significance.⁶

18. The consequence of such mission creep was profound, in particular as it meant that any State development efforts were taking place in a context of conflict, which alone meant that local delivery agents – whether State representatives or not – were placed at risk and required security. The development of security in turn escalated attempts to undermine that security.

IV. Lack of understanding of political dynamics

19. Many of the issues arising from mission creep resulted from a misunderstanding of the local political terrain and the nature of the Taliban movement.⁷ The local political system relied on a system of alliances that was difficult to manage. In this inherently unstable system, a largely top-down approach to war and State-building was always going to be difficult, especially if legitimate local actors could not be incorporated using bottom-up approaches.⁸

20. An element of the issue is certainly that, historically, the political processes of State development were invariably top-down, violent and exclusionary. In stable States, the central State holds either a monopoly or near-monopoly on the right to use or authorize the use of physical force if even threatened by insurgency or secession. However, in Afghanistan, the State itself was at least partially reliant on local power brokers, who not only did not lay down their arms but were effectively co-opted by the State, which thus became a constellation of actors with the ability to wield violence.

⁵ See for example Francis Fukuyama, *State Building: Governance and World Order in the 21st Century* (New York, Cornell University Press, 2005).

⁶ David Kilcullen and Greg Mills, *The Ledger: Accounting for Failure in Afghanistan* (London, Hurst Publishing, 2021).

⁷ Jeffery Sachs, “Blood in the sand” (see footnote 4).

⁸ See, for example, Sten Rynning, *NATO in Afghanistan: The Liberal Disconnect* (Redwood City, Stanford University Press, 2012); and Antonio Giustozzi, *Empires of Mud: Wars and Warlords in Afghanistan* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2009).

21. At the same time, many Afghans were (and are) in fact ready for democracy and sustainable governance institutions. Civil society organizations and structures, often considered to be foundational for effective governance, have long existed in Afghanistan. Customary forms of governance, such as collective decision-making bodies (shuras or jirgas) and community and religious leaders (maliks and mullahs, respectively), can strengthen State governance in Afghanistan. They can enhance the perceptions of the State, improve support for democratic values and even serve as a defence mechanism against abuses by the regime.

22. It is critical to note that States are not always set up like one expects, yet they may still function. Part of the hubris of State-building in general is the desire to take a familiar approach to institution-building. It is often assumed, for example, that rebuilding infrastructure and providing specific services that may conflict with the provision of existing community services will result in the increasing use of State services and a willingness to pay tax for those services; however, those results are not guaranteed.

23. Importantly, foreign forces failed to take into account that the division of powers is absent in Western-style democracies but not in most other parts of the world. The Taliban movement was constantly changing but also had strong roots in both State and non-State entities. As such, the Taliban was not an easy group to categorize or define, making them difficult to deal with diplomatically and politically in the sense that they did not fit into one clear political category (such as a party, organization or faction). This reality presented a particular difficulty for peace negotiations.

V. Institution-building and long-term dependency

24. Building State institutions is very difficult in practice. Historically, for example, State builders succeeded good at developing laws, documents and guidance, but the proper functioning of institutions requires fundamental changes in the political order of society, which in turn requires access to State power and authority, as well as resources with clear allocation processes. In Afghanistan, violent battles were often waged to decide these matters. It is also worth noting that formal institutions are meaningless when major – and powerful – actors ignore them.

25. The central point to be made is that the structure and operation of State institutions are inherently political, so restructuring any of them will also be political, creating alternative views of what those institutions should be, as well as winners and losers. Accordingly, State-building in Afghanistan was never a purely technical or military challenge that could be solved with more money, training, or kinetic operations.

26. Another major challenge in Afghanistan was insufficient economic development and sustainability, coupled with a poor tax collection system and corruption, as also identified in the report of the Special Inspector General. The State-building effort established a huge institutional structure that could not be sustained and largely consisted of ambitious programming based on unrealistic timelines that consumed huge amounts of cash rapidly. That situation not only produced considerable corruption but also undermined incentives for economic development or tax collection.

27. While the foreign forces indicated that they would scale back their involvement in the future, the Government of Afghanistan was supported by a military that had been created with an extensive reliance on their approaches, equipment and support. Expensive equipment, such as Blackhawk helicopters, was difficult to maintain, and the Afghans were reliant on the foreign forces for logistical support, maintenance and

intelligence, as well as aerial support. Once those supports were removed, the entire structure collapsed.

VI. Poor succession planning and lack of sustainability

28. The above-mentioned issues around dependency led inextricably to a lack of sustainability that was exacerbated by poor succession planning. Apart from issues with the Afghan National Army, the lack of understanding and failure to develop strong links with the Afghan ruling class resulted in most members of the ruling class abandoning their posts during the Taliban advance in August 2021. In some ways, this was a consequence of moral hazard – negative incentives created when people believe that they will be protected from the consequences of their decisions and actions. There was no incentive for Afghan leaders and officials to tackle urgent issues, such as dealing with corruption, supporting service delivery or improving the lives of ordinary Afghans, as they believed that the foreign forces would attend to those tasks. As a consequence, the Afghan regime struggled to support itself after the departure of the foreign forces.

29. Another consequence of the dependency and lack of planning was the absence of a sustainable tax base for maintaining State institutions. Tax revenue as a percentage of gross domestic product is less than 10 per cent in Afghanistan, with the shortfall made up by foreign financial transfers and aid.⁹ The withdrawal of that support in 2021 had catastrophic consequences for the Afghan economy and the State itself, as well as its citizens.

VII. Short-term commitment and miscalculation of the time required to build a State

30. Building a State takes time, but it is not impossible. However, it becomes very difficult when the State being constructed is not related to domestic political structures. The foreign forces expected that State-building would be quite a fast process and that \$1 trillion would be sufficient to achieve that aim. The problem was not resources, but rather the way in which they were expended. For example, creating a dependent political class, remote from most local institutions, created many additional issues and undermined political legitimacy.

31. Supporting the Afghans in developing their own functioning military, government and economic institutions would have been a much more long-term commitment, but the results would probably have been far more resilient and sustainable.

VIII. A way forward

32. While the international community may periodically hesitate to intervene, it is likely that international intervention in State-building will continue, not least because there are sometimes no viable alternatives. The real question is how the difficulties identified in the present paper can be avoided to allow for effective peacebuilding and the construction of stable, resilient States.

33. Sustainable Development Goal 16 is dedicated to the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, the provision of access to justice for

⁹ “Tax revenue (% of GDP)”, World Bank Open Data database. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/GC.TAX.TOTL.GD.ZS>.

all, and the building of effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. Human security and well-being should be at the core of peacebuilding approaches, alongside traditional efforts regarding institutions and infrastructure.

34. The achievement of peace in a country involves broader issues of justice and the recognition of human security concerns with the aim of building legitimacy for States and governance systems. Mission creep, however, can hamper this goal, as the Afghanistan example illustrates. Security interests (such as countering violent extremism) should not be prioritized at the expense of citizens in conflict-affected environments, especially because a mission with a greater focus on the concerns of local people is more likely to develop resilient and legitimate support.

35. The building of strong institutions also requires the recognition of the fact that not all institutions will look the same, be constructed identically or enjoy similar levels of legitimacy. A key lesson learned from Afghanistan is that merely superimposing a set of State institutions on existing governance mechanisms can result in the failure of the two layers of governance to connect and in the legitimacy of the State being undermined.

36. Interventions need to be contextually appropriate, with the clear acknowledgement that each society is different and that the root causes of conflict are therefore different. They need to be focused on processes as well as institutions, so that functions are prioritized over form and the interventions are politically astute. This approach involves working with local norms and political realities and requires incremental change over longer timescales than those often applied in accordance with existing best practices.

37. Understanding national and local political dynamics and using bottom-up approaches and partnerships with civil society are crucial, as is working with local actors that have legitimacy. This is in line with Goal target 16.7, which is aimed at ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels by 2030. Processes that allow bottom-up work beyond State institutions that may be dysfunctional, corrupt, illegitimate or unrepresentative are important while addressing the roots of those issues and potentially challenging related power structures that perpetuate poor governance and unresponsive, exclusive institutions.

38. Local ownership is critical but difficult to realize in practice. There is a need to build the capacities of national institutions while recognizing the complexities of international involvement in conflicts, acknowledging that there is no blueprint for the approach to peacebuilding and State-building, accounting for the long-term, sometimes unclear nature of peacebuilding and State-building, and developing networks and partnerships of agents involved in peacebuilding and State-building at the international, national and local levels.

Annex

Lessons to be drawn from the State-building experience in Afghanistan on the basis of the principles of effective governance

<i>Principle</i>	<i>Assessment</i>	<i>Examples and recommendations</i>
Competence	Developing long-term competence in public service is a long-term undertaking. Competence requirements are broad in post-conflict situations, and actual conflict situations, such as in Afghanistan, require an ability to take decisions quickly and have the legitimacy and resources to address local concerns. This requires considerable skill in environments in which public service has been underresourced for a number of years.	An additional skill required in Afghanistan included the ability to negotiate with different groups, including civil society, public servants, the international community, the national and international military, and the Taliban. One solution attempted in Afghanistan was the short-term contracting of private companies and individuals. The results were mixed; a combined approach allowing short-term solutions while developing long-term capacity might have been far superior. In addition, the position of international humanitarian agencies could have been clarified with regard to providing services at the local level in line with local needs rather than maintaining a separate ecosystem of accountability.
Sound policymaking	The multiple trade-offs affecting development at the local level are complicated by conflict and influenced by security concerns. Sound and consistent decision-making is required during a conflict to protect civilians and ensure continuity in the provision of services to the vulnerable as well as the development of underlying long-term economic and political sustainability. Achieving this balance between short-term priorities and long-term interests is very difficult.	A key lesson learned from Afghanistan is the need to avoid moral hazard – negative incentives created when people believe that they will be protected from the consequences of their decisions – in State-building. As a result of their dependence on foreign forces, there was never an incentive for Afghan leaders and officials to tackle corruption, military issues, service delivery or the quality of life of ordinary Afghans. After the withdrawal of foreign troops in August 2021, that dependence became clear as the Afghan regime crumbled and struggled to support itself.
Collaboration	Conflict requires considerable coordination centred on public servants. The process requires public administrators to collaborate with one another, external development agencies, external security agencies and non-State actors. Breakdowns in communications and the lack of coordination with key economic groups, such as farmers and the international community, undermine legitimacy and provide opportunities for anti-State groups to exploit the situation.	A key lesson learned from Afghanistan is that there were considerable discontinuities within the system of coordination. In particular, the superimposition of a particular form of State on existing institutions at the local level without meaningful collaboration, coupled with a divergence of the aims and objectives of the international community, especially between humanitarian and military actors, led to the creation of a relatively weak, non-resilient State.

<i>Principle</i>	<i>Assessment</i>	<i>Examples and recommendations</i>
Integrity	<p>Integrity is a key ingredient for repairing the relationship between a Government and its citizens, yet history has shown that procurement during conflict unfortunately provides an opportunity for some to engage in unethical practices. Corruption can be a difficult and intractable problem anywhere, but conflict tends to exacerbate the issue, because emergencies create opportunities for corruption. A massive increase in public procurement presents such an opportunity, as do environments that are insufficiently policed.</p>	<p>The increase in government procurement, in particular in States with weak institutions, such as Afghanistan, coupled with extended payment systems for relief means that partnerships between the State, civil society and citizens are critical for monitoring and taking action against corruption. This can be very difficult in situations with limited information in which there are no incentives for central government officials to enforce anti-corruption measures.</p>
Transparency	<p>It is extremely difficult to be transparent during a war, since both sides tend to use information that benefits them. Rumours, lies and misperceptions can derail State-building and trust. Political advocacy and close links with local populations are critical in undermining misinformation. Another main issue is corruption, which, together with a lack of transparency, undermines the legitimacy of the State among all those who work with it.</p> <p>In its policy brief No. 75, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs drew directly on the principles of effective governance for sustainable development to outline five core principles related to State-citizen relations during the pandemic, namely: (a) taking advantage of opportunities; (b) delivering essential services to all; (c) ensuring social protection for all; (d) providing credible and trusted leadership; and (e) governing with the aim of unification rather than division.^a This approach could equally be applied to conflict situations as a useful guide for governments in convening and providing trusted information to citizens. This relationship is centred on trust, without which it is likely to fail.</p>	<p>Afghanistan had and continues to have serious issues with corruption and a lack of transparency in government institutions, which is also reflected in its low ranking in the Corruption Perceptions Index.^b While Afghanistan made some progress towards developing anti-corruption laws, there have been significant difficulties with enforcement and the practicalities of prosecuting corrupt officials. It is important to note that corruption was frequently identified by both citizens and the international community as a critical issue throughout the 20-year intervention in State-building.^c</p>
Independent oversight	<p>In many post-conflict societies, oversight conducted through non-government entities is frequently weak, as civil society organizations are either no longer in existence or focused on immediate issues. In many contexts, independent oversight can be performed by the international community, which participates in the creation of public service commissions, for example. However, this is far more difficult</p>	<p>Two lessons to be learned from the Afghanistan example are that there can be too many sources of external oversight and that oversight needs to be more than a box-ticking exercise. In conflict contexts, for example, a local non-governmental organization could be overseen simultaneously by local leadership, the national Government, financial authorities, a national headquarters, one or more</p>

<i>Principle</i>	<i>Assessment</i>	<i>Examples and recommendations</i>
	when the international community itself is a protagonist in the conflict, and it is not a long-term solution to oversight.	international donors and, potentially, a local military authority, such as a provincial reconstruction team, each with different objectives and procedures. With regard to the second lesson learned, oversight itself can sometimes become a self-fulfilling prophecy. In the Vietnam War, for example, there were instances when external actors asked why an airstrip was in a certain location and were told that there was a base nearby. When asked why the base was there, they were told that it was “to guard the airstrip”. Oversight should be meaningful, serve to ask meaningful questions – and relate to accountability mechanisms.
Leaving no one behind	<p>More than 40 per cent of the poorest people in the world live in economies severely affected by conflict and violence, and this figure is expected to rise to 67 per cent in the next decade.^d This is a significant group in direct danger of being left behind. Many such economies are also in failing or failed States.</p> <p>The economic effects of conflicts are catastrophic and include the inability to collect tax, a lack of investment, chronic unemployment, the direct destruction of economic resources and infrastructure, and the lack of basic resources to maintain sustainable livelihoods. The destruction of underlying economic infrastructure, even if that infrastructure is linked to illicit activities, can undermine wider State-building if there are no viable alternatives for maintaining livelihoods. International humanitarian aid can only be a short-term solution, and there is considerable risk that the poorest will be severely affected in situations in which the source of survival of a dependent economy is removed.</p>	While data are difficult to obtain, it is clear that the Afghan economy is in an extremely difficult situation, given the impact of the uncertainty over the Taliban resurgence coupled with the freezing of all international funding, ^e with significant consequences for the goal of leaving no one behind.
Non-discrimination	Discrimination is a frequently cited source of conflict, which makes inclusion a critical element of public administration, in particular if public administration is seen as a microcosm of the society that it serves. Institutions should be inclusive and accessible and comprised of staff that are representative of all citizens. In addition, the behaviour of public institutions towards their users should be seen as being non-discriminatory. Promotion and	Some countries have long-term and historical issues with social cohesion, including discrimination, for example on the basis of ethnic or sectarian lines. ^f Evidence suggests that youth activism may be challenging some of these traditional cleavages during the pandemic, but the sectarian divide still appears to damage social cohesion in different parts of conflict-affected countries.

<i>Principle</i>	<i>Assessment</i>	<i>Examples and recommendations</i>
	performance management should be based on merit.	
Participation	Participation is important in environments in which certain groups have not felt represented through public service institutions. The lack of participation in governance networks, alongside discrimination, is a frequently cited underlying cause of conflict. Non-State actors and civil society groups in particular can play an important role in overcoming the underlying drivers of conflict, but also in promoting dialogue and even economic development. Participation at the local level with civil society organizations and community groups is critical for developing trusted approaches to State-building.	The example of Afghanistan shows that participation can be deeply political. Involving national actors in capitals is not sufficient for constructing broad-based States that enjoy political legitimacy. Understanding and including existing local political and institutional conditions and mechanisms are critical, together with the ability to incorporate elements of governance that may differ from those in Western models. It is much easier to reform institutions where great collaboration exists and vice versa.
Subsidiarity	In keeping with the principle of participation, subsidiarity is critical for managing the end of conflict and the start of peacebuilding. Centralized solutions are generally less effective than solutions developed in partnership with local actors. The dissemination of information and countering of fake news and misinformation are also more effective when conducted not just from a central government source but in tandem with evidence and approaches that are understood by local people.	In a multi-ethnic and multilingual State, such as Afghanistan, subsidiarity may be more important, given the need for inclusivity. Connection and collaboration with local communities is more likely to occur where decisions can be made at the local level than where there is the perception of central decisions being imposed locally.
Intergenerational equality	Not only are exclusionary public administrations frequently subject to gender imbalances, they also tend to be dominated by older generations, with limited access for younger and sometimes more qualified staff. Inclusion addresses such intergenerational inequality by creating opportunities and offering career development for younger staff members. There may be a conflict between those with community legitimacy who may be older and have traditional roles and those who are younger with linguistic and computer skills, for example, who may be better able to work with international organizations.	Conflict exacerbates intergenerational inequality, for example, when internal food distribution difficulties increase the vulnerability of the elderly and the very young, especially where food scarcity is rising. Afghanistan was already the third most food-insecure country in the world before the international community withdrew. The resulting reduction in humanitarian activity has already deepened a food crisis that disproportionately affects children and the elderly. ^g The resulting inequalities and hardship contribute to the underlying causes of conflict, fuelling the continuation of conflict and State fragility. Dissatisfaction combined with longer-term conflict drivers increases the pool of potential recruits for conflict entrepreneurs.

(Footnotes on following page)

(Footnotes to table)

^a United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, “COVID-19: Reaffirming State-people governance relationships”, policy brief No. 75, May 2020.

^b Transparency International, *Corruption Perceptions Index 2020* (Berlin, Transparency International, 2021). Available at: https://images.transparencycdn.org/images/CPI2020_Report_EN_0802-WEB-1_2021-02-08-103053.pdf.

^c See David Kilcullen and Greg Mills, *The Ledger: Accounting for Failure in Afghanistan* (London, Hurst Publishing, 2021).

^d World Bank, “Poverty”, 14 October 2021. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/overview#1>.

^e See, for example, Edith Lederer, “UN: Afghanistan’s economy is collapsing ‘before our eyes’”, Associated Press, 10 December 2021.

^f See, for example, United Nations Development Programme, “Impact of COVID-19 on social cohesion in Iraq”, 15 November 2020.

^g David Kilcullen and Greg Mills, *The Ledger* (see footnote “c”).
