

South Africa and the Reconstruction of Africa: Proposing Some Strategies*

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Introduction

South Africa wants Africa's wars to end, mainly because they pose a grave danger to its national security — the kind of danger that creates floods of refugees, hinders regional development, and keeps foreign investment away. So, for South Africa, assisting broken states in its own backyard, or providing indirect support to others who do, may yield rich dividends in terms of its national interests and commitment to create a "better Africa".¹

The problem that South Africa faces is to understand what form of foreign assistance is needed to stop people taking up arms during or shortly after peace negotiations. This is largely an African problem according to United Nations (UN) officials, and this despite several international and local attempts to keep conflict under control.² To improve this record, much has been said and written about 'post-conflict reconstruction'³ and the degree to which it can nurture and sustain peace agreements. While there is no common definition of the term, it is used broadly to describe a foreign intervention which aims to rebuild a country devastated by war. This kind of assistance, the experts say, extends beyond keeping peace and disarming combatants, to providing the building blocks for self-governance, security, economic exchange, and development — for creating a 'minimally capable state', as Hamre and Sullivan (2002) suggest.

Perhaps the best known and only real successful example of post-war reconstruction in history is the Marshall Plan, the American-backed programme to rebuild Western Europe after World War II. Since then, things have only got worse for reconstruction, particularly in Africa (Montgomery and Rondinelli 2004). This is what usually happens. After accepting a political deal, armed militants turn away from violence and enter mainstream politics; before long, local authorities and international aid agencies lose the confidence of citizens, as they both fail to provide basic needs (food, shelter, clean water, education, health care, and so forth) and create opportunities for work. The result: more conflict.

Presumably, modern post-conflict reconstruction is not working because there is, to this day, no standard recipe for planning reconstruction or doctrine for conducting it in the field. You would think that eliminating these uncertainties would be a top priority — and you would be wrong. The African Union (AU), for instance, is putting the final touches to a document which aims to establish and guide African reconstruction, called the *Policy Framework for Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development* (African Union 2006). On paper, the framework identifies big goals. To the unwary these goals look impressive, that is, until they

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learn that the majority of states in Africa, for example, are largely oblivious to the quality and quantity of their engineering and construction industries. In fact, not only is the AU unclear on how to rebuild Africa, it also lacks African 'statebuilders', and this imbalance is forcing it to rely on foreigners to do the job, thus perpetuating the problem of African dependency, or turn to military solutions, which tend to fail.

What is South Africa, a leading member of the AU, doing about supporting reconstruction? Simply put, far too little. For example, since 2003 South Africa has been charged by the AU to lead African reconstruction efforts in Sudan, and so far has done precious little. In the South, basic infrastructure is almost zero and development is simply not taking place (Business in Africa 2006). At any rate, military peacekeeping has been South Africa's policy instrument *du jour* for helping needy neighbours (Kagwanja 2006). But this is not good enough: experience shows that the biggest challenges often arise *after* peacekeepers leave.

Instead, because the key to ending Africa's wars is generally thought to lie in development *work* (as opposed to talking about it in conference halls and communiqués), this paper proposes that post-conflict reconstruction be recognised, and treated, as high priority in South African foreign policy. This is not to say that South Africa has lacked the political will to promote development in Africa's trouble-spots, but rather that there has been no credible, well-researched plan to back this commitment. This paper is about developing such a plan.

Background: the Need for a Plan

Exactly how South Africa plans to reconstruct a country after war remains a mystery, despite the promises of 'African solutions'. Even president Mbeki has expressed his concern about the problem. For example, in July 2005 he admitted, '[the] reconstruction of the African economies...is a challenging issue and I am not quite sure that we [South Africa] quite know what...to do'. In that case, what can South Africa do to master the art of post-war reconstruction?

This article suggests that researchers – both from academia and industry – should jointly prepare a strategy that would guide South African thinking about reconstruction and identify important themes for future research. This assignment, as obvious as it may seem, has never been done before.

While the purpose of this study is not to answer fully or even partially all the many questions that need to be addressed, it will attempt to raise specific strategies for reconstruction that may provide interesting leads for future studies. The strategies identified in the study are: aligning development with diplomacy and defence; establishing a needs assessment capacity; investing in science and technology; and partnering with business. The relevance of each theme will be explained and courses of action will be put forward during the discussion. These themes are, obviously, not set in stone. More research and deeper debate is needed to explore in greater detail the potential benefits of making post-conflict reconstruction a working instrument of South African foreign policy.

Aligning Development with Diplomacy and Defence

One of the main criticisms of post-war reconstruction is the lack of cooperation between different development actors. 'Doing your own thing' has served only to delay the delivery of public services to villages and teeming cities for months or even years, and this has led some societies to slide back to war (Eide *et al* 2005). Conclusion: integrated systems of planning and delivery are needed for, what Natsios (2005) calls, 'the new development climate'.

The launch of the UN Peacebuilding Commission in December 2005, intended to serve as a 'central node' for the world's major development actors, is a tangible product of this thinking. So too is the recent establishment of new inter-governmental reconstruction agencies in the US, Canada, and the United Kingdom.⁴ Not only have these agencies been mandated to coordinate the actions of different national entities that deliver foreign assistance, but also to give development 'an equal footing and independent standing alongside defence and diplomacy' (Brainard 2007). This is a strategy well-worth exploring for any government, including South Africa, which considers promoting peace and development as its topmost foreign policy goal.

As a cornerstone of this new policy, the South African government could explore the idea of establishing a single agency for reconstruction.⁵ At the moment, there are no structures in government, except at cabinet level,⁶ that jointly look at the problem of conflict in Africa. Because of this, the lower-level bureaucracy usually pieces together *ad hoc* committees or teams for each new crisis. Yet, there is a disadvantage with this way of planning in that it is not designed to spot and prevent potential trouble, but only to respond to it. A permanent agency, on the other hand, would promote optimum sharing of information between every poverty-fighting branch of government (and this means foreign affairs and defence, plus those departments with experience in service provision, such as public works, agriculture, health, and science and technology). Better coordination would make it easier for analysts to develop detailed options for policymakers on how to avoid conflicts before they start and to rebuild after they end. The proposed agency would preferably be placed in the Presidency, as real inter-departmental coordination in South Africa primarily emanates from this office.⁷ The ability to convene, coordinate and take action would also depend on whether a new 'umbrella agency' for reconstruction is given sufficient budget authority and legislative muscle to support integrated development planning and action.

Ultimately, the ability to leverage limited resources, and still make a difference in the lives of the poor, would be the litmus test of South Africa's new legislative mandate on reconstruction. The principle of leverage in reconstruction is linked closely to the next strategy, namely needs assessments.

Establishing a Needs Assessment Capacity

Generally speaking, post-conflict reconstruction proceeds in three phases. In the first phase, *assessment*, international and local experts collect data and analyse the needs of a post-conflict state. In the second, *funding*, money is raised, usually at a donor conference, to fund development programmes. In the third, *implementation*, agreed plans and actions are finally

executed on the ground. Clearly, describing the problem is one thing, footing the bill and doing the work is quite another. This is especially true for reconstruction, a process which can take generations to complete, and therefore is better left alone if one lacks the political will and resources to stay that long (Hazen 2007). Indeed, a job half-done is just as dangerous as not doing anything at all, as unmet expectations can lead to more conflict (Madlala-Roudledge and Liebenberg 2004).

The point is that the complexity of reconstruction and the high costs involved should cause Africa to take a smarter approach. This should focus, at least for now, on making needs assessments — or '[getting] the truth of the situation on the ground' (Rachel 2005). Assessments provide a basic starting point for considering *what* needs to be done to reconstruct a country, *how* it should be done, and *who* should do it. In other words, they help to ensure local ownership,, which Natsios (2005) describes as 'perhaps the most important...principle of development'.

However, it must be said that the AU rarely conducts its own assessments in the field. Often, this job is done by outsiders, as was the case for Sudan in 2005.⁸ The inconvenient truth is that even if the AU did prepare a plan for rebuilding a country, international aid agencies would probably ignore it. There are good and bad reasons for this. The bad reasons are that international donors often want to maintain a high profile in conflict-areas to secure funding, and in the process may overlook training and giving work to local staff. The good reasons concern the limited, at times non-existent capacity of post-conflict governments to lead reconstruction from beginning to end. In short, the AU wants ownership of reconstruction processes; yet few, if any, African governments are doing anything to challenge the factors that perpetuate the 'donor domination of the development agenda', to borrow a phrase from Kiiza *et al* (2006).

South Africa should consider following two strategies to make reconstruction a truly African-owned enterprise. First, it should look at establishing a credible and reliable assessment capability, consisting of a group of 'on-call' technical experts than would assist the AU with post-war planning. This group would be multi-disciplined in nature and its purpose would be to analyse key developmental needs and consider options to meet these needs. In a time of tight budgets, these options would have to be affordable for Africa. Value for money would also be a key issue. As critical as this step is, however, a better African assessment capacity would not by itself ensure that reconstruction belongs to Africa. South Africa should find ways to leverage its standing as a regional 'peace broker' and encourage the highest levels of international leadership to *legitimise* African thinking around reconstruction, ideally by using the UN Peacebuilding Commission.⁹

Effective reconstruction is not just a question of leadership and ownership alone, however. Africa, at some point in the future, will need to implement and monitor successful reconstruction operations on its own. As the next section will argue, this effort will require increasing the status and role of science and technology (S&T) in development.

Investing in Science and Technology

Developmental experts are increasingly seeing technology and innovation as engines of growth for all nations, even those shattered by war (Wagner *et al* 2001). Significantly, the

idea of utilising cutting-edge research for advancing development is touched upon in the AU policy framework for reconstruction. It proposes that Africa 'develop appropriate technologies for the rehabilitation and development of key social sectors such as housing, energy, water and sanitation [and] for physical infrastructure' (AU 2006).¹⁰ The framework, sadly, does not elaborate on its meaning of 'appropriate technologies', but the mere mention of the concept is important because it highlights two fundamental truths: S&T is important for infrastructure provision, in so far as every stage of an infrastructure project involves the application of a wide range of technologies (Rust *et al* 2007); technological development, conversely, is impossible without adequate infrastructure (Ridley *et al* 2006).

But herein lies a major predicament for Africa. Africa's current infrastructure stock is inadequate and too disintegrated to support development and trade (Black *et al* 2006). Yet, Africa has few ready candidates with the technological know-how and finance necessary to address the poor state of its infrastructure. It is possible, however, that this dilemma may be minimised if South Africa, a country with a rich heritage in scientific research and development, decides to project its technological footprint in arena of post-conflict reconstruction.

Encouragingly, a report from the South African department of science and technology (DST) suggested in 2004 that the department would 'make S&T interventions a cornerstone of a post-conflict reconstruction effort in Africa' (DST 2004). That intention, however, has yet to materialise. Still, there is no doubt that South Africa is well-positioned to develop and adopt new technologies that could boost African reconstruction.

A good start in this regard would be to help operationalise key elements of the AU reconstruction framework. 'Elements' is the operative word here, because no individual country, not even South Africa, will be capable of addressing every detail of the framework. A better option for South Africa would be to pilot projects on issues where significant domain expertise already exists locally, and which are crucial for international development, like mine-clearance (to make roads safe and stimulate the exchange of goods), labour-based construction (to create jobs for ex-combatants and restore essential services), and geographic information systems (to enhance development planning). Research into these and other areas of interest could one day place South Africa in a stronger position to participate in, perhaps even lead, African reconstruction.

As always, the big question when talking about development work in Africa is money. Another common area of concern is skills. Keeping these two points in mind, the next section of the paper suggests that African governments and regional organisations are unable to rebuild war-torn states on their own and will need to enlist the private sector to get involved — something that big business, until now, has been cautious to do.

Partnering with Business

During his tenure as UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan was extremely supportive of the role that business can play in alleviating poverty, ending conflict and promoting development (Kelly 2005). Even so, there has always been an implicit tendency to assume that investing from early-on is counter-productive, if not pointless, unless fighting has completely stopped. While this may well be the case, post-conflict countries usually face a bitter paradox: they

are the areas which have experienced significant levels of infrastructure destruction and — critically — where violent conflict is likely to re-emerge. One could therefore hypothesize that commercial activity is as important for 'normal' societies as it is for 'normalising' conflicting ones.

In that case, can a case be made for business in conflict resolution? Possibly, although one thing is fairly certain: private companies around the world are increasingly being hired-off the global market to do business in war-torn regions, with or without widespread support (Orr 2004). Multiple factors are influencing this trend. One factor is worth mentioning here, namely 'war profiteering', or working for money to provide a crucial service which other key players are unable or simply unwilling to provide.

The point to be made here is that post-conflict communities often cry for quicker action and this challenge, according to Gerson (2001), requires 'courting the private sector'. This is because, Gerson goes on to say, 'there is a gnawing realisation that breaking the cycle of poverty and war may exceed the capability of the World Bank and the United Nations'. Sidiropoulos (2007) shares this view, when she suggests, 'successful post-conflict reconstruction can occur only through partnerships between governments and business. It is in this area that much more can be done by both actors'. Sidiropoulos' thinking is critically important, given that the skills required for reconstruction — engineering, construction and project management, manufacturing, public administration, urban development, environmental management — are readily available in the private sector worldwide, including Africa.

South Africa's business community, of course, is one of the strongest in Africa. But like business anywhere, this expansion has been mainly fuelled by profits and market share and not by ending poverty.¹¹ This way of doing business in Africa is understandable considering that there is virtually no published research in South Africa on how business can be successfully used to end conflict *and* make profit in the process. Future research, therefore, would do well to explore how the South African government can enlist local companies in reconstruction and also 'ensure that the private sector...is more in tune with [its African] agenda' (Sidiropoulos 2007).

Significantly, Gerson (2001) makes a compelling case for those captains of industry that may be interested in undertaking 'expeditionary' ventures in post-conflict environments, when he argues:

By engaging in commercial activity in a region that others consider too risky, businesses can lay the groundwork for future long-term profits despite short-term risk. Early-entry businesses can establish a loyal consumer base, customise infrastructure for their own purposes, enact favourable deals...with local governments and already-existing business, and secure concessionary rights to [valuable] resources that will sustain future profits.

So, playing a part in establishing law and order could be good for South Africa business. In fact, the best example we have of successful reconstruction, the Marshall Plan, has shown that restoring the power of local business as a growth engine is better than any grand aid

programme (Hubbard and Duggan 2007). Indeed, charity has usually produced neither good government nor development in Africa.

Conclusion

The key to real reconstruction in Africa — to realising the African Renaissance — is ultimately trade (Eizenstat *et al* 2005). Only by engaging in global trade can African governments hope to promote development and ensure their own stability. But reconnecting to the outside world will not be easy. The world's major powers are less likely to open-up their markets if Africa does not get its house in order; conversely, Africa's poor countries are more likely to deteriorate without trade and foreign investment. This is a major predicament, but not an impossible one to beat if Africa finally takes the issue of post-war reconstruction well-beyond talk-shops and meetings, to where it matters most — in the field at the grassroots. The problem is that the time for action is now, and no major African state or organisation seems to be moving fast enough.

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Notes

¹ African National Congress (ANC) 2007. *International relations: a just world and a better Africa is a possibility*, <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/policy/2007/discussion/int_relations.html>

2 Both the UN and the World Bank have found in their experience that countries emerging from war have a 50 percent chance of relapsing into conflict within five years of signing a peace agreement. The UN Peacebuilding Commission was established precisely to reverse this worrying trend.

3 The term 'post-conflict reconstruction' is often used interchangeably by policymakers and academics alike with the terms 'peacebuilding', 'statebuilding', and/or 'nationbuilding'.

4 A number of other countries are reported to be investigating the possibility of establishing government-wide reconstruction agencies, including Germany, Australia, and France.

5 It is worthwhile mentioning that a 2007 report by The South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), entitled *Crime and its impact on human rights: ten years of the Bill of Rights*, prescribes a similar government-wide policy approach to fight crime and poverty in South Africa.

6 The Mbeki administration has introduced an integrated process for executive decision-making, through the 'clustering' of various ministries into cabinet committees. The committee responsible for international security issues is the International Relations, Peace and Security (IRPS) Cluster.

7 Vale and Maseko (1998) underscore this point in the context of South African foreign policy when they argue '...the distinguishing feature of South Africa's post-apartheid foreign policy is how obviously [it] has moved from the ministry of foreign affairs into the president's office — particularly, it seems, into the hands of [president Thabo] Mbeki'.

8 Sudan's framework for economic recovery, called the Joint Assessment Mission (JAM), was co-developed and sponsored by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank, with minimal AU involvement. To date, there is little evidence to suggest that the JAM has actually made a positive impact on Sudan's economic development, not least because the framework has lacked real support at the local level.

9 The Peacebuilding Commission would be an important platform to leverage international support for African planning processes because it brings together a membership drawn from the three principle organs of the UN (i.e. the General Assembly, the Security Council, and the Economic and Social Council), as well as major financial donors, troop-contributing countries, and top international financial institutions.

10 See African Union, AU Policy Framework on PCRD accessed at <http://www.africa-union.org/pcrd.htm>. It is worth noting that the CSIR played a key role in ensuring that S&T issues were incorporated into the final draft of the AU's official policy on reconstruction.

11 There are cases, of course, in which South African companies have become involved in social projects in post-war settings. For example, in the DR Congo, firms like AngloGold and BHP Billiton have invested considerable amounts of money, not only in mining operations, but also in supporting local infrastructure.