



REFLECTIONS

Insights from Resident Coordinators on generating entry points for UN engagement

Issue 1

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JOINT UNDP-DPA PROGRAMME ON BUILDING NATIONAL CAPACITIES FOR CONFLICT PREVENTION



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The UN provided technical, low-key support to the national mediation that facilitated a peaceful transfer of power following Lesotho's May 2012 parliamentary elections.

Photo: UN Lesotho

INTRODUCTION

In many countries, the conditions in which the UN operates continues to change and evolve and do not easily fit the 'traditional development' landscape. The UN is increasingly required to navigate the nexus between politics and development, as national stakeholders seek to address development challenges, strengthen their governance systems, manage group expectations, strengthen institutional capacities and state-society relations, manage the competition for and seek to reconcile perceived imbalances/exclusion. These conditions require UNCTs, and particularly RCs, to be equipped with political acumen and analytical capacities, to engage in catalytic approaches and programming while drawing on the leadership of RCs themselves. The insights gained through a series of interviews with current and former Resident Coordinators in countries as varied as Lesotho, Malawi, Kenya, Panama, Uganda, and elsewhere, provide key lessons about how RCs and UNCTs can effectively enhance these roles and the types of support required to do so. These lessons included:

- Recognizing that politics and development are intrinsically connected;
- Using development and humanitarian entry points to engage with national stakeholders;
- New and catalytic approaches are needed at the country level to address the drivers of conflict and violence
- It is critical for the UN to remain neutral, open, and maintain core values;
- The UN should not 'impose' solutions;

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- Resources within the UN system should be leveraged to provide consistent and complementary support;
 - RC's need support to develop capacities to engage at a political level.
 - There are tremendous opportunities for the UN system through the RC to support national stakeholders build consensus on how to address their challenges. These opportunities are often not recognized or exploited.

The "Reflections" series is intended to portray the variety of country contexts in which the UN works and the types of situations that RCs and UNCTs are required to manage. In turn, they shed light on how support to RCs and UNCTs can be improved in order to adequately equip the UN to support countries address the emerging challenges of the 21st century, all of which require national capacities for dialogue, mediation, consensus building and the peaceful resolution of conflicts. This publication represents the first of a series of 'Reflections' to be developed by the Joint UNDP/DPA Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention. The 'Reflections' seek to highlight emerging examples of innovative approaches and, in doing so, raise awareness about the types of roles the UN can play in mediating, facilitating, convening, or otherwise supporting efforts that bring national stakeholders together to jointly address development and political challenges.

BACKGROUND ON THE JOINT UNDP-DPA PROGRAMME ON BUILDING NATIONAL CAPACITIES FOR CONFLICT PREVENTION

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Department of Political Affairs (DPA) have collaborated on the development and implementation of conflict prevention initiatives in the field through the Joint UNDP-DPA Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention (Joint Programme). First launched in 2004 and then extended in 2006 and 2008 through 2011, the programme is executed by UNDP's Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR) on behalf of UNDP and DPA. The programme provides catalytic seed funding to emerging and ongoing conflict prevention initiatives in various countries.

Over the past eight years, support from the Joint Programme has made a contribution to strengthening conflict prevention capacities at national and local level, and supporting national architectures for peace, mediation, and dialogue. The Joint Programme is also working to mitigate tensions around elections and referenda in countries as diverse as Benin, Cyprus, Ecuador, Fiji, Georgia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Ghana, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Lesotho, Malawi, Maldives, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, the Solomon Islands, Togo, or Ukraine. In these countries, concrete support was provided through UNDP conflict prevention programmes and Peace and Development Advisers, who also provided political support and conflict analysis to United Nations Resident Coordinators and Country Teams. This approach opened entry points for conflict prevention work and ensured the integration of a conflict-sensitive perspective into development programming.

While the experiences shared in this note aren't exclusively related to the Joint Programme, the purpose of this series is to raise awareness about the types of roles Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams can play in engaging political and development actors in country. While the Joint Programme does not represent the sole means of such support, bringing together the institutional capacities and comparative advantages of DPA and UNDP represents a significant added-value. As many of the experiences described in this note attest, the ability to provide consistent and coherent support through the Joint Programme represents a critical mechanism of support to Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams in their efforts to traverse the nexus of politics and development.

AHUNNA EZIAKONWA, UN RESIDENT COORDINATOR IN UGANDA (FORMER RESIDENT COORDINATOR IN LESOTHO)



Ahunna Eziakonwa has been in Uganda since mid 2012, having previously served as UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Lesotho since 2008. Prior to that position, Ms. Eziakonwa worked in various positions with the UN Secretariat, serving in the Departments of Public Information, Peacekeeping Operations, and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

How do you perceive the current political situation in Lesotho?

They are struggling with a coalition government for the first time. There have been lots of teething problems with how to make the government work. The government is sticking together, things are happening but slowly. Democracy is up and running. The peaceful transition that happened was borne out of a culture of political dialogue and consultations. A lot of the agreements that were reached were done outside of parliament in a mediated forum to reach agreement and discuss things that were important to them. That space needs to be preserved. The UN needs to step in to ensure the mechanisms for continued dialogue are active and supported.

Could you describe the context when you first arrived in Lesotho as RC? How did you obtain buy-in for the UN to provide support to the political process?


When I arrived, there were no entry points. No opportunities to get involved. The space was occupied by SADC which was mediating the electoral dispute from the 2007 elections. They made it clear that it was a regional matter and the UN was not welcome to play a substantive role. The UN's role was limited to providing logistical support for the SADC mediation team. We tried to bring the UN's support, from DPA and others, but this was rejected by the government. The cabinet said that UNDP should focus on development and not get involved in political matters. The Heads of Churches, under the umbrella of the Christian Council of Lesotho (CCL) had the credibility, the moral authority, the acceptance of all parties, but not the technical capacity to mediate a complex political dispute. Supporting them was the major entry point. The strategy was to not make the UN too visible but rather work from behind to support the local initiative. They had exhausted all their other options. All hopes were invested in this local initiative. Everyone recognized it was well meaning but ill capacitated. The fact that the UN had played, in the past, an impartial role in creating platforms for dialogue helped. People remembered the role we played in 1998 where we supported a neutral place for them to come together and have these discussions. This was an entry point for us to provide some service without being the main player in the process.

What were the challenges, and how were these overcome?

With government, it was initially difficult. They saw our attempt to get involved in the political space as inappropriate. Some were more vocal than others. What I did was basically to gradually begin to meet with those who were open to some UN engagement, for instance the Foreign Minister, and basically used him as a vehicle for convincing his colleagues that this was part and parcel of the UN's mandate. Our interest in peace and stability was linked to our work in development. Building strong relationships with those who were open to the UN and using them to gain broader acceptance. Building relationships with civil society. The church leaders were the only trusted player. In a small country, where everyone knows everyone else, there is often mistrust. We started off with a crisis of trust. Building that trust back, you need to go through the institution that has the most trust amongst members of society and the confidence of the parties. Yes, there were issues with the church in the past. But the fact that we got close to them and provided mentoring and technical support, they began to trust the UN as a reliable partner and one that could help carry forward the process. And then there was the donor community, whom I met with on a regular basis to brief them on what was going on, what we knew, and that relationship of exchanging information created an air of confidence around the UN as a partner to support this. They gave messages to both sides, that the process we were supporting was a credible one and one that they should respect.

Could you describe the relationship between the UN and the Heads of Churches? How did the UN provide support to the mediation process?

In a small country like Lesotho that has a lot of complexities in its political history and a lot of tension between people and between parties, and really struggles to have a situation of trust and trust in their institutions, the fact that the church leaders succeeded in providing a dialogue platform that accomplished a lot in terms of the electoral process, leveling the playing field, changing the law and adopting new measures that allowed them to accept the process, represents a huge investment that needs to be preserved. Credibility in the church leaders wasn't always there, but with our support they worked hard to earn it. In the end they became quite trusted to the point where they were the most visible players in the effort to move towards a peaceful transition. Now they need to keep that reputation. I think the UN can help them maintain that reputation by making sure they remain engaged, remain available for when the country needs them. They should also have access to a team of local and international experts. The RC needs to be upfront with the leadership in terms of where the UN stands on these matters. The UN is not just for government, we should have open doors to listen to all sides. That requires meeting with the opposition. Had we not kept the doors open for this government when they were in opposition they would think differently about the UN. The UN should remain a neutral ground, our role is not to take sides, but to offer a space to explore solutions when there are disagreements. That message needs to be clearly stated. That all sides can count on the UN's impartiality. What really worked for us was that we were prepared to not take the credit. We were prepared to stay in the background. There is a very strong feeling amongst the Basotho that they



want to own their own destiny and the process of finding solutions to their own problems. They've had so much external interference that now they really want the initiatives to be nationally owned, making the decisions and claiming the victory, with the UN in a supporting role.

In light of the political role played by yourself and the UN, did you feel empowered to take risks or did you have doubts about your ability to engage?

I had moments of doubt about how far I could push things, particularly if we were met with resistance. At this point it was helpful to get advice from colleagues at HQ but also with interactions with colleagues in other complex situations. Once I was assured that this was well within our realm of operation I was a bit more emboldened to take next steps, to take calculated risks. My approach was to find good entry points, to position ourselves in the way we could that would be helpful and not attract controversy that could be a distraction. What were the best opportunities to be effective? Once that was clear, I felt empowered to take the risks because the steps we were taking were focused on empowering local institutions. They were not about scoring points for the UN.

Now did I feel that if I went wrong somewhere that I would be penalized as an individual, that really never occurred to me. My main interest was in keeping the conversation open with colleagues in the Framework Team, with DPA, with UNDP, all along seeking a corporate, or shared, vision. It was helpful to have the back and forth with HQ and also to explore and strategize with the UNCT to come up with joint positions.

What was your relationship with the UNCT in light of this context?

In the context of the UN 'Delivering as One' there was clear division of labour. We understood who was responsible for what. And for the elections, it was always clear that UNDP were in the lead, together with myself in my capacities as RR and RC. Because we had the mechanism of DaO there was a lot of discussion and information flow. The UNCT were in the loop with what was happening. The DaO process helped us see this as part of the whole change, the roles were clear. The risks were analyzed and accepted. As long as these were discussed, everyone accepted that this was a good role the UN could play. There was a certain pride when things were going right. And when things were not going so well, the UNCT came together to re-evaluate. For the most part, they really trusted my instincts without interfering too much. I think they were also relieved to know they could focus on the technical work and not have to be involved in discussions with political parties.

What types of support were critical?

There were two pillars of support that I couldn't have done without; the PDA and the UNDP Governance team. The PDA, by design, is an external, a foreigner in the country with limits in terms of their understanding of the situation. Local perspectives are needed. One of the approaches was that the PDA would work within the Governance Team, which

worked brilliantly. The Governance Team could bring in a lot of analysis and local knowledge, and the PDA could put the analysis into perspective. That was a very good collaboration. At any given time we had the benefit of the PDA with their international view, breadth of experience, and at the same time the depth of internal perspectives from the Governance Team. The PDA also played a very important role in nurturing the heads of churches. When they started off, they were very weak, and had some reluctance. I had regular meetings with them, but they needed a lot of support. I couldn't do that as RC, but the PDA could do that as it was 100 percent his job. That shuttle diplomacy role in the mediation effort as well as the coaching, nurturing, mentoring role for the mediators/ church leaders was extremely helpful. The PDA served within the local technical team which was set up to support the heads of churches, and which was made of civil society leaders under the LCN/CCL collaboration. Although this relationship proved difficult, it did provide some insightful lessons.



Three members of the four person Heads of Churches preside in opening moments of talks at UN House during the tense final months of electioneering in early 2012. Photo: UN Lesotho

In Uganda, what opportunities and challenges do you foresee for the UN's involvement in supporting national stakeholders build capacities for dialogue, conflict resolution, and prevention? Do you foresee similar types of support, such as the PDA, being required?

Uganda is a bigger country, and there is a lot more interest from external players. It is a strategic country. There's a lot at stake. When I arrived there were already entry points, unlike in Lesotho. The team was already working with the elders' forum that was quite active in the previous elections and had also served, at times, as mediators. The UNCT has the opportunity to engage with them and get agreement to provide support to them. Unlike in Lesotho where there is no national mechanism for political dialogue, Uganda has gone ahead and agreed on the National Consultative Forum which is constitutionally mandated to uphold the ideals of democracy and work on improving the electoral process. Since I've been here and talking with some of the players in the consultative forum we actually have a firm invitation to be the partner that supports that forum. It's a very delicate process with the political parties here, including the ruling party.


There's a lot of debate and tension. Having this forum to actually forge the way ahead on a code of conduct for political parties and electoral reform is hugely important if they are to succeed. We have an opportunity to support that. The first initiative has gone well and actually boosted our credibility to provide this type of support. I think Uganda is starting off with a very good entry point and at the same time there's this civil society group. The biggest challenge for us will be integrating the different processes and somehow finding convergence between them in terms of views and positions.

I've already communicated the need for a PDA. A key factor of our success in Lesotho was the fact that we started early. I arrived in 2008 shortly after the 2007 elections. We had four years to work at it. It gives you time to build relationships without all the emotions of elections in the background. That situation presents itself here, with three years before the 2016 elections. We need a PDA to help facilitate engagement with different stakeholders. We already have a mandate to support the NCF and for the Elder's Forum, having a PDA on the ground to support that is a necessity. It is critical that we have someone who will help keep us on top of the analysis so we can know what the best approach is and how we can go about our programming. If we start work at it now, by the time elections roll around a lot of things will be cooked and we won't have to rush around to find our way.

“Peace and security is part and parcel of development and security. You have to operate at both levels to be able to fulfill the UN’s mandate. Whether you see yourself as a development player or as a political player depends on how you define your role. For me, I don’t make too much of a separation, as long as it’s clear to the partners and to the government that we are here to support development overall”

In light of the above, what are the key opportunities for RCs in complex political situations?

As RCs, we really have opportunities to be useful in complex political situations, if that role is recognized by us and others within the system. The position is respected by in-country counterparts. It's increasingly seen as the most senior UN person on the ground, in the absence of a mission. Governments look to UN leadership more and more to step in and support. It's more sensitive in some countries than others but if we play our cards well we always have that entry point. The UN has the advantage of being on the ground, of having huge programmes on the ground and in some cases when we push for coherence we have the entire UN system and the contributions we make in the development context. In terms of positioning, the RC is well positioned to play a big role here. It's a position that requires you to develop relationships with a wide variety of players, government, political parties, parliament, donors, and civil society. You already



have those relationships to leverage when there is a political situation that requires some solutions. That foundation is already there for us to leverage. Being in the country, you build relationships of trust. As an RC, that's one of your first tasks. When there is a conflict situation, or a crisis, that is when the trust is important. They want to engage in an institution, a person that they can trust. There is an opportunity there for the RC to step in. There's an argument about the division between politics and development and whether our role is compromised when we get into this sphere of work. My argument is that you really can't separate the two. Peace and stability is part and parcel of development and security. You have to operate at both levels to be able to fulfill the UN's mandate. Whether you see yourself as a development player or as a political player depends on how you define your role. For me, I don't make too much of a separation, as long as it's clear to the partners and to the government that we are here to support development overall.

How can RCs be better prepared to play a role in complex political situations?

The induction did not prepare me for any of that. Maybe to the extent that it gave me the opportunity to interact with the key players in New York and to know what support is available. I worked in New York before I went to Lesotho, so I had an advantage. In terms of the content of the induction itself, some of it was helpful, like when we went to the UNSSC in Turin. There were some good resource persons who were brought in to talk about what they did in similar situations. That's helpful to get, first-hand experience from RC's who have been through the mill. For me, it was a one-off event. What would be really helpful would be to create more opportunities for interaction between RCs, to exchange their views, experiences, and share best practices and common challenges. I don't think there is enough of that happening in a systematic way. There are ad-hoc opportunities but there needs to be a more deliberate effort to bring together RCs from politically complex situations to really exchange views. HQ support needs to be coordinated. The more UNDP and DPA and the Framework Team can work together, and the extent that other agencies have a role to play, to brainstorm on the situations, to give one set of guidance to the RC, is very helpful to know that the UN is thinking together and not wait until there is a crisis to bombard you with briefs. Working together in peace time to have an understanding of the context, shared strategies and guidance for the UNCT and then when the moment of a crisis arrives, the approach to the field is also coordinated at HQ level. And finally I would say, PDA, PDA, PDA. There has to be some sort of predictable resourcing for that, where you actually develop a class of PDAs who are equipped and available for deployment where they are needed, rather than this constant negotiation and debate that leads to a lot of delays about whether the PDA comes and how long they stay. Some predictability in that area is key. They are a critical resource, especially when you get the right one. It's not just about having an extra member of staff, but because it is such delicate type of work, the person really needs to know what the job entails.

AENEAS CHUMA, DEPUTY SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR LIBERIA (FORMER RESIDENT COORDINATOR IN KENYA)



Aeneas Chuma was appointed to his current post in November 2012, having served as Resident Coordinator, Humanitarian Coordinator and Resident Representative in Kenya for four years. Prior to that, Mr. Chuma was Resident Coordinator and Resident Representative of the UN in Zambia, and as Deputy Resident Representative in Mozambique and Uganda, respectively. He also held various positions with UNDP in New York, Oman, and Zimbabwe, after beginning his career with the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe.

How do you perceive the political situation in Kenya, particularly in the lead up to the 2013 election?

There are a couple of issues. One is the technical work of elections. I think that is the easy part in terms of the capacity of the electoral commission, notwithstanding the challenges they have faced for instance in procurement. But by and large they will be able to manage credible elections based on the way they managed the referendum as well as several bi elections. Of course this is a much more complex exercise and there is a need to invest considerably in civic education.

Now having said that, the big threats to Kenya are much more political. The tensions in the conflict we have seen are ethno-political, they are ethnic but also driven by political concerns particularly now that we have counties with resources. Constituencies are often divided by tribe and, given the tendency to vote along tribal lines, people are trying to define constituencies as ethnically defined. If not, they try to drive out other groups. We have seen some agitation within constituencies, precisely because voting is ethnic and not based on ideology. Some candidates will claim 100% of a constituency precisely because of the predominance of one ethnic group. There will be tension along ethnic lines. We have done enough to map out 'hot spots', there are 25 of them but also to try and anticipate violence and invest in prevention measures - investing in peacebuilding through the peace infrastructure that we built with significant BCPR support. There are also tensions arising from the ICC issue.

What advice would you have for the incoming RC with regard to positioning himself/ herself with political actors and other national stakeholders?

Over the last four years following the 2008 elections, the UN has worked hard to regain the moral high ground by dealing with sensitive political issues in a balanced and neutral manner. In the aftermath of the 2008 elections, the UN and international community were perceived to have taken sides. The deliberate investment we, as the UN, made was to demonstrate that we work above that, that we were interested in the larger issues of building on the agenda for agreement, building on institutions and supporting the electoral process, promoting cohesion and creating the peace

infrastructure. We were not afraid to talk to anyone and to encourage social cohesion and recognize larger areas of agreement and build on that. In other words, we followed the principle of collaborative leadership. We had to put forward a broad based strategy that demonstrated we could work across the political divide with political parties in a credible manner.

The new RC should continue the highroad, don't be afraid to state things. Be principled and you must be able to demonstrate that you are neutral, that you are interested in building on the peace infrastructure, technical capacities of the electoral commission and support significant reforms in judiciary. We should be interested in key strategic issues and build on the UN's access to the nation's leadership.

“A Resident Coordinator’s work is political. Be it the institutional politics of managing the UNCT or the relationships with the government and donors. It is fundamentally political in nature. An RC needs to find what the political challenges are and identify how to position oneself, and the UN”

Reflecting on the difficult environment around 2008 and the way the UN was perceived, could you describe some of the key challenges you encountered when you first arrived as RC?

In many ways, the timing was fortunate as I arrived after the new constitutional dispensation had already been agreed upon. The focus was on institutional reforms in key institutions such as the police, the judiciary, and the electoral process. The UN was able to support capacity development and restoring confidence in the electoral process and the judiciary, though continued reform and a 'culture shift' for the country's police is still required. Managing political will also presented challenges.

The violence from the 2008 elections showed everyone that the country was on a precipice. Reforms that had been very difficult to pursue in the past suddenly were seen to be urgent. It was clear that a new constitution was necessary. There was an element of urgency.

In light of the political role played by yourself and the UN, what political support, if any, did you receive from the UN, including from the Secretary-General and UNDP Administrator? Did you feel empowered to take calculated risks?

I did feel empowered. I spoke on behalf of the UN in the country and worked closely with UN colleagues in New York and UNON. When you're working in a country, the UN needs to have a united front, and speak on behalf of the UN

system. I systematically engaged with DPA, UNDP, and others. It's also important to recognize the strengths and weaknesses within a UN Country Team.


The introduction of a PDA worked extremely well. It was important that I empowered the PDA to talk with anybody and everybody. The PDA was strong intellectually and politically astute and was able to control the political debate and able to provide effective services to national actors. I think it's very important to have a strong PDA who understands the key issues and can engage at the right level in a credible manner and pursue entry points that may not necessarily be available to the RC.



Collaborative Leadership Training Project. Photo: UNDP Kenya

What types of additional support would allow the UN, and the RC in particular, to more effectively engage at the political level?

A strong PDA capacity is the starting point. It is important to note that the PDA needs to be available to the whole Country Team, not just the RC. The PDA needs to have the space provided by the RC. In the end, the PDA was involved with political counselors in key embassies. Through that, the UN announced our presence as a political actor. The PDA is more than an advisor.




Involving the PDA in UNCT is critical. In Kenya, the PDA was involved in the UNCT's monthly briefings and would prepare an analysis to share. The PDA's reports were shared regularly with UNCT colleagues and his political analysis and strategic advice was announced as widely available to all heads of agencies. Having the PDA accompany the RC in meetings with key national stakeholders established the PDA's legitimacy and provided an opportunity for the PDA to demonstrate their value and establish relationships with key actors.

Could you describe your relationship with the UNCT? What were the dynamics? Did they 'buy in' to your understanding of the political context and recognize the role the UN could play?

It is critical to manage expectations with the UNCT in a transparent, predictable manner. There were instances where there were internal challenges regarding the UN's political role to the extent that I had to manage heads of agencies who felt the UN should make certain pronouncements, particularly with regard to instances of human rights violations such as extra-judicial killings. Some felt that the UN should talk when these events happen, but they could happen every day. Kenya is a bonafide member state and public pronouncements were often made by donors. The UN could play an important role by communicating quietly on behalf of the international community while using opportunities to publicly reiterate key messages in a sensitive manner. It is important that these messages be framed in a way that does not attack the government or sideline certain actors but rather encourages national stakeholders to take ownership and address these issues. The regular briefings by the PDA to the UNCT provided agencies a systematic opportunity to engage with the political discussion.

In light of the above, what are the key opportunities for RCs in complex political situations?

The RC must have the capacity for balanced and consistent analysis and should not be afraid to engage politically. The function of an RC, first and foremost, is not programmatic but political. Programmatic work is done by the Country Director or the Deputy Resident Representative. An RC's work is political. Be it the institutional politics of managing the UNCT or the relationships with the government and donors. It is fundamentally political in nature. An RC needs to find what the political challenges are and identify how to position oneself, and the UN. In a context that is divided like Liberia or Kenya, you cannot be seen to only be talking to one side. You have to be available to engage with all contending political parties. Ensure consistent messages with all stakeholders. We can use development programmes as entry points to issues of a political nature. You need to be prepared for disappointment but be narrow in terms of your political engagements. You can't run after every issue but rather look at the larger institutional issues. In Kenya, these concerned reform issues, constitutional issues, and leadership questions.



**Did your RC training and induction programmes adequately prepare you for the kinds of tasks that you have faced?
What could be further improved in these programmes to better equip RCs in future?**

Political analysis has to be built into an RCs training. We have mandatory courses on security in the field. In the same manner there has to be some form of orientation on political analysis, tailored to particular countries. By and large, the quality of preparation for RCs to engage in political work is wanting. Part of this is to ensure there is awareness about the types of support available. I was fortunate because a PDA was already being deployed when I arrived as an RC. We also had a Human Rights Advisor and a Humanitarian Advisor and then we had a PDA. We would meet every Monday morning. Each would say what they saw from the Human Rights perspective, the political perspective, and the humanitarian perspective. We institutionalized this process. Often their analyses were mutually supportive. It meant that I was briefed at the beginning of the week and had a more complete view of what was happening. The political function of an RC is very important and needs to be better supported and better organized, built into the Terms of Reference, orientation programme and for some countries more than others.

RICHARD DICTUS, EXECUTIVE COORDINATOR, UNV (FORMER RESIDENT COORDINATOR IN MALAWI)



Richard Dictus is currently the Executive Director of UNV, having previously served as UN Resident Coordinator/ UNDP Resident Representative for 4 years. Prior to working in Malawi, Mr. Dictus worked with the UN in Yemen, Sudan, Lesotho, Bangladesh, Pakistan, UNDP HQ in New York, and Fiji.

How do you perceive the political situation in Malawi during your tenure, including prior to and after the unforeseen changes in the country's leadership? Why did you think the UN had a role to play?

I arrived five months before the 2009 national elections. Internally the country had ground to a standstill. There was absolutely no space for dialogue. Parliament was taken over by bickering by the fragmented opposition. The government ruled with an absolute majority and didn't feel they were accountable. Civil society was absolutely outside of the picture, there were no entry points. The international community was torn up. The German ambassador had been politely asked to leave. The UK Ambassador was expelled, the first expulsion of a British Ambassador from a Commonwealth country for 25 years. In the middle of that you have a situation where the government still wants to send messages to the international community and the international community still wants to have a measure of influence on the thinking at ministerial and political levels. As the RC, I communicated to both sides on the reality of certain things, playing the role as referee and communicator. First in terms of preparations for the national elections and later about creating spaces for dialogue and dialogue opportunities between development partners and senior members of the government as well as between senior members of the government and civil society. That's what became known as the UN's dialogue process. In a country that is donor dependent development becomes politics, it becomes a debate about resource allocation in a country. Everything we touched was politics. If you were working in development, you were working in politics. There was no way to keep it irrelevant and no way not to remain engaged.

“People expect impartiality, neutrality, and sensitivity to the context that they wouldn't expect from a regular diplomat or a development partner... you need to be seen to be constantly talking to various sides”

- RICHARD DICTUS

How did you gain (or seek) acceptance amongst national stakeholders for the UN to play a facilitating role?

You are the representative of the UN. People expect impartiality, neutrality, and sensitivity to the context that they wouldn't expect from a regular diplomat or a development partner. As such, you need to be seen to be constantly talking to various sides. It also has a lot to do about the strategic use of the media – radio, TV, newspaper articles. I wrote a monthly feature, from a neutral development platform, about issues affecting the country. This created important entry points and facilitated engagements with national stakeholders. You need to make the right noises at the right times. By recognizing mistakes and being open, even about mistakes made by the UN, opportunities were created to bring relevant stakeholders together to discuss problems and solutions with a view to unblocking the deadlock within the government.


Could you describe the process involved here, how you engaged the relevant stakeholders and overcame challenges?

Informal contacts with government and development partners opened up entry points for discussion of certain issues to take place off the 'radar screen'. This also facilitated engagements between ministers and donors who may not have ordinarily engaged with each other. The toolbox of an RC is not just the formal system but the informal contacts, the informal channels that you have to develop. That's how you open doors that may otherwise be closed.

The dialogue between government and civil society actually came about through a mission by DPA. The Secretary-General visited Malawi in May 2010. In July 2011, 20 people were killed in a demonstration. The Secretary-General himself took the initiative to call the President of Malawi and say that "I have just been to your country and have been energized by what I've seen on MDG achievement, I am very conscious that if your country slides this will curtail future MDG achievement, can we help you?" On the basis of that, a DPA mission visited the country to see what options were available. After attending all the meetings together we came to the conclusion that there was an opportunity to bring the two parties together in order to bring the political temperature of the country down. In facilitating a series of workshops leading up to dialogue, it was critical that the UN manage expectations of the various stakeholders involved. During the facilitation process, the USG from UNON took over the process. While this was perhaps not the best move given that the RC had close personal connections with all the stakeholders present, the USG together with the RC managed to drive the process to a conclusion and debrief the new President. This process initiated an opportunity for a joint UNDP/BCPR, UNIFEM, and UNICEF initiative to begin a consultative process about developing national 'infrastructures for peace'. The country itself should have regular mechanisms for convening parties together to address crisis. It shouldn't have to rely on the UN for this role. The development situation in the country is difficult and is only going to get harder. Just as I left, the President of the country formally agreed to start a process of developing a national peace council. This was very much the result of the initial investment we made, due to the hard work of the interim PDA working with civil society and leveraging all the contacts we had made. I couldn't have done this in my first year but it was fortuitous that it could happen once I was well established and a well-known quantity.

What was the role of the PDA? How did the PDA enhance the RCs role, in what ways was it complementary?

The issue was that I had spent four months dealing entirely with the dialogue processes and I still had to be the RC and manage the UNDP office. And when it became fairly clear that this would require a sustained effort BCPR immediately jumped to my aid with the funding to hire an interim PDA. The PDA had skills as a facilitator, skills as a networker. I didn't



have the time to communicate with everybody, though the PDA could thoroughly engage with all sides which allowed things to move forward. You need to have someone who has an instinctive knowledge of the role that a particular RC can play at a particular point in time. It won't be the same in different contexts. A PDA needs to be adaptable, understanding, and have good communication with the RC. By allowing space for the PDA, the PDA was trusted to speak on my behalf, amplifying our ability to reach out and enhance the scope of conversation with the networks. The only way to get things done in this context was to sit down in conversation and work through issues. You can't do it via correspondence or via email. To have someone who prepares all the players for the critical moments for the RC to come in and move the process forward at key phases is an incredible luxury. Through carefully selecting what events we decided to organize we were able to manage the events. Every stage of consultation was cut up into six weeks or three months. Afterwards we would come together at an event. This allowed us to create moments and build a pace with key interlocutors. Whether it be a training workshop or an informal gathering, events were seen to add value and generate buy-in from all sides on the issue of the national peace architecture.

Could you describe the engagement between the PDA and the UNCT?


Youth was identified as a critical issue. The PDA worked with relevant agencies, including UNWomen, and UNICEF to ensure there was adequate knowledge of the technical issues. The PDA built on capacities and programming of UNICEF and UNWomen, and supported the integration of dialogue and conflict sensitivity into their ongoing activities. With UNICEF this was done in the context of the youth parliament, with technical assistance from the PDA. Making the unique skills of the PDA available to the entire UNCT, agencies were able to work together in a non-threatening, non-confrontational manner.

What are the key opportunities for the incoming PDA and RC?

There will be a new PDA and a new RC and they need to start by talking with everybody around the ideas of the peace architecture. The network of contacts is there. They need to see how far they can take the process. It's very clear that Malawi is a country that remains on the edge of violence, quite simply because of the economic and political problems the country is going through. There's an enormous frustration in the country arising from the feeling five years ago that they would grow very rapidly out of poverty. There were expectations that they would be able to buy cars. Now, they can't buy fuel for those cars. The middle class is angry, the farmers are angry. Unless these dynamics are managed carefully the country will return to the point of violence, each time worse than the time before. The peace architecture, by creating an additional voice to those in parliament, will be absolutely essential to stop the country going to violence in the next four to five years. There's an election in 2014 that will be make or break but a PDA would need to work on elections with the election advisor from the outset and the entire UNCT to ensure consistent, conflict-sensitive programming. It is not logical to pretend it is 'business as usual'. At the moment not every agency has the right capacities to be conflict sensitive, but this is essential.

What types of additional support are required for RCs and UNCTs in complex political situations?

The RC and UNCT need to be helped with the realization about what the propensity towards conflict is in the particular country that they work in. So they don't find themselves waking up in June or July of any given year and all of a sudden 300 people have been killed and they didn't see it coming. These things, you can see them coming but you need to know



where to look and how to look. Not all UNCTs are capable of doing that, they need to be helped with that adjustment. Often one PDA will be enough to support that process. But the moment that things look worse and begin to move quickly, then you are looking at different kinds of HQ engagements such as the Framework Team and then moving towards processes that sit closer to the Security Council. There is a path that you can go through. What needs to be done is for UNCTs and RCs to realize that such a path is possible and understand what they need to do to avoid the situation deteriorating by having technical advice in-country and, if they can't avoid it, identify the best way of positioning the UN as the situation starts to further deteriorate.

KIM BOLDOC, UN RESIDENT COORDINATOR IN PANAMA



Kim Bolduc is currently the UN Resident Coordinator in Panama, having previously served as Deputy Special Representative to the Secretary-General for the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), where she also served as UN RC/HC. Ms. Bolduc has served as UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Brazil, Honduras, and Peru, as well as working as Special Adviser to the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq.

How did you perceive the political situation in Panama prior to the political dialogue and why did you think the UN could play a role?

In early February 2012, the Ngäbe-Buglé indigenous people, who are the largest indigenous group in Panama, protested against a Government proposed mining reform, which dropped a crucial article from the law stipulating strict environmental safeguards for extractive projects in their territory. They also opposed the construction of a hydroelectric dam, "Barro Blanco", located near their indigenous lands. The Ngäbe-Buglé complained that the hydroelectric project effectively reduced the adjacent communities' access to water and seriously affected agriculture. In protest, indigenous communities blocked sections of the strategic Pan-American Highway in western Panama for over two weeks, thus almost paralyzing important economic activities and traffic in the country. On 5 February, following increasing tensions, anti-riot police violently broke the blockade. Two men died, and many indigenous people, including women and children, were injured. In the face of such widespread social unrest and the difficulty to resume dialogue between the parties in conflict, the indigenous leaders requested support from the UN and the Church as mediator/facilitator of the dialogue process. Once the government agreed to this facilitation role played by the UN, it became possible to organize a round table with all the parties concerned and find solutions to the issues in dispute.

What role did the UN play throughout the dialogue process?

The Church had the central mediation role, but more in terms of moral authority, while the UN facilitated the dialogue process by providing technical and methodological assistance, to both the government and the indigenous groups. The RC Office was the venue for all the dialogue meetings, at the request of the indigenous leaders, in order to ensure an environment of neutrality and respect for all the parties involved.

What did the dialogue aim to achieve?

To facilitate negotiations, two discussion platforms were organized, one to focus on the drafting of a bill of law to forbid mining concessions in indigenous territories, and regulate the use of natural resources on these lands. The second dialogue platform addressed a contentious hydro power plant project being built by an international enterprise which obtained the contract two years ago. The Ngäbe-Buglé communities demanded the closure of this project called "Barro Blanco", as they claimed they were not consulted before the granting of this concession which would greatly damage their environment and affect the Tabassara river, their lifeline.

After one week we managed to get the bill of law drafted and approved by all the parties. It was eventually ratified by the National Congress and the President. In addition, an agreement was signed between the government and the Ngäbe leaders which included the establishment of a Technical forum for the preparation of an integrated indigenous development strategy, to benefit all the seven indigenous groups in the country, represented by eleven indigenous Congresses. Once again, the UN was requested to provide technical support to this exercise until the completion and approval of such a strategy, which should include the development rights and requirements of the indigenous communities. The Government was committed to include this strategy in the National Development Plan, and ensure funding in the national budget for its implementation. This participatory process started shortly after the first part of the dialogue was concluded.

What risks did the UN, and you as the RC, face throughout the process?

The major risk is always to intervene and not be able to resolve the conflict situation, or see it worsening, in spite of all our efforts. In these highly sensitive contexts, trust and credibility are key assets the UN must protect, to be able to perform the facilitation role in conflict resolution.

Generally speaking, what role do you think the UN, and RCs in particular, can have in complex political situations?


It is important to be familiar with the local context and have a network of important contacts, with both the government and civil society. We need to be invited to play a central role in conflict resolution, by all the parties involved, and this invitation will only come if we have an established track record as a competent partner who can be trusted with such a sensitive task. Depending on the circumstances and the requirements expressed by the parties, we could be participating as observers, facilitators, mediators, advisors. The RC can offer the range of competencies and resources available through the UN country team and coordinate UN assistance to better achieve the expected results.

“[The UN] need to be invited to play a central role in conflict resolution, by all parties involved, and this invitation will only come if we have an established track record as a competent partner”

- KIM BOLDUC

How can RCs and UNCTs be better supported in complex political situations?

In complex political situations, the Organization should rapidly deploy additional resources, be it technical or financial, to provide a strong support to the team in the field. Provision of continued support from the team at HQ's level to monitor the situation and discuss about the right course of action is important, as it is important to have quick access to consult Senior Management in case of an escalation of the problem. To implement quick responses, simplified rules and regulations (fast track type) are key to enhance efficiency.



What advice would you have for incoming RCs?

The world geopolitics of today are much more complex, in my view, than when I started my RC career 18 years ago. Knowing the organization well will help the new RC to make use of the available tools, resources and contacts in problem solving. Some simple recommendations: Understand well the local context and the people we serve; establish a trustworthy reputation as a manager at the technical level, and as a Representative/Coordinator at the strategic and political level; be at the same time a team leader and a team member; in difficult times of doubt and confusion, go back to the UN values for guidance; your dedication, commitment, passion for the UN mandate, hard work and solidarity are contagious, your team will appreciate the example and follow it!

MARTA RUEDAS, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, BUREAU FOR CRISIS PREVENTION AND RECOVERY, UNDP (FORMER RC IN LEBANON)



Marta Ruedas joined BCPR having served as Deputy Special Coordinator, Resident Coordinator and Resident Representative in Lebanon. Prior to this role, Ms. Ruedas worked with UNDP/RBEC, served as UN Resident Coordinator/ UNDP Resident Representative in Bulgaria, São Tomé and Príncipe having previously worked with the UN in Bolivia, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, UNDP HQ in New York, Mongolia, and Mexico.

How did you perceive the political situation in Lebanon during your tenure?

It was a situation of perpetual balance. There were competing powers in perpetual tension with each other but always in a state of balance. The essential drive is to maintain that balance to not let it fall apart, which means that it doesn't move forward, on anything. When balance is imperative, controversial issues are not addressed. By controversial, I mean even such things as electoral reform or reform of the energy sector which would bring income to the country. There were some interests that had control of that sector that couldn't be destabilized. Many issues aren't addressed due to the perpetual need for balance.

What role could the UN play in this context?

The UN played a role as advocates. It was the UN that generated the discussion around electoral reform. No other actor could have brought stakeholders around that issue. As the UNDG, we weren't able to address the issue of Palestinians. Once we became an integrated mission, we didn't need the sign off of government, so we were able to push forward on that. It needs to be recognized that this was a period of opening up on the Palestinian issue.

Could you describe the circumstances that led to the UN supporting the only neutral space for dialogue in the country, the Common Space Initiative?

After 2008, there was a one week civil war in which Hezbollah showed everybody they had the capacity to win by arms. After this, there was an opening towards national dialogue. I got involved in discussion with the Presidency and the national dialogue was agreed on to be led by the Presidency with UNDP to provide support. However, the Presidency in the end refused because they didn't want to be seen to be receiving support from foreign elements, though they recognized the need for external support. It was a perception issue. Over a period of several months we came up that UNDP would support an external unit that would be open to supporting dialogue processes, including the national dialogue. It would be autonomous. It ended up being a sheer coincidence.

Common Space Initiative provides support to all walks of Lebanese political life. There's not a party that would see UNDP as a problem. Rhetorically they may take those stances during the dialogue but behind the scenes they would not.

In Lebanese life there is no 'neutral body', aside from the CSI. The first thing somebody does in Lebanon is to identify you politically. Neutrality is alien, but once there are neutral spaces they are valued and used. It can touch on difficult and sensitive issues as well as those that aren't necessarily 'hot button' issues. It provides a space for all actors to engage in. One of the first open dialogues we hosted was on the social compact. Not a 'hot button' issue but one that required a neutral space with all actors involved. We were supporting the national dialogue throughout the whole process in a discreet, technical manner. It wasn't unknown, it was just kept discreet.

How can RCs and UNCTs be better supported in complex political situations?

We need more politically oriented type of support such as PDAs, and so on. Initially, UNDP was much more technically oriented towards development, strictly speaking. But more and more, development is expanding into the political and the political into development. The portfolio of BCPR is related to conflict, which is eminently political in nature. Elections are political in nature. A lot of the issues we are beginning to address lie outside the scope of traditional development because countries can largely provide those services themselves, thankfully. We've provided this type of politically oriented support in HQ but need to provide it in countries. That's where PDAs come in. But we're also supporting with the new Conflict-related Development Analysis and various types of training. We have to, and have already discussed with UNDP/BOM, try to insert in every single training event that takes place for all levels of staff, an element that addresses these issues so people are prepared to address them as a natural part of their portfolio of management.

“More and more, development is expanding into the political and the political into development... A lot of the issues we are beginning to address lie outside the scope of traditional development because countries can largely provide those services themselves, thankfully.”

- MARTA RUEDAS

Contact Information: Joint UNDP-DPA Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention,
bcpr.jp@undp.org

For more information: www.undp.org/ or www.un.org
United Nations Development Programme – United Nations Department of Political Affairs
One United Nations Plaza • New York, NY 10017 USA

