



Peacebuilding

Elenie Opffer

Faculty, Western Institute for Social Research, Berkeley, CA, USA

What is it?

Originally peacebuilding referred to the multilayered set of organizing efforts to create and maintain peace by addressing the “root causes” of armed conflict and support local capacity building for conflict management. Today, the term has broadened to encompass a wide array of activities. It can include capacity building for nonviolent communication and conflict resolution, trauma healing services, economic development, repatriating refugees and resettling internally displaced persons, health system development, gender mainstreaming, youth empowerment, social and political reform that creates fair and trustworthy government, fair, accurate media coverage, building broad based education systems, economic, policing, and justice reforms, spiritual, community and job development, and restitution.

Who uses the concept?

Peacebuilding is often used by conflict interveners and government officials focused on ending hostilities in intrastate conflicts. Additionally, peace activists, NGO personnel, UN representatives and officials, and members of international development community may use the term. In the academic sphere, scholars in Peace and Justice, Conflict Analysis and Resolution, Security Studies, Political Science, and International Relations use the term.

Fit with intercultural dialogue?

Intercultural dialogue offers one avenue for creating understanding between conflicting parties. When coupled with economic development and other strategies to rebuild communities ravaged by violent conflict, it offers rich potential for building supportive

inter-group relationships. The success of the reconciliation efforts in both South Africa and Rwanda which involved open dialogues between victims and offenders demonstrate the power of dialogue to heal deep wounds and cultivate collaboration for peace.

What work remains?

Practitioners claim combining strategies for peace is more effective than a narrow focus; research is needed to confirm this, document best practices, and provide guidance on how to match resources to the most effective strategies by context. Other potential topics include the role of collaborative strategies in successful multi-faceted peacebuilding, and needs assessment for collaboration capacity building for implementation. While peacebuilding efforts most often target high conflict areas of the developing world, homicide, rape and other acts of violence are rampant in the developed world as well, particularly in areas marked by extreme income disparities and high unemployment. Academics and activists could forge alliances to promote peacebuilding more broadly in the developed world as the field gains wider recognition and support.

Resources

- Barnett, M., et al. (2007). Peacebuilding: What's in a name? *Global Governance*, 13, 35-58.
- CRinfo, (2013). *Peacebuilding*.
<http://tinyurl.com/nrpz9kk>
- Lederach, J. P. (1997). *Building peace: Sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace.
- United Nations. (2010). *UN peacebuilding: An orientation*. <http://tinyurl.com/l9w8zbb>