

**Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the Independent Evaluation of the Peacebuilding Fund:**  
**“Fund Fills Clear Niche and Has Seen Early Results, But Must Become Speedier, More Efficient and More Strategic to Fulfil Its Vision”**

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**Executive Summary**

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) undertook an independent evaluation of the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) on the request of the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), as counselled by the Fund’s Advisory Group. The evaluation took place between May and September 2008, in keeping with the PBF’s 2006 terms of reference, which stipulate that an independent evaluation of the Fund shall take place within two years of the Fund’s establishment. The evaluation’s objective was to assess, as systematically and objectively as possible, the PBF’s performance and operations and propose enhancements to its architecture and functions. OIOS utilized several methods to conduct the evaluation, including interviews and surveys with key stakeholder groups, site visits to three PBF-assisted countries (Burundi, Sierra Leone and Liberia), observations of PBF-related meetings, and systematic desk review of key Fund documents.

OIOS concludes that the Fund’s concurrent focus on early entry, speed, and high risk tolerance, coupled with the comparative advantage of the United Nations system, endows the PBF with the potential to fill a vital peacebuilding niche not readily met by other funding vehicles. Moreover, despite the challenge of assessing the Fund’s impact at this early stage of its operation, OIOS notes a handful of notable early results the Fund has achieved on the ground, including direct contributions to peace and peaceful dispute resolution. Noting the Fund’s unique niche, as well as an overall trajectory of improvement in its operations and management since the early experience of its pilot countries, OIOS maintains that its existing architecture and operations should continue to be enhanced.

Nevertheless, OIOS finds that the Fund has yet to fully fulfil its two key objectives: quickly identifying and funding countries’ most critical peacebuilding gaps, and catalyzing more substantial and sustainable peacebuilding funding in the countries it assists. With regard to quickly identifying and funding countries’ most critical peacebuilding gaps, OIOS found the Fund’s processes to be neither consistently quick nor sufficiently strategic. Decision-making and fund disbursements, though generally timely at Headquarters, have been less so in country; decision-making processes have not always facilitated quick and strategic assessment of the most critical peacebuilding gaps that heighten a country’s risk of relapse. While in-country decision-making processes are grounded in principles of national co-ownership, participatory planning, and coordination with countries’ longer-term development goals, rarely do they incorporate systematic, independent, and expert assessments of critical unmet gaps.

Further detracting from the Fund’s strategic focus is the lack of national and United Nations technical capacity for drafting and reviewing peacebuilding project proposals in a results-oriented manner; projects, recipient agencies and partners are not ordinarily selected for their optimal strategic fit. OIOS acknowledges that many of these issues are not unique to the Fund, but rather are systemic throughout the United Nations system. OIOS also finds that project implementation is sometimes slow and ineffective. Reasons for this include implementing partners’ lack of technical capacity for designing and implementing projects, as well as rigidities in United Nations recipient

agencies' rules, regulations and procedures. In addition, recipient agencies sometimes oversee and are held accountable for questionable projects only after these have been developed by other in-country stakeholders, without direct early involvement in their design.

With regard to the Fund's longer-term goal of playing a catalyzing role, OIOS found a widespread lack of clarity over what this role means in practice. When viewed as building national capacity for peacebuilding, this catalytic role has been only partially fulfilled. Viewed in the more traditional sense of attracting more substantial and sustainable peacebuilding funding to the projects and countries it assists, this catalytic role has also not been completely fulfilled. This lack of effectiveness stems in part from poorly designed and implemented projects, weak planning instruments, and a lack of clarity as to who should be responsible for this catalytic role, in what ways, and when.

In assessing how well the Fund is equipped to gauge its own effectiveness, both for accountability and for stakeholder learning, OIOS concludes that the PBF, despite regular updates to Member States on overall progress, lacks an adequate mechanism for systematically reporting on the Fund's performance in achieving pre-determined global and country- and theme-specific objectives. The Fund does articulate an accountability structure, but OIOS found accountability lines to be fragmented, weak, and lacking clear incentives and disincentives with which to ensure performance. In addition, while country planning documents do nominally establish formal monitoring and evaluation structures, in practice there are few resources and little capacity to undertake these activities in country. The Multi-Donor Trust Fund Office of the United Nations Development Programme currently focuses on fund use rather than performance, and project proposals do not typically articulate clear performance targets.

Stakeholders do not generally fault PBSO for the Fund's many challenges to date, and note a positive overall trend toward improvement. They express appreciation for the many constraints PBSO faces as fund manager, and for the operational improvements it has made in a short time period despite these challenges. Nevertheless, OIOS noted some gaps and lack of capacity in key functional areas of the Fund's management, including overall fund management, monitoring and evaluation, lesson learning, communications, conflict analysis and resource mobilization.

OIOS recommends that PBSO should:

- In consultation with key stakeholders and through a systematic mapping exercise, improve the clarity of PBSO's role and that of its key partners in the Fund's guiding documents and in its stakeholder communications;
- Conduct a strategic internal resource assessment in order to fill its key functional gaps;
- Develop an improved suite of tools, guidelines and procedures to facilitate faster and more strategic decision-making;
- Within its delegated authority, strengthen the Fund's accountability mechanism and more clearly articulate this mechanism in the Fund's guiding documents;
- Within its delegated authority, and in partnership with recipient agencies at Headquarters and in the field, proactively address the main sources of delay in project implementation; and
- Facilitate more systematic lessons learning within and across countries, as well as within the Office itself.

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## I. Introduction

1. In March 2008, the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) requested the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) to undertake an independent evaluation of the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund (PBF). In his report establishing the PBF (A/60/984), the Secretary-General envisaged an independent evaluation of the Fund to be commissioned no later than two years from the adoption of its terms of reference. PBSO, in consultation with the PBF Advisory Group (AG), recognized OIOS, with its operational independence, as the appropriate entity to complete the exercise with objectivity and impartiality. The Inspection and Evaluation Division (IED) of OIOS was designated to conduct the evaluation.

2. The PBF was established by the Secretary-General in October 2006 at the request of the General Assembly in its sixtieth session (A/RES/60/180) and the Security Council at its 5335th meeting (S/RES/1645 [2005]). The purpose of the PBF is to quickly identify and fund countries' most critical peacebuilding gaps at the earliest post-conflict stage possible, when other funding mechanisms might not be available, and to catalyze more substantial and sustainable support by other peacebuilding funding actors in the longer term. PBSO was established as the Secretariat entity responsible for overall management of the Fund.

3. The objective of this evaluation is to assess, as systematically and objectively as possible, the operations and results of the PBF and propose enhancements to its architecture and functions. In undertaking this evaluation, OIOS considered oversight activities previously conducted in relation to the Fund.<sup>1</sup> OIOS is also aware of the relatively nascent state of the Fund, and that most projects supported by it did not commence until late 2007. Thus, rather than attempting to assess the Fund's long-term impact, the present evaluation intends to assess preliminary outcomes and to identify early gaps in order to indicate how the Fund might be retooled for improved effectiveness, efficiency and relevance.

## II. Methodology

4. In conducting this evaluation, OIOS employed the following 12 qualitative and quantitative data collections methods:

- (1) A self-administered web-based survey of United Nations system staff responsible for management or administration of the Fund, both at Headquarters and in PBF-assisted countries;<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> OIOS discovered that, to date, these oversight activities have been limited to an audit of the Multi-Donor Trust Funds (MDTFs) administered by the United Nations Development Programme's Multi-Donor Trust Funds Office. (*Financial report and audited financial statements for the biennium ended 31 December 2007 and Report of the Board of Auditors. United Nations Development Programme. A/63/5/Add.1*) The present evaluation thus represents the first oversight report focusing on the PBF as a whole.

<sup>2</sup> This survey was conducted from 14 August to 8 September 2008. It included PBSO staff members identified by PBSO as being involved with the Fund in some way (n=13); staff of UNDP's MDTF Office, which serves as the Fund administrator of the Fund (n=5), and staff serving in the capacity of the PBF Secretariat in the 11 countries supported by the Fund (n=50). Of the total universe of 68 staff members to which the survey was sent, 30 responses were received, for a 46% response rate.

- (2) A self-administered web-based survey of United Nations system staff assisting PBSO in various capacities as partners in its management of the Fund, both at Headquarters and in PBF-assisted countries;<sup>3</sup>
- (3) A self-administered paper survey of Member States serving as donors to the PBF, members of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), or in both of these capacities;<sup>4</sup>
- (4) 13 in-depth interviews with staff at PBSO, which is responsible for overall direction and guidance on the programme management of the PBF and monitoring of its operations as Fund manager;<sup>5</sup>
- (5) 5 in-depth interviews with staff at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Multi-Donor Trust Fund (MDTF) Office, which is responsible for disbursement of funds to UN recipient agencies (RAs) as Fund administrator;<sup>6</sup>
- (6) 2 focus groups with 16 representatives of Member States serving as donors to the PBF, members of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), or in both of these capacities, or that serve as significant peacebuilding donors through non-PBF funding vehicles;
- (7) 6 in-depth interviews with members of the Fund's AG, an independent body of 10 eminent personalities in the field of peacebuilding charged with providing advice on and oversight of the Fund;
- (8) 8 in-depth interviews with members of the Peacebuilding Contact Group (PBCG), which assists PBSO in the determination of Window II country eligibility, and in the review and approval of Priority Plans for their alignment with the Fund's terms of reference, for non-duplication, and for the determination of overall country envelopes;<sup>7</sup>
- (9) 12 in-depth interviews with external experts in the field of peacebuilding and peacebuilding funding;<sup>8</sup>
- (10) Site visits to 3 PBF-assisted countries selected as case study sites for this evaluation;<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This survey was conducted from 25 August to 15 September 2008. It included UN system staff and management identified by OIOS, PBSO, members of the PBCG, and PBF Secretariats in the 3 PBF-supported selected as case studies for this evaluation (i.e., Burundi, Liberia, and Sierra Leone). Of the total universe of 110 staff members to which the survey was sent, 43 responses were received, for a 39% response rate.

<sup>4</sup> This survey was conducted from 20 August to 15 September 2008. Of the total universe of 58 Member State representatives to which the survey was sent, 21 responses were received, for a 36% response rate.

<sup>5</sup> OIOS was thus able to interview all staff identified by PBSO management as having some involvement with the Fund. However, OIOS acknowledges that 5 of the 13 have more intimately involved.

<sup>6</sup> OIOS was thus able to interview all MDTF Office staff involved with the Fund.

<sup>7</sup> Of the eight entities serving on the PBCG, OIOS was able to interview representatives of six.

<sup>8</sup> Interviewees were independently selected by OIOS, in conjunction with an external consultant engaged in the field of peacebuilding, their peacebuilding expertise. Interviewees represented academic and non-academic think tanks (n=4), non-governmental and civil society organizations (n=2), and bilateral and multi-lateral donors to peacebuilding outside the PBF mechanism (n=6).

<sup>9</sup> The three case study sites were selected on a number of pre-determined criteria, including the funding window(s) through which they received PBF funding, size of overall country envelope, stage of Fund implementation, order of funds receipt, working language, number of approved projects, and more. Data collection included interviews and focus groups with the following stakeholders: senior representatives of the national Government; senior mission management;

(11) Observations of key PBF-related meetings occurring during the evaluation;<sup>10</sup>

(12) A systematic desk review of key PBF- and peacebuilding-related documents both within and outside the UN system.<sup>11</sup>

5. Owing to the nascent status of the Fund, OIOS did not focus on project-level impact evaluation, but rather on the relevance of the Fund and its effectiveness and efficiency in achieving its intended objective of identifying and funding countries' most critical peacebuilding gaps and catalyzing more substantial and sustainable support. Thus, project beneficiaries were not systematically involved in the assessment of Fund results, although OIOS did conduct interviews with a non-random sample of project beneficiaries in order to gain an understanding of the Fund's effectiveness on the ground.

6. The present evaluation is marked by a number of limitations. First, the evaluation is notable for its large scope but limited time frame. To avoid over-reliance on one data source over another, OIOS employed the mixed-method approach to data collection outlined above. However, while this mixed-method approach has enabled OIOS to answer all of the questions delineated in the evaluation terms of reference, it was not possible to answer additional questions that arose in the course of the evaluation (e.g., what PBSO's precise resource requirements are for filling the functional gaps identified). Second, while OIOS' mandate limits its oversight to Secretariat entities only, much of the Fund's decision-making and implementation activities occur outside the Secretariat. Thus, while the present report identifies key vulnerabilities regardless of where they occur, its recommendations are directed to PBSO as the fund manager and unit of account within the Secretariat. Third, OIOS conducted the evaluation in a fluid environment in which a number of improvements in fund management were on-going at the time of the evaluation. Fourth, OIOS did not conduct an independent analysis of each separate country scenario to assess relevance of priority plans and projects. Finally, the evaluation's methodological limitations included the lack of uniformly high response rates to its surveys, the more limited experience of some survey respondents (whose responses were subsequently given less weight), and the lack of geographic representation of its three selected case study sites.<sup>12</sup>

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members of the national Steering Committees; representatives of United Nations RAs; representatives of civil society organizations (CSOs) or non-Governmental organizations (NGOs); and end beneficiaries of PBF-funded projects. In Burundi a total of 65 interviews and focus groups were held, in Liberia a total of 36 interviews and focus groups were held, and in Sierra Leone a total of 55 interviews and focus groups were held. In one non-selected country, Côte d'Ivoire, an interview with one UN senior in-country representative was conducted.

<sup>10</sup> These included PBSO donor briefings, PBCG meetings, peacebuilding workshops, presentations to the PBC, PBSO presentations on the PBF and peacebuilding, meetings of the national Steering Committees in each of the 3 countries selected as case studies for this evaluation, and visits to project implementation sites in each of the 3 countries selected as case studies for this evaluation.

<sup>11</sup> OIOS used formal data collection instruments to systematically examine all 5 country terms of reference available at the time of the evaluation, all 7 country Priority Plans available, and a sample of 23 of the 44 project proposals approved to date (or 52% of all project proposals). For the last analysis, OIOS drew a stratified random sample, weighted for the overall proportion of each country's share of the total project portfolio. OIOS further set sampling parameters such that a minimum of 1 project was selected per country (i.e., such that those countries possessing only 1 project to date would automatically be selected), and that all Window III projects were reviewed.

<sup>12</sup> OIOS wishes to note, however, that the response rates reported are consistent with, and in some cases higher than, those typically garnered by IED among UN stakeholders. Furthermore, in a non-respondent analysis, OIOS found that the demographic profile of survey respondents closely mirrored that of the larger samples from which they were drawn. This suggests a higher degree of representativeness in the data parameters cited throughout this report than might otherwise be the case.

### III. Background

7. The PBF was launched in 2006 in response to the growing global demand for sustained support to countries emerging from conflict.<sup>13</sup> It is currently guided by its terms of reference, finalized in August 2006.<sup>14</sup> The role of the PBF is to establish a crucial bridge between conflict and recovery at a time when other funding mechanisms might not yet be available, by identifying and funding countries' most critical peacebuilding gaps and catalyzing further resources. The PBF thus focuses on providing support during the very early stages of a peacebuilding process, based on the following four funding criteria:

- (1) Activities in support of the implementation of peace agreements;
- (2) Activities in support of efforts by the country to build and strengthen capacities which promote coexistence and the peaceful resolution of conflict;
- (3) Establishment or re-establishment of essential administrative services and related human and technical capacities; and
- (4) Critical interventions designed to respond to imminent threats to the peacebuilding process.<sup>15</sup>

8. The Fund is supported entirely by voluntary contributions, with total commitments amounting to US\$270 million as of September 2008. To date, 44 donors support the PBF, including one private donor. At present 11 countries receive assistance through the Fund.<sup>16</sup>

9. The Fund is governed by the General Assembly, which guides the operations of the PBF and, on the basis of an annual report submitted by the Secretary-General, may also offer overall policy guidance on the use of the Fund. The PBC may offer overall policy guidance as well. Accordingly, the Secretary-General is charged with keeping the PBC informed of the activities financed by the Fund and lessons learned. Governance of the Fund is further supported by an independent AG of 10 eminent personalities in the field of peacebuilding, appointed by the Secretary-General on the basis of nominations from Member States, which is charged with providing advice on and oversight of the Fund. AG members are appointed for a two-year period and meet at least twice a year.

10. Under the authority of the Secretary-General, the PBSO, under the leadership of its Assistant Secretary-General, provides overall direction and guidance on the programme management of the PBF and monitors its operations. The UNDP MDTF Office administers the PBF in accordance with its regulations, rules, directives and procedures.

11. PBF funding decisions are rendered in a two-tiered process. The first tier occurs at a global level, identifying those countries eligible for assistance through the Fund. Country eligibility can be determined through one of three windows:

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<sup>13</sup> A/60/984

<sup>14</sup> *Peacebuilding Fund: Terms of Reference*, 22 August 2006

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2

<sup>16</sup> These include Burundi, Central African Republic, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Haiti, Kenya, Liberia, Nepal and Sierra Leone.

- (1) In Window I, the Secretary-General declares a country eligible on the recommendation of the PBC, based on its presence on the list of countries under consideration by the PBC;
- (2) In Window II, the Secretary-General declares a country eligible based on the advice of the UN Senior Policy Group, regardless of whether the country is under consideration by the PBC; and
- (3) In Window III, any country requiring access to immediate funding to respond to an unforeseen and imminent threat to the peace process can submit a funding request to the Secretary-General for relatively small projects (i.e., less than US\$1 million per project) that meet these criteria.

12. The PBF's second decision-making tier occurs at the country level. For those countries deemed eligible for funding through windows one or two, a national (or "joint") Steering Committee (NSC) comprised of the senior in-country United Nations representatives and representatives of the recipient national government prepares a country assessment and gap analysis, informed by the UN country team (UNCT) common country assessment (CCA). From these the NSC develops priority areas for funding, articulated in the form of a Priority Plan. PBSO reviews the Priority Plan, in close consultation with key stakeholders, in order to ensure its alignment with the Fund's terms of reference, prevent the global duplication of efforts and determine the overall country envelope. Upon approval of the Priority Plan, the UNCT and the national government jointly prepare country-specific criteria for project eligibility, solicit calls for submission of project proposals based on these criteria, and vet the project proposals of potential implementing partners.

13. Among those eligible as implementing partners are: government authorities, the organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, and other international organizations and non-governmental organizations. Regardless of the exact constellation of implementing partners, however, all projects must include a United Nations recipient agency, which is charged with overseeing project management, monitoring and reporting, and ultimately fiduciary responsibility and accountability for project performance.<sup>17</sup> Both the UNDP MDTF Office and recipient agencies levy a fee to cover the indirect costs associated with administration of the Fund and management of PBF-funded projects, respectively. The UNDP MDTF charges a standard administrative fee of 1%. The RAs charge between 5-9% (typically 7%), depending on the magnitude of the project at hand.

## **IV. Findings**

### **A. While not yet completely fulfilling its objectives, the Fund has the potential to fill a unique peacebuilding niche**

14. OIOS concludes that the PBF has the potential to fill a unique niche that other actors involved in peacebuilding cannot. In benchmarking the Fund against other peacebuilding funding

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<sup>17</sup> Peacebuilding Fund: Terms of Reference, 22 August 2006. See also: Memorandum of Understanding between the Recipient UN Organisations and the United Nations Development Programme regarding the Operational Aspects of the Peacebuilding Fund.



vehicles, OIOS identified a number of components that jointly position the PBF for a unique role.<sup>18</sup> These include the Fund's emphasis on early entry into immediate post-conflict scenarios, with a view to bridging the post-conflict period to longer-term peace and stability; the Fund's narrow focus on rapidly deploying "seed" money to those relapse risks strategically deemed to be most critical, while catalyzing more substantial and sustainable funding; and national co-ownership, marked by joint steerage of the Fund on the ground by senior in-country United Nations and senior government representatives, and inclusion of other national actors. In interviews, virtually all stakeholders cite one or more of these areas as dimensions of the Fund's uniqueness.

15. OIOS did not find the PBF to be the only fund embodying some of these features, but it is the only fund to embody all of these features combined. No other fund simultaneously addresses these same thematic peacebuilding priorities in addition to the PBF's further focus on early entry to bridge conflict to peace, building national capacity to do so, and catalyzing more substantial and sustainable financing. In surveys, large majorities of stakeholders agree that the Fund addresses a unique global peacebuilding need that others do not.

16. Underpinning the Fund's potential niche is the United Nations system's perceived comparative advantage in deploying an instrument such as the PBF. Though not explicitly mentioned in the PBF's guiding documents, this comparative advantage was noted in many stakeholder interviews and surveys. It includes the United Nations presence on the ground; its speed in getting funds from Headquarters to the field, which some donors even claim to be superior to that of bilateral and other multilateral institutions; its higher risk tolerance for critical interventions of a politically sensitive nature; and greater credibility with parties related to the conflict, coupled with the greater cachet it enjoys with national governments.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, however, some involved in managing the Fund take the view that the United Nations system, though comparatively better prepared than others, is less than ideally equipped for the agility, responsiveness, and catalytic role the Fund entails.

17. OIOS notes that the timing of the present evaluation is insufficient to fully judge the PBF's success, as even the longest-standing projects began within the year preceding the evaluation and much of the current project portfolio is even more recent. OIOS finds it unrealistic to expect a fund attempting a somewhat different and unique combined approach to peacebuilding to be completely effective within its initial funding cycle, particularly in light of the manifold challenges it faces. OIOS noted numerous stakeholder misunderstandings of the Fund, what it does and what makes it different, and what it could reasonably achieve in its first funding cycle.<sup>20</sup> PBSO has also lacked, until recently, a strategic communications function to help fill information gaps and manage

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<sup>18</sup> Among the funds selected for benchmarking include UNDP's Crisis Prevention and Recovery Thematic Trust Fund (TTF); UN Trust Fund for Human Security; the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF); the World Bank's Standby Recovery Financing Facility (SRFF); a number of other MDTFs; and a number of bilateral funds.

<sup>19</sup> These statements are based on stakeholder perceptions rather than direct observation. For a complete list of the benchmarked funds, see Table 1 in para 29.

<sup>20</sup> Large numbers of survey respondents identified by PBSO itself, for example, lacked a basis for judgment for responding to any survey questions – including PBSO staff members who, though admittedly not directly involved with the PBF, are involved with the PBC, and whose work would require a basic familiarity with the Fund. Moreover, in its site visits OIOS noted numerous misconceptions of the Fund generally, a lack of distinction between the PBF and the PBC, expectations of follow-on funding tranches, misinformation surrounding Fund operations and processes, and more.

expectations. OIOS therefore concludes that the Fund is relevant and fills a unique niche that its stakeholders should continue to try to realize, but that it should continue to be refined.<sup>21</sup>

**B. The Fund faces inherent tensions due to conflicting objectives and priorities in its design framework, as well as unclear roles and responsibilities among key partners**

18. OIOS finds the PBF, like many United Nations instruments and programmes operating in complex, political contexts, to be marked by a number of tensions that have hampered its effectiveness and efficiency. OIOS identified four main areas where these tensions exist: in the Fund's overarching objectives, in its place in the post-conflict arena, in its various funding criteria and priorities, and in the roles and responsibilities assigned to key stakeholders.

19. First, with regard to its overarching objectives, OIOS notes that the Fund simultaneously emphasizes both speed and deliberative, nationally co-owned institutional arrangements for strategically identifying countries' most critical gaps. Although this dual focus helps set the Fund apart from other funding vehicles, its terms of reference and guidelines are unclear in conveying which of its two overarching objectives is of higher priority. As a result, it has been difficult to reconcile these two goals in practice. OIOS learned, for example, that some NSCs, under pressure to quickly disburse funds, have sometimes opted for rapid approval of projects rather than thoroughly scrutinizing them, particularly in Window I recipient countries where political pressure to disburse funds might be more acutely felt, and in pilot countries. Conversely, OIOS found that when other NSCs have undergone more deliberative processes, their thoroughness has come at the expense of speed.

20. Second, with regard to its place in the post-conflict arena, OIOS notes that while the Fund's guiding documents clearly see it focusing on the immediate post-conflict period, in reality the Fund's application has been more varied. Its earliest and most heavily assisted recipients have been in the post-post-conflict phase at the time of the Fund's entry, which may put it in competition with funds and agencies in the development arena. However, this post-post-conflict focus underscores that the Fund has been relatively untested in immediate post-conflict settings to date, making it difficult to render judgment on its effectiveness as a *post*-conflict fund. In addition, some Member States foresee the Fund playing a greater preventive role in countries that have not recently witnessed conflict but risk descending into conflict. There has been little discussion of how the Fund will either adapt its strategies and structures to these non-post-conflict scenarios or shift its focus back to post-conflict in future, and how it will manage stakeholder expectations accordingly.

21. Third, with regard to its funding criteria and priorities, OIOS finds these to be multi-layered and complex. The lack of a clear, common and consistent definition of what constitutes "peacebuilding" further complicates this issue. The Fund focuses on those peacebuilding needs most likely to prevent a relapse to conflict and on those needs not being adequately met by others, with a view to spurring more substantial and sustainable funding to them. It also articulates four specific

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<sup>21</sup> In this regard, where appropriate throughout the report, OIOS identifies key areas in which the Fund's architecture might be enhanced for greater effectiveness and efficiency, while leaving more pointed specification of the precise institutional arrangements for addressing these to PBSO's ASG, on the guidance of PBF's AG and other key stakeholders.

thematic funding priorities.<sup>22</sup> Aside from a lack of clarity within individual criteria (e.g., what constitutes a critical threat to peace, whether gap-filling entails a budgetary as well as a substantive dimension, and so on), it remains unclear whether all of the Fund's criteria apply all of the time, or whether some of them apply only some of the time. Fewer than half of partners (42%) and Member States (38%) rate the clarity of the PBF's funding priorities as excellent or good; just over half of staff (60%) rate these as highly. Similarly, 56% of partners, 44% of Member States, and 64% of staff rate the clarity of the PBF's funding criteria as excellent or good. Stakeholders external to the PBF network were even less clear about the Fund's criteria and priorities.

22. Fourth, with regard to Fund roles and responsibilities, OIOS notes these to also lack clarity. Accordingly, Fund partners tend to rate their roles and responsibilities as somewhat clear.<sup>23</sup> OIOS identified three main areas of the Fund's work to be particularly impeded by this lack of clarity: fulfilling the Fund's catalytic role, ensuring accountability, and bringing independent expertise to bear on decision-making. With respect to the Fund's catalytic role, it has been unclear which entities should be playing this role and in what specific ways. (See Finding F.) With regard to accountability, OIOS found lines to be fragmented, diffuse and weak. (See Finding D.) For some partners, the Fund's guiding documents clearly stipulate accountability roles and responsibilities, but it is unclear how these partners can enforce accountability among those over whom they have little jurisdiction. In other cases, it is clear that a given partner plays a role in ensuring accountability, but there have been divergent interpretations over what specific outputs this role entails.

23. Finally, OIOS noted the need for greater independent peacebuilding expertise as a substantive complement to NSCs' country expertise. This need for greater expertise emanates from the lack of technical peacebuilding expertise OIOS found to exist on the ground. The independence of this expertise, meanwhile, is suggested as a more objective counterweight to the subjective perspectives of decision-makers, and thus serves to strengthen accountability. In this regard, OIOS finds it unclear how PBSO wishes to optimize the AG and other partners as resources, and some Member States (20%) and staff (33%) rate the AG as somewhat or very ineffective in fulfilling its role to date, and in interviews even some AG members themselves question the body's effectiveness at present.<sup>24</sup> It is clear, for example, that the AG is charged with providing advice and oversight, but still unclear is how this role can be maximized to aid accountability. Additionally, in light of capacity gaps at the country level, OIOS concluded the AG's advice might be more profitably used to help strengthen country structures, decision-making processes and peacebuilding projects for success.<sup>25</sup> Stakeholder proposals to increase the AG's effectiveness include more frequent meetings

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<sup>22</sup> See PBF TOR, para 2.1(a-d). These include: activities to support the implementation of peace agreements; activities to support capacity-building for coexistence and peaceful conflict resolution; (re-)establishment of essential administrative services and related human and technical capacities; and critical interventions to respond to imminent peacebuilding threats.

<sup>23</sup> In the partner survey, 34% of respondents rate their roles and responsibilities as very clear, 40% as somewhat clear, 23% as somewhat unclear and 3% as very unclear.

<sup>24</sup> Terms of Reference for the Peacebuilding Fund Advisory Group, 6 September 2007. The AG consists of "up to 10 eminent persons ... with a relevant profile in areas related to peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery ... [and/or] the management and oversight of financial resources" to "provide advice and oversight on the speed and appropriateness of the Fund allocations and ... examine performance and financial reports on its use in order to ensure accountability and transparency."

<sup>25</sup> As noted in Finding F, in-country decision-makers often have first-hand knowledge of the country but lack peacebuilding expertise. And OIOS' desk review found that no Priority Plan solicited an independent external needs assessment to determine critical gaps, relying instead on a desk review of key planning documents (e.g., UNDAF, PRS) and a participatory process of culling stakeholder opinions on country needs.