

Lessons from post-war reconstruction programmes

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What lessons can be learned from past examples of UN and multilateral collaboration that have helped set up previous bespoke reconstruction programmes (e.g. Iraq, Afghanistan)?

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The K4DD helpdesk service provides brief summaries of current research, evidence, and lessons learned. Rapid evidence reviews are not rigorous or systematic reviews; they are intended to provide an introduction to the most important evidence related to a research question. They draw on a rapid desk-based review of published literature and consultation with subject specialists.

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1. Summary

Conflict can lead to the damage or destruction of infrastructure, housing, schooling, healthcare, water and sanitation, electricity, telecommunications, transportation, public space, and agriculture. It can cause the economy to shrink, prices to rise, poverty to increase, mass traumatisation, and lead to displacement and the loss of educated and skilled labour force (KPMG-Ukraine, 2022). Cities have become the focus of fighting which has led to widespread devastation in urban areas of residential, cultural, commercial, civic infrastructure, both as collateral or due to intentional destruction (Pullan and Azzouz, 2019). These impacts can be felt decades after the fighting stops and temporary changes can become permanent (KPMG-Ukraine, 2022; Pullan and Azzouz, 2019).

In response to this damage and destruction, various post-war reconstruction efforts have emerged. This rapid review looks at lessons learned from some past reconstruction efforts to help inform thinking for future reconstruction programming, drawn from the available literature with a focus where possible on more recent literature¹. It includes lessons from Lebanon, Afghanistan, Iraq (both post the 2003 war and post the war with Islamic State), and from the Gaza Strip, as well as literature drawing on lessons learned more generally, especially those focusing on reconstruction initiatives in the Middle East and North Africa region.

The literature shows that reconstruction is often complicated and large areas may remain in ruin for years (Pullan and Azzouz, 2019; ISE, 2019). Reconstruction is a political as well as a technical process (Lynch, 2018; Van Veen, 2022; Harris, 2009). Hasty and poorly realised reconstruction can occur if fair and effective long-term planning is not properly considered (Pullan and Azzouz, 2019). The loss of public spaces (buildings, streets and squares) makes it harder for residents to meet, discuss, and participate in reconstruction efforts (Pullan and Azzouz, 2019).

Reconstruction processes are multi-staged, simultaneously working on a variety of social, security, economic, and political priorities, and time consuming (KPMG-Ukraine, Abboud, 2014). They often begin with a damage assessment to help inform the reconstruction plans and priorities (KPMG-Ukraine, 2022). However, these do not always adequately engage with the affected individuals or with the actual realities on the ground (ISE, 2023; Lynch, 2018).

Reconstruction financing comes from a variety of sources, including international and regional organisations, bilateral donors, and private investment, and may take the form of grants or loans (KPMG-Ukraine, 2022; Abboud, 2014). Pooled funding mechanisms may be used, such as Trust Funds administered for example by the UN (Abboud, 2014). However international assistance is often insufficient given the time commitment needed for the reconstruction process and may be complicated by donors' political involvement in the

¹ There is a focus in some of the recent literature on lessons learned looking towards the reconstruction of Ukraine.

conflict (KPMG-Ukraine, Lynch, 2018, Abboud, 2014). The conditionalities placed on financial assistance can also affect reconstruction efforts (Abboud, 2014).

Reconstruction efforts have been led in a variety of ways. Sometimes the international community has assumed the lead, and sometimes international actors have taken their own approaches to reconstruction in the same country (Abboud, 2014; Harris, 2009). Multi-stakeholder platforms involving governments, international development partners, NGOs, communities, and in some cases, the private sector have been used to coordinate reconstruction efforts (ISE, 2019). However sometimes, local participation has been neglected with detrimental consequences for reconstruction processes (Abboud, 2014).

1.1 Key lessons

Some key lessons from reconstruction in countries such as Lebanon, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Gaza, include:

- ▶ Reconstruction should be a collaborative approach, focusing on local inhabitants as the primary stakeholders (Pullan and Azzouz, 2019). The reconstruction efforts need local buy in and leadership (Mustasilta et al, 2023; Pullan and Azzouz, 2019; Milton et al, forthcoming).
- ▶ Consensus needs to be built around prioritisation of immediate and long-term needs through public engagement and a credible criteria-based approach for how, when and where reconstruction occurs (ISE, 2023).
- ▶ Damage assessments should involve affected individuals and the actual realities on the ground (ISE, 2023; Lynch, 2018).
- ▶ Reconstruction should consider more than physical infrastructure but also the wider material and immaterial necessities of normal life (Van Veen, 2022; Pullan and Azzouz, 2019).
- ▶ Coordination of reconstruction efforts (including shared goal setting and agreement on how to reach shared objective) is vital and parallel efforts by different actors reduces their effectiveness (Harris, 2009; Mustasilta et al, 2023; Matsunaga, 2019). The international community should work through national institutions rather than bypassing them (Matsunaga, 2019).
- ▶ Reconstruction projects should be modest, promising less and delivering more (Mustasilta et al, 2023; Wessel and Asdourian, 2022).
- ▶ Transparency and clarity of objectives and the reconstruction process is important for holding actors accountable (Mustasilta et al, 2023). Problems related to accountability (e.g., dual accountability or local accountability being undermined) have a major impact on reconstruction outcomes (Matsunaga, 2019).
- ▶ Reconstruction efforts should reduce corruption as much as possible (Van Veen, 2022).
- ▶ Invest in the capacity of local people and institutions needed to deliver reconstruction (ISE, 2023; Harris, 2009; Van Veen, 2022).

- ▶ Any “temporary” reconstruction solutions need to be assessed for what they might mean in the long-term as they may end up as such (Pullan and Azzouz, 2019).
- ▶ Restricting contact with a key reconstruction actor militates against the effectiveness of reconstruction efforts (Harris, 2009; Milton et al, forthcoming).
- ▶ Reconstruction should address the underlying root causes of conflict, or it may re-emerge later (Harris, 2009).
- ▶ International actors need to accept that reconstruction is a long-term commitment, and they need to adopt a flexible approach to deal with the uncertain, fluid, and complex nature of reconstruction (Mustasilta et al, 2023; Matsunaga, 2019).
- ▶ Political considerations can hinder reconstruction efforts as reconstruction is a political as well as a technical process (Milton et al, forthcoming; Lynch, 2018; Harris, 2009).

2. Post-conflict challenges

Wars have resulted in dispossession from homes and mass displacement; damaged and destroyed infrastructure; economies evolving into war economies; reshaping of local and state institutions; communal polarisation; impoverishment; plummeting health and education levels; and mass trauma that has lasting psychological and developmental effects (Lynch, 2018). “Refugee repatriation and the return of the internally displaced to their homes of origin will be a central challenge for any post conflict reconstruction plan”, with safety concerns, destroyed homes, and difficulty proving ownership (Lynch, 2018: 5).

Urban areas which have been damaged or destroyed by conflict require a daunting amount of debris removal and ideally recycling² (Pullan and Azzouz, 2019). This is made riskier as some might be mixed with unexploded ordnances or be bobby trapped (Pullan and Azzouz, 2019). The social environment of urban areas could also have changed and citizens might struggle with “new conflict infrastructures including fences, walls, checkpoints, enclaves and segregated road systems as well as no-man’s lands, buffer zones, besieged neighbourhoods and non-functional areas” which may become long-term or even permanent (Pullan and Azzouz, 2019: 2). The effects of conflict mean that resuming mobility, social connections, economic productivity, and cultural activity in urban areas post-conflict is slow and ineffectual (Pullan and Azzouz, 2019).

It may seem the most efficient and least costly alternative to completely demolish and rebuild severely destroyed urban neighbourhoods, but this can result in changes in the population as residents may find it hard to return and reclaim their property (Pullan and Azzouz. 2019; Hamadeh and Bassil, 2020). Ownership is a key challenge when displacement has

² Restart Ukraine and the UNDP Accelerator Lab noted that examples of recycling that could be used for new construction could possibly be learnt from countries whose construction industries manage to recycle more than 90% of construction waste, including **Great Britain, Denmark, the Netherlands** (Restart Ukraine, no date). ReStart Ukraine is an open platform, uniting citizens, activists, architects, designers, researchers, anthropologists, municipalities, NGOs, international organizations, government departments, and private business who would like to contribute to restoring the war-torn urban fabric of Ukraine.

occurred, especially in informal areas (Pullan and Azzouz, 2019; Lynch, 2018; Hamadeh and Bassil, 2020).

Pullan and Azzouz (2019: 2), in their study of cities in conflict, note that the destruction of residential areas, resulting in displacement makes it much harder for residents to take a “local role in the rebuilding of their neighbourhoods”, while the destruction of public spaces (buildings, streets, and squares) “eliminates places in the city where people can meet, discuss and participate in plans for recovery”.

Accepting foreign or domestic investments for major developments in war torn cities, without taking into account fair and effective long-term planning, may result in hasty and poorly realised reconstruction (Pullan and Azzouz, 2019; Hamadeh and Bassil, 2020). Poorly planned reconstruction can generate new waves of hostility and division (Pullan and Azzouz, 2019). In Beirut, Lebanon, for example Solidere, a private company that was granted by the Lebanese government exclusive rights to develop and rebuild Beirut’s Central District, committed systematic violations of housing, land, and property rights of former residents of the area and empowered elites (Hamadeh and Bassil, 2020). Displacement took place because of “unofficial demolitions—that occurred under the pretext of cleaning up the destruction—and whose perpetrators remain unidentified” (Hamadeh and Bassil, 2020).

Abboud (2014) warns that there is a “high probability of elite capture of reconstruction opportunities”. However, in cases where public sector institutions are questionable as a result of who is in charge, organisations such as the World Bank “relied more heavily on local stakeholder and private sector participation in project preparation and implementation, decreasing reliance on public sector institutions” (ISE, 2019: 18).

2.1 Politics of reconstruction

Reconstruction cannot be separated from politics and the choices made are “rarely ... driven only by humanitarian or economic needs” (Lynch, 2018; Milton et al, forthcoming). Pullan and Azzouz (2019: 3) warn that reconstruction is “often dominated by political and economic allegiances and the [destroyed area] may be selectively rehabilitated according to ideology or affiliation”. Reconstruction needs to be viewed through “both through political and technical lenses” as it is at its core, “a political rather than purely technical process” (Van Veen, 2022; Harris, 2009: 1).

A workshop looking at post-conflict reconstruction in the Middle East found that reconstruction was a loaded word that meant different things in different contexts and to different people (Lynch, 2018). For example, in the Gaza reconstruction mechanism “policies labelled as reconstruction can actually be a vehicle for sustaining and perpetuating structures of domination” (Lynch, 2018: 4). In Syria, Assad views calls for reconstruction “as a way of signalling the end of conflict and the beginning of his international rehabilitation” (Lynch, 2018: 4). There is a risk that focus on physical reconstruction could “undermine international norms of accountability and justice and will serve to reward those accused of ... crimes [against humanity]” (Lynch, 2023: 4). Reconstruction “in places like Syria are especially complicated by the questions of how assistance can be given to a regime that was

in large part responsible for the country's devastation and has been implicated in war crimes" (Lynch, 2018: 4).

2.2 Common risks of recovery and reconstruction processes

A study by the Institute of State Effectiveness looking at lessons from past reconstruction experiences found that common risks include:

- "Projectized, silo-riven approaches which can drive mismanagement and corruption;
- Fragmentation and incoherence of both government systems and institutions as well as international support;
- Failure to understand the nature of the regime, the character of the state, and the nature of interest groups that shape the political dynamics;
- Flawed or negative incentive structures set into place that will take decades to undo, as institutional inertia continues;
- Inadvertent support of the illicit criminal economy, not only thwarting the potential for the legitimate economy to grow, but also ripening conditions for corruption; and
- Elite capture of resources meant for reconstruction, peacebuilding, and development that will prevent redistribution of wealth and power, perpetuating inequalities and grievances" (ISE, 2019: 1).

3. Post-conflict reconstruction

Post-war reconstruction involves efforts to simultaneously improve social, security (restoring law and order), economic (rehabilitation and development), and political conditions (justice and reconciliation) (KPMG-Ukraine, 2022:45; Abboud, 2014). The reconstruction process is multi-staged and time consuming (KPMG-Ukraine, 2022).

The Institute for State Effectiveness (ISE) (2023: 1) notes that "effective reconstruction requires strong leadership and communications, well-sequenced plans and clear priorities" to ensure that stakeholders coordinate well. They suggest that the "re-establishment of law and order is a necessary pre-condition for much of the progress in other areas of post-conflict recovery" (ISE, 2019: 24).

3.1 Assessing the damage

Assessments of the extent of the damage and the early recovery and long-term reconstruction needs, as well as assets and areas of opportunity, are required post-conflict (KPMG-Ukraine, 2022; ISE, 2023). As well as swiftly assessing immediate humanitarian needs and providing life-saving assistance, there should be a detailed assessment of the damages and destruction caused by the armed conflict to inform a comprehensive recovery and reconstruction plan (KPMG-Ukraine, 2022). Assessments should take into account local and regional variations (ISE, 2023). Such assessments are often carried out with the assistance of national and international organisations such as the World Bank Group, the

European Union, United Nations Development Group, and International Monetary Fund (KPMG-Ukraine, 2022).

A review by KPMG-Ukraine found that experiences from previous war-torn countries suggests that damage assessment methodology often follows a similar format, and relies on both ground-based and remote-based³ data:

- 1) Identification of priority sectors (including infrastructure, housing, healthcare, energy, trade, agriculture, and education)
- 2) Assessment of damages and losses in the priority sectors
- 3) Estimation of damages, losses and qualitative impacts to establish the sector specific recovery needs and inform reconstruction planning (KPMG-Ukraine, 2022).

However, Lynch (2018: 4) notes that these economic needs assessments and templates from international best practice have often not included enough “engagement with the affected individuals or with the actual realities on the ground”. This can result in the political and societal dimensions of reconstruction being overlooked and the legacies of violence and trauma not being adequately addressed in reconstruction plans (Lynch, 2018).

3.2 Financing reconstruction

“The revenue base of post conflict states tends to be very depleted and, thus, reconstruction policies cannot be undertaken by relying on domestically generated revenues or existing reserves” (Abboud, 2014).

International organisations and other countries often play a key role in supporting post-conflict reconstruction efforts, in the form of humanitarian assistance, loans, and technical support (KPMG-Ukraine, 2022). Some key organisations often involved in reconstruction include the World Bank⁴, the International Monetary Fund, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) who “undertake structured processes to improve a war-torn country’s social, economic, and infrastructural status” by providing financial and technical support (KPMG-Ukraine, 2022: 45). Regional organisations (such as the Islamic Development Bank and the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development) have also contributed to reconstruction financing (Abboud, 2014).

Funding modalities for reconstruction used by donor countries include “direct support through bilateral assistance or nongovernment organization (NGO) support; pooled funding

³ E.g., remote sensing and satellite imagery; social media analytics; existing public information; and data obtained from the partner humanitarian agencies (KPMG-Ukraine, 2022).

⁴ The World Bank, for example, aims to support and create the environment for the return of trade, savings, and domestic and international investment; rebuild important physical structures such as vital transportation, communication, and utility networks; restore law and order, strengthening government institutions, and making it possible for civil society organizations to operate efficiently to re-establish the framework of governance; promote macroeconomic stabilization; jump-start the economy by investing in key productive sectors; restore adequate legal and regulatory frameworks; and rehabilitate financial institutions“.

mechanisms such as United Nations–administered funds; and directed funding to NGOs or international NGOs” (Abboud, 2014). Donor countries have provided financial (grants and loans) and other support for post-war reconstruction. For example, the US provided USD20.9 billion over a period of three and a half years for Iraq's reconstruction and the EU pledged USD166 million to Iraq since 2016 (KPMG-Ukraine, 2022). However, as Lynch (2018) notes such assistance can be complicated or insufficient for the reconstruction needs. The Gulf states, for example, have “the financial resources to fund large scale reconstruction, but they are parties to the wars in Syria, Yemen and Libya and cannot offer non-political reconstruction assistance” (Lynch, 2018: 5). In addition, many donor states “do not have the financial or political appetite to assume responsibility for long-term commitments to post conflict reconstruction programs” (Abboud, 2014).

International trust funds have been an important mechanism in the reconstruction of countries (Van Veen, 2022). Past examples include the Iraq Relief and Reconstruction Fund, the Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund, the Syria Reconstruction Trust Fund and the Multi-Donor Trust Fund for South Sudan (Van Veen, 2022). Many of these funds have been run by the World Bank or the United Nations (Van Veen, 2022).

The monetary help provided comes with conditions for the country receiving funding (KPMG-Ukraine, 2022; Abboud, 2014). Such conditions include: funds can only be used for the specified purpose; a fixed principal repayment rate; and funds should be paid within the designated timeline (KPMG-Ukraine, 2022; Abboud, 2014). Abboud (2014) warns that “the phenomenon of conditionality has affected many reconstruction cases and led to policies that are often disconnected from on-the-ground realities and the reconstruction demands of post conflict constituents”. In addition, “borrowing and debt can hamper reconstruction as much as they can support it” (Abboud, 2014).

Abboud (2014) notes that the “demands of financing often mean that private-sector actors take on a significant role in reconstruction”. “Private financing can also occur through investment, diasporic remittances, private bank loans, multilateral trust funds, and, in some cases, microfinance schemes” (Abboud, 2014).

The World Bank and the IMF, as well as the UN, have also aided states with the calculation of the ‘war reparation cost’ - “the cost that the attacking country must bear to ensure that the other is provided with assistance for its reconstruction and development through the disruption it experienced”⁵ (KPMG-Ukraine, 2022: 50). However, not all countries are willing to provide the “levels of financing needed to rebuild what they were complicit in destroying” (Lynch, 2018: 5).

⁵ For example, the United Nations Compensation Commission processed the claims of governments, international organisations, businesses and people (a total of 2.7 million claims) for losses and damages incurred due to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, resulting in US\$52.4 billion in compensation awards to the 1.5 million successful claimants (KPMG-Ukraine, 2022).

3.3 Leading reconstruction efforts

The international community has often assumed the lead in reconstruction at the expense of domestic participation (Abboud, 2014). In best case reconstruction scenarios “an extensive range of stakeholders interact and consult: international, regional and local, including community groups, urban planners, architects, engineers, donors, politicians, local and International NGOs, economists and sociologists” (Pullan and Azzouz, 2019: 4). Pullan and Azzouz (2019: 1) note that “local inhabitants must be regarded as the primary stakeholder”. However, Abboud (2014) warns that “policymakers misread the role of stakeholders and fail to incorporate them into, or in some cases exclude them from, reconstruction planning, thus leaving major gaps between the presence of political and economic power on the ground and the policies being pursued to achieve reconstruction”.

Countries may also have multi-stakeholder platforms that involved the governments, international development partners, NGOs, communities, and in some cases, the private sector (ISE, 2019: 23). For example, the National Solidarity Program (NSP) in Afghanistan, Croatia’s Social and Economic Recovery Project (CSERP), Bosnia and Herzegovina’s Priority Reconstruction Program (PRP); Plan Colombia (ISE, 2019; KPMG-Ukraine, 2022). Coordinating in this way can help reduce fragmentation and duplication of reconstruction efforts.

Involving citizens in planning and delivery of recovery strategies can be done in a variety of ways such as spatial planning, demand-side accountability, participatory visioning and planning exercises, and involving citizens perspectives in monitoring programming (ISE, 2019).

Local reconstruction in cities

Research from the reconstruction of post-conflict cities indicates that responsible local reconstruction is possible, but it can only contribute at a small scale unless there is collaboration with a larger organisation (Pullan and Azzouz, 2019). For example, in 2017 the Al-Bir charity in Homs worked in partnership with UNHCR to rehabilitate apartments in Homs for returnees from the Syrian war (Pullan and Azzouz, 2019). In Hebron, in the Palestinian West Bank, the Hebron Rehabilitation Committee, a combined government, international and local initiative, has combined renovation of the historical fabric of the city with economic and social development since 1996 (Pullan and Azzouz, 2019). In Mosul, a local NGO, Mosul Heritage, has worked alongside UNESCO’s flagship ‘Revive the Spirit of Mosul’ initiative by working with local communities and teaching preservation and conservation techniques that locals can use to restore what was destroyed (Yakoob, 2023).

Local contractors have a better idea of what is possible in the context (especially if they have had to rebuild before), what local people want, and are sources of employment for local people (Pullan, forthcoming). Therefore, Pullan (forthcoming) suggests that they should be favoured over bringing in large foreign contractors.

4. Lessons learned from reconstruction efforts

This section looks at lessons learned from past reconstruction efforts, including those about sequencing drawn from a multicounty study of sequencing pathways for reconstruction by the Institute of State Effectiveness; and lessons learned from the cases of Lebanon, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Gaza.

4.1 Lessons for sequencing

The Institute for State Effectiveness (ISE) (2019: 2), looking at lessons from past reconstruction efforts, found that “Approaches that have worked were marked by consistent and patient commitments, with an integrated view across the domains of security and justice, social and institutional development, and economic recovery”. They go on to focus on key principles learned from past reconstruction efforts for effective sequencing pathways for reconstruction including (ISE, 2023: 1):

- **“Sequenced reconstruction should respond to the specific context of the catastrophe”**. In the immediate aftermath of active war there needs to be a focus on “preservation of life (i.e., through demining, provision of shelter and basic services) for incentivizing the safe return of displaced populations that will provide the human capital to pursue broader recovery”.
- **Build societal consensus around prioritization decisions⁶**: have and communicate a shared understanding of both the immediate needs and the long-term challenges through public engagement.
- **Rationalise tensions between competing goals over time and place**: develop a credible criteria-based approach for how, when and where reconstruction occurs to balance trade-offs of sequencing reconstruction across different areas.
- **Balance the goals of citizens** (i.e., food, housing, jobs, essential services) **and the market** (i.e., largescale infrastructure, value chain investment) **with the state’s ability to deliver while recognizing the sequencing dependencies across key sectors** (e.g., the need to de-mine before rebuilding roads, the human capital and capabilities needed to undertake housing construction projects).
- **Manage the “absorptive curve through careful sequencing and front-load improvements to public sector management to reduce costs and spur investment”**: invest in the people and institutions needed to deliver reconstruction. There needs to be an early focus on logistics, institutional design, capacity building, and program planning to ensure capacity to plan and manage reconstruction projects, which may take the form of central/regional reconstruction agencies. “In addition to public sector capacity, necessary market conditions, industries, workforce

⁶ Examples of priorities for the early stages of recovery and reconstruction and issues that can be left for later can be found in ISE (2019: 16). Priorities include: Citizen engagement and protection; Restoration of core services; Basic civil service reform; Public financial reform; Market building; Rule of Law; Infrastructure; Diaspora and internally displaced persons (IDPs); and Land Disputes (ISE, 2019).

and standards must be in place in the private sector as well to support reconstruction” (ISE, 2023: 3).

Lessons learned from studies of urban post-war reconstruction also indicate that timing is an important consideration in reconstruction and so-called temporary solutions need to be assessed for the long term as they may end up as such (Pullan and Azzouz, 2019).

4.2 Lessons from Lebanon

Harris (2009) drew out lessons from the reconstruction experience in Lebanon after the 2006 war between Hezbollah and Israel, with the aim of applying them to Gaza. They include:

- **“Restricting contact with a key reconstruction actor militates against effectiveness”** (Harris, 2009: 2). Proscribing contact with Hezbollah, an actor who was part of the governing structures through which local and international assistance must be disbursed in Lebanon, reduced the effectiveness of reconstruction efforts (Harris, 2009).
- **“When governmental reach does not extend to all conflict-affected areas, the assistance efforts of other actors will prove more effective, resulting in an increase of support for those disbursing assistance”** (Harris, 2009: 2). As Hezbollah was able to disperse cash quickly to those in need, they garnered considerable support compared to the Government of Lebanon who was unable to do this in many areas devastated after the 2006 conflict (Harris, 2009).
- **“Parallel efforts reduce effectiveness”** (Harris, 2009: 2). Donors adopted a variety of approaches to supporting the reconstruction of Lebanon, with Western governments generally channelling their funding through central government and regional donors bilaterally adopting and then undertaking the reconstruction of villages, schools, mosques and hospitals (Harris, 2009). Despite being seemingly effective, these decentralised efforts served to “undermine government credibility, stability, reconciliation and the reconstruction process as a whole” (Harris, 2009: 3). A Unity Government could enable a single needs assessment and a single reconstruction masterplan, supported by one agreed international lead individual to co-chair one reconstruction trust fund (Harris, 2009).
- **“Border management is necessary but not sufficient”** (Harris, 2009: 3). A prerequisite for re-construction to take place is meaningfully open borders, which is really a challenge of political will rather than technical border management (Harris, 2009).
- **“Support is needed to build institutional capability and accountability”** (Harris, 2009: 4). UNDP helped to establish a Reconstruction and Recovery Unit in the Lebanese Prime Minister's Office to help with institutional capacities for reconstruction (Harris, 2009).
- **“Ensure that donors honour their pledges”** (Harris, 2009: 5). Lebanon did not receive all the reconstruction funds pledged, which led to a cycle of indebtedness as “individuals borrow to finance reconstruction, and the most vulnerable are further

imperilled, returning to live in unfit and unsafe dwellings through lack of credible alternatives” (Harris, 2009: 5).

- **“Reconstruction should address the underlying root causes”**, such as a catastrophic economic situation (Harris, 2009: 5).

4.3 Lessons from reconstruction in Afghanistan

Research by Mustasilta et al (2023) into the lessons from Afghanistan after the nearly twenty years of international intervention by NATO Allies and partner countries post 9/11, highlighted that:

- It is important to keep efforts modest, locally driven, and context specific. The lack of local buy-in and leadership in the planning of reconstructions efforts “proved not only ineffective but counterproductive and conducive to corruption” (Mustasilta et al, 2023).
- Genuine strategic coordination, involving shared goal setting and agreement on how to reach shared objectives, not just shared mechanisms to meet and exchange information, is important. All actors’ activities should together form a coherent endeavour (Mustasilta et al, 2023).
- Clarity of objectives and transparency is also important for holding actors accountable for their actions and there needs to be an acknowledgement that intervening leads to long-term responsibilities (Mustasilta et al, 2023).

Another call for keeping reconstruction efforts modest comes from Naheed Sarabi, a visiting fellow in Brookings’s Global Economy and Development program and the former deputy minister for policy in Afghanistan’s finance ministry, who suggests that efforts needed to “promise less, deliver more” (Wessel and Asdourian, 2022). She also emphasised the importance of coordination and local leadership (Wessel and Asdourian, 2022).

4.4 Lessons from reconstruction in Iraq

Reflecting on key lessons from the reconstruction in Iraq post-2003 and the US-led coalition’s invasion to overthrow Saddam Hussain, Hideki Matsunaga, Director General of the Middle East and Europe Department of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and a former adviser to the World Bank on the Middle East and North Africa, noted that:

- **“Actions taken by the international community need to reinforce national success through national institutions”**, rather than bypassing them to try and achieve early results (Matsunaga, 2019). For example, “donor-funded physical infrastructure put in place since 2003 was already breaking down by 2005 since Iraqi institutions were not fully engaged, and the roles of institutions in operating and maintaining infrastructure were not sufficiently considered” (Matsunaga, 2019). The imposition of external solutions (e.g. de-Baathfication) invites counter-productive reactions from local counterparts (Matsunaga, 2019). A serious challenge for this

approach is finding legitimate actors to work with in some countries (e.g., Syria and Yemen) (Matsunaga, 2019).

- **“International actors need to adopt a flexible approach to deal with the uncertain, fluid, and complex nature of reconstruction, even when facing increased security risks”**, for example by maintaining a presence in less volatile parts of a country (Matsunaga, 2019).
- **“Problems related to accountability have a major impact on reconstruction outcomes”** (Matsunaga, 2019). Dual accountability, where donors and international organisations were more accountable to their domestic constituencies than those in the recipient country made delivering result on the ground more difficult (Matsunaga, 2019). Local accountability can also “be undermined when reconstruction financing comes from resources unconnected to the local population” (Matsunaga, 2019).

Matsunaga also noted the importance of donor coordination to prevent reconstruction becoming a set of disparate projects rather than a national enterprise, as occurred in Iraq (Wessel and Asdourian, 2022). He also argued that private finance and private sector investment is needed for reconstruction efforts too (Wessel and Asdourian, 2022). However, Abboud (2014) suggests that there was an obsession in Iraq with private-sector involvement in reconstruction, at the expense of the public sector’s involvement.

Iraq experienced another period of conflict in 2014-2017, when the Islamic State took over parts of the country. Van Veen (2022) reflected on three lessons from a mechanism that the United Nations established in Iraq during the fight against Islamic State (IS), the Funding Facility for Stabilization. The Funding Facility for Stabilization was set up to rehabilitate public infrastructure and provide basic services to communities in the five Iraqi governorates most affected by IS (Van Veen, 2022). It was set up to function for 8 years (2015-2023), with a budget of USD1.88 billion from contributions by at least 29 countries (Van Veen, 2022). In mid-2022 it had managed to rehabilitate and rebuild a vast array of essential public infrastructure fast and without major (corruption) scandals, including schools, water plants, hospitals and government offices (Van Veen, 2022). UN staff in Mosul felt that this was achieved as a result of “a cooperative central government (at times less so at the provincial level), a private sector capable of undertaking construction work effectively, sustained international resource mobilisation, a clear lead agency to take charge of the trust fund (in this case: the United Nations Development Programme, UNDP) and a senior-level UN champion to manage bureaucracy and ensure high-level engagement” (Van Veen, 2022).

The key lessons Van Veen (2022) identified include:

- **Reduce corruption as much as possible.** The Funding Facility for Stabilization has thorough operating and tendering procedures that are relatively fast and possesses engineering, financial and reputational vetting capabilities, as well as flexible hiring and firing procedures to deploy a small army of necessary local engineers, administrators, and accountants.
- **Reconstruct what you can touch, but also what you can sense.** “Develop plans for physical reconstruction of (public) infrastructure at the same pace and in alignment with a broader recovery strategy on the part of the government” (Van

Veen, 2022). In order to revive normal life, “joined up material and immaterial recovery plans must be put in place with a high-level coordination mechanism that enables intervention to close gaps once they emerge” (Van Veen, 2022).

- **Restoring local administration is key, but can be sensitive.** The “quality of local administration is fundamental to the durability and continuity of reconstruction efforts” and efforts are needed to upgrade local administrative capabilities, including the ability of communities to engage with their local authorities (Van Veen, 2022).

4.5 Lessons from reconstruction in Gaza

Milton et al (forthcoming) analysed the reconstruction efforts in the Gaza Strip following the 2021 and 2022 wars, placing these efforts in the context of previous reconstruction experiences after the 2008/09, 2012, and 2014 conflicts with Israel. Lessons include:

- Donor fatigue can become an issue in a context where the frequency of recurring conflict has led to previous rebuilding efforts being destroyed in a short period (Milton et al, forthcoming).
- Policies by Israel preventing the availability of financial resources or construction materials into Gaza slow down any reconstruction efforts (Milton et al, forthcoming).
- The heavily top-down approach to reconstruction by the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism (GRM)⁷ which did not include the local authorities (Hamas) or local communities in the planning process created obstacles to donor coordination and a focus on donor rather than the local communities’ priorities⁸ (Milton et al, forthcoming).
- Intra-Palestinian divisions have also hindered reconstructions as some donors have made their support for reconstruction conditional on Palestinian reconciliation and an end to the Hamas-Fatah rift (Milton et al, forthcoming).

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⁷ An agreement reached in 2014 under which the UN regulates cross-border flows in and out of the Gaza Strip.

⁸ Several project funded by UNRWA and Qatar did take local people priorities more into account and provided compensation for owners of completely and partially damaged units to rebuild their houses (Milton et al, forthcoming).

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6. About this review

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