Conclusion

Consolidating democracy is never easy. It requires skilled leadership, an active civil society, functioning political institutions, and – most importantly – a significant degree of *time*. These are scarce commodities in even the most benevolent transition to democracy. In a post-conflict scenario, however, the challenges are multiplied many times over. Deep-rooted conflicts impact negatively on almost every area of political and social relations. Civil society is often weak or highly partisanized or both; leaders and local elites are usually the very people who have until recently been engaged in the conflict itself; the economy will have been severely damaged; and the basic institutions of government have either ceased to function or face severe crises of legitimacy. Under such conditions, attempts to reconstruct a sustainable democracy face huge obstacles. It is not surprising, therefore, that the record of promoting democracy in such cases includes many failures and relatively few unambiguous successes.

The consolidation of democratic governance relates both to the existence of a conducive institutional framework, and the respect for and compliance with democratic procedures. It is therefore vital that any assessment of the progress made in implementing an agreement adopts a holistic view of the agreement and of its implementation. The various phases that this handbook focuses on, from pre-negotiation to implementation, should all be regarded as part of one continuous process that requires constant vigilance and evaluation.

What overall lessons do these successes and failures hold for would-be democracy builders? The first is that more attention needs to be paid to the *process* by which one reaches a peace settlement rather than simply concentrating on a scenario's *outcomes*. The distinction between process and outcome is one of the starkest lessons of post-settlement peace building in the 1990s. In 1998, two long-lasting and seemingly intractable conflicts – Northern Ireland and Bougainville – finally reached peace agreements. These two conflicts have many parallels: both have been long-running disputes over autonomy that had claimed several thousand lives; both involve complicated questions of

territorial and cultural sovereignty; and both have been seemingly impervious to resolution, despite numerous previous attempts at a settlement. These underlying factors did not change in either case in the lead-up to their respective peace agreements. The substantive issues concerning questions of regional autonomy mechanisms had also been debated and discussed over a number of years: the mechanisms contained in the 1998 “Good Friday” agreement in Northern Ireland, for example, had been around for some time as part of earlier peace proposals. What did change in both cases, however, was a renewed focus on the *process* by which negotiations took place.

In Northern Ireland, this meant genuinely inclusive talks in which all elements – including extremists from both sides – were brought into the process as equal players, rather than being left to disrupt proceedings from outside. The presence of a skillful and committed chair who earned the respect of all sides, in the shape of former US Senator George Mitchell, and political leaders of the major moderate factions committed to seeing agreement reached, was also crucial. In Bougainville, New Zealand’s intervention as a respected but impartial third party enabled talks to be held in a neutral environment that encouraged the building of mutual trust and commitment. There, the key to the peace settlement was not what the agreement said but what it failed to say: key issues concerning independence and future autonomy arrangements for Bougainville were left out of the agreement altogether, to be addressed at a later date. In both the Northern Ireland and Bougainville cases, then, the process by which negotiations were held was a key to their success. Peace talks were structured in such a way as to promote dialogue, trust and commitment – the keys to building a lasting peace.

Attempts to resolve similar conflicts elsewhere would benefit from more focused attention on this issue at an early stage in negotiations, rather than the rushed and often ill-thought through agreements that characterize so many failed settlements. Of course, many agreements are rushed precisely because of the urgency of the issues involved: in places like Bosnia, Rwanda and Burundi, the overriding importance of the agreements was to stop the killing. If they succeeded in this key aim but failed to establish sustainable democracy, this can hardly be a source of blame for the architects of those settlements. But it does illustrate that rushed agreements aimed primarily at stopping conflict may not be the best base on which to try to build a viable democratic state.

The international community and domestic actors alike need to see democracy as a long-term process of building trust from within, rather than a quick-fix solution that can be imposed from without. The international community's obsession in the early 1990s with elections as a form of conflict resolution is perhaps the most obvious manifestation of this "quick-fix" mentality. The world is littered with elections, often conducted at the behest of the international community, which only served to inflame and politicize the root causes of conflict. The 1993 elections in Burundi, for example, served as a catalyst for the devastating ethnic conflict that was to follow by bringing the Tutsi-Hutu rivalry into sharp relief. Similarly in Rwanda, pressures for multipartism and democracy were translated into mobilization of ethnic interests and intensified ethnic competition over control of the state. In certain other countries, internationally sponsored elections were imposed by the international community as a form of exit strategy for their involvement. But elections are the beginning of a democratic process, not the end-point, and any genuine strategy for the promotion of democracy following a deep-rooted conflict needs to view elections as only the first step in a long-term process.

Elsewhere, the failure was not one of the elections *per se*, but rather the lack of forethought that went into them. In both Algeria in 1991–1992 and Burundi in 1993, inappropriate electoral systems produced a winner-take-all outcome which encouraged the "loser" to turn to violence rather than accept the outcome. In Angola, the fact that the constitution centralized power in a one-person office – the presidency – meant that it offered few incentives for a loser to stay in the process. In Bosnia, the 1996 elections held after the signing of the Dayton Accord took place in an environment of fear that served to solidify rather than break down ethnic divisions. The choice of electoral system itself exacerbated this problem by replicating the deep divisions between ethnic groups in the legislature. In Cambodia, a free and fair electoral process that was technically faultless elected two main parties, each of whom had expected to control power alone. A clumsy post-election power-sharing arrangement that had no constitutional basis was hastily cobbled together and, unsurprisingly, fell apart within a few years.

With the benefit of hindsight, all of these cases would have benefited from more careful forethought as to exactly what the elections in question were supposed to achieve, how they would be likely to impact upon the political environment, and, most

importantly, how they could be designed to achieve more sustainable outcomes. This could have included, for example, the diffusion of powers to a parliament in the Angolan case, electoral system design to encourage inter-ethnic accommodation in Bosnia and constitutionally mandated power-sharing arrangements in Cambodia. Elsewhere, the devolution of power to provinces or local areas, autonomy arrangements for particular regions, special recognition of group or indigenous rights, reparation and reconciliation commissions, gender equality mechanisms, peace committees and a host of other devices have been used to manage deep-rooted conflicts or stop existing ones from escalating.

The utility of these types of arrangements and many others, highlights the point that the distance between the success or failure of democracy is often not that large. Well-designed institutions which address real issues through creative structuring of incentives and constraints can achieve much; so can carefully structured peace talks aimed at bringing all interests "inside the tent". Conversely, democracy-promotion is often threatened by the imposition of institutions which work well in western countries but which aggravate problems in divided societies. Greater study of the way different democratic institutions work in different societies is thus crucial to democracy promotion in the next decade.

So too is the international community's continued support for democracy building as a long-term process rather than a short-term event. The key to democratic consolidation is time, and the successive repetition of periodic events such as elections, so that patterns of behaviour become regularized over the long term. It is virtually impossible to consolidate democracy without this *iterative* factor. This is also, however, the issue that is most consistently overlooked by domestic democracy builders and the international community alike.

More important than either institutional engineering or international support, however, is the key role of local, indigenous support for democracy. Democracy as a form of government is synonymous with questions of domestic sovereignty and domestic jurisdiction. It remains, for the time being at least, a form of government predominantly associated with states and their subregions, rather than international or regional groupings. This means that the importance of local actors in making democracy work is paramount.

Amongst local actors, no group is more important than political leaders. Virtually ever successful transition to democracy discussed in this manual depended primarily upon far-sighted, courageous and creative political leadership. Leaders who are prepared to make sacrifices, to make deals with their political foes, to negotiate, to move forward when others are afraid or unwilling, are essential to building a sustainable democracy. But leaders alone can only do so much. Without fundamental support for peace and democracy amongst a population, no amount of enlightened leadership can succeed. Fortunately, examination of deep-rooted conflicts around the world suggests that, in almost all cases, ordinary people, men and women, remain fundamentally committed to democracy. They are also inevitably the biggest losers when democracy breaks down. Building a sustainable peace requires the fundamental harnessing of ordinary people behind democratic values – values based, above all, on the people themselves being the ultimate arbiters of their political leadership and their country's destiny.

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