

# Time to shock the system:

Capacity to design and implement UN  
Peacebuilding Fund Projects in Guinea-Bissau



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## Executive Summary

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This assessment on the capacity needs for implementing United Nations (UN) Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) projects was conducted between October 2021 and January 2022. The engagement with around 60 stakeholders in Bissau and New York provides an overview of how the capacity to implement better PBF projects can further trigger their potential to become a more catalysing tool in the country's peacebuilding process.

During interviews, stakeholders were somehow cohesive and complementary in identifying challenges faced by Guinea-Bissau. Far less cohesive was their understanding of how to address them. This disparity confirms that while peacebuilding often focuses on identifying conflict causes, it should also focus on the conditions and approaches that can assist a country in sustaining peace.

This situation shows that in better implementing PBF projects in Guinea-Bissau, a systematic and continuous capacity building process needs to be designed for critical stakeholders in the country. The ever-changing dynamics in Guinea-Bissau are essential in understanding the broader peacebuilding context. They must be included in the design and implementation of PBF projects.

There is an underlying need to address the linkage between development and peace in the country. Most actors understand the importance and links between development and peace. However, there is strong dissonance on what constitutes peacebuilding and how to build its intentionality in the design of projects.

In the past 15 years, the PBF has allocated more than USD 45 million to the country. A considerable amount, especially during the 2012 coup, was not spent and had to be returned to the UN. PBF projects are still implemented through a short-term focus lens. They are heavily driven by UN agencies, programmes, and funds. Further understanding of risk management skills could be particularly beneficial in designing and implementing projects.

Ownership and inclusivity are part of the discourses in the country. Still, very few national actors feel fully included or perceived ownership in identifying priorities and designing

projects. The design of PBF projects should be done more broadly to ensure that priorities are not only "accepted" by internal actors. Instead, the UN should pursue a more substantial buy-in and sense of national ownership in ensuring that different peacebuilding players effectively internalise peacebuilding priorities.

These issues show the importance of fostering the ownership of local and national authorities to own PBF projects effectively. PBF projects are still perceived as mostly externally driven, reinforcing divisions rather than unifying actors.

Not surprisingly, government and civil society actors have, to a large degree, taken the back seat in defining priorities and responses of PBF projects. Generating knowledge and awareness of the PBF functions and roles opportunities should be an imperative and a regular part of the calendar of the PBF secretariat and the implementing agencies.

The PBF size is proportionately large in Guinea-Bissau, considering the small pool of funders present in the country. Therefore, unlike in other recipient countries where the PBF may be pretty small compared to more significant pockets of funding allocated, the catalytic nature of the PBF in Guinea-Bissau needs to be better understood within the context of the country.

While the support it provides for the continuation of UNCT presence in the country, it should focus more on the sustainability of action and how projects effectively transfer and build skills. This approach should ensure that projects can see results long after the short-term timeframe of PBF projects is finished.

The PBF provide a flexible funding mechanism regarding thematic areas that no other donor would engage with. However, unfortunately, this thematic risk-taking propensity is not followed by its ability to fund a broader range of actors and effectively strengthen the role of civil society. A more robust engagement of PBF projects recipients regarding planning and adaptability must be included from the onset of initiatives.

In 2021, much of the discussions on PBF projects were centralised on bureaucratic arrangements, including no-cost extensions, competition for agency-specific portions of funds, and fractured relationships across the UN system in the country. UN actors should be further empowered to understand their joint role and capacity of influencing and implementing projects in the context of institutional changes.

Guinea-Bissau's fragmented political space where everything could be a priority requires a further understanding of strategic positioning and capacity of implementation. No actor can resolve all the problems alone, and acknowledging limitations can ensure more targeted projects with clear intentions of change and the ability to measure results. Lack of ambition may be frowned-upon at times, but "biting more than one can chew" certainly does not assist the PBF to become more effective.

This report proposes the following capacity building responses to develop better PBF projects in Guinea-Bissau:

- *Understanding Peacebuilding and getting peacebuilding intentionality right*
  1. The PBF secretariat can continuously support the UN, government, and civil society actors and include them in national, regional, and global peacebuilding discussions. This report suggests two approaches:
    - Induction: the development of an annual induction process and retreat with implementing parties of PBF projects would benefit them in ensuring a common view, a focus on results, and understanding of opportunities for further internal collaboration. The process is also helpful for those already implementing PBF projects to identify risks, develop mitigation strategies, and focus on results rather than outputs. It can also serve as a space for those intending to apply for PBF funds to better understand the mechanism's scope and develop better proposals.
    - Continuous mentoring and networking: capacity-building processes should be seen as a constant effort. The PBF can facilitate interactions between project implementers, create a frequent loop of discussions regarding their role, just-in-time feedback on results, and link them with similar projects being developed in Guinea-Bissau and other PBF recipient countries. Developing one-on-one or collective sessions with regional and global peacebuilding experts and practitioners may help identify lessons learned and reduce the attempt to constantly "reinvent the wheel."

2. Focus on outcomes rather than compliance with administrative requirements: PBF projects could become more effective in working towards a mentality shift regarding the importance of realistic and applicable monitoring and evaluation tools. Many projects are designed with overly ambitious outcomes and impractical tools of measuring results, including targets and indicators. PBF implementers can be empowered to develop more realistic approaches, and showing the importance of measuring results is essential to the success of any PBF project.
- *Ownership and inclusivity must be re-thought*
3. PBF project design should be accompanied by a stronger indication of nationally led responses. National actors are often included in later parts of the process, making their capacity to influence the definition of priorities and strategies of action limited. Capacity building processes, like inductions, should include national actors when possible, identifying opportunities to put them in the driving seat.
  4. In designing PBF projects, applicants should be more transparent on how the work conducted is expected to contribute to longer-term outcomes in the country. A higher focus on "transferring knowledge and skills" rather than "doing the work" should be a fundamental tenet in approving PBF projects. This can ensure that while UNCT will remain involved in PBF projects, they should think even before implementing the initiative's sustainability after its closure.
  5. In general, engaging with national actors should not be simply listed in the proposal document. Applicants should be requested to provide evidence that national actors were not merely "consulted" but that they were instead an intrinsic part of the development of goals.
- *Project management skills*
6. Enhancing the capacity of PBF project staff in project management and monitoring and evaluation is a paramount criterion for better implementation. The PBF secretariat and the lead agencies should be committed to providing

regular capacity building to staff, especially those explicitly recruited for PBF projects.

7. In the design of project timelines, the first few months should be dedicated to ensuring that all staff from the UN, government and civil society are familiarised with their goals, and a clear roadmap on implementation is identified.
8. Risk management approaches should go beyond the formulation of proposals. They should effectively be part of the everyday job. However, to be successful, the PBF needs to be flexible in ensuring that required changes in the scope of projects are approved to enable staff to focus on outcomes, not outputs.

# Table of Contents

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<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>Methodology</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>Guinea-Bissau's Political Environment</b> .....	<b>13</b>
Box 1: Perceptions of perennial political instability and decentralisation .....	14
<b>National and International Peacebuilding Planning Processes in Guinea-Bissau</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>Peacebuilding Institutions in Guinea-Bissau</b> .....	<b>22</b>
National government.....	22
Civil Society.....	25
<b>Box 2: Inclusivity – enhancing the role of youth and women</b> .....	29
The United Nations.....	31
The Broader International Community.....	34
<b>PBF in Guinea-Bissau: Planning and Implementation Capacity</b> .....	<b>36</b>
Peacebuilding Financing in Guinea-Bissau.....	36
PBF project allocations .....	40
UNCT and PBF Projects .....	43
National actors and PBF projects.....	45
<b>Key Findings</b> .....	<b>48</b>
Institutional Capacities .....	48
Individual skills.....	52

# Introduction

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For the past decades, the international community has aimed to identify better ways of assisting countries in their process of preventing conflicts and sustaining peace. Despite many efforts, peacebuilding remains critically under-recognised, under-prioritised, and under-resourced globally and within the United Nations (UN) System.<sup>1</sup> International actors still struggle to engage in the shared responsibility with domestic entities, ensuring that ownership is fully included in the knowledge and understanding of peacebuilding processes and enabling local actors to design, engage, and implement sustainable responses.

The creation of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture (PBA) in 2005 was based on the premise that if the UN promoted peace successfully, it needed to change its approaches to conflicts. Since, its Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) has invested in financing catalytical peacebuilding projects that would develop innovative and sustainable peacebuilding efforts.

Guinea-Bissau has been critical in the global peacebuilding discourse and practice, including through the support of the PBF. It has hosted for over two decades several peacebuilding and political missions. The deployment of the latest peacebuilding office in Guinea-Bissau, the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS), in 2009 was a direct result of how UN structures evolved in the 2000s. Under the umbrella of an integrated peacebuilding office, it attempted to "*maximise the individual and collective impact of UN responses, concentrating on those activities required to consolidate peace*".<sup>2</sup>

More than a traditional funding arrangement, the PBF aims to catalyse initiatives that foster the prevention of conflicts, sustain peace, and ultimately support resilience within societies. The understanding of the catalytic nature of the PBF varies, especially when using its different funding modalities that vary from longer-term to rapid responsiveness.

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<sup>1</sup> UN Secretary-General Advisory Group of Experts, "Letter Dated 29 June 2015 from the Chair of the Secretary-General's Advisory Group of Experts on the 2015 Review of the United Nations Peacebuilding Architecture Addressed to the Presidents of the Security Council and of the General Assembly," June 29, 2015, [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/150630\\_Report\\_of\\_the\\_AGE\\_on\\_the\\_2015\\_Peacebuilding\\_Review\\_FINAL.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/150630_Report_of_the_AGE_on_the_2015_Peacebuilding_Review_FINAL.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Susanna P Campbell, *Global Governance and Local Peace : Accountability and Performance in International Peacebuilding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).



PBF projects are funded via three facilities. As stated in the name, the Immediate Response Facility (IRF) expects to provide rapid funding for immediate peacebuilding and recovery needs. IRF projects can cover a period of up to 18 months.

Under the IRF, the PBF created another facility, funded through a global competition, to enhance the role of youth and women in peacebuilding processes. The Gender and Youth Promotion Initiative (GYPI) results from the UN's attempt to further ensure inclusivity in peacebuilding processes by supporting "the empowerment of women and the advancement of gender equality." It also "recognises the important and positive role young people play in peacebuilding." Grants go through a global competition, where both the UN and civil society organisations are eligible to apply. Projects can be up to 18 months.

The Peacebuilding and Recovery Facility (PRF) provides more substantial and medium-term projects, driven towards national ownership and stakeholder engagement in managing PBF resources at the country level. PRF projects are longer in nature, being up to 36 months.

To support PBF projects, the UN created a secretariat located under the Office of the UN Resident Coordinator (RC). For the past 15 years, it has been responsible for identifying relevant projects, promoting coherence amongst the UN system, and ensuring that projects are effectively implemented.

The Secretariat also provides support in the affairs of the PBF national steering committee in Guinea-Bissau, composed of UN actors, government, civil society organisations and donor community. The steering committee is co-chaired by the UN RC and the national government. After a few years without functioning, the steering committee was re-established in mid-2021, an essential step in enhancing the quality and relevance of PBF projects.

One issue of interest in developing PBF projects is the increased requirement for local participation in the implementation. In recent years, PBF projects were required to spend at least 40% financing locally-led initiatives. This move is an essential step towards national ownership and inclusivity on projects. Projects assessed, however, provided some challenges regarding meaningful inclusivity in their design.

Guinea-Bissau became one of the first to have a UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) configuration in 2007, becoming then eligible to receive PBF projects. The Fund has, since

2008, allocated around USD 46 million<sup>3</sup> towards peacebuilding initiatives in Guinea-Bissau, led by the UN, government institutions and civil society organisations. By the end of 2021, the Fund managed a portfolio of around USD 11 million in the country. This number may increase depending on the new annual allocations and GYPI projects in 2022.

For almost 20 years, political and peacebuilding missions like UNIOGBIS provided great insight into how the UN responds to crises and works towards achieving its mandate. However, peacebuilding in Guinea-Bissau has been at a crossroads after 2020. While many UN missions have undergone transitions in recent years, Guinea-Bissau's situation is unique. Having never hosted a UN peace operation, its transition saw the handover of functions from its peacebuilding office to the UNCT.

With the departure of UNIOGBIS, peacebuilding's nature, scope, and goals remain contested in Guinea-Bissau. International and national actors must be well-positioned and respond to a complex and often complicated environment. Further understanding how PBF projects are planned, designed, and implemented can assist in strengthening the quality of responses and further contributing to sustainable peace and development in Guinea-Bissau.

This needs assessment study is based on the understanding that if PBF projects are better designed and implemented, it may help ensure Guinea-Bissau's path to stability. It acknowledges that to develop effective institutional and individual interventions, the capacity-building initiatives need to be based on a solid understanding of the context of projects.

It hopes to shed light on how institutions (external and national) respond to the political, social, and economic environment. It also identifies how these institutions enable or constrain the implementation of successful projects. Finally, it aims to identify the necessary skills to ensure adequate performance that achieves intended results on individuals engaged with the PBF and the support needed from their institutions to maximise the impact of the funding received on the national peacebuilding process.

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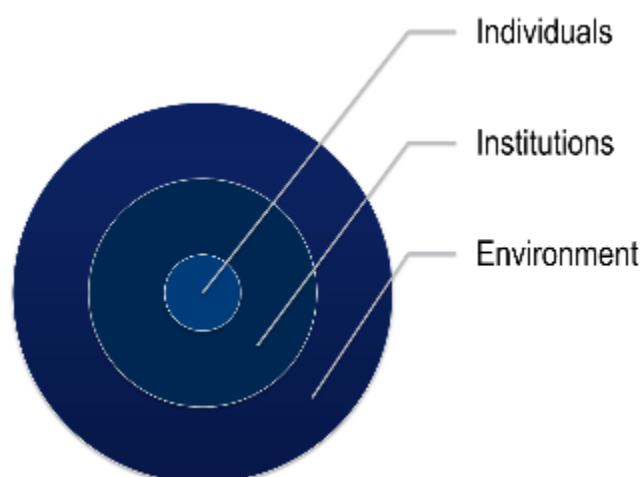
<sup>3</sup> Some of the funds allocated had to be returned to the PBF, particularly projects that were in place during the coup of 2012.

# Methodology

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This study results from a process that identified needs that can assist in developing effective capacity building of UN actors, government, and civil society organisations in designing, planning, and implementing PBF projects. It was conducted based on the understanding that one must look at multiple levels to ensure the effective implementation of PBF projects. It expects to provide insight into how different structures and individuals made sense of their environment, liaising, and selling issues to other actors, leading to more effective responses.

**Figure 1: Capacity-building levels of analysis**



*Source: Designed by the author*

The findings in this document are based on three specific levels of analysis, often interlinked. It acknowledges that individual capacity to implement PBF projects are embedded and directly linked to institutional capacity and environmental conditions. The report is, thus, shaped in a format that does not simply investigate specific skills required for implementing PBF projects.

This study conducted qualitative research that engaged with documentary analysis, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and a degree of participatory observation. The study

reviewed various primary and secondary data related to the role of peacebuilding needs in Guinea-Bissau, focusing on the capacity to design and implement PBF projects. It assessed previous planning documents (e.g., Terra Ranka) and existing country strategies (e.g., National Development Plan 2020-2023 - Hora Tchiga).

Relevant documents also included national planning processes, UN, and other donor initiatives. These assisted in identifying how the priorities set for development and peacebuilding are connected to the existing national and international capacity to implement them.

A variety of stakeholders were interviewed, representing various sectors within Guinea-Bissau. The interviews were conducted between October 2021 and January 2022, in-person or through video calls/e-mail. It used a purposive sampling method, implemented via semi-structured guiding questions prepared in collaboration with the PBF secretariat. Around 60 individuals participated in this process, from the UNCT, former UN staff in Guinea-Bissau, UN bureaucrats in HQ, government officials, local and international civil society organisations, the donor community, and academics.

The study followed up with specific individuals several times, based on their availability and interest. Such an approach aimed to gather more nuance and understanding of perspectives and make sense of existing and future dynamics. This study also conducted several focus groups with individuals from the same organs, sectors, or institutions (local and external).

Interviews were anonymised to enable individuals to freely share their thoughts without fear of repercussion. Quotes presented in this report were adapted (and translated) for ease of reading, attempting to keep as closely as possible to the original and intended meaning.

Finally, the analysis and views in this report do not necessarily reflect the opinions and positions of the UN (including the PBF secretariat, who requested this study), government, or civil society organisations. While their views were used as a basis for the report, the findings and any misunderstandings are the author's sole responsibility.

## Guinea-Bissau's Political Environment

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Guinea-Bissau has a long history of political instability, often characterised by bad governance, corruption, the limited rule of law, as well as unconstitutional changes of government. This has given rise to a politics of patronage and the mutual distrust among Guinea-Bissau's political elites and society, with complex civil-military and political dynamics.

The level of instability at a political level provides an opportunity to understand the constitutional and legal aspects of the frequent crises the country frequently face. The country has experienced at least four putsches (in 1980, 2003, 2010, and 2012), a period of violent conflict in 1998–1999, and the assassination of President Nino Vieira in 2009. Since gaining independence in 1973, only one President has finished their mandate, José Mario Vaz, in 2020.

The increasing tension that culminated in the Guinea-Bissau civil war in 1998-1999 helped consolidate the country's military power and the ascension of specific groups to power. While ethnic differences in the country are still seen as taboo by many, it has often influenced the direction of the political environment.

Following the 2012 coup, hope for restoring normalcy in the political and institutional functions of Guinea-Bissau was pegged on the conduct of elections. However, in-between elections, Guinea-Bissau has been frequently embroiled in political impasses, including government composition and the problematic relationship between powers. The constant changes of prime ministers and stalemates within (and with) parliament directly affected the government's capacity to implement and account for budgets and programmes.

### Box 1: Perceptions of perennial political instability and decentralisation

Perennial political instability remains a critical constraint for peace in Guinea-Bissau, affecting the entire country. Interviewees identified that this issue is vital for ensuring good governance, sustainable development, and inclusive economic growth. One interviewee mentioned that *"the political instability in the country leads to an inward-looking space of debate amongst the elite. Therefore, issues related to infrastructure, health, and education, central to the country's sustainable development and peace, are overlooked."*

This argument was frequently mentioned during interviews. In 2021, for instance, the country saw several strikes (e.g., health and education), and increasing polarisation of political statements and positions, often of a religious nature. The disputed political space is confronted by the need to strengthen civil society and media, to ensure stronger inclusivity, social cohesion, and local and national ownership.

Thus, a vital aspect of political dynamics is the centralisation of power by the elites in Bissau, dating to colonial times. Being a small exploration colony, the Portuguese empire largely centralised its efforts within the capital. The rest of the country was used to explore resources. Once independence was achieved in 1973, this same structure was maintained, despite initial attempts to expand state authority. According to one interviewee, since the 1980s, and notably since the end of the single-party system in 1994, the State's role outside Bissau has drastically reduced.

Most interviewees confirmed these views. Many highlighted that one of the critical challenges in the country relates to a limited state capacity outside the capital, which often is the source or the conduit for local level tension. Without the presence of the State, local actors' resort to their sources of authority and conflict resolution, not always done through peaceful means.

Land access and ownership were often defined as prominent drivers of instability, especially outside Bissau. Little trust in the courts or police is aggravated by distance and access to these resources. Traditional leaders can be called to resolve it but disputed, often by the disenfranchised youth. As a result, the resolution of conflicts become more violent rather than mediated.

Part of the reason rests on the challenge that the State must deal with, manage, and mediate land conflicts. Ministries, such as territorial administration and local authority, still have a heavy presence in the capital, limiting their ability to go to the different regions and Tabancas.

Therefore, decentralisation goes beyond sharing responsibilities between the national and local institutions. Some mentioned the problems as part of how structures, systems and budgets are developed. Regions depend on Bissau for everything, including budgetary allocations.

The limited state presence, including in the dozens of islands that compose Guinea-Bissau (primarily inhabited), thus, opened the space for many of the challenges the country currently see. One visible example includes using parts of the country as transit points for drug trafficking towards Europe and the United States.

Despite such a tense political environment, most interviewees (internal and external) reflected the nature of societal resilience within Guinea-Bissau. Several sources of resilience were highlighted, possibly all interconnected. First, many identified the country's rich and diverse cultural history as an essential identity source. Traditional and cultural elements of society are often threatened. However, they are still vital in determining how different groups respond to conflicts and identify solutions outside or complementary to state-society relations.

Second, while the country faces constant political tension, the "stable instability" led many to identify ways of coping with a complex political environment. One interviewee mentioned that "for me, the country faces a great sense of passive acceptance, and lack of trust in the State. This lead everyone to do their thing, to become more resilient and frequently reinvent themselves. Nevertheless, it also shows a real problem in the social contract that needs to be resolved."

Third, civil society organisations were often identified as essential pockets of stability in the absence of a strong state (and the centralisation of power in Bissau). These organisations play a crucial role in maintaining societal relations by guaranteeing certain services and civic spaces, particularly at the Tabanca and regional levels.

# National and International Peacebuilding Planning Processes in Guinea-Bissau

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Bissau-Guinean contested political environment also led to a fractured and contested environment for peacebuilding planning. Dating back to the late 1990s, the government and the international community developed various policy frameworks to create an environment conducive to developing and implementing peace processes. Following the 1998-1999 war, policies were premised on the rhetoric of supporting national plans of establishing lasting solutions to instability rather than imposing them on the polity.

Before the UN PBA creation, many national peacebuilding strategies were embedded within specific developmental plans or sectoral visions. These early examples are identified, for instance, in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Programmes (PRSP) and the Security Sector Reform Plan approved in the 2000s.

These plans identified priorities that still linger until today's Guinea-Bissau peacebuilding environment. Many of these priorities remain contested, unresolved, and demanded in the country, including security sector reform; justice sector reform; economy and infrastructure; social issues; public administration reform, and elections/institution building.

In 2007, when Guinea-Bissau was added to the PBC, a Peacebuilding Priority Plan was implemented. It was followed by creating a 2011–2013 comprehensive Priority Plan. Like previous developmental and sectoral plans, both plans identified improving democratic governance and participation, security and justice sector reform, and youth training and employment as priority implementation areas.

Several Poverty Reduction Strategy Programmes (PRSPs) were crucial in developing a peacebuilding narrative in the country. The 2007 PRSP I identified various objectives to strengthen governance, modernise the public administration, and ensure macroeconomic stability.

It also recognised that it was critical to enhance economic growth and job creation, increase access to social services and basic infrastructure, and improve the living conditions of



vulnerable groups. Its evaluation pointed out that the programme failed to meet expectations. However, significant results began to show in mid-2009 when efforts were accelerated. They attributed the shortfalls to the "degree of political instability and administrative discontinuity which repeatedly delayed the formulation and implementation of the policy and undermined its political ownership", among other challenges. These same challenges will continue in the years to come.

The second Poverty Reduction Strategy Programme of 2011–2015 aimed to address the shortfalls of the previous one. It had five main priorities. These included: stabilising security by harmonising the reform of the defence and security forces, reducing the food insecurity index and incidence of poverty at the national level, increasing economic growth rate, and minimising structural inequalities between men and women.

In parallel to the PRSPs, other frameworks gained prominence, including the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) of 2013–2016 and its successor, UN Partnership Framework 2016-2020 (UNPAF). The 2013-2016 UNDAF pillars were aimed at strengthening the rule of law and republican institutions, enabling a stable economic environment, promoting sustainable economic development, and increasing human capital development. Like UNDAF, UNPAF included similar pillars, as seen below:

- Democratic governance and the rule of law
- Inclusive and sustainable economic growth
- Equitable, sustainable access for all citizens to essential services
- Sustainable and equitable management of natural resources

Following the second PRSP and the 2014 elections, the government created a national peacebuilding plan. It adopted a significant vision from 2015–2020 in its Strategic and Operational Plan, Terra Ranka. The program was expected to be operationalised simultaneously with the PBF supported Priority Plan of 2015-2017 and 2018-2020. The visions of the government and the plan were to "*restructure the governance of its institutions on a model that is inclusive, participatory, open to democratic dialogue and respectful of the differences in opinion and interests of the component groups of the population, to ensure social peace*", and achieve stability and good governance in Guinea-Bissau.

It is worth noting that, unlike previous policies, the Terra Ranka and Peacebuilding Priority Plans prioritised the reform of governance over peace and stability. However, the second outcome of the Priority Plan aimed also to have modernised defence and security forces, respect for constitutional order and human rights. Similarly, the last Peacebuilding Priority Plans aimed to increase the constructive political dialogue and national consensus-building among political, economic, and civil society leadership, the independent and impartial justice system, commitment to the rule of law and access for women and youth to political participation and economic opportunities.

In September 2016, a contested ECOWAS-led mediation process called for establishing an inclusive dialogue process. This process called for an inclusive consensus on the government to serve until the 2018 elections and conducting various governance reforms, including reform of the constitution, which should redefine the role of the executive, parliament, and judiciary.

These aspirations were contained in the six-point roadmap agreed to by Guinea-Bissau's political actors. The subsequent Conakry agreement of October 2016 aimed to implement the roadmap and resolve the political crisis in Guinea-Bissau. More importantly, it denoted the need for a consensual process of nominating and appointing a prime minister who has the confidence of the Republic, as well as the formation of an all-inclusive government. The process had limited results.

In 2020, the UN developed a peacebuilding needs assessment that identified eight critical priorities for intervention, in line with UNIOGBIS imminent withdrawal. While this needs assessment does not constitute a formal strategic plan developed with the national government, it has effectively replaced the peacebuilding priority plan. The priorities are, namely:

1. Weak governance framework
2. Support and encourage inclusive and meaningful political dialogue and far-sighted reform of the political system for the implementation of urgently needed key reforms and strengthening of an environment conducive to long-term stability and sustainable development

3. Support the government of Guinea-Bissau in strengthening democratically accountable institutions and enhancing the capacity of state organs to function effectively, per the constitution
4. Support an enabling environment to expand socio-economic opportunities and implement fiscal policy and accountability inclusively
5. Support the government of Guinea-Bissau in its fight against drug trafficking and transnational organised crime through capacity-building and advisory assistance for effective implementation of its National Strategy Plan and the introduction of innovative approaches
6. Strengthen the judicial capacity and the human rights system to effectively address impunity, promote and protect human rights, including through the establishment of a national human rights institution
7. Support the mainstreaming of gender equality concerns in all actions, with gender, age, and diversity perspective and a lifecycle approach to "leave no one behind" through the promotion of full, meaningful, and effective participation and representation of women, and their empowerment at all levels
8. Support the efforts of the government to ensure effective civilian control and oversight over the defence and security forces
9. Enhance alignment of international assistance with the peacebuilding priorities of Guinea-Bissau through agreed-upon interventions with national counterparts

The document is a lengthy 91-pages assessment containing a solid justification for engagement in particular areas. The eight priorities were often identified as the main entry point for defining peacebuilding responses in Guinea-Bissau, at least by the UN actors. They reflect decades of UN work on the ground and their assessment of a context perceived to be in line with national priorities. In November 2020, national actors validated them after a 3-day workshop between the UN, the government and civil society actors.

However, such an exercise had flaws and limitations. First, according to most interviews, despite government endorsement, the process of defining the eight priorities had limited government or civil society participation and, more worryingly, buy-in. The lack of buy-in and mutual accountability for its inclusion in governmental and civil society planning makes it a

substantive document conceptually but weak implementation possibilities. One interviewee highlighted that "we need a truly consultative process that is inclusive, bringing not only the usual suspects. But to do that, we need time, resources, and buy-in from the highest levels at the UN, government, and civil society. Only then we can see them as genuine."

Second, most interviewees (those that knew about it at least) felt that the eight priorities were essential and relevant to the context of Guinea-Bissau. However, many reflected that they were based on the mandates of specific UN agencies that could fit within the Guinea-Bissau peacebuilding environment. Instead, they stated they should have reflected a deep assessment of the multiple levels of priorities identified by national actors themselves.

One interviewee mentioned when discussing the process of defining priorities. "Because it had to be internally negotiated, some of the eight peacebuilding priorities are not actually related to peacebuilding. This process of stretching out objectives means that achieving and demonstrating outcomes becomes a challenge."

After the departure of UNIOGBIS, the UN and the government worked towards the approval of the 2022-2026 UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), replacing the previous UNPAF. Publicly endorsed in November 2021, it directly results from the new role that the UN expects to play. This framework included the eight peacebuilding priorities identified in 2020 through six strategic objectives. The objectives were as follow, and many are related to peacebuilding (sometimes explicitly):

- Consolidate democracy, the rule of law and reforms and modernise public institutions
- Reform the economy and promote growth and employment
- Develop productive sectors and infrastructure
- Enhance human capital and improve people's living conditions
- Revitalise foreign policy, promote regional integration and recognise the value of Guinea-Bissau nationals in the diaspora
- Preserve biodiversity, combat climate change, and enhance natural capital

The multiplicity of initiatives and plans within the government and the UN certainly creates confusion of priorities and driving policies. Worryingly, in recent years, and particularly since the withdrawal of UNIOGBIS, peacebuilding plans have become more diluted in the country.

The number of policies and programs, often overlapping, creates another major challenge for peacebuilding planning and implementation in Guinea-Bissau.

Policies like the 2020 peacebuilding priorities and the UNSDCF provide essential entry points for peacebuilding action. However, the lack of clear direction and a peacebuilding plan makes UN agencies navigate different justifications for engagement and limited connection to the longer-term theories of change.

Similar confusion occurs in government-driven policies, and the last two national visions clearly show such a challenge. First, Terra Ranka had a clear peacebuilding language and complemented other plans like the peacebuilding priority plans and UND(P)AFs. More recently, the Hora Tchiga makes almost no mention of peacebuilding, stability, or societal cohesion. It focuses more on economic growth as the key conduit for development and change.

The country's lack of a clear vision or priority regarding its peacebuilding goals and objectives can hinder progress. The lack of participation of national and local actors in designing UN priorities is particularly worrying. One person interviewed described these new plans and needs as "a self-fulfilling prophecy that responds to the mandates of specific agencies, rather than real identified needs in the country." Unsurprisingly, Guinea-Bissau often sees uncoordinated responses between different actors involved in peacebuilding.

# Peacebuilding Institutions in Guinea-Bissau

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Peacebuilding is a long-term process constrained by short-term realities.<sup>4</sup> Peacebuilding is intrinsically linked to a holistic approach to development, made clear by the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly its Goal 16, which states that peace and development complement one another. Together with Human Rights respect, they reinforce each other by ensuring that sustaining peace is vital to achieving sustainable development.

Much of the discussions around peacebuilding have been done under the context of "dialogue." Such dialogue remains critical in the country and can be expanded. By bringing the "usual suspects", the focus would stay as a political settlement discussion, which is a bargaining process that focuses on a quick fix. Indeed, elite-based discussions and dialogue remain critical. However, suppose a more inclusive population is not part of the discussions. In that case, peacebuilding results will remain elusive and distant for most.

While many in Guinea-Bissau seem to have passively accepted its position of constant instability, there is much that international actors need to do. Bringing new players negotiating spaces for the marginalised may be one of the main ways to ensure that few do not control the solutions for the country's problems.

Multiple actors operating in Guinea-Bissau's peacebuilding have responded to complex societal and political dynamics. This section provides a brief overview of some of the key peacebuilding actors in the country. By no means does it provide a mapping, but rather a bird's eye view of some of the dynamics and players.

## National government

The National government is a central peacebuilding player in the country. Having control of national planning, allocation of resources and ministerial structures, it should engage in various ways to assist the country in facing its perennial challenges.

Under the role of the President and prime ministers, the executive has often been the source of peacebuilding plans. Sadly, they have also been often the source of instability. The

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<sup>4</sup> Gustavo de Carvalho and Onnie Kok, "Does Anyone Know What Good Peacebuilding Looks Like?," *ISS Today*, 2016.

executive played a fine line between dealing with internal political dynamics and identifying long-term approaches towards peacebuilding.

Recent dynamics of changes in governmental plans highlight such differences. The 2016 national plan, Terra Ranka, directly presented a theory of change that peacebuilding responses should accompany deals with long-term development and stability. The plan, which some interviewees mentioned as heavily influenced by international peacebuilding discourse, was the roadmap for implementing governmental and national responses. However, its success and use were limited.

After a new government in place since 2020, the plan was informally replaced by a new governmental vision, Hora Tchiga. Hora Tchiga, aligned with other sectoral developmental goals, shows a narrower focus on peacebuilding. Some described a "fatigue" of peacebuilding discourse within many governmental circles and a stronger inclination to discuss development.

This fatigue certainly wasn't shared by all government actors interviewed, especially those dealing directly with issues related to peacebuilding. One government official said that "we do have a certain distancing between the peacebuilding process and the population. But as a government official, I still struggle to see a clear comprehension within the State of what we should be doing as peacebuilding."

One interviewee shared some interesting thoughts about where peacebuilding fits within the government. "The issue is not simply that government is not willing to discuss peacebuilding. Beyond that, there is an issue of language. We need to discuss better what peacebuilding means, the priorities, and how they can be aligned. We take concepts for granted, but we need to ensure their better common understanding."

This view was confirmed by another government official that described that "our institutions are weak, so it becomes difficult for us to identify clearly and to express the needs. We don't have many peacebuilding experts. Donors understand that weakness and take advantage of it. They come with a space of authority and use our fragility as an excuse for showcasing their relevance."

This situation reflects the fragmented way in which the Bissau-Guinean government operates. While most ministries would be somehow engaged with peacebuilding processes, in principle, their different capabilities, political affiliations and positions affect how they prioritise and plan. However, one external interviewee mentioned that "we always need to have multiple conversations with different stakeholders within the government to understand better how it actually works."

The revitalisation of the PBF Steering Committee in mid-2021 was identified as a critical opportunity to generate better interaction between external and national actors. However, government participation, mainly through the country's ministry of foreign affairs, raised some questions on "who should represent the government".

Budgeting has also been an issue in implementing peacebuilding responses by specific ministries. Ministries are expected to receive allocations from the finance ministry. However, the latter controls the resource allocation process almost entirely. This means that some ministries that, in principle, would be more involved in peacebuilding initiatives become under-resourced.

This situation strengthens the dependency of ministries on external financial support, including the PBF. While that could be seen as a substantial opportunity for local-international partnership, many interviewees reflected some challenges that such a situation creates. One shared that "most government institutions do not fully engage with resource mobilisation beyond the UN. There is a general feeling that the UN will be there for us".

In opposition to this view, another interviewee from a governmental institution openly complained about setting priorities in developing projects in partnerships with external actors. These challenges relate to the broader objectives and theories of change and even monitoring and evaluation metrics, relevant indicators, and targets.

Indeed, these two views present a crucial entry point on some of the problems to engage with peacebuilding at the national level. On the one hand, the reliance on external funding may generate a degree of over-reliability of external support. On the other hand, it is the result of such reliability that often makes external actors define responses and expected outcomes with limited local and national inputs.



Stakeholders were generally concerned about the State capacity to intervene in local-level issues due to lack of resources, presence and even (as mentioned by some) interest. The limited extension of state authority creates a space where the rule of law and essential services become provided outside formal institutions. Therefore, civil society and traditional leaders have often been at the forefront of peacebuilding initiatives at the local level. The following section will reflect more on their role.

## Civil Society

Despite many challenges, civil society organisations have played a critical role in advancing the peacebuilding agenda in Guinea-Bissau. The weakening of institutions, and lack of access to services, created a space where there is limited State trust or even any expectations of its intervention. In the absence of adequate formal institutions, many have acted to fill the space where no other actor is present.

The word "dysfunctional" was overwhelmingly mentioned by civil society actors when describing Guinea-Bissau, identified by many as a conflict driver in itself. However, societal inequality generates the space where sustainable peace does not always feature in the political agenda in the country.

Civil society, though incredibly resilient, still face many challenges to remain in existence. While the country has many civil society organisations, it was a standard view that their role is often threatened, dependent on external funding and priorities, and fragile. Civil society groups said that while they have essential human resources, they are frequently faced with the challenges of institutional support, including through funding. As a result, most work through voluntary commitments, and very few had any core support.

Many identified peacebuilding and development as intrinsically interconnected, and their theories of change often overlap. The high number of priorities in Guinea-Bissau and limited resources forced many organisations to change engagement areas frequently. The focus of civil society organisations is as vast as the number of preferences that need to be addressed. Many are working on developmental issues like health and education. Others, focusing on creating civic spaces, engage with advocacy to strengthen rights in the country and access to services.

Unsurprisingly, very few organisations identified peacebuilding as their primary focus area. Notably, a small number of organisations would purely consider themselves as being peacebuilding players. Their work included creating spaces for dialogue in the country, identifying common challenges and priorities, and supporting local and national actors in responding to identified root causes of conflict and instability.

Civil society groups play a crucial role in supporting communities to work systematically. They often perceive themselves through lenses of vulnerability, especially as many lack protection. Jurists and lawyers have been demanding an independent judiciary system and respect for human rights.

Considering access to justice is limited, expensive and geographically inaccessible for many, civil society organisations often highlight this area as a critical priority. Protection of human rights, including media actors, was presented as an area of interest. Many supported capacity-building to empower actors to engage with a limiting environment for human rights protection.

The centralisation of resources in Bissau was also present in assessing the role of civil society organisations. Many acknowledged that very seldom political decisions effectively addressed the needs of those in the regions and Tabancas. The limited presence of the police, access to schools, courts, and hospitals were all mentioned as significant challenges that often were implemented or facilitated by civil society groups. The centrality of civil society in regions and Tabancas in providing support at the local level was thus presented as a situation where it effectively replaces the State functions in many ways.

Many civil society organisations highlighted the importance of dealing with marginalised groups in Guinea-Bissau, including women, youth, or persons with disabilities. The participation of women in political processes has been the focus of many organisations through awareness raising, capacity building and advocacy.

Increasing external actors created funding requirements to engage local actors in funding initiatives, including the PBF. Many civil society groups widely appreciated this; however, they noted the challenges of working with long-term processes driven by short term projects.

Many define their initiatives based on the availability of funds rather than the defined perspectives.

The following transcript describes some of the significant challenges perceived by a civil society actor:

*"The partnership with external actors, including the PBF, is generally good and complementary. But we don't really have much means. It's hard to become more sustainable when you don't have the institutional backing. The little we get is punctual and once-off support to do activity here and there. We depend on the partners, and their mandate becomes our activities. This is not the right way to work, as we end up adapting our activities based on what the partner is willing to give, not the other way around."*

The consequence of such a situation is that many organisations become forced to change their work areas, depending on what funding is available. For many, it becomes challenging to professionalise their work, as the partners control the rules, narratives, and processes. Another activist mentioned this challenge very clearly. "We should stop seeing this process as who controls which processes here. People will go, the institutions will stay. That's what we need to be concerned about."

UN agencies and the European Union were often the most mentioned donors to civil society actors. This issue partially reflects on the eligibility of funds and the risk aversion of donors of dealing directly beyond the "usual suspects." Local actors perceive partners as the leading implementors of projects, which many see as a challenge for sustainable peace in the country. "They are doing something that is about me, but not for or with me", said one of the civil society actors.

Civil society actors showed that they often had to compete with international civil society organisations to implement local projects. Many saw it as unfair and inequitable competition – the eligibility process reinforces foreign actors and disempowers local organisations. It was widely acknowledged that very few local organisations could secure funding from international partners.

One interviewee mentioned, "international civil society organisations often get the funds, and we implement certain aspects of their projects. We can execute activities as sub-contractors, but we don't influence them." To become more effective, many argued the need for "participatory development" to have a more decisive say on how and where funds should be allocated, based on their local experience.

Many referred to projects done in partnership with UN agencies and reflected that they were "touch-and-go". Ironically, they were often part of PBF projects without being aware. When presented with the role played by the PBF, many showed a degree of surprise.

## Box 2: Inclusivity – enhancing the role of youth and women

A frequent issue mentioned in interviews relates to the need to address the demographic potential of youth and women in Guinea-Bissau's peacebuilding process. Part of a need identified by local and external actors and an increasing requirement for funding disbursement, gender issues are at the forefront of many peacebuilding projects in the country, particularly those funded by the PBF.

The creation of GYPI was seen by many as an essential vehicle towards developing more inclusive projects. These projects are expected to help mainstream important demographic issues in the country and elevate their role in the mind and action of Bissau-Guinean peacebuilding actors. Despite being a short 18-months project, all actors interviewed appreciated the initiative and provided coherent rationales for its use and need.

For many years, internal and external actors strengthened women's political participation, including dialogue and political mediation processes. The focus on women, peace, and security issues follow global trends to further engage on the subject since UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000).

In recent years, peacebuilding actors advanced inclusivity by seeing youth engagement as a national and local stability tool. Forty per cent of the population is under 18 years old, making Guinea-Bissau one of the most prominent young populations in the world in proportion to its total population.

Therefore, there is a dire need to ensure adequate access to resources, education, and economic means. Microgrants and vocational training were usual tactics for ensuring youth productivity to reduce the possibility of tension and political conflicts. An implicit theory of change frequently presented in interviews was that "if young men and women do not have access to resources, they will end up being prone for violence." Projects that support capacity building towards access to the job market and entrepreneurial skills are increasingly common and part of local and international strategies in the country.

In developing a sense of inclusivity of women and youth in Guinea-Bissau, many reflected the importance of generating spaces of communication that enable their civic participation. Many shared the importance of raising awareness of a culture of peace amongst the population, which could assist in dealing with many of the issues faced by society, like the

increasing land conflict problem. International actors, local civil society and government all seemed to agree on the importance of engaging youth, especially in ensuring their positive role in conflict management and general decision making.

The increasing number of projects funded on women and youth, peace, and security by the PBF creates a space where actors acknowledge the need to include relevant societal groups in peacebuilding responses. These have also been facilitated by dedicated governmental and civil society organisations working on these issues, ensuring that the work is not only led by external actors.

## The United Nations

Several peacebuilding missions were able to bring attention and focus on the importance of peacebuilding in Guinea-Bissau. While UNIOGBIS was not eligible to receive funds directly from the PBF or other sources, it engaged with agencies and funds in implementing projects as part of an integrated office. For instance, its political section work often involved several agencies implementing political dialogue and institutional reforms.

Despite its work, the frequent instability in the country often affected the work of the UN. In moments of political change, whether during the 2012 coup or the contested 2019 elections, its ability to engage with national actors was often constrained. The example of the PBF in 2012 is quite telling, resulting in most projects from the PBF not being implemented and a change of strategic direction of PBF-funded initiatives.

In December 2020, UNIOGBIS ended its long presence. Its transition, a commonplace in the UN in 2021, has unique elements deserving attention. While the UN is dealing with many changes from peace operations to special political missions or the UN Country Team, the transition in Guinea-Bissau goes beyond. The UNCT took over many responsibilities once conducted by UNIOGBIS.

The departure of UNIOGBIS and the transition of some of its functions to the UNCT and other institutions does not mean the peacebuilding process is over. The UN Secretary-General describes this as part of "*global conflict trends, and the expected number of UN transitions will require the PBF's critical support.*"<sup>5</sup>

As part of the UNIOGBIS drawdown, the UN strategically reviewed the mission and its work. The process was central to the decisions made by the UN Security Council on the future of the country. It showcased that downsizing an SPM that had been in the country for almost twenty years would require strengthening the UNCT.

Without a Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG), the UN RC became thus the highest UN figure in the country. Many described challenges faced within his role, which

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<sup>5</sup> UN Secretary-General, "Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund: 2020-2024 Strategy," 2020, [https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/pbf\\_strategy\\_2020-2024\\_final.pdf](https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/pbf_strategy_2020-2024_final.pdf).

was short-lived. By October 2021, the RC had already left his position. When writing this report, the UN was yet to announce the new RC for Guinea-Bissau, creating a strategic gap in the UN leadership.

Interviewees and participative observation identified apparent fractures within the UN system in Guinea-Bissau, ranging from institutional competition, strategic uncertainty, and inter-personal challenges. These bureaucratic challenges directly affect the ability of many agencies to implement functions fully. Institutions and staff had, thus, to navigate a sensitive environment that was not always fit for coordination, coherence, and cooperation within the UN itself.

Working with the new RC office will be critical to ensure a clear direction by all the agencies on their goals and how they should implement their mandated tasks. The RC has the crucial role of defining strategies. If used wisely, it can assist with better coordination and streamlining of action. However, all the power centralised in the RC could hinder processes if not conducted properly.

Recruitment and attraction of personnel is thus a vital process within the new phase for UNCT, after the UNIOGBIS transition. Language is certainly an issue, with challenges of attracting quality Portuguese speakers to join the UN in Guinea-Bissau. Anecdotally, most interviews with UN international staff were conducted in English instead of Portuguese.

The UN was also limited by its capacity to fill critical positions within its ranks. For instance, the UN's ability to engage strategically with peacebuilding analysis has been compromised since the departure of UNIOGBIS. The country has waited since March 2019 for the deployment of a Peace and Development Advisor (PDA). This staff would be responsible for assisting with conflict analysis, assessing triggers, and ensuring solid analytical coordination in identifying ongoing priorities.

Considering many national staff working for the UN, having standard recruitment processes could reduce costs and strengthen collaboration amongst agencies. Some even suggested the creation of a national roster that could facilitate more effective procurement, recruitment and, ultimately, optimal implementation.



In addition to bureaucratic constraints, limited access to resources impacted the ability of the UN agencies to mobilise and implement peacebuilding initiatives. With UN agencies limited financial resources, two trends could be perceived. First, some larger agencies considerably increase in size, a direct attempt of taking over some of the tasks previously done by UNIOGBIS. The most obvious example was the UN Development Programme (UNDP), which currently takes the lead within the UN in dealing with most of the eight peacebuilding priorities defined in 2020.

Some described UNDP's highly successful resource mobilisation efforts as one of the ways to fill the UNIOGBIS gap, including identifying new funding opportunities (e.g., Japan) and the existence of relevant core funding from its HQ. However, such an approach also generated internal competition for visibility and resources. With the growth of UNDP, an agency with a notorious broad mandate, it increasingly ventured into new areas, including those within the scope of other agencies.

Second, agencies that rely on project resources instead of core funding saw their presence in the country threatened. Many agencies reduced their presence in the country, often physically based in their regional offices in Dakar. Agencies like UN-Women and UNESCO no longer are in the country. The United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC), International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee (UNHCR) are on their way to closing local presence in Guinea-Bissau.

The PBF was essential in providing a no-cost extension for two of its vital projects, on national dialogue and reforms and combatting transnational organised crime, including drug trafficking. Such stopgap measures had their challenges, with debates between agencies, the RC and New York regarding these no-cost extensions. They were eventually approved.

After one year since UNIOGBIS withdrawal, the UN needs to assess its role in the country once again. Funding access was a challenge for the agencies in 2021, which increased the need for support from the PBF. New projects approved by the PBF in late 2021 can partially fill this gap.

The PBC Guinea-Bissau country configuration will meet in early 2022 to discuss developments in the country. Many interviewed argued that the meeting can become a vital opportunity for further sensitising member states on the need for continued action and enhanced support to

Guinea-Bissau. This could assist in bringing attention to critical stakeholders and ensure continuous attention to the priorities for Guinea-Bissau moving forward.

The PBC and its members, the UN regional office in West Africa (UNOWAS), different agencies and programmes, and bilateral donors will be at the forefront of a discussion regarding best-supporting countries like Guinea-Bissau. Ensuring continued political attention and financial support is expected to be high on the agenda if the UN remains relevant in the country's future.

## The Broader International Community

In recent years, international support has been organised mainly by the so-called "Guinea-Bissau P5", led by ECOWAS. Other members of the P5 are the African Union (AU), the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP), the European Union (EU) and the UN.<sup>6</sup> Their work has also been complemented by the presence of International Financial Institutions (IFIs), like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the African Development Bank (AfDB). Bilateral partners such as Portugal, Spain, the United Kingdom and Japan have played an essential role.

The August 1998 Abuja Peace Agreement endorsed deploying an ECOWAS interposition force that would operate independently from the UN. ECOWAS, together with the CPLP, observed the 1999 elections following the Abuja Agreement under the guidance of the UN. It also mediated the 1998-1999 conflict.

Later, the ECOWAS Mission in Guinea-Bissau (ECOMIB) and UNIOGBIS aimed to support the country achieve some level of security after the 2012 coup. When ECOMIB was deployed to Guinea-Bissau in 2012, its mission was to secure Guinea-Bissau's transitional arrangements. It worked closely with the CPLP to support initiatives to provide ease of movement of humanitarian agencies in the country and restore constitutional rule in the Bissau-Guinean polity.

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<sup>6</sup> UN Peacebuilding Fund, "The Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund: Guinea-Bissau Country Brief," August 21, 2021, [https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/country\\_brief\\_gb\\_20210804.pdf](https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/country_brief_gb_20210804.pdf).

ECOWAS also played a crucial role in bringing conflicting parties to the negotiating table and identifying areas that need to be addressed to end political standoffs. These efforts resulted in the six-point ECOWAS roadmap and the Conakry Agreement on implementing the roadmap and finding lasting solutions to the problems of Guinea-Bissau.

The ECOMIB role evolved to include SSR activities such as barrack renovations. However, the operations and successes of the ECOWAS mission could be downplayed by the lack of financial resources for a prolonged stay. ECOMIB also departed the country in 2020.

The EU SSR mission in Guinea-Bissau, part of the International Partners Group for SSR in Bissau, operated from 2007–2010 within the mandate of operationalising the SSR strategy. It assisted in the formulation of laws and documents necessary to address problems in the military, police, and getting the citizens well acquainted with the programme through awareness-raising.

# PBF in Guinea-Bissau: Planning and Implementation Capacity

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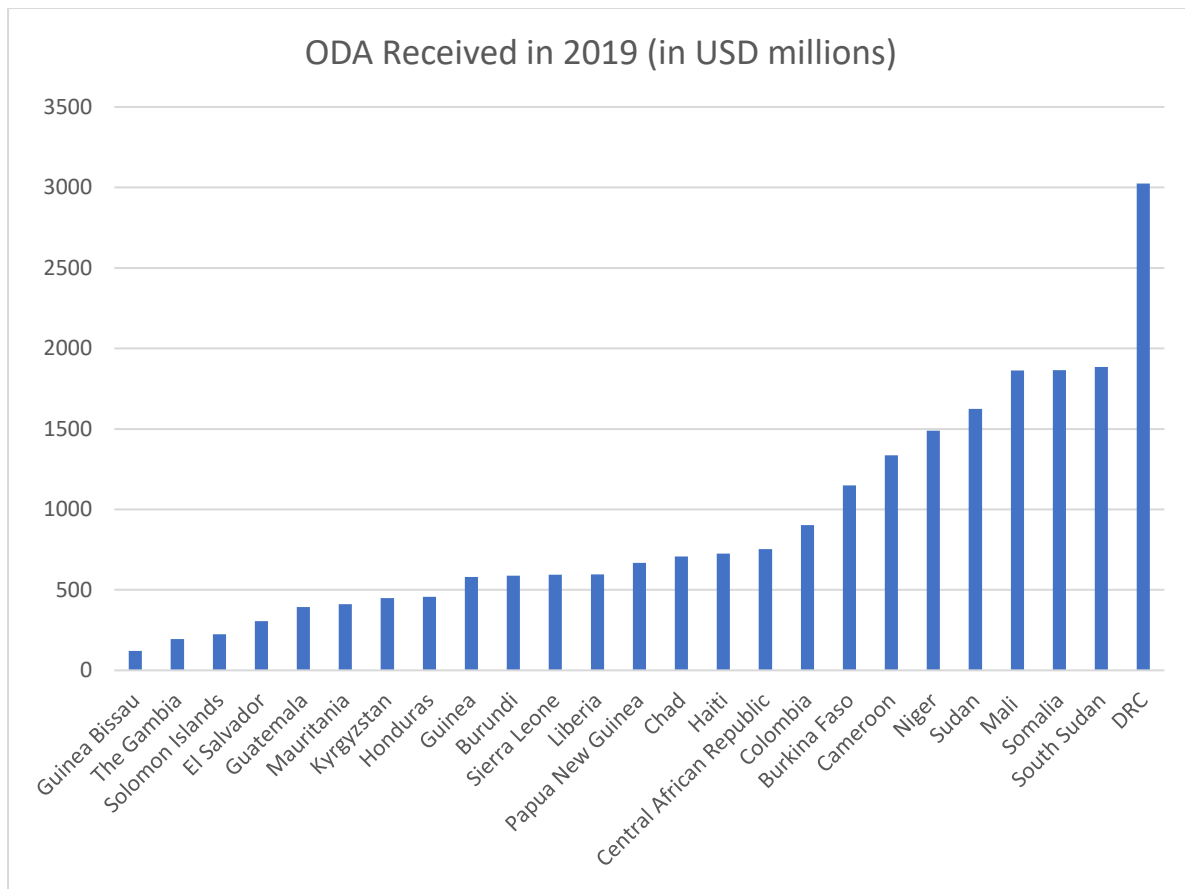
As part of being part of a broader approach and a goal, the Peacebuilding Fund, together with other actors, can assist countries in dealing with the root causes of instability to prevent conflicts and sustain peace. This section reflects on different dynamics that influence the allocation of resources by the PBF and the design of its projects.

## Peacebuilding Financing in Guinea-Bissau

Guinea-Bissau has long been part of the countries facing instability that suffer from invisibility amongst donors. Since UNIOGBIS withdrawal, peacebuilding's limited attention further highlights its nature as an "aid orphan". In most PBF recipient countries, the fund is seen as minor compared to other donors. In Guinea-Bissau, the situation is quite different. PBF allocations could easily match those of other more significant donors. The lack of substantive and varied funding means that the PBF is seen by most beyond its catalytical scope.

Of the 25 countries eligible to the PBF, Guinea-Bissau receives the least official development assistance (ODA), USD 120 million, as of 2019. This means that UN PBF contributions are around 10% of the development assistance funding Guinea-Bissau gets every year. Compared to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) or Somalia, PBF funding corresponds to only about 1% of the total ODA received, a considerably smaller percentage than Guinea-Bissau.

**Graph 1: ODA in PBF eligible countries**



Source: Collected by the author from <https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-data/aid-at-a-glance.htm>

The following graph gives an idea of this environment based on OECD statistics. PBF allocations are not included, partially because its funds are disbursed through UNCT agencies like UNICEF or UNDP. Considering the amount the fund manages in the country in 2022, it would be safe to place it amongst the top 5 donors in the country, just behind the Global Fund.

**Figure 2: Guinea-Bissau Official Development Assistance (Average 2018-2019)**

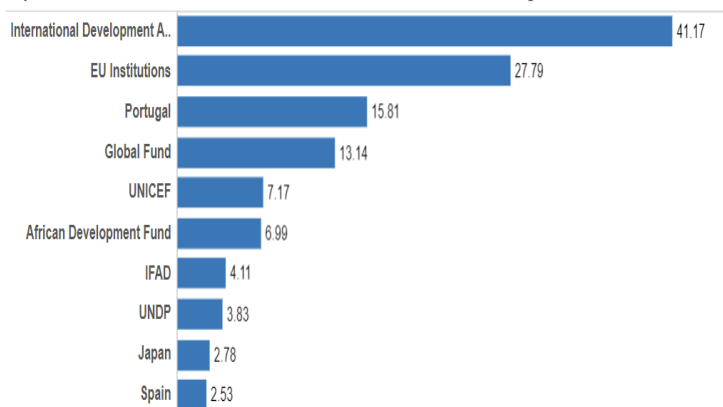
### Receipts for Guinea-Bissau

	2017	2018	2019
Net ODA (USD million)	113.4	153.6	120.5
Net ODA/GNI (%)	8.4	10.5	8.4
Gross ODA (USD million)	120.2	158.5	132.2
Bilateral share (gross ODA) (%)	27.0	16.3	24.8
Total net receipts (USD million)	121.1	145.1	170.5

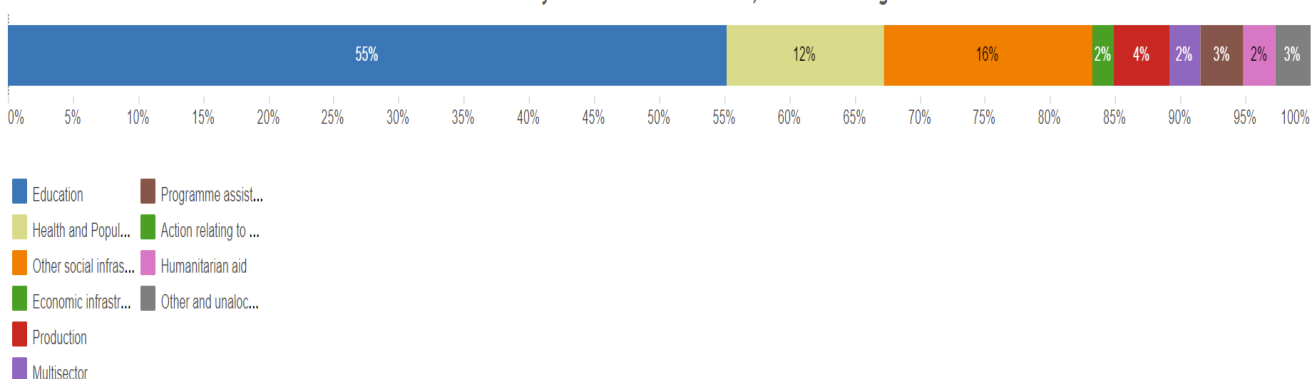
### For reference

	2017	2018	2019
Population (million)	1.8	1.9	1.9
GNI per capita (Atlas USD)	680.0	750.0	820.0

### Top Ten Donors of Gross ODA for Guinea-Bissau, 2018-2019 average, USD million



### Bilateral ODA by Sector for Guinea-Bissau, 2018-19 average



Source: OECD - DAC: <http://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-data/aid-at-a-glance.htm>

Given the limitations of funding access in the country, it challenges how different players see the PBF. One interviewee described that "agencies often see generic opportunities for PBF Funding. They do not always reflect its applicability and specific objectives."

Many agencies confirmed such views on the PBF, acknowledging that they have not always used the opportunity to activate it as much as they could have. This means connecting the intended work with peacebuilding, its limits, and results become difficult. "We need to be able to articulate better what is our peacebuilding intentions, rather than simply trying to overly adjust projects that are not necessarily linked to peacebuilding goals," the interviewee continued.

In peacebuilding, three players were described as the critical entry points for funding. The largest one, the EU, provides a wide range of funding opportunities in the country, with an essential focus on peacebuilding. The second one is the PBF itself, described in detail. And the

third one is a newcomer in the country, Japan. In 2021, Japan approved a USD 2.5 Million 12-months project on building strong institutions for sustaining peace in Guinea-Bissau, implemented through UNDP.

The difference of styles between these three prominent donors is clear. The PBF was described as having "substantive flexibility" but rigidity in funding eligibility. The EU was often presented as more bureaucratically restrictive and with many transactional costs concerning managing the projects. Japan pursues a unique approach in the country, in line with its roles in other countries. It does not work directly with governments or civil society organisations, implementing it through UNDP partnership.

Their project management requirements were presented as diverging considerably from one another. The PBF was seen as flexible in the implementation but focused on results. The EU was often seen as less stringent on monitoring and evaluation tools but with minimal deviation on initial plans. Both funding tools could learn from one another and ensure a more flexible and adaptable approach to peacebuilding funding.

Often actors shared that great projects implemented in the past had to be halted due to the lack of funding continuation. This was something mentioned about the PBF and the other donors. As a result, many government and civil society actors would work with short-term projects and limited continuity or sustainability of previous projects.

More worryingly, most saw limited to no coordination amongst peacebuilding donors in the country. This leads to the creation of projects that do not necessarily complement one another and even, at times, overlap objectives and implementation. The role of the PBF steering committee was often mentioned as the only platform for peacebuilding coordination in the country. It could serve better as a space for bringing donors together to jointly identify with government and civil society priorities of funding and ways of coordinating action.

Most (if not all) civil society actors presented the eligibility to funds as a significant challenge. This means that UN agencies are often the lead of projects financed by the PBF, or in the case of the EU, either the UN or international civil society organisations.

## PBF project allocations

Since its first disbursement in Guinea-Bissau in 2008, the PBF allocated USD 46,483,298 as of November 2021. Thirty-eight projects have been approved between 2008 and 2021, focusing on several focus areas. The table below provides an overview of the number of projects approved in each area:

**Table 1: Allocation of PBF Projects based on Focus Areas (from 2008 to June 2021)**

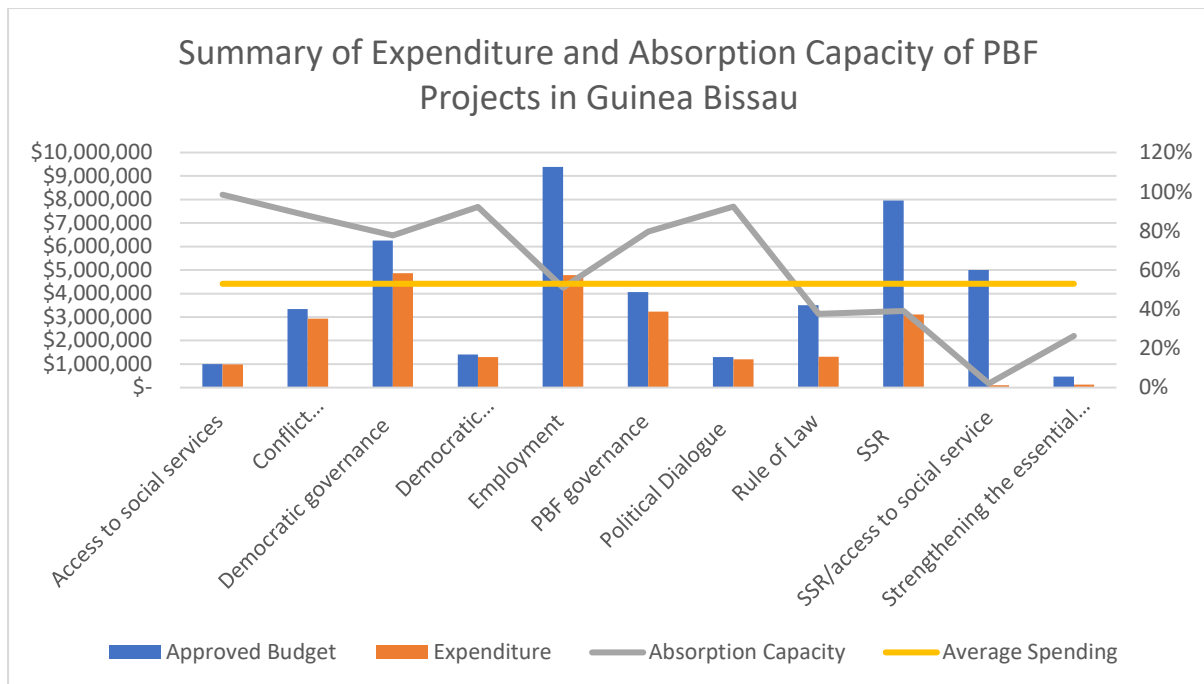
Focus Areas	No. Of Projects	Percentage
Access to social services	2	5.3%
Conflict prevention/management	2	5.3%
Democratic governance	9	23.7%
Democratic governance/Conflict prevention	2	5.3%
Employment	4	10.5%
PBF governance	6	15.8%
Political Dialogue	3	7.9%
Rule of Law	3	7.9%
SSR	5	13.2%
SSR/access to social service	1	2.6%
Strengthening essential national state capacity	1	2.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

*Source: Peacebuilding Fund Secretariat*

While most projects focused on Democratic Governance, financially, projects received most funds in employment and security sector reform areas. The imbalance can be seen in the graph below:



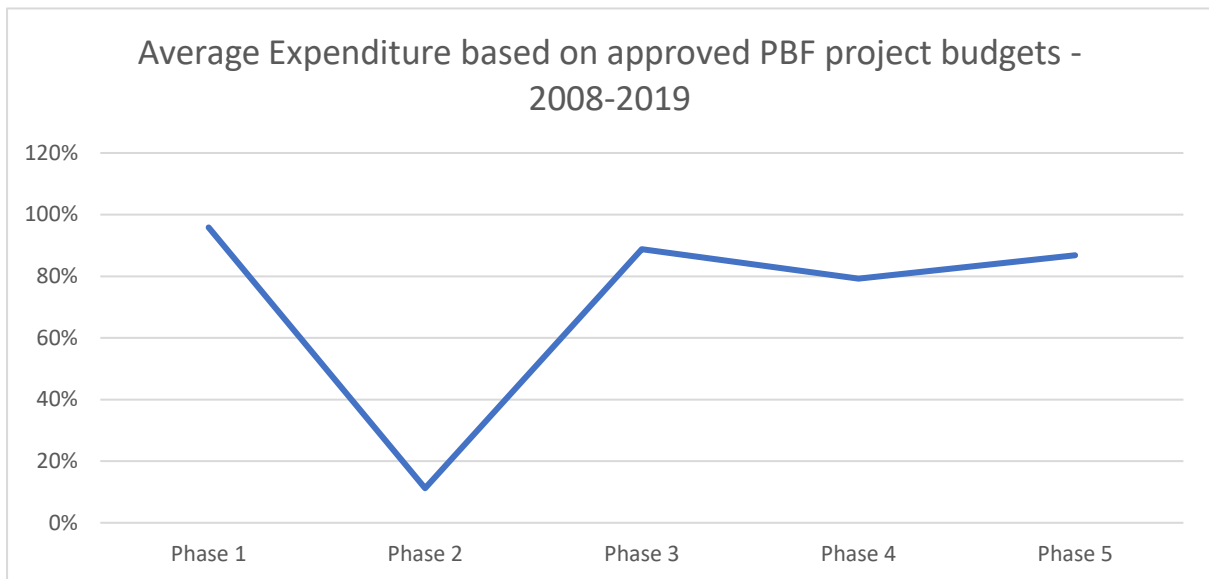
**Graph 2: Expenditure and Absorption of PBF funds in Guinea-Bissau**



In its early days, the government implemented the priorities in close coordination with the UN PBF to establish joint tracking and monitoring tools. In the wake of the 2012 coup, the PBF withdrew financial assistance. Following the new regime pact in 2013, the PBF resumed its aid by providing financial support to establish an environment conducive to the conduct of the 2014 elections.

In the country's first five phases of PBF funding, projects showed an expenditure of 56% (phase six is excluded as projects are still ongoing). From an expenditure point of view, the deviation indicates that Phase 2 was the most significant cause for overall lower expenditure. During phase 2, the country faced the 2012 coup d'état, providing severe difficulties for the UN to spend funds as expected. If phase 2 is excluded, the spending totals 88%.

**Graph 3: Average expenditure of PBF projects**



PBF projects have evolved considerably since their first use in Guinea-Bissau. Initial projects heavily emphasised the UN's ability to engage with democratic governance, SSR, and employment issues. In the first two phases of funding, these projects showed a varied absorption rate. Indeed, most projects in the first phase had a very high absorption rate, with an average expenditure of 96% of the total approved budget.

The second phase showed much more varied spending, with some projects with a high expenditure rate and other projects, particularly those related to Democratic Governance, SSR and Employment, with expenditure rates of less than 0.2%, 5% and 10%, respectively. While these low implementation rates are significant, it also shows the willingness of the PBF to fund potentially high risk and adapt its strategy moving forward.

Phase 3 had an average expenditure of 88%, Phase 4 of 80%, Phase 5 of 86%. Phase 6 showed another considerable decline in expenditure rate, dropping its spending average to 17% based on the overall standard of allocated funds. In discussion with stakeholders, some shared that such decline was due to the challenges related to the transition of UNIOGBIS to the UNCT and the convoluted power transition of 2020. When writing this report, these underspending were being discussed, particularly in line with existing no-cost extensions.

## UNCT and PBF Projects

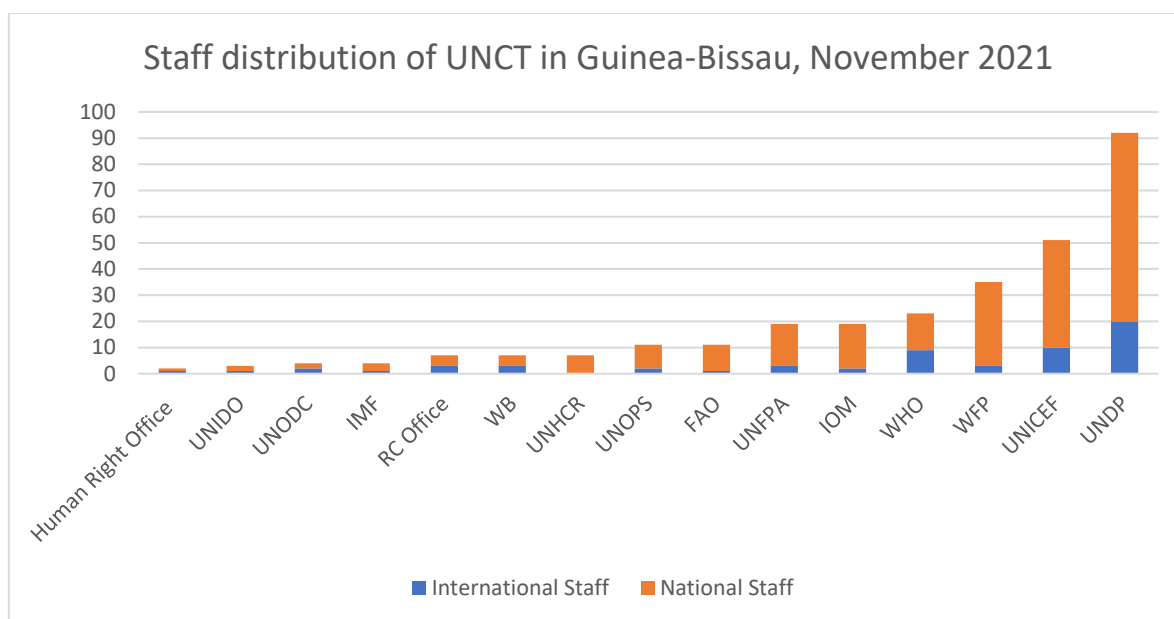
With the departure of UNIOGBIS, many of its tasks were transferred or absorbed by UNCT members. By November 2021, all UN agencies had 295 staff, 79% national. The total average of national staff amongst UNCT members was 74%, with all agencies having at least 50% of national staff.

Agencies widely vary in individual capacity, with an average of around 20 personnel per agency. Like UNHCHR, UNIDO, UNODC or IMF, the smallest agencies ranged from 2 to 4 personnel. The largest agencies like WHO, WFP, UNICEF and UNDP ranged from 23 to 92 personnel. UNDP, for instance, had 92 staff in the country, 78% of national staff, composing 31% of all UN staff in Guinea-Bissau.

Amongst the international staff, around 21% of the UN workforce, interviews showed a high level of rotation, especially those recruited directly to implement specific projects. These often play more managerial roles, ranging from P4 to above. Many were also included in the International UN Volunteer category, which was considered an essential stopgap measure to overcome the constraining recruitment policies by the UN.

By large, national staff can be considered the backbone of the UN personnel in Guinea-Bissau. They are not only the most significant component of the UN in Guinea-Bissau but were often identified in interviews as staff members with the largest institutional history and memory. Anecdotal evidence showed several national staff working for UN agencies (and UN missions) for over a decade. The high turnover of staff also threatens the ability of some of the agencies to implement their existing projects fully. Most international staff interviewed had been in the country for less than 3-4 years.

**Graph 4: Staff distribution across UN Agencies, Programmes and Funds**



*Source: Internal UN Documents*

The different sizes of agencies provide an essential entry point for individual capacity to plan and implement PBF projects. The largest agencies, like UNDP, UNICEF, or WFP, tend to see the PBF complement their work on peacebuilding and development.

For the smaller agencies, PBF projects can become the sole funding source. Once projects are completed, their presence can also be jeopardised. Agencies like UN-Women or UNESCO no longer have a presence in the country, covering Guinea-Bissau from their offices in Senegal.

One agency staff mentioned, "if it hadn't been for the PBF and another donor, we couldn't have a presence here. We don't have core funding, which means we must be looking for external resources all the time. So, what type of balance do we get there? Do we use more funds to pay for staff, or do we free that space to enable activities? That's the challenge, all the time."

Staffing, especially international personnel, was a heavy aspect of PBF budgets. Many agencies rely on UN Volunteers, consultants, and other individuals under specific service agreement contracts to implement PBF projects. Using these special contracts was seen to reduce costs and increase recruitment speed.

Despite its integrated position on paper, most agencies still seem to struggle with one another. "Agencies perceive the PBF simply as part of the mobilisation circuit. This often results in a constant perception of competition with other agencies. It is evident to me that results are not then the priorities", said one interviewee.

## National actors and PBF projects

Financing remains one of the critical contextual challenges for advancing the peacebuilding agenda in Guinea-Bissau. Many ministries engaged in peacebuilding initiatives lack the resources to conduct them. This led to many comments regarding the nature of funding to government initiatives.

Many national interviewees highlighted physical assets (e.g., cars, computers, and buildings) as their immediate peacebuilding priorities. External support, often reluctant to fund those, engage in a continuous pull-and-push process of negotiating what type of support is required.

The governmental rationale for partnering with external actors was often described as follows. First, there is limited funding or resources to engage in a priority area. Second, to respond to issues where the government may not have the required in-house expertise. Third, pressure from external actors to react to a particular demand.

Few of the national beneficiaries felt fully included in the project's design. When asked when one beneficiary from the government was included in the planning of PBF initiatives, it provided helpful insight. The official said: that "we get approached when the projects are already approved, given a portion of funds to implement. We are told what the indicators and baselines are. We do need the funds to engage, so we end up accepting these projects, even if we don't fully agree with them."

Many civil society organisations would engage in PBF projects without fully knowing their source. They would describe the lead agency as being the source of the funding. This provides an opportunity for the PBF to increase its visibility in the country, ensuring that projects financed by the Fund are better represented in their implementation. This could assist with ensuring peacebuilding intentionality and visibility of peacebuilding projects in the country.

Ownership was intensely discussed in most interviews. Many actors, national and international, confirmed the challenges faced by the State to own processes and projects correctly and, as a result being side-lined in the definition of their scope or implementation. It was usual in discussions with government personnel unaware of certain developments, priorities, or projects.

Identifying key entry points within the State was seen, thus, as an essential step towards ownership. As presented by one interviewee, acknowledging political limitations should be seen as part of the business, not an excuse for bypassing national actors. A national interviewee mentioned that "if we want the process to be nationally owned, we need to understand better what peacebuilding is, and what can be our role in it. But to reach there, we need to bring together government, civil society and the population to ensure that this is a participative process."

An unintended consequence is that many civil society and even government actors often showed their views of the PBF with a degree of cynicism. While they need funds to survive, they also understand that it must be relevant. They need to ensure compliance with decisions made by the UN and higher government officials.

Due to the short-term nature of PBF projects, many faced difficulties in seeing how these projects would effectively contribute to long-term results. Very few peacebuilding projects in the country have a longer timeline (including those of other donors). Unsurprisingly, the short-term view of funding affects the impact expectations.

This dynamic is well described by one interviewee that said, "we never see 5-year projects here. To work together takes time. To reach that collaboration is difficult – first, because many institutions are not willing to talk long-term. Second, we eventually do palliative measures and deal with immediate causes, not the root causes. And on top, we don't have the support of the State. We are alone here."

The results of this type of cynicism were uneven. Some civil society organisations and government institutions were able to adapt and understand that their role must be flexible and adaptable. For instance, some civil society organisations mentioned changing

government interlocutors when limited results were achieved. This showed a good understanding of focusing on outcomes rather than activities.

To other civil society and government actors, this situation led to inertia. Many expected that it was the UN responsibility to approach them. They would then respond to the demands and needs presented if they did. If they didn't, they would be frustrated with international actors' perceived lack of interest to work with them.

These two opposed approaches are two sides of the same coin. On the one side, some understood that peacebuilding requires flexibility and actively pursuing adaptability to succeed. On the other side, other actors perceived their voice to be limited in the design of responses, de-facto operating as an implementing tool rather than an equal partner.

One interviewee shared a relevant reflection regarding the duality of engagements with the PBF. "I remember one meeting organised to design concepts for PBF projects. I feel that we were pushed for a concept and process that was already pre-defined. There was not much we could do, and the UN voice ended up prevailing over national actors and civil society organisations."

## Key Findings

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The context of Guinea-Bissau's peacebuilding process has been discussed at length in this report. This section investigates some of the key findings regarding institutional and individual capacities for implementing PBF projects, which serve as the basis for the recommendations included in the Executive Summary.

### Institutional Capacities

PBF projects still face challenges in entirely fitting within the mandates of the UN agencies that are leading their implementation. For some, especially the larger agencies, PBF projects allow them to advance areas and strengthen their presence on the ground. PBF projects become their crucial entry point for others, especially smaller agencies. Therefore, in the absence of the PBF, some of these agencies do not exist.

This situation means that most projects are seen, as presented in interviews, through short-term lenses within different agencies. Measurement of results is generally seen through output lenses, especially in developing visible events, tangible infrastructure, or specific processes. Far less was focusing on how these outputs contributed to outcomes and impact.

Most interviewees struggled to identify how PBF projects' actions could catalyse longer-term change and national ownership. National actors themselves perceived the PBF as a lifeline for some intended initiatives. Still, they seldom saw the bigger picture regarding the broader contribution the fund could have.

From a UN perspective, a clear vision of how the PBF fits as a cross-cutting UN initiative is lacking, forcing it to become agency and project-driven. The Secretariat's role under the RC office attempted to bring together different UN actors, often with the reluctance of various offices, agencies, and even individuals.

The PBF is not risk-averse in terms of the thematic areas that it funds. Its willingness to continue engaging with the country and pushing for quality projects must be commended. However, many often saw the eligibility and requirements as a high transactional cost that forces staff to become heavily involved in bureaucratic elements.



While PBF projects must disburse at least 40% of the funds to national actors, no national organisation alone has received funds directly from the PBF. Disbursements to civil society actors occurred only via UNCT or, on one occasion, via an international civil society organisation operating in the country. Risk management approaches should be aligned with more robust funding flexibility criteria, especially to empower local and national actors.

The question around the nature of the PBF was often asked. "Who are we talking about when we mention the PBF? The Secretariat? The Peacebuilding Support Office? The Peacebuilding Commission? We need to make all these structures work better with us. They can't just be the ones reminding us of deadlines and tranches. We need to have more engagements with dynamics in New York itself."

Those who identified priorities and designed successful PBF proposals were often not directly involved in the implementation. Considering the short-term nature of projects, ranging from 18 to 36 months, this directly impacts ensuring the projects "kick the ground running." Challenges arise as it takes time for new staff to familiarise themselves with the tasks and implement the projects.

The transient nature of projects and personnel often makes it harder to ensure continuity at the UN level. Projects are often seen as once-off initiatives. This is particularly clear in the smaller agencies that inadvertently plan for outputs rather than having a clear sense of outcomes.

Larger agencies tend to have a more robust capacity for implementation. Stronger administrative, procurement, and "people on the ground" tend to dominate the UN's ability to define and implement specific priorities. Smaller agencies showed more difficulties in implementing many activities.

These issues force one to reflect beyond the mandates and responsibilities of agencies. It also begs a thorough institutional and inter-agency discussion led by the RC office. The RC should help investigate different comparative advantages within the UNCT and complement different strengths. Some agencies would have more capacity to implement, while others would have more capacity to facilitate/advise/guide. The following quote summarises this argument well:

*"There is an identity crisis, some agencies facilitate, and others implement. But in the projects, they all say they can implement to get more funds. There should be a less proud approach by the agencies, and stronger coordination to ensure that comparative advantages are strengthened, not their limitations."*

While expenditure was reasonably high (with 88% in all funding phases, excluding the 2012 coup), many still complained about a "spending rush" in later project implementation. The PBF secretariat attempted to reduce such problems by changing how tranches were disbursed, forcing an equal distribution of expenses. Many presented the new developments as positive.

Interviews also showed a significant degree of fractured relations amongst individuals within the several agencies. Despite the presence of the resident coordinator's office, it was clear that a siloed mentality still existed amongst many institutions. Partnership with other agencies (and even government and civil society organisations) was often presented as duty-bound rather than an opportunity to further advance the projects' objectives.

As a result, many interviewed shared that in developing joint PBF projects, often agencies would still act within their mandates, separately and in siloes. Some anecdotal evidence was seen during the planning for 2022 PBF projects where inter-agency tension generated mutual frustrations within individuals and visible organisational stress. One interviewee described these challenges by saying, "when an agency receives PBF resources, they see that as their agency fund. So, their accountability to the PBF is seen often as a bureaucratic requirement. We need to be able to see the bigger picture if we want to ensure results accountability."

Part of the problem was presented by one of the interviewees. This staff member mentioned, "the dependency that many of the agencies have in PBF resources forces them to twist their project to their agency mandates, not the other way around." Unsurprisingly, during discussions with UN staff, there was often a demand for more thematic flexibility towards "pure development" initiatives.

As one of the interviewees described, part of the problem was in the very proposals submitted to PBSO. It adds by saying that "the problem is the type of requirements asked in the proposals. It sounds like we are back in the 2000s. What is the activity, the output, the region

you are working with? Then we want to ask what the link with the UNDSCF objectives is. We need to get a better sense of the role of national actors and how we know we will have enhanced the capacity. We need to change this."

Interestingly, despite constant friction amongst UN members, they have also shared the need for better communication amongst themselves and with the PBF. One interviewee mentioned that the PBF Secretariat should play a more active role in the engagement of different agencies, moving beyond a process of "sharing deadlines, negotiating contracts, and feedback on monitoring and evaluation."

Areas could include, for instance, constant engagements on the state-of-the-art of peacebuilding in Guinea-Bissau and globally; sharing of experiences, challenges, and opportunities; sessions to engage with national and local actors; information on the progress of other projects in Guinea-Bissau and beyond.

These suggestions confirm that the PBF secretariat has a vital role in continuous support to developing knowledge, understanding, and, ultimately, capacity to implement quality projects. Transforming the Secretariat from a perceived administrative body to a critical actor to which agencies are accountable would benefit it in implementing its mandate. This would allow the Secretariat to continuously capacitate local and international actors, identify project management gaps, and streamline the planning.

However, it would require walking a fine line between being engaged and present and not creating an impression of being too intrusive on the work conducted by agencies. The backing of the RC would be critical in ensuring that the PBF is not simply seen as an additional fund to the agencies and that its strategic importance is elevated to the highest level.

The challenges faced in resource mobilisation by civil society shows several aspects of deficiency of interacting with local actors. The process tends to maintain the centrality of the UN System in implementing PBF projects while also trying to enhance the role of civil society organisations. Civil society organisations could receive more active support to understand better the resource mobilisation process required to sustain their work and become less dependent on the mandate identified externally.

Without institutional support, most civil society organisations will remain passive and not fully understand their role in the broader peacebuilding context in the country. One interviewee said, "with all these once-off projects coming in, civil society actors do have a basic understanding of the general results chain that is expected to be implemented in a project description. Now, the challenge is going deeper, and when you start probing the institutional outcomes and impact, it is much more limited."

## Individual skills

During interviews, stakeholders presented a detailed contextual description and analysis of the situation in Guinea-Bissau. It became clear that most of the root causes of conflicts were well understood, which led to a straightforward identification of peacebuilding needs.

The main challenge was in transforming those needs into action. A confusing understanding of intentionality and theory of change shows the need to understand better peacebuilding and design activities intended to contribute to specific outcomes.

As part of a process of active observation, this study identified that many, especially at the UN, saw the issue regarding peacebuilding intentionality more as a bureaucratic requirement than an internalised objective. Once probed, many actors struggled to identify how their inputs and activities would effectively contribute to broader outcomes.

This could be seen through two visible challenges. First, many saw the short-term nature of PBF projects as a hindrance towards longer-term planning. Building spaces and momentum for initiatives that others can take over or even create the foundation for future projects seemed more like an afterthought.

Second, the composition of teams engaged with the PBF projects also highlighted the short-term nature of much of the thinking. Considering that individuals were often recruited specifically to lead PBF projects, these staff members were also "thrown at the deep end." Added to the high staff turnover at the UN, this means that many don't have the institutional memory or even the authority to implement the project geared towards longer-term needs.

It becomes clear that there is a strong emphasis between actors in seeing peacebuilding as a tool, implemented through direct interventions and clear boundaries. Expressions like "outcomes," "theory of change," and "peacebuilding intentionality" were often received with

sighs and "eye-rolling" reactions. This reaction was confirmed by views that saw them as a tick in the box. Most interviewed had not received training on these areas, mostly learning them "on-the-job." A small number of UN staff mentioned being part of training on planning, project management, or monitoring and evaluation. One even said an initiative organised in 2013 by PBSO and ACCORD, a South African think tank, on peacebuilding planning as the last helpful exercise.

Project management was the most cited skill lacking in implementing PBF projects. One interviewee shared this very eloquently. "Most of us in the civil society or even the UN are lawyers, political scientists, sociologists. We don't always understand project management cycles, which is detrimental for the implementation of projects."

Another interviewee mentioned that "we need more on-the-job training. We hire people expecting they know how to do the job. Still, the reality is more complex than that." This view was confirmed by others who shared that while the UN hires people who "can do the job", less focus is on transferring that knowledge.

Unsurprisingly, the measurement of events results was often challenging to identify immediate and longer-term outcomes. When asked about the impact of their initiatives, many UN actors struggled to determine how their events contributed to the intended behavioural change. One interviewee even mentioned that "we do these workshops, but don't follow up with them [beneficiaries] after when asked about means of verification. So, it isn't easy to know what we have achieved. But to be honest, that is not so regular for us to do this. We finish an activity and then move to the next."

These planning challenges were obvious when assessing different results-based frameworks and their outcomes, targets, and indicators. Even in approved projects, a common trend was found in PBF projects. Too many indicators and targets show that the limited staffing capacity to monitor them would be compromised. There is a heavy presence of quantitative indicators, often focusing on several "events", such as meetings, workshops, or conferences. Qualitative indicators and targets measuring utility and sustainability of work were far less present.

This tension between outside actors that want to "DO" instead of "TRANSFER" seems visible in most interactions, clearly impacting how national actors perceive them. In addition,

national and local actors mainly seemed unaware of their power in potentially driving processes.

Another interviewee confirms this view by saying that the lack of a solid induction process before implementing PBF projects is a significant challenge for achieving intended outcomes. Some suggested that project management courses should be available to those implementing PBF initiatives and included in the budgets. Materials presented as useful tools that personnel could use are the UNDP Handbook on planning, monitoring and evaluation for development results and the UNDG Results-based management handbook.

Both national and international actors emphasised their roles as implementers of peacebuilding initiatives. A much lower focus was given to supportive roles, particularly when assessing interviews from external actors. This showcases the vital role of external actors in supporting national processes by enhancing ownership, including evaluating language, discourses, and positionalities vis-à-vis local actors.

There is a clear need to find a common denominator to understand peacebuilding intentionality and the very PBF role. Providing continuous support in basic project management and understanding its long-term intentions can benefit those engaging with PBF projects. However, to be successful, it cannot be seen as a once-off event but rather as a continuous process of strengthening the capacity of implementers and beneficiaries on PBF projects in Guinea-Bissau.