Rebuilding with Integrity: Ethical Project Management for Post-War Public Works[1]

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Abstract

Post-war reconstruction presents some of the most complex challenges in project management, particularly in the field of public works. Roads, bridges, hospitals, schools, and water systems are not only essential for restoring basic services but also symbolic of a nation's recovery and resilience. Yet in fragile, post-conflict contexts, such projects are highly vulnerable to corruption, mismanagement, and exploitation. This article argues that ethical project management is not simply a best practice but a moral and strategic necessity in post-war public works. The paper begins by defining the principles of ethical project management (transparency, accountability, inclusivity, and sustainability) drawing from international standards and professional codes of conduct. It then examines the unique ethical challenges of post-war environments, where urgency, weak institutions, and vast inflows of aid create fertile ground for unethical practices. Issues such as corrupt procurement, exclusion of marginalized groups, unsafe labor practices, and environmental neglect are analyzed as threats not only to project outcomes but also to long-term peace and trust in public institutions. The article demonstrates how ethical project management contributes directly to post-conflict recovery by rebuilding legitimacy, ensuring equitable access to services, preventing conflict relapse, and fostering sustainable development. Strategies for embedding ethics into project delivery are outlined, including transparent procurement, independent oversight, community participation, capacity building, and accountability mechanisms. Case examples from reconstruction efforts highlight both successes and failures, offering lessons for future initiatives. Ultimately, the study underscores that public works in post-war settings are not purely technical endeavors. They are social and political acts with deep implications for peace, justice, and national cohesion. Embedding ethics at every stage of project management is therefore indispensable to ensuring that reconstruction fosters not only physical recovery but also the foundations of a fair and lasting peace.

Key Words: *Ethical Project Management, Post-war Reconstruction, Public Works, Transparency and Accountability, Sustainable Development, Peacebuilding.*

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1. Introduction

1.1.   The Complex Realities of Post-War Contexts

Armed conflict leaves behind a landscape of destruction that extends far beyond the visible damage to roads, bridges, schools, hospitals, and water systems. These physical scars, though dramatic, are only part of the picture. The governance structures that regulate public life, the social trust that binds communities, and the economic systems that sustain livelihoods are often equally, if not more, devastated. Institutions that once provided essential services may collapse or lose legitimacy, bureaucracies may be hollowed out by corruption or politicization, and rule-of-law mechanisms may be replaced by informal power structures or war economies (Acostamadiedo Gutiérrez, 2019). The erosion of these foundations creates an environment in which rebuilding becomes exponentially more difficult, as technical challenges intersect with political fragility and social fragmentation.

For ordinary citizens, the aftermath of conflict is marked by urgent, unmet needs. Access to clean water, adequate shelter, functioning healthcare systems, and reliable education are often compromised for years. The destruction of productive infrastructure (i.e. transportation networks, energy grids, and markets, etc.) disrupts economic activity and reduces opportunities for employment, driving many households deeper into poverty. Vulnerable groups, including women, children, internally displaced persons, and persons with disabilities, often bear the heaviest burdens, as they face compounded barriers to accessing resources and participating in decision-making. These realities underscore that reconstruction is not only about repairing material damage but also about addressing deep social inequalities and rebuilding the fabric of everyday life.

At the same time, governments and international partners are under intense pressure to demonstrate visible progress. Post-war societies are politically fragile, and peace agreements often depend on quick "peace dividends" that can reassure citizens that violence has ended and that stability is returning. Roads, schools, clinics, and electricity supply projects are highly visible indicators of recovery and are therefore prioritized as symbols of governmental effectiveness and donor impact. Yet this pressure for rapid results can create tension between speed and quality. Quick, poorly planned interventions risk reinforcing corruption, excluding marginalized groups, or producing infrastructure that is unsustainable (Acostamadiedo Gutiérrez, 2019). Balancing the urgency of visible reconstruction with the slower processes of institution-building, inclusivity, and accountability is therefore one of the most profound dilemmas of post-war recovery.

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Table 01. Post-Conflict Recovery: Key Dimensions & Challenges

| Physical Destruction	Institutional
• Damage to roads, bridges, schools, hospitals, water systems, etc. • Visible scars but only part of the problem.	• Governance structures weakened or collapsed. • Bureaucracies politicized/corrupted. • Rule of law.
Human & Social Impact	**Reconstruction Challenges**
• Unmet needs: water, shelter, healthcare, education. • Economic disruption: transport, energy, markets. • Vulnerable groups (women, children, displaced, disabled) suffer most.	• Pressure for quick peace dividends. • Visible projects prioritized (roads, schools, etc.). • Risk of corruption, exclusion, unsustainable infrastructure. • Need balance: rapid recovery vs. long-term institution building.

1.2. Public Works as Symbols and Instruments of Recovery

Public works are central to reconstruction efforts not only because they restore essential services but also because they carry powerful symbolic significance. In societies emerging from conflict, infrastructure is more than a collection of physical assets; it is a visible representation of state authority, social renewal, and the promise of a more stable future. A functioning bridge reconnects communities divided by war, enabling trade, mobility, and social interaction. A newly rebuilt school signals investment in the next generation and the return of normalcy. A restored hospital provides lifesaving care while embodying the principle that government and aid agencies are committed to safeguarding human dignity. These projects, therefore, operate on two levels: they serve immediate material needs while also acting as markers of political legitimacy and social cohesion.

However, the same visibility that makes public works potent symbols of recovery also renders them vulnerable to becoming flashpoints for dissatisfaction. When poorly managed, reconstruction projects can reproduce or even intensify pre-existing grievances. Unequal access to infrastructure (i.e. when certain ethnic, religious, or geographic groups receive disproportionate benefits) can entrench divisions rather than heal them. Similarly, substandard quality, often the result of rushed timelines or corrupt procurement practices, undermines public confidence in both governments and international donors. Perceptions of corruption, whether justified or not, can transform infrastructure projects from symbols of hope into potent reminders of exclusion and injustice (Acostamadiedo Gutiérrez, 2019). In some contexts, failed or abandoned projects have even become rallying points for opposition movements, reinforcing cynicism and mistrust.

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The dual nature of public works as both practical utilities and symbolic signifiers underscores the importance of ethical project management. Ensuring that projects are delivered fairly, transparently, and sustainably is essential not only to meet material needs but also to secure their role as catalysts for reconciliation and long-term peacebuilding. In this way, infrastructure becomes more than concrete and steel: it becomes a medium through which societies renegotiate trust, legitimacy, and the social contract in the aftermath of war (Lindberg & Orjuela, 2014).

Figure 01. Public Works in Post-conflict Reconstruction
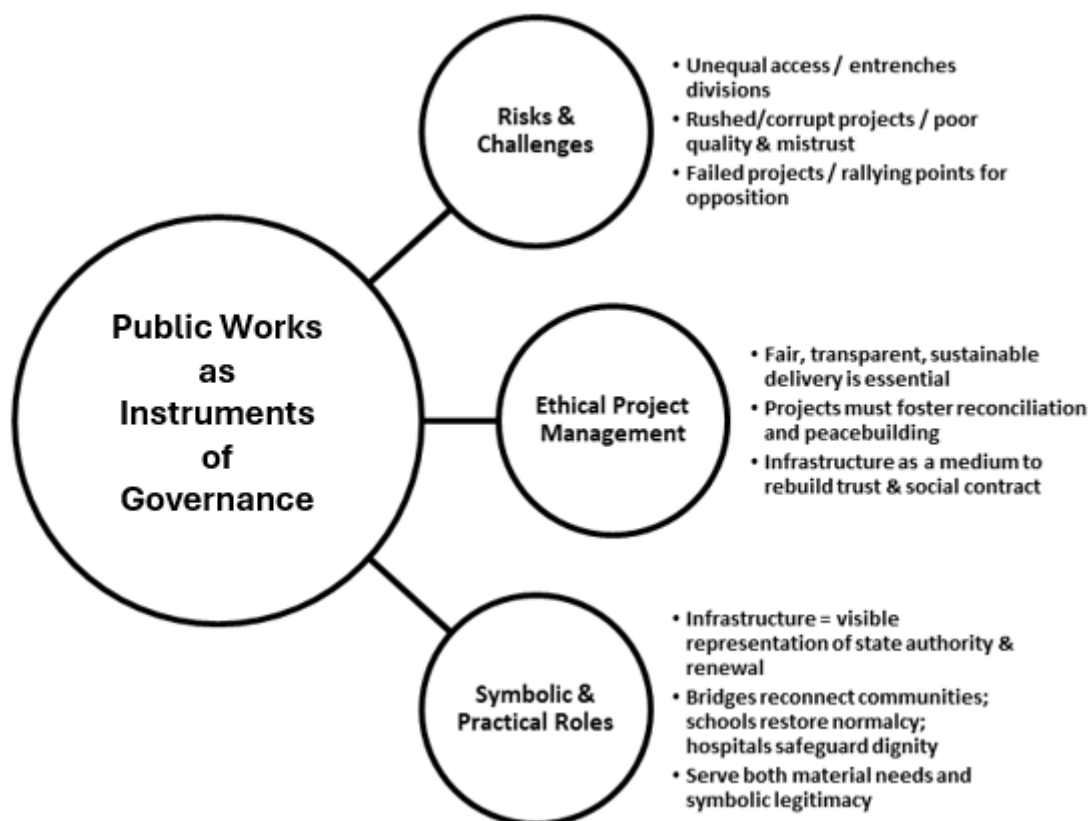

1.3.   Ethical Dimensions of Project Management

In such high-stakes environments, project management cannot be treated as a purely technical discipline. While tools such as scheduling, budgeting, and risk analysis remain vital, the broader social and political context of post-war reconstruction demands an approach grounded equally in ethics and responsibility. Every decision taken in the design and implementation of public works (whether concerning procurement, labor practices, environmental safeguards, or community participation) carries implications that extend beyond efficiency. These choices influence perceptions of justice, inclusivity, and fairness, shaping whether citizens view reconstruction as a genuine effort to rebuild society or as a continuation of exploitation and exclusion.

For example, procurement processes that are opaque or influenced by political favoritism do more than inflate costs; they undermine public confidence in institutions and feed narratives of corruption (Acostamadiedo Gutiérrez, 2019). Similarly, neglecting to consult communities about their priorities risks producing infrastructure that is poorly aligned with local needs. A road may be built where a health clinic was desperately required, or a water system installed without consideration of cultural practices around resource use. Such misalignments not only waste resources but also perpetuate feelings of marginalization and irrelevance among affected populations.

By contrast, a transparent and inclusive approach to project management can help transform public works into vehicles for reconciliation. Fair bidding processes enhance trust in public institutions and reassure citizens that reconstruction resources are being managed responsibly. Incorporating community participation ensures that projects are socially relevant, culturally sensitive, and more likely to be maintained in the long term. Integrating environmental safeguards signals a commitment to sustainability, preventing short-term fixes from becoming long-term liabilities. Together, these practices contribute not just to successful infrastructure delivery but also to the rebuilding of legitimacy, social trust, and peace.

Figure 02. Ethical Dimensions of Post-Conflict Project Management
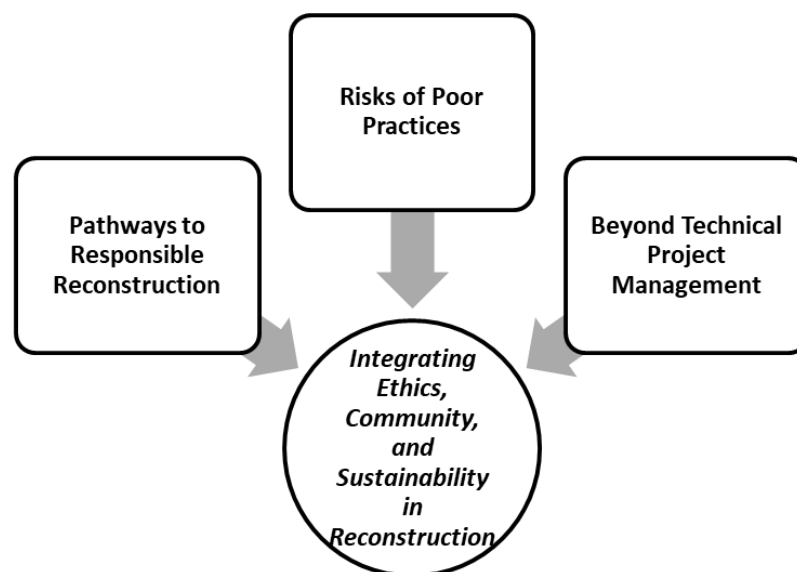
1.4. Challenges to Ethical Practice in Post-War Reconstruction

The urgency to "build back quickly" often collides with the equally pressing need to "build back ethically." In the immediate aftermath of conflict, governments and donors are under immense pressure to demonstrate rapid progress. Citizens expect visible improvements in their daily lives as a peace dividend, and political leaders often seek high-profile infrastructure projects to signal authority and competence. However, this pressure for speed can come at the expense of careful planning, due diligence, and inclusive decision-making. Projects are sometimes rushed into implementation without proper feasibility studies, environmental assessments, or community

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consultations, resulting in infrastructure that is either unsustainable or misaligned with actual needs.

Weak oversight mechanisms further compound these risks. Post-war states often have fragile institutions, limited regulatory capacity, and depleted human resources due to conflict-related displacement or brain drain. This institutional weakness makes it difficult to enforce procurement standards, monitor expenditures, or sanction malpractice. The influx of large-scale foreign aid, while necessary for reconstruction, can unintentionally fuel corruption by overwhelming local accountability systems and creating parallel structures that bypass government oversight (Acostamadiedo Gutiérrez, 2019).

International actors, too, face conflicting incentives. Donors frequently prioritize speed and visibility to satisfy political constituencies at home, showcase tangible outcomes, or reinforce strategic interests. This emphasis on rapid results can lead to the selection of projects based on symbolic value rather than long-term sustainability. For example, highly visible but poorly designed facilities may be inaugurated quickly, only to fall into disrepair within a few years due to lack of maintenance planning or local ownership.

At the domestic level, local elites may exploit reconstruction resources for personal or political gain. Control over aid flows and contracting opportunities can become a source of patronage, reinforcing clientelism and exclusion. Instead of fostering national reconciliation, reconstruction may exacerbate divisions if benefits are distributed unequally along ethnic, religious, or political lines.

These pressures make it especially difficult to uphold ethical standards, yet they also make such standards more critical than ever. Building back ethically requires slowing down certain processes to ensure transparency, inclusivity, and sustainability, even when political and donor pressures push for immediate results. The challenge, then, lies in balancing the urgent need for visible progress with the equally urgent imperative of rebuilding societies on foundations of fairness, accountability, and trust.

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Table 02. Tension Between Speed and Ethics in Post-Conflict Reconstruction

Theme	Key Points
Pressure for Speed	• Governments & donors pushed to deliver "peace dividends" quickly • Visible projects (roads, clinics, schools) prioritized to show authority • Rushed implementation / poor feasibility studies, weak consultation, unsustainable results
Institutional Weakness	• Fragile states = limited oversight & depleted human resources • Weak capacity to enforce standards or monitor corruption • Foreign aid influx can overwhelm accountability, create parallel structures
Conflicting Incentives	• Donors emphasize speed & visibility for political gains • Projects chosen for symbolic value, not sustainability • Local elites exploit aid & contracts / patronage, exclusion, deeper divisions
Balancing Urgency & Ethics	• Ethical standards are harder but more critical under pressure • Need transparency, inclusivity, sustainability despite time pressure • True recovery = progress built on fairness, accountability, and trust

1.5. Purpose and Structure of the Article

This article examines the role of ethical project management in the delivery of public works in post-war contexts. It argues that ethical approaches are not simply an aspirational ideal but both a moral imperative and a strategic necessity for achieving sustainable recovery. In environments where fragile peace settlements coexist with weak institutions and profound social grievances, the ethical dimension of reconstruction becomes inseparable from its technical execution. How projects are designed, financed, and delivered directly influences whether they serve as instruments of reconciliation and stability, or as drivers of exclusion and renewed conflict.

The discussion begins by clarifying the principles of ethical project management (i.e. transparency, accountability, fairness, inclusivity, sustainability, etc.) and situating them within existing international frameworks such as the Project Management Institute's Code of Ethics, the World Bank's Environmental and Social Framework, and the United Nations Development Program's good governance standards. It then explores the specific challenges of applying these principles in fragile, post-conflict environments, highlighting the risks of corruption, elite capture, exclusion of vulnerable groups, exploitation of labor, and environmental neglect (Acostamadiedo Gutiérrez, 2019).

Building on this analysis, the article identifies strategies for embedding ethics into reconstruction processes. These include transparent procurement mechanisms, independent oversight, participatory planning, community-driven approaches, whistleblower protections, and integration of environmental and social safeguards. Case studies from contexts such as Iraq,

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Afghanistan, Bosnia, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone are used to illustrate both the costs of neglecting ethics and the benefits of integrity-driven approaches.

In doing so, the article underscores the potential of ethically managed public works not only to restore infrastructure but also to contribute to broader goals of peacebuilding and state-building. Ethical project management transforms reconstruction from a narrow technical task into a multidimensional process that rebuilds trust, strengthens institutions, and lays the foundation for peace, justice, and national cohesion.

2. Ethical Project Management: Principles and Frameworks

2.1. From Technical Tasks to Ethical Imperatives

Project management is often perceived as a largely technical discipline, primarily concerned with meeting deadlines, controlling budgets, and delivering outputs on schedule. This traditional view emphasizes efficiency and performance indicators while treating projects as neutral undertakings detached from broader social dynamics. However, in fragile, post-war contexts, these technical concerns intersect with profound ethical considerations that cannot be ignored. The processes through which resources are allocated, contracts are awarded, labor is organized, and communities are consulted (or excluded) carry significant moral weight. They shape not only the quality of the final infrastructure but also the legitimacy of the institutions overseeing reconstruction.

Ethical project management therefore extends far beyond compliance with established professional standards. It requires an intentional and proactive commitment to values such as transparency, accountability, fairness, inclusivity, and sustainability. Transparency ensures that decisions about procurement and resource use are open to scrutiny, reducing opportunities for corruption and misuse (Acostamadiedo Gutiérrez, 2019). Accountability requires that project actors are answerable to both donors and citizens, creating mechanisms through which grievances can be addressed and misconduct sanctioned. Fairness demands that resources are distributed equitably, preventing reconstruction from favoring certain groups over others and thereby fueling further divisions. Inclusivity emphasizes the participation of diverse stakeholders (especially marginalized communities) in shaping priorities and outcomes. Finally, sustainability ensures that projects are designed with long-term viability in mind, protecting the environment, strengthening local capacity, and avoiding the pitfalls of short-term, symbolic fixes (Lindberg & Orjuela, 2014).

In post-conflict settings, adhering to these principles is not merely an ethical choice but also a pragmatic necessity. Infrastructure delivered through opaque or exclusionary processes risks eroding trust in government and international partners, potentially reigniting grievances that contributed to conflict. Conversely, projects managed with integrity can serve as highly visible demonstrations of fairness and renewal, strengthening social cohesion and laying the foundation for peace.

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Table 03. Ethical Project Management in Post-Conflict Settings

Dimension	Traditional (Technical) View	Ethical (Expanded) View	Impact in Post-Conflict Settings
Focus	Efficiency, deadlines, budgets, outputs	Values: transparency, accountability, fairness, inclusivity, sustainability	Shapes trust, legitimacy, and reconciliation
Transparency	Limited to reporting	Open decision-making in procurement & resource use	Reduces corruption, increases citizen confidence
Accountability	Mainly to donors & superiors	Answerable to both donors *and* citizens	Enables grievance redress & sanctions misconduct
Fairness	Neutral allocation assumed	Equitable distribution of resources across groups	Prevents exclusion, reduces risk of renewed conflict
Inclusivity	Stakeholder input minimal	Active participation of diverse communities, esp. marginalized	Ensures relevance, strengthens ownership & cohesion
Sustainability	Short-term delivery prioritized	Long-term viability, environmental & social safeguards	Protects against "white elephant" projects, builds resilience
Overall Outcome	Technical success = delivery on time & budget	Ethical + technical success = legitimate, trusted, socially cohesive outcomes	Infrastructure becomes both service provider & peacebuilding tool

2.2. Defining Ethical Project Management

Ethical project management can be understood as the application of project management principles that are explicitly informed by moral and social responsibilities. It extends the boundaries of conventional project practice by integrating normative values into technical processes, thereby ensuring that projects are not only efficient but also just and legitimate. According to the Project Management Institute's Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct, project managers are obligated to act with responsibility, respect, fairness, and honesty (PMI, 2006). Responsibility emphasizes accountability for decisions and their consequences; respect acknowledges the inherent dignity of stakeholders; fairness ensures impartiality and equitable treatment; and honesty demands truthfulness and integrity in communication and execution. These values provide an ethical compass that guides project decisions in complex and contested environments.

The salience of these values is heightened in post-war reconstruction, where fragile institutions, limited oversight, and heightened social sensitivities magnify the consequences of unethical practices. In such contexts, project managers are not simply implementers of technical plans but also mediators of competing interests, custodians of scarce resources, and, in many respects, agents of peacebuilding. A procurement decision that might seem routine in a stable corporate setting can become politically charged in a post-war society, where perceptions of favoritism or exclusion can erode public trust or reignite social grievances.

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Moreover, public works in post-conflict states differ markedly from private-sector projects in both financing and accountability structures. They are typically funded by international donors, development banks, or humanitarian agencies, and thus subject to layers of external scrutiny and political expectations. The same time, they are delivered under conditions of fragility, where state institutions may be weak, regulatory frameworks underdeveloped, and communities deeply divided. These circumstances amplify the stakes of ethical conduct: failures are not merely technical but can undermine peace agreements, exacerbate inequality, or compromise the legitimacy of the rebuilding process.

In this sense, ethical project management in post-war reconstruction is not peripheral to technical practice but central to the very possibility of sustainable recovery. It represents a deliberate integration of moral reasoning into decision-making, ensuring that reconstruction contributes to justice, inclusivity, and long-term stability rather than reproducing cycles of corruption and exclusion (Acostamadiedo Gutiérrez, 2019).

Table 04. Ethical Project Management in Post-War Reconstruction

Principle / Value	Definition	Application in Post-Conflict Settings	Risks if Ignored
Responsibility	Accountability for decisions & their consequences	Careful stewardship of scarce resources; transparent procurement	Mismanagement fuels corruption, undermines trust
Respect	Recognition of dignity & rights of stakeholders	Inclusive engagement with divided communities; cultural sensitivity	Disrespect exacerbates grievances, deepens divisions
Fairness	Impartiality, equity, and justice in decisions	Equitable distribution of aid & infrastructure across groups	Perceived favoritism reignites tensions, fuels inequality
Honesty	Truthfulness, integrity, accurate communication	Clear communication with citizens, donors, and institutions	Deception erodes legitimacy, weakens peace processes
Role of Project Managers	Beyond technical implementers: mediators, custodians, peacebuilders	Balance donor expectations, political pressures, and community needs	Short-term technical fixes overshadow long-term legitimacy
Contextual Stakes	Post-conflict states: weak institutions, divided societies, external financing	Ethical conduct central to recovery, peacebuilding, and stability	Failures undermine agreements, reproduce cycles of exclusion

2.3. Core Principles of Ethical Project Management

- **Transparency:** Transparency is one of the most fundamental ethical principles in project management, particularly in post-war contexts where mistrust of institutions is widespread. Clear and open processes in procurement, budgeting, and decision-making reduce opportunities for corruption, favouritism, and the misuse of funds. Transparency also enables citizens, civil society organizations, and donors to monitor how resources are allocated and spent, thereby fostering confidence in both the government and

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implementing agencies (Chêne, 2012). In practical terms, transparency can be achieved through measures such as publishing contracts, conducting open tenders, and making project documents publicly accessible. Without transparency, reconstruction risks reinforcing perceptions of secrecy and inequality, which can undermine peacebuilding efforts.

- **Accountability:** Closely linked to transparency is accountability, which ensures that project managers, contractors, and government officials are answerable for their actions. Accountability mechanisms include independent oversight, third-party audits, and the enforcement of sanctions for malpractice or non-compliance. In post-conflict contexts, where institutional checks and balances are often weak, accountability mechanisms serve as critical safeguards against corruption and mismanagement (World Bank, 2018). They also empower citizens by providing avenues to raise concerns, file complaints, or challenge unethical practices. A reconstruction project that lacks accountability not only risks inefficiency but also damages the legitimacy of both state and donor institutions.

- **Fairness and Equity:** Fairness and equity require that reconstruction resources are distributed impartially and without discrimination. This principle is particularly important in societies fractured along ethnic, religious, or regional lines, where unequal access to infrastructure can exacerbate grievances and fuel renewed conflict. Fair project management prioritizes the needs of marginalized or vulnerable groups, ensuring that recovery does not reproduce patterns of exclusion. For example, equitable access to schools, healthcare facilities, and clean water can serve as powerful demonstrations of social justice, helping to rebuild trust in institutions and foster national reconciliation.

- **Inclusivity and Participation:** Inclusivity and participation emphasize the active involvement of communities in shaping the design, implementation, and monitoring of public works. Engaging local stakeholders ensures that projects respond to genuine needs rather than externally imposed priorities, thereby strengthening relevance and long-term ownership (UNDP, 2021). Participation also has a symbolic function: it demonstrates respect for citizen voices, builds legitimacy, and fosters a sense of shared responsibility in the reconstruction process. In post-war contexts, where trust is fragile, inclusive project management can contribute directly to reconciliation by bridging divides and empowering marginalized populations to take part in rebuilding their societies.

- **Sustainability:** Finally, sustainability is a critical ethical principle that balances the urgency of immediate reconstruction with the long-term resilience of societies. In the rush to deliver visible results, projects often neglect environmental and social safeguards, resulting in infrastructure that deteriorates quickly or causes unintended harm. Ethical project management requires integrating sustainability into every stage of reconstruction, through environmental impact assessments, capacity-building for maintenance, and policies that promote resilience to future shocks (UNEP, 2024). By embedding sustainability, projects ensure not only the durability of infrastructure but also its role in supporting stable, prosperous, and environmentally sound development.

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Table 05. Core Ethical Principles in Post-War Project Management

Principle	Definition	Practical Mechanisms	Risks if Neglected	Positive Outcomes
Transparency	Open and clear processes in procurement, budgeting, decision-making	Publishing contracts, open tenders, public access to documents	Corruption, favoritism, misuse of funds, secrecy	Builds confidence among citizens, donors, and civil society
Accountability	Project actors answerable for their actions and decisions	Independent oversight, audits, sanctions for malpractice	Inefficiency, corruption, loss of legitimacy	Safeguards resources, empowers citizens to raise concerns
Fairness & Equity	Impartial and just distribution of resources	Prioritizing marginalized groups, equitable access to schools, health, water	Reinforces exclusion, fuels grievances, risk of renewed conflict	Promotes social justice, reconciliation, and trust in institutions
Inclusivity & Participation	Active involvement of communities in shaping projects	Stakeholder engagement, participatory planning, community monitoring	Misaligned priorities, weakened ownership, marginalization	Strengthens legitimacy, relevance, shared responsibility, reconciliation
Sustainability	Balancing urgent needs with long-term resilience	Environmental assessments, maintenance capacity, resilience policies	Rapid deterioration, harm to environment, wasted resources	Durable infrastructure, stable development, resilience to future shocks

2.4. International Frameworks Guiding Ethical Practice

2.4.1. International Standards and Their Relevance to Fragile States

Several global frameworks provide guidance for embedding ethical principles into project management, particularly in fragile and post-war environments. These frameworks, developed by professional associations, multilateral institutions, and civil society organizations, establish normative standards for transparency, accountability, inclusivity, and sustainability. They serve as reference points for practitioners and policymakers, offering structured approaches to decision-making in complex and politically sensitive settings. While they cannot be applied mechanically to every context, they provide important benchmarks against which reconstruction efforts can be measured and adapted.

The Project Management Institute's (PMI) Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct is one of the most widely recognized professional frameworks. It emphasizes responsibility, respect, fairness, and honesty as foundational values for project managers (PMI, 2006). Although developed with a global audience in mind, its principles resonate strongly in post-war settings, where ethical lapses can have heightened consequences for peace and stability.

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Multilateral organizations have also developed governance and safeguard frameworks that shape the ethical dimensions of reconstruction. The World Bank's Environmental and Social Framework (2018) sets out mandatory requirements for projects financed by the Bank, including protections for human rights, labour standards, indigenous peoples, and the environment. Similarly, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has articulated Principles of Good Governance (Elahi, 2009), which highlight transparency, accountability, and inclusivity as prerequisites for sustainable recovery. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has further advanced sustainability norms through tools such as environmental impact assessments and resilience planning, underscoring the importance of balancing short-term recovery with long-term ecological integrity (UNEP, 2024).

Civil society organizations also contribute sector-specific frameworks. Transparency International has developed anti-corruption tools tailored to infrastructure and construction projects, including guidelines for open contracting, whistleblower protections, and independent monitoring (Transparency International, 2016; 2024; Open Contracting Partnership, 2015; 2019). These resources provide practical strategies for mitigating risks that are especially acute in post-war environments where large inflows of aid and weak institutions create fertile ground for corruption (Acostamadiedo Gutiérrez, 2019).

The value of these frameworks lies not in their rigid application but in their adaptability. Post-war contexts are marked by unique political, cultural, and institutional conditions that require flexibility in implementation. Applying global benchmarks in ways that respect local realities while still upholding universal principles of fairness, justice, and accountability, ensures that reconstruction efforts remain both context-sensitive and ethically grounded.

Together, these frameworks establish a normative foundation for ethical project management. They help define what "integrity" looks like in practice, offering guidance to governments, donors, project managers, and civil society actors navigating the challenges of post-war recovery. By aligning reconstruction with these standards, stakeholders can work to ensure that public works contribute not only to physical rebuilding but also to the restoration of legitimacy and trust.

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Table 06. Global Frameworks for Ethical Project Management in Post-War Contexts

Framework / Organization	Core Principles / Standards	Relevance to Post-War Reconstruction	Key Tools / Mechanisms
Project Management Institute (PMI) **Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct**	Responsibility, Respect, Fairness, Honesty	Provides universal professional values for project managers; highly relevant where ethical lapses can destabilize peace	Code of ethics, professional conduct guidelines
World Bank **Environmental and Social Framework**	Human rights, labor standards, indigenous peoples' rights, environmental protection	Ensures reconstruction projects funded by the Bank respect social and environmental safeguards	Mandatory ESF standards, safeguard policies
UNDP **Principles of Good Governance**	Transparency, Accountability, Inclusivity	Frames reconstruction as part of sustainable governance and state-building	Governance benchmarks, participatory planning tools
UNEP **Environmental Safeguards & Resilience Planning**	Sustainability, ecological integrity, long-term resilience	Balances urgent reconstruction with environmental stewardship	Environmental impact assessments, resilience frameworks
Transparency International **Anti-Corruption Tools**	Integrity, anti-corruption, open contracting	Addresses corruption risks in post-war aid and infrastructure projects	Whistleblower protections, open contracting, independent monitoring

2.4.2. The PMI Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct

The Project Management Institute (PMI) has established a *Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct* that articulates four core values: responsibility, respect, fairness, and honesty (PMI, 2006). These values serve as a moral compass for project managers and practitioners, providing guidance in contexts where technical decisions intersect with ethical dilemmas. While originally intended as a professional standard for the global project management community, the framework has particular salience in fragile and post-war environments, where the stakes of ethical decision-making extend beyond individual projects to the broader processes of peacebuilding and state reconstruction.

- **Responsibility** emphasizes accountability for both actions and outcomes. In post-conflict settings, this means project managers must ensure that scarce reconstruction resources are used effectively and transparently, avoiding negligence or mismanagement that could erode trust or waste donor funds. Responsibility also entails acknowledging the

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wider social and political impacts of reconstruction projects, not only their technical success.

- **Respect** underscores the importance of valuing the dignity and diversity of stakeholders. In divided societies emerging from war, respect requires sensitivity toward ethnic, religious, and cultural differences, ensuring that reconstruction processes do not inadvertently marginalize vulnerable groups. By fostering inclusivity and dialogue, respect helps rebuild fractured social relationships.

- **Fairness** requires impartiality in decision-making, particularly in the allocation of resources, procurement, and hiring practices. In post-war contexts, where favouritism and elite capture often persist, fairness is essential to preventing reconstruction from becoming another site of inequality. Fair procedures in contracting, recruitment, and service provision demonstrate that reconstruction benefits are distributed equitably across communities.

- **Honesty** demands truthfulness, transparency, and integrity in communication and reporting. In fragile governance systems, where mistrust is often pervasive, honesty helps rebuild confidence between governments, donors, and citizens. It ensures that promises made in reconstruction processes are credible, verifiable, and grounded in reality.

By framing these four values as professional obligations, the PMI Code highlights the universality of ethical commitments in project delivery. Although the framework is not tailored exclusively to post-conflict contexts, its principles resonate strongly in such environments, where ethical lapses can have disproportionate consequences for peace and stability. Importantly, the PMI framework reminds practitioners that project management is not solely a technical discipline: it is also an ethical practice, and its integrity is vital to the legitimacy of reconstruction efforts.

Table 07. PMI Code of Ethics in Post-Conflict Reconstruction

Value	Definition	Application in Post-War Settings	Risks if Neglected
Responsibility	Accountability for actions and outcomes	Use resources effectively and transparently; acknowledge social and political impacts	Mismanagement, wasted donor funds, loss of trust
Respect	Valuing dignity and diversity of stakeholders	Sensitivity to ethnic, religious, cultural differences; inclusive dialogue	Marginalization of vulnerable groups, deepened divisions
Fairness	Impartiality in decision-making	Equitable allocation of resources, fair procurement and hiring	Elite capture, inequality, resentment
Honesty	Truthfulness, transparency, and integrity	Clear and credible communication; verifiable commitments	Mistrust, false expectations, delegitimization of institutions

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2.4.3. The World Bank's Environmental and Social Framework

The World Bank's Environmental and Social Framework (ESF) provides a comprehensive set of requirements designed to safeguard human rights, protect the environment, and ensure that infrastructure projects do not generate unintended harm. The framework establishes a series of *Environmental and Social Standards (ESSs)* that cover critical domains such as labour rights, community engagement, cultural heritage preservation, and environmental sustainability (World Bank, 2018). By embedding these standards into project design and implementation, the ESF seeks to align development and reconstruction initiatives with principles of equity, accountability, and resilience.

For post-war contexts, the ESF is particularly valuable because it extends project management beyond immediate delivery to consider long-term impacts on both societies and ecosystems. Standards on labour and working conditions help prevent the exploitation of vulnerable populations, such as refugees, displaced persons, and demobilized combatants, who are often drawn into reconstruction labour markets. Community engagement standards mandate inclusive consultation, ensuring that local voices shape infrastructure priorities and reducing the risk that projects deepen existing social divisions. Provisions on cultural heritage are especially relevant in post-conflict societies where monuments, religious sites, and historical landmarks may hold symbolic value for reconciliation. Finally, environmental sustainability standards help integrate resilience into reconstruction, mitigating the risks of ecological degradation, resource conflict, or climate vulnerability (Collier et *al*., 2008).

At the same time, applying the ESF in post-conflict environments is not without challenges. The framework's safeguards require careful consultation, environmental and social assessments, and the establishment of grievance mechanisms, all of which take time and institutional capacity. Post-war governments, however, often face intense political pressure to deliver rapid and visible results as a way of consolidating fragile peace settlements. This creates a tension between the need for speed and the imperative of ethical due diligence. For example, in Afghanistan and Iraq, large-scale infrastructure projects were often fast-tracked with minimal consultation or environmental safeguards, resulting in poorly designed facilities that deteriorated quickly or fueled social grievances (SIGAR, 2021; SIGIR, 2013).

This tension illustrates a central challenge in applying global standards to fragile contexts: ethical frameworks must be adapted to balance urgency with integrity. The ESF offers critical benchmarks for preventing harm and promoting justice, but its effectiveness depends on political will, institutional capacity, and the willingness of donors and governments to prioritize ethics alongside speed. In this sense, the ESF is less a rigid template than a flexible guide, one that underscores the principle that reconstruction must "do no harm" while also building the foundations of long-term resilience.

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Table 08. World Bank Environmental and Social Framework (ESF) in Post-War Reconstruction

Domain / Standard (ESS)	Purpose	Application in Post-Conflict Settings	Risks if Neglected
Labour & Working Conditions	Protect workers' rights, prevent exploitation	Safeguards refugees, displaced persons, and demobilized combatants in reconstruction labor markets	Exploitation, unsafe conditions, social grievances
Community Engagement	Ensure inclusive consultation & participation	Local voices shape priorities; reduces risk of exclusion or divisions	Misaligned projects, community resentment, deepened divisions
Cultural Heritage	Protect monuments, sites, and traditions	Preserves symbolic assets vital for reconciliation and identity	Loss of heritage, weakened reconciliation, cultural conflict
Environmental Sustainability	Integrate ecological protection & resilience	Prevents degradation, resource conflict, and climate vulnerability	Rapid deterioration, ecological harm, new sources of conflict
Accountability & Grievance Mechanisms	Provide oversight & channels for redress	Citizens can raise concerns, improving legitimacy and trust	Corruption, impunity, delegitimization of reconstruction

2.4.4. The UNDP Principles of Good Governance

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has long emphasized that good governance is both a normative ideal and a practical necessity for sustainable development and recovery. Its framework identifies transparency, accountability, participation, and inclusivity as the core principles of good governance (Elahi, 2009). These principles are especially critical in post-war contexts, where mistrust of state institutions, systemic corruption, and the exclusion of marginalized groups are often enduring legacies of conflict. By embedding governance principles into reconstruction, the UNDP framework seeks to ensure that rebuilding physical infrastructure is inseparable from rebuilding social trust and institutional legitimacy (Acostamadiedo Gutiérrez, 2019).

Transparency ensures that decision-making processes, budgets, and procurement contracts are open to public scrutiny, reducing opportunities for corruption and signalling a break with opaque wartime governance practices. Accountability requires not only formal oversight mechanisms, such as audits and performance reviews, but also meaningful sanctions for malpractice, creating incentives for both governments and contractors to act responsibly. Participation calls for the active involvement of citizens in shaping reconstruction priorities through consultations, participatory planning processes, and community monitoring. Inclusivity emphasizes that reconstruction must address the needs of historically marginalized groups, such as women, ethnic minorities, and displaced populations so that recovery does not replicate or deepen pre-war inequalities.

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The UNDP framework also provides practical tools for operationalizing these principles. Participatory planning processes enable communities to directly shape infrastructure priorities, reducing the risk of irrelevance or rejection. Anti-corruption strategies, including integrity pacts and transparent procurement platforms, strengthen accountability in resource allocation. Community monitoring mechanisms such as citizen report cards or local oversight committees, empower civil society to evaluate project delivery and hold institutions accountable. These tools allow governance principles to move beyond rhetoric, embedding ethics in concrete practices at the project level.

Table 09. UNDP Principles of Good Governance in Post-War Reconstruction

Principle	Definition	Application in Post-Conflict Settings	Practical Tools / Mechanisms	Risks if Neglected
Transparency	Open access to decisions, budgets, contracts	Breaks with opaque wartime governance, reduces corruption	Transparent procurement, open budgets, published contracts	Corruption, secrecy, continued mistrust
Accountability	Oversight and sanctions for malpractice	Incentivizes responsible action by governments & contractors	Audits, integrity pacts, performance reviews	Impunity, misuse of resources, delegitimization
Participation	Active citizen involvement in decisions	Citizens shape reconstruction priorities & monitor progress	Consultations, participatory planning, community monitoring	Misaligned projects, rejection by communities
Inclusivity	Address needs of marginalized groups	Ensures women, minorities, displaced are part of recovery	Social inclusion policies, targeted programs, quota systems	Inequality, exclusion, renewed grievances

2.4.5. Transparency International's Anti-Corruption Tools

Transparency International (TI) has developed sector-specific tools to combat corruption in infrastructure and construction projects, sectors consistently identified as among the most vulnerable to graft, resource diversion, and political capture. These tools include integrity pacts, independent monitoring frameworks, and guidelines for clean contracting (Transparency International, 2016; 2024). Collectively, they aim to embed transparency and accountability at each stage of the project cycle, from procurement and contract negotiation to implementation and evaluation.

Integrity pacts are voluntary agreements between contracting authorities and bidders in which all parties commit to refrain from bribery, collusion, or other corrupt practices. By making contracts subject to monitoring by civil society or third-party observers, integrity pacts create enforceable standards of fairness and accountability in procurement processes. Monitoring frameworks developed by TI provide structured methodologies for civil society organizations and

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watchdogs to oversee public works, ensuring that project delivery aligns with contractual obligations and ethical standards. Clean contracting guidelines set out practical steps for open procurement, including transparent publication of tenders, criteria-based selection processes, and disclosure of contract terms.

These tools are particularly relevant in post-war contexts, where large inflows of donor aid combine with weak institutional oversight to create high risks of corruption and mismanagement. In such environments, traditional state mechanisms of accountability may be either too fragile or too compromised to function effectively. TI's frameworks therefore act as external safeguards that can complement domestic institutions, reducing opportunities for elite capture and ensuring that reconstruction resources reach intended beneficiaries. For example, integrity pacts applied in infrastructure projects in Latin America and South Asia have shown measurable success in reducing procurement irregularities, demonstrating their potential adaptability to post-conflict contexts as well (Acostamadiedo Gutiérrez, 2019).

Importantly, TI's approach highlights the central role of civil society and citizen engagement in ethical project management. By positioning oversight not only in the hands of governments and donors but also within independent civic actors, TI underscores that integrity is a collective responsibility. This emphasis is especially valuable in post-war settings, where citizen participation in oversight can simultaneously increase accountability and foster renewed trust between communities and state institutions.

In sum, TI's anti-corruption tools provide practical, field-tested mechanisms for embedding ethics into the infrastructure sector, which is often the backbone of reconstruction. Their adaptability to fragile contexts makes them vital resources for ensuring that post-war public works are not captured by corruption but instead serve as visible demonstrations of fairness, transparency, and renewal.

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Table 10. Transparency International (TI) Tools for Ethical Project Management in Post-War Reconstruction

Tool / Mechanism	Definition	Application in Post-Conflict Settings	Risks if Neglected	Positive Outcomes
Integrity Pacts	Agreements between contracting authorities and bidders to prevent bribery, collusion, and corruption	Makes procurement fairer; monitored by civil society or third-party observers	Procurement irregularities, elite capture, inflated costs	Enforceable standards of fairness and accountability
Independent Monitoring Frameworks	Civil society or watchdog oversight of project delivery	Compensates for weak state institutions; ensures projects meet contractual and ethical standards	Mismanagement, corruption, poor-quality delivery	Independent verification builds trust and compliance
Clean Contracting Guidelines	Steps for open procurement: transparent tenders, criteria-based selection, contract disclosure	Aligns procurement with fairness, reduces secrecy	Non-transparent contracting, favoritism, corruption risks	Transparent publication of tenders; measurable integrity improvements
Citizen & Civil Society Engagement	Civic actors involved in oversight alongside donors & governments	Builds accountability from below, not only top-down	Citizens excluded, continued mistrust of state	Increased legitimacy, citizen trust, collective responsibility

2.4.6. Adapting Global Frameworks to Local Realities

Together, these frameworks provide a comprehensive reference point for ethical project management, offering clear principles and practical tools for transparency, accountability, inclusivity, and sustainability. However, their effectiveness in post-war contexts depends heavily on how they are interpreted and applied. Fragile environments are characterized by weak institutions, contested legitimacy, and urgent needs for rapid delivery, conditions that make rigid application of international standards both impractical and potentially counterproductive. Applying global norms without adaptation risks overlooking cultural values, marginalizing local practices, or overwhelming limited institutional capacities (Collier et *al.*, 2008).

The challenge, therefore, lies in blending global principles with context-sensitive strategies. This means ensuring that international benchmarks remain a source of ethical guidance while allowing for flexibility in implementation. For example, while environmental and social safeguards may call for extensive consultation processes, these must be designed in ways that are feasible in contexts where communities are dispersed or where administrative capacity is minimal. Similarly, anti-corruption tools such as integrity pacts or open contracting platforms

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must be adapted to local legal systems and digital infrastructures in order to be effective (Acostamadiedo Gutiérrez, 2019; Open Contracting Partnership, 2015; 2019).

Critically, adaptation must not dilute the underlying ethical commitments of these frameworks. Instead, the aim is to anchor reconstruction in global principles of fairness, accountability, and inclusivity while embedding them within locally owned processes that enhance legitimacy and sustainability. This balance between universality and contextualization is what enables ethical project management to move from aspirational frameworks to tangible practices that shape real-world outcomes in post-war societies.

Table 11. Applying Global Ethical Frameworks in Post-War Reconstruction

Dimension	Global Principle	Contextual Challenge	Adaptation Strategy	Risk if Ignored
Transparency & Accountability	Open procurement, audits, anti-corruption tools	Weak institutions, fragile oversight, limited digital systems	Adapt tools (e.g. integrity pacts, open contracting) to local legal and technical capacity	Elite capture, corruption, misuse of aid
Participation & Inclusivity	Broad citizen engagement, consultation, marginalized voices	Communities dispersed, limited capacity for large-scale consultations	Use context-appropriate participation (local forums, community monitoring, adapted methods)	Exclusion, grievances, delegitimization
Sustainability & Resilience	Environmental and social safeguards, long-term resilience	Pressure for rapid delivery; limited capacity for assessments	Simplify but preserve safeguards (e.g. scaled EIAs, local resilience planning)	Short-lived or harmful infrastructure, ecological degradation
Fairness & Equity	Equitable distribution of resources	Patronage politics, elite capture, contested legitimacy	Transparent allocation criteria, monitoring by independent or civic actors	Renewed inequality, deepened divisions
Universality vs. Local Ownership	Upholding universal ethical standards	Risk of imposing external norms without adaptation	Blend global benchmarks with local practices to enhance legitimacy	Cultural misfit, rejection of frameworks, unsustainable recovery

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3. Ethical Challenges in Post-War Public Works

3.1. Practical Obstacles to Ethical Project Delivery

While the principles of ethical project management are well established in theory, their practical implementation in post-war contexts is fraught with significant obstacles. The legacies of conflict (i.e. fragile political systems, weakened institutions, polarized societies, and destroyed economies) create an environment in which adherence to ethical standards becomes exceedingly difficult. The urgency to restore essential services often collides with the slower, more deliberate processes required for transparency, accountability, and inclusivity. Under these conditions, reconstruction efforts risk being shaped by expediency rather than integrity.

One of the defining characteristics of post-war recovery is the scale and speed of international aid inflows. Large amounts of funding, often disbursed quickly and under pressure to show visible results, create conditions ripe for corruption, elite capture, and misallocation of resources. Weak or compromised institutions are often unable to effectively monitor or regulate this influx, allowing opportunities for unethical practices to proliferate. In such contexts, even well-intentioned actors may find themselves making ethically questionable trade-offs between speed, cost, and inclusivity (Lindberg & Orjuela, 2014)

These challenges have consequences that extend far beyond inefficiency or financial loss. When reconstruction is perceived as corrupt, exclusionary, or unfair, it undermines the legitimacy of both national governments and international partners. Instead of contributing to peacebuilding, public works projects can deepen mistrust, exacerbate social divisions, and in some cases, even fuel renewed conflict. The stakes are therefore particularly high: in post-war environments, ethical lapses are not merely technical failures but political acts with long-term implications for peace and stability.

The sections that follow examine the most pressing ethical challenges in post-war public works, including corruption and misuse of funds, opaque procurement processes, exclusion of marginalized groups, exploitation of vulnerable labor, environmental negligence, and the persistent tension between urgency and ethical standards. Together, these challenges highlight the fragile terrain on which project managers, governments, and donors must operate, underscoring the need for ethical vigilance at every stage of reconstruction.

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Table 12. Ethical Challenges in Post-War Public Works

Challenge	Root Causes	Manifestations in Reconstruction	Consequences if Unaddressed
Corruption & Misuse of Funds	Rapid aid inflows, weak oversight, elite capture	Diversion of resources, inflated costs, patronage networks	Loss of trust, delegitimization of government/donors, deepened inequalities
Opaque Procurement	Fragile institutions, political interference	Closed tenders, favoritism in contracts, lack of disclosure	Perceptions of injustice, poor-quality infrastructure
Exclusion of Marginalized Groups	Polarized societies, entrenched inequalities	Projects bypass women, minorities, displaced populations	Reinforces divisions, risks renewed conflict
Exploitation of Vulnerable Labor	High unemployment, weak labor protections	Refugees, displaced, demobilized combatants in unsafe or underpaid jobs	Social grievances, perpetuation of exploitation cycles
Environmental Negligence	Urgency of visible progress, limited capacity for assessments	Shortcuts on safeguards, unsustainable projects	Ecological degradation, resource conflicts, climate vulnerability
Urgency vs. Ethical Standards	Political pressure for quick results, donor demands	Rushed projects, trade-offs on consultation & quality	Unsustainable infrastructure, erosion of legitimacy

3.2.   Corruption and Misuse of Funds

Corruption is perhaps the most pervasive ethical challenge in post-war reconstruction and is frequently cited as a central factor undermining recovery efforts. The sudden inflow of donor funding (often amounting to billions of dollars in a very short timeframe) creates fertile ground for embezzlement, bribery, and the diversion of resources. Weak oversight institutions, combined with the urgency to disburse funds quickly, often mean that standard accountability mechanisms are bypassed or inadequately enforced (Transparency International, 2016; 2024). In such environments, corruption becomes not an exception but a systemic feature of reconstruction.

The consequences of corruption extend far beyond financial inefficiency. Misappropriated funds that should have supported schools, hospitals, or water systems often end up enriching political elites, warlords, or private contractors with political connections. This not only deprives communities of essential services but also reinforces perceptions of inequality and exclusion. When citizens see reconstruction funds being siphoned off or misused, public trust in both national governments and international donors is severely eroded. Corruption in reconstruction therefore carries a double cost: it wastes scarce resources and delegitimizes the very institutions meant to safeguard peace (Lindberg & Orjuela, 2014).

The cases of Iraq and Afghanistan starkly illustrate these dynamics. In Iraq, the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction (SIGIR) reported billions of dollars lost due to fraud, waste, and mismanagement during the reconstruction period following the 2003 invasion (SIGIR, 2013).

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Similarly, in Afghanistan, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) found that a significant share of international aid (estimated by some analysts at up to 40 percent) was lost to corruption, inflated contracts, and projects that were never completed or quickly fell into disrepair (SIGAR, 2021). "Ghost schools" and unused hospitals became emblematic of how corruption undermined not only service delivery but also the credibility of both the Afghan state and its international partners.

Corruption also exacerbates the political economy of conflict. Funds diverted into patronage networks strengthen elite capture, consolidate war economies, and often entrench the same power structures that fueled the conflict in the first place (Le Billon, 2008). In this sense, corruption in post-war reconstruction is not simply a financial irregularity; it is a political act that undermines the peace process and increases the risk of relapse into violence. Addressing corruption is therefore a core ethical obligation in project management and a precondition for sustainable recovery (Acostamadiedo Gutiérrez, 2019).

Table 13. Corruption in Post-War Reconstruction

Dimension	Key Features	Consequences
Root Causes	Sudden inflows of donor aid, weak oversight, urgency to disburse funds	Systemic corruption, bypassed accountability mechanisms
Forms of Corruption	Embezzlement, bribery, inflated contracts, diversion of resources, "ghost projects"	Misuse of funds meant for schools, hospitals, water systems
Impact on Services	Loss of resources for essential infrastructure	Communities deprived of education, healthcare, water access
Impact on Legitimacy	Erodes trust in governments and donors	Reinforces perceptions of inequality and exclusion
Impact on Political Economy	Strengthens patronage networks, consolidates war economies	Entrenches power structures that fueled conflict
Ethical Implication	Corruption is not a "technical issue" but a core political challenge	Undermines peacebuilding and increases risk of renewed violence

3.3. Opaque Procurement and Contracting

Procurement processes are a critical arena where the principles of ethical project management are most often compromised in post-conflict contexts. In the urgency to deliver visible results, procurement procedures are frequently rushed, conducted without sufficient due diligence, and subject to political interference. Contracts may be awarded to politically connected firms or foreign contractors through non-competitive bidding, leading to inflated costs, substandard work, and, in many cases, incomplete or abandoned projects (World Bank, 2018). These practices undermine not only the efficiency of reconstruction but also the credibility of the institutions tasked with delivering it.

The opacity of procurement is compounded by weak oversight mechanisms. In post-war environments, regulatory bodies, audit agencies, and anti-corruption commissions often lack

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both the authority and resources to monitor contracting processes effectively. This institutional fragility allows procurement decisions to be shielded from public scrutiny, thereby fostering environments where nepotism, favoritism, and collusion between officials and contractors flourish. Over time, such patterns create a cycle of mistrust between citizens and the state, as communities come to associate reconstruction projects with corruption rather than recovery (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016).

Real-world examples underscore the scale of this challenge. In Afghanistan, the U.S. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) documented cases where contracts for schools, clinics, and roads were awarded to firms with political ties despite lacking technical expertise, resulting in unsafe or unfinished infrastructure (SIGAR, 2021). In Iraq, similar patterns emerged as large, non-transparent contracts were awarded to politically favored companies, many of which delivered poor-quality work at inflated prices (SIGIR, 2013). These practices not only wasted resources but also contributed to public perceptions that reconstruction served elite interests rather than community needs.

The consequences of opaque procurement extend beyond immediate inefficiency. By concentrating resources in the hands of politically connected actors, such practices reinforce existing power imbalances and marginalize communities already disadvantaged by conflict. They also weaken opportunities for local firms to participate in reconstruction, undermining job creation and economic recovery. In this sense, procurement is not a neutral technical process but a deeply political one that shapes who benefits from reconstruction and who remains excluded. Addressing procurement opacity through transparent bidding systems, open contracting initiatives, and independent oversight is therefore essential for embedding ethics into post-war reconstruction (Open Contracting Partnership, 2015; 2019).

Table 14. Procurement in Post-War Reconstruction

Dimension	Key Issues	Consequences	Ethical Response
Urgency & Political Interference	Rushed procedures, non-competitive bidding, contracts to politically connected or foreign firms	Inflated costs, poor-quality or incomplete projects	Transparent bidding, fair competition
Weak Oversight	Under-resourced regulatory bodies, audit agencies, and anti-corruption commissions	Shielded decision-making, nepotism, favoritism, collusion	Independent monitoring, third-party audits
Public Perceptions	Communities associate reconstruction with corruption rather than recovery	Cycle of mistrust between citizens and the state	Open contracting, public access to procurement data
Economic Impact	Exclusion of local firms, preference for elites or foreign contractors	Lost opportunities for jobs, weakened local recovery	Local participation requirements, capacity-building
Political Impact	Reinforcement of existing power imbalances	Marginalization of disadvantaged communities	Integrity pacts, civic oversight

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3.4. Exclusion of Marginalized Communities

A core ethical challenge in post-war reconstruction is the exclusion of marginalized groups from the benefits of public works. Marginalization can occur along ethnic, religious, gendered, or geographic lines, often reflecting the same cleavages that fueled conflict in the first place. When reconstruction resources are distributed unevenly (whether intentionally through political favoritism or unintentionally through poor planning) they risk entrenching inequality and deepening social divisions. The result is not only inequitable service delivery but also the erosion of trust in state institutions and international donors (Lindberg & Orjuela, 2014).

The case of Bosnia and Herzegovina illustrates this danger vividly. Following the Dayton Peace Agreement (1995), donor-funded reconstruction focused heavily on restoring housing and utilities. However, critics argue that these efforts often reinforced ethnic segregation by prioritizing returns and investments along ethnic lines, thereby hardening wartime divisions rather than promoting reconciliation (Donais, 2009). Instead of fostering integration, public works became part of a political process that cemented separation, leaving minority communities underserved and alienated.

Similar dynamics have been observed in other post-conflict settings. In South Sudan, for example, reconstruction projects were frequently concentrated in the capital, Juba, while peripheral regions remained neglected. This uneven distribution of resources exacerbated regional grievances and fueled perceptions of favoritism by the central government. Gender-based exclusion is also a recurring issue: women, who often bear the brunt of conflict and displacement, are frequently underrepresented in consultation processes, resulting in infrastructure projects that fail to meet their specific needs, such as maternal health services or safe sanitation facilities.

Ethical project management, by contrast, demands a deliberate commitment to fairness and equity. Ensuring equitable access to infrastructure and services requires not only technical planning but also political will to address historical inequalities. This may involve affirmative action in resource allocation, participatory mechanisms that amplify the voices of marginalized groups, and monitoring systems that assess the inclusivity of reconstruction outcomes. In this way, public works can serve not only as physical assets but also as instruments of reconciliation, helping to mend the social fabric of war-torn societies.

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Table 15. Exclusion of Marginalized Groups in Post-War Reconstruction

Dimension	Key Issues	Consequences	Ethical Responses
Ethnic / Religious Exclusion	Reconstruction aligned with dominant groups or political favoritism	Reinforces wartime divisions, entrenches inequality	Equitable allocation, reconciliation-oriented planning
Geographic Exclusion	Concentration of projects in capitals or politically favored regions	Peripheral regions neglected, fueling regional grievances	Balanced regional distribution, targeted rural investment
Gender-Based Exclusion	Women underrepresented in consultations; projects overlook specific needs	Lack of maternal health, safe sanitation, women's safety	Gender-sensitive planning, affirmative inclusion mechanisms
Root Cause	Political favoritism, weak planning, historical inequalities	Entrenched exclusion, mistrust of state and donors	Affirmative action, monitoring of inclusivity
Ethical Imperative	Fairness & equity in access to public works	Without inclusivity, reconstruction fuels conflict risks	Participatory planning, equity audits, social monitoring

3.5. Exploitation of Vulnerable Labor

Reconstruction efforts in post-war settings frequently rely on large labor forces drawn from vulnerable populations, including refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees, and demobilized combatants. While these groups represent an important human resource for rebuilding societies, they are also among the most at risk of exploitation. In the absence of strong labor protections and enforcement mechanisms, workers often encounter unsafe conditions, delayed or withheld wages, and, in extreme cases, forced or child labor (ILO, 2017). Such practices violate international human rights standards and undermine the ethical legitimacy of reconstruction projects.

The vulnerabilities of these populations are heightened by their socio-economic precarity. Refugees and IDPs, for instance, may accept exploitative working arrangements out of desperation to secure income or housing. Demobilized combatants, targeted for reintegration through labor-intensive reconstruction programs, are similarly vulnerable: when promised wages are delayed or working conditions prove unsafe, the risk of their remobilization into armed groups increases. Thus, unethical labor practices do not simply harm individuals, they threaten the broader peace process by perpetuating cycles of grievance and instability.

Empirical evidence illustrates the consequences of such ethical lapses. In Afghanistan and Iraq, reports surfaced of local laborers hired by international contractors working in hazardous conditions without proper safety equipment, while wage theft and non-payment were widespread in subcontracting chains (SIGAR, 2021). In South Sudan, construction projects employing demobilized soldiers often failed to deliver promised compensation, fueling frustration among ex-combatants and undermining disarmament, demobilization, and

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reintegration (DDR) programs (Schjødt, 2018). These examples demonstrate how neglecting labor ethics can erode confidence in both national authorities and international donors.

Ethical project management in reconstruction must therefore prioritize the protection of labor rights. This includes ensuring safe working environments, timely and fair payment, and the prohibition of exploitative practices such as child labor and coerced recruitment. Moreover, reconstruction projects should be designed not only to create short-term employment but also to provide skills training and long-term livelihood opportunities for vulnerable populations. By doing so, labor-intensive reconstruction can serve as both an economic engine and a peacebuilding tool, transforming vulnerable groups from marginalized victims into active contributors to recovery.

Table 16. Labor Exploitation in Post-War Reconstruction

Dimension	Key Issues	Consequences	Ethical Responses
Vulnerable Labor Pools	Refugees, IDPs, returnees, demobilized combatants	High risk of unsafe conditions, wage theft, child/forced labor	Prioritize protections for vulnerable groups
Unsafe Conditions	Lack of safety equipment, poor oversight of contractors	Worker injuries, deaths, erosion of project legitimacy	Enforce occupational health & safety standards
Delayed / Withheld Wages	Weak monitoring of subcontractors, corrupt practices	Economic hardship, remobilization risks	Transparent payment systems, independent audits
Risk of Remobilization	Demobilized soldiers denied fair compensation	Return to armed groups, undermining DDR programs	Guarantee fair contracts, link work to reintegration support
Ethical Imperative	Reconstruction must not exploit desperation	Exploitation fuels grievances and instability	Fair wages, safe work, ban on child labor, skills training
Transformative Potential	Labor-intensive programs as peacebuilding tools	Empower vulnerable groups, rebuild trust, support recovery	Employment + capacity building for long-term livelihoods

3.6.   Environmental Negligence and Short-Termism

In the rush to demonstrate visible recovery after war, environmental standards are often treated as secondary concerns. Governments and donors, under pressure to produce quick results, may prioritize speed and cost over sustainability and resilience. As a result, reconstruction frequently relies on rapid construction using substandard materials, inadequate planning, and a disregard for ecological impacts. This short-termism undermines the durability of infrastructure and risks creating new vulnerabilities for communities already struggling to recover (UNEP, 2018).

One common manifestation of this problem is the failure to conduct environmental and social impact assessments (ESIAs) before initiating large-scale projects. Roads may be constructed

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without consideration of their impact on local ecosystems; housing projects may be built on floodplains or unstable terrain; and water systems may be installed without safeguards against over-extraction or contamination. These oversights not only compromise the effectiveness of reconstruction but also generate long-term costs in terms of environmental degradation, health risks, and community displacement.

The experience of post-earthquake Haiti illustrates the dangers of environmentally negligent reconstruction. Hastily constructed housing projects, intended to provide rapid shelter for displaced populations, were often built with poor-quality materials and without adequate planning. Within a few years, many of these structures collapsed or became uninhabitable, wasting scarce resources and compounding social frustration (Schuller & Morales, 2012). Although Haiti is not a post-war case, the parallels highlight how short-term reconstruction imperatives can undermine both safety and sustainability.

Similar challenges have been documented in post-war contexts. In Afghanistan, road construction projects funded by international donors often ignored basic drainage and maintenance needs, leading to rapid deterioration within a few seasons. In South Sudan, large-scale logging and land clearing linked to reconstruction exacerbated deforestation and displaced rural communities, further destabilizing fragile livelihoods (UNEP, 2024). These examples reveal that reconstruction projects that overlook environmental sustainability may unintentionally create new forms of insecurity, from food and water scarcity to increased vulnerability to natural disasters.

Ethical project management requires striking a careful balance between speed and sustainability. While immediate reconstruction is necessary to restore livelihoods and demonstrate progress, it must be pursued in a way that safeguards ecological systems and supports long-term resilience. Incorporating environmental standards through ESIAs, use of sustainable materials, and resilience planning, ensures that post-war reconstruction does not merely replicate pre-conflict vulnerabilities. Instead, it offers an opportunity to "build back better," creating infrastructure that is durable, environmentally responsible, and capable of withstanding future shocks.

Table 17. Environmental Negligence in Post-War Reconstruction

Dimension	Key Issues	Consequences	Ethical Responses
Short-Termism	Pressure for speed and low costs; substandard materials	Fragile infrastructure, wasted resources, new vulnerabilities	Balance urgency with resilience planning
Lack of ESIAs	Failure to conduct environmental & social impact assessments	Roads, housing, and water projects causing ecological damage, unsafe siting	Mandatory ESIAs, ecological safeguards
Health & Safety Risks	Projects built on unstable terrain, floodplains, or with contaminated water sources	Community displacement, public health crises	Integrate risk-sensitive land use planning
Long-Term Degradation	Over-extraction of resources, deforestation, poor waste management	Environmental decline, food & water insecurity, disaster vulnerability	Sustainable resource use, resilient design standards

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Ethical Imperative	Reconstruction must not sacrifice future stability for immediate gains	Creates "new insecurities" in already fragile societies	Use sustainable materials, embed resilience in all projects
Transformative Potential	Reconstruction as an opportunity to "build back better"	Durable, resilient, environmentally sound infrastructure	Embed sustainability as a core recovery principle

3.7. The Tension Between Urgency and Ethics

Perhaps the most fundamental challenge in post-war reconstruction is the persistent tension between the urgent demand for visible recovery and the slower, more deliberate processes required to uphold ethical standards. In the immediate aftermath of conflict, governments and international donors face immense pressure to demonstrate that peace brings tangible benefits. Citizens expect rapid improvements in infrastructure and services (i.e. electricity, schools, healthcare facilities, etc.) as visible "peace dividends" that validate the sacrifices made during war and signal a break with the past. Donors, for their part, often prioritize quick, high-profile projects to showcase political success to domestic audiences and justify their financial commitments abroad (Anderson, Brown, & Jean, 2012).

However, this drive for speed frequently collides with the careful planning, consultation, and oversight necessary for ethical project management. Transparent procurement procedures, community engagement processes, and environmental assessments all take time. In fragile states with weak institutional capacity, these safeguards are often seen as obstacles to efficiency and may be bypassed in favor of expedited contracting and delivery. While such shortcuts can accelerate visible outputs in the short term, they typically undermine long-term sustainability, inclusivity, and public trust.

The consequences of privileging urgency over ethics are well documented. In Afghanistan, donor-driven timelines led to the rapid construction of schools and clinics, many of which were later found abandoned, unsafe, or poorly utilized because local communities had not been adequately consulted or involved in their maintenance (SIGAR, 2021). Similarly, in Iraq, large-scale projects were launched quickly to demonstrate political progress, but many collapsed due to corruption, inadequate oversight, and lack of local ownership (SIGIR, 2013). These failures not only wasted resources but also fueled perceptions of illegitimacy, reinforcing cynicism toward both international actors and national authorities.

The dilemma is therefore profound: cutting corners may create the illusion of rapid progress, but it risks undermining the deeper goals of peacebuilding and state-building. Ethical project management requires finding a balance between urgency and integrity, delivering timely improvements without sacrificing inclusivity, accountability, or sustainability. In practice, this means designing phased approaches that can deliver quick wins while simultaneously embedding longer-term safeguards. Without such balance, reconstruction risks becoming a cycle of poorly executed projects that erode rather than restore public confidence.

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Table 18. Urgency vs. Ethics in Post-War Reconstruction

Dimension	Drivers of Urgency	Ethical Requirements	Consequences of Prioritizing Speed	Balanced Approach
Political Pressure	Governments & donors want visible "peace dividends" to show legitimacy and success	Transparent procurement, oversight, accountability	Shortcuts in contracting, corruption, inflated costs	Quick wins paired with independent audits
Citizen Expectations	Populations expect rapid access to services (schools, clinics, electricity)	Community consultation, inclusivity, local ownership	Misaligned projects, abandoned or unsafe facilities	Participatory planning with phased delivery
Donor Incentives	Donors showcase high-profile projects to domestic constituencies	Environmental and social safeguards	Projects deteriorate quickly, poor sustainability	Align donor timelines with local capacity
Institutional Weakness	Fragile states lack strong oversight or capacity	Careful planning, feasibility studies, monitoring	Collapsed projects, wasted resources, public mistrust	Capacity-building alongside project rollout
Overall Dilemma	Speed = visible progress now	Ethics = sustainable progress later	Illusion of recovery that undermines trust and stability	Balanced sequencing: short-term delivery + long-term safeguards

4. Why Ethics Matter in Post-War Reconstruction

4.1. Linking Integrity to Sustainable Peace

Ethical project management is not merely a desirable feature of reconstruction, it is a central determinant of the success and sustainability of post-war recovery. In societies emerging from conflict, the rebuilding of infrastructure is deeply intertwined with the rebuilding of trust, legitimacy, and social cohesion. Roads, schools, hospitals, and water systems are not only material assets but also symbolic demonstrations of whether the new political order is committed to fairness, accountability, and inclusivity. The manner in which these projects are conceived, financed, and delivered carries consequences that extend far beyond the realm of technical efficiency.

Fragile post-war contexts are marked by minimal public trust in government, widespread suspicion of elites, and often polarized social divisions. In such settings, every decision about public works such as where to build, who is employed, how contracts are awarded, and who benefits can be politically charged. Infrastructure can easily become a site of contention, reinforcing perceptions of inequality and exclusion if managed without integrity. Conversely, ethically grounded approaches can help foster legitimacy, demonstrate a break from past injustices, and promote reconciliation among divided communities.

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Moreover, ethical project management plays a preventive role by reducing the risk of conflict relapse. Corruption, inequity, and exclusion in reconstruction have been shown to exacerbate grievances, undermine peace agreements, and contribute to renewed violence (Collier, Hoeffler, & Söderbom, 2008). By embedding transparency, accountability, and participation in reconstruction processes, project managers and policymakers can create a virtuous cycle in which infrastructure not only restores services but also contributes to long-term stability and resilience.

In short, ethics are not peripheral to post-war reconstruction; they are foundational. Without an ethical compass, reconstruction risks becoming a process that enriches elites, alienates citizens, and destabilizes fragile peace settlements. With ethics at the center, however, public works can serve as bridges (both literal and metaphorical) toward trust, justice, and sustainable peace.

Table 18. Ethics as a Foundation of Post-War Reconstruction

Dimension	Key Issues	Consequences if Neglected	Positive Outcomes if Embedded
Trust & Legitimacy	Fragile states face low public trust, suspicion of elites	Reinforces perceptions of inequality and exclusion	Builds citizen confidence, strengthens legitimacy
Social Cohesion	Divided societies shaped by conflict legacies	Infrastructure fuels contention, deepens divisions	Projects become symbols of fairness and reconciliation
Political Sensitivity	Decisions on location, employment, contracts highly politicized	Public works perceived as elite capture	Demonstrates inclusivity, breaks from past injustices
Conflict Prevention	Corruption, inequity, exclusion undermine peace	Grievances reignite violence, peace agreements collapse	Transparency, accountability, participation reduce relapse risk
Symbolic Power of Infrastructure	Roads, schools, hospitals = more than material assets	Risk of alienation, wasted opportunity	Serve as visible demonstrations of justice & renewal
Foundational Role of Ethics	Ethics often sidelined as "aspirational"	Recovery becomes elite enrichment & destabilization	Ethics as compass: recovery that delivers trust, justice, and sustainable peace

4.2. Restoring Trust in Fragile Institutions

In post-conflict states, public institutions frequently suffer from a profound legitimacy deficit. Years of violence, corruption, and political exclusion often leave governments widely perceived as self-serving, predatory, or biased in favor of particular groups. Citizens who have experienced systemic injustice may be deeply skeptical of official claims to act in the public interest. Under these conditions, reconstruction projects are not only technical exercises but also highly visible tests of government credibility. The way public works are financed, managed, and delivered becomes a powerful signal of whether institutions are capable of turning the page on past practices and governing inclusively.

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Transparent and accountable project management can therefore serve as an important counterbalance to widespread mistrust. Open procurement processes, public disclosure of contracts, and clear reporting on expenditures all contribute to building confidence that resources are being used responsibly. When reconstruction funds are managed ethically, they signal a decisive break from patterns of corruption and exploitation that may have contributed to conflict in the first place. Citizens observing such practices are more likely to view governments and their international partners as committed to fairness and the collective good.

Real-world examples illustrate the importance of this dynamic. In Sierra Leone, following the end of the civil war in 2002, donor-supported auditing mechanisms and joint monitoring frameworks played a crucial role in ensuring that reconstruction funds were not misappropriated. These measures enhanced the credibility of both the government and donor agencies, strengthening fragile institutions during a critical period of recovery (Fanthorpe & Sesay, 2009). By contrast, in Afghanistan and Iraq, widespread corruption in reconstruction contracting not only wasted resources but also undermined state legitimacy, reinforcing perceptions that governments were incapable (or unwilling) to act in the public interest (SIGAR, 2021; SIGIR, 2013).

In this sense, ethical project management does more than ensure efficient outcomes: it is central to rebuilding the very foundations of state legitimacy. Where citizens perceive fairness and accountability in the delivery of public works, they are more likely to extend trust to public institutions. Without such trust, even the most ambitious reconstruction projects risk being dismissed as illegitimate or self-serving.

Table 19. Ethical Project Management and State Legitimacy in Post-War Contexts

Dimension	Key Issues	Consequences if Neglected	Positive Outcomes if Embedded
Legitimacy Deficit	Governments seen as corrupt, biased, self-serving	Deep public mistrust, rejection of state authority	Opportunity to demonstrate fairness & renewal
Transparency	Lack of open procurement & reporting	Fuels suspicions of misuse, elite capture	Open contracts & clear reporting signal responsibility
Accountability	Weak oversight, unchecked corruption	Funds diverted, projects abandoned	Independent audits, sanctions deter malpractice
Symbolism of Public Works	Projects viewed as political tools	Infrastructure perceived as illegitimate or self-serving	Delivery seen as serving collective good
Impact on Trust	Citizens skeptical of state & donors	Reconstruction dismissed as exploitation	Fair & ethical management fosters citizen confidence
Ethical Imperative	Ethics central to project delivery	Without ethics / wasted resources & eroded legitimacy	With ethics / stronger institutions & peacebuilding

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4.3. Preventing Conflict Relapse

One of the most pressing concerns in post-war reconstruction is the risk of conflict relapse. Research consistently shows that countries emerging from war face a high probability of returning to violence within the first decade of peace, particularly when governance failures persist (Collier, Hoeffler, & Söderbom, 2008). Unethical reconstruction (characterized by corruption, favoritism, or exclusion) can aggravate rather than resolve the grievances that fueled conflict in the first place. When citizens see reconstruction resources misallocated or captured by elites, their confidence in the peace process erodes, creating fertile ground for renewed instability.

Corruption is especially destabilizing in fragile settings. It not only drains resources from urgently needed services but also symbolizes the continuation of unjust and exploitative practices. For example, in Afghanistan, billions of dollars in international aid were lost to corruption, embezzlement, and poorly executed projects. This fueled widespread resentment and reinforced the perception that both the Afghan government and its international partners were complicit in misuse of resources (SIGAR, 2021). Insurgent groups capitalized on this discontent, using the failures of reconstruction as evidence of government illegitimacy.

Favoritism and exclusion can be equally destabilizing. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, post-war reconstruction often reinforced ethnic separation by prioritizing certain communities over others, which deepened divisions and undermined reconciliation efforts (Donais, 2009). Similarly, in South Sudan, uneven allocation of reconstruction projects across regions contributed to perceptions of political marginalization and fueled renewed outbreaks of violence in the years following independence. These cases illustrate how inequitable reconstruction not only fails to address the root causes of conflict but can actively reproduce them.

By contrast, ethical project management offers a pathway to preventing conflict relapse. When resources are distributed fairly, when procurement processes are transparent, and when communities are included in decision-making, reconstruction projects help foster trust and demonstrate that peace brings tangible, equitable benefits. Infrastructure, in this context, becomes more than a service, it becomes a peace dividend that strengthens the social contract between citizens and the state. Ethical approaches thus function as preventive tools, reducing the likelihood that old grievances will resurface and that societies will slide back into violence.

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Table 20. Ethical Project Management and the Risk of Conflict Relapse

Dimension	Unethical Practices	Consequences	Ethical Alternatives
Corruption	Embezzlement, inflated contracts, poorly executed projects	Loss of resources, public resentment, insurgent recruitment	Transparent procurement, independent audits, anti-corruption tools
Favoritism	Allocation skewed toward politically connected or dominant groups	Deepens inequalities, fuels grievances	Equitable resource allocation, inclusivity monitoring
Exclusion	Marginalized groups left out of decision-making & benefits	Perceptions of alienation, undermined reconciliation	Participatory planning, deliberate inclusion of vulnerable groups
Symbolism of Reconstruction	Projects seen as serving elites or external actors	Legitimacy crisis, loss of faith in peace process	Infrastructure as "peace dividend" demonstrating fairness
Conflict Prevention Role	Ignoring ethics reproduces root causes of conflict	High risk of relapse within a decade	Ethical project management builds trust, strengthens social contract

4.4.   Promoting Social Cohesion and Equity

Public works are not simply technical outputs; they are deeply political instruments that shape patterns of inclusion and exclusion within societies. In fragile, post-war contexts, where divisions along ethnic, religious, or regional lines remain raw, the allocation of reconstruction resources carries symbolic and material significance. Decisions about where to build a road, who is employed in its construction, or which communities receive access to electricity or clean water can either bridge divides or deepen them. As such, public works have a direct impact on social cohesion and the prospects for reconciliation.

When reconstruction projects deliberately prioritize marginalized groups and foster participatory planning, they can contribute meaningfully to reconciliation and social healing. For instance, initiatives in Rwanda following the 1994 genocide sought to integrate local communities into decision-making through programs such as Umuganda (community work), which encouraged collective participation in rebuilding. These practices not only addressed urgent infrastructural needs but also provided opportunities for citizens to cooperate across social divides, reinforcing a sense of shared purpose and national unity (Ansoms & Rostagno, 2012). Similarly, participatory water and sanitation projects in Sierra Leone emphasized inclusivity by engaging local women's groups, thereby ensuring that infrastructure addressed the needs of communities historically excluded from decision-making (Fanthorpe & Sesay, 2009).

Conversely, when public works projects sideline particular groups, they can easily become sources of resentment and division. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the uneven distribution of reconstruction funds in the late 1990s often favored communities aligned with dominant political parties, reinforcing ethnic separation rather than promoting integration (Donais, 2009). In South Sudan, infrastructure investments that disproportionately benefited urban centers such

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as Juba exacerbated tensions with rural populations who felt neglected, fueling perceptions of marginalization and stoking renewed conflict.

Ethical approaches to project management are therefore essential to transform public works into instruments of unity rather than division. This involves more than avoiding discrimination; it requires proactive measures to ensure equity in resource allocation, deliberate inclusion of marginalized voices in planning processes, and monitoring systems that evaluate whether reconstruction is advancing social justice. By embedding fairness and participation into reconstruction, public works can help societies move beyond the legacies of conflict, turning infrastructure into a foundation for trust, reconciliation, and long-term peace.

Table 21. Public Works as Instruments of Inclusion or Exclusion

Dimension	Inclusive / Ethical Approaches	Exclusionary / Unethical Approaches	Consequences
Allocation of Resources	Equitable distribution across ethnic, religious, and regional groups	Concentration in favored regions or communities	Inclusion fosters trust; exclusion fuels grievances
Participation in Planning	Local consultation, participatory forums, inclusion of marginalized groups (women, minorities, displaced)	Top-down decision-making, neglect of vulnerable voices	Participation builds legitimacy & relevance; exclusion alienates citizens
Employment Practices	Hiring vulnerable populations (IDPs, ex-combatants, rural poor) fairly and transparently	Nepotism, elite capture of jobs and contracts	Fair hiring supports reconciliation; favoritism entrenches inequality
Symbolic Function	Infrastructure as a peace dividend, visibly demonstrating fairness and unity	Infrastructure seen as benefiting elites or dominant groups	Inclusive projects foster cohesion; biased ones deepen division
Monitoring & Equity Audits	Systems to assess inclusivity, fairness, and impact on social justice	Lack of oversight allows inequities to persist	Monitoring prevents marginalization

4.5. Attracting and Sustaining International Report

Donors and international financial institutions play a central role in financing post-war reconstruction, often providing the bulk of resources needed to restore infrastructure and essential services. In recent decades, these actors have increasingly conditioned aid and loans on adherence to governance, transparency, and anti-corruption standards. Ethical project management is therefore not only a moral imperative but also a strategic tool for securing and sustaining external assistance. Projects that demonstrate transparency, accountability, and inclusivity are more likely to attract continued funding, technical expertise, and long-term partnerships (OECD, 2016; 2025).

The logic behind these conditions is clear: international stakeholders are accountable to their own taxpayers, constituencies, or boards of directors. They must be able to demonstrate that

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funds disbursed for reconstruction are being used effectively and responsibly. When corruption scandals or evidence of mismanagement emerge, donor governments and financial institutions often respond by reducing aid flows, suspending programs, or imposing stricter oversight. Such measures can disrupt recovery and exacerbate fragility. By contrast, when recipient governments and project managers embed ethics into procurement, reporting, and monitoring systems, they build confidence among donors that reconstruction resources are safeguarded against misuse.

Examples from recent history highlight this dynamic. In Liberia, following the end of its civil war in 2003, the establishment of transparent financial management systems under the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Program (GEMAP) reassured donors and helped sustain significant aid inflows for infrastructure and institutional reforms (Sawyer, 2005). Conversely, in Afghanistan, persistent corruption in public works projects (including so-called "ghost schools" and unfinished hospitals) undermined donor trust and contributed to declining international willingness to fund reconstruction efforts in later years (SIGAR, 2021).

Ethical project management thus carries pragmatic benefits that extend beyond domestic legitimacy. It functions as a confidence-building mechanism in international relations, signaling that post-war governments and implementing agencies are committed to responsible stewardship of external resources. By meeting governance and accountability standards, reconstruction projects not only secure vital funding but also strengthen partnerships that are essential for long-term recovery. In this way, ethics serve as both a moral compass and a practical strategy for sustaining international support in fragile contexts.

Table 22. Donors, Ethics, and Post-War Reconstruction

Dimension	Donor Expectations	If Ethics Are Neglected	If Ethics Are Upheld
Governance Standards	Transparency, accountability, anti-corruption safeguards	Aid suspension, stricter oversight, reduced funding	Sustained donor confidence and support
Accountability to Constituencies	Donors must justify effective use of funds to taxpayers/boards	Corruption scandals → political backlash	Demonstrated responsibility / continued aid
Impact on Aid Flows	Funding conditional on integrity and oversight	Declining willingness to finance reconstruction	Increased, reliable inflows of aid and loans
Partnerships & Expertise	Ethics as a foundation for collaboration	Weak partnerships, donor disengagement	Strong partnerships, technical assistance, capacity-building
Strategic Function of Ethics	Ethics as both moral and practical tool	Fragility exacerbated by interrupted funding	Ethics reinforce legitimacy and long-term recovery

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4.6. Building Sustainable and Resilient Infrastructure

Ethical project management requires that reconstruction efforts extend beyond immediate recovery to incorporate long-term considerations of environmental and social sustainability. While the urgency of post-war rebuilding often drives governments and donors to focus on quick, highly visible outcomes, short-term fixes rarely endure. Roads built with substandard materials, housing constructed without proper planning, or water systems installed without community ownership can deteriorate within a few years, wasting scarce resources and undermining trust. Ethical management, by contrast, emphasizes the responsibility to design and implement projects that meet present needs while also contributing to resilience against future shocks (UNEP, 2018).

Sustainability in reconstruction is multidimensional. Environmentally, it requires safeguarding ecosystems, using appropriate building materials, and conducting environmental and social impact assessments (ESIAs) to minimize harm. Socially, it involves ensuring that infrastructure serves the long-term interests of communities, is accessible to marginalized groups, and is supported by adequate maintenance and capacity-building mechanisms. Economically, it means investing in durable infrastructure that can withstand future crises (whether natural disasters, economic downturns, or renewed instability) without requiring constant external intervention.

Examples from past reconstruction efforts illustrate the costs of neglecting sustainability. In Haiti, poorly planned housing projects constructed after the 2010 earthquake collapsed within a few years, leaving families vulnerable once again and fueling public frustration with both the government and international donors (Schuller & Morales, 2012). In Afghanistan, road projects built rapidly to meet donor-driven timelines fell into disrepair due to lack of maintenance planning and inadequate community involvement in their upkeep (SIGAR, 2021). These cases underscore how failure to integrate sustainability into reconstruction undermines both material outcomes and public legitimacy.

Conversely, ethically grounded projects that embed sustainability principles have demonstrated more durable impacts. In Rwanda, investments in community-based watershed management and climate-resilient agriculture projects helped restore degraded land while simultaneously providing livelihoods and reducing tensions over scarce resources (Ansoms & Rostagno, 2012). Such examples illustrate how reconstruction can be harnessed as an opportunity not merely to replace what was lost, but to "build back better," creating infrastructure that enhances resilience, equity, and environmental stewardship.

In this sense, ethics and sustainability are deeply intertwined: both prioritize the long-term well-being of societies over immediate political or symbolic gains. By embedding sustainability into reconstruction, ethical project management ensures that infrastructure is not just a short-lived peace dividend, but a lasting foundation for stability and development.

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Table 23. Ethical Project Management in Post-War Reconstruction: A Comprehensive Framework

Ethical Dimension	Key Ethical Requirements	Risks if Neglected	Positive Outcomes if Upheld
Transparency & Accountability	Open procurement, clear reporting, independent audits	Corruption, elite capture, misuse of funds	Trust in institutions, donor confidence
Fairness & Inclusion	Equitable allocation across ethnic, religious, gender, and regional lines	Exclusion, reinforced divisions, grievances	Social cohesion, reconciliation, equitable service delivery
Labor Protections	Safe conditions, fair wages, no child/forced labor, reintegration of ex-combatants	Exploitation, wage theft, remobilization of fighters	Livelihoods, stability, peacebuilding through jobs
Environmental & Social Sustainability	ESIAs, resilient design, sustainable resource use, community ownership	Unsafe infrastructure, ecological degradation, wasted resources	Durable infrastructure, resilience, environmental stewardship
Urgency vs. Ethics Balance	Phased delivery: quick wins + long-term safeguards	Shortcuts, poor planning, unsustainable projects	Visible peace dividends that endure, balanced recovery
Legitimacy & Trust-Building	Manage projects fairly, openly, and inclusively	Public works seen as elite-serving, delegitimization of state	Restored state legitimacy, stronger social contract
Conflict Prevention	Fair distribution, transparent processes, participatory planning	Reconstruction fuels old grievances, relapse into war	Reconstruction as peace dividend, reduced relapse risk
Donor Confidence & Partnerships	Meet governance standards, protect aid from misuse	Reduced or suspended funding, strained partnerships	Sustained funding, long-term international cooperation

4.7. Infrastructure as a symbol of Peace

Finally, public works in post-war countries carry a symbolic weight that extends far beyond their practical function. A newly built school is not only a place of learning but a visible assurance to parents and children that the sacrifices of war are giving way to a more stable and hopeful future. A bridge that reconnects divided communities is not just a piece of infrastructure but a tangible reminder that coexistence is once again possible. Hospitals, water systems, and electricity grids all embody the idea that peace delivers more than the absence of violence, it brings improvements in daily life.

When managed ethically, such projects become powerful demonstrations of justice, fairness, and renewal. Transparent procurement processes and equitable distribution of resources show citizens that reconstruction is being undertaken in the public interest, not to enrich elites or reward particular groups. Participation of local communities in planning and implementation further enhances this symbolic role by making infrastructure a product of collective effort. In these contexts, public works embody the values of inclusion and accountability, reinforcing the

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sense that peace represents a shared achievement and a foundation for long-term reconciliation.

Conversely, unethical practices can transform these same projects into symbols of exclusion, corruption, or failure. In Iraq and Afghanistan, for example, unfinished or poorly built schools and hospitals became highly visible reminders of corruption and mismanagement, eroding public trust in both governments and international donors (SIGIR, 2013; SIGAR, 2021). In Bosnia and Herzegovina, reconstruction projects that disproportionately favored particular ethnic communities became associated with division rather than unity, signaling that peace had entrenched, rather than overcome, wartime separations (Donais, 2009). In such cases, infrastructure projects (rather than fostering reconciliation) reinforced cynicism, resentment, and alienation.

The symbolic dimension of public works underscores why ethical project management is indispensable in post-war contexts. Infrastructure is never neutral; it is imbued with political and social meaning. Delivered with integrity, it becomes a cornerstone of peacebuilding, visibly representing fairness and hope. Delivered unethically, it risks undermining the very stability it is meant to support. Thus, in post-conflict societies, ethical management of public works ensures that infrastructure is not merely a technical accomplishment but a powerful instrument of peace.

Table 24. The Symbolic Role of Public Works in Post-War Societies

Dimension	Positive Symbolism (Ethical Management)	Negative Symbolism (Unethical Management)	Implications
Schools & Education	Promise of stability, investment in future generations	Unfinished/unsafe schools / corruption, broken promises	Signals whether peace is credible to youth & parents
Bridges & Connectivity	Reconnection of divided communities, social healing	Reinforces inequality if access is selective	Can symbolize unity or division
Hospitals & Health Systems	Commitment to dignity, care, and rebuilding lives	Poorly built/abandoned hospitals → distrust & resentment	Shapes trust in government commitment to welfare
Utilities (Water, Electricity)	Visible peace dividend, improved quality of life	Unequal distribution fuels resentment, exclusion	Infrastructure as everyday test of fairness
Community Participation	Shared effort, inclusivity, local ownership	Exclusion of marginalized groups entrenches division	Participation strengthens symbolic legitimacy
Overall Symbolism	Public works = fairness, justice, reconciliation	Public works = corruption, exclusion, failure	Infrastructure is never neutral; it signals either hope or betrayal

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5. Strategies for Embedding Ethics in Project Management

5.1. Tailoring Global Ethics to Fragile Settings

While the challenges of maintaining ethical standards in post-war public works are considerable, they are not insurmountable. A range of strategies has been developed and tested across different reconstruction contexts to mitigate risks, enhance accountability, and ensure that public works meet both technical and moral obligations (Collier et *al*., 2008). These strategies span institutional reforms, procedural innovations, and participatory mechanisms that, taken together, provide a framework for embedding ethics into every stage of the project cycle.

Institutional reforms focus on strengthening governance systems that regulate procurement, contracting, and financial management. Without such reforms, even well-designed reconstruction programs remain vulnerable to elite capture and corruption. Procedural innovations, such as open contracting platforms, third-party audits, and integrity pacts, create greater transparency and reduce opportunities for mismanagement (Open Contracting Partnership, 2015; 2019). At the same time, participatory approaches (i.e. community consultations, citizen monitoring, inclusive planning processes, etc.) ensure that reconstruction reflects the needs and priorities of affected populations while fostering local ownership.

Importantly, these strategies are not mutually exclusive. Ethical project management requires a multi-layered approach that addresses vulnerabilities at both the systemic and operational levels. International donors and national governments play a critical role in setting standards and providing resources for oversight, but the active engagement of civil society and local communities is equally essential for ensuring accountability on the ground. When combined, these approaches transform reconstruction from a narrow technical exercise into a broader peacebuilding process rooted in fairness, transparency, and inclusivity.

The following subsections examine key strategies in detail, including transparent procurement and contracting, independent oversight and auditing, community participation and co-design, local capacity-building, accountability mechanisms and whistleblower protections, integration of environmental and social safeguards, and the use of donor conditionality and performance incentives. Each of these tools offers practical pathways for translating ethical principles into practice in the complex terrain of post-war recovery.

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Table 25. Strategies for Embedding Ethical Standards in Post-War Public Works

Strategy Area	Key Measures	Ethical Contribution
Institutional Reforms	• Strengthening procurement, contracting, and financial management systems • Regulatory frameworks against elite capture	Builds systemic integrity, reduces corruption risks, enhances rule-based governance
Procedural Innovations	• Open contracting platforms • Third-party audits- Integrity pacts	Increases transparency, minimizes opportunities for mismanagement, creates enforceable checks
Participatory Approaches	• Community consultations- Citizen monitoring • Inclusive planning processes	Ensures local ownership, reflects affected populations' needs, strengthens trust and legitimacy
Independent Oversight & Auditing	• External evaluations • Monitoring by watchdogs	Adds impartial scrutiny, detects irregularities, reinforces accountability
Local Capacity-Building	• Training local officials and contractors • Developing institutional know-how	Enhances sustainability, empowers domestic actors, reduces reliance on external actors
Accountability Mechanisms & Whistleblower Protections	• Channels for complaints • Legal protection for whistleblowers	Encourages reporting of misconduct, deters unethical practices, protects integrity of processes
Environmental & Social Safeguards	• Integration of impact assessments • Social inclusion measures	Aligns reconstruction with sustainability, protects vulnerable groups, embeds justice principles
Donor Conditionality & Performance Incentives	• Linking aid disbursement to compliance • Rewarding ethical performance	Aligns funding with ethical standards, promotes responsible conduct by recipients

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5.2. Transparent Procurement and Contracting

Transparent procurement processes are essential for reducing corruption, promoting fairness, and ensuring that reconstruction resources are used effectively. In post-war contexts, where large inflows of aid and limited institutional capacity create fertile ground for misuse, procurement is one of the most vulnerable stages of project management. Mechanisms such as open bidding platforms, e-procurement systems, and the public disclosure of contracts allow citizens, media, and watchdog organizations to scrutinize decisions, thereby increasing accountability and discouraging malpractice (OECD, 2016; 2025).

Open bidding ensures that contracts are awarded on the basis of merit rather than political favoritism or personal connections. Competitive procurement processes can reduce inflated costs and improve the quality of infrastructure by attracting qualified contractors. E-procurement systems, meanwhile, digitize and automate procurement processes, making it more difficult to manipulate records and reducing opportunities for collusion. Public disclosure of contracts and project documents further strengthens transparency by enabling oversight actors (including civil society organizations, journalists, and communities) to track whether resources are allocated as promised.

Global initiatives such as the Open Contracting Partnership (OCP) have demonstrated how transparency tools can transform procurement in fragile contexts. The OCP's Open Contracting Data Standard provides a framework for governments to publish accessible, standardized information about the entire procurement process - from planning and tendering to implementation and monitoring (Open Contracting Partnership, 2015; 2019). By making data available to the public, these systems create a deterrent against manipulation and favoritism and empower watchdogs to hold both governments and contractors accountable.

In Liberia, following the end of its civil war, donor-supported procurement reforms introduced competitive bidding and contract publication requirements for public works projects. These measures significantly improved transparency, reassured international donors, and enhanced public confidence in the government's ability to manage reconstruction resources responsibly (Sawyer, 2005). Such examples suggest that, even in fragile post-conflict contexts, procurement transparency can be achieved with the right combination of political will, institutional reform, and international support.

Ultimately, transparent procurement and contracting are not simply technical safeguards but ethical commitments. They demonstrate that reconstruction is undertaken in the public interest rather than for private gain. In doing so, they help restore legitimacy to fragile institutions, ensure fair competition, and improve the efficiency and sustainability of reconstruction projects.

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Table 26. Strategies for Embedding Ethical Standards in Post-War Public Works

Strategy Area	Key Measures	Ethical Contribution
Institutional Reforms	• Strengthening procurement, contracting, and financial management systems • Regulatory frameworks against elite capture	Builds systemic integrity, reduces corruption risks, enhances rule-based governance
Procedural Innovations	• Open contracting platforms-Third-party audits • Integrity pacts	Increases transparency, minimizes opportunities for mismanagement, creates enforceable checks
Participatory Approaches	• Community consultations-Citizen monitoring • Inclusive planning processes	Ensures local ownership, reflects affected populations' needs, strengthens trust and legitimacy
Independent Oversight & Auditing	• External evaluations • Monitoring by watchdogs	Adds impartial scrutiny, detects irregularities, reinforces accountability
Local Capacity-Building	• Training local officials and contractors • Developing institutional know-how	Enhances sustainability, empowers domestic actors, reduces reliance on external actors
Accountability Mechanisms & Whistleblower Protections	• Channels for complaints • Legal protection for whistleblowers	Encourages reporting of misconduct, deters unethical practices, protects integrity of processes
Environmental & Social Safeguards	• Integration of impact assessments • Social inclusion measures	Aligns reconstruction with sustainability, protects vulnerable groups, embeds justice principles
Donor Conditionality & Performance Incentives	• Linking aid disbursement to compliance. • Rewarding ethical performance	Aligns funding with ethical standards, promotes responsible conduct by recipients

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5.3. Independent Oversight and Auditing

Independent oversight and auditing are crucial mechanisms for ensuring that reconstruction projects adhere to ethical standards and that resources are managed responsibly. In post-war environments, where government institutions are often weak and vulnerable to capture by elites, external monitoring provides an additional layer of accountability that can deter corruption and malpractice. Oversight by international organizations, civil society groups, and local watchdogs helps verify compliance with procurement rules, labor standards, and financial management practices, thereby reinforcing transparency and public trust.

Third-party monitoring is particularly valuable in contexts where governments lack the capacity or, in some cases, the political will to enforce regulations. Independent monitors can track project implementation, verify whether funds are spent as intended, and provide timely feedback to donors and communities. Similarly, independent auditing of financial records helps detect irregularities, identify risks, and ensure that corrective measures are taken before problems escalate. These functions are critical not only for reducing waste and corruption but also for demonstrating to citizens that reconstruction is being carried out in the public interest.

Evidence from Sierra Leone's post-war reconstruction highlights the benefits of embedding oversight mechanisms. Donor-supported auditing procedures and financial monitoring systems introduced after the civil war significantly reduced the misuse of funds and improved accountability in the delivery of public works (Fanthorpe & Sesay, 2009). In Liberia, the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Program (GEMAP) brought in international experts to jointly oversee key financial institutions, including procurement agencies. While controversial, this arrangement reassured donors and contributed to increased confidence in Liberia's post-conflict recovery (Sawyer, 2005).

Beyond donor-driven models, civil society organizations and local watchdogs can play an equally important role in oversight. Community-based monitoring of schools, clinics, and roads, sometimes referred to as social auditing has been shown to increase accountability by empowering citizens to demand answers from authorities and contractors. In Afghanistan, civil society-led monitoring of school construction projects exposed cases of fraud and incomplete work, pressuring both government and international actors to tighten controls (Integrity Watch Afghanistan, 2016).

Embedding independent oversight and auditing into reconstruction not only strengthens accountability but also builds confidence among donors and citizens alike. For donors, such mechanisms provide assurance that resources are being managed responsibly; for citizens, they signal that reconstruction is being conducted fairly and transparently. In both respects, oversight serves as a bridge between technical efficiency and ethical governance, ensuring that public works contribute to legitimacy and long-term peace.

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Table 27. Independent Oversight and Auditing in Post-War Reconstruction

Dimension	Key Points	Ethical Contribution
Rationale	• Ensures adherence to ethical standards in weak institutional contexts • Deters corruption and malpractice	Reinforces accountability and public trust in reconstruction
Mechanisms	• Oversight by international organizations, civil society, and watchdog groups. • Third-party monitoring of project implementation • Independent financial auditing	Provides impartial scrutiny, detects irregularities, ensures funds are used responsibly
Examples	• **Sierra Leone:** Donor-supported auditing reduced misuse of funds, improved accountability. • **Liberia (GEMAP):** Joint international oversight of financial institutions reassured donors. • **Afghanistan:** Civil society-led monitoring exposed fraud in school construction, improved controls.	Demonstrates effectiveness of diverse oversight models, strengthens transparency and donor confidence
Civil Society Role	• Community-based monitoring ("social auditing") of local services (schools, clinics, roads) • Empowers citizens to demand accountability	Builds local ownership, increases responsiveness of authorities, enhances legitimacy
Overall Impact	• Reduces waste and corruption • Provides assurance to donors • Strengthens citizen trust and participation.	Bridges technical efficiency with ethical governance, contributes to legitimacy and long-term peace

5.4. Community Participation and Co-Design

Participatory planning is a cornerstone of ethical project management in post-war reconstruction. In fragile contexts, where mistrust of government and external actors is often high, engaging local communities in needs assessments, design, and monitoring ensures that public works projects reflect genuine priorities rather than externally imposed agendas (Chambers, 1997). Participation also helps correct power imbalances by giving voice to marginalized groups such as women, youth, and minorities who might otherwise be excluded from decision-making. By incorporating diverse perspectives, participatory approaches enhance both the relevance and legitimacy of reconstruction.

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Community involvement has several practical benefits. First, it increases the likelihood that infrastructure will meet actual needs. A health clinic placed according to local input, for example, is more likely to be accessible and utilized than one designed without consultation. Second, participation fosters a sense of ownership, which can translate into better maintenance and long-term sustainability of infrastructure. Third, it creates opportunities for dialogue and cooperation among groups that were divided during conflict, thereby contributing to reconciliation and social healing.

The case of Rwanda illustrates the transformative potential of participatory approaches. After the 1994 genocide, community-based programs such as Umuganda a tradition of collective labor adapted to post-conflict recovery were used to rebuild schools, roads, and housing. These initiatives not only produced relevant infrastructure but also helped foster social cohesion and a sense of shared responsibility for national recovery (Ansoms & Rostagno, 2012). Similarly, in Sierra Leone, participatory planning in water and sanitation projects gave communities an active role in decision-making, ensuring that facilities addressed local needs and reducing the risk of elite capture (Fanthorpe & Sesay, 2009).

Conversely, reconstruction efforts that exclude communities often fail to achieve their objectives. In Afghanistan, for instance, numerous schools and clinics were built in locations that communities considered irrelevant or unsafe, in part because they had not been adequately consulted during the planning stage (SIGAR, 2021). Many of these facilities remained unused or fell into disrepair, highlighting how neglecting participation undermines both effectiveness and legitimacy.

Ethical project management therefore requires more than token consultation; it demands meaningful participation at every stage of the project cycle. Mechanisms such as community advisory boards, participatory budgeting, and citizen monitoring platforms can institutionalize this involvement. By embedding participation into reconstruction, public works become more than physical structures, they become platforms for rebuilding trust, fostering inclusion, and strengthening the social contract in post-war societies.

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Table 28. Participatory Planning in Post-War Reconstruction

Dimension	Key Points	Ethical Contribution
Rationale	• Addresses mistrust in fragile contexts • Ensures projects reflect genuine community priorities • Gives voice to marginalized groups (women, youth, minorities)	Enhances legitimacy, inclusivity, and fairness
Practical Benefits	• Infrastructure better aligned with actual needs • Fosters community ownership, improving sustainability • Creates dialogue across divided groups, aiding reconciliation	Strengthens relevance, long-term viability, and social cohesion
Positive Examples	• **Rwanda:** *Umuganda* community labor rebuilt infrastructure and fostered cohesion • **Sierra Leone:** Participatory water/sanitation planning reduced elite capture and met local needs	Demonstrates participatory models can combine technical success with peacebuilding
Negative Example	• **Afghanistan:** Schools/clinics built without consultation were unused or unsafe, undermining legitimacy	Highlights risks of exclusion and failure when participation is neglected
Mechanisms	• Community advisory boards-Participatory budgeting • Citizen monitoring platforms	Institutionalizes participation, embeds trust-building and accountability
Overall Impact	• Goes beyond token consultation-Embeds participation across the project cycle	Rebuilds trust, fosters inclusion, strengthens the social contract

5.5.   Building Local Capacity

Sustainable reconstruction requires more than the delivery of physical infrastructure, it depends fundamentally on strengthening the skills and institutional capacity of local actors who will ultimately be responsible for maintaining and managing public works. While international agencies and contractors often play a leading role in the immediate aftermath of conflict, long-term recovery hinges on the ability of domestic institutions, local governments, and national project managers to assume ownership of reconstruction. Building local capacity is therefore not only a technical necessity but also an ethical obligation, as it ensures that reconstruction processes contribute to autonomy, self-reliance, and long-term stability.

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Capacity-building must address multiple dimensions. At the individual level, training in ethical project management equips local professionals with tools to balance technical requirements with transparency, accountability, and fairness. This includes specialized instruction in anti-corruption measures, financial management, participatory planning, and environmental safeguards, all of which are essential in fragile contexts. At the institutional level, strengthening procurement agencies, audit bodies, and regulatory frameworks enhances the resilience of governance systems against capture or misuse. At the community level, empowering local committees and civil society organizations helps ensure that reconstruction is subject to grassroots oversight and that infrastructure investments remain aligned with citizen priorities.

Without such investments, ethical frameworks risk remaining externally imposed and donor-driven. International actors often introduce sophisticated accountability mechanisms, but these can be unsustainable if local institutions lack the capacity to operate them once donor support is withdrawn. This dependency not only weakens the durability of reconstruction outcomes but also undermines local legitimacy by fostering perceptions that governments are unable to manage their own recovery. Conversely, when local actors are trained and empowered, they become capable stewards of reconstruction, reducing dependency on external expertise and increasing the likelihood that ethical standards will be institutionalized over the long term.

Examples from past reconstruction efforts underscore this point. In Liberia, post-war recovery included extensive capacity-building programs within the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, which helped strengthen public financial management and reassure donors of improved governance (Sawyer, 2005). In Rwanda, investments in local government capacity to manage participatory planning and service delivery were instrumental in scaling up community-based reconstruction initiatives, fostering both legitimacy and sustainability (Ansoms & Rostagno, 2012). By contrast, in Afghanistan, many donor-driven accountability mechanisms collapsed once external funding and expertise declined, highlighting the dangers of neglecting local capacity development (SIGAR, 2021).

Building local capacity is therefore inseparable from ethical project management. It ensures that reconstruction is not merely a temporary infusion of external resources but a process of institutional transformation that equips societies to manage their own recovery. By embedding training, knowledge transfer, and institutional strengthening into reconstruction strategies, public works can serve as vehicles not only for service delivery but also for long-term empowerment and resilience.

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Table 29. Local Capacity-Building in Post-War Reconstruction

Dimension	Key Points	Ethical Contribution
Rationale	• Long-term recovery depends on domestic ownership • Strengthening local skills and institutions is both a technical necessity and ethical obligation • Reduces dependency on external actors	Promotes autonomy, self-reliance, and long-term stability
Levels of Capacity-Building	• **Individual:** Training in ethical project management, anti-corruption, financial management, participatory planning, and environmental safeguards • **Institutional:** Strengthening procurement agencies, audit bodies, and regulatory frameworks • **Community:** Empowering civil society groups and local committees for grassroots oversight	Creates multi-layered resilience, aligns reconstruction with citizen priorities
Risks Without Capacity-Building	• Ethical frameworks remain donor-driven and externally imposed • Mechanisms collapse once external funding/expertise is withdrawn • Undermines legitimacy of local government	Weakens sustainability, fosters dependency, erodes public trust
Positive Examples	• **Liberia:** Capacity-building in Ministry of Finance improved public financial management and donor confidence • **Rwanda:** Strengthened local governments to scale participatory planning and service delivery, enhancing legitimacy	Demonstrates sustainability and institutional transformation when local actors are empowered
Negative Example	• **Afghanistan:** Donor-driven mechanisms collapsed after withdrawal of external support, leaving institutions fragile	Highlights dangers of neglecting local ownership
Overall Impact	• Embeds training, knowledge transfer, and institutional strengthening into reconstruction-Equips societies to manage their own recovery	Transforms reconstruction into a process of empowerment, resilience, and ethical governance

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5.6. Accountability Mechanisms and Whistleblower Protections

Creating safe and effective channels for reporting misconduct is critical in post-war contexts where corruption is often systemic and deeply entrenched. In such environments, unethical practices are not merely isolated incidents but may constitute routine aspects of governance and reconstruction. Under these conditions, individuals who witness wrongdoing (whether government officials, contractors, or community members) must be given secure avenues to report misconduct without fear of retaliation. Whistleblower protection laws, anonymous reporting hotlines, and grievance redress systems are therefore essential components of ethical project management, serving both to deter malpractice and to strengthen institutional accountability (Transparency International, 2016; 2024).

Whistleblower protection laws are particularly important because they provide legal safeguards against reprisals such as job loss, harassment, or violence, risks that are especially acute in fragile states where rule of law is weak. By enshrining protections in national legal frameworks, governments can encourage individuals to expose corrupt practices and unethical behavior. Anonymous reporting hotlines and digital platforms, often operated by independent agencies or NGOs, complement these laws by offering secure channels through which information can be shared confidentially. Grievance redress systems, meanwhile, enable citizens directly affected by reconstruction projects to raise complaints about issues such as land disputes, unfair labor practices, or misuse of funds, ensuring that problems are addressed before they escalate.

Examples from post-conflict settings highlight the value of such mechanisms. In Sierra Leone, donor-supported anti-corruption initiatives introduced confidential reporting hotlines that allowed citizens to report instances of bribery and misuse of public funds during reconstruction, helping to strengthen the Anti-Corruption Commission's effectiveness (Fanthorpe & Sesay, 2009). In Liberia, grievance redress systems linked to donor-funded infrastructure projects provided communities with accessible avenues for voicing concerns, which helped reduce tensions around land use and resource allocation (Sawyer, 2005). By contrast, in Afghanistan, the absence of strong whistleblower protections meant that individuals exposing corruption were often subject to intimidation, which contributed to the persistence of fraudulent practices in public works (SIGAR, 2021).

Importantly, accountability mechanisms are not only about enforcement; they also have symbolic significance. The very existence of safe reporting channels demonstrates to citizens that governments and donors are committed to transparency and fairness, thereby fostering trust in fragile environments where legitimacy is often contested. For these mechanisms to be effective, however, reports must lead to tangible consequences. Failure to act on allegations can erode confidence and discourage future reporting.

In sum, embedding whistleblower protections, anonymous reporting systems, and grievance redress mechanisms into reconstruction frameworks strengthens accountability and helps deter malpractice. These tools empower individuals to act as guardians of integrity and ensure that

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reconstruction resources are used in the service of recovery rather than personal enrichment. As such, they represent a vital dimension of ethical project management in post-war contexts.

Table 30. Accountability Mechanisms and Whistleblower Protections in Post-War Reconstruction

Dimension	Key Points	Ethical Contribution
Rationale	• Corruption often systemic in post-war contexts • Individuals need secure channels to report misconduct • Protects officials, contractors, and citizens from retaliation	Strengthens accountability, deters malpractice, reinforces integrity
Mechanisms	• **Whistleblower Protection Laws:** Safeguards against reprisals such as job loss, harassment, or violence • **Anonymous Reporting Hotlines & Digital Platforms:** Confidential channels often managed by independent agencies or NGOs • **Grievance Redress Systems:** Citizen access to raise complaints (land disputes, labor practices, misuse of funds)	Provides legal, practical, and participatory tools to expose and address misconduct
Positive Examples	• **Sierra Leone:** Confidential hotlines improved Anti-Corruption Commission's effectiveness • **Liberia:** Grievance systems linked to donor projects reduced tensions over land/resource allocation	Demonstrates how reporting mechanisms can enhance trust and reduce conflict
Negative Example	• **Afghanistan:** Weak protections led to intimidation of whistleblowers, enabling persistence of corruption	Shows risks when protections are absent or ineffective
Symbolic Value	• Existence of safe reporting channels signals commitment to transparency and fairness • Builds trust in fragile, contested environments	Enhances legitimacy of governments and donors
Overall Impact	• Empowers individuals as guardians of integrity • Ensures reconstruction resources are used for recovery rather than enrichment	Embeds accountability, fosters trust, deters misconduct

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5.7.   Integrating Environmental and Social Safeguards

Post-war reconstruction must prioritize sustainability by embedding environmental and social safeguards into project management frameworks. While the urgency of rebuilding often drives governments and donors to focus on speed and visibility, neglecting environmental and social considerations can create new vulnerabilities and perpetuate cycles of harm. Tools such as environmental impact assessments (EIAs), social safeguard policies, and resilience planning provide critical mechanisms for anticipating risks, mitigating negative impacts, and ensuring that reconstruction contributes not only to immediate recovery but also to long-term well-being (UNEP, 2024).

Environmental safeguards are vital in fragile contexts where ecosystems may already be degraded by conflict, displacement, and resource exploitation. Reconstruction projects that overlook these safeguards risk exacerbating deforestation, water scarcity, or soil erosion. For example, in South Sudan, uncontrolled logging and land clearing for construction projects intensified environmental degradation and displaced rural communities, undermining both livelihoods and stability (UNEP, 2024). Similarly, in Afghanistan, donor-funded road construction projects often failed to incorporate proper drainage systems, resulting in rapid deterioration and ecological damage within just a few years (SIGAR, 2021). Such cases highlight how the absence of environmental safeguards can compromise both infrastructure durability and ecological balance.

Social safeguards are equally critical. Post-war reconstruction often involves land acquisition, resettlement, and the redistribution of scarce resources, all of which can reignite tensions if handled poorly. Safeguard policies help ensure that vulnerable groups, including women, minorities, and displaced populations, are not excluded or disadvantaged by reconstruction. For instance, participatory land management processes in Rwanda's post-genocide recovery helped reduce disputes by giving communities a formal role in land-use decisions, thereby supporting reconciliation while advancing infrastructure goals. By contrast, in post-earthquake Haiti, housing reconstruction that ignored community consultation led to widespread dissatisfaction and rapid deterioration of poorly planned settlements (Schuller & Morales, 2012).

Integrating resilience planning into reconstruction further strengthens long-term outcomes. Rather than simply replacing what was lost, resilience-oriented approaches "build back better," incorporating disaster risk reduction, climate adaptation, and conflict sensitivity into project design. This ensures that infrastructure is not only functional but also capable of withstanding future shocks. Examples include investments in flood-resistant housing in Sri Lanka after the 2004 tsunami and drought-resilient water systems in East African post-conflict communities, both of which combined immediate recovery with long-term sustainability (UNEP, 2018).

Incorporating environmental and social safeguards is thus an ethical imperative as well as a technical necessity. It demonstrates respect for communities and ecosystems, prevents unintended harm, and ensures that reconstruction contributes to sustainable peace. By embedding these safeguards into project management frameworks, post-war societies can

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transform reconstruction from a reactive exercise into a forward-looking process that aligns infrastructure with ecological balance, social justice, and resilience.

Table 31. Environmental and Social Safeguards in Post-War Reconstruction

Dimension	Key Points	Ethical Contribution
Rationale	• Urgency of rebuilding often prioritizes speed over sustainability • Neglecting safeguards creates new vulnerabilities and harm • Safeguards ensure recovery supports long-term well-being	Aligns reconstruction with ecological balance, social justice, and resilience
Environmental Safeguards	• Use of Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) • Mitigation of risks like deforestation, water scarcity, soil erosion • Cases: (a) **South Sudan:** uncontrolled logging/land clearing displaced communities (b) **Afghanistan:** poor road drainage caused rapid deterioration and ecological damage	Protects ecosystems, ensures infrastructure durability, prevents conflict over resources
Social Safeguards	• Policies addressing land acquisition, resettlement, and resource redistribution- Protection of vulnerable groups (women, minorities, displaced populations) • Cases: (a) **Rwanda:** participatory land-use management reduced disputes and supported reconciliation (b) **Haiti:** exclusion from housing planning caused dissatisfaction and rapid settlement decline	Prevents exclusion, reduces tensions, fosters inclusion and legitimacy
Resilience Planning	• "Build back better" approaches- Integration of disaster risk reduction, climate adaptation, and conflict sensitivity • Cases: (a) **Sri Lanka:** flood-resistant housing post-tsunami (b) **East Africa:** drought-resilient water systems	Ensures infrastructure withstands future shocks, links recovery with sustainability
Overall Impact	• Prevents unintended harm- Respects communities and ecosystems • Embeds sustainability in reconstruction processes	Transforms rebuilding into forward-looking, ethical, and resilient development

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5.8.   Donor Confidentiality and Performance Incentives

Donors and international agencies wield significant influence over post-war reconstruction through the provision of financial resources, technical expertise, and policy guidance. This influence can be harnessed to reinforce ethical practices by tying funding to compliance with transparency, accountability, and inclusivity benchmarks. Conditionality (where aid disbursements are contingent on meeting governance standards) has long been a tool of international financial institutions, while performance-based financing links disbursements directly to demonstrated outcomes, creating concrete incentives for governments and contractors to uphold ethical standards (World Bank, 2018).

Performance-based mechanisms are particularly effective in fragile contexts, where weak institutions and entrenched corruption can otherwise undermine reconstruction. By conditioning financial flows on the achievement of verifiable milestones (i.e. publishing procurement data, conducting independent audits, implementing grievance redress systems, etc.) donors encourage governments to prioritize reforms that might otherwise be sidelined. For contractors, linking payments to ethical compliance and project quality reduces incentives for corner-cutting or corruption, aligning financial rewards with ethical performance.

There are notable examples of conditionality shaping reconstruction outcomes. In Liberia, post-war assistance under the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Program (GEMAP) included stringent requirements for international oversight of key financial institutions. While controversial, these conditions reassured donors and facilitated sustained aid flows during a fragile transition period (Sawyer, 2005). In Sierra Leone, donor conditionality requiring anti-corruption measures and procurement reforms strengthened the Anti-Corruption Commission, improving public trust in the early phases of recovery (Fanthorpe & Sesay, 2009). Conversely, in Afghanistan, the failure to enforce strict conditionality allowed billions in aid to be siphoned off through corruption and poorly monitored contracts, contributing to widespread disillusionment with both the government and its international partners (SIGAR, 2021).

Despite these benefits, donor conditionality carries risks. If imposed rigidly or without sensitivity to local contexts, it can undermine national ownership and perpetuate perceptions of external dominance. Conditionality may also encourage governments to prioritize compliance for donor visibility rather than genuine institutional reform, producing superficial changes that fail to take root. Moreover, heavy reliance on external benchmarks can inadvertently weaken accountability to citizens by shifting governments' focus toward satisfying donors instead of responding to domestic constituencies.

For this reason, conditionality and performance incentives must be carefully designed to complement, rather than replace, domestic accountability mechanisms. Collaborative approaches, where conditions are co-created with local stakeholders, can help align donor requirements with local priorities and build legitimacy. When balanced appropriately, conditionality serves as a powerful lever for embedding ethics into reconstruction while still respecting the sovereignty and agency of post-war governments.

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Table 32. Donor Conditionality and Performance Incentives in Post-War Reconstruction

Dimension	Key Points	Ethical Contribution
Rationale	• Donors shape reconstruction via funding, expertise, and policy guidance • Conditionality ties aid to governance standards (transparency, accountability, inclusivity) • Performance-based financing links disbursements to outcomes	Aligns financial support with ethical standards, incentivizes reforms
Mechanisms	• Conditionality: aid contingent on meeting governance benchmarks • Performance incentives: payments tied to milestones (procurement transparency, audits, grievance systems) • Contractor payments linked to ethical compliance and project quality	Creates financial rewards for integrity, deters corruption and corner-cutting
Positive Examples	• **Liberia (GEMAP):** International oversight of financial institutions reassured donors, sustained aid flows • **Sierra Leone:** Conditionality requiring anti-corruption measures strengthened Anti-Corruption Commission	Strengthened oversight, improved trust, facilitated aid in fragile transitions
Negative Example	• **Afghanistan:** Weak enforcement of conditionality enabled large-scale corruption and poorly monitored contracts, eroding trust	Shows dangers of neglecting strict conditionality in high-risk contexts
Risks & Limitations	• Can undermine national ownership if imposed rigidly • May foster superficial compliance for donor visibility rather than real reform- Shifts accountability focus from citizens to donors	Risks external dominance, weakens domestic legitimacy if poorly designed
Design Principles	• Conditions should complement domestic accountability, not replace it • Collaborative, co-created benchmarks with local stakeholders • Balance donor leverage with respect for sovereignty	Embeds ethics while strengthening legitimacy and local ownership
Overall Impact	• When balanced carefully, donor conditionality and performance incentives drive ethical reforms while respecting sovereignty	Serves as a powerful lever for embedding ethical governance into reconstruction

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6. Case Studies: Lessons from Reconstruction Efforts

6.1.   Reconstruction on the Ground: What Worked, What Didn't

Examining real-world reconstruction projects offers critical insights into how ethical or unethical project management shapes outcomes. While every post-war context is shaped by distinct historical trajectories, political dynamics, and cultural norms, comparative experiences reveal common patterns that transcend individual cases. These patterns highlight the conditions under which reconstruction succeeds in fostering peace and stability, and the circumstances in which it falters, reinforcing fragility or fueling renewed conflict.

Case studies also demonstrate that ethical project management is not an abstract principle but a practical determinant of outcomes on the ground. Where transparency, accountability, participation, and sustainability are embedded into reconstruction, public works have served as vehicles for reconciliation, legitimacy, and long-term resilience. Conversely, where corruption, favoritism, or exclusion prevail, infrastructure projects have become symbols of inequality and mismanagement, undermining trust in governments and international actors alike.

By analyzing examples from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Afghanistan, and Iraq, this section highlights both the risks of neglecting ethical standards and the benefits of embedding them into reconstruction frameworks. Together, these cases provide valuable lessons for policymakers, donors, and project managers, offering guidance on how to design reconstruction efforts that deliver not only physical infrastructure but also social and political stability.

Table 33. Lessons Learned per Country

Post-War Country / Period	Lessons
Bosnia and Herzegovina (1995–2000s)	Reconstruction reinforced ethnic divisions when aid allocation was politicized, illustrating the risks of exclusion.
Rwanda (1994–2000s)	Community-based reconstruction (*Umuganda*) demonstrated the potential of participatory approaches to foster social cohesion.
Sierra Leone (2002–2010)	Donor-supported audits and anti-corruption measures enhanced accountability and trust in public works.
Liberia (2003–2010)	Conditional aid under GEMAP showed how external oversight can stabilize governance but raised debates about sovereignty.
Afghanistan (2001–2021)	Corruption and poorly monitored contracts highlighted how unethical management undermined legitimacy and sustainability.
Iraq (2003–2010)	Large-scale reconstruction plagued by opaque procurement and elite capture became symbols of exclusion and mistrust.

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6.2.   Iraq and Afghanistan: The Cost of Corruption and Mismanagement

Post-2003 reconstruction efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan offer stark illustrations of the dangers posed by inadequate ethical oversight in public works. Both countries received unprecedented levels of international aid, with billions of dollars earmarked for infrastructure, governance reform, and economic recovery. Yet, despite the scale of investment, outcomes were often characterized by waste, corruption, and poorly executed projects. Reports from the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction (SIGIR) and the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) detail systemic failures in project design, procurement, and monitoring, leading to widespread inefficiencies and a loss of legitimacy for both national governments and international donors (SIGIR, 2013; SIGAR, 2021).

Examples of failed projects became emblematic of these shortcomings. In Iraq, hospitals and water treatment plants were left incomplete despite substantial funding allocations, while in Afghanistan, "ghost schools" were recorded, institutions that existed on paper but were never built or staffed. Roads constructed without proper engineering standards quickly deteriorated, sometimes becoming unusable within a few years. Such outcomes not only wasted scarce resources but also reinforced public perceptions of mismanagement and corruption.

The ethical failures in both countries had consequences that extended far beyond technical inefficiency. By diverting funds and delivering substandard or nonexistent infrastructure, reconstruction projects eroded public trust in state institutions. Citizens came to view both their governments and international partners as complicit in exploitation rather than committed to recovery. This legitimacy deficit created fertile ground for insurgent groups, which exploited grievances by framing reconstruction as evidence of foreign occupation and elite corruption. In Afghanistan, for instance, the Taliban leveraged public dissatisfaction with failed projects to bolster its support in rural areas, undermining stabilization efforts and prolonging conflict (SIGAR, 2021).

The Iraq and Afghanistan experiences highlight the central importance of embedding ethics into reconstruction frameworks. Without transparency, accountability, and community participation, even massive financial investments risk producing outcomes that are wasteful at best and destabilizing at worst. These cases underscore a critical lesson: reconstruction must be understood not merely as a technical exercise in infrastructure delivery but as a deeply political process in which ethical project management is indispensable to legitimacy, stability, and peace.

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Table 34. Iraq and Afghanistan: The Cost of Corruption and Mismanagement in Post-War Reconstruction

Dimension	Key Points	Ethical Implications
Context	• Massive international aid after 2003 • Billions allocated for infrastructure, governance reform, and recovery • Oversight provided by SIGIR (Iraq) and SIGAR (Afghanistan)	Scale of investment created expectations for accountability and effectiveness
Failures in Practice	• Incomplete hospitals and water treatment plants (Iraq) • "Ghost schools" existing only on paper (Afghanistan) • Poorly constructed roads that deteriorated within years	Demonstrated systemic flaws in project design, procurement, and monitoring
Corruption and Waste	• Aid in Afghanistan lost to corruption, embezzlement, or misallocation • Widespread inefficiencies reinforced perceptions of mismanagement	Erosion of public trust, diversion of resources from genuine recovery
Consequences for Legitimacy	• Citizens perceived governments and donors as complicit in corruption • Failed projects fueled resentment and delegitimized both state and international actors	Undermined credibility of reconstruction, weakened social contract
Conflict Dynamics	• Insurgent groups exploited grievances • Taliban used dissatisfaction with failed projects to mobilize rural support • Reconstruction seen as foreign occupation and elite capture	Corruption directly undermined stabilization, prolonged conflict
Lesson Learned	• Reconstruction must go beyond technical infrastructure delivery • Embedding ethics (transparency, accountability, participation) is essential	Ethical project management is key to legitimacy, stability, and sustainable peace

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6.3. Bosnia and Herzegovina: Reconstruction Reinforcing Divisions

Following the Dayton Peace Accords of 1995, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) became the focus of one of the largest post-war reconstruction programs of the late twentieth century. International donors mobilized billions of dollars to restore housing, utilities, transportation networks, and other essential services devastated by years of conflict. In material terms, the reconstruction effort achieved notable progress: roads were repaired, electricity grids reestablished, and thousands of homes rebuilt. However, the social and political impacts of reconstruction were more ambiguous. Many projects were criticized for entrenching, rather than alleviating, ethnic divisions that had fueled the war in the first place (Donais, 2009).

Housing reconstruction provides a striking example. Instead of fostering reintegration, housing programs were frequently implemented in ways that reinforced ethnic separation. Return policies often prioritized "majority" communities in specific municipalities, making it difficult for displaced minorities to reclaim property or resettle in areas controlled by other ethnic groups. Similarly, the restoration of utilities such as water and electricity frequently followed patterns of political control, with dominant ethnic parties directing resources toward their constituencies. As a result, reconstruction outcomes tended to mirror wartime territorial divisions, effectively legitimizing ethnic partition under the guise of technical rebuilding.

These dynamics reveal how decisions that might appear technically neutral (i.e. where to allocate housing funds or how to sequence utility restoration, etc.) carry profound political consequences in post-conflict societies. In Bosnia, the failure to apply an explicitly ethical lens to project management allowed reconstruction to become a mechanism of exclusion. Instead of contributing to reconciliation, infrastructure projects signaled to communities that ethnic affiliation remained the primary determinant of access to resources. This outcome illustrates how neglecting fairness and inclusivity in reconstruction not only undermines social cohesion but also risks perpetuating the very grievances that drove conflict.

The Bosnian case underscores a critical lesson for ethical project management: technical efficiency alone is insufficient in post-war contexts. Without deliberate attention to equity, inclusivity, and reconciliation, reconstruction can exacerbate existing divisions. Conversely, embedding ethical principles into project design and implementation could have transformed infrastructure into a platform for rebuilding trust and fostering integration. Bosnia and Herzegovina demonstrates that in fragile, divided societies, ethically neutral approaches are not neutral at all – they are inherently political, and their consequences may entrench fragility rather than advance peace.

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Table 35. Bosnia and Herzegovina: Reconstruction and the Risk of Entrenching Divisions

Dimension	Key Points	Ethical Implications
Context	• Post-1995 Dayton Peace Accords- One of the largest late-20th century reconstruction programs • Billions in donor aid for housing, utilities, and infrastructure	Significant material recovery, but mixed social and political impacts
Housing Reconstruction	• Programs often reinforced ethnic separation • Majority communities prioritized, minorities faced barriers to return/resettlement • Outcomes mirrored wartime territorial divisions	Legitimized ethnic partition, hindered reintegration
Utilities & Services	• Restoration of water, electricity, and transport often followed political control • Dominant ethnic parties directed resources to their constituencies	Reconstruction became a tool of exclusion and political patronage
Political Consequences	• Technically neutral decisions carried political weight • Access to resources tied to ethnic affiliation • Reconstruction reinforced rather than alleviated wartime divisions	Undermined reconciliation, perpetuated grievances
Critical Lesson	• Technical efficiency alone is insufficient • Neglect of equity and inclusivity risks exacerbating fragility • Ethical neutrality ≠ political neutrality in divided societies	Reconstruction must embed fairness, inclusivity, and reconciliation to promote peace
Overall Impact	• Material rebuilding achieved • Social cohesion weakened, divisions entrenched • Missed opportunity for infrastructure to foster trust and integration	Demonstrates the cost of failing to apply an ethical lens to reconstruction

6.4. Rwanda: Community-Based Reconstruction

In contrast to the divisive outcomes observed in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Rwanda's post-genocide reconstruction demonstrated the potential of ethically grounded and participatory approaches. After the 1994 genocide, which left the country's infrastructure devastated and its social fabric torn apart, the government prioritized not only rebuilding physical assets but also restoring trust and fostering national unity. Central to this effort was the adoption of Umuganda (a traditional practice of collective community work) revived and institutionalized as part of

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Rwanda's post-conflict governance strategy. By embedding participatory mechanisms into reconstruction, Rwanda sought to align technical rebuilding with broader goals of reconciliation and legitimacy (Ansoms & Rostagno, 2012).

Through Umuganda, citizens were mobilized monthly to engage in rebuilding schools, repairing roads, maintaining public spaces, and constructing community facilities. Beyond the material outcomes, this practice reinforced a sense of shared responsibility and common purpose across previously divided groups. Participation was not limited to physical labor: local consultation processes also allowed communities to articulate their needs and priorities, ensuring that reconstruction projects were contextually relevant and aligned with social demands. This emphasis on inclusivity helped bridge divides and fostered ownership of public works.

The participatory ethos of Rwanda's reconstruction extended beyond Umuganda. Community-based programs in housing and agriculture similarly integrated citizen input, creating channels for dialogue between local populations and state institutions. These approaches strengthened social cohesion by making reconstruction a cooperative endeavor rather than a top-down imposition. Importantly, participatory processes also bolstered the legitimacy of public institutions, signaling that the state was responsive to citizens' needs and committed to equitable recovery.

Nonetheless, Rwanda's experience was not without complications. Critics argue that participation was, at times, shaped by authoritarian governance and enforced through state structures, raising questions about the voluntariness of community engagement. The government's centralization of authority and limitations on political freedoms complicate the narrative of fully inclusive participation (Reyntjens, 2013). Yet even within these constraints, Rwanda's approach demonstrates that reconstruction strategies grounded in ethics (particularly inclusivity and community ownership) can produce outcomes that extend beyond infrastructure delivery to encompass reconciliation and institution-building.

The Rwandan case highlights a critical lesson: participatory reconstruction, when genuinely inclusive, transforms public works into instruments of social healing. By embedding ethical principles into the very process of rebuilding, Rwanda leveraged reconstruction not only to restore physical assets but also to strengthen trust, unity, and resilience in a deeply fractured society.

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Table 36. Rwanda: Participatory Reconstruction and Social Healing

Dimension	Key Points	Ethical Implications
Context	• Post-1994 genocide: infrastructure devastated, social fabric torn • Government prioritized both rebuilding and reconciliation	Reconstruction framed as both technical and moral project
Participatory Mechanism : Umuganda	• Revived tradition of collective community work, institutionalized monthly • Citizens rebuilt schools, roads, public spaces, and facilities • Consultation ensured projects matched local needs	Fostered shared responsibility, unity, and ownership of reconstruction
Broader Participatory Approaches	• Community-based housing and agricultural programs • Citizen input integrated into planning • Dialogue between communities and state institutions	Strengthened cohesion, built trust in state responsiveness, promoted equitable recovery
Positive Outcomes	• Rebuilding aligned with reconciliation goals- Infrastructure became a platform for social healing • Legitimacy of state institutions reinforced	Demonstrates transformative power of embedding ethics and inclusivity in reconstruction
Complications & Critiques	• Participation sometimes shaped by centralized, authoritarian governance • Questions about voluntariness of engagement	Highlights risks of state-led participation being coercive rather than fully inclusive
Critical Lesson	• Participatory reconstruction, when genuinely inclusive, transcends infrastructure delivery • Embedding ethical principles fosters reconciliation, trust, and resilience	Reconstruction as an instrument of peacebuilding, not just material recovery

6.5.   Sierra Leone: Accountability in Practice

Sierra Leone's recovery following its brutal civil war (1991–2002) provides an instructive example of the benefits of embedding strong oversight mechanisms into reconstruction. Emerging from a conflict fueled in part by resource predation and state corruption, the legitimacy of post-war governance depended heavily on demonstrating that public resources would be managed responsibly. Recognizing this, donor agencies and the Sierra Leonean government jointly

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developed monitoring systems and auditing procedures to oversee the allocation and use of reconstruction funds, particularly in public works. These mechanisms were designed not only to detect malpractice but also to deter corruption by making financial flows more transparent and accountable (Fanthorpe & Sesay, 2009).

Donor-supported auditing procedures played a central role in safeguarding reconstruction resources. Independent financial audits of infrastructure projects helped identify irregularities early, while joint donor-government monitoring frameworks ensured that external assistance was accompanied by credible checks and balances. These measures significantly reduced the misuse of funds compared to earlier phases of aid delivery in the region, where weak oversight had often led to widespread leakages. By requiring compliance with auditing standards, donors reinforced accountability while helping to strengthen local financial management practices.

The emphasis on oversight also had important symbolic and political effects. For citizens, visible mechanisms of accountability signaled that reconstruction was not simply a repetition of the corrupt practices that had contributed to war. For donors, the reforms provided assurance that their investments were protected, sustaining long-term funding flows for infrastructure, governance reform, and service delivery. According to Fanthorpe and Sesay (2009), this mutual confidence between citizens, government, and donors was critical for consolidating Sierra Leone's fragile peace.

Nonetheless, challenges persisted. Oversight mechanisms were heavily donor-driven, raising questions about sustainability and local ownership once external actors began to scale down their presence. Capacity gaps within domestic institutions limited the ability of the state to independently maintain rigorous auditing standards. These weaknesses underscore the importance of complementing oversight reforms with sustained investments in capacity-building for local institutions.

Despite these limitations, Sierra Leone's experience demonstrates that strong accountability mechanisms can mitigate ethical risks and contribute to both legitimacy and stability in post-war reconstruction. By embedding auditing and monitoring into infrastructure delivery, the country avoided many of the pitfalls observed in contexts such as Afghanistan and Iraq. The case underscores a broader lesson: in fragile states, oversight is not a bureaucratic luxury but an ethical and political necessity for ensuring that reconstruction strengthens peace rather than perpetuating fragility.

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Table 37. Sierra Leone: Oversight and Accountability in Post-War Reconstruction

Dimension	Key Points	Ethical Implications
Context	• Civil war (1991–2002) fueled by corruption and resource predation • Post-war legitimacy hinged on responsible management of resources	Reconstruction tied to rebuilding trust in governance
Oversight Mechanisms	• Donor-supported auditing procedures • Independent financial audits of infrastructure projects • Joint donor–government monitoring frameworks	Created transparency, reduced misuse of funds, deterred corruption
Positive Outcomes	• Early detection of irregularities • Strengthened local financial management practices • Reduced misuse compared to earlier aid delivery	Reinforced accountability, improved efficiency, reassured citizens and donors
Symbolic & Political Effects	• For citizens: visible accountability signaled departure from past corruption • For donors: assurance sustained long-term funding flows	Strengthened legitimacy of both state and reconstruction process
Challenges & Limitations	• Oversight heavily donor-driven • Sustainability questioned once donors scaled back • Domestic institutions had limited capacity to maintain standards independently	Risk of dependency, underscores need for local capacity-building
Critical Lesson	• Oversight is not a bureaucratic formality but a political and ethical necessity • Embedding accountability mechanisms helps consolidate peace in fragile states	Demonstrates how ethical oversight can transform reconstruction into a legitimacy-building process

6.6. Liberia: Donor Conditionality and the Question of Sovereignty

Liberia's recovery after its second civil war (1999-2003) highlights both the opportunities and dilemmas associated with using donor conditionality to promote ethical project management in fragile contexts. Decades of authoritarianism, corruption, and violent conflict had left state

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institutions hollowed out and public trust severely eroded. Against this backdrop, donors were reluctant to channel large volumes of reconstruction aid directly through government systems without safeguards. To address these concerns, the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Program (GEMAP) was introduced in 2005 as a framework to improve financial management, curb corruption, and restore credibility to state institutions (Sawyer, 2005).

GEMAP was notable for its stringent conditionality. Donor agencies and international financial institutions embedded external experts within Liberia's core financial institutions, including the Ministry of Finance, the Central Bank, and procurement agencies. These experts were given co-signatory authority over major financial transactions, meaning that government expenditures required donor approval to be executed. The arrangement aimed to prevent corruption, enhance transparency, and ensure that reconstruction funds were used responsibly. In practice, this created a hybrid governance model in which sovereignty was partially shared between the Liberian state and international actors.

From an ethical standpoint, GEMAP had both strengths and limitations. On the positive side, the program reassured donors that funds would not be siphoned off through corrupt networks, enabling sustained international investment in Liberia's recovery. It also contributed to concrete improvements in financial oversight, procurement practices, and auditing, thereby reinforcing accountability in public works and other sectors. For citizens, GEMAP's transparency measures signaled a break with the exploitative practices of the past, helping to slowly rebuild confidence in state institutions.

At the same time, GEMAP raised concerns about sovereignty and local ownership. Critics argued that the program represented a form of external tutelage, undermining the authority of Liberia's elected government and limiting its ability to exercise independent decision-making (Clapham, 2009). The presence of international co-signatories in domestic institutions was viewed by some as an infringement on national sovereignty, potentially weakening the legitimacy of the very institutions it sought to strengthen. Moreover, GEMAP's heavy reliance on external expertise risked perpetuating dependency rather than fostering long-term local capacity.

Despite these tensions, Liberia's experience with GEMAP demonstrates the complex trade-offs involved in embedding ethics into post-war reconstruction through external oversight. On one hand, conditionality provided immediate safeguards against corruption and reassured donors, ensuring that vital funds continued to flow. On the other hand, it highlighted the risks of imposing accountability mechanisms that may be effective in the short term but politically contentious or unsustainable in the long term. The case underscores the need to balance ethical imperatives with respect for sovereignty, designing oversight frameworks that gradually transition from donor-driven conditionality to locally owned accountability systems.

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Table 38. Liberia: Donor Conditionality and Ethical Oversight through GEMAP

Dimension	Key Points	Ethical Implications
Context	• Post–second civil war (1999–2003) • Institutions hollowed by authoritarianism, corruption, and conflict • Donors reluctant to fund government directly without safeguards	Fragile legitimacy required strict oversight of aid and public funds
GEMAP Framework (2005)	• Donor conditionality program to improve financial governance • External experts embedded in Ministry of Finance, Central Bank, and procurement agencies • Co-signatory authority: major expenditures required donor approval	Created hybrid governance model, sharing sovereignty between Liberia and international actors
Positive Outcomes	• Reassured donors, sustaining vital aid flows • Improved financial oversight, procurement, and auditing • Signaled to citizens a break with past corruption	Reinforced accountability, enabled responsible management of reconstruction
Challenges & Critiques	• Viewed as external tutelage, limiting sovereignty • Risked weakening legitimacy of elected government • Reliance on international expertise perpetuated dependency	Ethical safeguards clashed with principles of sovereignty and local ownership
Political Effects	• Built donor confidence, facilitating investment • Mixed citizen perceptions: transparency welcomed, sovereignty concerns persisted	Showed tension between effective oversight and national autonomy
Critical Lesson	• Conditionality can safeguard funds and build accountability in fragile contexts • Must be designed to transition gradually toward local ownership • Balance between ethical imperatives and sovereignty is key	Highlights the trade-off between short-term accountability and long-term legitimacy

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6.7. Cross-Cutting Lessons from Reconstruction Efforts

The comparative experiences of Iraq, Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Liberia highlight the decisive role that ethics plays in shaping reconstruction outcomes. Despite their distinct historical, cultural, and political contexts, these cases converge on three critical lessons that inform both theory and practice in post-war project management.

- **First, ethics and oversight determine legitimacy:** Where corruption, mismanagement, and weak accountability mechanisms dominate, reconstruction efforts rapidly lose credibility. In Iraq and Afghanistan, billions of dollars were wasted on incomplete or poorly executed projects, with oversight failures enabling widespread corruption. The result was not only material inefficiency but also profound damage to the legitimacy of both domestic governments and international donors. These examples illustrate that without ethical safeguards, large-scale reconstruction can become a liability, reinforcing grievances and fuelling renewed instability.

- **Second, inclusivity is essential for peacebuilding:** Post-war societies are deeply divided, and reconstruction processes that neglect fairness or equity risk entrenching conflict-era divisions. Bosnia and Herzegovina demonstrates how reconstruction, when shaped by political favoritism and ethnic exclusivity, can reinforce segregation rather than foster reconciliation. This case underscores that technical efficiency is insufficient: ethical project management must deliberately prioritize equity and inclusivity if infrastructure is to serve as a foundation for peace.

- **Third, participation and accountability foster resilience:** Community-driven approaches and independent oversight mechanisms enhance trust, ownership, and long-term sustainability. Rwanda's participatory model of reconstruction, rooted in *Umuganda* and community consultation, illustrates how direct citizen involvement can produce infrastructure that is both relevant and socially cohesive. Similarly, Sierra Leone's donor-supported auditing mechanisms show that strong accountability systems can mitigate corruption and reassure both citizens and international partners. These examples demonstrate that when ethical principles of participation and accountability are embedded into reconstruction, public works become not only physical assets but also instruments of legitimacy and resilience.

Taken together, these lessons emphasize that reconstruction is never a neutral, purely technical exercise. It is a profoundly ethical and political process in which the management of public works can either reinforce fragility or contribute to sustainable peace. The challenge for policymakers, donors, and project managers is therefore to institutionalize ethical standards in ways that are both context-sensitive and durable, ensuring that reconstruction delivers not only infrastructure but also justice, trust, and reconciliation.

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Table 39. Comparative Lessons from Post-War Reconstruction Cases

Core Lesson	Illustrative Cases	Key Insights for Ethical Project Management
1. Ethics and Oversight Determine Legitimacy	• **Iraq & Afghanistan:** (a) Billions wasted on incomplete or poorly executed projects (b) Oversight failures enabled systemic corruption- Aid misuse eroded public trust in both governments and donors	• Corruption undermines not only efficiency but also legitimacy • Ethical safeguards (auditing, monitoring) are indispensable for credibility and stability
2. Inclusivity is Essential for Peacebuilding	• **Bosnia & Herzegovina:** (a) Reconstruction programs often reinforced ethnic divisions (b) Resource allocation favored majority groups, marginalizing minorities (c) Technical rebuilding legitimized segregation rather than fostering integration	• Technical efficiency is insufficient- Equity and fairness must be embedded in reconstruction • Infrastructure decisions carry profound political consequences
3. Participation and Accountability Foster Resilience	• **Rwanda:** Participatory approaches (e.g. *Umuganda*) combined physical rebuilding with reconciliation (a) Citizen input ensured relevance and ownership (b) Enhanced cohesion and trust in state institutions • **Sierra Leone:** Donor-supported audits and monitoring reduced misuse of funds, reassured donors, and built citizen confidence	• Participation transforms reconstruction into a cooperative, trust-building process • Accountability mechanisms deter corruption, sustain funding, and consolidate peace
Cross-Cutting Insight	• All cases demonstrate that reconstruction is not a neutral technical task but a deeply ethical and political process	• Embedding ethics-through oversight, inclusivity, participation, and accountability ensures that public works contribute to legitimacy, justice, and sustainable peace

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7. The Role of Stakeholders

7.1. Stakeholders as Drivers of Ethical Reconstruction

Ethical project management in post-war public works cannot be achieved by a single actor operating in isolation. Reconstruction takes place in fragile environments marked by weak institutions, polarized societies, and competing political interests. In such contexts, ethical standards are upheld only when multiple stakeholders collaborate to balance technical efficiency with social legitimacy. Each group (governments, international donors, civil society organizations, local communities, and project managers) brings distinct responsibilities and capacities that, when aligned, can transform reconstruction into a vehicle for both material recovery and peacebuilding.

Governments play a central role in setting the regulatory and institutional frameworks that govern reconstruction. They are responsible for enacting anti-corruption measures, enforcing procurement rules, and ensuring that public works reflect national priorities. International donors, meanwhile, provide critical financial resources and technical expertise but also exercise influence through conditionality and oversight mechanisms. Their role is to support rather than supplant domestic institutions, aligning aid with ethical standards while respecting sovereignty.

Civil society organizations and watchdog groups act as independent monitors, ensuring that reconstruction remains transparent and inclusive. By amplifying the voices of marginalized populations and holding both governments and contractors accountable, they safeguard against elite capture and misuse of resources. Local communities also play a crucial role, not only as beneficiaries but as co-designers and implementers of public works. Their participation enhances relevance, ownership, and long-term sustainability. Finally, project managers serve as the operational link between policy frameworks and implementation, translating ethical principles into practice through day-to-day decisions on procurement, labor practices, and community engagement.

Taken together, these stakeholders form an interdependent ecosystem. Where collaboration is strong and responsibilities clearly defined, reconstruction has the potential to deliver infrastructure that promotes equity, legitimacy, and stability. Where coordination breaks down, however, even well-funded projects risk reproducing the corruption, exclusion, and mistrust that undermine peace. Understanding and leveraging the complementary roles of stakeholders is therefore essential to embedding ethics at the heart of post-war project management.

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Table 40. Stakeholder Roles in Ethical Project Management of Post-War Reconstruction

Stakeholder	Core Responsibilities	Ethical Contribution
Governments	• Establish regulatory and institutional frameworks • Enact anti-corruption measures • Enforce procurement and financial management rules • Align projects with national priorities	Provides legitimacy, ensures rule-based governance, prevents elite capture
International Donors	• Provide financial resources and technical expertise • Apply conditionality and oversight to safeguard aid • Support (not supplant) domestic institutions • Balance accountability with respect for sovereignty	Strengthens transparency, sustains funding, encourages reforms while respecting ownership
Civil Society & Watchdog Groups	• Act as independent monitors • Amplify voices of marginalized groups • Hold governments and contractors accountable	Safeguards inclusivity, deters corruption, enhances transparency
Local Communities	• Participate in needs assessments, design, and monitoring • Serve as co-designers and implementers of projects • Ensure relevance and sustainability of public works	Builds ownership, fosters legitimacy, enhances social cohesion
Project Managers	• Translate ethical principles into practice in procurement, labor, and community engagement • Operationalize frameworks into day-to-day decisions	Ensures ethical standards are embedded throughout project cycle

7.2.   Local and National Government

Governments bear the primary responsibility for leading reconstruction efforts in post-war societies. As sovereign authorities, they are tasked with establishing legal frameworks, setting national priorities, and coordinating the allocation of resources across competing demands. Their role is central to ensuring that reconstruction is not only technically efficient but also ethically grounded. This includes enforcing procurement standards, preventing corruption, guaranteeing equitable resource distribution, and integrating principles of inclusivity and

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sustainability into planning. By doing so, governments can transform reconstruction from a purely technical endeavor into a vehicle for state-building and reconciliation.

Yet, post-war states are often constrained by weak institutional capacity, fragile legitimacy, and contested authority. Many emerging governments struggle to enforce procurement laws, regulate contractors, or monitor financial flows, leaving public works vulnerable to elite capture and corruption (Gnaldi & Del Sarto, 2024). In these contexts, the absence of strong governance structures risks undermining both efficiency and legitimacy, as citizens perceive reconstruction as serving narrow political or ethnic interests rather than the common good. Addressing these deficits requires embedding ethical principles into the very architecture of governance, ensuring that rules and institutions are designed to promote transparency, fairness, and accountability.

Key mechanisms for embedding ethics include the establishment of independent anti-corruption agencies with the authority to investigate and sanction malpractice; the introduction of transparent budgeting systems that allow citizens to track expenditures; and the decentralization of decision-making to local governments, which can enhance responsiveness to community needs. For example, Sierra Leone's emphasis on joint donor-government monitoring mechanisms after its civil war helped strengthen oversight while gradually building domestic capacity (Fanthorpe & Sesay, 2009). Similarly, Rwanda's investment in local governance structures enabled communities to participate directly in decision-making, reinforcing legitimacy and ensuring that public works addressed local priorities (Ansoms & Rostagno, 2012).

Ultimately, ethical leadership from political elites is indispensable. Formal rules and institutions can only be effective when leaders demonstrate a genuine commitment to integrity and accountability. By setting the tone at the top, political elites shape the norms and expectations that cascade through bureaucracies and implementing agencies. In contexts such as Liberia, where post-war leaders endorsed reforms under the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Program (GEMAP), visible commitment from political authorities was critical in reassuring both citizens and donors of the government's willingness to break from corrupt practices (Sawyer, 2005).

Governments therefore occupy a pivotal position in post-war reconstruction. While constrained by fragility, they hold the unique authority to institutionalize ethics in governance structures and to signal that reconstruction is intended for the collective good. Where governments exercise ethical leadership and strengthen accountability systems, they not only deliver infrastructure but also lay the groundwork for renewed trust between state and society.

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Table 41. Government Leadership in Ethical Post-War Reconstruction

Dimension	Key Points	Ethical Contribution
Core Responsibilities	• Establish legal frameworks and national priorities • Coordinate allocation of resources • Enforce procurement standards • Guarantee equitable distribution • Integrate inclusivity and sustainability into planning	Positions government as the sovereign authority ensuring legitimacy and fairness
Constraints in Post-War Contexts	• Weak institutional capacity • Fragile legitimacy and contested authority • Limited ability to enforce laws, regulate contractors, and monitor funds	Creates vulnerability to elite capture, corruption, and exclusionary practices
Mechanisms for Embedding Ethics	• Independent anti-corruption agencies with sanctioning powers • Transparent budgeting and expenditure tracking • Decentralization to empower local governments- Joint monitoring mechanisms with donors (e.g. Sierra Leone) • Local governance participation structures (e.g. Rwanda)	Strengthens transparency, accountability, and responsiveness to citizens
Examples	• **Sierra Leone:** Joint donor-government monitoring improved oversight and built domestic capacity • **Rwanda:** Local governance enabled inclusive decision-making and reinforced legitimacy • **Liberia (GEMAP):** Political commitment reassured citizens and donors of reform intentions	Illustrates how governance reforms and leadership commitments build credibility and resilience
Leadership Imperative	• Ethical leadership from elites essential for reforms to be credible • Leaders must demonstrate integrity, accountability, and commitment to collective good	Shapes norms and expectations across institutions, signaling a break from corruption
Overall Impact	• Governments occupy a pivotal role in setting the ethical tone of reconstruction • Effective leadership institutionalizes accountability and inclusivity • Reconstruction becomes both a technical and political project for peacebuilding	Strengthens trust between state and society, advancing reconciliation and legitimacy

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7.3.   International Donors and Financial Institutions

Donors and international financial institutions (IFIs) such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and regional development banks play a pivotal role in post-war reconstruction. Given the scale of destruction and the fiscal collapse that often accompany armed conflict, domestic governments rarely have sufficient resources to finance recovery on their own. Donor agencies thus provide critical funding for rebuilding infrastructure, restoring basic services, and stabilizing public finances. Their influence extends beyond financial contributions: through conditionality and governance benchmarks, donors can shape the institutional frameworks within which reconstruction occurs, incentivizing transparency, accountability, and ethical conduct (OECD, 2016; 2025).

One of the most widely used donor tools is conditionality – tying aid disbursements to the adoption of specific reforms, such as anti-corruption measures, procurement transparency, or fiscal responsibility laws. In theory, this approach encourages governments to embed ethics into reconstruction frameworks and reassures donor constituencies that their resources are being used responsibly. For example, in Liberia, the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Program (GEMAP) imposed stringent financial oversight mechanisms, which reassured donors of Liberia's commitment to ethical management and enabled the sustained flow of aid (Sawyer, 2005). Similarly, in Sierra Leone, donor requirements for independent auditing strengthened accountability institutions and reduced opportunities for corruption in public works (Fanthorpe & Sesay, 2009).

However, donor influence is not without drawbacks. Donor priorities often emphasize speed and visibility, reflecting pressures to demonstrate quick results to home audiences. This emphasis can clash with ethical safeguards that require time for consultation, capacity-building, and oversight. In Afghanistan and Iraq, for instance, massive inflows of donor aid were channeled rapidly into large-scale projects with insufficient monitoring. The result was widespread corruption, unfinished or substandard infrastructure, and a profound loss of legitimacy for both governments and their international partners (SIGAR, 2021; SIGIR, 2013). These cases illustrate the risks of privileging short-term donor visibility over long-term sustainability.

A balanced approach is therefore essential. Donors must require compliance with ethical standards (i.e. transparent procurement, environmental and social safeguards, anti-corruption frameworks, etc.) while simultaneously supporting local capacity-building to ensure sustainability. Rather than imposing externally driven models that risk undermining sovereignty and local legitimacy, donors should work collaboratively with governments, civil society, and communities to co-create accountability mechanisms that reflect local realities. Initiatives such as the Open Contracting Partnership and participatory monitoring frameworks provide promising examples of donor-supported reforms that align global standards with local ownership (Open Contracting Partnership, 2015; 2019).

Ultimately, the role of donors in ethical project management is dual: they serve as financiers and as norm-setters. Their financial leverage can promote accountability, but its effectiveness

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depends on whether donor policies reinforce domestic institutions rather than replace them. By striking a balance between conditionality and partnership, donors can help ensure that reconstruction delivers not only visible infrastructure but also the ethical governance practices necessary for long-term peace and resilience.

Table 42. Donors and International Financial Institutions in Ethical Post-War Reconstruction

Dimension	Key Points	Ethical Contribution
Core Role	• Provide critical funding for infrastructure, services, and fiscal stabilization • Influence institutional frameworks through conditionality and governance benchmarks	Enable recovery where domestic resources are insufficient; incentivize ethical conduct
Key Mechanisms	• Conditionality linking aid to reforms (anti-corruption, procurement transparency, fiscal responsibility) • Governance benchmarks and auditing requirements- Collaborative initiatives (e.g. Open Contracting Partnership, participatory monitoring)	Encourages transparency, strengthens accountability, and aligns reconstruction with global ethical standards
Positive Examples	• **Liberia (GEMAP):** Stringent donor oversight reassured funders, sustained aid flows • **Sierra Leone:** Donor requirements for independent auditing reduced misuse of funds	Demonstrated how conditionality can safeguard resources and reinforce accountability institutions
Risks & Critiques	• Emphasis on speed and visibility over sustainability • Risk of imposing externally driven models undermining sovereignty and local ownership • **Afghanistan & Iraq:** Rapid aid disbursement without monitoring enabled corruption, unfinished projects, and legitimacy loss	Shows dangers of privileging donor visibility over inclusivity, accountability, and long-term resilience
Balanced Approach	• Couple conditionality with capacity-building • Co-create accountability frameworks with governments, civil society, and communities • Prioritize long-term sustainability over quick donor visibility	Promotes ownership, reinforces domestic institutions, ensures reforms are context-sensitive
Overall Role	• Donors act as both financiers and norm-setters • Effectiveness depends on reinforcing rather than replacing local institutions	When balanced, donor influence embeds ethics into reconstruction while respecting sovereignty

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7.4.   Non-Governmental Organizations and Civil Society

Civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a dual role in post-war reconstruction: they act both as service providers and as watchdogs. In fragile contexts where state institutions are weak or distrusted, CSOs often step in to fill urgent gaps in service delivery, providing healthcare, education, housing, or livelihood support to affected populations. At the same time, their independence positions them as crucial actors for monitoring the conduct of governments, donors, and contractors. By raising awareness about corruption, advocating for inclusive policies, and creating channels for citizen engagement, CSOs contribute directly to embedding ethical standards in reconstruction (Fukuyama, 2014).

As watchdogs, CSOs play a vital role in exposing malpractice and ensuring that reconstruction resources are used responsibly. Through activities such as budget monitoring, procurement tracking, and independent reporting, they can identify irregularities that might otherwise go unnoticed. For example, Integrity Watch Afghanistan mobilized communities to monitor school construction projects, uncovering cases of incomplete facilities, fraudulent reporting, and misuse of donor funds (Integrity Watch Afghanistan, 2016). Such initiatives not only increased transparency but also empowered citizens to demand accountability from both state institutions and international agencies.

CSOs also serve as advocates for marginalized groups whose needs are often overlooked in post-war settings. By amplifying the voices of women, minorities, and displaced populations, they help ensure that reconstruction policies and public works projects promote equity rather than deepen exclusion. In Rwanda, women's organizations played an important role in shaping post-genocide housing and community development programs, ensuring that reconstruction addressed gender-specific vulnerabilities (Burnet, 2008). In Bosnia and Herzegovina, local NGOs challenged ethnically biased reconstruction practices, highlighting how aid distribution was reinforcing wartime divisions (Donais, 2009).

However, the effectiveness of CSOs depends heavily on the broader political and legal environment. In contexts where governments restrict civic space, impose legal barriers, or intimidate activists, CSOs face severe constraints on their ability to operate independently. Authoritarian tendencies, as observed in Rwanda, can limit the degree of genuine civic participation even where community-based approaches are promoted (Reyntjens, 2013). Furthermore, CSOs themselves may face challenges of capacity, coordination, and accountability, particularly when heavily reliant on donor funding.

Despite these challenges, CSOs remain indispensable to ethical project management in post-war reconstruction. Their ability to provide services while simultaneously monitoring and critiquing state and donor practices makes them a bridge between communities and institutions. By fostering citizen engagement, amplifying marginalized voices, and exposing corruption, CSOs help ensure that reconstruction delivers not only physical infrastructure but also social justice and accountability.

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Table 43. Civil Society and NGOs in Ethical Post-War Reconstruction

Dimension	Key Points	Ethical Contribution
Dual Role	• Provide services where states are weak (healthcare, education, housing, livelihoods) • Act as watchdogs over governments, donors, and contractors	Address urgent needs while safeguarding accountability and inclusivity
Watchdog Functions	• Budget monitoring, procurement tracking, independent reporting- Exposing malpractice and misuse of funds • **Example:** Integrity Watch Afghanistan revealed fraud and incomplete schools	Enhances transparency, deters corruption, empowers citizens to demand accountability
Advocacy for Inclusion	• Amplify voices of women, minorities, and displaced populations • **Example:** Women's organizations in Rwanda influenced housing/community programs • **Example:** NGOs in Bosnia challenged ethnically biased reconstruction	Promotes equity, prevents exclusion, strengthens legitimacy of reconstruction
Constraints & Challenges	• Restrictive political/legal environments limit independence • Authoritarian contexts may suppress genuine civic participation • Capacity, coordination, and donor dependency issues	Effectiveness undermined when civic space is constrained or organizations lack autonomy
Overall Role	• Act as a bridge between citizens and institutions • Foster engagement, expose corruption, amplify marginalized voices • Deliver services while promoting accountability	Ensure reconstruction delivers not only infrastructure but also fairness, justice, and legitimacy

7.5. Local Communities and Beneficiaries

Local communities are not passive recipients of reconstruction aid but active stakeholders whose involvement is essential for ethical project management. In post-war settings, where external actors and central governments often dominate decision-making, community participation ensures that public works reflect genuine needs and priorities rather than imposed agendas. By engaging communities in project planning, monitoring, and evaluation, reconstruction can foster local ownership, strengthen legitimacy, and create infrastructure that is both relevant and sustainable (Chambers, 1997).

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Community-driven approaches also play an important role in reducing the risks of elite capture and resource misallocation. When decisions are taken exclusively by political elites or donor agencies, there is a high likelihood that projects will serve narrow interests rather than the broader public. By contrast, participatory mechanisms such as community committees, participatory budgeting, and citizen monitoring platforms can create checks against favoritism and corruption. For instance, community oversight of water and sanitation projects in Sierra Leone helped ensure equitable service provision and reduced opportunities for misuse of funds (Fanthorpe & Sesay, 2009).

Moreover, involving communities directly in reconstruction fosters a sense of ownership that extends beyond the construction phase. Infrastructure built with local participation is more likely to be maintained and protected by residents, increasing its longevity. Rwanda's Umuganda - program, where citizens collectively contributed labor to rebuild roads, schools, and housing, demonstrated how community participation can simultaneously deliver infrastructure, foster social cohesion, and rebuild trust in public institutions (Ansoms & Rostagno, 2012). Ownership also enhances resilience by equipping communities with the skills and organizational structures needed to address future challenges.

However, for participation to be meaningful, communities must have access to both information and decision-making mechanisms. Tokenistic consultation risks reproducing patterns of exclusion and disillusionment. Transparency about budgets, timelines, and project objectives is necessary for citizens to evaluate and influence reconstruction processes effectively. In Afghanistan, a lack of accessible information about donor-funded projects often left communities unaware of their entitlements, enabling corruption and undermining accountability (SIGAR, 2021). Genuine participation therefore requires institutionalized channels for dialogue, transparency, and grievance redress.

In sum, local communities are not merely beneficiaries of post-war reconstruction, they are co-creators of its legitimacy and sustainability. By embedding community participation into every stage of the project cycle, reconstruction can move beyond technical delivery to become a process of empowerment, reconciliation, and resilience-building.

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Table 44. Local Communities as Co-Creators in Post-War Reconstruction

Dimension	Key Points	Ethical Contribution
Core Role	• Communities are active stakeholders, not passive recipients • Engage in planning, monitoring, and evaluation- Ensure projects reflect real needs	Aligns reconstruction with citizen priorities, strengthens legitimacy
Checks Against Misuse	• Reduce risks of elite capture and favoritism- Mechanisms: community committees, participatory budgeting, citizen monitoring • **Example:** Sierra Leone-community oversight improved fairness in water/sanitation projects	Increases transparency, deters corruption, ensures equitable distribution
Ownership & Sustainability	• Local involvement fosters stewardship of infrastructure • Enhances long-term maintenance and protection • **Example:** Rwanda's *Umuganda* collective work rebuilt infrastructure and social trust	Builds social cohesion, encourages responsibility, boosts resilience
Requirements for Meaningful Participation	• Access to budgets, timelines, and project objectives- Institutionalized dialogue and grievance redress channels • **Counterexample:** Afghanistan-lack of transparency left citizens unaware of rights, enabling corruption	Prevents tokenism, empowers communities to hold actors accountable
Overall Impact	• Communities shape both physical and social reconstruction • Participation transforms aid delivery into empowerment and reconciliation	Embeds justice, inclusivity, and resilience into post-war recovery

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7.6. Project Managers and Practitioners

At the operational level, project managers play a pivotal role in translating ethical principles into day-to-day practice. Positioned at the interface between policy frameworks, donor expectations, and community needs, they are responsible for making decisions that directly shape the quality, fairness, and legitimacy of reconstruction outcomes. Beyond overseeing budgets, timelines, and deliverables, project managers are tasked with ensuring that reconstruction aligns with ethical commitments such as transparency, accountability, inclusivity, and sustainability. Their role is therefore both technical and moral, requiring constant navigation of dilemmas in resource-constrained and politically charged environments.

Ethical dilemmas for project managers often emerge where competing pressures intersect. Scarcity of resources may force difficult trade-offs between speed and quality, or between meeting donor visibility requirements and addressing long-term community needs. In environments characterized by corruption or political interference, managers may face pressure to award contracts to favored firms, bypass procurement standards, or exclude marginalized groups from project benefits. In such contexts, adherence to ethical principles requires not only technical competence but also moral courage and institutional backing.

Professional training and codes of conduct are essential tools for empowering project managers to act with integrity. Frameworks such as the Project Management Institute's Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct emphasize responsibility, fairness, honesty, and respect as guiding values for practitioners. When supported by institutional mechanisms (i.e. whistleblower protections, grievance redress systems, transparent reporting requirements, etc.) these codes provide a foundation for resisting unethical practices and maintaining accountability.

At the same time, institutional support is crucial. Even well-trained project managers may find their ethical agency constrained if organizational cultures prioritize speed, visibility, or political expediency over integrity. Providing project managers with autonomy, clear accountability structures, and protection against retaliation enables them to uphold ethical standards in practice. For example, in Sierra Leone's reconstruction, donor-backed auditing systems not only increased oversight but also gave project managers stronger grounds to resist corrupt pressures (Fanthorpe & Sesay, 2009).

Ultimately, project managers serve as the operational bridge between abstract ethical frameworks and concrete reconstruction outcomes. Their decisions shape whether infrastructure projects become symbols of fairness and renewal or of exclusion and mistrust. Investing in their professional development, embedding ethics into project management training, and creating supportive institutional environments are therefore indispensable for ensuring that reconstruction delivers on its ethical as well as technical promises.

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Table 45. Project Managers as Ethical Gatekeepers in Post-War Reconstruction

Dimension	Key Points	Ethical Contribution
Core Role	• Operate at the intersection of policy, donor expectations, and community needs • Manage budgets, timelines, and deliverables while upholding ethics • Ensure reconstruction aligns with transparency, accountability, inclusivity, and sustainability	Translate abstract ethical commitments into practice, shaping legitimacy and fairness
Ethical Dilemmas	• Trade-offs: speed vs. quality, donor visibility vs. community needs • Pressures from corruption, favoritism, or political interference • Risks of exclusion of marginalized groups	Requires moral courage and competence to resist unethical practices
Professional Tools	• Training in ethical project management- Codes of conduct (e.g. PMI's Code of Ethics: responsibility, fairness, honesty, respect) • Institutional mechanisms: whistleblower protections, grievance systems, transparent reporting	Provides frameworks and safeguards for integrity in decision-making
Need for Institutional Support	• Organizational cultures may prioritize expediency over ethics- Managers need autonomy, accountability structures, and protection from retaliation • **Example:** Sierra Leone-donor-backed audits gave managers leverage against corrupt pressures	Strengthens managers' ability to enforce ethical standards despite constraints
Overall Impact	• Project managers are the operational bridge between frameworks and outcomes • Their decisions determine whether projects foster fairness and trust or exclusion and mistrust	Embedding ethics in project management training and culture ensures reconstruction is both technically sound and morally credible

7.7. Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration

Effective ethical project management in post-war reconstruction requires coordination among all stakeholders. No single actor (whether government, donor, civil society, or community) can uphold ethical standards in isolation. Instead, collaborative mechanisms are essential for aligning priorities, facilitating dialogue, and ensuring shared accountability. Instruments such as joint steering committees, donor–government compacts, and community advisory boards provide platforms for interaction among stakeholders, creating opportunities to balance competing

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interests while maintaining collective responsibility for outcomes (Anderson, Brown, & Jean, 2012).

Such collaborative approaches serve several functions. First, they reduce duplication by harmonizing donor initiatives with government-led strategies, avoiding fragmentation that often undermines efficiency in post-conflict contexts. Second, they promote inclusivity by creating structured opportunities for community voices and civil society perspectives to inform project design and monitoring. Third, they distribute responsibility across actors, ensuring that ethical obligations, such as transparency, accountability, and fairness are upheld collectively rather than left to individual institutions that may be weak or compromised.

Practical experiences reinforce the value of collaboration. In Liberia, joint oversight mechanisms under the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Program (GEMAP) balanced donor conditionality with government participation, creating a hybrid system of accountability that reassured donors while strengthening state capacity (Sawyer, 2005). In Rwanda, community advisory structures embedded in local governance frameworks enabled participatory planning that linked reconstruction to reconciliation (Ansoms & Rostagno, 2012). By contrast, in Afghanistan, the lack of coherent coordination among donors, government agencies, and communities contributed to inefficiencies, duplication of projects, and widespread corruption (SIGAR, 2021).

Collaboration does not eliminate ethical risks, but it creates safeguards that make lapses less likely and easier to detect. By fostering dialogue and ensuring that no single stakeholder monopolizes control, multi-actor frameworks provide a foundation for embedding ethics into reconstruction processes. Ultimately, ethical project management in post-war contexts is most effective when it is shared when governments, donors, project managers, civil society, and communities see themselves as partners in both rebuilding infrastructure and rebuilding trust.

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Table 46. Collaborative Mechanisms for Ethical Project Management in Post-War Reconstruction

Dimension	Key Points	Ethical Contribution
Rationale	• No single actor can uphold ethics alone • Weak or compromised institutions require shared responsibility • Collaboration balances competing priorities	Prevents concentration of power, strengthens legitimacy, distributes accountability
Mechanisms	• Joint steering committees • Donor-government compacts • Community advisory boards • Multi-actor monitoring frameworks	Provide structured platforms for dialogue, oversight, and inclusivity
Functions	• **Efficiency:** Reduces duplication and fragmentation • **Inclusivity:** Creates channels for civil society and community input • **Accountability:** Distributes responsibility across stakeholders	Harmonizes efforts, ensures fairness, upholds transparency
Positive Examples	• **Liberia (GEMAP):** Joint oversight balanced donor conditionality with government participation, strengthening accountability • **Rwanda:** Community advisory structures linked planning to reconciliation	Reinforced trust, improved coordination, embedded ethics in governance
Negative Example	• **Afghanistan:** Weak coordination among donors, state, and communities caused inefficiencies, duplication, and corruption	Illustrates risks of fragmented, uncoordinated approaches
Overall Impact	• Collaboration does not eliminate risks but reduces and exposes them • Builds shared ownership and trust • Embeds ethics into reconstruction as a collective responsibility	Creates safeguards, enhances transparency, makes ethical lapses less likely

8. Conclusion
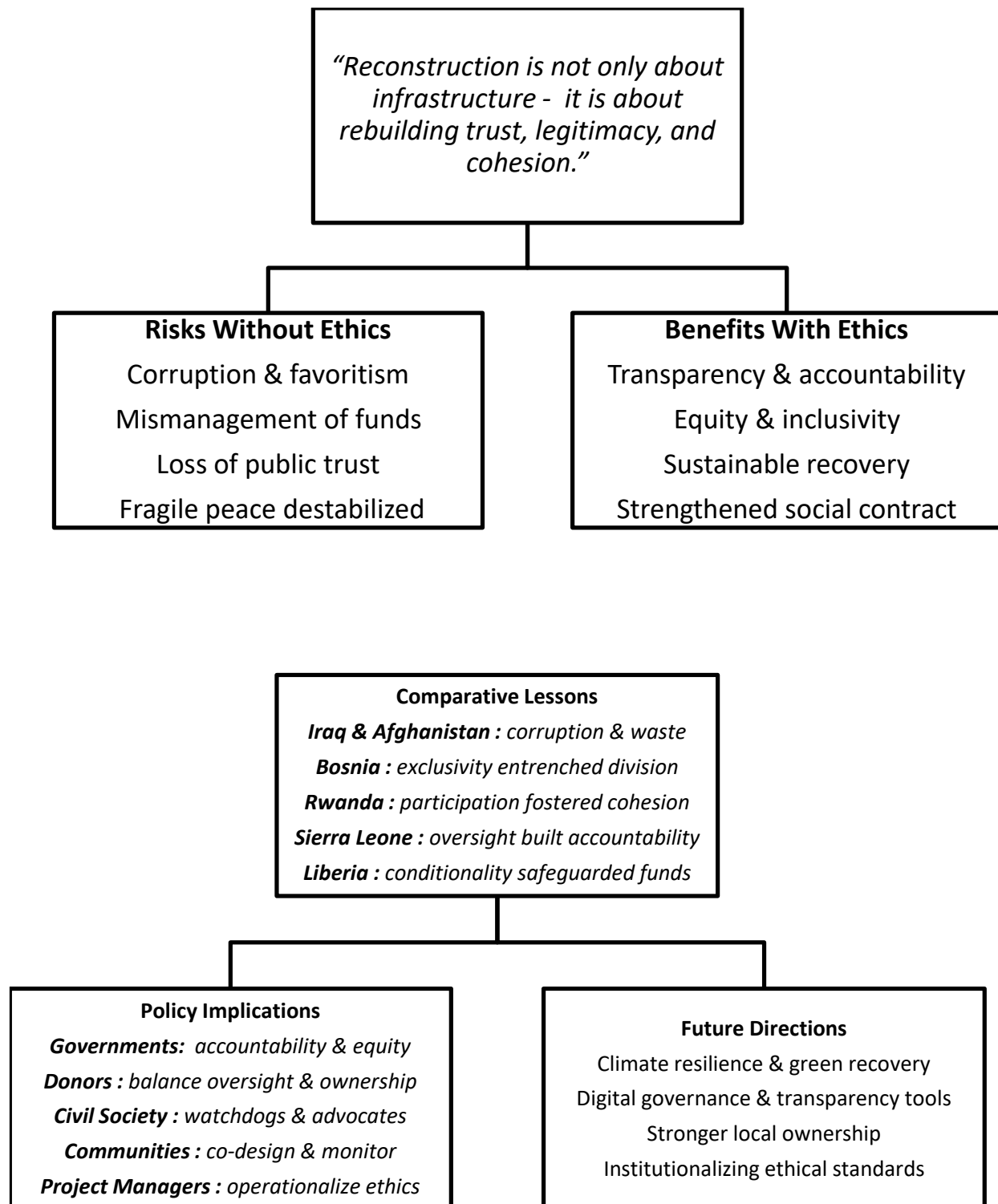
8.1. Ethics as a Cornerstone of Reconstruction

Post-war reconstruction is a profoundly complex endeavor that extends far beyond the rebuilding of physical infrastructure. At its core, it is about re-establishing trust, legitimacy, and social cohesion in societies fractured by violence. Ethical project management is therefore not an accessory but a cornerstone of sustainable recovery. Without strong ethical foundations, reconstruction risks becoming an arena for corruption, favoritism, and mismanagement –

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outcomes that can erode confidence in state institutions, fuel grievances, and destabilize fragile peace processes. Conversely, when transparency, accountability, inclusivity, and sustainability are embedded into public works, reconstruction delivers more than roads, schools, and hospitals: it produces visible symbols of fairness, justice, and renewal that strengthen the social contract.

The analysis of principles, challenges, and case studies throughout this article underscores that ethical project management is not merely a normative aspiration but a practical necessity. Experiences from Iraq, Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Liberia demonstrate that reconstruction succeeds when ethical standards are upheld and fails when they are neglected. These cases highlight the dual nature of public works as both technical outputs and political instruments, capable of either bridging divides or entrenching them.

This concluding section synthesizes the study's findings into three parts. First, it outlines the key insights that emerge from comparative experiences of reconstruction. Second, it identifies policy implications for governments, donors, project managers, and civil society actors committed to embedding ethics in practice. Finally, it points to future directions, emphasizing areas for further research and emerging challenges (i.e. climate resilience, digital governance, local ownership, etc.) that will shape the ethical management of reconstruction in the decades ahead.

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Figure 03. Ethical Project Management in Post-War Reconstruction

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8.2. Lessons from Case Studies

The comparative cases examined in this article illustrate both the risks of unethical practice and the benefits of integrity-driven approaches in post-war reconstruction. Iraq and Afghanistan stand as cautionary tales: despite vast international investment, weak oversight, opaque procurement, and systemic corruption squandered resources and delegitimized state institutions. The result was not only wasted funds but also the erosion of public trust, which insurgent groups exploited to undermine fragile peacebuilding efforts. These cases demonstrate that without ethical safeguards, reconstruction can exacerbate grievances and destabilize recovery rather than supporting it.

Bosnia and Herzegovina illustrates another dimension of ethical failure. Even where reconstruction projects delivered technically successful outcomes (i.e. repaired housing and restored utilities) decisions made without regard to fairness or inclusivity entrenched ethnic divisions. Infrastructure in this context became a symbol of exclusion rather than reconciliation, underscoring that technical efficiency alone cannot substitute for ethical judgment. Equity and inclusivity are essential for ensuring that reconstruction contributes to social cohesion rather than perpetuating wartime fault lines.

By contrast, Rwanda's experience highlights the potential of participatory reconstruction. Through mechanisms such as Umuganda and community consultation, citizens were actively engaged in planning and implementation. This not only ensured that infrastructure was responsive to local needs but also fostered social cohesion, trust, and a sense of collective ownership. Similarly, Sierra Leone's emphasis on donor-supported audits and accountability mechanisms illustrates the value of independent monitoring in curbing corruption and ensuring that reconstruction resources reached their intended beneficiaries. These experiences show that participation and accountability can significantly enhance both legitimacy and sustainability.

Taken together, these cases reveal a simple but powerful truth: the ethical quality of reconstruction projects determines their broader impact on peace and legitimacy. Infrastructure is never neutral, it can either embody fairness, justice, and renewal or reinforce exclusion, corruption, and division. Ethical project management thus emerges as a determinant of whether reconstruction becomes a foundation for sustainable peace or a source of renewed fragility.

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Table 47. Comparative Lessons from Post-War Reconstruction Cases

Case	Key Experience	Ethical Insight
Iraq & Afghanistan	• Massive donor investment • Weak oversight & opaque procurement • Systemic corruption squandered resources • Insurgents exploited public disillusionment	Without ethical safeguards, reconstruction erodes trust, fuels grievances, and destabilizes fragile peace
Bosnia & Herzegovina	• Housing and utilities technically restored • Resource allocation entrenched ethnic divisions • Infrastructure mirrored wartime partitions	Technical efficiency without fairness entrenches exclusion; equity and inclusivity are essential
Rwanda	• Participatory reconstruction (*Umuganda*, community consultation) • Citizens engaged in planning & implementation • Projects aligned with local needs	Participation fosters ownership, cohesion, and trust; ethical inclusion strengthens legitimacy
Sierra Leone	• Donor-supported audits and monitoring • Independent oversight curbed corruption • Resources more effectively allocated	Accountability mechanisms ensure transparency, reduce misuse, and reinforce trust in institutions

8.3. Shared Responsibilities of Stakeholders

The comparative analysis of post-war reconstruction demonstrates that ethical project management cannot be achieved by a single actor acting in isolation. Effective and sustainable recovery requires coordinated efforts across multiple stakeholders, each carrying distinct but complementary responsibilities. Translating ethical principles into practice therefore demands clear policy commitments and operational mechanisms that embed transparency, accountability, inclusivity, and sustainability into every stage of reconstruction.

Governments must lead the process by enacting strong legal and regulatory frameworks that institutionalize ethical standards. This includes establishing transparent procurement laws, strengthening anti-corruption agencies, and decentralizing decision-making to ensure equitable resource allocation. Political leaders play a particularly crucial role by setting the tone for

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accountability and demonstrating resistance to elite capture. Without visible ethical leadership, even the best-designed frameworks risk being undermined by entrenched interests.

Donors and international financial institutions must balance urgency with integrity. While the pressure to deliver rapid results is understandable, aid conditioned solely on speed risks fueling corruption and waste. Instead, donor support should be tied to ethical benchmarks (i.e. independent audits, transparent budgeting, grievance redress mechanisms, etc.) while simultaneously investing in local capacity to sustain reforms (Belloni & Strazzari, 2014). This dual approach ensures that donor influence reinforces domestic accountability rather than substituting for it.

Civil society organizations and the media serve as indispensable watchdogs. By amplifying citizen voices, exposing malpractice, and advocating for inclusive policies, they hold both governments and donors accountable. Policies that protect civic space and safeguard press freedom are therefore essential for enabling CSOs and media actors to fulfill this role effectively.

Local communities must be empowered to shape reconstruction priorities and monitor project implementation. Their participation ensures that public works reflect genuine needs, enhances ownership, and reduces the likelihood of elite capture. Mechanisms such as participatory budgeting, community monitoring platforms, and advisory boards should be institutionalized to embed citizen engagement into reconstruction processes.

Finally, project managers operating at the interface of technical delivery and ethical responsibility require both professional guidance and institutional safeguards. Training in ethical project management, adherence to professional codes of conduct, and protection through whistleblower and grievance redress systems enable managers to navigate the ethical dilemmas that inevitably arise in fragile contexts.

Taken together, these policy implications underscore that ethics in post-war reconstruction is not a normative add-on but a strategic necessity. Only when governments, donors, civil society, communities, and project managers act in concert can reconstruction deliver infrastructure that embodies fairness, strengthens legitimacy, and lays the foundation for durable peace.

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48. Policy Implications for Ethical Project Management in Post-War Reconstruction

Stakeholder	Core Responsibilities	Key Ethical Contribution
Governments	• Establish legal & regulatory frameworks • Enforce transparent procurement laws-Strengthen anti-corruption agencies • Decentralize decision-making for equity • Political leaders set tone for accountability	Institutionalize ethics in governance; demonstrate visible leadership against elite capture
Donors & IFIs	• Provide financial support tied to ethical benchmarks (audits, transparent budgeting, grievance mechanisms) • Balance urgency with integrity • Invest in local capacity to sustain reforms	Reinforce domestic accountability while avoiding substitution; safeguard aid from corruption
Civil Society & Media	• Act as watchdogs through advocacy, monitoring, and reporting • Amplify citizen voices, especially marginalized groups • Expose malpractice and promote inclusivity • Require protection of civic space and press freedom	Enhance transparency, ensure inclusivity, hold governments and donors accountable
Local Communities	• Participate in planning, monitoring, and evaluation • Shape priorities through participatory budgeting, monitoring platforms, and advisory boards • Provide local oversight to reduce elite capture	Foster ownership, legitimacy, and sustainability; align reconstruction with real needs
Project Managers	• Translate principles into practice at operational level • Manage ethical dilemmas in resource-constrained, politicized contexts • Apply professional codes of conduct (e.g. PMI standards) • Rely on whistleblower protections and grievance systems	Ensure integrity in daily decision-making; bridge technical delivery and ethical responsibility

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8.4. Public Works as Instruments of Peacebuilding

Public works in post-war contexts are never neutral. A bridge, road, or school may appear as a purely technical achievement, yet in fragile societies such infrastructure carries profound symbolic significance. Delivered ethically, reconstruction projects represent fairness, inclusion, and a decisive break with past injustices. Delivered unethically, they become visible markers of exclusion, corruption, or neglect (Belloni & Strazzari, 2014). Infrastructure is therefore both material and symbolic: it shapes access to essential services while also shaping perceptions of justice, trust, and peace. Recognizing this dual role underscores why ethics must remain central to project management in post-war recovery.

Looking ahead, several emerging challenges highlight the need for deeper research and innovation in this field. First, climate resilience must become an integral component of post-war reconstruction. As conflict-affected states are often highly vulnerable to climate shocks, embedding environmental safeguards and adaptive design into public works will be critical for ensuring that infrastructure contributes to long-term stability rather than future crises.

Second, digital governance offers both opportunities and risks for ethical project management. E-procurement systems, open contracting platforms, and digital monitoring tools can greatly enhance transparency and accountability (Open Contracting Partnership, 2015; 2019). At the same time, reliance on digital technologies may exacerbate inequalities if marginalized populations lack access to information or the capacity to engage with new platforms. Future practice must therefore consider how digital tools can be leveraged inclusively to reinforce ethical standards.

Third, strengthening local ownership remains a persistent priority. While donor-driven models can introduce vital safeguards, they risk undermining sovereignty and creating dependency if not paired with investments in local capacity. Research should further explore models of co-designed accountability mechanisms that combine international standards with domestic legitimacy, ensuring that ethics are institutionalized beyond donor cycles.

Finally, cross-disciplinary approaches will be essential for advancing ethical project management. Insights from peacebuilding, development studies, public administration, and environmental governance can enrich project management frameworks, allowing practitioners to navigate the intersection of technical, political, and social dimensions more effectively.

In sum, future directions in ethical reconstruction must grapple with the reality that infrastructure is not only about material recovery but also about shaping collective identities and relationships in post-war societies. Ensuring that public works embody fairness, inclusion, and sustainability is therefore both a moral and strategic imperative for building durable peace.

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Table 49. Future Directions in Ethical Project Management for Post-War Reconstruction

Emerging Challenge	Key Considerations	Ethical Contribution
Climate Resilience	• Conflict-affected states highly vulnerable to climate shocks • Embed environmental safeguards and adaptive design into public works	Ensures infrastructure supports long-term stability rather than generating new crises
Digital Governance	• Tools: e-procurement, open contracting, digital monitoring • Risks: digital exclusion of marginalized groups • Need for inclusive design and access	Enhances transparency and accountability while safeguarding against inequality
Strengthening Local Ownership	• Donor-driven models risk dependency and undermine sovereignty • Pair safeguards with capacity-building • Develop co-designed accountability mechanisms	Institutionalizes ethics beyond donor cycles; reinforces domestic legitimacy
Cross-Disciplinary Approaches	• Draw on peacebuilding, development, public administration, and environmental governance • Address technical, political, and social intersections of reconstruction	Provides richer frameworks for managing complexity ethically
Infrastructure as Symbolic	• Infrastructure is both material and symbolic • Can embody fairness, inclusion, and renewal-or exclusion, corruption, and neglect	Shapes perceptions of justice, trust, and peace; reinforces the social contract

8.5.   Final Reflection

The overarching conclusion of this article is that rebuilding infrastructure without rebuilding integrity is a recipe for fragile recovery. Post-war reconstruction that focuses solely on technical delivery while neglecting ethics risks reproducing the very grievances that fueled conflict in the first place. Ethical project management transforms reconstruction from a short-term exercise in rebuilding bricks and mortar into a long-term peacebuilding strategy. By embedding transparency, accountability, inclusivity, and sustainability into public works, reconstruction can generate outcomes that strengthen legitimacy, promote reconciliation, and foster resilience.

Ultimately, infrastructure is more than a material product, it is a symbol of the social contract between states and citizens. Delivered ethically, it signals fairness, justice, and renewal; delivered unethically, it becomes a visible reminder of exclusion, corruption, and neglect. For

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countries emerging from war, ethical reconstruction is therefore not optional but indispensable. It is about embedding values into the very foundations of society, ensuring that recovery contributes not only to physical rebuilding but also to political stability and social cohesion.

Only by rebuilding with integrity can post-war states move beyond fragile recovery and lay the foundations for lasting peace.

Table 50. Rebuilding with Integrity in Post-War Reconstruction

Dimension	Key Insight	Ethical Contribution
Core Argument	Technical delivery without ethics produces fragile recovery	Reconstruction must embed integrity to address root grievances of conflict
Ethics as Transformation	Ethical project management turns reconstruction into peacebuilding, not just infrastructure delivery	Embeds transparency, accountability, inclusivity, sustainability
Symbolic Dimension	Infrastructure represents the social contract between state and citizens	Ethical delivery signals fairness, justice, and renewal; unethical delivery signals exclusion and corruption
Strategic Imperative	Ethics is not optional but indispensable in fragile contexts	Ensures recovery supports legitimacy, reconciliation, and resilience
Final Lesson	Only by **rebuilding with integrity** can states move beyond fragility	Ethical reconstruction lays foundations for lasting peace

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