

The 2030 Agenda. Towards sustainable development in fragile states?

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“Business as usual is not an option” – nowhere is this mantra of the 2030 Agenda more relevant than in fragile and conflict-affected states. If international providers of development cooperation carry on as before, these states will not reach the ambitious objectives set out in the Agenda – the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – by 2030. At the same time, these countries – currently home to around 1.5 billion people – are steadily gaining in relevance for international cooperation. Extreme poverty will become increasingly concentrated here: according to the latest forecasts from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), as many as 62% of the world’s most impoverished people could be living in fragile states by 2030. The dramatic effects of conflict and fragility on global development at present are evident from the fact that 80% of current humanitarian needs are due to political (man-made) conflicts. The world faces neither a refugee nor a humanitarian crisis, but a conflict and fragility crisis.

With the integration of a comprehensive peace dimension, the 2030 Agenda lays the basis for a new form of engagement with fragile and conflict-affected states and hence for the eradication of extreme poverty, the reduction of violence, and the narrowing of social and political inequalities. This paper discusses what affected countries and the international community can do in order to ensure that the peace dimension achieves its full impact.

Fragility and conflict: core problems for sustainable development

Promoting peaceful and inclusive societies has gained in relevance in the international debate in recent years. This reflects two underlying trends. Firstly, the topography of global poverty is changing. Although extreme poverty around the world is decreasing, growing numbers of the poorest of the poor are living in fragile and conflict-affected countries. In order to do justice to the 2030 Agenda’s promise to “leave no one behind”, these countries are increasingly featuring in routine development cooperation. Secondly, the noticeable increase in the number of armed conflicts in recent years shows that violence is by no means confined to the poorest countries, but can erupt wherever political, social and economic inequalities coincide with disrupted relations between state and society – and government institutions are unwilling or unable to embrace peaceful social and political change.

Fragility and conflict are not purely domestic issues. They usually have transboundary effects – migration movements are just one example. Likewise, the causes of fragility and violence are certainly not only home-grown. Global factors, such as arms, drugs and human trafficking, the resource trade and land grabbing for energy and food security in industrialised countries all have massive impacts on local conflict dynamics. The prevention and management of fragil-

ity and armed conflicts are thus becoming a global, regional and local challenge.

The 2030 Agenda's peace dimension

Conflict and fragility in their diverse forms and dimensions are the greatest obstacles to sustainable development, as the final Millennium Development Goals Report, among others, showed. The MDGs did not take into account the specific challenges that war and violence pose to sustainable development. The MDGs were a technocratic logframe with a reduced number of development goals, which failed to do justice to the complexity of the challenges and applied an – already obsolete – linear concept of development. The 2030 Agenda, by contrast, reflects the complex challenges of an interdependent and increasingly insecure world and defines cooperation, integration, local processes and inclusivity as its guiding principles. This transformative ambition is particularly important for the Agenda's peace dimension.

Peace features prominently in the 2030 Agenda: it is one the “five Ps” (People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership) identified as key pillars in the Preamble and also forms a separate Goal 16 on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. It has thus been recognised that development can only be sustainable if topics such as peace, good governance, inclusion, constructive state-society relations and justice are taken into account. However, peace-relevant targets are defined not only for Goal 16 but also for a number of other SDGs. For example, Target 1.4 aims to achieve equal access to basic services and land, Target 4.7 calls for education for the promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, Target 5.2 deals with the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls, and Target 10.2 aims to overcome political, social and economic inequalities between demographic groups. In fragile and conflict-affected states in particular, these and other objectives must be viewed as a package – the peace dimension – if the transformative vision of the Agenda is to be realised.

The indivisibility of the SDGs should also be emphasised in this context: progress in one area should not undermine progress in another. According to the 2030 Agenda's Preamble, “[t]he interlinkages and integrated nature of the Sustainable Development Goals” are of crucial importance. The SDGs should be mutually supportive. SDG 16, therefore, is not only an “enabler” for other SDGs: the other SDGs should, indeed must, also contribute to fostering peaceful, just and inclusive societies. In rural development (SDG 2) and economic growth (SDG 8), for example, the potential impacts on conflict dynamics must

be considered. There is also immense potential for basic services such as education (SDG 4), health (SDG 3 and others) and social security (e.g. SDG 1) to contribute to the attainment of SDG 16: equal access to social services and the quality of these services can do much to build public confidence in the state and mitigate or even overcome the structural causes of conflict, provided that a targeted approach is adopted in the various sectors. The greatest threat to the transformative effect of the Agenda would be fragmentation, with actors cherry-picking out the individual targets they wish to address rather than adopting an integrated approach. The 2030 Agenda calls for a radical departure from silo thinking and makes a powerful appeal for cooperation.

Challenges with implementation

The Agenda's peace dimension calls for fundamental changes in order to facilitate sustainable and peaceful development and ensure that fragile and conflict-affected countries are not left behind (yet again) in the implementation of the SDGs. Looking at the current situation around the world, the sheer scale of the challenge facing national and international actors seems almost overwhelming. However, rather than becoming resigned to the situation, we should make targeted efforts to identify factors and alliances capable of fostering peaceful, just and inclusive societies. They can primarily be found at the national level, but also in the governance of international cooperation and within the global framework.

Converting global goals into national strategies and context-appropriate priorities with a view to achieving peaceful and inclusive societies is, politically, a highly sensitive undertaking in fragile and conflict-affected states. As an additional complicating factor, the SDG system is not sufficiently focused on managing the structural causes of inequality and conflict, nor does it create a robust and coherent framework in which to address issues such as reconciliation, social cohesion and non-violent conflict resolution. The global indicators are also less than helpful. Yes, SDG 16 covers a range of topics of importance for peaceful development, but compared to other goals, there is relatively little clarity on how it is to be achieved.

Creating national spaces for dialogue

These gaps also show that there cannot be a standard format for the national pathways towards peaceful, just and inclusive societies. The causes of conflict and fragility are diverse and context-specific. It would be a mistake – which should certainly be avoided – to see SDG 16 as a blueprint for addressing these causes, without considering other aspects. The SDGs, at least initially, therefore offer little more than a

shared vision and a normative reference point. However, for countries which find themselves in complex situations of conflict or fragility, this is already an important starting point, enabling politically sensitive topics to be discussed and the taboos surrounding political challenges to be removed. In that sense, the 2030 Agenda – in a best-case scenario – opens up spaces for dialogue about national development priorities. The Agenda also gives civil society a mechanism with which to demand social and political change, even in the face of resistance, and to integrate peace-relevant topics into national planning and prioritisation processes.

However, the Agenda says relatively little about precisely how these national processes should be shaped. Here, lessons can be learned from the implementation of the *New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States*. This international frame of reference was agreed between the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) and the fragile states (g7+) in the *International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding*. The first step envisaged under the New Deal is to undertake fragility assessments to pinpoint the particular challenges existing at the national level and, on this basis, to identify the specific reasons for, and characteristics and drivers of, fragility. Five Peace and Statebuilding Goals provide a frame of reference. These and other processes should involve local stakeholders who otherwise often lack access to national authorities but are directly affected by, or play an important role in, peacebuilding

The New Deal's five Peace and Statebuilding Goals

PSG 1: *Legitimate politics*, fostering inclusive conflict resolution

PSG 2: *Security*, strengthening the state's monopoly of force

PSG 3: *Justice* and the rule of law

PSG 4: *Economic foundations*, generating employment and improving livelihoods

PSG 5: *Revenues & services*

A focus on inclusion

In view of the growing tendency to restrict civil society's scope for action, the benchmark that must be applied by the international community to measure the success of national implementation is the extent to which it is inclusive. Experience with New Deal implementation has shown that genuinely inclusive processes are not an end in themselves but help to set the right priorities. As each country decides its own priorities, this goes some way to avoiding a situation in which fragile states cherry-pick the "easy" aspects of SDG 16 and neglect targets which are more politi-

cally sensitive (and therefore transformative). Positive incentives to spur inclusive domestic action for the SDGs are needed but are not sufficient to ensure that the people in fragile and conflict-affected states are not left behind (again). What is needed here is early investment in coherent political and financial strategies and programmes, in order to encourage fragile and conflict-affected countries to align their policies towards sustainable development and to review and report internationally on progress.

Reviewing progress towards the goals poses further challenges at the national level. Due to the complexity of the Agenda and the requirements for disaggregation of the data, major efforts to build the capacities of independent statistical offices are needed. However, official data alone will not provide a complete picture. In fragile and conflict-affected countries, it is especially necessary to take account of and understand people's perceptions, needs and experiences in order to gain a comprehensive overview of progress towards the complex and politically sensitive targets set for SDG 16. This is the only way to ensure that implementation of SDG 16 (and, indeed, the Agenda as a whole) delivers progress for all at the local level. On politically sensitive issues in particular, data and survey results from civil society organisations can also be utilised, especially if this information is already available for many of the SDG 16 targets. These additional data can help to measure progress at local level while also taking account of the views of marginalised groups.

International engagement in fragile states

An important task for the international community, then, is strengthening national dialogue spaces and offering support. This means seeing itself as less of a problem-solver and more as a supporter of inclusive local processes. External organisations should desist from simply transferring best practice – e.g. in institution- or democracy-building – and, instead, should give much more consideration to the political environment in order to support highly complex endogenous processes in a context- and conflict-sensitive way. Political economy and conflict analyses are already being conducted far more frequently – and yet the international community often reacts helplessly when governments in fragile states prove to be less of a driver and more of a brake on sustainable development. The OECD *International Network on Conflict and Fragility* (INCAF) has been thinking for some time about how external actors can support inclusive political reform and negotiating processes.

Initial results show that complex problems – such as chronic poverty, marginalisation and structural exclusion of certain groups – are primarily political in nature and do not lend themselves to off-the-peg

technical solutions. Building on a detailed – and, as far as possible, local knowledge-based – analysis of power-political dynamics and stakeholders, targeted efforts must be made to identify opportunities to exert influence via the political process. Change is brought about less through conditionalities than through long-term support for reformist political elites, whether at governmental or civil society level.

In other words, development cooperation must become more political. All international engagement in fragile contexts, from planning to implementation, must be targeted towards crisis prevention, conflict management and peacebuilding in order to achieve the SDGs in fragile states. This will require increased analytical capacities (also at the local level), innovative toolkits, more willingness to take risks, and appropriate levels of funding. The New Deal, whose purpose was to bring about this paradigm shift in the cooperation with fragile states, has not yet fulfilled the high expectations of behavioural change – at least according to the findings of the Independent Review. The reasons lie, among other things, in the pressure to achieve short-term successes and in donor institutions' aversion to risk and lack of willingness to embrace reform. The New Deal must be revitalised so that international cooperation in fragile states does not revert to “business as usual” as soon as the weapons fall silent and a peace deal is signed.

A global partnership for peace and development?

The 2030 Agenda is infused with the spirit of a new global partnership based on shared responsibility and recognition of interdependencies. This generates impetus for governmental, civil society (and, if appropriate, private sector) actors from the development, humanitarian aid, peacebuilding and security communities to rally behind shared goals and cooperate more intensively. Often, a multitude of international agencies are engaged in fragile and conflict-affected countries. Such configurations lend themselves to the development of a shared strategic vision for conflict prevention, mitigation of humanitarian crises, and the promotion of a sustainable peace.

In addition, in order to provide the peace dimension of the 2030 Agenda with an institutional setting, an international forum is required. Neither the UN Peacebuilding Commission nor other institutions

currently have such a broad mandate. One idea being mooted is to develop the *International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding* into a global forum for peaceful and inclusive societies. This offers potential for lessons learned from New Deal implementation to be shared with other stakeholders engaged in dealing with the diverse challenges facing the SDGs in fragile and conflict-affected countries. This would require far more countries and actors to be involved in the Dialogue than are currently represented there.

It is also important to conceptualise shared learning in universal terms and to give every country the opportunity to voice their own experiences of dealing with conflict. This new form of discussion among equals also has the potential to increase the credibility of external engagement in fragile states. Furthermore, in such a forum, joint activities on dealing with global factors (such as organised crime and illicit financial and arms flows) can be agreed on a binding basis in order to mitigate the negative impacts on local conflict dynamics.

Beyond the forum, fragile and conflict-affected countries could be encouraged and supported, if necessary through pilot projects, to report to the *High-Level Political Forum (HLPF)* on SDG implementation and clearly identify gaps and difficulties. This is the only way to make the specific challenges in the global review process visible. It is also essential to ensure that the process itself can be utilised in a manner which facilitates shared learning about the challenges facing sustainable development in fragile states.

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