Conflict, Violence, and Instability in the Post-2015 Development Agenda

On April 26, 2013, the UN Foundation (UNF), Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO), the International Peace Institute (IPI), and the Post-2015 Development Team at the Executive Office of the Secretary-General jointly convened a workshop to assess the impact of conflict, violence, and instability on development. The meeting brought together members from the UN Secretariat, agencies, funds, and programs as well as outside experts to consider strategies for addressing the post-2015 development agenda.

This meeting note summarizes the key themes and ideas that emerged from these discussions. Suparva Narasimhaiah, a former intern at IPI, drafted this note, which reflects the *rapporteur's* interpretation of the meeting and not necessarily the views of all other participants. IPI owes a debt of gratitude to the governments of Norway and Finland, as well its many generous donors whose support makes publications like this one possible.

As the discussions and deliberations on the post-2015 development agenda move forward, there is increasing acknowledgement that the impact of conflict, violence, and instability on development should be addressed.

Co-organized by the UN Foundation (UNF), Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO), the International Peace Institute (IPI), and in collaboration with the Post-2015 Development Team at the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, a workshop on April 26, 2013, brought together members from the UN Secretariat, agencies, funds, and programs along with outside experts to assess the lessons learned so far on the impact of conflict, violence, and instability on development and to consider strategies for addressing them in the post-2015 development agenda. The discussion aimed to offer ideas and inputs into the final deliberations of the High-Level Panel and its May 2013 report, the secretary-general's July 2013 report, as well as the negotiations among the member states at the UN.

The workshop's recommendations clearly align with the High Level Panel's goal of building stable societies, while "building peace and effective governance" are referred to in very broad terms in the secretary-general's report.

Recommendations

- **Conceptualize a strong narrative:** The post-2015 agenda should be underpinned by a bold and ambitious narrative that addresses conflict and violence. The voices of the affected—from the global South and the regions experiencing persistent conflict—need to be heard. In other words, the narrative must belong to the people, who can best make the case that violence is an impediment to development and undermines opportunities and aspirations. While universal, this post-2015 agenda can be contextualized to allow for regional, national, and local interpretations and implementations. Workshop participants suggested that language for this narrative can already be found in existing UN documents and from the results of the extensive global consultations held to date.

- **Design ambitious goals:** Design ambitious goals starting with the secretary-general's reports. The reports set the standards for the discussions among member states at the UN. Goals in a post-2015 framework should be universal yet adaptable and contextualized to each national situation, and they should reflect underlying narratives and targets. Indicators need to be based on numerical standards that will be global but adaptable to different country situations, and they should be disaggregated, based on gender, age, income level, etc. "Reducing violent deaths" was suggested as a relevant target.

- **Strategize the UN approach:** While strengthening the narrative and designing ambitious goals are the first steps toward addressing conflict and violence in the post-2015 agenda, workshop participants recognized that an internal United Nations system consensus around a common framework was also required as well as providing the time and space for the intergovernmental process to discuss and debate the issues.

Background: Discussing the Future of the Global Development Agenda

As 2015 approaches, the international community is focused on accelerating progress toward achieving the current United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Preparations are also underway to develop a successor framework to address the post-2015 development challenges. Extensive national and global consultations on eleven different themes are in progress, which are overseen by the UN Development Group with the support of member states. The UN Task Team appointed by the secretary-general in January 2012 continues to support the process for a global development agenda beyond 2015 by providing analytical thinking and substantial inputs. The High-Level Panel, also appointed by the secretary-general in July 2012, assembled representatives from civil society, the private sector, academia, and local and national governments and presented its recommendations and vision for the post-2015 development agenda in May 2013. The Open Working Group of the General Assembly, mandated by the Rio+20 Outcome document, have prepared a proposal on Sustainable Development Goals for consideration by the assembly at its 68th session in 2013. Other regional consultations (through Regional Economic Commissions), global expert group consultations (Sustainable Development Solutions Network), and the UN Global Compact are all working to develop suitable proposals for a post-2015 development framework.

Finally, after due consideration of all proposals and recommendations from these different streams, member states at the UN will negotiate and adopt the post-2015 development framework.

In the various global consultations held to date, there has been a significant emphasis on the implications of conflict and violence for the post-2015 development framework. Early in the process, the UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda recommended to the secretary-general in its report[1] that it is important to address "peace and security . . . one of the four core dimensions where progress is required in order to build a rights-based, equitable, secure and sustainable world for all people." Subsequently through its "Peace and Security: Thematic Think Piece," the inclusion of a separate set of goals related to peace and security was again suggested (including targets on personal security, democracy, and inclusive politics). Global thematic consultations in Monrovia, Panama, and Helsinki were held on the same theme, and raised questions of whether there should be a multidimensional goal on peacebuilding and security; stand-alone goals on violence and security on one hand and conflict and instability on the other; or whether to embed these approaches into other candidate goals. In addition, the thematic discussions on governance and inequality as well as the country and regional consultations emphasized the importance of issues such as personal security, freedom from fear, good governance, equality, and political access and inclusion.

This workshop sought to bring together participants from the UN secretariat, agencies, funds, and programs along with experts from civil society to review the lessons learned on the impact of conflict, violence, and instability on development and to consider strategies for addressing these issues in the post-2015 development framework. A challenge for addressing conflict and violence in the post-2015 development framework is to realistically define it.

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1 UN System Task Team on Post-2015 UN Development Agenda, "Realizing the Future We Want for All: Report to the Secretary-General," New York: United Nations, June 2012.

Conceptualizing Conflict, Violence, and Instability in the Post-2015 Development Agenda

The current MDGs have mobilized communities and governments to address internal factors inhibiting development. Yet the goals were not designed to address the specific challenges of conflict, violence, and instability and their effects on development. Over the last decade the UN system and others have learned a great deal about how to deal with development in environments characterized by conflict and violence. The research and experience from the 2011 *World Development Report*, the insights from g7+ countries, the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding, and the New Deal parameters agreed upon in Busan in late 2011 provide valuable insights on the need and the ways to address violence and conflict. Given that the existing MDG goals were never intended to address conflict and violence, it would be appropriate to leverage existing knowledge to design an inclusive mandate for the post-2015 development agenda.

Undoubtedly, the statistics from the 2011 World Development Report and other research have captured the attention of the global community. For example, key statistics include:

- Violence in all its forms (personal violence, conflict violence, urban and criminal violence, etc.) contributes to and reinforces poverty and can be viewed as driving development in reverse.[2]

- Over 50 percent of the world's poor will be living in fragile states while much of the remaining poor will be found in the fragile contexts of the middle-income countries by the year 2015.[3]

- 1.5 billion people live in areas affected by fragility, conflict, instability, organized criminal violence, and no low-income fragile or conflict-affected country has yet achieved a single MDG.[4]

These figures represent the stark reality of the negative impacts of conflict, violence, and instability on the process of development. Yet looking to the pursuit of development beyond 2015, experts in the workshop debated whether these eye-catching statistics may also be divisive, reinforcing a sense of rich vs. poor, us vs. them. The question for post-2015 goals becomes what will engage all member states to address the specific challenges of conflict, violence, and instability and their effects on development.

A recurring theme heard from experts in the discussions was that personal security and access to justice are basic needs around the world. Without personal security and access to justice, tensions within societies over lack of food, persistent poverty, inability to run businesses and conduct commerce, etc. are exacerbated. In this context, parents become afraid to send their children to school.

While internal, domestic factors are drivers behind conflict, violence, and instability, the discussion also highlighted the impact of external factors—e.g., the arms trade, commodity price fluctuations, and trafficking in natural resources. In addition, trends in today's globalized economy and structural shifts can offer new economic opportunities to countries and regions, yet instability may inhibit taking advantage of these opportunities. One example given was that the expected evolution of the Chinese economy from one based largely on manufacturing to a service economy might lead to a shift of manufacturing to the resource-rich areas of Africa. This shift may not happen, if violence, conflict, and instability are prevalent.

Conceptualizing the right narrative is vital for mobilizing global support to address conflict, violence, and instability in the post-2015 development agenda. The use of compelling language in the narrative is essential. The voices of the affected—from the global South and the regions most affected by persistent conflict—need to be heard. In other words, the narrative should focus on the people. Language from the UN Charter, the Millennium Declaration, Monrovia consultations, the Dili Consensus, the speech from Graça Machel

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2 Paul Collier, "Development and Conflict," Oxford University: Centre for the Study of African Economies, Department of Economics, October 1, 2004.

3 Laurence Chandy and Geoffrey Gertz, "Poverty in Numbers: The Changing State of Global Poverty from 2005 to 2015," Global Economy and Development at Brookings, Global Views Policy Brief 2011–01, Washington, DC: Brookings Institute, 2011.

4 World Bank, *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security and Development* (Washington, DC, 2011).

at the Meeting of the High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda in Monrovia, and a recent *Huffington Post* op-ed by Mary Robinson, Kevin Rudd, and Judy Cheng-Hopkins are possible sources for persuasive language. Making the case that violence serves as an impediment to development, which undermines opportunities and aspirations, can be central to the narrative. The narrative should be articulated in such a way that every state can claim ownership of the post-2015 development agenda.

A universal agenda with necessary contextualization to allow regional, national, and local interpretations and implementations is called for. Finding a positive narrative and using terms such as "personal security" and "access to justice" instead of "conflict" and "violence" are more likely to generate member state support.

For a future-oriented focus, the question arose over the shifting geography of global poverty. Some participants asserted the need to focus on poverty in Africa, while others insisted on a focus on poverty in middle-income countries. In either case, though, a consensus emerged around a narrative with a universal agenda and goals, given that violence and instability are impediments to development everywhere. The underlying elements of a compelling narrative that inspires achievement of goals, targets, and indicators should define the following:

- a theory of change,
- targets for the post-2015 agenda,
- who the agenda aims to influence,
- what internal and external issues are being addressed, and
- whose and what kind of behavior needs to change.

Designing the Goals

Goals which are universal yet adaptable, contextualized, and prioritized at country levels are ideal. Broad and generic goals tied to the narrative and accompanied by targets and indicators is the preferred package for a successful post-2015 development agenda. Less is more. Though goals need to be kept simple with easily interpretable language that any grandmother could understand,

they must still tackle the crosscutting issues and the complexities of the world as well as the linkages and overlaps among challenges and crises of today.

Similarly, targets need to be based on numerical indicators that are global, yet adaptable at country levels. Indicators need to be disaggregated, based on gender, age, income level, etc. The disaggregation of indicators can be flexible allowing countries to choose their own standards for disaggregation. In dealing with horizontal inequality issues, indicators aggregated at regional levels comparable with aggregates at national levels within their respective regions would be appropriate. Some suggested indicators include the following:

- **To address violence:** violent deaths per 100,000 and freedom from fear of violence;
- **To address access to justice:** number of birth registrations, tracking numbers of those held in pre-trial detention, and length of judges' tenures; and
- **To address inclusive politics:** percentage of eligible voters participating in elections and measuring free elections.

Irrespective of a decision to focus on stand-alone goals on conflict and violence or on a multidimensional integrated approach, a target on "reducing violent deaths" addresses the most basic concern about the impact of conflict and violence on development, and it might serve member states well to consider including this as a goal in the post-2015 development agenda.

Lessons for developing adequate targets and indicators can be drawn from the global experience on the peacebuilding indicator framework and the fragility assessments under the New Deal framework. In particular, further study is merited on the work of the Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding and of the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding, which proposes a basket of disaggregated indicators that would be selected from the larger set of shared indicators for the New Deal. One idea emerging from the peacebuilding indicator framework discussions is the option of including "perceptual indicators," i.e., whether the desired goals or targets have been perceived to have been achieved by the people. An alternative proposal could be "experience indicators," i.e.,

consumer (peoples') experience would be an indicator of the quality of the development projects and programs undertaken.

Strategizing the UN Approach

The MDGs are the first set of global development goals that have provided a platform for all states to think about development and the need for it. The next post-2015 framework needs to be one that can supplement the achievements of the MDGs and raise global development efforts to the next level. This would be a good strategy to garner support from member states. Additional targets and indicators that address conflict and violence would essentially allow the post-2015 framework to build from and grow out of the current MDG framework. The post-2015 development agenda needs to capture the fundamental realities about development and the underlying causes that hinder it.

To illustrate the point, consider a triangle.

The Development Triangle

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        /\
       /  \
      / Development \
     /--------------\
    /  Underlying    \
   /    Causes        \
  /_____\
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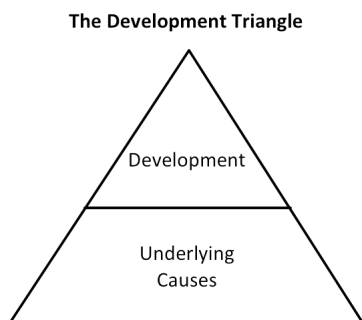
The top part of the triangle denotes various facets of development emphasized by the MDG framework, e.g., poverty, education, gender justice, and equality. What lies beneath are the underlying causes that may be addressed by the post-2015 framework, which within specific social settings has an impact on the various facets of development. If we attempt to cut off the bottom part of the triangle, and address the various aspects of development alone, we would fail to tackle the underlying causes that hamper development. Research and experience has shown that conflict, violence, and instability are underlying causes that deter improvements in education, health, justice, and income. By addressing conflict and violence in the post-2015 framework an underlying cause that hampers development can be dealt with in addition

to working on achieving the recognized components of development within the MDG framework.

Bringing in "champions and messengers" of the cause before the UN, in particular youth and citizens from affected regions would provide a strong message and act as a meaningful strategy to capture the attention of member states around the importance of including conflict, violence, and instability in the post-2015 development agenda.

Understanding the differing opinions among states and reconciling them remains crucial. Sovereignty issues, fear of militarizing or securitizing development, and concentrating power further in the Security Council are all legitimate concerns for many states who object to the idea of including conflict and violence in a development agenda. Tapping and mobilizing support through regional groups is possible, yet it requires carefully developed approaches given competing interests within and among regional groups. Including regional and subregional organizations in the intergovernmental consultations can foster their roles in implementation, which may be helpful to achieving future goals and targets.

Five important points for strategy on the post-2015 development agenda include:

(1) **Deal with the "what" in the narrative:** Strengthen the narrative based on what is sought to be achieved and what needs to be different from the MDGs as well as why it needs to be different.

(2) **Target the right champions from states:** Bring in support from economic and financial officials and engage with the youth, and provide them with support to campaign for causes, using social media to share messages and create global platforms.

(3) **Empower civil society within countries:** Activate people's movements at country levels.

(4) **Create an internal coalition within the UN:** Engage with member states to provide an understanding of the need to address conflict and violence.

(5) **Agree to a common framework within the UN:** Ensure a common ground toward a common framework among all UN department, agencies, funds, and programs.

Conclusion

There was a clear agreement among the participants of the workshop that addressing conflict, violence, and instability in the post-2015 development agenda is critical. While the international community has an opportunity to build on the success of the MDGs via a positive, people-centric agenda with ambitious yet practical goals in a post-2015 agenda, challenges exist in conceptualizing a narrative; setting targets and indicators; and developing a strategy to address conflict, violence, and instability with member state consensus. Many of the recommendations, suggestions, and strategies discussed at the workshop were integrated into the May 30, 2013, High-Level Panel report, "A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development." The secretary-general's July 2013 report, "Dignity for All," calls for "building peace and effective governance based on the rule of law and sound institutions." Now the responsibility is in the hands of the member states to debate and define their goals for the next development agenda and to act upon them.

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