

Fostering consensus for peace in the sustainable development debate

This week, at the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), UN Member States will discuss whether to promote peace in the new global development framework. Following a round of discussions with a number of key member states and other policy actors in recent weeks, Saferworld explores how best to make the case for the inclusion of peace.

The idea that peace and good governance should be central to and integrated throughout the global development framework has not come without opposition. Objections to this idea that peace is a core part of development rather than a peripheral addition range from:

- issues of sovereignty and interference
- a belief that peace could ‘displace’ other priorities
- fears over the possible financial implications of focusing on peace
- concern that its insertion represents the imposition of a ‘Northern agenda’
- worries that commitments to peace might bring with them new ‘conditionalities’
- and even technical disputes about which parts of the UN system are actually responsible for peace issues.

While such concerns need to be heard, the objections stem in part from misconceptions about the nature of the framework and the implications of the peace agenda:

- The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will not be binding nor in anyway impose conditionalities, but rather generate data from which sovereign states can develop their own sets of priorities.
- The inclusion of peace and governance should not be dismissed as a Northern agenda, as it is founded on [evidence](#) that progress on entrenched poverty is almost always dependent on fostering peace and improving governance.

- Ensuring that development works in favour of peace to avert conflict and humanitarian crises should mean fewer military interventions.
- A development agenda that helps prevent conflict should also *free up* some of the resources currently spent on peacekeepers and militaries for sustainable development.
- The UN Security Council (UNSC) is only one instrument used to address peace issues—often reactively, when a crisis point has already been reached. However, the role of development in contributing to peace cannot be neglected if the UN is to fulfil its Charter.

Article 1 of the United Nations Charter

The Purposes of the United Nations are:

To maintain international peace and security, and to that end: take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace...

But underpinning UN Member States’ concerns are also political and ideological faultlines. Responding to these requires sensitive diplomacy – but member states also need a keen eye for evidence, arguments and policy options. Framing the arguments for inclusion of peace and good governance in the most sensitive possible way should not mean shying away from making the full case for what is *necessary* to build sustainable peace, drawing on the best possible evidence. With this in mind, this article identifies some of the key points that Open Working Group (OWG) participants could usefully reaffirm.

Preventing conflict and violence is a universal, not a particular, agenda.

Like all development priorities, peace will be more relevant to some member states than to others. While it is clear that post-conflict countries are especially vulnerable to fragility and new outbreaks of violence, riots in London and Athens, upheaval in Thailand, or

the events of the Arab Spring illustrate that no country is immune from violence. Bosnia offers an interesting illustration of the risk of conflict as 'development in reverse'. In 1990, it was a relatively poorer part of an affluent European state. As such, its [GDP per capita](#) stood at \$1,713. By 1995, after conflict had transformed the former Yugoslavia's development prospects, Bosnia's per capita GDP had fallen to just \$563. A preventative agenda is insurance against this – a risk that remains relevant for all countries.

The evidence tells us that poverty cannot be eradicated without preventing conflict and reducing violence.

A growing list of countries – from [Guatemala](#) to g7+ members – have been pointing out that peace commitments are fundamental to their development progress. Importantly, as the [African Development Bank \(AfDB\) recently observed](#) 'More than 200 million Africans live in countries affected by conflict and instability'. AfDB observed 'little progress' in these countries on food security, poverty reduction and gender equality, with only 26% of their populations having access to sanitation. With this in mind, 54 African nations are expected to call for peace to be a key priority in the post-2015 framework in the African Union (AU) Common position, due in March. This will sit alongside support for the peace agenda from the 19 g7+ countries, the 29 other states that agreed the [Dili consensus](#), the 28 states of the [European Union \(EU\)](#), and many other individual states such as Turkey, Mexico, Kuwait, Tunisia and Cote D'Ivoire. Increasingly, as the AU common position is set to illustrate, peace is just as much a Southern agenda as it is a Northern one.

Promoting peace will enhance, not detract from, sustainable development and environmental protection.

The [same report](#) by the AfDB also shows that conflict affected and unstable countries in Africa had either stalled or regressed on environment and clean energy indicators. It stands to reason that a focus on sustainable development and environmental protection is harder for countries to maintain in times of conflict and crisis and with weaker governing institutions, and therefore that a peace agenda is indivisible from the sustainability agenda. Principles 24 and 25 in the Rio Declaration, 1992, also affirm this.

Rio Declaration 1992

Principle 24: Warfare is inherently destructive of sustainable development...

Principle: 25: Peace, development and environmental protection are interdependent and indivisible.

The views of poor people, and others consulted around the world, should not be ignored.

Poor people have repeatedly affirmed freedom from crime, violence and abuse, as well as more honest and responsive government, as among their key priorities. The 2013 [MYWORLD](#) survey included over a million respondents from around the world who ranked 'honest and responsive government' and 'protection against crime and violence' as their fourth and seventh highest priorities. Beyond the headlines, studies such as '[Time to Listen](#)' (CDA) and '[Voices of the Poor](#)' (World Bank) supply the detail. The overall message is clear: that 'peace is important to poor people' and that poor people define poverty as in part 'the helplessness to protect themselves from exploitation and abuse'. As the nations of the world come together to design a framework whose stated purpose is to lift populations out of poverty, the voices and perspectives of the poor should be clearly heard.

Use politically sensitive language to promote the peaceful and stable societies agenda.

There are a number of possible labels that could be given to the peace agenda. Generally, Saferworld has argued that the headline is less important than the substance: i.e. the actual development outcomes that targets and indicators will promote. But some headline labels at this stage could throw the development of targets and indicators off track. The following comments can be made on terminology currently under consideration:

- Stress 'national ownership': the SDGs are about what individual countries do for themselves, not what the international community does to them.
- 'Fragility' is considered a pejorative term by many member states, so is not a good point of reference.
- 'Security' for some states invokes the Security Council and therefore potentially raises concerns about mixing UN agendas that should be kept separate.
- 'Resilience' is perhaps too obscure a term to qualify for 'MDG' style goals. It is also rather broad – its vagueness could make it easy for key peace commitments to be diluted or dropped as negotiations progress.

- A focus on ‘institutions’ may be easier to agree upon – but again, the word would appear obscure to the public, and would open the door to targets that focus on institutional capacities.
- ‘Capacities’ are necessary to achieve development outcomes, but they are not goals in themselves.
- Promotion of ‘peaceful and stable societies’ offers a positive framing for the peace agenda that avoids many of the concerns with other terminology.

Propose an evidence-based peace agenda: focus on outcomes that address key drivers of conflict and violence.

When the peace agenda is explained as a set of key developmental targets for preventing violence and conflict, many member states may discover that their overall concern about bringing divisive or ‘hard’ security issues into the post-2015 framework is not an issue. Many of the targets that would support peace are not controversial but already command a wide consensus.

Overall, the final framework will support peace if it complements targets on inclusive, equitable socio-economic development with targets that would promote security, justice, and inclusive, responsive, fair, and accountable state-society relations - all within a global community that is working to address external stresses that lead to conflict.

Based on Saferworld’s past briefs on [key drivers of conflict](#), [goals, targets and indicators](#), [gender](#) and external stresses (forthcoming), set out below is a current set of peace related targets that cover this agenda. Importantly, Saferworld has illustrated that, with [over 100 existing multinational metrics](#) to build on, these targets could be effectively measured to provide a balanced view of progress towards sustainable peace.

Finally, all of the targets included below are framed to *focus on actual outcomes* rather than capacities *per se*. As the last round of MDGs have shown, as well as many major evaluations of peacebuilding experience, we must not continue to focus on the ‘form rather than the function of change’ (a phrase borrowed from the [World Development Report 2011](#), but see also the [EU](#)). Targets on peace, like those on other themes, should capture broad, whole-of-sector development outcomes.

Theme	Target
Peaceful & stable societies	Reduce the incidence of violence and ensure people have confidence in security provision
	Eliminate impunity and ensure all social groups have access to justice
	Ensure that divisions within society can be resolved peacefully
State-society relations	Ensure that all people enjoy freedom of speech, association, peaceful protest and access to independent media and information
	Ensure that public participation in political processes and civic engagement at all levels is increased.
	Ensure public access to government data, including all budgets and fiscal accounts.
	Reduce by X% bribery and corruption and ensure that officials can be held accountable.
Peace & gender	Increase women’s political participation and influence on decision-making at all levels
	Eliminate violence against women and girls
External stresses that lead to conflict	Stem the global trade in drugs, arms and other commodities that fuel conflict
	Reduce illicit financial flows, including money laundering, tax evasion, transnational corruption/bribery and trade mispricing, by x%, and recover at least y% of illicit financial flows, by 2030
	Targets on environmental sustainability
Equitable, conflict sensitive development	Ensure progress, measured by disaggregated indicators for all social groups on ambitious targets for education, health, decent employment and economic inclusion, food security, water and sanitation, energy