

The 2030 Agenda and the New Deal: Where next?

Discussion Paper for the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding

Key points

The New Deal played a significant role in ensuring that peace was included in the 2030 Agenda. It offers many ongoing lessons that should be reflected upon and absorbed in the planning of the 2030 Agenda implementation. The New Deal has created space for much-needed dialogue at multiple levels, helping to navigate the political and technical challenges governments and their external supporters face in emerging from conflict and fragility. New Deal priorities, processes, tools and mechanisms can be built upon in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) implementation. However, how the two frameworks now come together for mutually beneficial impact in conflict-affected states is open to question. Key points reflected in this analysis include:

- At minimum, alignment can be achieved by linking individual country compact Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goal (PSG) priorities to individual SDG targets and indicators. New Deal countries would thus prioritise only some SDG targets for implementation.
- The New Deal-2030 Agenda integration process should also be used to reassess progress and priorities within each country context and identify what might have been missing in the New Deal framework. General lessons from the New Deal pilot phase should be addressed, including by:
 - Valuing inclusion, notably create a more prominent role for civil society and draw in new actors;
 - Using the prominence of the 2030 Agenda to widen ownership of PSG priorities across government;
 - Rebalancing the focus of international engagement onto people and learning how to build peaceful societies;
 - Learning how to build accountable institutions that draw their strength from inclusiveness and responsiveness while accepting the limits of outside engagement;
 - Engaging on a wider spectrum of financing issues beyond increased aid and domestic revenues, including broader set of financing options, including illicit financial flows, resource-sector private investment and remittances.
- A more inclusive global dialogue on peaceful societies could be built on the now universal recognition of the links between peace and development. This would allow for IDPS countries to share their lessons, whilst also facilitating collective action to enable national implementation of the peaceful, just and inclusive societies agenda.

1 Global policy: mission accomplished?

Several weeks ago world leaders committed to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The existence of Goal 16 on peace, justice and governance – and indeed a strong reference to peace across the 2030 Agenda – was by no means guaranteed. While many actors around the world collectively and passionately engaged, attention must be drawn to the critical role of the New Deal in bringing peace so prominently into the new framework. For example, the New Deal's Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals (PSGs) shaped thinking on how issues like justice and legitimate politics underpin peaceful societies and needed to be addressed within the framework.

Indeed, while itself influenced by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the whole New Deal architecture of goals, sub-priorities and indicators on issues related to peace, justice and governance had already been piloted through the New Deal, setting a precedent and proving that peace could be integrated into more traditionally development-oriented sectors.

Finally, the existence of the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (IDPS) provided a network of governments, multilaterals and civil society actors committed to securing a focus on peace in the new development framework. The active role of g7+ countries was especially critical, notably influencing the Open Working Group, the Common African Position, and the High Level Panel. Countries that have been affected by conflict and faced serious development challenges in the last 15 years have played an instrumental role in ensuring that we try and avoid this trap in the next 15.

Despite its strong commitment to peaceful, just and inclusive societies, the 2030 Agenda is by no means perfect. It risks collapsing under the sheer weight of its ambition or, through trying to do everything, doing nothing. Many of its targets are ambiguous and unquantified (an issue if we are to establish whether and when targets have been met). If the follow-up and review mechanism is weak, while there is wide flexibility on how member states are to integrate the global goals and the targets into national development policies (the envisioned foundation for implementation), significant questions loom as to how the framework can drive change on the ground. Furthermore, properly monitoring change across 169 targets will stretch even the most well-resourced national statistical offices.

Nonetheless, there is also much that can be built upon and leveraged in the new agenda. The 2030 Agenda will be universal, applied to all. Its scale means that there is something for everyone to work towards collectively – no bad thing in an increasingly polarised world. No other multilateral framework can claim to have such broad global ownership, thanks in part to the extensive consultation phase. Its multi-stakeholder approach means that it will also, in theory, be implemented by all. New data will slowly become available on a wide range of development issues.

With regards to peace, many of the issues that are recognised to drive conflict across different contexts are addressed, including injustice, weak rule of law, corruption, transnational stresses (arms, illicit finance, organised crime), unaccountable and unrepresentative governance, and failures to protect human rights. That these issues will be targeted and monitored in the world's foremost development framework is a big success.

2 Harmonizing progressive agendas

Some immediate challenges loom. The 2030 Agenda notes the special situations faced by countries in conflict and post-conflict situations. It is in these countries where efforts to eradicate extreme poverty that are central to the new agenda will be most urgent. At the same time, these countries will face the biggest hurdles in implementing the SDGs.

Furthermore, the global burden of conflict and violence has been escalating rapidly in recent years. The incidence of armed conflicts – including outright wars – has increased sharply. Strikingly, 2014 was the deadliest year since 1989,¹ and one in every 122 humans alive today is either a refugee, internally displaced, or seeking asylum.² Effective models that can reverse this trend have never been more needed.

¹ T Pettersson, P Wallensteen, 'Armed conflicts, 1946–2014' *Journal of Peace Research* 2015, Vol. 52(4) 536–550

² UNHCR, 'Worldwide displacement hits all-time high as war and persecution increase', 18 June 2015

Through explicitly focusing on statebuilding and peacebuilding, identifying a limited number of priorities, and coordinating donors and national governments around a common plan, the New Deal was set up to address the specific challenges that countries in and emerging from conflict face in meeting the MDGs. What role will the New Deal play in delivering the SDGs – and what lessons can be learned from its pilot phase? On a very practical level: will countries affected by or emerging from conflict now be expected to meet both the SDGs and the PSGs? Is there a way to bring them together? We need to avoid a situation where different domestic and international actors are working in parallel, one group on meeting the New Deal PSGs and another on meeting the SDGs.

The minimalist approach to SDG-New Deal integration could be referred to as ‘the alignment option’. Under this approach, we carry on with the New Deal as before, keeping the focus on aid coordination delivered through PSGs and compacts in a limited number of conflict-affected and fragile states. The only thing that needs to be done under this option is, in each context, to link the priorities identified in compacts under the five PSGs to relevant targets in the SDGs (this should be relatively straightforward with 169 to choose from). For example, under PSG 2, Somalia’s compact includes priority 2, which is “Justice institutions start to address the key grievances and injustices of Somalis.” This can be linked to and reported against target 16.3, to “Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all.” Coherence can also be created through alignment of PSG and SDG indicators.

Even under this option, an important step would be to re-affirm political commitment, buy-in and support at the highest level and across government among both g7+ and INCAF members.

Where compacts do not yet exist, SDG targets might provide a guiding framework or menu for narrowing down priorities. The minimalist alignment approach would mean that g7+ countries would not seek to meet all the SDGs – far from it – but only a handful of identified priority targets. However, in reality, few countries will take on all 17 goals and 169 targets and every country will need to prioritise. Indeed, the 2030 Agenda notes that the goals and targets are “global in nature and universally applicable, taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities.”

In order to prioritise, the process of fragility assessments, consultation and dialogue that leads to PSG priorities should be retained. In this way, the political milestones and *process* added value of the New Deal can be leveraged for the attainment of PSG and SDG commitments. Fragility assessments could be revisited, further rounds of inclusive national consultations carried out and country compacts perhaps even revised. Indeed, compacts need to be truly multi-stakeholder in practice in order to ensure that they are reflective of the needs of the people.

Once this alignment job is done, the continued long-term relevance of the five PSGs might be open to question. They were developed to affirm foundational political and institutional priorities that could act as a crucial foundation for fragile states to achieve wider development goals such as the MDGs. But this gap in the MDG framework has now been filled with SDG Goal 16.

An important risk is that the wide range of SDGs counteracts the clarity and relative simplicity offered by the New Deal. PSGs were valued for setting out a simpler, clearer foundation regarding the issues g7+ members needed to focus on before wider progress on sustainable development became possible. Embracing SDGs in conflict affected contexts must not undermine such clarity – and this is where long-term buy-in specifically to Goal 16 will be crucial.

3 An opportunity for reform

The alignment option, then, is not as straightforward as it might seem. In fact, to assume SDG-New Deal integration requires little effort would be to miss an opportunity for lesson learning and reform. Instead of business as usual, the launch of the SDGs offers a chance to pause and reaffirm where we are and what the priorities should be in each country.

Internationally, this is likewise an important opportunity to have a serious discussion about what has worked and what hasn't – for example looking at the New Deal's role in conflict resolution in South Sudan or the management of the Ebola crisis in West Africa.

One major challenge that the New Deal's pilot phase has faced is weak ownership of the PSGs as priorities across government and society. They have not always graduated beyond being financial and technical milestones confined to ministries of finance or planning and pleasing to those allocating aid – whereas they need to be goals owned by whole governments and societies. The higher visibility and prominence of the 2030 Agenda could help to broaden political and social buy-in to the New Deal process if we create the right synergies between PSGs, SDGs and national planning frameworks, having greater influence at levels where the most consequential decisions are made and delivered across government.

In line with the multi-stakeholder approach of the 2030 Agenda, this could also be an important opportunity for the role of civil society to be enhanced and better protected – learning valuable lessons from the more prominent role civil society plays within the Open Government Partnership. The global consensus that has been built up around the new development framework could provide a basis for engagement with important actors in conflict-affected states, including emerging donors and companies, who have so far tended to steer clear of the New Deal.

A third reform opportunity, which the 2030 Agenda clearly establishes, is the need to put people back at the centre of our focus. The new development agenda's emphasis on building peaceful, just and inclusive *societies* is fundamental. When technical assumptions regarding best practice are privileged over a keen awareness of domestic political dynamics and risks of doing harm, there is an ever-present danger that international engagement in conflict-affected states will seek to strengthen the capacities of states regardless of the level of commitment to peace – and sometimes at the expense of both peace and the people they are meant to serve. The new agenda needs to be more strongly focused on building strong societies, to ensure that there is healthy balance in state-society relations and that divisions within society can be resolved peacefully. We still have much to learn about how we build stronger societies and, indeed, about broader peacebuilding within society.

We also have more to learn about building states and institutions that draw their strength from inclusiveness and responsiveness. Effective state institutions are needed to deliver public services and create conditions for inclusive economic growth. But key institutions must also be strong enough to uphold the rule of law, tackle impunity and create avenues for all voices to be heard if we are to avoid the cycles of injustice that underpin conflict. For example, stronger parliaments and political parties might be needed to make the state more representative and inclusive. Strengthening the independence of judiciaries may be needed to ensure accountability. What we do know is that there are no templates. Furthermore, capacity building and outside support can help, but only when the context is right: our experience tells us that, ultimately, such strength can only come from political will and vision which is broadly shared across society. How the New Deal can best adapt to this reality needs to be more carefully considered, so that international support reinforces change in the direction of legitimacy, people's security and justice rather than making such transformations less likely by simply backing the status quo.

A further area for reflection is linked not to the 2030 Agenda, but to its sister document, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on financing for development. The Addis agreement (which includes a strong focus on conflict-affected states) looks at development financing well beyond aid. While aid will continue to be critical for many g7+ countries and raising domestic revenue is already a PSG priority, the SDGs could provide an opportunity to engage on a broader set of financing options, including action on illicit financial flows, resource-sector private investment, and the role of remittances. Issues related to conflict sensitivity and donor-government coherence would then be put on the table alongside discussions on aid delivery. This could have the added advantage of helping make the New Deal more relevant for a wider set of actors at both national and global levels.

There are numerous other issues that could be addressed – such as the need for true localisation, context-relevant support and a focus on longer-term resilience – and there will also be specific issues at national level within each context that will merit serious attention. Similarly, the need to ensure the New Deal is actively used to promote meaningful progress in countries faced with acute crisis or instability is a critical issue. Nonetheless, the point is that the transition to a focus on achieving SDGs in conflict-affected states is also an opportunity to improve international engagement. The independent review of the New Deal and the end of its pilot phase is thus well timed.

Taking into account the caveats above, key components of the New Deal – like fragility assessments or compacts – should be retained along with agreed principles for engagement in conflict-affected states. Likewise, the unique relations of trust and cooperation that have developed within and through the IDPS process also need to be preserved and built on. Nonetheless, there are serious challenges that will need to be addressed going forward, and whether or not this results in a new New Deal may need to be decided by a broader group than the IDPS.

4 Beyond our current horizons: an opportunity to shape global cooperation

The SDGs present a further opportunity for thinking beyond current horizons. The IDPS-New Deal process has been confined to a small number of countries – sometimes met with undue suspicion by other groups of states. That the new global development framework, negotiated by 193 UN member states, includes Goal 16 and a focus on peace means that their discussions may now have a much more universal appeal. Is it time for the IDPS to revisit who it engages, expanding its membership, under new banners and with a different model of ownership?

A benefit of this could be that the New Deal approach and the lessons learned could be shared with others who will now be thinking about how to operationalize or support Goal 16. For example, could fragility assessments be used by other countries for inclusive and participatory processes of identifying context-specific priorities for Goal 16 implementation? What lessons have been learned on setting peace, justice and governance indicators and what are the challenges around data? Many g7+ countries that have piloted the New Deal are, in some regards, ahead of the game. Such lessons need to be documented in a targeted way to shape future global action.

The question, then, is how can the IDPS engage more meaningfully with the international community and share its lessons? At the global level, perhaps the IDPS might create – or eventually even become – a Global Dialogue on Peaceful Societies (GDPS). While g7+ countries and a focus on their special needs could remain a core concern or key workstream, this expanded GDPS might have a universal focus. In this scenario, caution would have to be taken to ensure that attention to the particular needs of g7+ countries was not diluted.

At the same time, it could be crucial to have a basic premise at its core: that *all* societies can be

more peaceful. Race riots, gang violence and civil war often share roots in injustice and exclusion. Furthermore, some of the countries that are facing the most severe crises of violence today were not originally on lists of fragile states and have not been involved in the New Deal process. And achieving peace in any one country requires action for global common goods by all nations.

This is not to dispute the evidence, which tells us that countries emerging from conflict are those most at risk of falling back into it, nor to deny that these countries need special attention. However, the SDGs offer an opportunity to make peace a universal issue: if we are to leverage the 2030 Agenda to *prevent* conflict, this requires friends of the agenda to focus on Goal 16 implementation in a much wider set of contexts than the IDPS has done to date. Fully embracing the universality of peaceful, just and inclusive societies will mean redefining ‘fragility’, which still remains binary (i.e. you’re on the list or you’re not) and, beyond the g7+, politically sensitive (if you’re on the list you may well be unhappy about it). The ongoing debate on how ‘fragility’ might be redefined or replaced to inform better conflict prevention and peacebuilding is therefore very timely.

A GDPS could also use the political acceptance of Goal 16 and the SDGs as the basis on which to draw new actors (emerging donors, middle-income countries, regional organisations, UN agencies) into more meaningful discussion while linking up with other relevant global platforms such as the UN Peacebuilding Commission or the OGP. It would also present an opportunity to reinforce high-level political buy-in to the focus on peace in the SDGs. The GDPS could provide a forum to mobilise the much-needed support for data-gathering capacities for monitoring. It could also be a forum for exchange of best practice and effective policy on peaceful societies, for example between the Liberia and the US on managing youth gangs or between Northern Ireland and Ghana on social cohesion, facilitating genuine two-way cross-country learning. The GDPS might include a strong focus on transnational stress factors and the ways in which policies in one country inadvertently impact on the stability of others. Finally, the members of the dialogue might also be a source of international political support and partnership for change-makers at national level, including of course in g7+ countries.

Scepticism towards the creation of a further layer of global dialogue and international clutter is justified. Its absence is not the problem; calls for attention to be squarely focused at national level should be heeded. Nonetheless, aside from the need to address genuinely transnational challenges, collective action, support, pressure and monitoring at the global level will help enable meaningful change on the ground. As it stands, a truly global platform to promote peaceful societies, inside or outside the UN, is still missing. If other actors fill this space, it may not be defined with sufficient recognition of the priorities, knowledge and capacities that exist regarding fragility, conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

Therefore the IDPS and its members must engage in shaping the vision, whether or not they wish to adapt the IDPS itself towards championing this vision. While no international body or grouping can claim ownership of this agenda or Goal 16, a GDPS could be a means to mobilise collectively in a way that is sensitive to formal UN processes and reviews. This requires leadership, strategic diplomacy and commitment, though it need not require additional architecture, secretariats, and more bureaucracy.

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Unpacking the linkages between the New Deal and the 2030 Agenda highlights both challenges and opportunities. There are practical solutions to the challenges, though they will not be as simple as they sound. The opportunities must be leveraged to change how the international community engages in conflict-affected states, based on the lessons from the New Deal, but also change how the international community engages with itself.