



NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

CENTER ON INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

**Advancing the Building Stable Societies Agenda
within the Post-2015 Framework**

Meeting Note

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The world faces old and new security challenges that are more complex than our multilateral and national institutions are currently capable of managing. International cooperation is ever more necessary in meeting these challenges. The NYU Center on International Cooperation (CIC) works to enhance international responses to conflict, insecurity, and scarcity through applied research and direct engagement with multilateral institutions and the wider policy community.

CIC's programs and research activities span the spectrum of conflict, insecurity, and scarcity issues. This allows us to see critical inter-connections and highlight the coherence often necessary for effective response. We have a particular concentration on the UN and multilateral responses to conflict.

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Advancing the Building Stable Societies Agenda within the Post-2015 Framework

The High Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (HLP) set down an important marker as to how peace and stability could be integrated into the successor framework to the MDGs. The Panel included “build peace and effective, open and accountable institutions for all” as one of their five transformative shifts, and proposed illustrative goals on “good governance and effective institutions” and “stable and peaceful societies.” These reflect what people in fragile and conflict-affected environments, advocates, academics and practitioners have been emphasizing for many years: that peace and development are inextricably linked. Conflict destroys hard-won development gains and holds back development progress. Building stable and peaceful societies is a prerequisite for poverty reduction and sustainable development.

While the relationship between peace and development is undisputed, whether to include peace and stability in the post-2015 development agenda remains controversial among some member states. Objections range from the political to the practical, creating challenges for the broader community of stakeholders and member states who believe that peace, stability and governance¹ belong in the final post-2015 framework.

On August 28, 2013 the NYU Center on International Cooperation and the United Nations Foundation convened an informal meeting to discuss how best to advance the building stable societies agenda as part of the post-2015 framework. Speakers provided opening remarks reflecting on the experience of the High Level Panel and reactions to its report. The objectives of the discussion were to 1) familiarize participants with the sensitivities around the issues and highlight the key challenges and potential pitfalls in pushing this agenda forward; 2) discuss how best to approach these issues and how to frame the key messages for member states; and 3) ensure coordination among advocacy efforts.

1. The High Level Panel proposed two illustrative goals covering peace, stability and governance: Goal 10, Ensure good governance and effective institutions; and Goal 11, Ensure stable and peaceful societies. For the purposes of the meeting, these issues were discussed jointly as a broad category of issues.

This meeting note summarizes the key points and recommendations that emerged from the discussion, which was held under the Chatham House rule of non-attribution.

Critical Fault Lines

Over the course of the discussion several critical fault lines were highlighted. These relate to how peace and stability are framed, trade-offs among these and other issues on the post-2015 agenda and disagreements around targets. They lay bare the persistent tensions among member states

In the early post-2015 discussions, many stakeholders, most notably the UN System Task Team, used the terminology of “peace and security” to highlight the relationship between conflict, violence, instability and development. This generated a substantial negative response from several member states. For these actors, “peace and security” invokes the role of the UN Security Council and a perception that some countries are trying to push development issues into the purview of the Council. In addition, several countries are concerned about the implications of discussing domestic conflict and instability within a global framework, which may threaten their sovereignty and cause their country to be placed on “the wrong list.”

The HLP was eventually able to find a more palatable formulation by discussing peace, stability and governance as they relate to development. Building peaceful and stable societies enables people to go to work, farmers to cultivate their fields and children to go to school. Building stable and effective institutions enables states to promote and sustain development. By framing the issues in this way, the HLP provided a more constructive and less threatening way to discuss peace and stability within the post-2015 framework. While this formulation has helped soften the discussion, several member states still perceive this as an effort to drive development issues towards the Security Council and to establish a basis to infringe on national sovereignty.

Another complicating factor is the perception of a zero-sum relationship among the many issues covered by the post-2015 agenda. Many Middle Income Countries (MICs) are deeply concerned that a focus on peace and stability will over-shadow the issues that matter most to them, such as climate and sustainability. These fears are particularly acute in concerns over ODA flows whereby many MICs and Least Developed Countries (LDCs) fear an overall shift in ODA towards conflict-affected and fragile states. In response, their strategy has been to dismiss issues of peace and stability or to argue that they do not belong in the post-2015 agenda.

Another common objection is that targets for peace, stability and governance cannot be reliably measured, rendering them inappropriate for the post-2015 development agenda. While it is true that these are challenging phenomena to measure and that existing data is limited and poor, considerable work has already been done to develop meaningful and measurable targets² and this work can and should be further developed. Indeed, participants agreed that the best way to address objections related to measurability is for academic and civil society stakeholders to define clear, concise, measurable targets and to show concretely that these phenomena can be effectively tracked and measured.

It was noted that the illustrative targets for peace, stability and governance proposed by the HLP were integrated at a late stage in the process and did not receive the same level of technical scrutiny received by the other illustrative targets. Participants were encouraged to take up the challenge of further developing and refining meaningful targets in these areas.

That said, the community of stakeholders that support the inclusion of peace and stability in the post-2015 framework should be cognizant of which issues present measurement challenges that are so serious they risk limiting the power of the targets. External stressors (organized crime, drugs, trafficking, etc.) were thought to fall into this category and participants were cautioned that measurement

2. See The New Deal agreement on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals (PSGs): <http://www.newdeal4peace.org/peacebuilding-and-statebuilding-goals/> and the work of the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding on indicators: <http://www.pbsbdialogue.org/documentupload/03%20PSG%20Indicators%20EN.pdf>

challenges could prevent targets in these areas from driving real change. This is not to say that these and other hard-to-measure issues are not important or deserving of emphasis, but that in selecting and advocating for specific targets the arguments around measurement need to be tight and defensible.

Looking specifically at the illustrative targets related to peace and stability proposed by the HLP, it was noted that they command varying levels of support from member states and key stakeholders. They were grouped as follows:

Strong support

- Provide free and universal legal identity, such as birth registrations
- Increase by x% the share of women, men, communities, and businesses with secure rights to land, property, and other assets
- Prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against girls and women
- End child marriage

Some support

- Guarantee the public's right to information and access to government data
- Reduce illicit flows and tax evasion and increase stolen asset recovery by \$x
- Reduce violent deaths per 100,000 by x and eliminate all forms of violence against children

Limited support

- Ensure people enjoy freedom of speech, association, peaceful protest and access to independent media and information
- Reduce bribery and corruption and ensure officials can be held accountable

Limited support or actively opposed

- Stem external stressors that lead to conflict including those related to organized crime
- Ensure justice institutions are accessible, independent, well-resourced and respect due-process rights
- Enhance the capacity, professionalism and accountability of the security forces, police and judiciary

It is important to note that this stratification provides a rough snapshot of how support appeared to be distributed at the time that this event took place. Member state positions are at a formative stage and will develop considerably over the coming months. Nevertheless, based on this analysis, participants discussed the value of starting from a base of targets around which the broadest supportive constituency can be built. In addition, it is worth considering which targets will help focus attention on the most critical issues or proxies that are difficult for member states to dispute and, where possible, have a multiplier effect in that they would highlight changes across several social objectives, including but not limited to peace and stability.

Challenges and Potential Pitfalls

Given the sensitive dynamics surrounding the possible inclusion of peace and stability in the post-2015 framework, several challenges and potential pitfalls for advocacy were highlighted in the course of the discussion.

At present, the constellation of member states supporting the building stable societies agenda is comprised of OECD and G7+ countries. While the G7+ are strong and effective advocates for peace and stability, their credibility is limited particularly among the G77 who see them as linked to and even controlled by the OECD. Compounding this is the danger that civil society and member state stakeholders that support the inclusion of peace and stability may overreach in their advocacy efforts, causing a backlash against the inclusion of these important issues because they are perceived as a “northern agenda.”

Likewise, early in the establishment of the HLP, there was a perception that northern interests drove the process. While the Panel greatly dispelled this perception through wide-ranging consultations, some member states seem prepared to dismiss the HLP proposals merely on the basis of their origins. Participants agreed that the best approach is to focus on advancing the ideas and principles proposed by the HLP and to examine those ideas on their merits without reference to the panel itself.

While the inclusion of peace, stability and governance as goals by the HLP is widely viewed as a victory among civil society and member state supporters, keeping these issues on the agenda will require building a broader constituency of support. Participants discussed building a common civil society position, which would focus on key messages and targets, and finding common cause with other civil society constituencies that focus on social and environmental issues making it increasingly difficult for member states to disregard the links between peace, stability and development. One suggestion was to further explore the concept of resilience because it resonates with both the peace and environmental communities and may point to meaningful targets that could garner broad support across civil society and member states.

Among member states, powerful southern voices drawing particularly from Middle Income Countries (MICs) across Africa, Asia and Latin America must be brought on board, or at least encouraged not to object. The challenge is that many of the missions in New York must cover a range of technical issues with limited staff capacity. Participants discussed focusing on a short list of up to 15 countries that could be supported with expertise and technical inputs in New York and in their capitals. Leveraging the ongoing efforts of local civil society and academia would be valuable to support advocacy in capitals and provide a credible local perspective.

Conclusion and recommendations

This meeting provided an opportunity for civil society stakeholders to discuss the current political landscape as it relates to advancing the building stable societies agenda within the post-2015 framework. The discussion highlighted the sensitivities and concerns voiced by member states and offered several suggestions on how best to frame and target advocacy to ensure that peace and stability are included in the final post-2015 agenda.

Language and framing

Experience suggests that language and framing matter. Given the competing issues and interests wrapped up in the post-2015 agenda, it is important to articulate peace, stability and governance *as they relate to development*. Building on the work of the HLP, adopting a positive formulation will also be essential. Focus on *building* stable societies, rather than emphasizing conflict and violence. Highlight the importance of building *resilience*, rather than reducing vulnerability.

Direct advocacy towards key players

Continue to cultivate the traditional supporters of peace and stability while also broadening the base of support. G7+ countries will continue to be key champions and should be supported to cultivate their own voice in New York. But, if the building stable societies agenda is perceived as pertaining only to conflict affected countries, powerful MICs will continue to dismiss the issues. The major challenge will be to build a core group of supportive southern missions. Participants identified South Africa, Nigeria, Indonesia, India, Kenya, Egypt, Mexico, China, Brazil, Colombia and Ghana as key players deserving of strategic advocacy, whether because of their potential to support or block the issues. Though they have greater access to technical capacity, OECD countries are also still forming their positions and considering how peace and stability fit in the hierarchy of their priorities for post-2015. This group could also benefit from analysis on how they can engage constructively on these issues.

Build a multi-faceted coalition for advocacy

Like international agencies and government ministries, civil society tends to be siloed with limited engagement across issue-areas. Given the breadth of the post-2015 agenda and the potential trade-offs among the issues, finding common cause across advocacy communities will be essential to advance a coherent universal agenda. Specifically, identifying targets that will drive change across several areas and that incorporate peace and stability will help build support.

Build on existing agreements

Where possible, build support around agreed language in existing conventions, conferences and resolutions. There is a particularly rich body of agreements in relation to violence against women and children that can be usefully drawn upon for the post-2015 agenda. But, it is also important to be weary of resolutions that invoke the Security Council and therefore risk repelling member states.

Get to work on data and targets

Building on existing efforts, refine defensible and meaningful targets against which peace, stability and governance can be measured within the post-2015 framework. There is some urgency to prove to naysayers that these issues can be measured effectively and that implementing and tracking change in relation to peace and stability will help build a sustainable foundation to underpin progress across all other aspects of development.



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