Forging Coherence on Two Vital Agendas for Sustainable Peace and Development: The Agenda 2030 and Sustaining Peace

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Exciting movements are underway in and around the United Nations for those of us concerned with issues of peace, and the global agendas seeking to operationalize, and realize, new frameworks and revitalized agendas to ensure a better world for all. Over the last year we have seen significant movements to assess and reorient United Nations' efforts towards greater commitments to sustaining peace and preventing conflict, as signified in April 27, 2016 twin Security Council/General Assembly Resolutions[1], We have also seen the adoption[2] of new global development framework – Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – that for the first time places peace concerns prominently at its core. It does this on the one hand by placing peace one of five areas of critical importance identified in the Preamble, and by dedicating one of 17 goals to the topic of *peaceful, just and inclusive societies.*

On January 10 of this year, new member of the Security Council Sweden took swift, admirable action to build upon the commitments laid out in the twin resolutions by hosting a Security Council ministerial level debate on sustaining peace and conflict prevention[3]. This important debate was opened by the new United Nations Secretary General António Guterres himself, as he threw his weight squarely behind the two resolutions, promising to "rebalance" United Nations efforts and place far greater attention on preventing violent conflict. He highlighted 2017 as the year OF peace and a year FOR peace.

Presently there are efforts to bring these two agendas (*sustaining peace/conflict prevention* and *Agenda 2030*) together. In anticipation of the January 24 United Nations High Level Dialogue "*Building Sustainable Peace for All: Synergies between the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustaining Peace*"[4] – and to introduce the first of what will hopefully be a semi-regular blog series broadly covering the topic of forging and sustaining peace – I am sharing some of my thinking that has evolved over time and in relation to my policy and practice work on issues that lie at the heart of these agendas and their intersections.

It is worth stating that reflecting on parallel, and undoubtedly complementary agendas is a worthy goal – at the most basic level, to promote coherence which lies at the heart of effective peacebuilding. But it is not easy. I just had the opportunity with New Deal constituency colleagues to do precisely this – reflect upon how our New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States (a framework and policy dialogue process) will align with the new Agenda 2030 – which our three constituencies (the g7+ network of countries affected by conflict, OECD/DAC donor countries - INCAF, and civil society - CSPPS - the Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and

[1] http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2282(2016)&referer=http://www.un.org/en/sc/documents/resolutions/2016.shtml&Lang=E

[2] http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/1

[3] http://webtv.un.org/meetings-events/watch/part-1-conflict-prevention-and-sustaining-peace-security-council-7857th-meeting/5276997208001

[4] http://www.un.org/pga/71/wp-content/uploads/sites/40/2016/12/HL-event-Building-Sustainable-Peace-for-all-Synergies-between-the-2030-Agenda-for-Sustainable-Development-and-Sustaining-Peace-pogramme-and-workshops-concept-notes.pdf

Statebuilding) were very active in supporting the creation of. The result of this six months of reflection, debate, and negotiation is here.

A key argument that I want to make in this post may be obvious, but requires steadfast, genuine attention. Having concepts, frameworks and strategies *is* a vital starting point, but it is just that, a starting point. Ongoing ownership of these agendas is clearly what matters at the end of the day for implementation, for realization of the aspirations embedded in these agendas. Meaningfully inclusive processes lie at the core of ownership, and these processes must begin and end *in* countries, with appropriate nurturing and accompaniment by international actors. At the same time, we cannot deny nor neglect the reality that many drivers of conflict and fragility are transnational and international in origin and motive, and thus require international partnership to address. While these two agendas represent a profoundly important step in a growing universal consciousness about what is needed to fuel sustainable peace and development for all, there is much work to do to ensure they are owned, actively pursued, and realized at national levels.

After sharing some reflections on the two agendas at hand and their important intersections, I'll close with some thoughts on how our experiences from the New Deal – which are inextricably linked to Agenda 2030 and the twin resolutions – offer insight, and added value if effectively utilized, for bringing these two agendas together, on the ground, where it matters most.

Sustaining peace and preventing conflict

While undoubtedly many might roll their eyes at these topics being heralded anew, given that both have been around and valued, particularly by scholar-practitioners, for decades – their movement to the *top* of the UN agenda must simply be welcomed. It illustrates, finally, that these are not marginal issues, or issue of "low politics" in *realpolitik* terms. They are paramount to achieving globally agreed goals, and reflective of the widening recognition that paying for the repercussions of war is simply too costly – there needs to be a robust commitment to prevention, which has faced considerable resistance by member states over time, with concern around implications for their sovereignty, amongst other things. At the same time, certainly some will fear that escalation of these agendas to the level to the Security Council may simply create a host of new obstacles, and serve to politicize and dilute the issues. A fair concern. Though, positively, Security Council attention to climate change and HIV/AIDs appears to be more helpful than harmful.

The back and forth on whether and how to address and approach issues of sustaining peace and conflict prevention over the years at the UN illustrates the profound complexities underlying questions of how to address these topics – conceptually, politically, ideologically, operationally. While a key goal of the UN is to "take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace" – enshrined in the UN Charter – the challenge of course is gaining agreement on what constitutes "threats to peace." We know that these are often conceived of very differently by different actors – be they governments and civil societies, Northern and Southern actors, and/or members of different ethnic, racial and income groups within and across societies.

The evolution of the field of peacebuilding, and the United Nations policy documents and instruments focused on the peacebuilding agenda illustrate the challenges of achieving lasting consensus on how to conceptualize and operationalize the notion of sustaining peace, encapsulated historically in the notion of *peacebuilding*. While, for example, the Agenda for

Peace (1992) suggested that peacebuilding was a post-conflict tool to follow peacekeeping, and the Supplement (1995) expanded the notion to refer to all stages of the conflict/peace cycle, the 2005 development of the UN's Peacebuilding "architecture" reverted to a post-conflict understanding of its role.

And despite the rising awareness of the problem of conflict recurrence and the need to address root causes and remain engaged in conflict settings, it was only seven years ago when the Secretary General, guided by the new leadership of the UN's peacebuilding architecture, decided its primary focus should be on the "immediate aftermath" of conflict. Some of us pushed back on this. At the time, I had the opportunity with eight other scholar/policy oriented practitioners to reflect on where the UN's peacebuilding architecture needed to go, and in my paper I argued that: *"the new focus on the immediate aftermath of conflict supported by the UN's Peacebuilding Architecture (PBA) crowds out important debates surrounding potential core drivers or building blocks of sustainable peace. Strengthened efforts are needed to conceptually and practically link this 'early recovery' period with longer-term peace."*

I then examined five "core drivers of peace sustainability," drawing on scholarly and policy literature and practice, around: 1) peace operations and sustaining international commitment; 2) coordination, integration, transition, strategy – particularly around the strategies, frameworks and processes for addressing drivers and root causes of conflict; 3) national capacity development, for conflict management; 4) economic recovery; 5) addressing obstacles to peace sustainability, i.e. proliferation of unregulated armed groups and their lack of attention in post-conflict DDR and SSR processes (receiving more attention today thankfully), poorly regulated natural resources, illicit drugs and organized crime; lack of trust in peace processes and lack of political will and appropriate mandates for which progress can be measured and actors held accountable. These five drivers I believe remain central, both for *sustaining peace* and *preventing conflict* – in particular conflict renewal or reversion, but also simply preventing new conflict – especially driver 3 – building on the longstanding commitments, often not honored, to put national actors in the driver's seat of change in their countries.

Thankfully attention is now reignited towards thinking about what *sustains* peace, not just in the immediate aftermath of conflict, but over the long-term. This movement, embraced in the two twin resolutions, grew from findings of the 2015 "AGE" report – a study by an Advisory Group of Experts (AGE) as part of the review process mandated by the Security Council and the General Assembly for the tenth anniversaries of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) and the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO). The twin resolutions highlight sustaining peace in a way that reorients the notion of peacebuilding to one that must take place in all phases – as an effort that happens before, during and after conflict – thus making it a responsibility of *the whole UN* – and not just one agency. According to the resolutions and drawing from the AGE report, sustaining peace:

"should be broadly understood as goal and a process to build a common vision of society, ensuring that the needs of all segments of the population are taken into account, which encompasses activities aimed at preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict, addressing root causes, assisting parties to conflict to end hostilities, ensuring national reconciliation, and moving towards recovery, reconstruction and development, and emphasizing that sustaining peace is a shared task and responsibility that needs to be fulfilled by the government and all other national stakeholders, and should flow through all three

pillars of the United Nations' engagement at all stages of conflict, and in all its dimensions, and needs sustained international attention and assistance,"

Those who follow the UN and more generally debates over the years on peacebuilding know that there is nothing terribly new here. But again, accepting it at the level of Security Council and General Assembly through formal resolutions *is* new, signaling high level commitments upon which concerted action can be built. It is also refreshing to see this level, finally, of commitment to the notion of "root causes" – which has been the subject of great waffling and substantive debate over the years (I summarize in this piece). The important point here is that national actors must ultimately retain responsibility for addressing root causes, while the outstanding question of what role international actors have in this regard remains poignant. I have argued in this same piece that we can facilitate space, and *accompany*. Of course it becomes complicated if national governments are totally unwilling to move in the direction of addressing root causes. In such cases – DRC, Bosnia-Hercegovina, and even Zimbabwe come to mind – fragility prevails. In this sense the resolutions underscore the inherently political nature of peacebuilding – though I believe more needs to be done to unveil what this means for operationalizing the sustaining peace agenda. Particularly as we reflect upon links with the *development* agenda, which thankfully now has more political entry points than the previous, Millennium Development agenda – notably with Goal 16.

Other welcome elements of this conceptualization, are the notion of the common vision of society (which suggests entry points for national development planning processes, and the national prioritization of goals and targets needed to realize Agenda 2030 within countries), and the underscoring of the need for inclusive processes, highlighting women and youth, amongst wider civil society. This reflects the formalization of this emerging norm of inclusivity in peacemaking and peacebuilding – of course welcome news for civil society interests around the world. Sadly, these commitments face challenges globally with shrinking space for civil society to operate where governments feel threatened and prefer closed systems. These commitments also may face grave challenges in the context of a Trump presidency if prevailing prognoses are right – where authoritarian and extremist political processes, globally, will be empowered in this new era[5].

The 2030 Agenda, and sustaining peace

Few would argue that the 2030 agenda is not an outstanding achievement, offering tremendous value for truly linking development and peace agendas. Member states (from the North, South, and especially conflict-affected countries) were joined by international organizations and civil society globally to bring about the "peace" priorities and perspectives in the 2030 agenda.

In a recent piece I authored on civil society's role in the 2030 agenda, I describe and reflect on this process.

Of particular relevance to this question of the links with the sustainable peace agenda, I assessed what is needed to ensure that the 2030 agenda is truly transformative – that is – that it will foster sustainable peace within *and across* societies in ways that ultimately serve to transform the root

[5] https://twitter.com/McCandlessErin/status/821832437118464001 .

causes of violence, conflict, and fragility. Three priorities, I suggested as fundamental starting points to ensure this, are:

1. Address or hold promise of addressing common drivers of conflict and violence on the one hand, and peace and resilience on the other – globally, within and across member states;
2. Offer ongoing pathways for meaningful inclusion of societal actors; and
3. Provide clear implementation and financing mechanisms.

I'll reflect primarily on the more substantive rather than operational aspects of the first two, here, building on my analysis in the aforementioned chapter. The third point is equally, and profoundly important – nothing will materialize without clear implementation and financing mechanisms, and the new Secretary General's commitment to placing issues of sustaining peace and preventing conflict at the top of his agenda for UN reform and action is a highly welcome starting point.

Addressing drivers

On the first point, it will be natural to focus attention on Goal 16 in the 2030 Agenda. Indeed, Goal 16 addresses both internal drivers of violent conflict (lack of access to justice, corruption, unaccountable institutions, exclusive decision making at national and sub-national levels) and external ones (illicit financial and arms flows, organized crime, exclusive global governance). However, other goals and targets are highly relevant for achieving sustainable peace – as reflected by the inclusion of peace in the preamble of the 2030 Agenda connotes. Notably, Goal 10 (on reducing inequalities) and Goal 5 (gender) are highly relevant for transforming structures and institutions, and ultimately shifting power relations at multiple levels—a foundation for achieving genuine, just, and sustainable peace in and across countries. Goals 1 and 2, addressing poverty, food security and agriculture are deeply entwined with ensuring that the basic material conditions required for a decent existence provide a core foundation for peace – long argued, in particular, by African thinkers and policymakers. Additionally, as attention rightly rises on the profound and frightening interconnections between fragility and violent conflict and the environment, and notably, the drivers and impacts of climate change, Goals 12-15 also require a peace lens. Goals dealing with social services and infrastructure too, can and must be addressed in conflict and peace sensitive ways, a fairly well studied but not sufficiently implemented topic. And the rising attention to cities and sustainable peace is even starting to garner the attention it deserves.

It is also argued that the framework could go further in addressing structural drivers of conflict and fragility – particularly to align with the agenda of *sustaining peace* and the goal to address root causes. I have heard Global South activists argue that the framework is not sufficiently transformative because it does not fundamentally shift the macro-economic fundamentals and reposition country economies so that they are not so vulnerable to global economic volatility– processes that creates poverty and inequality in the first place. It also does not provide pathways for redistributive justice – i.e. addressing contexts where there are serious disparities of land and resources that fuel conflict. This was also a limitation in the World Bank's hallmark 2011 WDR on Conflict, Security and Development, that argued the need for focus on investing in citizen security, justice and jobs to reduce violence and strengthen institutions over the long haul.

The framework is also suspiciously missing reference to mechanisms to foster reconciliation, conflict resolution and peace-making, and more generally the social and relational side of social cohesion, at all levels within society. During the development of the Agenda, these issues were consistently advocated for by civil society – (as evident in statements informing the Agenda's development, on www.cspps.org). They were also featured in the New Deal Common Indicators after extensive debate amongst stakeholders.

It is also important to underscore that the peaceful, just and inclusive societies dimension of the 2030 Agenda is much greater than just Goal 16. The framework is clearly unprecedented in bringing together a broad range of structural issues that often underlie or contribute to violent conflict and fragility, alongside and embedded within traditional development objectives, as it puts forth an expansive range of targets (169) covering political, economic and social realms, to affect them. While Goal 16 was by all accounts a magnanimous achievement, it came with some expense to a concerted effort to mainstream a peace and conflict lens throughout the framework. Adopting one central goal can foster a concerning perception that "peace" is associated with primarily security, governance and rule of law activities – which can too easily be dismissed as a Northern/Western agenda. We must continue to draw upon decades of evolutionary thought to ensure it is perceived as an integrated concept, with inclusive development also at its core, and seek to ensure that "peace" in the development framework includes goals and targets throughout, that together encompass the potential for significant change at country and international levels. In this spirit, the Center for Cooperation at NYU has prepared a useful analysis that makes the case for an integrated approach to peaceful, just and inclusive societies.

Pathways for inclusion

The second area concerns the ways in which the framework and its implementation offer ongoing pathways for inclusive participation. The 2030 Agenda addresses these issues in myriad ways, notably, by effectively mainstreaming the concept of inclusivity through many of its goals: education (Goal 4), economic growth and full employment (Goal 8), infrastructure (Goal 9), cities (Goal 11), societies and institutions (Goal 16). By emphasizing participation and inclusion in a range of issues that are often interactive and interdependent, the Agenda addresses power asymmetries, and the exclusionary policies that fuel violence and violent conflict, in a way that most official peacebuilding agreements do not. Central to realizing results in this area will be how the pathways for participation are actively forged, *in particular*, at national levels, but also globally, with stronger participation of Global South actors. In my chapter I highlight some of the weaknesses of the Agenda 2030 process, notably the much more influential role that northern civil society was able to have in the Agenda's development, undoubtedly, given that much of the technical and political elements of the process unfolded in New York.

It will be vital that all working for the cause of peace endeavor to "connect the dots" – that is, build meaningful linkages between the inclusion agendas at different levels, towards ensuring that inclusion at one level (i.e. the peace processes, where advances are being made to encourage this both within the UN and by important civic efforts[6])

[6] http://www.inclusivepeace.org/content/supporting-peace-processes-through-comparative-evidence

transmits into other levels, sectors, processes, and notably, results. I make this case in reflecting on the New Deal[7], how our concerted efforts[8] have sought to understand and promote inclusion not just as a policy goal in terms of process, but in actualizing *more inclusive results*. Agenda 2030 provides entry points for those working in and on negotiating inclusive peace agreements, to reflect and engage deeply on the pathways for ensuring these issues translate into policy and programmatic results. This of course demands within the United Nations context, that those leading on peace operations – the Department for Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and the Department for Political Affairs (DPA) for starters, genuinely come together the United Nations Development Program and other UN agencies to ensure that their strategic frameworks and processes foster meaningful ways to link the political and developmental with national actors at the helm. The challenge – as I've argued in numerous places, perhaps first here – is that many of these upstream processes are more heavily managed by the UN, rather than national actors, thus undermining the notion that peacebuilding strategies are and must be nationally led endeavors – which *is* the priority in national development planning processes (and Agenda 2030), supported by UN agencies and especially UNDP. The goal of truly ensuring national actors are in the drivers' seat in peacebuilding and development processes requires confronting this tension.

Enter the New Deal.

Conclusion: The New Deal and the Role of the International Dialogue

International Dialogue constituencies were heavily engaged in the shaping of efforts around Goal 16 and wider peace related language in Agenda 2030. While the development of the New Deal predated Agenda 2030 efforts, the global agenda was seen as a North Star, to bring the New Deal inspired concerns and priorities to the highest policy level and to ensure the greatest impact for all. At the same time, the adoption of the 2030 Agenda – lauded by all New Deal constituencies – presented a challenge: what now is the role for the New Deal? After much deliberation we have made the clear case for the continuing central importance of the New Deal in countries affected by conflict and fragility. In sum, we argue that the New Deal offers a set of processes and specific instruments that will support selection, prioritisation and implementation of SDGs in ways that create inclusive dialogue around the nature of what they mean in specific contexts, and how they can be implemented and monitored most effectively – and in ways that concertedly support addressing and not aggravating the drivers of conflict and fragility. Not only are these principles representative of good development practice and specifically aligned to fragile and conflict settings, they are also already negotiated and agreed by IDPS stakeholders. Ownership of these principles is strong, and growing, and thus will necessarily support effective realization of the SDGs. Further, the multi-stakeholder International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding represents exactly the kind of partnership envisioned in Agenda 2030's Goal 17. This partnership can be used and built upon to realize the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda.

Most importantly for this reflection at hand on how to bring these two agendas (*sustaining peace/conflict prevention* and *Agenda 2030*) together – the New Deal offers practical, concrete experience and deep insight into the *how* to pursue both agendas in an integrated way. This is precisely what the International Dialogue has been endeavoring – through years of often quite

[7] http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01436597.2016.1191344?journalCode=ctwq20

[8] Safeguarding inclusivity and the role of civil society in conflict-affected states

delicate political dialogue – to do. While evaluations on our successes and failures have been undertaken, the key areas of added value in my view for this discussion are three:

- New Deal processes have sought to bring analysis of conflict and fragility to bear, on political decision-making *and* development planning;

- New Deal instruments have grappled with and continue to grapple with myriad political tensions involved in bringing key actors into dialogue around historical, structural, and fundamentally *political* challenges in fomenting meaningful change – both in terms of how the international aid architecture works and needs to work *and* in how governments can and need to more effectively engage their societies in these processes as a starting point;

- New Deal processes have operationally brought societal constituencies (and international constituencies) together in meaningful ways, and catalyzed and institutionalized (in different countries, with varying degrees of success) inclusive processes that link the peacemaking/peacebuilding and development spheres – with a focus on both processes and results.

It is the case that these have been attempted and achieved with varying degrees of success. And while the New Deal can be critiqued for this, the efforts in g7+ countries by both governments and civil societies have in many cases been tremendous, and are ongoing. It would be a futile waste of resources and morally debilitating for those who have devoted their time, energy and resources, to *not* ensure that Agenda 2030 and sustaining peace agenda efforts build upon these efforts in g7+ countries. This can start with a more concerted engagement between actors engaged in these agendas, and it must occur at all levels. While undoubtedly there are political dynamics at play mediating for and against the inclusion and larger voice of different constituencies and actors and substantive concerns – what cannot be debated any longer is that these agendas must be fundamentally driven by national actors. Within the International Dialogue process, g7+ countries (governments *and* their civil societies) are taking a profound lead in agreeing to, and adopting, a courageous stance and needed actions to move their countries forward in ways that both challenge needed, structural problems in the international aid architecture, and, in ways that have them take ownership of domestic obstacles to meaningful change. This is a process that will take time, that requires ongoing engagement and support of all constituencies and partners.

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