

SDG 16

Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

“There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development”

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As strategies are being developed to enhance implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 goals, a number of objectives seem to have risen to the surface: including a global policy environment that makes it possible for governments to achieve their commitments; ensuring robust, data, appropriate to each country; reliable funding sources; clear and measurable indicators; a secure, just and inclusive social fabric, and SDG 16, the so-called “peace goal.” It recognizes that “there can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development.”

The targets for SDG16, on peaceful, just and inclusive societies, were strongly endorsed by many policy advocates, but remained controversial in part because of geopolitical policy compromises that will be noted below but also because of the absence of conversations with peace and security experts during the process of developing the targets.¹ However, the larger message of Goal 16 is widely affirmed: that the success of the 2030 Agenda will depend on our ability to sustain stable, secure and inclusive societies governed by states that are essentially trustworthy, responsive to constituents, free of corruption and committed to eliminating violence, in part by reigning in coercive security institutions.

While SDG 16, as with the other goals, will likely offer challenges to any proposed indicators of success, there are at least two hopeful notes going forward. The first is the commitment to assuring structures of governance robust enough to enforce the rule of law and ensure equal access to justice (Target 16.3), eliminate corruption and bribery and abide by the same laws that it enforces within its citizenry (Target 16.5), and restrict predatory corporate and criminal interests (Target 16.4). These targets clearly recognize that citizen trust in all aspects of government, trust that is duly earned, is the soundest basis for peaceful, just and inclusive societies.

Also welcome is language specifying stronger participation by developing countries in institutions of global governance (Target 16.8). For many of these countries, the tasks of virtually all SDGs – including Goal 16 – are only tenable within multilateral structures, ensuring progress together that is much more elusive alone.

This includes addressing the problems of illicit financial flows (IFFs), which each year drain millions of dollars from developing countries (see chapter 2.16). But as we see often at the UN, having access to global governance is insufficient without the commitment to balance global structures, creating more functional and inclusive equivalences of state responsibility and authority (Target 16.7). We are convinced that

¹ As noted by Ribeiro Pereira (2014).

Implementation of SDG 16 vital for the Middle East and North Africa

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The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with its accompanying Goal 16, constitutes significant progress as compared with the previous MDG agenda, because it makes the links stronger between peace and security, nationally and globally, democratic, effective and transparent governance, social inclusion and access to justice.

It is obvious that war-torn and deep-rooted long-lasting conflict countries – where good governance is lacking and the rule of law and essential elements of democracy are undermined – will continue to fail even in meeting the most basic needs of their peoples. Almost all of the countries in the Middle East and North Africa are in such a situation. The bleak situation of the region is well reflected by the Global Peace Index 2015. Countries in the region are among those with the worst score, even deteriorating compared to the previous year (average rank stands at 109 over 162 countries).¹

1 Cf. Institute for Economics and Peace (2015). Scores worsened in particular in Libya, Yemen, Iraq and Syria.

There are both external and internal reasons for these conflicts and violence; yet all of these reasons are related to the great impact of the flaws in the global system and the failure of the international community to implement international law and respective resolutions. The lack of peace and security in the region is also linked to foreign invasions and occupation, and the violation of the right to self-determination. Furthermore, the unprecedented flow of refugees and displaced people from the region, which is the biggest since World War II, is intensively shaking stability in the region and creating or increasing tensions among and within the countries.

In parallel, there is a dramatic shift in the composition of official development assistance (ODA) towards the inclusion of expenditures for humanitarian interventions, security related expenditures and refugee costs in host countries, often at the expense of previous development programmes. This shift is based on the interpretation by the OECD countries of the link between security, justice and democracy, namely that security is necessary to democracy and development. Obviously, this logic ignores the root causes of instability and conflicts and focuses on its symptoms. This reflects a short term vision which might be serving

geopolitical interests but will not have long lasting positive impact on stability, security and peace in the region.

At the national level, the principle of allocation of maximum available resources to development is challenged by high military spending, which amounts to US\$ 196 billion in 2014, an increase of 5.2 percent over 2013, and 57 percent since 2005.²

In this context, the implementation of SDG 16 is vital for the region. However, progress is significantly challenged by failure of the region to deal with systemic and structural problems, to a large extent generated by its dependence on oil revenues, including authoritarian governments; widespread corruption, in both the public and private sector; and the default to a business as usual approach. Consequently, efforts to create stability and address governance

2 Cf. SIPRI (2015). SIPRI did not publish an updated estimate for the Middle East for 2015 as data for 2015 has been unavailable for several countries.

issues should be accompanied by efforts towards a paradigm shift focusing on the rights-based approach, enhancing productive economies and implementing fair redistribution of wealth policies.

To overcome these challenges, countries of the region should:

1. **Unpack the new paradigm of sustainable development:** The 2030 Agenda, including SDG 16, can potentially give more clarity on the role of the state and different actors including the private sector. To implement its goals and targets, countries have to be more inclusive and sustainable in patterns of production, consumption and the provision of public services.
2. **Focus on addressing inequalities in achieving peaceful societies:** Inequality and lack of inclusion remain the core challenge in the region hampering societal peace and stability. This challenge can only be addressed by eradicating disparities at multiple levels: geographic, political, gender, social, economic, cultural and environmental. This also requires the revision of social and economic policy choices.
3. **Redesign relations with international partners and institutions:** These relations should be based on the mutual respect of interests, mutual accountability and the protection of a more equitable policy space based on the right to self-determination and the right to development.
4. **Prioritize human rights and democracy as values and regard security as a tool to protect them:** The current tendency, not only in the region but worldwide, is to consider security as a value by itself, which is creating massive harm to development efforts and violating basic human rights.
5. **Foster political participation, inclusion, citizen empowerment and engagement:** People should enjoy an enabling environment for a more active engagement in public policy-making through increased levels of transparency and social dialogue.
6. **Reconstitute the state and ensure the separation of powers:** The accumulation of all powers in either one or a few hands is common in the region. Together with widespread corruption, clientelism and nepotism this jeopardizes accountability, widens inequalities and creates policies of exclusion and discrimination and gross human rights violations.

References

- Institute for Economics and Peace (2015): Global Peace Index 2015. Sydney
http://economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Global-Peace-Index-Report-2015_0.pdf
- SIPRI (2015): Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2014. Stockholm
<http://books.sipri.org/files/FS/SIPRIFS1504.pdf>

2.15 “There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development”

as this balancing takes further shape, trust levels in the promises of global governance are likely to rise as well.

At the UN, it is important to note that there are significant centres of policy coherence regarding the core concerns of Goal 16. For instance, the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), currently led by Kenya’s Ambassador Macharia Kamau, is taking steps in accord with the Secretary-General’s Advisory Group of Experts² to broaden its scope and authority both beyond Member States in its formal configurations and to matters beyond post-conflict reconstruction, including the often neglected task of conflict prevention. The evolving attention of the PBC to complex matters impacting both the onset and longevity of conflict includes addressing persistent poverty and other inequalities within and among states, while highlighting the need to build strong state institutions and reliable, transparent governance to help prevent the onset (or relapse) of conflict.

For its part, the UN Security Council seeks to apply its Charter mandate to “maintain” peace and security in part through a widening group of “thematic obligations” including to climate health, women’s full participation in peace processes, and trafficking in weapons, narcotics and persons. The Council is regularly accused by some UN Member States of spending more time attempting to restore peace and security – often through controversially coercive means – than to “maintaining” it in the first instance. Other states urge the Council to leave thematic obligations to the various committees of the UN General Assembly tasked directly with matters ranging from rule of law and the protection of fundamental freedoms to the strengthening of national institutions.

However, institutional turf and trust issues aside, the fact that the Security Council recognizes many of the profound promises embedded in the 2030 Agenda and their potential implications for peace and security

has great potential. In this regard, Security Council Resolution 2220 (2015) on small arms notes the Council’s grave concern

“(…) that the illicit transfer, destabilizing accumulation and misuse of small arms and light weapons in many regions of the world continue to pose threats to international peace and security, cause significant loss of life, contribute to instability and insecurity and continue to undermine the effectiveness of the Security Council in discharging its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security.”³

Weapons, of course, don’t have to be “illicit” to have wide ranging impacts, but that the Council is seized of at least some of these important development-security links can hopefully lead to more comprehensive (and earlier) security contributions relevant to the fulfillment of the SDGs.

Unfortunately, Security Council (and other UN) resolutions tend to embody limitations of language and policy dictated by permanent members including some of the largest weapons producing states. While rightly highlighting the “destabilizing accumulation” of weapons, there is scarce mention of the “destabilizing production” of such weapons. Destabilizing “accumulation” takes the form of weapons procured but not secured; or weapons acquired specifically to humiliate or suppress populations; or weapons purchased to replace older models which then – deliberately or inadvertently – are diverted into the open market. But weapons production in and of itself creates its own instabilities and diversions, including the diversion of vast and critically-needed resources from human development to often-wasteful military purposes.

Beyond security and to the UN’s credit, little time has been wasted in setting up procedures to help ensure full, flexible implementation of SDG goals and targets. From the Commissions on Social Development and Population and Development to high-level events

2 Cf. the report of the Advisory Group and a letter from its chair Ambassador Gert Rosenthal at: www.un.org/en/peacebuilding/pdf/150630%20Report%20of%20the%20AGE%20on%20the%202015%20Peacebuilding%20Review%20FINAL.pdf.

3 Cf. [www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2220\(2015\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2220(2015)).

sponsored by the presidents of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), there is broad recognition within the UN system that the planet is running out of time for the type of realignment suggested by both the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.⁴ One can worry that these landmark events may have come too late in the game to save us from ourselves or, less dramatically, that they are not thoughtful enough in terms of what has been left out, what has been willfully ignored, what can possibly go wrong. What can be doubted less is the sincerity of UN leadership and

⁴ A reflection note on plans for the implementation of the Paris Agreement can be found at: http://unfccc.int/files/meetings/paris_nov_2015/application/pdf/reflections_note.pdf

most UN Member States, to seize the opportunity presented by these goals and agreements to “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.”

Nevertheless, sustaining peaceful and inclusive societies, establishing state institutions worthy of constituent approval without imposing security arrangements that provoke intimidation or fear remain considerable challenges. Part of this challenge is related to people’s lingering distrust of governments and their security apparatus in countries worldwide. Many indigenous and rural persons, many politically concerned individuals, many marginalized persons in local communities and neighbourhoods: these and

Targets for SDG 16

- 16.1** Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere
- 16.2** End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children
- 16.3** Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all
- 16.4** By 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organized crime
- 16.5** Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms
- 16.6** Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels
- 16.7** Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels
- 16.8** Broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance
- 16.9** By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration
- 16.10** Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements
- 16.a** Strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacity at all levels, in particular in developing countries, to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime
- 16.b** Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development

others acknowledge a fear – not without reason – of the coercive and at times wholly disproportionate responses of the security sector.

As the UN knows well, in many parts of the world, it is a struggle to hold police accountable for their mis-behaviour. It is a struggle to hold militaries accountable for bombing civilian and community targets in the name of fighting terror; indeed many persons in the security sector seem to take refuge in a system that rarely acknowledges the need for nuanced response to perceived threats, let alone abuses committed or security failures of any sort.

Security Arrangements Worthy of the SDGs

To promote a viable security-development linkage in the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals is to acknowledge that state security sectors have the capacity to both impede and enable sustainable development. While civil society advocates must continue to address the security sector when its conduct crosses lines that intimidate populations and deny due process and other fundamental rights, they can also remind that sector of its ability to enhance implementation of the 2030 Agenda in many ways, including curtailing various forms of trafficking and armed violence that overwhelm many communities in Latin America and in other global regions.⁵ UN human rights treaty bodies also have a role to play in scrutinizing security sector conduct. But still within some states, an unaccountable security sector combined with official assertions of sovereignty and suppressions of those who would otherwise be community watchdogs create a climate which can only be interpreted as hostile to the fulfillment our 2030 development promises. We can be fair, but we must also be vigilant.

While SDG 16 includes specific targets to support a framework for peaceful societies – especially on matters of governance, corruption and the rule of law – the contention of many of our security colleagues,

⁵ For more on the security-development linkage in Latin America, cf. Lucatello / Zuber (eds.) (2014).

including Reaching Critical Will,⁶ is that the volume of small arms and other weapons systems – production, transfer and proliferation – also poses grave risks to the stable, abundant societies envisioned by the SDGs. Some will evaluate the UN’s multilateral treaties and disarmament architecture and decide that, as dysfunctional as they sometimes seem, something is better than nothing. The question we should be asking, though, is whether or not the remedy is sufficient to the cure that we hold out in the form of a promise to global constituencies?

If the vast global arms trade is still as serious a problem as many of us maintain (and to which Goal 16 alludes), we will need more robust instruments of arms restraint than at present. Since its negotiation and adoption, the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), which entered into force on 24 December 2014, has been hampered by Member States, particularly those like U.S. and Russia who as major arms exporters are reluctant to be bound by its provisions; it also has weak oversight provisions and has diverted time and energy from implementing the UN Programme of Action (UNPoA), adopted in 2001, which engages the practical, multilateral work of stockpile management, weapons marking and tracing, arms trafficking and improved security at borders and ports.⁷ And the ATT, through no intrinsic failure of its own, has no actionable outcome regarding arms that have long ago left the factory, the second-hand weapons that now do so much damage every day to communities and their development aspirations in Libya, Mali, Yemen, Nigeria and elsewhere.

When one steps back from this level of institutional scrutiny to gaze a bit higher, it is clear that security and development represent more than bookend obligations by states, but point to inter-related responses to existential threats affecting communities and

⁶ The disarmament programme of the Women’s International League for Peace and Security, cf. e.g. <http://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/statements/GDAMS2011.pdf>.

⁷ Information on the 6th Biennial Meeting of States on the UN Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons (BMS 6) in June 2016 can be found at: <https://www.un.org/disarmament/convarms/salw/bms6/>.

societies. A failure to live up to the promise of the 2030 Agenda, by accepting data that is selectively analyzed and promoted, funding that is unreliable and unevenly applied, policy that reaches towards the most vulnerable but never quite makes physical contact, weapons that drain public resources and are more numerous in many communities than textbooks or antibiotics – is as likely to exacerbate militarism as cure its many defects. In addition, a security policy that inhibits the safety and education of children, the political participation of women, the promotion of a free press and the fair administration of justice – all in violation of specific SDG targets – will not help to promote development so much as keep people locked in fearful, subordinated social and political contexts.⁸ Trust in the state (as in persons) is an under-analyzed, under-appreciated dimension in sustainable community development, as heavy handed, unaccountable security continues to play a huge role in undermining development confidence.

Pursuing the 2030 sustainable development goals, the UN has geared up for its High Level Political Forum assessments, indicators (of varying quality) are being finalized, and agencies are figuring out how best to secure needed funding.⁹ Security arrangements are evolving also. Moving forward, it is important to fully understand the diverse potentials of these arrangements and to minimize the more toxic aspects of their practices. If Member States fail to make a “best faith” effort to meet their 2030 promises, including on security arrangements fit for sustainable development, this will do more than bring discredit to the UN; it will signal that the world has likely crossed a threshold of threats to planetary health and peace from which our species might never recover. Having heartily celebrated our recent policy achievements, we have woken up with a bit of a hangover and now recognize the full complexity of our new development obligations, attempting to fix a series of urgent and related problems – including on security arrangements – that have deep and stubborn roots.

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⁸ This is a core component of the argument in Guerra / Zuber (2012).

⁹ An advocacy toolkit geared towards full and effective implementation of Goal 16 and its targets has been produced by TAP Network, cf. <http://tapnetwork2030.org/goal-16-advocacy-toolkit/>.