

The Conflict and Fragility Agenda Post-Busan: Directions, Opportunities, Challenges

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Paris, Accra, Dili, Busan, thousands of hours of negotiations and finally a new deal on a path to overcome the challenges of development in the most fragile societies on Earth. But, far from an endpoint, the process is just at its beginning. There are no questions on the fact that the 4th High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan in late 2011 marked a turning point on the debate and strategies for international assistance and on the relationship between donor nations and recipient countries. Governments achieved an agreement on improving the way aid is given, on how to be more efficient in disbursing aid, and on how to provide development for societies that have so far failed to reach the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). They also reached a "New Deal" for engagement in fragile states.

Many questions still remain unanswered, especially on how to establish not only a new relationship between donors and recipient countries, but also between governments and their societies.

In a meeting co-organized by the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform and the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development on 25 January 2011 in Geneva, experts, policymakers, NGO representatives and governments came to one conclusion: the transformation of the New Deal into concrete actions will be full of challenges, but it represents a real opportunity to advance the conflict and fragility agenda, and contribute to a post-2015 sustainable development framework.

For Achim Wennmann, Executive Coordinator at the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform, the meeting was an opportunity to think about the outcome of Busan, and about directions and opportunities to strengthen the conflict and fragility agenda post-Busan.

The transformation of the New Deal into concrete actions represents an opportunity to advance the conflict and fragility agenda

While current efforts have focused on donor-recipient relations, more attention must be given to the relationship between governments and their societies

The Geneva Peacebuilding Platform is a joint project of four institutions:

What did Busan represent?

The International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (IDPS), hosted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), seeks to develop new development architectures and ways of working that are better tailored to the situation and challenges of fragile contexts, and to building peaceful states and societies. It is a “conversation for change” that involves 51 countries, organizations and civil society, including the G7+, a group of 19 countries that consider themselves ‘fragile’ and that have united their voices to establish a dialogue with their international partners.

From the outset, the diagnosis of the obstacles that the international community and recipient countries face in reducing fragility and increasing resilience were relatively clear. At least four issues prevent fragile states to progress: The MDGs are not the right policy framework to deal with the challenges of mistrust, violence remains endemic in many contexts, the persistence of injustice, and a lack of opportunities in addressing social issues and poverty reduction.

Incentives for a more efficient effort are lacking. Development plans are frequently framed along short term targets, while they require long term processes that would have to live with the idea of setbacks. Also, self-interests and a broad variety of constraints, including a lack of vision, capacity, and confidence, are often stacked against the societal transformation required to exit fragility.

A third obstacle is the fragmentation of efforts and funding, as well as the lack of coordination among actors involved in a specific country. This situation led to a failure in generating a sufficiently large aggregate impact.

Finally, the legacy of mistrust left by violence is often not adequately overcome by sustained and sincere efforts towards political dialogue.

Describing the backdrop against which the New Deal was developed and agreed by the IDPS, Erwin Van Veen, Policy Analyst on Peace and Security at the OECD's International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF), pointed out that Busan marks two main changes for the development agenda. The first is the positive engagement of emerging powers – such as Brazil and China – with the global development agenda.

As a result, the Busan outcome document reflects the start of a global consensus on important development challenges. “There is still a long way to go towards more concerted action. But a key step has been made”, said Van Veen.

The second element was the fact that Busan created a global partnership for development as a way to continue and expand this engagement. Within this broader picture, the New Deal seeks to reduce conflict and fragility. It has three key areas of action.

1. It establishes a new framework with 5 goals for peacebuilding and statebuilding. This includes fostering inclusive political settlements and conflict resolution, establishing and strengthening people's security,

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addressing injustices and increasing people's access to justice, generating employment and improving livelihoods, and managing revenue and building capacity for accountable service delivery. None of these goals are part of the MDG framework.

2. It agrees new ways to work together, with a focus on the inclusion on how to best assess fragility, developing a vision, agreeing compacts and stimulating political dialogue and leadership.
3. It sets out a set of agreements to improve the quality of assistance to fragile states.

Implementation

During the seminar, however, it became clear that if the elaboration of the New Deal was a challenge, the real test will be its implementation. "We have a good and a bad news", said Van Veen. "The good news is that there is a New Deal as a basis for change. The bad news is that it will still need to be implemented, which will take patience and persistence."

In terms of legitimacy, a question will be how to place the Busan outcomes and their goals into a UN framework, especially with regards to the emerging discussion on the follow on to the MDGs process. In terms of technical work, the development of indicator to support the goals of peacebuilding and statebuilding will be also a new issue. Knowing if a goal is being reached will be fundamental in the new path chosen by countries. There is no doubt, however, that the elaboration of these indicators will be a political exercise. "It matters what you measure", said Van Veen, underlining the fact that this is not exclusively a technical effort.

Finally, the pilot phase of implementation of the new strategy in places such as Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Liberia will test if donors and national governments are ready to change the way they act.

Speaking on behalf of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Antoine Laham provided some insight into what governments such as his own are already planning in terms of implementation. According to him, Bern was among the first countries to endorse the New Deal and is already studying ways to implement it, with a national plan of action and identifying areas to act. Appropriate guidelines are being written to allow engagement in fragile states, and a first attempt is a project to be implemented in Kabul, with the partnership of the governments of the United Kingdom and Norway.

Bern will also increase its level of aid to fragile states by 15 to 20 per cent. From the current baseline of 28 per cent, this increase means that approximately half of Switzerland's development assistance will be devoted to fragile states. In sum, Laham points out that "there is a lot of work to be done, especially on implementation".

The real test for the New Deal will be its implementation

A question will be how to place the Busan outcomes and their goals into a UN framework

The New Deal focuses primarily on the relationship between aid providers and aid recipients; now, we need to speak about the “Real Deal”: the commitment of national governments to their own populations

The New Deal in perspective

Koenraad Van Brabant, Head of Reflective Practice at Interpeace, encouraged everyone to look not just at the New Deal document (December 2011) but in addition at the g7+ statement that is annexed to the Dili Declaration (April 2010). Whereas the New Deal focuses primarily on the relationship between aid providers and aid recipients, the g7+ statement expresses the commitments of these national governments to their own populations. That is the “real deal”, Van Brabant underlined.

Beyond that, a proper appreciation of the IDPS must not only look at what it did achieve, but also take into account what it did not talk about. Van Brabant argued that the International Dialogue pre-Busan has really been a conversation about aid and aid flows to fragile and conflict-affected countries. This is not surprising given that the Dialogue inserted itself within the wider global policy conversation about aid effectiveness. Aid and aid flows to fragile and conflict affected countries are an important area of attention. But it by no means covers the much broader conversation and debate about peacebuilding and statebuilding.

So far the IDPS has not paid attention for example to how countries descend into violence and fragility. The focus has been on pathways out of fragility – but surely a deeper understanding of pathways into fragility would also be relevant. What is more, the Dialogue has failed to unpack ‘fragility’ and is treating it as fundamentally the same in all these different countries. There may indeed be a perceived similarity of problems for aid providers. But in relation to peacebuilding and statebuilding we need to acknowledge that the nature, scope and reasons for persistent fragility and violence will be different in each context.

The IDPS has also failed to examine the relationship between statebuilding and peacebuilding. There seems to be an underlying assumption that the two are mutually complementary and reinforcing, and that a ‘more capable’ (or ‘stronger’) state will lead to a more peaceful society. The historical record and more recent country experiences do not support such simple assumption.

Van Brabant's views were echoed by Graeme Simpson, Director of Policy and Learning at Interpeace's New York office, who alerted the audience about the risk of presuming the compatibility between peacebuilding and statebuilding. He noted that the critical test was not just whether or not state capacities were built, but the focus should be on whether or not the relationship between states and the societies they serve have been transformed. “Only then can peacebuilding be effective”, he says. “We need to start looking at fragility and resilience in societies and not just in states.”

The pilot phase of the New Deal is going to be crucial in testing the ability of Busan to assure a new path on the development of aid strategies. As Van Brabant, Simpson points to the need to understand fragility as both “country-specific” and “conflict-specific”. Donors and policymakers must understand that the experiences and sources of fragility and resilience in Afghanistan, for example, are very different from Timor-Leste.

We need to better understand the pathways ‘into’ and ‘out-of’ fragility

Simpson believes that the real opportunity in developing the new framework is to recognize that there are different sources and characteristics of fragility, but also that there are differences on the elements that assures cohesion in each society. "The conversation about fragility has a flip side: resilience and social cohesion", he says, claiming that the understanding of this other side needs to be enhanced.

Another central element of discussion is the elaboration of the indicators and measurements for peacebuilding and statebuilding. Simpson claims it is the moment to go beyond traditional measures and to implement a more complex exercise that will look not only at the state capacity, but also will measure the relationship between government and society. If there is a new path, the international community must also have the ability to measure new things, including the accountability of governments towards society.

For this to happen, the most important criteria of measurement must be those identified by the stakeholders in these societies themselves. This would imply that indicators should be developed in an inclusive way, as well as in a spirit that leaves room for flexibility. The danger, Simpson claims, is that an indicator is "stuck in time". "The needs and expectations of people in these countries change over time. Therefore our measurements need to be responsive to these changes".

Opportunities

Besides these critical observations, there was a shared view that the New Deal and its implementation represent a tremendous opportunity to strengthen peacebuilding and statebuilding in conflict-affected and fragile states and societies.

According to Van Veen, there are two reasons for why the New Deal could progress the conflict and fragility agenda further than previous efforts: "Never has a process of dialogue of such dimensions brought everyone together as inclusively as this one did", he argues. "We often talk about each other, but now we finally talk with each other".

The second reason making this effort different from others is the fact that governments are increasingly aware of the widening gap between what they sign up to, and what they really implement. "There are important operational challenges for donors: How to best procure, staff, design, support and deliver in support of national and local peacebuilding and statebuilding efforts", Van Veen points out. "This new framework offers a starting point to improve current practice. The challenge is to do this in a realistic way that recognizes the complexities in many of the countries affected."

Another opportunity was raised by Luigi De Martino, Coordinator of the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development. He argues that Busan gave an important signal to the international community and its emerging post-MDG discussions. "The current MDGs do not deal with peace and security", he points out. "500.000 people die every year in the world as a result of violence. Only 10 per cent die in classical conflict settings. In 14 countries of the world, the violent death rates are over 30 to every 100,000 people".

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The New Deal represents a tremendous opportunity to strengthen peacebuilding and statebuilding

According to De Martino, implementing the New Deal in countries facing high levels of violence but that are not in a classical conflict situation will be a key challenge. "The non-conflict settings have to be taken into account when talking about peacebuilding and statebuilding," he says.

Overall, the New Deal, the IDPS, and the Geneva Declaration are initiatives where states, societies and external actors will be able to translate their new analysis about pathways out of conflict and fragility into concrete action. The initiatives offer a rich input into the evolving discussion about a new consensus towards a post-2015 sustainable development framework.

About this Brief

This Brief is a summary of a lunch-time seminar co-organized by the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform and the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development on 25 January 2011 in Geneva. All views expressed in this Brief relate to the interventions made during the event. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the Rapporteur, the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform, or the Geneva Declaration Secretariat. All documents mentioned in this Brief can be downloaded at <http://www.interpeace.org/index.php/civil-society>.

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About the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform

The Geneva Peacebuilding Platform is an inter-agency network that connects the critical mass of peacebuilding actors, resources, and expertise in Geneva and worldwide. Founded in 2008, the Platform has a mandate to facilitate interaction on peacebuilding between different institutions and sectors, and to advance new knowledge and understanding of peacebuilding issues and contexts. It also plays a creative role in building bridges between International Geneva, New York, and peacebuilding activities in the field. The Platform's network comprises more than 700 peacebuilding professionals and over 60 institutions working on peacebuilding. <http://www.gpplatform.ch>.

About the Geneva Declaration

The Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development is a diplomatic initiative aimed at addressing the interrelations between armed violence and development. The Geneva Declaration was first adopted by 42 states on 7 June 2006 during a Ministerial Summit in Geneva, and is now endorsed by over 110 states. The signatories recognize that armed violence constitutes a major obstacle to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The Geneva Declaration is the strongest political statement to date that addresses the impact of armed violence within a development context. <http://www.genevadeclaration.org>.

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