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“Peaceful, Just and Inclusive societies in the Sustainable Development Goals: a Universal Agenda”.

Remarks at the Conflict Prevention and Resolution Forum meeting: “The Future of Goal 16: Peace and Inclusion in the Sustainable Development Goals”. Washington DC, December 7, 2015

Introduction

I am planning to address four questions:

- What is goal 16 and the peaceful, just and inclusive societies’ agenda, and why do they matter?
- Now the agenda is in place, what can we do now that we couldn’t do before? What’s different?
- How will the agenda become reality? What will implementation look like?
- What’s the relevance for the US?

What is goal 16 and the peaceful, just and inclusive societies’ agenda and why do they matter?

Consider the following passages from Agenda 2030:

- “Peace: we are determined to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies which are free from violence” *Preamble*
- 34. “The new Agenda recognizes the need to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies that provide equal access to justice and that are based on respect for human rights, on effective rule of law and good governance at all levels and on transparent, effective and accountable institutions. Factors which give rise to violence, insecurity and injustice, such as inequality, corruption, poor governance and illicit financial and arms flows, are addressed.” *Declaration*
- 5.2: Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls
- 5.5 Ensure women’s full and effective participation
- 10.2: By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all
- 10.3: Ensure equal opportunity... including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices..”

So that perhaps gives you a flavor – and that’s without even getting to Goal 16. And when we do look at the Goal 16 targets, the scope is surprisingly broad, emphasizing reducing violence and violent death, equal access to justice, good governance (including fostering accountable and transparent institutions), inclusive decision making, access to information and fundamental freedoms. It also addresses issues at the global level, including trafficking, illicit financial and arms flows, and more inclusive global governance.

Looking back, in the case of the Millennium Development Goals, while the Millennium Declaration of 2000 was put together as the result of a broad-based political process, the goals and targets were drawn up completely separately by a small group of technocrats. In the case of Agenda 2030, the Declaration and the goals and targets have all gone through the same exhaustive set of consultations and political negotiations. While this has led to goals and targets that may be less satisfactory from a technical perspective, what has been gained is a political legitimacy that the MDGs never had, and an agenda that is a single continuous document, which was designed to be read and implemented as a whole. Above all, this is a political document, not a technical one.

So the first point I'd like to make here is that the fostering of peaceful, just and inclusive societies within the 2030 Agenda is more than just Goal 16 (including in particular important parts of the preamble, declaration and goals 5 and 10, among others). The approach enshrined in the document, that we might call 'Goal 16+', is also much more than an 'enabler' of development, and it covers much more than just fragile and conflict affected environments, although it does of course encompass those.

Rather, it is a core aspirational goal in its own right, a universal vision of what society at its best can be. The Declaration states that "We envisage...a just, tolerant, open and socially inclusive world in which the needs of the most vulnerable are met", set out in a framework of "universal goals and targets which involve the entire world" and in which "no one will be left behind". And it is by looking at these ideas as a package, whether as Goal 16+ or as the 'peaceful, just and inclusive societies' agenda', that we can see why a number of the key actors in the process have described this as the most transformative part of Agenda 2030.

Now the agenda is in place, what can we do now that we couldn't do before? What's different?

Part of what is radical about this is inherent to the whole of the 2030 Agenda, which represents a significant paradigm shift from the Millennium Development Goals. The MDGs were a development log frame, a deliberately small list of traditional development objectives, emerging from an already out of date aid approach that had to do with discrete external interventions carried out by rich, largely white countries, on behalf of poor, largely brown, ones. The new agenda reflects a different world, where national and local ownership is paramount, where holistic approaches to supporting the building of local capacity are the norm, and where global power is shared more broadly. The whole agenda is expressed in terms of partnership, of the countries of the world working together as peers to solve common problems.

This approach is particularly transformative when it comes to the peaceful, just and inclusive societies agenda: let me just mention a couple of examples.

The first example is in relation to traditional development objectives, Agenda 2030 has affirmed the insights of the G7+ and the New Deal, and the World Development Report of 2011, that in fragile and conflict affected societies, to do development you need to pay attention to the social fabric, to issues like political inclusion, access to justice and institutions. But Agenda 2030 goes further, saying that this is true for all societies, that issues like effective, inclusive and transparent governance and justice for all are key to achieving all sustainability and development objectives, everywhere. Indeed, one of the implementation strategies that is beginning to be used is to identify the implications of goal 16 for all the first 15 goals, to approach it as an issue that has to do with the implementation of each, just like goal 17.

Another very different example concerns the implications for the prevention of armed violence. One of the challenges that has bedeviled the prevention field is that it gets chopped up into lots of different compartments. One set of folks focus on immediate, often militarized responses to outbreaks of armed violence or human rights violations, while another thinks about root causes. One group thinks about fragile and conflict affected states, while another focuses on urban violence in middle income societies, and another on issues of exclusion, access to justice and state violence in developed countries. What the peaceful, just and inclusive societies agenda provides is a universal framing that makes it possible for any and all countries to share their experience and lessons learned. This has the potential for the existence of spaces where, for the first time, we can imagine a conversation that would include violence in the Great Lakes region of Africa, urban violence in Central America, and "Black Lives Matter". And it does so from a positive, not a negative, perspective. There's a surprising amount of difference between knocking on a government's door and saying "We're the conflict prevention team, and we're here to stop bad things from happening" as opposed to saying "We're the peaceful, just and inclusive societies team and we're here to help you make good things happen".

It's also a discussion that includes external as well as internal factors. That's important, because there is a long-standing dialogue of the deaf between global North and South, with donor countries grumbling about poor governance in the 'feckless South', while developing countries point to global rules for trade that are rigged against them, and financial crises that are caused by the 'irresponsible North'. The framing of the countries of the world working together in partnership to solve common problems is critical for addressing today's challenges –and I could mention climate change and mass migration as just a couple that come to mind.

How will the agenda become reality? What will implementation look like?

There's a lot of wording in the Agenda 2030 document about means of implementation, follow up and review. None of it gives much guidance as to how to achieve peaceful, just and inclusive societies – or any of the other goals and targets, for that matter. If you're a government looking for a roadmap to achieve a target like 16.7, "Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision making at all levels" you're not going to find it in the Agenda 2030 document.

As far as measurement is concerned, other speakers are experts in this area, but I would just note that the main focus at this point is on agreeing global indicators, and that measurement at a national level will be something different, with "each government setting its own national targets guided by the global level of ambition but taking into account national circumstances" which doesn't sound very promising. And it is noticeable that many of the goal 16 targets raise measurement issues – not because we don't know how to measure things like inclusion and corruption and effective governance, but because most governments are significantly uninterested in having consultants with clipboards running around asking their citizens what they think about their government.

The money discussion is beyond the scope of this event, but the question of where the money is going to come from to fund a program with this kind of size is a serious one. Relatively few countries in the world fund the aid budget. Only 10 countries, for example, pay for 90% of humanitarian aid. European donors have faced several years of stagnant economies, and are now being hit with substantial demands to address the refugee crisis, let alone the funding of the climate change response. Whilst it wouldn't take much re-allocation of military budgets to development to make a significant difference, the pendulum is swinging the other way, with many countries now re-arming. Commercial and philanthropic interests have a role to play, but can't replace the function of governments, that have obligations and responsibilities that other actors don't have.

It also appears that the formal systems of review of the 2030 Agenda aren't going to be very rigorous. Existing models, like the Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Council were not followed, and it is likely to be up to civil society to make up the difference.

There are two particular dangers with implementation of the peaceful, just and inclusive societies agenda. First, there is the danger of co-option by those with a narrow, securitized perspective on the peace issues. There is some support for this in the Goal itself, with target 16a calling for strengthening national institutions to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime, which invites a narrow interpretation.

Another concern is fragmentation. It is noticeable that many actors, including both governments and civil society, are already choosing to cherry pick particular targets – e.g. violence against women, or disarmament – rather than taking a broader perspective. To realize the potential of the peaceful, just and inclusive societies agenda, it is going to be important for a critical mass of attention to be focused on fostering and tracking progress across the full breadth of the issues.

What's the relevance for the US?

Well, I think there's a very easy way of approaching this. Think about these questions- Would you describe the US as a fully peaceful, just and inclusive society? And does it encourage peaceful, just and inclusive societies around the world as a core principle of its interactions with other countries? This is Washington, so it doesn't seem fair to ask for a show of hands, but if you answered 'no' to either or both of those questions, then I would suggest to you that yes, this agenda is relevant to the US.

I am by no means an expert on US domestic policy, so I will just note that the Agenda 2030 includes goals and targets that address issues like migration, economic and political inclusion and access to justice that would seem to have some relevance in the US, and might provide some useful framing for domestic advocacy. And the calls in the document for greater inclusion in global governance, and rules-based, non-exclusionary trade policies might provide some entry points for considering the US global role.

Conclusion

So to conclude. The transformative potential of Agenda 2030 as a whole, and the peaceful, just and inclusive societies agenda in particular, is very substantial. At the very least it provides a new, positive and universal aspirational framework that can recast the terms of discussion on a wide range of issues, from development to the prevention of armed violence. But implementation will pose significant issues, which will require more focus from governments and non-governmental actors than they have shown so far. And indeed, if we would like to see the US as a more peaceful, just and inclusive place, then it does, indeed, apply here.

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