



Consulting the evidence

How conflict and violence can best be included in the post-2015 development agenda

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Key messages

- The inclusion of a peace and justice goal in the High Level Panel's post-2015 report is a welcome acknowledgement of the negative impact of insecurity and injustice on development progress.
- In developing this goal and its targets and indicators further, however, it is important to consult the evidence on what we know about the relationships between insecurity, peace and development.
- There is stronger evidence demonstrating correlations between insecurity and underdevelopment than between peace and development.
- A 'positive peace' approach to conflict and violence can be argued for in the post-2015 framework as an intrinsic good, but not on the basis of an instrumental relationship with development.

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Introduction

On 30 May 2013, the High Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (HLP) released its much anticipated report, constituting the first milestone in what will be a much longer process of agreeing the new development framework. Included within the 12 goals proposed by the HLP is one on ensuring stable and peaceful societies. This goal sets out targets on violence reduction, the capacity of security and justice sectors, the accessibility of justice and external stresses that can trigger conflict (HLP 2013: 52). The governments, coalitions, NGOs and individuals who have been advocating for issues of peace and security to be included in the new development goals will be breathing a collective sigh of relief, even if arguments about the targets and indicators will no doubt continue. That issues of conflict and violence were overlooked in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) has been much lamented. For the most part, the inclusion of Goal 11 in the HLP's report has been seen as a welcome development, redressing one of the failings of the previous iteration of global development goals.

The process is far from over, however. First of all, the HLP was just the first act in a much longer international community drama, and there is still the United Nations Secretary-General's report, the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals and negotiations amongst UN member states themselves, to come. While peace and security might have cleared the first hurdle, there are many more ahead. Second, aside from the political process which is now underway, much of the technical work is only now set to begin in earnest. This will primarily involve developing indicators to measure progress towards the proposed targets. As a result, there is still room for backtracking or mistakes in taking the peace and security agenda forward. This paper aims to assess the current state of the evidence on the relationship between peace, security and development and, on this basis, propose particular formulations of how these issues should be included in the post-2015 agenda in a way that best reflects this evidence. It is argued here that, while there might be important normative reasons for advocating for a 'positive peace' approach to including violence-related issues on the post-2015 agenda, (that is, people might prefer to live in societies that are democratic, open, free, etc., rather than just free of violence), there does not appear to be sufficient evidence to argue that anything beyond a 'negative peace' approach is actually instrumental to other development outcomes. Furthermore, given that there is such a strong relationship between the presence of violence and development disruption, it seems important that this 'negative peace' be prioritised in the new development goals.

A word on vocabulary

Proposals in this area use a number of related terms, including conflict, fragility, insecurity, security, violence, peace, stability, peacebuilding and statebuilding. In addition, some of these terms are supplemented by additional terms to ensure their focus is on the level of the individual, rather than the state; and thus terms like 'human security', 'citizen security', and 'personal safety', are also used. Which term is employed has important political implications that those advocating for goals in this area must carefully weigh. 'Peace and security', for instance, is seen to potentially raise concerns around national sovereignty, given the conventional association of this term with UN Security Council mandates. 'Conflict' is seen to be too limiting because it does not include the significant levels of criminal violence plaguing much of Latin America and other contexts. The terminology turf war has perhaps gone too far, so that it is not always clear what is being discussed and that, essentially, most proposals are talking about essentially one of two things: namely, how

violence (conflict or crime-related) disrupts development progress and destroys people's lives; or alternatively, how peace contributes to development.

For the purposes of this paper, the terms 'conflict and violence' or 'insecurity,' are used as a shorthand. This adopts a 'negative peace' approach, focusing on how conflict or violence disrupts development; rather than a 'positive peace' approach which would focus on how peacefulness facilitates development. Ultimately it is conflict and violence that are demonstrated to have the greatest impact on development prospects and are the clearest terms by which to refer to one of the key reasons frequently pointed to for the bottom 1.5 billion of the world's population not faring as well as hoped in achieving the MDGs (World Bank 2011: 1; International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (undated)).

Where did the security-development nexus come from?

Interest in the relationship between conflict and development has deepened as the developmental costs of war have become apparent. Paul Collier estimates that the average cost of a civil war is USD 64 billion and NGOs have calculated that armed conflict cost Africa approximately USD 284 billion between 1990 and 2005 – which is almost the total amount of aid the continent received in the same time period (Collier 2008: 32; IANSA, Oxfam and Saferworld 2007). Throughout the 1990s in particular, those countries plagued by conflict were also increasingly those countries at the bottom of human development – such as Sierra Leone, Liberia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia. Thus it became apparent that improving development efforts depended on addressing the challenge of conflict.

Concurrent to this, ideas of security also underwent reconceptualization throughout the 1990s, with the emergence of human security and critical security studies. These new approaches offered an alternative to traditional security, in which self-interested states are seen to exist within an anarchic and competitive international system (Walt 1991; Waltz 1979). Human security, enunciated most clearly in the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report, promotes an individual or human-centred understanding of security and defines this as freedom from fear and want (UNDP 1994). Critical security studies, that emerged in the mid-1990s, raised questions about both the referent of security (the entity being secured – such as the state, community or individual) and what constitutes a threat (Krause and Williams 1997). Both human and critical security led to the acceptance of a wider understanding of who security is for; and a broader understanding of the nature of threats, going beyond interstate aggression to include factors such as environmental degradation, migration flows, infectious disease, poverty and lack of basic services. Thus, as the development community was becoming increasingly interested in issues of conflict, security studies was also broadening its focus in a manner more amenable to linking with development.

The increasing interconnectedness of security and development, often given the shorthand 'security-development nexus', has since become a widely accepted tenet of international development. The importance of security in development processes was further reinforced by the 2011 World Development Report, in which security, justice and jobs were pointed to as key priorities for fragile and conflict-affected states. This was not particularly big news to much of the development community but the fact that the Bank, renowned for being

perhaps the most (seemingly) technical international development actor wary of ‘politics’, recognized the importance of security to development, was seen as a watershed moment.

Perhaps even more importantly, alongside these shifts in international policy and academic debates bringing security and development closer together, poor people themselves have also been pointing to security as one of their key priorities. The World Bank’s Voices of the Poor study, published in 2000, drew on interviews of approximately 60,000 poor people across 60 countries, who indicated that safety, security and justice issues were of central importance to their lives. Security is thus both a priority of the poor and increasingly linked to better developmental outcomes. Here, this paper focuses in particular on the links between security and development, in order to ensure that the targets and indicators developed for the post-2015 framework reflect as accurately as possible the state of the evidence.

There is stronger evidence for linking insecurity and poverty than peace and development

The correlations between insecurity and underdevelopment are much stronger than correlations between peace and development. That is, where there is conflict there is often underdevelopment; but where there is peace there is often not development. Therefore, while some might suggest that peace enables development, it is empirically more accurate to say that conflict or insecurity disrupts development. This might seem a semantic point but the subtle difference in the two claims is important.

Much of the research that has been undertaken on the relationship between security and development has been about the effects of violence on development (see for instance Geneva Declaration 2010; Global Burden of Armed Violence 2008). One of the main findings of a Geneva Declaration report on the relationship between armed violence and MDG achievement is the importance of being precise about the causal relationships we claim:

The relationships between armed violence and development are complex and require careful definition of key terms and precise statistical analysis. Even so, the study finds that areas experiencing comparatively high rates of conflict-related and homicidal violence tend to experience declining levels of progress in relation to both human development as measured by poverty, income and the achievement of specific MDG goals ... [I]n order to set priorities and prioritize interventions, it is critical to develop a credible evidence base of the many ways in which armed violence and development are connected (or not).

(Geneva Declaration 2010: 4)

Using econometric analysis, the report finds that ‘higher poverty levels tend to go hand in hand with higher levels of violence’ (2010: 13). Research by the OECD also draws attention

to the manner in which insecurity and conflict inhibit development (2001: 37-38). Stewart, Huang and Wang (2011) found in an empirical review of 18 countries that had experienced conflict that per capita income fell in 15, food production fell in 13, export growth declined in 12, and debt increased in all 18. Fukuda-Parr summarises some of the key aspects of the relationship as follows:

The destructive consequences of armed conflict have been well documented and can be traced to immediate impacts on human wellbeing as well as longer-term development. Wars destroy and disrupt physical infrastructure, human capital, government capacity, and services. As GDP shrinks, government revenues also decline, and with resources diverted to war effort, expenditures for productive and social sectors shrink further. Collier (1999) estimates that the cumulative effect of a seven year war is around 60 per cent of annual GDP. A recent study by Milanovic (2005) which looks at causes of slow growth in the world's poorest countries over the last two decades, identifies war and civil strife as the single most important factor to explain slow growth, accounting for an income loss of about 40 per cent

(Fukuda-Parr 2007: 2-3)

This research reveals strong correlations between high levels of violence and low levels of development and it is understandable that, from this, one might infer that peace facilitates development. Yet this claim goes at least two steps too far. First, the claim is not that peace necessarily facilitates or enables development, but rather that violence or conflict ('un-peace') inhibits development. While this might sound like a restatement of the same relationship, the distinction is important in terms of what we measure and expect to contribute to eradicating poverty. Second, even if we accept that peace enables development, the definition of peace becomes key. There is a big difference between claiming that negative peace (i.e., the absence of violence) enables development; and claiming that positive peace (i.e., absence of violence plus the multitude of 'goods' seen to entrench peace – like good government, accountability, strong state-society relations, equal access to resources, etc.). The latter remains highly contested within the development community.

While the components of good governance might be desirable in and of themselves, many are not linked to stronger developmental outcomes in the same way that the absence of violence is. Indeed, the study by Milanovic (2005) on the causes of weak growth in poor countries, mentioned above, found that poor policies and slow reforms had a minimal impact on economic growth, while democratization and improved basic services had no or negligible effects. Grindle questions some of the findings of the 'large N' studies measuring correlations between development and aspects of good governance often included in positive peace definitions, on the basis of the big outliers that are often overlooked (Grindle 2010: 9). She highlights that on good governance measures, countries like China and Vietnam are likely to score quite poorly, and yet these countries have 'extremely impressive records for consistently high growth rates and poverty reduction, in the case of China over the course of three decades' (Grindle 2010: 9). What is more, given the sheer size of these countries in population terms, with China the largest national population in the world, the performance of these countries 'probably ought not to be overlooked in terms of what it suggests about the importance of good governance' (Grindle 2010: 9). The question that these insights raise, which is important for those crafting the post-2015 development agenda to consider is, if 'countries can develop in significant ways without ... demonstrating clear good governance, shouldn't researchers consider such cases as important to a theoretical relationship between governance and development?' (Grindle 2010: 9).

Even the Global Peace Index, despite its name, uses 23 indicators that relate to negative, not positive, peace in their dataset. Further, their 2012 report states that correlations with

positive peace factors are often presumed rather than verified, although trends are apparent in relation to some areas, such as corruption:

Peace is notoriously difficult to define. Perhaps the simplest way of approaching it is in terms of harmony achieved by the absence of war or conflict. Applied to nations, this would suggest that those not involved in violent conflicts with neighbouring states or suffering internal wars have achieved a state of peace, which has been described as a “negative peace”.

...

An additional aim of the GPI is to explore the concept of a “positive peace”. Various studies have proposed that a culture of peace might be based on human rights, gender equality, democratic participation, tolerant solidarity, open communication and international security. However, these links between peace and its causes tend to be presumed, rather than systematically measured.

(GPI 2012: 10)

The evidence suggests, therefore that reducing conflict and violence is likely to have a clearer dividend for poverty reduction and development than focusing on positive peace that combines security- and governance-related issues. This does not suggest that no relationship exists between the ‘goods’ that are included within positive peace, and perhaps particularly notable is how issues of inequality have been demonstrated to trigger conflict in diverse parts of the world (Asia Foundation 2013: 83-84; 116; Stewart 2008). However, given that some of the world’s largest economies have developed without the very attributes that some good governance advocates claim are necessary, questions must be raised about the relevance of their inclusion in a development framework (Grindle 2010: 10; Andrews 2008). While an absence of violence is clearly linked to better development outcomes in other areas, the same cannot be said of good governance, even if it is a good that people may seek in and of itself.

What does this mean for post-2015? Next steps ...

In terms of how these issues get included in the post-2015 development agenda, the above evidence suggests that post-2015 proposals focused on positive peace go beyond what is empirically valid for achieving reductions in poverty. This is not to say that aspects of good governance are not desirable end goals in their own right. If the international community decide they should be included in the post-2015 agenda, this should be done in a way that is upfront about their intrinsic good, rather than suggesting they are instrumental and that ‘all good things go together’ in an unproblematic way. In light of this evidence, this section examines the proposals for including security-related issues in the post-2015 development agenda, from both the HLP and a number of advocacy organisations.

Proposal from the High Level Panel

The Report of the High Level Panel sets out a goal on ensuring stable and peaceful societies. The wording of the goal is the result of careful negotiations, avoiding words like ‘security’ due to concerns about state sovereignty and the jurisdiction of the UN Security Council. Yet the targets proposed, as well as the explanation of the goal area provided in the

report, refer primarily to negative, rather than positive, peace. For instance, the report sets out:

Without peace, children cannot go to school or access health clinics. Adults cannot go to their workplaces, to markets or out to cultivate their fields. Conflict can unravel years, even decades, of social and economic progress in a brief span of time (2013: 52).

This refers to the ability of violence to disrupt daily life and highlights the need to end or prevent conflict or violence. This negative peace approach is also adopted in some of the targets proposed under Goal 11, such as reducing violent deaths (HLP 2013: 52). However, this does get blurred with a positive peace approach in some parts, for instance when the report notes that:

To achieve peace, leaders must tackle the problems that matter most to people: they must prosecute corruption ... They must enhance accountability. They must prove that the state can deliver basic services and rights, such as access to safety and justice, safe drinking water and health services, without discrimination (2013: 53).

This approach conflates concerns about insecurity with governance concerns. As pointed out above, there may be an intrinsic value in doing so, but there is not sufficient evidence to suggest that it is instrumental to poverty reduction or development.

Overall, the HLP report's proposal on security-related issues conforms to the evidence of how conflict and violence actually impact on development, although the connections to a good governance agenda are apparent in part. Given that an instrumental relationship does exist between insecurity and poverty, the post-2015 agenda provides an opportunity for ensuring that this relationship gets built into the new development framework. As further work is undertaken at both the political level to refine the goal areas; and at the technical level to develop the targets and indicators, it will be important to bear this in mind.

Civil society proposals and advocacy

During the HLP process, there have also been a number of proposals for the inclusion of issues related to insecurity in the post-2015 framework from advocacy organisations (for an overview of some of the key contributions see Denney 2012). These include armed violence reduction proposals, the g7+ Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals, and the evolving proposal from the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) and their partners. Civil society proposals have also gained significant traction, in part through active participation in the multiple UN global thematic consultations on conflict and fragility that took place in Liberia, Panama and Sweden, and through their advocacy efforts. Key amongst them are proposals from Saferworld (2012a; 2012b; 2013), Save the Children (2012) and a joint CSO consortium (2012) that link violence-related issues with governance-related issues, suggesting a positive peace approach.

A joint CSO statement, for instance, suggests defining 'peace and development as best upheld by states that are inclusive, responsible, fair and accountable to all their people' (Joint CSO Statement 2012: 7). This is based on a desire to focus on the causes or drivers of conflict, just not the symptoms (Joint CSO Statement 2012: 4; Saferworld 2012: 7). These causes and drivers are often seen to reside in poor governance practices that are characterized by a lack of accountability, an exclusive political settlement, weak state-society relations, inequitable access to resources and a lack of substantive justice (CSO Joint Statement 2012). Saferworld, who has set out probably the most comprehensive proposal, suggests nine targets, with a minimum of three indicators per target, on issues ranging from violence reduction (including specifically violence against women and girls), constructive resolution of societal divisions, political freedoms, access to social services and

resources, equitable economic growth, effective management of natural resources, to the eradication of transnational crime (2013: 8-15). Similarly, Save the Children includes in its list of ‘must haves’ for the post-2015 agenda issues of protection from violence, as well as participation and accountability (2012: 8-10). In this way, the proposals go beyond a focus specifically on conflict and violence to also include issues raised in the global consultations on governance.

These approaches are much more expansive than negative peace, focused on cultivating those things that embed peace within a society, rather than ending violence. Importantly, this seemingly subtle difference between advocating for a positive, as opposed to negative peace, changes the key causal claim from development is disrupted by conflict; to development is driven by peace. This is a substantial cognitive leap that the evidence does not necessarily support. This, of course, is not to suggest that positive peace is not a laudable aspiration, and indeed, it can be put forward for inclusion in the post-2015 agenda on the basis of this alone. However, there is currently insufficient evidence to justify its inclusion through arguments that it is instrumental to development.

How can issues of violence and conflict best be incorporated? Going forward ...

Of course, the MDGs are about much more than just instrumental or causal relationships. The MDGs are aspirational and as much about intrinsic goods as they are about what could reasonably be said to contribute to development, based on available evidence. Those responsible for crafting the post-2015 agenda may, therefore, want to include some goals that are more aspirational – recognizing them as normative goods. However, given the clear causal links between insecurity and poverty, it makes sense in this particular case to ensure that this more instrumental relationship is captured and prioritised.

There seem to be at least two ways in which issues of conflict and violence can be incorporated into the post-2015 agenda in a way that bears a strong relationship to the available evidence about their relationship with poverty. These represent maximalist and minimalist approaches and are not mutually exclusive.

The first, maximalist, approach is to include them in a group of goals that share the same relationship to poverty reduction – that is, they disrupt it. This could lead to a group of ‘development disruptor’ goals. This category of goals would include phenomena that, as the name suggests, disrupt or limit progress towards reducing poverty. For instance, violence and conflict limit the prospects for development (World Bank 2011). Other goal areas that might be included in this category include disasters, economic shocks, pandemic diseases and the effects of climate change. In the case of all of these phenomena, their absence does not necessarily drive development, but their presence does disrupt it. That is, contexts where there is no conflict, no disasters, low rates of pandemic disease, an absence of economic shocks and climate change impacts do not necessarily experience development (because the absence of these factors are not drivers of development). However, where these disruptors are present, development efforts are inhibited. The purpose of proposing that issues of conflict and violence be included through a ‘development disruptors’ approach is to provide

a clearer causal explanation – or theory of change – demonstrating the relationship between the goal areas included and the overall purpose of the framework – poverty reduction.

The second, more minimalist approach, is to couch issues of violence and conflict in whatever way is politically feasible (for instance, as ‘peace’) but to ensure that the targets and indicators are based on a negative peace definition, that highlight the more proximate relationship between insecurity and poverty than between positive peace and development. This would mean that targets and indicators should aim to measure levels of violence, crime and injustice, as well as people’s perceptions of them and the capacity of services to address them. They should, however, stop short of measuring more normative ‘goods’, such as levels of corruption, accountability, etc. that are, in some cases, presented as being instrumental to peace and development, but for which weak, or at least contested, evidence exists. These kinds of goods could be measured, perhaps, through an explicitly normative goal on governance and institutions, but they are not as directly relevant to the reduction of poverty as the absence of violence.

Conclusion

The arguments made here should not be construed as being ‘anti-peace’. Of course living in open and accountable societies is more desirable to many people – in a general wellbeing sense – than living in closed and unaccountable societies. Yet for the post-2015 development framework to be useful and relevant, it should be as focused and specific as possible. There are endless ‘goods’ that we could include in the post-2015, but it is important to make decisions about the key priorities, given that the ultimate focus is on eradicating extreme poverty and the potential influence that the new goals will have on setting the global agenda. In relation to issues of conflict and violence, the stronger correlations between insecurity and poverty than between peace and development suggest that our efforts should be focused on a negative peace approach. This is what we know is most likely to have the greatest dividend for reducing poverty.

This paper has aimed, briefly, to clarify the presumed relationship between security and development. Drawing upon available evidence, it indicates that there are much stronger correlations between insecurity and poverty or underdevelopment than there are between peace and development. Given that an instrumental relationship can be seen to exist between insecurity and poverty, this evidence should be taken into account when formulating the post-2015 development agenda and the way in which issues of violence and conflict are included. Two ways in which insecurity can be incorporated are set out, arguing against positive peace approaches that link security-related issues with broader governance issues, which may be deemed to be intrinsic goods but are not supported by evidence to demonstrate that they are instrumental to poverty reduction. The proposal made here for conflict and violence to be framed as ‘development disruptors’ within the post-2015 framework represents an initial attempt to think beyond the realm of proposals that link security- and governance-related issues, as many civil society proposals do. This proposal provides a clearer theory of change about how issues of conflict and violence impact upon our efforts to reduce poverty. In addition, as technical discussions about targets and indicators now begin in earnest, it is important that the strongest articulation of why issues of violence and conflict matter to poverty reduction are included.

The post-2015 agenda presents the international community with an opportunity to articulate a more relevant and comprehensive set of priorities for reducing poverty. Given that the HLP have set the overall purpose of the new framework to eradicate, not just reduce, absolutely poverty, ensuring as many of the goals contribute to reducing poverty in an instrumental way is of utmost importance. Insecurity is widely accepted to be a disruptor of development. The inverse – that security or peace enables development – is not as widely supported by the evidence. Keeping this kind of evidence in mind in the process of

finalizing the post-2015 development goals will be critical to ensuring the framework provides the best possible basis for achieving poverty eradication.

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