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*Benefits and Costs of the Conflict and Violence
Targets for the Post-2015 Development Agenda*

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Post-2015 Consensus

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Introduction

As the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) expire in 2015 and the next “Post2015” Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are negotiated, it is critical to promote an integrated approach that addresses the root causes of violence and conflict for sustainable development and peace.

James Fearon and Anke Hoeffler’s (2014) “Peaceful, Stable and Resilient Societies” paper provides a revealing assessment of the costs of violence and the need for a violence prevention approach to development. The authors argue that a “transformative shift” toward peace in the next development agenda requires addressing both violence in conflict and societal violence more broadly. They suggest that there has been increasing acceptance by the international development community over the last 15 or so years of the need to address the risk and costs of large-scale violence for economic and social development. However, the authors argue that while this is an important first step, it is not enough. Fearon and Hoeffler conservatively estimate the costs of interpersonal violence – such as homicides, intimate partner violence and child abuse – to be six times as much as the cost of violence in civil wars, and argue that there is a strong economic case for prioritizing the reduction of societal violence reduction as key targets in the next development agenda.

Viewpoint

The authors’ argument is based on a conservative economic cost/benefit assessment of general trends, which – despite gaps in available data – provide useful ball-park assessments of at least minimum costs of violence. With widely varying data, assessments are not comprehensive. However, their conservative estimations – such as using reported sexual violence data when estimates suggest only 4% of such incidents are reported to the police – indicate that the costs of violence are likely even more extreme. This means their violence-prevention argument is even more critical.

While Fearon and Hoeffler take an economic approach to their assessment of development, a more holistic approach further strengthens their case. Current Post2015 discussions are oriented around promoting not just traditional economic development but sustainable development more broadly. As articulated in the 1987 Brundtland Commission report, sustainable development is based on three overlapping dimensions: environmental protection, social development (including human rights), and economic development. Violence not only entails substantial economic costs but also involves failures to uphold human rights obligations and protect the environment. For one example, violence can both violate people’s right to life, liberty and security of person and also their opportunity for equality, such as through discriminatory or gender based forms of violence.¹ For another, systems of violence including around weapons production and use prevents sustainable ecological development and preservation and contributes to environmental degradation

¹ E.g., Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 2; Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women, Article 2

including through pollutants and waste.² Consequently, a more holistic approach which addresses the social development and environmental protection dimensions of development only reinforces the importance of a violence prevention approach.

Given the compelling case for prioritizing societal violence prevention, what goals and targets should states prioritize in crafting the next development agenda? The authors propose violence reduction targets in a range of areas: reduce civil war violence by 20%, child death by 43%, child violence by 50%, interpersonal violence by 50%, end Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in low-prevalence societies and reduce by 50% in high prevalence societies, and eradicate child marriages for those under 15 years of age. They also highlight particular interventions relevant to these targets, including: UN peacekeeping for violence from internal conflict, development generally for non-conflict violence, alcohol-related interventions, non-violent parenting technique interventions, and various domestic violence prevention programs.

While Fearon and Hoeffler make a strong case for addressing violence prevention, the specific targets they recommend are less compelling. For one thing, they put too much faith in development, arguing that “development is likely to decrease violence over time” (38). However, as feminist economists (who the authors do not cite) have shown, traditional approaches to development are frequently gender biased, and promote unequal and feminized burdens of adjustment.³ These inequalities put women and other feminized groups at increased risk for insecurity and violence. Consequently “development” is not a silver bullet for violence reduction, especially for women.

Furthermore, the authors’ focus on the negative frame of “reducing violence” – rather than a positive frame such as “enhancing capabilities” or “enhancing resilience” – risks promoting business as usual rather than truly transformative policy interventions. A focus on victims of violence depoliticizes the situation that put those survivors at risk to begin with. It also promotes a charity rather than justice framework that ignores unjust and unequal power relations promoting continued violence. As a result, this approach risks failing to recognize and strengthen at-risk groups as critical agents of change or to transform the structural constraints that perpetuate inequality and violence rather than equality and peace.

A More Promising Approach

A more promising means of reducing violence would be to take a holistic approach to strengthening the participation, protection, and rights of women and other at risk-groups across the conflict spectrum to prevent the root causes of violence and conflict. As international commitments on human rights including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against

² See, e.g., Downey, Liam, Eric Bonds and Katherine Clark. (2010). “Natural Resource Extraction, Armed Violence, and Environmental Degradation.” *Organization and Environment*: 23(4): 417–445.

³ Beneria, Lourdes. (2003). *Gender, Development, and Globalization: Economics as if All People Mattered*. New York: Routledge;

Boserup, Ester. (1970). *Women’s Role in Economic Development*. New York: St. Martin’s Press.

Women (CEDAW), Beijing Platform for Action, and the Women Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda have suggested, upholding women's human rights and ending Violence Against Women (VAW) requires a transformative approach that moves from traditional militarized state security to human security based on women's experiences and lives. Beyond this, effectively preventing violence requires a move from words to action, with concrete financing and accountability mechanisms to promote robust implementation.

What does this mean for the Post2015 development agenda? First, it means that a holistic approach to preventing violence is critical. This requires both strengthening the capacity of at-risk groups for full and meaningful participation in their communities and also eliminating structural facilitators of violence. In this regard, strengthening women's rights movements should be a key target for the Post2015 development agenda. Strengthening feminist movements is important both because reducing violence against women is a key gap area with large space for positive change and also because women can be "force multipliers" of peace and development, building resilience and security of families, communities, societies, and nations.⁴ Recent research suggests that – rather than democratic governance or any other indicator – strong women's rights movements are the number one predictor of policies on reducing violence against women.⁵ At the same time, creating an enabling environment by eliminating violent social structures is also critical. While the authors suggest that alcohol-focused interventions may be useful to prevent violence, they fail to address the importance of addressing militarism and arms. This is a particularly important gap for reducing violence against women, as militarism and arms are intricately connected with gender inequality and sexual and gender based violence.⁶ Reducing military financing, promoting gender-sensitive security sector reform, and regulating small arms and light weapons as per commitments on the (2013) Arms Trade Treaty should be priority targets.

Second, financing for violence prevention and equality is essential to moving from words to action. As the authors noted, societal violence prevention is a critical gap area in current development aid: less than one percent of development assistance is allocated to women. This is part of a broader trend of deprioritizing women's rights and gender equality. According to the 2010 Secretary General Report on Women's Participation in Peacebuilding, among five countries on the Security Council's agenda implementing poverty reduction strategies, only 4% of budgets were allocated to addressing women's needs or advance gender equality.⁷ Meanwhile, there is a \$1.7 trillion arms trade that exacerbates sexual and gender based violence and restricts resources which could otherwise have been invested in building resilient societies through strengthening gender equitable social development. In the Post2015 agenda, it is critical that the international community puts its money where its mouth is. Building on commitments in Beijing (1995),

⁴ See, e.g.: UN Human Development Reports on gender equality (1995), sustainability and equity (2011), and reducing vulnerabilities and building resilience (2014). Also: Hudson, Valerie M., Bonnie Ballif-Spanvill, Mary Caprioli, and Chad F. Emmett. (2012). *Sex and World Peace*. New York: Columbia University Press.

⁵ Htun, Mala and S. Laurel Weldon. (2012). "The Civic Origins of Progressive Policy Change: Combating Violence Against Women in Global Perspective, 1975–2005," *American Political Science Review*: 106, 2012.

⁶ See, e.g. Cynthia Enloe. (2010). *Manoeuvres: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives*. Los Angeles: University of California Press; Leatherman, Janie. (2011). *Sexual Violence and Armed Conflict*. Cambridge: Polity.

⁷ A/65/354-S/2010/466, para 30

and Rio (1992), the Post2015 development agenda should prioritize strong financing including innovative financing mechanisms. This should include a target on reducing military spending – such as by the 50% reduction proposed by the Women’s Major Group⁸ – so as to free up resources for gender equitable social development.

Finally, strengthening accountability is critical for impact. In the current globalized world, non-state actors from transnational corporations to private military companies to international financial institutions operate with limited human rights accountability especially to those most at risk. Prioritizing means of implementation which includes accountability mechanisms for non-state as well as state actors will be critical moving from commitments to accomplishments and should be highly prioritized at a high level.

Conclusion

As the next development agenda is designed, policymakers should take to heart Fearon and Hoeffler’s call for a violence-prevention approach to development that addresses all forms of violence, not just violence in conflict. However, as they negotiate the targets and indicators, they should be reminded that a transformative approach cannot be based on the business as usual economic approach to development: it must take an integrated approach that also strengthens the other two sustainable development dimensions – social development and environmental protection. Doing so requires building on human rights obligations for all people including women and overturning the structural obstacles to equality that perpetuate conflict and violence.

⁸ Women Major Group’s contribution for the 8th session of the Open Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals: Conflict Prevention, Post-conflict Peace building and Promotion of Durable Peace and Rule of Law and Governance (2014). Available: http://www.peacewomen.org/assets/Post2015/Resources/peace_conflictwmgfinal.pdf

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