

The Solutions Forum on SDG 16+: Towards Implementation

Geneva, 29-30 May 2017

Conference Report

Objectives

The purpose of the meeting was to generate dialogue cutting across stakeholder communities in the conflict and violence prevention and reduction space. In view of deepening and enriching the Pathfinders process on SDG 16+ (see Box 1), participants were brought together to capture creative ways to bridge the gap between practical on-the-ground programming experience, and the perspectives and institutional parameters within which policymakers and funders reach their decisions.

Box 1 – The Pathfinders

Coordinated by the Center on International Cooperation (CIC) at New York University, the Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies is a group of UN member states, international organizations and societal partners geared towards implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Through the notion of “SDG 16+” it promotes a more holistic understanding of SDG 16 that includes relevant targets and indicators from other goals. Convened by Brazil, Sierra Leone and Switzerland, the ambition is to establish a Roadmap for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies that will feed into the High-Level Political Forum in 2019, in order to generate transformative strategies that provide a basis for integrated action and partnerships.

Process

The Solutions Forum on SDG 16+ was a gathering led by civil society and convened by the Graduate Institute's Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding (CCDP), in collaboration with the Center on International Cooperation (CIC) at New York University and with the generous support of the Swiss Confederation (see Box 4). The meeting was held at Geneva's Maison de la Paix and many of its resident programmes and institutions, in particular the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) and the Small Arms Survey, were involved in the planning and implementation phases.

The meeting used a unique mix of plenary interviews and parallel sessions in order to build a continuous dialogue across the event themes. Participants also took part in a thought-provoking conversation dinner (see Box 2). At the core of the process were workshops on replication, scaling up and value for money. On the first day, issues addressed included why and for whom replication and transferability in violence prevention and

reduction matters, how we scale up, and how cost-effectiveness is identified and evaluated. Moreover, the workshops posed the question of what are the main challenges, in terms of programming and communication, of working together – both as individual practitioners and as collaborating institutions? On day two, a further set of workshops focused on identifying key enabling factors to advance the implementation of target SDG 16.1, again emphasizing operational insights from locally-proven solutions. Throughout the event, these small group discussions were embedded in a series of plenary exchanges in which workshop takeaways were presented and reflected upon.

Box 2 – The Conversation Dinner

In order to generate concrete civil society input to the Pathfinders Roadmap, event participants also engaged in a conversation dinner in which pre-selected table leaders facilitated open and frank discussions around the following two themes:

1. What would be a good result for SDG 16+ in five years to get us on the path to 2030?
2. What does the Roadmap need to say to help us meet that ambition?

Key takeaways from each table were synthesized by table rapporteurs and shared with the Center on International Cooperation at New York University in order to feed into the Pathfinder process.

Key takeaways

- Recognize the unique nature of SDG 16+ : it constitutes a cross-sectoral agenda that is quite abstract for advocacy purposes, while being the crucial backdrop for the implementation of many of the other goals.
- Explore programming entry-points beyond and below the state, going beyond national implementation frameworks in order to generate constructive political coalitions across the public and private sectors, and from the regional to the local levels. The rising prominence of cities is key in this regard.
- Make the business case for prevention, developing innovative communication strategies that convince stakeholders to invest in programmes the outcomes of which are elusive and difficult to measure, and where the potential for scaling up and transferability to other settings is hard to ascertain.

Replication

Replication means to share elements of experiences, strategies, and methodologies, and to learn positive and negative lessons from a specific context for adaptation in other settings. Replication – and replicability – is important in order to foster sustainable change and good practices, to make strategic decisions, and ultimately to make the investment case for a particular agenda or programming priorities.

What are some ways to effectively adapt programmes and policies to address their transfer to a new context? Crucially, institutions need to improve their learning processes in a way that acknowledges failures as well as perceived success stories, and that maps differences as well as similarities across programming contexts. Instruments must have effective long-term planning cycles, and be embedded in a political analysis that enables engagement without automatic legitimization, and that captures informal and formal networks of power and authority – at both the state and sub-state level (notably the city).

Scaling up

Scaling is “up”, “out” and “across”: it is about “manualizing” processes, scaling horizontally within a region or country, or scaling across learning or over time. It is an explicit decision that should be based on a feasible (evidence-based) pathway to meaningful and cost-effective results. Efforts to scale will likely need to address “the chasm phase” and on-the-ground politics. Scaling up is important to ensure that resources are used wisely (including for risk management), to check and prevent violence from scaling up (which is not necessarily the same as scale for conflict reduction), to break violence cycles, and to build on and maximize existing results.

“ Think about scaling in terms of the emergence of issue domains and informal networks, rather than formal institutions ”

What are some ways to effectively catalyse efforts to scale up beyond small-scale or pilot interventions? The first aspect is design and delivery: this involves keeping the design simple, so that it can effectively be scaled up, out or across, as well as a focus on problem-driven adaptation, and on processes (that work) instead of policy packages. Scaling needs to be targeted, with efforts put into understanding how to achieve scale in terms of both operational systems and available research and data (e.g. norm-change methodologies and strategic communications).

The second aspect is about partnerships: beyond the national level, scaling involves mobilization across stakeholder groups, finding a common language, and taking the time to understand what works locally. City-level and other sub-national partners may well be key in this regard. In order to identify and harness a will for action and implementation, it is worth thinking about scaling in terms of the emergence (and supporting the formation) of issue domains and informal networks, rather than formal institutions. Those who wish to scale need stronger narratives – and in this, lessons may well be learned from those who scale fear.

“ How do we quantify, in financial terms, prevention counterfactuals? ”

Value for money

Value for money means ensuring that outcomes and intended positive impacts of programmes and policies are optimized for sustainable inputs relative to investment. Value for money needs to value the process: building consensus, consultation, capacity, and ownership. There is also a clear issue of time horizons, and calculating value for money on sustained impact.

Should we necessarily focus on value for money at all? Perhaps this is an optic premised on external intervention, on an old-fashioned donor-driven view of development assistance – one that misses new models of local delivery and the merits of financial instruments (e.g. social impact bonds or results-based financing) that could open a sustainable funding stream for violence prevention. By demonstrating return one can attract investors and potentially a new class of donors (especially private-sector companies), thereby opening new markets and new employers. An open question remains, however: how do we cost the counterfactual (i.e. how do we quantify in financial terms what we are trying to prevent from happening)? Perhaps there is also a need to rethink whether the kind of research being conducted (e.g. longitudinal studies) constitutes value for money: is there appropriate evidence that better policies are generated as a result, and how can the link be ascertained?

In terms of solutions, joint programmes across organizations and sectors are attractive to donors, especially over longer periods. Research needs to be conducted on the business case for prevention, in order to produce simple, clear narratives that allow policymakers to invest in what works. This requires tools for monitoring immediate effects, coupled with a strong theory of change for the longer term. It is also vital to identify the populations and structures where impacts will be greatest, and on developing transformational programming frameworks, including gender transformation indicators and measures.

Box 3 – The Participants

The event was attended by a set of hand-picked individuals with a wealth of experience in the fields of public health, criminal justice, conflict and violence prevention, urban safety, peacebuilding, and security sector reform. Representatives of permanent missions to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva were also in attendance. With decades of diplomatic, programming, and field experience, these individuals are part of global issue-based networks in Latin and North America, Europe, Africa, and Asia-Pacific.

- Andrea Aeby, Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva
- Anthony Agyenta, Independent Expert, Former United Nations Peace and Development Advisor for Kenya
- Anna Alvazzi del Frate, Director of Programmes, Small Arms Survey
- Maria Appelblom, Chief of the Standing Police Capacity, United Nations Police Division
- Helal Atmar, Officer, Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva
- Julie Barretta, Multilateral Peace Policy Specialist, Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs
- Peter Batchelor, Myanmar Country Director, United Nations Development Programme
- Sara Batmanglich, Peace and Conflict Advisor, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
- Remko Berkhout, Consultant, Swiss National Science Foundation
- Thomas Bierkstekker, Director of Policy Research, the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies
- Alexander Butchart, Coordinator, Prevention of Violence, World Health Organization
- Simon Cleobury, Peacebuilding Adviser, UK Permanent Mission to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva
- Teresita Quintos Deles, Senior Mediation Adviser, United Nations Department of Political Affairs
- Luigi De Martino, Project Coordinator, Small Arms Survey
- Ruth Dreifuss, Chair, Global Commission on Drug Policy
- Manuel Eisner, Professor, Institute of Criminology and Director, Violence Research Centre, University of Cambridge
- Michael Gerber, Special Envoy for Global Sustainable Development, Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs
- Natko Gereš, Program Officer, Promundo
- Thomas Guerber, Director, Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces
- Samantha Jayasuriya, Deputy Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva
- Oliver Jütersonke, Head of Research, Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding, the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies
- Fahiraman Rodrigue Kone, Researcher, African Security Sector Network
- Keith Krause, Director, Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding, the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies
- Jannie Lilja, First Secretary, Permanent Mission of Sweden to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva
- Henri Myrtilinen, Head of Gender, International Alert
- Ewa Nilsson, Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Sweden to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva
- Caroline Putman-Cramer, Protection Adviser, International Committee of the Red Cross
- Christelle Rigual, Researcher and Coordinator, Gender Centre, the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies
- Sara Sekkenes, Conflict Prevention and Partnerships Advisor, United Nations Development Programme
- Eun-ji Seo, Counsellor and Expert on Political and Disarmament Issues, Permanent Mission of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva
- David Steven, Senior Fellow and Associate Director, Center on International Cooperation, New York University
- Marcel Stössel, Senior Advisor on Fragility Conflict Violence, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
- Ana Glenda Tager, Regional Director for Latin America, Interpeace
- Karen Volker, Director of Strategic and International Partnerships, Cure Violence
- Victoria Walker, Assistant Director, Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces
- Achim Wennmann, Executive Coordinator, Geneva Peacebuilding Platform and Senior Researcher, Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding, the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies
- Claudia Zingerli, Scientific Coordinator, Swiss National Science Foundation

Conclusions and outlook

Participants agreed that a strong community of practice had not yet emerged for SDG 16+, which perhaps constitutes the most abstract and elusive, but also the most crucial element of the 2030 Agenda. Among the issues flagged were the lack of return from awareness-raising programmes (which tend not to address the incentives behind behaviour), as well as the inherent institutional reluctance to transcend siloed programming in favour of a more cross-cutting approach. Too often, programming has been skewed towards big spending (e.g. procurement contracts on equipment, leading not least to a militarization of violence reduction efforts), or towards programming with a very narrow focus (e.g. primary prevention without a holistic approach).

Research standards were also highlighted vis-à-vis mention of programmes lacking baselines to measure change, as well as programmes without robust monitoring and evaluation procedures. In this vein, practitioners and programmers highlighted the promise of programmes that invest in knowledge management (partnering with specialized institutions), while also stressing the relevance of programmes that from the start develop incentives to minimize conflicts of interests (when attempting to break down silos). The ideal might be multi-year, knowledge-driven, integrated programming.

There was also discussion of violence interrupters using facilitators who are given institutional (and possibly international) backing.

Ceasefires and truces may then become the starting point for more sustained change, focusing on harm reduction followed by social inclusion measures to make perpetrators part of the solution. An obstacle for this kind of approach is the lack of transparency and endemic corruption at state and sub-state level, and the need for consensus-building across the political spectrum. There was also active discussion of gender programming, particularly that which addresses hyper-masculinities, in the context of an understanding of local cultures and practices (e.g. community policing in Lebanon).

“ A political coalition of willing member states is crucial for the ambitions of SDG 16+ ”

From policymakers and funders came a series of relevant takeaways on how to advance the implementation of SDG 16+ and the peaceful societies Grand Challenge, as outlined in the Roadmap. This included the importance of localization and the need to take into account translation into a specific context, as well as the use of forums such as the G20 to amplify crucial aspects of the agenda. From a scientific standpoint, methodological questions were emphasized, as was the importance of relating research needs to practice in a more intimate manner. This includes working with counterfactuals and scenarios, as well as jointly developing the case that SDG 16+ can actually deliver on its promises.

What can policymakers and funders do to help advance the strategic implementation work for peaceful societies? Participants agreed that a political coalition of willing member states is crucial – starting with the Pathfinders process, no less, and strengthening and expanding the coalition across regions and income levels. The disarmament coalition may be a source of inspiration, in that it included states as well as civil society actors in a common platform that could be mobilized for advocacy and support. Geneva is an

“ National conversations must include the private sector and social movements ”

important location in this respect, although the challenge will be to transcend the views of many states that the Agenda 2030 is principally a national agenda, and that reporting on SDG 16+ is a national activity.

While it is of course beyond dispute that SDG implementation is a predominantly national endeavour, participants reiterated that national conversations must also include the private sector and social movements in a more effective and inclusive manner. A comprehensive approach is key in this regard, yet in order to make the business case for SDG 16+, compelling stories and targeted research are needed – not least as key motivators for the private sector to participate and invest. This is why an implementation coalition is so crucial: to be attractive to donors, the agenda needs to be at once owned through pooled mechanisms at the country level, but also entail a global financing initiative. Lessons from combatting malaria are a case in point. Overall, participants agreed that funding strategies themselves need to be innovative in order to move forward.

Box 4 – The Organizers

This event was convened under the auspices of the Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding (CCDP), a research organ of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva. Key staff members included Keith Krause (CCDP Director), Janine Bressmer, Oliver Jütersonke, Sandra Reimann, and Achim Wennmann.

The CCDP would like to thank the Swiss Confederation for its support. Gratitude also goes to David Steven (Center on International Cooperation, New York University) for anchoring the event in the Pathfinders Process, and to Jennifer Milliken (lead event coordinator), Gillian Martin Mehers, and Stephen Perry for their facilitation expertise.

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