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POLICY BRIEF: RESILIENCE AND THE SDGS
STRENGTHENING PEACE THROUGH 'RESILIENCE' IN THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

In September 2015, heads of state gathered at the UN general Assembly to adopt a new global development agenda, commonly referred to as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Earlier in July 2015, Ministers of finance had met to agree on the means for financing this new development agenda which replaces the Millennium Development Goals that reflected the development priorities between 2000 and 2015. Finally, in March 2016, the UN Statistical Commission agreed on the indicator framework proposed by the Inter Agency Expert Group (IAEG), as a practical starting point for monitoring progress on the goals and targets of the SDGs. Cumulatively, this established the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, based on extensive work of states, multilateral organizations and civil society organizations, that will guide international development policies of the next fifteen years. The attention now shifts to the design and implementation of national level development plans and policies that will enable countries to meet these goals.

The inclusion of Goal 16, as well as the upholding of peace as a cross-cutting theme in the SDG framework, in principle represents the long awaited mainstreaming of peace into the development discourse. Goal 16 seeks to: "Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels." However there is still little clarity on how this might be operationalised.

This brief proposes that a resilience orientation to peacebuilding can help countries meet the "peace goal" of the SDGs, as well as providing a vehicle for integrating this universal aspiration with the other Goals of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. It draws on evidence collected over the course of Interpeace's **Framework for Assessing Resilience (FAR) Programme** including pilot research in Timor-Leste, Guatemala and Liberia.

INTRODUCTION: MAINSTREAMING PEACE IN THE NEW DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

The "Post-2015" Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by heads of states at the 46th UN General Assembly has sought to mainstream peace in international policy, with all signatories committing to "promote peaceful and inclusive societies" under Goal 16, but also more broadly to meet all Goals in the spirit of a "plan of action for people, planet and prosperity that also seeks to strengthen universal peace in larger freedom."

The explicit references to peace in the SDGs encourages governments, civil society and multilateral agencies to invest in - and commit to - development strategies and interventions that aspire to promote peace as a priority. **Peace and development are inextricably linked, and while this is recognized in the new development agenda, there is much less certainty as to how this aspiration can be translated into practice.**

Fragile societies will be the testing ground of whether governments and the international community commit to this rhetoric and successfully operationalise it. Conflict-affected states have struggled the most to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and as early as 2005, the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness recognized the need for a specific set of principles to guide development assistance in fragile and conflict-affected states. This eventually led to the creation of the International Dialogue for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (IDPS), a forum composed of fragile countries under the grouping known as the G7+, development partners, and civil society; and to the implementation of the New Deal – a set of guiding principles and a proposed implementation framework containing goals for peacebuilding and statebuilding in fragile states.

The premise of the New Deal is that the MDGs were insensitive to the particular challenges of fragile countries, and so it proposed an alternative set of goals, framed as the Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals (PSGs) which better reflected the priorities of conflict-affected states. The New Deal also proposed a framework for action or guidance for countries to achieve the PSGs. The inclusion of Goal 16 as well as the more comprehensive nature of the SDGs, has the potential to achieve the more holistic approach promoted by the IDPS and the New Deal, but the explicit definition of a pathway for implementing the SDG framework in fragile countries remains a cause for concern. We believe that a 'resilience approach for peace', can help to cultivate this pathway.

It has been argued **elsewhere** that a focus on resilience can add value to the conception and operationalisation of peacebuilding interventions. Based on Interpeace's FAR Programme research, this brief explores whether such a" resilience for peace" approach can also contribute to national policies and strategies - such as development plans – that meet the aspirations of Goal 16 - as well as the broader aim of strengthening universal peace proposed in the new global development agenda.

RESILIENCE: A PATHWAY TO LOCAL OWNERSHIP IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SDGS

The starting point of a 'resilience for peace' approach is the identification of capacities that exist at different levels of social organization in any society: in individuals, at the household level, in communities, within institutions, or at the wider society level. These capacities manifest in various forms and are very specific to a given context. They may exist as physical assets that people possess, norms by which social relations are ordered, or networks through which information is disseminated. People have recourse to these capacities when they are under stress or threat, whether from sudden shocks such as an earthquake, or from the enduring stress in protracted situations of oppression and conflict. In the three case studies of Liberia, Guatemala and Timor-Leste – each of which experience different forms an sources of fragility based on their distinct contexts – the research on resilience in relation to conflict demonstrated that such resilience capacities exist and are being used to survive, or get by or to transform situations of conflict and promote durable peace (in resilience terminology: 'absorb', 'adapt' or 'transform').

A resilience approach therefore focusses on a society's or a community's endogenous capacities for peace, as opposed to its fault-lines for fragility and in doing so, affirms its endogenous assets, capacities and strengths. The experience from the FAR programme has been that this resilience-based approach offers a 'convening power' that enables people to more willingly participate in consultations and dialogue leading to programme and policy design. And as a result, programmes **and policies are more likely to be nationally and locally owned.** If the SDGs are to be meaningfully implemented at the national level, a resilience-based approach can help to ensure this is rooted in local experience, is context-specific, and is locally owned and led. The importance of local or national ownership was emphasized by the Open Working Group that drafted the SDGs and their targets, and is a central concern and incentive for peaceful and inclusive societies.

RESILIENCE FOR PEACE IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF GOAL 16: FROM BUILDING CAPACITY TO BUILDING TRUST

Goal 16 of the SDGs makes an important statement about the link between state/society relations and peace by way of targets 16.6 (Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels) and 16.7 (Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels). It is important, however, that these targets are given a broad interpretation that goes beyond just building the capacity of state institutions and promoting participation, so as to also include the critical issue of building trust between the state and society.

An important lesson of the FAR research has been that resilience capacities do not exist separately from one another or at discrete levels of society. Rather, one can observe interdependent 'resilience systems' that connect between different levels of society and social organisation. In this respect, one of the most relevant themes to have emerged from all three of the FAR case studies was the critical relationship between the state and its citizens. **Lack of trust in the state and perceptions of an ineffective and corrupt state was strongly correlated with low levels of resilience.** This is of vital relevance to both the aspirations and the implementation of SDG 16.

This was powerfully illustrated through the FAR research in Guatemala., where the lack of understanding about 'who the state is' and what its functions and responsibility actually are, was striking among those interviewed, and was clearly linked to the weakness of public institutions. This was, identified as a real obstacle to resilience and peace in the country. In Timor-Leste, one man conjured the imagery of a rotting bridge to describe the relationship between citizens and the state, signaling the lack of trust and the threat this poses to peace. Whereas Timorese identified leadership as a source of resilience for peace, because of the historical role played by resistance leaders in the independence movement, they also deplored the lack of trust in the state and contemporary political elites as undermining this resilience. These examples illustrate that trust between the state and its citizen is key to a society's resilience, as well as to its peacefulness.

This perspective was reinforced by the recent **Review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture by the Advisory Group of Experts**, which stated:

> *"Much as peace cannot be imposed from outside, peace cannot simply be imposed by domestic elites or authoritarian governments on fractious populations that lack even minimal trust in their leaderships or each other. Too often "national ownership" is equated with acquiescing to the strategies and priorities of the national government. In divided post conflict societies, such an approach risks perpetuating exclusion."*
> Report of the Advisory Group of Experts on the 2015 Review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture, Paragraph 42, p. 21

However, this approach is not just relevant to the goal of peace, per se, but reflects important points of intersection between the objective of peace and other dimensions and goals of the SDGs – for example in relation to wider humanitarian and development goals. In Liberia, for example, where the FAR research took place against the backdrop of the Ebola crisis, persons consulted cited the government's failure to provide adequate health services and a culture of corruption as undermining their trust in both state institutions and leaders. This undermined the effectiveness of the Ebola response as people were not following the government's instructions regarding precautionary measures in the early stages of the epidemic.

The language of resilience, has indeed been used with some frequency in the Agenda for Sustainable Development, specifically in framing Goals 1 and 11, 13 and 14. However, resilience was *not* referred to in Goal 16 in relation to peaceful societies, where the aspiration to make societies resilient to violent conflict – or more ambitiously: "resilient *for* peace" – might perhaps have been particularly important. The value of this language, if framed by the understanding of resilience for peace set out above, is that **it should safeguard against reducing the broader peace goal to a checklist of externally imposed or top-down indicators. Applying the concept of "Resilience for peace" to Goal 16 can help highlight the importance of endogenous capacities and agency of local actors, alongside the need for effective institutions to ensure not only that the goal is met,** but also *sustained over time*. This could be an important strategy to draw attention to these crucial aspects of peacebuilding

– trust, organizational capacity of communities, the presence of facilitative intermediaries between state and society – in the implementation of the SDGs. This is relevant to all countries, but most fundamental to fragile countries.

GOAL 16 AND MAKING PEACE SUSTAINABLE: THE TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL OF RESILIENCE

THE CONVENING POWER AND PREVENTION POTENTIAL OF A RESILIENCE-BASED APPROACH

An assessment of resilience capacities in a given context sheds light on the actions that individuals and communities resort to, but it also provides a framework for analyzing whether these actions serve as short term remedial or palliative solutions, or whether they may actually contribute to the transformation of the situation and thus contribute to the prevention of new or re-emerging conflict. This distinction is an important one and has been at the heart of the Frameworks for Assessing Resilience programme. As noted above, whereas absorptive and adaptive forms of resilience were easily detectable, examples of transformative resilience were seldom consciously articulated by informants in the course of the research. However, **through a multistakeholder dialogue process (referred to as National Working Groups on Resilience) sustained over several months, strategies and interventions for transformation based on the resilience capacities identified, were analyzed and defined in each of the three pilot countries.**[1]

The novelty of this process has not been solely in the ability of a multisectoral group to define policy recommendations or even action plans as a result of an exercise aimed at assessing resilience capacities. But it has also been in the commitment and ownership that stakeholders have demonstrated in this process. Furthermore, programming around the positive attributes, capacities and action for "resilience", has proven to have a real 'convening power'. So, for example in Guatemala, actors who have traditionally been antagonistic towards one another, agreed to be on the same working group to find solutions to the particularly divisive issue of socio-environmental conflicts. The critical reflection on "what we have" and "our assets" is especially affirming and allows individuals to come to terms with their, and their society's capacities, and to build on these and draw on them in an endeavour to prevent violent conflict.

A resilience orientation to peacebuilding traces a pathway for moving from a survival mode where only the manifestations and symptoms of conflict are being addressed, to generating the impulse for long term transformation to address the underlying causes of conflict. For example, the National Working Group on Resilience in Timor-Leste has developed a Guide on Civic education that draws on the resilience capacities detected and is, at the time of writing, pursuing efforts to put in place a national commission on civic education to coordinate civic education initiatives that already exist throughout the country. This strategic decision to focus on civic education, and to build on existing initiatives in this regard, has been guided by the vision that lasting peace in Timor-Leste will require "the right conditions for good quality leadership to emerge at all levels in order to strengthen relations between the state and citizens based on our values, on justice and on trust between each other in our society."[2] These 'right conditions' include mechanisms by which leaders can be held accountable, but also a population that is capable of critical reflection in order to demand and initiate positive social change.

Resilience in the context of peacebuilding, unlike in relation to natural disasters or humanitarian crises, cannot be defined as 'bouncing back' to the status quo ex ante. It inevitably requires transformation because conflict is not an external shock but a product of relationships and confrontations within the context. The structural processes that underpin conflict are constantly evolving and so resilience for peace must be conceived as the capacity to transform the

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1   Whereas in Guatemala the members of the Working Group chose to work on resilience in relation to specific thematic areas (Socio environmental conflicts, Crime and Insecurity, and fragility of public institutions), in Timor-Leste the strategy focused on issues of leadership development and civic education, and in Liberia they opted to work towards more general recommendations pertaining to peace and development.

2   CEPAD and The National Working Group on Resilience, 2016, Understanding and Strengthening Resilience for Peace; Timor-Leste Final Report – Frameworks for Assessing Resilience, CEPAD and Interpeace, Dili

context by addressing changing patterns of conflict in non-violent ways. Strategies pertaining to civic education, or as in the case of Liberia, to reforming the mechanisms for managing land resources, are medium- to long-term, and seek to bolster the respective society's resilience for peace by initiating the transformations necessary for the non-violent resolution of conflicts.

PROGRESS TOWARDS PEACEFUL SOCIETIES: ASSESSING RESILIENCE CAPACITIES FOR PEACE

The indicators that have been proposed for the twelve targets defined under Goal 16 focus on measuring outcomes – the number of conflict related deaths; primary government expenditure as a percentage of originally approved budgets; proportion of population satisfied with government services; etc. – and rightly so: specific, measurable and results-oriented indicators are key to effective follow-up mechanisms at both the national and international level. **However, for fragile countries, and in particular those emerging from conflict or in conflict, these indicators may seem so far-fetched and progress might appear so slow, that they could become discouraging.** For a country that has quasi non-existent health services, being asked to report progress on people's satisfaction with public services may be quite daunting. **It is therefore important to think of intermediary milestones that focus on developing capacities as a stepping stone on the pathway towards the outcomes defined by the indicators.** However, this should not detract from the universal application of the SDGs by giving opportunistic, recalcitrant or oppressive governments in conflict-affected societies the leeway to suggest that the targets of Goal 16 do not apply to them.

The target on promoting the rule of law and equal access to justice, for example, is measured by indicators that look at the percentage of victims reporting victimization and the percentage of unsentenced detainees. These indicators assume a well-functioning modern justice system, whereas, as observed in Liberia, Guatemala and Timor-Leste, it is often traditional leaders and informal institutions that are the actual implementers or guarantors of justice and in assessing progress, these mechanisms should not be rendered invisible, even though they must be subject to the same scrutiny for effectiveness, accessibility and inclusiveness.

In the absence of the police, or due to the remoteness of formal courts, communities have recourse to alternative justice or security structures. As the national survey undertaken in the course of the FAR programme in Guatemala revealed, people have more trust in neighboourhood patrols and Indigenous authorities than they do in judges and the police.
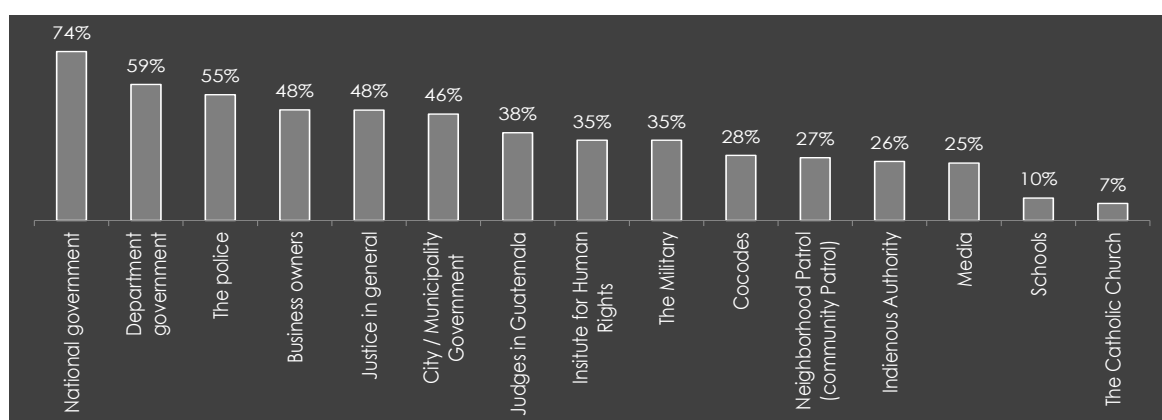
Figure 1: Trust in selected actors in Guatemala (% little – no trust).[3] Results from the national survey conducted in Guatemala demonstrate that people have more trust in Neigbourhood patrols and Indigenous Authorities than they do in the police and judges.

However, the resilience of these informal structures and authorities can also manifest negatively and may even take on a violent

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3   Interpeace and Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, 2016, GUATEMALA: Population-based survey about conflicts and resilience : http://www.interpeace.org/resource/peace-among-us-a-population-based-study-about-resilience-for-peace-in-guatemala/

character, challenge state authority and undermine a society's resilience for peace. For example, in Guatemala, what some see as neighbourhood patrols which help to uphold security in communities where the police are absent, are perceived by others as and violent vigilante groups who undermine the state's authority by taking justice into their own hands.

The potential for such negative manifestations is critical in assessing resilience for peace in the context of SDG 16. Whereas more traditional conflict analysis approaches might focus on the neigbourhood patrols/vigilante groups as a driver of conflict or obstacle to peace in the context of broken relationships between state and society, a resilience lens reframes their role as a potential source of resilience, albeit one with negative consequences. The options for solving this issue then becomes about harnessing the positive attributes of these groups whilst mitigating and indeed dismantling their violent practices – rather than seeking to eliminate such groups altogether.

Indicators that focus on capacities, as in the resilience framing, can also provide intermediary milestones such as the degree of coherence between formal and informal justice systems. This would provide a more realistic, manageable and incremental strategy for achieving Goal 16, as well as other goals, in the new development agenda, particularly in countries emerging from conflict or in fragile situations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A critical factor for success for the 2030 Agenda and the implementation of the SDGs will be the degree to which the strategies put in place to achieve those goals are genuinely and inclusively nationally and locally owned and led. In fragile and conflict affected societies, where there is a high degree of polarization amongst citizens and lack of trust in the state, finding points of convergence and defining a common vision of sustainable development, particularly as it relates to the goal of a "peaceful and inclusive society" will be of primary importance. A resilience orientation may be invaluable in this regard as it can draw attention to the existing strengths and endogenous capacities in a society, and empower groups and individuals to build on these to design development policies and implement programmes that resonate with the population. Moreover, resilience focusses on nurturing and strengthening existing capacities, and can thus promote a preventive approach to conflict and violence, making this universally relevant – including to societies where violent conflict is not manifest.

- *National Governments looking to design policies and national plans should do so with a view to achieving the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda, but they must also ensure that these policies and interventions build on the assets and capacities for peace that exist in society. Engaging actors from all sectors of society in a participatory assessment of resilience can be an effective strategy for identifying these strategies and mobilizing support for the policies.*

- *In addition to working towards effective, accountable and inclusive institutions, national governments and civil society alike, must be willing to engage in processes that will help to build trust between the state and citizens. The nature and specific form of these processes will be specific to the context of any given society, but are likely to rely on credible intermediaries such as traditional authorities or informal conflict resolution mechanisms that have the potential capacity to better connect state and society.*

- *In monitoring progress towards the achievement of the goals and targets defined in the New Development Agenda, national governments and international mechanisms such as the high level political forum should complement the indicators focused on outcomes with reviews of progress made in building resilience capacities, particularly as it pertains to Goal 16 – promoting peaceful and inclusive societies. Intermediary milestones focused on resilient capacities for peace will render the goals more realistic and achievable for the most fragile countries.*

The task of "promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development" is both a *requirement* for achieving the other SDGs, and an *outcome* of achieving all the other goals. Gender equality, health and well-being, reduced poverty, food security, economic growth and reduced inequality are all aspirations of the SDGs, but they are all also necessary components of peaceful societies. Therefore, whereas access to justice and effective, accountable and inclusive institutions are necessary

conditions for a peaceful society, they are by no means sufficient. In this regard, it is necessary that we do not limit ourselves to Goal 16 when looking at the peacebuilding potential of the SDGs, but rather look at all goals. The focus on resilience for peace as set out in this brief has a vital relevance across many of the SDGs. The common language and shared aspiration to build on existing resilient capacities hence offers a creative vehicle and platform for integrated programming in the implementation of the various goals, as well as for realizing the universal aspiration of the peace goal of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

ABOUT FRAMEWORKS FOR ASSESSING RESILIENCE (FAR)

Frameworks for Assessing Resilience (FAR) was a two-year programme (2014-2016) that was designed by **Interpeace**, and funded by **Sida** to better understand, address and assess the key sources of fragility and resilience within conflict- or violence-prone countries. Interpeace believes that in order to transform conflict, it is necessary not only to identify its causes, but also to better understand existing sources of resilience for peacebuilding in societies so that they can be strengthened.

The FAR programme combined multi-stakeholder participatory research in the three pilot countries – Timor-Leste, Guatemala and Liberia – with an expert-practitioner dialogue at the global level. FAR compared the resilience factors identified in the three pilot countries in order to explore where they were unique to particular country contexts, and where they would also offer more generic experiences and analyses. This led to the development of a **Guidance Note and Framework for understanding, assessing and strengthening resilience for peace**.

The FAR programme used a research approach that combines Interpeace's qualitative research process with national surveys (based on random sampling). Interpeace partnered with the **Harvard Humanitarian Initiative** (HHI), based at Harvard University in the USA, to design and implement these national surveys.

The programme was implemented by **Interpeace's Regional Office for Latin America in Guatemala**, and by Interpeace's partner organizations the **Platform for Dialogue and Peace (P4DP)** in Liberia, and the **Centre of Studies for Peace and Development (CEPAD)** in Timor-Leste.