CSOs and the IDPS - POLICY BRIEF 7

WHAT THE INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE ON PEACEBUILDING AND STATEBUILDING HAS NOT TALKED ABOUT.

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1. Important Achievements...

The International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (IDPS) was an outcome of the 3th High Level Forum (HLF) on Aid Effectiveness in Accra (Ghana) in September 2008, and can be said to have concluded its 'first phase' at the 4th HLF in Busan (South Korea) in December 2011.

It has been a meaningful process that made some significant contributions and became an incubator for some innovative developments.

- It has *reintroduced* concerns about violence, conflict and peace into the mainstream development paradigm whose 'Millennium Development Goals' were the depoliticized and technocratic version of a Millennium Declaration (2000) that did talk about peace, security, human rights, disarmament, democracy and good governance[i];
- It provided a platform where governments of states that others had labeled as 'fragile', could voice *their* views, concerns and expectations. It became an opportunity for so-called 'fragile states' to discover their common concerns and develop common perspectives and proposals/demands for more and more efficient and effective assistance. This led to the creation of the "g7+" group of 'fragile and conflict-affected states', which has currently 19 members (the number of states called 'fragile' in various 'fragility indexes' tends to be higher);
- It has generated *a certain momentum* among aid donors and aid recipient governments to stop lamenting the 'fragility' and join efforts to move towards 'resilience';
- It confirmed the central importance of *state-society relations* in the pursuit of a legitimate state and sustainable peace;
- Its core declarations (Dili Declaration with its g7+ Statement in Annex; Monrovia Roadmap with its important Annex, and the 'New Deal' document) are *less 'sanitized' of any politics* than tends to be the case in such public inter-state documents, and overtly include the subject of 'political dialogue/legitimate politics'.

These are significant achievements. Yet a proper appreciation of the IDPS between Accra and Busan also requires understanding and acknowledgment of what it has *not* talked about and left unexamined.

2. ...but a Misleading Title.

Notwithstanding some work on and references to political dialogue and legitimate politics, it is fair to say that this so far has been a dialogue (and sometimes a quasi-negotiation) about '*aid and aid flows to fragile and conflict-affected states'* rather than a dialogue about 'peacebuilding and statebuilding'. A clear indicator of this is the profile of participants in the IDPS for the g7+, who overwhelmingly came from Ministries of Finance, Economic Affairs and/or Planning and from 'aid coordination' units therein. These are indeed core interlocutors for discussions about aid, but not normally the places in government where the mandate for 'peacebuilding' is situated.

This shouldn't surprise if we remember that this dialogue originated and inscribed itself in a wider policy dialogue on 'aid effectiveness'. For a long time already aid donors have been cautious about investing non-humanitarian aid in fragile and conflict-affected environments; their habitual 'development' modalities and instruments are not well adapted to deal with the particular challenges of a weak (and sometimes contested) state and with the perceived higher risks of investing in unstable environments. Research had already indicated that although large numbers of poor people lived in 'fragile states', by 2006 only about 26% of Official Development Assistance went to such countries. That raised questions about a disconnect between aid flow volumes and comparative need. No less worrying was the observation that 75% of the aid flows to 'fragile countries' was concentrated in only five countries. Several others, whose populations had dire needs, seemed 'aid orphans'.[ii] Hence the articulation, already in 2007 (by the aid providers, without input from the aid recipients) of the '*Fragile States Principles'*, for situations where the principles of the 2005 Paris Declaration were felt to be not directly applicable.

The label of 'fragile states' (rather than 'fragile situations' or 'fragile societies') also carries fairly direct connotations of weaknesses in the institutions of the state. The quantity and quality of financial aid flows to fragile countries and the relevance and effectiveness of capacity-strengthening support are therefore relevant topics of conversation for a policy and practice dialogue about 'statebuilding'.

But the challenges of 'peacebuilding and statebuilding' cannot be reduced to the question of 'greater efficiency and effectiveness of aid and aid flows to fragile and conflict affected countries'.

What have been the most important issues that the IDPS has not discussed?

3. 'Fragility': Discrepancy between concept and realities?

'Fragility' is a central concept at the origins of and in the IDPS. It is rather surprising then that the Dialogue did *not* bother to unpack this vague concept, and examine what it actually refers to in reality. Throughout there has been a strong and unchallenged *assumption* that countries like South Sudan, the DRC, Burundi, Afghanistan, Timor Leste and others actually have a lot in common because they are all considered 'fragile states'. Looked at through the bureaucratic lens of the aid donors, a certain claim can be made for such view as they present fairly similar challenges and dilemmas to the international aid administrations. When considered however through their individual histories, in their specific social and cultural make-up, in light of the origins and patterns of violence each of them experienced and sometimes continues to experience, and with attention to the economic and human resources that they have potentially available, these countries reveal themselves as *very different in the nature, scope and reasons for their persistent fragility* (and in their potential sources of 'resilience').

Nor did the IDPS pay any attention to why countries slide into fragility and large scale violence? Surely learning more about the '*pathways of descent into violence and fragility'* is highly relevant when working on the 'pathways out of fragility'?

These are not purely academic observations. It is only now, post-Busan, that attention is getting focused on properly assessing 'fragility'. One strand of opinion envisages the development of a 'fragility-resilience spectrum' as a step-by-step process that creates and describes a pathway out of fragility, and for which uniform benchmarks of progress can be established. Another strand of opinion would argue that, given the differences among countries in the nature, scope and reasons for fragility,

and the different resources potentially available to them, their pathways 'out of fragility' inevitably will be distinctively different, so that 'progress' becomes a very situation-specific assessment.

The tension and potential mismatch between concept and realities will become visible once the 'New Deal' commitments (and the commitments of the national governments of the g7+ as expressed in their Statement at the Dili meeting in April 2010?- see Policy Brief 6) get 'implemented' in the seven countries that have volunteered to be pilots. '*Text' then will meet and be confronted with 'context'* – and the 'New Deal' with the 'Fragile State Principles'.

4. The Problematic Relationship between Statebuilding and Peacebuilding.

Another question left unexamined by the IDPS so far is that of the relationship between 'statebuilding and peacebuilding'. The Dialogue has operated on the *assumption* that both are mutually reinforcing. Given its origins in questions of aid effectiveness and the difficulties of using the 'normal' development aid approaches and instruments in situations where the national government counterpart is 'fragile', not surprisingly the IDPS has tended to focus more on 'statebuilding' than on 'peacebuilding'. A weak state that can't provide protection and services to its people, and that is largely bypassed by international aid actors, is a problem indeed and a very appropriate topic of discussion. But an *assumption* that 'stronger' state institutions will automatically increase the chances of 'durable peace', has been and needs to be challenged. First of all, many of the countries in the 'g7+' are still in a historical process of state formation (and 'nation-building'). Generally such processes have been violent. Acquiring the monopoly of the use of violence and establishing territorial control, more often than not has involved the use of quite some coercion and violence. Secondly, the analysis of the trajectories into violence and 'fragility' often shows a pattern wherein a segment of the elite controls the apparatus of the state and uses it against other elite segments and part of the population. Elite infighting, as well as resistance and revolts of parts of the population against a state in which they feel not stake, which is controlled by an elite segment that is not theirs and which they perceive as detrimental to their well being, are regular features in the stories of these countries. Therefore '*state building' does not automatically equate with 'peacebuilding'.* The core questions are: whose state is this, and who does this state serve and protect?

The IDPS partially acknowledges this, in affirming the centrality of state-society relations and in its references to political dialogue and inclusive and legitimate politics. But it hasn't really faced up to the potential tensions and contradictions between state building and peacebuilding.

A proper examination of the relationship between state building and peacebuilding can also not be limited to 'fragile states'. It must include examples of 'strong states' which are or were ostensibly 'peaceful' because they enabled highly authoritarian governance. Uzbekistan, Belarus, Egypt, Syria and Iran are cases in point. The historical record shows that strong, authoritarian states can maintain 'law and order' for decades. Yet at some point the suppressed dissent and resentment over the underlying structural violence (and human rights abuses) will erupt. At best this leads to relative bloodless transitions or 'flower revolutions', at worst to forms of civil war, as we see today in Libya and Syria. Finally, we would also do well to look at and learn from cases where people have built genuinely peaceful states and societies. You don't learn about health by only studying disease and medicine, but also by looking at healthy lifestyles and robust immune systems.

5. How can we Build Peace More Effectively?

The IDPS so far has largely concentrated on 'better aid' in fragile and conflict affected countries. There is a reasonable but *insufficiently examined assumption* that such 'better aid' will also mean greater

peacebuilding effectiveness and higher chances of sustained peace. Much of course will depend on *what* a more capable state with higher quantity and better quality of financial resources will actually do – and *how* it will do it? The IDPS Declarations contain a certain 'theory of peace', in the form of inclusive and legitimate politics, security for all, addressing injustices and providing justice for all, fair and equitable services for the population as a whole, and livelihoods and employment. Unfortunately, so far the IDPS has not given us much evidence-based insights in how to more effectively built peace in different societies with perhaps generic challenges but also very distinctive and specific histories and characteristics.

6. What is the Problem with the Aid Providers?

The evaluation of the implementation of the Paris Declaration and the monitoring surveys of the Fragile States Principles (see Briefing Paper 5) signal very clearly that –by and large- the aid providers have only made modest changes in the way they do business. Evidence of efficiency and effectiveness problems with aid has been around for long and generally tends to point at similar things. The 'New Deal' is partially innovative but otherwise is a new document to talk about old questions.

 A working hypothesis would see a multitude of factors for this resistance to change in the conventional ODA providers. These can perhaps be grouped into three domains: Caution with regard to the politics and policies of the aid recipient 'partners'; the relationship of the aid administrations with their domestic constituencies, and the structures and incentives of the aid administrations themselves. Unfortunately, the IDPS so far did not dialogue about this remarkable 'resilience' of ODA providers to resist change.

7. Conclusion.

The International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding between October 2008 and December 2011 has really been a dialogue about "aid and aid flows to fragile and conflict affected states". There are understandable reasons for this, given how the Dialogue emerged. The issues considered are relevant, but do not add up to a genuine policy and practice-oriented dialogue about how to build and protect legitimate states in specific historical, socio-cultural and geo-political contexts, in ways that minimize violence and enhance the chances of sustained peace. It has worked with an unexamined concept of 'fragility', ignored what must be learned from pathways into violence and fragility, and left critical assumptions about peacebuilding and statebuilding and about better aid and peacebuilding effectiveness unexamined. Nor has it looked into the question why the official aid administrations are (in general) so resistant to change? Pointing this out doesn't take away from the real achievements of the IDPS, but provides a more balanced assessment and draws attention to important gaps and potential weaknesses.

Perhaps post-Busan the IDPS can take up these critical policy and practice questions that so far have been left unattended?

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[i] See Vernon, P. & D, Baksh 2010: Working with the Grain to Change the Grain. Moving beyond the Millennium Development Goals. London, International Alert.
http://www.international-alert.org/resources/publications/working-grain-change-grain

[ii] DAC 2007: Ensuring Fragile States are not Left Behind. Paris, OECD
http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/34/24/40090369.pdf