Fragile and conflict-affected states will benefit more from the Sustainable Development Goals if they adopt the New Deal’s focus on the social contract between and within state and society.

Fragile and conflict-affected states have struggled to ensure satisfactory progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. As a consequence, the New Deal was developed through the forum of the International Dialogue for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding and advocated by the g7+ group of fragile and conflict-affected countries. The New Deal defines five Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals (PSGs), which incorporate broader-ranging objectives aimed at ensuring a peaceful political settlement, putting in

**Sustainable Development Goal 16**

**DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS MUST MEASURE SOCIAL COHESION**

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The unique challenges facing fragile and conflict-affected states must be better reflected in the development of indicators for the SDGs.

- Indicators assessing people’s confidence in security and justice institutions must become more explicit and articulate to capture trends in the “social contract” between the state and its people.

- Indicators assessing social cohesion among individuals and groups must also be reinforced as a measurement of capacities to prevent, contain and de-escalate conflict.
place core capacities to prevent (re)lapse into conflict and enabling post-conflict recovery. A comprehensive list of indicators for the PSGs was also developed but never formally finalised. Though uncompleted, the PSG indicators can help fill a few critical gaps among the indicators now proposed for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Fine-tuning the SDG indicators
The SDGs include a goal (number 16) 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.”

Goal 16 has ten underlying proposed targets that largely mirror the priorities contained in the PSGs. The UN System has proposed a draft set of SDG 16 indicators. While the proposed SDG indicators cover the majority of PSG indicators, a few critical omissions threaten to make the SDGs less relevant for people living in fragile and conflict-affected states.

Firstly, the PSG indicators focus on the social contract between the state and society at large (vertical cohesion) as a fundamental component of peace- and statebuilding. It particularly focuses on measuring trust in the institutions that are normally granted the monopoly on violence and on detention – issues of critical importance to people in countries where the state apparatus has been or remains an actor in intra-state conflicts. They do so, for example, by measuring the public confidence in the performance of security institutions and of formal and customary justice institutions including human rights mechanisms. While the proposed SDG indicators focus on access to justice and crime reporting rates, the PSG indicators thus go a step further in assessing people’s perceptions of security institutions’ legitimacy and performance.

Secondly, the PSGs place front and centre the nature of intercommunal and interpersonal relations (horizontal cohesion) as an important indicator of social cohesion between groups and individuals. Fragile and conflict-affected states often see social cohesion rapidly erode leading to distrust, hostility, marginalisation and alienation. The PSGs propose both ‘negative indicators’ on intergroup disputes that produce violence but also indicators tracking positive developments in social cohesion such as participation in political processes, civic engagement at the local level and the number of joint initiatives involving different groups in society. Indicators on vertical cohesion should accompany the SDGs to a wider extent than what has currently been proposed.

The SDGs in the security-development nexus
The PSGs’ focus on vertical social cohesion reflects that post-conflict recovery and political settlement processes are fundamentally dependent on shifting the loyalty and trust of citizens towards the state from competing power centres. The PSGs’ focus on horizontal cohesion reflects the need to strengthen social cohesion among individuals and groups and thereby reinforcing the social fabric needed to prevent, contain and deescalate conflict among people and identify groups.

As the world’s poor are increasingly concentrated in fragile and conflict-affected states, the special needs of these contexts merit special attention as a particularly complex security and development challenge. For people in these settings, reinforced social cohesion metrics would make the SDGs even more relevant as a partner on their journey from conflict to peace and development.

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