A Peacebuilding Lens on the Sustainable Development Goals

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A Network of People
Building Peace

"A central promise of Agenda 2030 is to "leave no one behind".
This promise can only be fulfilled through the broadest
partnerships between the international community,
Governments and civil society."

SG Ban Ki-Moon at Arab Regional Conference on the Role of
Civil Society in Implementing Agenda 2030, April 20th 2016

What Are the SDGs and How Do They Relate to Peacebuilding?

2015 marked the end of the time frame for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). To build on the progress made as well as address shortcomings, the international community drafted a new set of goals for the next fifteen years, the 2030 Agenda. Seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were agreed upon by the General Assembly (see figure 1). Each of the seventeen goals has several more specific targets, and there are a number of indicators for each target to measure progress. The full list of targets and indicators can be found in the Report of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators.

Figure 1. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals
(source: www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/news/communications-material/)

This new framework aims to be more comprehensive in its reach and to incorporate a more holistic, sustainable vision of development than the MDGs. It also aims to be more inclusive of ordinary people's voices in the formulation of its priorities and in pledging to 'leave no one behind'. The 2030 Agenda explicitly recognises the strong impact of violence and insecurity on development and vice versa, stating that "there can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development" (A/RES/70/1, p. 2). The Agenda 2030 therefore includes peace as a cross-cutting issue alongside four other critical areas such as a focus on people and partnerships; and has its own "Peace Goal", SDG 16.

Goal 16 is 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" (A/RES/70/1, p. 14). While this goal mentions peace most explicitly, it is important to note that a peace dimension is found across the SDGs as a whole. There are many targets and indicators under other goals that are closely related to the aim of sustainable peace. The *Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies,* a multi-stakeholder

initiative committed to the peace dimension of the SDGs, found that in total "36 targets from seven other SDGs directly measure an aspect of peace, inclusion or access to justice, with only a third of these found in SDG16" (Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, NYU CIC (2017), p. 7). The authors have put together a useful overview of these "16+ targets", as they labelled them (see figure 2).

National governments and other actors have started to localise the SDGs and their respective targets and indicators. These initial planning years are an important time for civil society organisations (CSOs) to engage with these processes to help shape the discussions and potentially collaborate in and/or monitor their implementation and hold their governments to account.
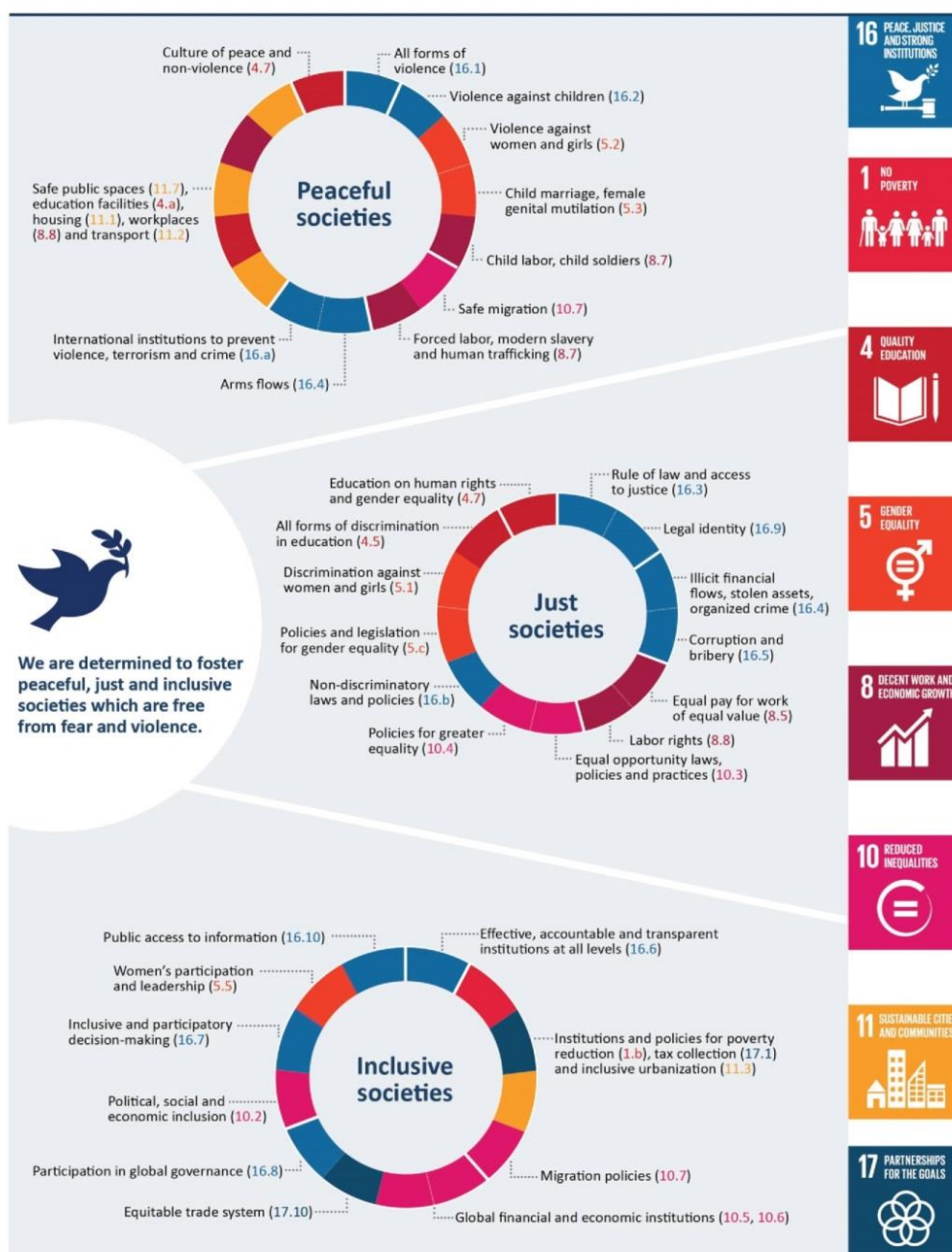

Figure 2. The 16+ targets as compiled and visualised by the Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies (March 2017).

What Role for Peacebuilding Civil Society Organisations?

CSOs were heavily involved in the drafting of the 2030 Agenda and particularly in pushing for the inclusion of a peace goal. GPPAC was part of a group of international NGOs that collectively lobbied at the UN in New York and with different member states to ensure peace became an integral part of the agenda. A relatively well worded peace goal, as well as a number of relevant indicators for peacebuilding and conflict prevention under multiple goals, was achieved on paper. Now that the goals are set, a strong political commitment for implementation at local, national, regional and international level needs to be fostered, maintained and scrutinised for the SDGs to really help prevent violence and insecurity.

The 2030 Agenda considers CSOs important actors in implementing the SDGs. It aims to be "an Agenda of the people, by the people, and for the people" (A/RES/70/1, p. 12, §52). Its implementation is supposed to be a multi-stakeholder process involving "Governments as well as parliaments, the United Nations system and other international institutions, local authorities, indigenous peoples, civil society, business and the private sector, the scientific and academic community – and all people" (ibid.).

CSOs are among the actors who can push for an accelerated and persistent implementation of the SDGs by governments and authorities at different levels. They can support their governments by popularising the SDGs and identifying local needs, help ensure an inclusive implementation process (particularly including youth, women and minorities), and monitor progress on the respective targets and goals by collecting data on the indicators.

Connecting Your Work to the SDGs

The implementation of the SDGs as a whole will require a great deal of resources and collaborative action, and many new alliances and initiatives have already been formed in its support. However, it should not be an entirely new endeavour, and duplication of existing efforts should be avoided. One of the lessons learned from the MDGs is that the SDGs should not become another checklist that diverts efforts and resources from important existing activities. Instead, the challenge is to mainstream the Agenda 2030 into the work undertaken by peacebuilding CSOs and other organisations. We should integrate and capitalise on existing processes and structures, and create synergies with ongoing efforts. In other words: the SDGs must be made useful for the ongoing peacebuilding and conflict prevention work of CSOs. At the same time, CSOs must reflect on how their current work can usefully be linked to specific SDG processes at national, regional and global level to strengthen their impact and support.

With this in mind, much of the work peacebuilding CSOs already undertake relates to the SDGs, specifically to the peace dimension and the targets connected to this (see figure 2). This provides two opportunities for CSOs:

1) Linking the work of Peacebuilding CSOs to the SDGs

As CSOs working on conflict prevention and peacebuilding we can start by examining how existing work can be framed as contributing to the achievement of the SDGs. This does not mean that it has to cover the whole range of the 16+ targets. Rather, connections to even just one or two particular targets can and should be recognised and communicated accordingly. This can be useful

a) to show how civil society is already actively involved in the implementation of these goals,

b) to demonstrate how these goals can practically be achieved, and

c) as a way to explicitly promote peacebuilding and conflict prevention work as helping to achieve this global policy agenda (including towards local or national authorities as well as donors).

Framing activities in this way will help ensure that the important efforts of CSOs working on conflict prevention and peacebuilding are 'registered' as contributing to the SDGs and thus their realization overall is accelerated. On the UN Sustainable Development website specific projects can be officially connected to the SDG, linking them to the respective goals, as a voluntary initiative. This linking can possibly also give the work of CSOs political and practical leverage for discussions with governments and donors as they are likely to connect their support and engagements to the SDGs in the future.

Example 1: Linking your work to the SDGs

Promoting gender-inclusive disaster management in the Pacific

The ongoing impact of climate change in the Pacific region has caused Pacific member states to consistently stress to the international community the importance of environmental security. This has led to an increased commitment to making the links between climate change, peacebuilding, human security, development, and human rights as well as the importance of these issues for women, peace and security. There is now an opportunity, through the Sustainable Development Goals and UNSCR2242 on women, peace and security, to amplify women's calls for a shift from reaction to prevention and for governments to put women's human security first.

There is often an assumption that women are merely victims in terms of environmental insecurity. The Women's Weather Watch (WWW), coordinated by GPPAC Pacific's regional secretariat femLINKpacific, tries to counteract this by pushing for a more gender-inclusive preparedness and humanitarian response during disasters such as storms, cyclones, droughts, floods and tsunamis. It also applies a conflict prevention and human security lens to disaster preparedness, response and recovery. Through an innovative application of media and communication technology, including community radio, to disperse information before, during and after a disaster occurs, the network responds to the persistent under-representation of women in local government and

governance structures and their lack of responsiveness to women's security needs.

This work links to a number of SDGs. It addresses goal 5 on gender equality (linking to 7 out of 9 targets – for details see the list of indicators and femLINKpacific policy paper on WWW). Making sure women's issues are addressed and that women are part of decision-making processes contributes to inclusive societies which are better able to withstand and manage arising conflicts or disaster-induced times of hardship which may fuel them. In that sense, the WWW also contributes to goal 16 overall. By increasing women's participation in decision-making, it contributes specifically to target 16.7 on "responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making". Amplifying media and communication rights and improving public access to information through community media, the WWW addresses target 16.10. Concerning itself with the protection of women and children from violence and discrimination it tackles the first and second target of SDG16 ("Reduce all forms of violence" and "End abuse, exploitation [...] and all forms of violence against [...] children"). Lastly, by raising awareness for the many risks of natural disasters, the WWW also addresses goal 13 on climate action.

By making these links, femLINK and the GPPAC Pacific network are creating greater visibility of women's leadership knowledge and expertise and are supporting governments to deliver on their obligations.

(Information largely taken from femLINKpacific (2016): Women's Human Security First: Women's Weather Watch)

2) Making the SDGs useful for CSOs

The SDG framework also provides a chance to engage with national, regional and global actors working on similar issues. The SDG framework can be seen as a political instrument to bring issues of peacebuilding and conflict prevention onto the national agenda and address obstacles to social change (see also Baxmann, 2017). Following agreement by all member states at the global level, the SDG discussion is now shifting mostly to the national level. National development plans, actions and indicators of progress are being (or should be) developed for each country. This process differs per country and the opportunities it offers and its political relevance will vary. But, just as with other international, regional or national policy processes, meaningful civil society participation will be critical to achieve an inclusive, transparent and accountable implementation of the SDGs. The coming year offers a chance for CSOs to shape the way the SDGs will be translated into action in each country.

As part of this opportunity, broad awareness raising on the SDGs among CSOs and the wider population is needed to ensure their engagement with the SDG framework. Advocacy and monitoring of governments' commitment to peacebuilding and conflict prevention is required to increase the political cost to national governments of not prioritising certain SDGs. The TAP Network has developed a useful advocacy toolkit and related materials for SDG 16, which can be expanded to look at the SDGs overall through a peacebuilding and conflict prevention lens.

In sum, the SDGs can provide a framework to popularise peacebuilding and

conflict prevention and advocate concrete actions such as a national peace policy, national peace infrastructures or peace education being formally taken up in a school curriculum. Even though the Agenda 2030 is a global framework, engaging with the SDGs allows CSOs to be part of a national dialogue on what a peaceful and inclusive society in their respective countries should look like in 2030 and how this vision can be developed with the contribution of the government, civil society and multilateral organisations.

Example 2: Making the SDGs useful for you

For over 30 years, GPPAC Northeast Asia's regional secretariat Peace Boat has been committed to advocating and creating opportunities for dialogue for conflict prevention and cooperation for sustainable development among individuals and communities. Complementing its peacebuilding activities, Peace Boat is also engaged in activities including education, disaster risk reduction and environmental protection. Highlighting the interconnectedness of peace and sustainability has long been a major part of Peace Boat's activities. Peace Boat views the Sustainable Development Goals as a key opportunity to raise awareness of these links, enabling more comprehensive cooperation and integration between various stakeholders and fields.

For these reasons, Peace Boat is a committed campaigner for the SDGs. In August 2016, in collaboration with the United Nations Department of Public Information and the UN Information Center, Peace Boat unveiled the vibrant SDGs logo on its hull during the departure ceremony of its 92nd Global Voyage.

Peace Boat's Ecoship and SDG14

A concrete elaboration of this campaign is Peace Boat's development of the "Ecoship", a 55,000 ton, 2000 passenger, nature-inspired vessel which will set sail in 2020 under the flag of the Sustainable Development Goals. The Ecoship was registered as one of the first three voluntary commitments for SDG14 which will be addressed at the UN Ocean Conference (to be held at the UN Headquarters in June 2017). Peace Boat has actively participated in preparatory meetings to the conference, and the Ecoship Project was the first voluntary commitment to be introduced by a non-governmental organization. Its contribution to SDG14 will come not only through its technology and design but also through its diverse activities. Four annual global voyages will create the framework for hundreds of educational programmes, advocacy campaigns, and applied research, as well as for hosting international conferences and world-class exhibitions, on themes relating to the SDGs and the interconnectedness of peace and sustainability.

(Information largely taken from "Peace Boat preparing for the UN Ocean Conference – committing to implementation of SDG 14" (Peace Boat website, news item, February 17, 2017))

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