ADVANCING GOOD GOVERNANCE in International Development

Peace, Security, and Governance in Goal 16: How Do We Tackle This?

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Plenary: The "Securitisation" of Aid: Is Goal 16 Being Commandeered by the Security Agenda?

This session started by considering recent developments in the UK, as an illustration of the current global shift to prioritise the peace and security elements of Sustainable Development Goal ("SDG") 16 for the expenditure of overseas development assistance. The session focused on the risks of prioritising security, and the interrelationship between those efforts and tackling poverty and inequality. The panel concluded by discussing ways that participation, accountability and security provide a framework for implementing the SDGs in the UK and globally.

Key Points from the Session

1. **Security is a crucial factor in development.** Goal 16 affirms the inextricable relationship between peace, security and development. Promoting peaceful and developed societies helps in ensuring that access to development is available for all. Goal 16 underlines all of the other SDGs and a failure to implement it may hinder the achievement of the other goals. The way in which each of its elements is interpreted and applied is therefore critical. Within this context there has been concern that the UK and other countries' approach to aid is introducing the security agenda furthered by government agencies and departments in an unfettered way. Specifically, it is feared that development expenditure may be used to serve strategic counter-terrorism objectives – in the UK in furtherance of the new aid strategy of "Tackling Global Challenges in the National Interest". This concern is heightened when it is considered that the UK's aid strategy was introduced only two months after the SDGs were brought into existence but contains little reference to the SDGs and appears to make security a higher priority than poverty reduction and the objective to "leave no one behind". With these interlinked issues, the question is how best to balance security and development. Fundamentally, the approach should be to humanise the security agenda and make it about protecting people and enabling development, not about the advancement of government or state security concerns.

2. **Fragility, which can be caused or made more challenging by insecurity, must be addressed in order to tackle extreme poverty.** By 2030 it is estimated that almost two thirds of people living in extreme poverty will be located in "fragile" states. Some aid agencies such as the UK Department for International Development have an increasing focus on fragile situations, which is consistent with their mandate to reduce poverty, but will further sharpen their attention on the related security issues. In order to be effective the formulation and implementation of development programmes in these fragile contexts must acknowledge and address the security context. There remains a risk that, if aid agencies are focused on the security risk posed by fragile states to donor countries, they will deprioritise assistance countries like Malawi that are fragile but do not pose an international security risk.

3. **Sustainable and secure contexts are built when people know that there is a government that can be held accountable.** The awareness that people can influence and hold their respective governments accountable is critical in establishing a sustainable and secure environment for development. While democracy can be indicative of the possibility of asserting accountability, the mere existence of a democratic system of government should not be taken as a demonstration that good governance exists or that development will occur. Donors and non-governmental organisations should work with governments and with communities to further the capability and accountability that can produce lasting security. This requires a genuine focus on tackling local issues and building local solutions. There are some positive examples of this. The UK has recently announced locally targeted action in Jordan, in which the EU will relax rules governing exports from Jordan if Syrian refugees provide the labour, in order to incentivise investment and job creation. This sort of project shows the innovative solutions that can be advanced through multiple government departments working together.

4. **Enhancing security and preventing violence are issues that require global action but are open to political influence.** The OECD Development Assistance Committee's recently reformulated definition of Official Development Assistance now includes "preventing violent extremism." The notions of both extremism and violence are open to interpretation and conflict between governments. Action in this area could be undertaken domestically or in a way that is inappropriately intended to advance donor country foreign policy or security interests, rather than the reduction of poverty. Under the new UK aid strategy, for example, there will be more Official Development Assistance spending by departments other than the Department for International Development. Those departments are not bound by the UK legislation that requires the primary purpose of aid spending to be the reduction of poverty. Safeguards must be put in place to avoid this type of activity being influenced by political expedience.

Emerging Questions

1. Could the inclusion of security-related targets in Goal 16 inadvertently lead to development assistance being used to support coercive state security mechanisms?

2. Within the context of an increasing focus on fragile situations, how should issues of security be tackled in order that poverty can be reduced?

3. Whose security is it that should be considered? Should it be the people in recipient countries, their national governments or, in the context of a globalised and interconnected world, is it right to consider donors' national interests?

4. How will the response to current refugee and migrant needs, especially in Europe, impact on the links between aid delivery internationally and related activities domestically? Is aid being used to curb migration or to root out poverty? How are the interventions shaped and how will this impact on related security considerations?