ADVANCING GOOD GOVERNANCE in International Development

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

9 – 10 June 2016

Rhodes House, Oxford

Plenary: Goal 16 and the Challenge of Fragility: Making Progress in Contexts of Conflict and Protracted Crisis

Panellists in this plenary session explored strategies for making progress with Goal 16 – including reducing violence and exploitation, tackling corruption, ensuring the rule of law and bolstering institutional effectiveness – in areas affected by conflict and crises. These fragile contexts are where progress with Goal 16 is most desperately needed, and where such progress is most difficult to achieve. The session also examined the need for better linkages between humanitarian and development actors in fragile contexts.

Key Points from the Session

1. **"Fragility" is a misleading concept when applied to regions in conflict or crisis.** Panellists questioned the notion of "fragile states," noting that it may be more appropriate to think in terms of "fragile situations." Nevertheless, they noted that the term "fragile" belies the durability and sustainability of crisis conditions. For example, war economies can be highly profitable to certain individuals in powerful positions. Similarly, youth in fragile contexts may wholeheartedly embrace conflict as a means of empowerment, prolonging crises.

2. **Existing modalities of crisis response undermine progress.** Panellists emphasized that responders should begin acting with long-term development in mind early on in a crisis. Equally, responders should be mindful of the hazards of outside-led intervention. Governments in fragile contexts may be undermined by a sudden influx of outside actors, and the vacuum that is created when these actors (including the private sector) pull out can lead to the collapse of the entire region.

3. **Locally led, culturally appropriate responses are the most effective in fragile states.** Panellists stressed that the effectiveness of humanitarian response depends largely on the cultural familiarity of those responding. Local actors' understanding of language and custom is vital to meeting the needs of affected people. These local actors are also best positioned to promote institutions that build peace by dealing with the root causes of crisis. Similarly, regional organizations can play an important role in predicting and preventing crisis, given their proximity to the context and culture.

4. **To address fragility, we must change the narrative.** Panellists stressed that progress in fragile contexts begins with changing the narrative that affected people are faceless and powerless. This change begins with seeing affected people not as statistics, but as individuals with families, histories and stories. It also requires us to recognize and support affected people's leadership and resilience in peacebuilding. We must empower affected populations to participate in governance structures and lead peacebuilding institutions and processes in fragile contexts.

5. **Journalists have a role to play in changing narratives.** Media can inform and inspire political will to address Goal 16 issues in fragile contexts. However, development is often not perceived as "sexy," or marketable enough for mainstream channels. Equally, many governments put up barriers to impartial reporting on governance failures or push their own countervailing narratives. In an age of heightened information transparency and decreasing deference to authority, the role and responsibility of journalists in shaping and changing narratives is vital.

Emerging Questions

1.   Is progress with Goal 16 in contexts of conflict and crisis truly practicable?

2.   How do we make peace and development "sexy"?

3.   How can humanitarian and development actors leverage climate change adaptation to make progress in contexts of fragility?