

# Peace is at the heart of sustainable development

*Of all the threats to sustainable development, conflict is one of the most intractable and damaging. Local partners and detailed understanding of root causes are key to constructive intervention*



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By **Summer Brown**,  
Director – Peacebuilding Advisory Unit,  
International Alert

**T**he 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), provide a comprehensive and holistic framework for addressing global challenges. SDG 16 seeks to promote ‘peaceful and inclusive societies’. In places of conflict and fragility, peace and (SDG 16) must be integrated into the approaches that we use to implement all the other Global Goals, if they are to be effective and sustainable.

The recent UN and World Bank Group report *Pathways for Peace* noted that by 2030 more than half the world’s poor will be living in countries affected by high levels of violence. It also dispelled the myth that development in and of itself leads to more peaceful societies. In fact, there is often no linear relationship between the two.

Fragility and conflict plagues us across the world, from the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar to war in Yemen. Fragility and poverty are on the rise, even in more stable nations such as the UK.

A 2017 report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that more than one in five of the UK population are currently living in poverty. We have an important challenge on our hands – one that is for all of us to address if we want to progress the SDGs. So the real challenge for us is to create a symbiotic relationship between SDG 16 and the others, so that we can ensure the sustainability of our development investments.

In its 2015 *States of Fragility* report, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) stated that we are unlikely to eliminate extreme poverty (SDG 1) unless we address conflict. One could conclude that any funding that goes towards development without an integrated

approach that also addresses the drivers of conflict is a poor investment.

On the more positive side, a more integrated approach could indeed lead to more peaceful and stable societies.

### Understanding the context

From local to national to regional to global, context matters for an integrated approach. International Alert’s research on violent extremism in Syria, for example, shows that this involves a complex interplay of psychological, social, political and ideological factors, as well as cultural and identity issues.

A failure to appreciate this complexity could mean that we ask the wrong questions and consequently take the wrong

play – from donor, to international non-governmental organisation (INGO), national government and local civil society. If an organisation knows what it does well, does it and pushes itself to innovate, it will most likely advance in its vision.

But each of us must invest in measuring what we do well and how we improve upon it. With the breadth of potential work that one could do, we as organisations suffer from being drawn in too many directions and diluting our impact by trying to do too much with too little. We often oversell to donors at the proposal stage and under-deliver in the implementation stage.

For this to change, we need to be clearer on what is actually feasible and the time that it takes to achieve results. Donors, too, must

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approaches and implement the wrong activities. It is therefore critical to listen and understand before we act.

And this should go even further, to include the full duration of our engagement. The complexity of issues, from the communities where we intervene to the funding structures of procurement, needs to be fully appreciated before intervening. Equally important is the ability to adapt programming, adjusting to contextual changes as one implements, to ensure that interventions continue to deliver results.

So yes – it is useful to have goals and targets as agreed upon through an arduous and important process of political negotiation. But our interventions must flow first and foremost from understanding the context before choosing a goal or goals to work on in an integrated manner.

### Know what you do well – and do it

Every SDG is important. To achieve one, we must also move forward on the others. However, we all have different roles to

be ready to back proposals and interventions that are realistic over ones that overpromise sweeping changes in what are often, at most, five-year interventions.

Clarity of mandate and understanding of one’s competitive advantage is important – as is innovation that may fail but that may also be successful. Donors can and should in many cases drive agendas. In that same vein, when INGOs and local partners coordinate, they can drive impact and add up to more than the sum of their parts.

### Know what you don’t do well – and partner up

Partnerships matter perhaps more than ever because of the complexities of the issues in fragile contexts. The trend is for there to be many areas where there are humanitarian, development and peacebuilding needs in one context.

In a recent address, UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed listed the myriad issues in the Sahel region – from violent terrorism to extreme poverty, climate

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◀ A Rwandan peacekeeper serving with the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) on patrol in the Muslim enclave of PK5 in Bangui



change, displacement, human trafficking and drugs. “Peace, security, development and human rights are intertwined and mutually reinforcing in the Sahel, as everywhere,” she said. “Unless we address the root causes of these interconnected challenges, their impact will continue to increase and the repercussions will spread.”

These intertwined issues are unfortunately plaguing not only the Sahel, but also numerous places where International Alert and many others work. These issues are stacked one on top of the other, creating a Venn diagram of such complexity that to untwine it would take decades when what is needed is immediate action.

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This is often the clash between humanitarian actors and development and peacebuilding actors. We all recognise a great need to act, but without understanding the root causes at the same time as the most immediate needs, interventions will be short-lived and short-sighted. But being in such close proximity to one another is an opportunity for holistic approaches – if we understand that we need one another to be successful.

Local partners are key to short-term access and long-term change because they are most likely to remain in the places that are their homes, countries and regions. So, if done well, an investment with or in a local partner is a wiser one. In understanding who they are as organisations and change-makers, we can find ways to complement one another. After all, we all want a better, more equitable world.

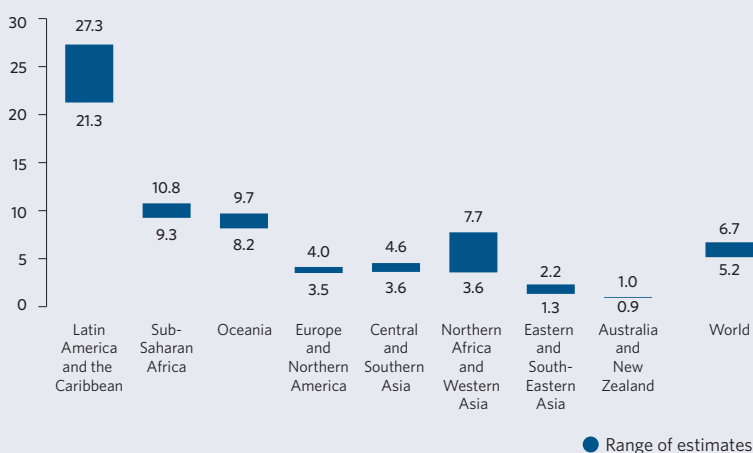
The paths to peace are numerous. With a lot of realism, and a dash of optimism, we must work together in an integrated manner to achieve them. ●

## 16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

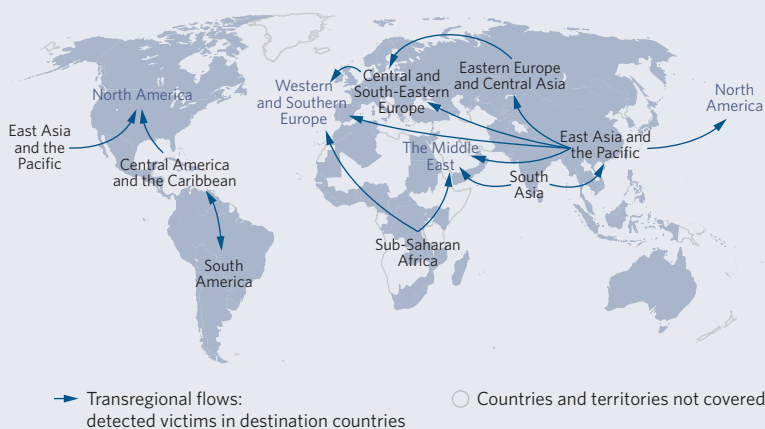


**Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels**

Number of victims of intentional homicide per 100,000 population, 2015 or latest year



Main destinations of transregional trafficking flows and their significant origins, 2012-2014



**While trafficking affects all regions, many transnational flows involve the movement of victims from lower- to higher-income countries. More than a quarter of all trafficking victims detected in 2014 were children. In sub-Saharan Africa and Central America and the Caribbean, the majority of detected victims were children**

Source: The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2017, United Nations