Expert Group Meeting

Strengthening national capacity for the integration of sustainable development principles into development strategies in countries emerging from conflict

Date: 18-19 November, 2009

Location: UNON: Nairobi, Kenya

Summary Report

Background

Progress has been made in developing and applying guidelines[1] to develop sustainable development strategies and integrate sustainable development principles in more medium-term strategies generally, but this tool, somewhat modified, may be particularly useful for countries emerging from conflict. Developing countries transitioning from conflict management to development planning are often familiar with bottom-up approaches to conflict resolution based on social inclusiveness, openness and transparency. Similar approaches are taken when integrating sustainable development principles into development planning processes and these have been embodied into national sustainable development strategies (NSDS). However, recent research has revealed that only two out of ten post-conflict countries in Africa[2] and two out of ten post-conflict countries in Asia and the Pacific[3] are taking an NSDS approach in their comprehensive development frameworks. These post-conflict countries are at varying stages in the development planning process and all have some form of poverty reduction strategy (PRSP) along with other planning frameworks such as UNDP Country Programme Actions Plans, United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks

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[1] DESA/DSD/PC2/BP13. GUIDANCE IN PREPARING ANATIONAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY: MANAGING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE NEW MILLENIUM. 2002

[2] DESA/DSD. Mapping of Sustainable Development Strategies in Countries Emerging from Conflict: Africa. 2009

[3] DESA/DSD. Mapping of Sustainable Development Strategies in Countries Emerging from Conflict: Asia and the Pacific. 2009

(UNDAF), Peace Building Programmes implemented by the United Nations Peace Building Commission, and other UN agencies programs, but they could benefit from taking a more holistic integrated approach afforded by national sustainable development strategies.

Recent research has also pointed to common constraints to implementing national sustainable development strategies in the post conflict countries include poor governance, scarce resources, financial and budgetary limitations, weak institutional capacity and lack of timely and reliable statistics and information. Post-conflict countries are typically characterized by limited implementation capacities.

An expert group meeting was held as part of a larger effort to improve capacities of countries emerging from conflict to integrate sustainable development principles into development strategies and, thereby, to increase the likelihood of sustainable peace. The meeting was one component of a project currently under implementation by DESA entitled "Strengthening National Capacity for the Integration of Sustainable Development Principles into Development Strategies in Countries Emerging from Conflict". Project activities include establishing an "expert advisory group" to guide methodological work and key elements of project implementation, creating a scalable toolkit of appropriate yet flexible methodologies for use by key actors, testing these methodologies, as applicable, according to national circumstances in a number of pilot countries and making them available through a forum for information sharing, and building capacities at the regional level. This expert group meeting contributed to this overall effort, taking primary steps in identifying members for the project Advisory Group.

Objectives

The expert group meeting achieved the following predefined objectives:

1. <u>Review and evaluate experiences and status of methodologies</u> for integrating sustainable development principles in overall development strategies in countries emerging from conflict.
   - Assess the principles of NSDS, and analyze impediments to their implementation;
   - Identify both common and unique challenges to designing and implementing effective sustainable development strategies; and
   - Share success stories and brainstorm solutions for addressing those challenges.

2. Highlight <u>key challenges, their causes and areas of concern</u> related to sustainable development planning.
   - Determine priority issues for improving stability and encouraging peacebuilding in conflict-affected countries (e.g., through improving equal access to natural resources, reversing environmental degradation, rectifying social disparities, strengthening the security sector, building governance capacity, generating sustainable livelihoods);
   - Analyze challenges in transitioning from early recovery to long-term planning; and
   - Examine blockages that hinder sustainable development, the design of development plans, and the implementation of development programs.

3. Identify and assess the <u>critical gaps</u> in the area of NSDS and comprehensive development planning in conflict-affected countries.
   - Assess needs related to the process, content, implementation and monitoring of sustainable development strategies;

- Take stock of relevant guidance, planning tools, and other forms of support to sustainable development programming in conflict-affected countries; and
- Pinpoint gaps in existing capacity.

4. Develop <u>selection criteria</u> of the pilot countries to be considered under the project.
   - Determine common challenges in conflict-affected countries;
   - Identify other important pilot country criteria; and
   - Brainstorm and evaluate initial pilot country candidates.

5. Make <u>recommendations</u> and propose areas to be tackled to achieve the main project objectives of:
   - Increasing capacities to utilize sustainable development principles in policy-making in countries emerging from conflict;
   - Producing methodologies (scalable toolkit) based on NSDS guidelines that explain and illustrate ways to integrate sustainable development principles into national development strategies as part of peacebuilding.
     - ✓ Identify ways to fill identified capacity gaps;
     - ✓ Propose concrete products for the Program; and
     - ✓ Consider the target audience and dissemination approaches for these products.

Program

The meeting took place over two days (18-19 November 2009) at the United Nations Office of Nairobi (UNON). The detailed agenda schedule can be found in Attached Annexes.

Day One of the program focused on:

- o providing background to the experts on the project (see Attached Annexes for presentation by Sami Areikat);
- o providing background on National Sustainable Development Strategies (see Attached Annexes for presentation by Irena Zubcevic);
- o reviewing the background report methodology and the draft paper outline (see Attached Annexes for presentation by Sandra Ruckstuhl, and see Attached Annexes for supplementary handout);
- o identifying and discussing challenges to sustainable development planning in conflict-affected countries and related gaps; and
- o Sharing the experience of the "Human Security and Conflict in Northern Kenya" Project (see Attached Annexes for presentation by the project team).

Day Two of the program focused on:

- o exploring additional challenges and success models in sustainable development planning in conflict-affected countries;
- o discussing two specific case experiences presented by the experts (see Attached Annexes for presentations by B.C. Chikulo and Alice Urusaro Karekezi respectively);
- o identifying tools, mechanisms and capacity development methodologies for more effective integration of sustainable development principles; and
- o Defining criteria for determining pilot countries for testing and refining a toolkit to be developed in the second phase of the project.

In order to channel the discussion toward informing the background paper and components of follow-on activities, the agenda focused on the following topic areas and discussion questions:

A. Review of <u>NSDS principles and associated challenges</u> to sustainable development planning in conflict-affected countries:
    1. *What are the most salient development-related linkages with conflict and security?*
    2. *What makes conflict-effected contexts uniquely difficult in terms of sustainable development programming?*
    3. *What are the common challenges and blockages that hinder the application of NSDS guidelines in conflict-affected contexts?*
    4. *What has worked well in addressing those challenges? Why?*

B. <u>Critical gaps</u> in NSDS guidelines and comprehensive development planning in conflict-affected context:
    1. *What kinds of guidance and tools currently exist that is useful in helping address these considerations and meet these challenges?*
    2. *What kind of guidance and other forms of support for sustainable development planning in conflict-affected contexts are lacking?*
    3. *What are the* technical support *and* knowledge *gaps in our toolboxes? What guidance is missing from our repertoire?*
    4. *How could these gaps be filled to help improve development planning and implementation?*

C. <u>Success models</u> for integrating sustainable development principles in overall development strategies in countries emerging from conflict:
    1. *Considering identified "challenges" and "blockages" discussed earlier, what are some examples of success in addressing those? What where the keys to these successes?*
    2. *What are other options for addressing these blockages?*

3. How can these success stories be translated into models for future application?

D. <u>Tools and mechanisms</u> for more effective integration of sustainable development principles into national development strategies in conflict affected countries:

1. *What existing tools are there to support the implementation of these principles in conflict-affected countries?*
2. *What tools do you find useful? Why?*
3. *What additional tools would help improve planning and development effectiveness?*

E. <u>Strengthening capacities</u> to utilize sustainable development principles in policy-making in conflict-affected countries.

1. *Given all these we know, what are the most urgent lessons with regard to building capacity for sustainable development planning?*
2. *What are important criteria for determining pilot countries where methodologies for improving capacity can be tested?*
3. *What countries might be good examples for piloting? Why?*
4. *What would you like to learn from the case studies?*

F. <u>Priority setting and next steps</u> for the three-year program.

1. *What kind of guidance (toolkit, trainings, etc.) should be prepared to support improvement in these areas? What needs are most urgent?*
2. *What audiences should be targeted?*
3. *What should be the dissemination and engagement strategies?*

Attendance:

The EGM brought together 18 leading experts, within and outside the UN-system, in NSDS and sustainable development planning, in particular at the country level in post conflict development. The list of participants included in attached Annexes. Due to scheduling conflicts, few experts were not able to attend, however many of these individuals expressed an interest in future cooperation.

Messages

The meeting validated the preliminary outline, and emphasized several key areas of importance for development in the paper and the remainder of the work program. These key issues are described in more detail below.

General: There is an implicit and important opportunity to foster peacebuilding in tandem with development, and thus NSDS can serve as an obvious entry point for sustainable conflict resolution in countries emerging from conflict. Sustainable development and resource management activities *are* conflict preventative and help to build peace. Sources, types and consequences of conflicts are idiosyncratic and highly contextual. Therefore, there is no benefit from an instructional approach. Thorough contextual analysis is an important first step in any development intervention, whether it is a humanitarian project or strategy initiative. Because the needs and the socio-political dynamics are different in countries that have experienced conflict, approaches to building sustainable development are different from those of "non-conflict countries". Challenges lie not just in design, but especially in implementation. Implementation of projects and strategies in countries affected by conflict are particularly low. Therefore, addressing *impediments to implementation* will be a primary focus of this three-year initiative.

NSDS and PRSPs: The meeting reinforced the value of the general NSDS principle of building on existing strategy development processes. Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) were frequently referenced in this discussion, and it was reinforced that they can

be considered NSDS as long as they consider the three interdependent dimensions of development (economical, social and environmental pillars), and emphasize a medium to long-term outlook, rather than just urgent and short-term action plans. The World Bank's analytical work on developing and implementing PRSPs in conflict-affected countries was referenced repeatedly.

Conflict causes and risk multipliers: The experts identified and explored several issues that can cause and escalate conflict, including social, cultural and ethnic polarization, the breakdown of social fabric; economic disparity and poverty; and poor natural resource management. In socially divided societies, communities often do not share national aspirations or a national identity. This complicates the development of national strategies. Conflict "risk multipliers" can keep fragile post-conflict countries unstable; this include extreme institutional capacity reduction; climate change and environmental degradation; youth unemployment and child soldiers; poor social services; uneven development and lack of government reach; and lingering IDP/refugee/returnee issues. Furthermore, post-conflict countries often experience a rise of crime and violence, which affects social and economic development. Effective NSDS processes will identify, understand, and address these issues. Conflict insensitive approaches to development can complicate conflict dynamics.

Specific issues and specialized guidance: Challenges in these countries are both in design *and* in implementation. While existing NSDS guidance remains pertinent, low implementation rates and poor development effectiveness indicators are particularly low indicating that countries emerging from conflict require additional specialized guidance. Some "standard" development issues may have to be addressed differently in post-conflict countries (e.g., macroeconomic stabilization and governance and institution building). Pre-assessment is integral to development planning, and should be a first step in implementing conflict-sensitive NSDS. This is particularly important because these countries face unique development challenges such as IDPs, refugees and returnees; DDR and child soldiers; breakdown of security and justice institutions and violence and deep social division. Initiatives that address these issues can be integrated into broader

strategies, targeting stakeholders who are prone to participate in destabilizing activities. An emphasis on manifesting peace dividends in development programming has proven successful in other countries emerging form conflict, as "conflict stakeholders" are converted into "peace stakeholders". Statistics show that many of these countries relapse into violent conflict within a few years demonstrating a cycle in which states move from conflict to fragility and back to conflict. NSDS in countries emerging from conflict should facilitate the interruption of this dynamic.

Country-driven processes and third party actors: Donor agendas can characterize NSDS development in countries emerging from conflict, as institutional capacity for priority setting can be low. Yet NSDS still need to be country driven, and the challenge remains to determine how international actors can support countries in articulating their needs in the midst of change and instability. Capacity within governments should be fostered to promote understanding of global issues, bottom-up priority setting, and donor negotiations. But while the NSDS approach emphasizes nationally-driven processes, there remains a need to collaborate with various regional and international actors. While no universal formula is apparent, it should be discussed to which extent international organizations and third countries should be consulted and involved in the NSDS process, and coherence between a NSDS and international strategies needs to be addressed. Such inter-organizational cooperation also creates added stability amidst ever-changing contextual factors and governments. In this spirit, the Project should harmonize with the initiatives of related agencies. This improves efficiency, maximizes multi-level impacts and promotes knowledge development rather than duplication.

Data issues, decision support and monitoring: Baseline data is typically outdated or non-existent, as data gathering is often not a government priority, and capacity for data collection is often low during and immediately after conflict. Where disparities between regions or ethnicities are a major potential source for conflict, appropriate disaggregation of indicators is important. With regard to data sources, data from international organizations, often collected in relation with specific projects, may be of interest for establishing baselines and NSDS monitoring. GIS technology can be an important source

of information. Building local capabilities in the technicalities of data collection and analysis are important components of overall capacity building for sustainable development.

Weak linkages, multiple levels: Levels of analysis and engagement, and linkages between these, where a common theme of EGM discussions. The group emphasized the need for NSDS in countries emerging from conflict to look beyond the national level to the regional level (e.g., river basins and ecosystems, addressing border conflicts and spillover risks) and to the local level. Linkages between these different levels are equally important in order to ensure harmonization and coherence. Division between traditional and central authorities can grow deeper during conflict; bridging capabilities between these organizational levels can improve stability and long-term development effectiveness. Given the localized development challenges that characterize countries emerging from conflict, there need to be a shift away from the generally applied top-down approach to formulating sustainable development strategies. Top-down approaches are still too common in development planning and do not adequately involve the majority of people who are experiencing the worst circumstances in the wake of violent conflict. This requires developing a local knowledge base with regard to national and global issues, and reciprocally a national-level knowledge base about local concerns. This indicates a kind of paradigm shift, which donors can facilitate through a more pedagogical yet participatory approach.

Fostering participation and maximizing local knowledge: The Project will refine methods for empowering stakeholders in post-conflict countries as they identify and articulate their development needs with the overarching objective of promoting equality and poverty reduction. While social and institutional challenges, such as corruption, can pervade post-conflict contexts, these societies also demonstrate resilience, valuable indigenous knowledge and traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. It is important to understand and capitalize on these. Per existing UNDG guidance on capacity building, approaches should focus on building competencies and improving processes to support sustainable development planning and policy. "Participation" extends beyond

consultations and includes involving local knowledge and capacity. Engaging in-country talent at national and local levels improves technical capabilities and ownership, and benefits the contextual relevance of development interventions.

Clarifying and operationalizing conceptual issues around "conflict": The project will analyze and improve NSDS for "countries emerging from conflict". Some expert group members found this terminology confusing, citing that conflict is a continuum, that the nature of conflict changes over time, and that timelines related to peace agreements and the cessation of violence are messy and unclear. Clarification of these terminological issues came in discussing the criteria for pilot countries, when the experts identified the utility of using "conflict intensity" and quantitative measurements and external partner definitions of "fragility" to determine a category of relevant countries. Finding clarity in these issues is important not only for the underlying methodology of the Project, but it has operational implications as well. Sequencing short and long-term initiatives to rebuild countries emerging form conflict is an ever-present challenge for planners and implementing agencies. NSDS process requires a minimum level of capacity (e.g., government structures and security). Therefore, NSDS processes should generally start after a certain level of recovery has been achieved. The time span between ending of conflict and developing a NSDS is a critical factor in launching the design of a strategy. The more distant the conflict is, the stronger the role of national actors, and the better the data to inform policy.

Diverse project audience: The experts identified a diverse audience for the products of the Project. These range from national level policy makers (e.g., ministers, directors) to grassroots leaders. All of these groups have different needs, including skill-building, policy-relevant technical training, and sensitization. The experts acknowledged the limited scope of the Project, and the target audience should soon be clarified and defined.

Outcomes and the Way Forward

Added value of project: The group discussed the added value of the project, and identified these as: (I) defining the unique characteristics of development contexts in countries emerging from conflict; (ii) providing guidance for building organizational linkages and "stitching" together field components; (iii) supporting capacity development for conflict resolution in tandem with sustainable development processes. The team will continue to develop the project around these conclusions.

Background paper content and development: The group reviewed, validated and refined the outline based on experts' country experiences and good practice knowledge. The background report will define the unique areas of "post-conflict" contexts and review and build on existing literature on "conflict-sensitive approaches to development". The team will follow up with additional key informants (government affiliates and staff of implementing agencies) who will provide additional insight into the paper.

Established Advisory Group: The Advisory Group with the main task of providing feedback on the project outputs was established during the EGM. The Group's members consists mainly of the experts who attended the EGM and other experts from within and outside the UN-system, in NSDS and sustainable development planning, in particular at the country level in post conflict development. Upcoming correspondence will include circulation of this EGM report, and will seek input on the draft background paper when it is ready for review. The Advisory Group's members are listed in Attached Annexes.

Identified criteria for the pilot countries: The meeting identified 13 criteria points for assessing potential pilot countries, of which there will be three in total located in Africa and Asia/Pacific Regions:
- Time elapsed from conflict to recovery
- Different types and nature of conflict
- Existence of institutions and their capacity

- National ownership and official willingness to cooperate

- Indices of fragility

- Countries lapsed back to conflict

- Level of poverty

- Current resources and development

- External involvement

- Regional representation

- Conflict intensity

- Adequate level of recovery

- Potential to coordinate development activities in the country

The objective of piloting will be to test the developed guidelines. Aiming to select the countries by the first half of 2010, the team will investigate countries that meet these criteria, and conduct discussions with country representatives to determine willingness to engage on the project.

End of EGM Report