War and peace: Is our world serious about achieving Sustainable Development Goals by 2030?

Abstract

Only 12 years are left to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. However, the 2018 Global Peace Index revealed that global peacefulness declined for the fourth straight year, with the average level of country peacefulness deteriorating by 0.27% last year. There is an increased political instability worldwide. These three years are also the formative years of the SDG period (2015–2030). Peace, stability, human rights, and effective governance based on the rule of law are important conduits for sustainable development. From the perspective of war and peace, the periods of millennium development goals (2000–2015) and healthcare for all by 2000 were no different. We are residing in a world that is increasingly divided. Some regions enjoy sustained levels of peace, security, and prosperity, whereas others fall into seemingly endless cycles of conflict and violence. Globe is witnessed a steep rise in armed conflicts in recent years and with 62% of those in extreme poverty estimated to be living in countries at risk from high levels of violence by 2030. It is time to ask - Is the world really serious about achieving SDGs? Or will we set yet another ceremonial set of goals for 2050 and allow the global war to continue?

Keywords: Arms, global war, international conflicts, Sustainable Development Goals, United Nations, weapon of mass destruction

Background of the Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are an intergovernmental set of aspirations spearheaded by United Nations (UN) advocating set of 17 goals with 169 targets covering a broad range of sustainable development issues measured through 230 individual indicators.[1] The history of the SDGs can be traced to 1972 when governments met under the auspices of the UN Human and Environment Conference to consider the rights of the human family to a healthy and productive environment. Twenty years later, at the Rio+20 Conference, a resolution, known as “The Future We Want,” was reached by member states. Among the key themes agreed on were poverty eradication, energy, water and sanitation, health, and human settlement. Paragraph 246 of the “Future We Want” outcome document forms the link between the Rio+20 agreement and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs were supposed to be achieved by 2015. A further process was needed to agree and develop development goals from 2015 to 2030. Four dimensions as part of a global vision for sustainable development are inclusive social development, environmental sustainability, inclusive economic development, and peace and security. The MDGs were a first important step and focal point for governments to orient their policies and overseas aid programs to end poverty and improve the lives of poor people. However, the MDGs have been criticized for being too narrow and leaving out many people and their needs. The new SDGs, and the broader sustainability agenda, go much further than the MDGs, addressing the root causes of poverty and the universal need for development that works for all people.[2–7]

The SDGs aim to significantly reduce all forms of violence and work with governments and communities to find lasting solutions to conflict and insecurity. Strengthening the rule of law and promoting human rights are keys to this process, as is reducing the flow of illicit arms and strengthening the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance.

Peace, stability, human rights, and effective governance based on the rule of law are important conduits for sustainable development. We are residing in a world that is increasingly divided. Some regions enjoy sustained levels of peace, security, and prosperity, whereas others fall into seemingly endless cycles of conflict and violence. This is by no means inevitable and must be addressed.

Peace and Security Around the World

High levels of armed violence and insecurity have a destructive impact on a country’s development, affecting economic growth, and often resulting in long-standing grievances among communities that can last for generations. Sexual violence, crime, exploitation, and torture are also prevalent where there is conflict or no rule of law, and countries must take measures to protect those who are most at risk.[8]
During the last 15 years, world has witnessed a rise in terrorist attacks worldwide; the Arab Spring, ongoing conflict in Gaza, the rise of terrorist groups in Iraq, Syria, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and parts of Africa; several mass shootings and incidents of civil unrest in America–Paris–Dhaka–Belgium–Turkey, and most recently, the refugee crises in Europe.

The global trends report detailed that in 2014 alone, 13.9 million people became newly displaced – four times the number of the previous year. Worldwide, there were 19.5 million refugees (up from 16.7 million in 2013), 38.2 million were displaced inside their own countries (up from 33.3 million in 2013), and 1.8 million people were awaiting the outcome of claims for asylum (against 1.2 million in 2013).

Most alarmingly, however, it showed that over half of the world’s refugees are children. The rate of children leaving primary school in conflict-affected countries reached 50% in 2011, which accounts to 28.5 million children, showing the impact of unstable societies on one of the major goals of the post-2015 agenda: education. Syria is the world’s biggest producer of both internally displaced people (7.6 million) and refugees (3.88 million at the end of 2014). Afghanistan (2.59 million) and Somalia (1.1 million) are the next biggest refugee source countries. Almost 9 out of every 10 refugees (86%) are in regions and countries considered economically less developed.

According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, of the seven countries unlikely to meet a single MDG at the end of 2015, all were affected by high levels of conflict and violence in recent years. Unfortunately, the world as a whole has become incrementally less peaceful in the last decade. The Institute of Economics and Peace’s 2018 Global Peace Index Report finds that global peacefulness declined for the fourth straight year, with the average level of country peacefulness deteriorating by 0.27% last year, as a result of growing authoritarianism, unresolved conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa, and increased political instability across the world.

**How Would Have Mahatma Gandhi Reacted to Sustainable Development Goal 2030?**

*Are we serious?*

*Why the goal of “global peace and justice” has been placed at number sixteen and not number one?*

*Will the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, and United States) will stop selling arms to India and Pakistan and let them achieve SDGs?*

*May God bless the world leaders with wisdom!*

*(Prayer) My Lord, help me to tell the truth in front of strong people and not to lie to obtain the applause of the weak ones.*

**Time to Think: Sustainable Development Goal 16-Peace and Justice**

Globe is witnessed a steep rise in armed conflicts in recent years and with 62% of those in extreme poverty estimated to be living in countries at risk from high levels of violence by 2030. Determined efforts are needed to respond to these interlinked challenges. To mitigate the impact of violence and insecurity on development, the 2030 agenda includes peace as a cross-cutting issue as well as SDG 16, 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.”

How to measure advancement toward such a goal and how to decipher universal targets and indicators at the national level is a serious challenge. SDG goal 16 has the highest number of targets (10) and the lowest number of means of implementation (2) making the pursuit of peace, justice, and good governance, destined to remain the stuff of idealistic hopes.

**What We Propose: Goal 16 is the Core of Sustainable Development Goals**

There is no doubt that the inclusion of this goal in the SDGs is significant. However, more importantly, it is to be argued that SDG 16 is the most important goal, without which none of the other goals can be sustained. It should be in the core to make realize other goals. SDG 16 is just as complex as it is significant. It is persuasive to view peace, security, and governance as complex political issues that fall squarely in the purview of governments and security agencies or as issues specific to “conflict zones.”

However, SDG 16 is not just about ending wars and reducing the incidence of violence. In addition to two targets on reducing violence, SDG 16 also has a focus on important drivers of conflict including access to justice, corruption and bribery, transparency, fundamental freedoms, and participatory decision-making.

Government and International Organizations must put Goal 16 as a prerequisite and to the core of SDGs [Figure 1]. There should be unambiguous indicators to reflect peace is prevailing. Means of implementation need to be focused. The spread of weapons of mass destruction poses a threat to the international community. Indiscriminate trade in conventional arms and the use of chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles raises serious humanitarian and security concerns. Sale of arms and innovating on mass destructive weapons need to be reduced. Although primary responsibility for ensuring peace rested at the national level, such responsibility must be accompanied by responsible behavior and international cooperation. Global processes need to be leveraged to facilitate national-level action. This should include building a global partnership that brings together supporters of peaceful, justice, and inclusive
societies, providing context-specific support, and addressing transnational drivers of conflict, such as illicit financial flows and arm flows. All stakeholders need to demonstrate a strong commitment to implementation. Serious efforts toward achieving global peace and justice are not visible. Goal 16 as a prerequisite and the core of all SDGs. SDGs by 2030 cannot be achieved without global peace. The gap between aspirations and intent must be reduced.

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