



The 2030 agenda for sustainable development: a golden opportunity for global violence prevention

Finn Kjaerulf · B. Lee · L. Cohen · P. Donnelly · S. Turner ·
R. Davis · A. Realini · M. Moloney-Kitts · R. Gordon ·
G. Lee · J. Gilligan

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On September 25, 2015, all member states of the United Nations adopted the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. The United Nations General Assembly approved seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 subtargets (United Nations 2015). History has shown that setting visionary goals can help unite leaders and decision-makers with researchers and practitioners worldwide toward an overarching, common cause. The millennium development goals (MDGs) of 2000 incorporated clear indicators to measure progress until the deadline of 2015, and moved the global development

agenda forward with some notable successes. For example, it cut extreme poverty in half, and the successes led to the SDGs.

However, the landmark study *Conflict, Security, and Development* (World Bank 2011) and the recent report *States of Fragility 2015* (OECD 2015) remind us that a great portion of the populations and countries in the world missed the boat. One and a half billion people (21 % of the world's population) who live in “fragile states” with conflict, organized crime, violence, and other insecure situations did not get their fair share of development benefits. This includes countries with: (1) homicide rates higher than 10 (per 100,000 a year), (2) civil wars (number of killed higher than 1000 a year), (3) UN or regional peacebuilding or peacekeeping mandate, and (4) low income levels with particularly weak institutions, conditions that place citizens at high risk for violence and conflict (World Bank 2011).

Trends in global progress show a growing concentration of poverty and weak human development in countries affected by fragility. There is an increasing consensus that reversing these trends will require considerable efforts to decrease violence, to improve access to justice, and to strengthen institutions. Measures to reduce fragility like building state capacity and inclusive institutions, social and economic resilience, human security, peace, justice, and violence prevention were not included in the MDGs. In both fragile and non-fragile states, people across the world experience increased vulnerability to the epidemic of violence due to a number of factors, including (but not limited to) gender and age, disability, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity, and displacement/refugee status and/or statelessness.

These earlier, ‘missed’ factors are among the new themes that have received special attention in the 2030

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F. Kjaerulf (✉)
DIGNITY-Danish Institute Against Torture, Bryggervangen 55,
2100 Copenhagen, Denmark
e-mail: fk@dignityinstitute.dk
URL: <http://www.dignityinstitute.org>

B. Lee · G. Lee
Yale University, 34 Park Street, New Haven, USA

L. Cohen · R. Davis · A. Realini
Prevention Institute, 221 Oak Street, Oakland, CA, USA

P. Donnelly
Public Health Ontario, 480 University Avenue, suite 300,
Toronto, ON, Canada

S. Turner
Prevention of Violence Canada, 2102 Sutherland Road, Victoria,
BC, Canada

M. Moloney-Kitts · R. Gordon
Together for Girls, New York, USA

J. Gilligan
New York University, New York, USA

agenda for sustainable development. This is good news for the enormous number of people around the world living with violence and fear as part of their everyday lives, and for the community of committed violence prevention researchers and practitioners that participate in the World Health Organization's (WHO's) Violence Prevention Alliance (VPA), as well as other researchers, actors, and activists against violence. This is the moment we have strived for. It presents a golden opportunity for creating a strong momentum for global violence prevention—especially for the least-favored, most vulnerable countries.

Which SDGs and targets are relevant for violence prevention?

The new 2030 agenda explicitly recognizes that prevention of violence is required as part of sustainable national development (United Nations 2015):

Goal 16 “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.” Two particularly important subtargets focus on violence reduction:

Target 16.1 “Significantly *reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere.*”

Target 16.2 “End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and *all forms of violence against and torture of children.*”

Subtargets 16.6 and 16.7 clarify that participatory governance is critical to establishment of peaceful societies:

Target 16.6 “Develop effective, accountable, and transparent institutions at all levels.”

Target 16.7 “Ensure responsive inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.”

Goal 5 “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.” This goal also has two subtargets for violence reduction:

Target 5.2 “End *all forms of violence against women and girls* in public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.”

Target 5.3 “Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage, and female mutilation.”

In addition to Goals 5 and 16, there are a number of SDGs that address known risk factors associated with violence, especially Goals 1 (End poverty), 3 (Ensure healthy lives and well-being), 4 (Quality education), 10 (Reduced inequalities), and 11 (Inclusive, safe and resilient cities). The World Development Report states: “Political exclusion and inequality affecting regional, religious, or ethnic groups are associated with higher risks of civil war, while inequality between richer and poorer households is closely associated with higher risks of violent crime” (World Bank 2011).

Preventing violence requires coordinated and comprehensive efforts and resources, alongside SDG indicators—developed elsewhere (Lee et al. 2016)—and active South-North cooperation across sectors and fields to leverage resources and expertise for greater cumulative impact. By acknowledging the link between sustainable development and violence prevention, the SDGs guide us toward a safer and better world.

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