

# CONFLICT AND THE NEW OBJECTIVES OF THE HUMANKIND

*The paper investigates the connection between conflict and sustainable development seen as a target of the international community. The paper aims to demonstrate that the current MDGs and future SDGs will not be achieved if greater emphasis will not be placed on the prevention and management of conflicts. Violent conflicts matter because they are fertile ground for poverty, regional instability, terrorism, diseases and death. Therefore, in order to eradicate all these problems, conflict should be placed on the policy map and measures for preventing, managing and resolving should be foreseen.*

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Following **the Millennium Summit** from 2000, UN has adopted **the Millennium Development Goals** (MDGs), a series of 8 targets to be fulfilled by 2015, aiming at eradicating and solving the following humankind problems: poverty and hungry, lack of education, child mortality, gender inequality, HIV and other diseases, environmental degradation, through a global partnership formed by international organizations and states.

As progress reports show, by the end of 2014, many developing countries were on their way to achieve the MDGs except the conflict affected states. Only 12 of 40 conflict affected states have reached one or two MDGs (like reducing poverty), an improved situation compared to 2011, when none of them reached any MDGs. However, the progress remains a modest one, the conflict affected states severely lagging “behind the rest of the developing countries in terms of meeting the MDGs”. (World Bank 2013, 2)

Given the negative relation between conflict and the possibility of reaching the MDGs, the current essay argues on the importance of considering and therefore treating the **prevention, management and resolution of conflicts** as one of the new Sustainable Development Goals in order to achieve all the other targets formulated by the UN.

In this paper, we understand “conflict” as organized violence which includes: “state actions against other states or against civilians, civil wars, electoral violence between opposing sides, communal clashes based on regional, ethnic, religious or other group identities or competing economic interests, gang-based violence and organized crime and international non-state armed movements with ideological aims.” (World Bank 2011, xv) Since 1945, the number of conflicts registered in the human history reached 331, with 32 ongoing conflicts leaving behind 26 million deaths.(Marshall, 2014) Although the number of inter-states wars, civil wars and coup d’état has fallen since 1990, **the Global Peace Index 2014 Report** considers that the overall trend of the world has seen a slight deterioration of peace since 2007. The conflicts taken place today are affecting the same states repeatedly diminishing their capacity to develop and prosper. According to the World Bank , “90% of the last decade’s civil wars occurred in countries that had already had a civil war in the last 30 years” (World Bank 2011, 2).

Scholars argue the existence of a **connection between economic growth/decline and conflict**. According to this theory, where countries start to develop, wars are becoming less possible because people are more interested in keeping the wellbeing; where development fails, states are at risk of conflict by slowing down the economy and concentrating the precarious resources in the hands of small group generating frustration for the others. Paul Collier, in his masterpiece “The Bottom Billion”, claims that “unless economic growth takes place post-conflict, a nation has a 44% chance of slipping back into violence”. (Mercy Corp 2011, 3) The economists from the World Bank go further advancing the idea of a **“violence trap”**: countries are poor because they are affected by conflict and are dragged into conflict because they are poor. People join violent movement due to the lack of opportunities caused by country instability. (Collier et al 2003, 1) Therefore, the “violence trap” cannot be overcome unless economic situation is improved at a national level, institutions gain

public trust and start functioning properly and resources distribution is becoming more equal. Walton (Helpdesk Research Report 2011) mentions that civil wars often start following growth collapses (the growth rate during the five years prior to conflict averages -0.5%, compared to 2% in peaceful countries) associated to other factors as demographic consistency of the population, external shocks, distribution and exploitation of natural resources. Because of its deep negative relation with development, conflict puts in danger the reach of any MDGs and in future of any Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in conflict affected states with direct effects on their neighbors. The economic cost of violence at global level was in 2013, 9.8 trillion USD. The amount equates to 11.3% of the global GDP or to 1.350 USD per person, a figure which could lift out of poverty the total population living under the 2\$ threshold. (Institute for Economic& Peace 2014, 3)

**From a social and human costs perspective**, conflict affects today almost one-and-a-half billion people which are becoming more exposed to the lack of food, education and health, all of them goals set by UN. According to World Bank, one in four people on the planet lives in areas affected by conflict. People in conflicted-affected areas are “twice as likely to be under-nourished as those in other developing countries”, thrice as likely to be unable to go to school, twice as likely to die before age five and more than “twice as likely to lack clean water” (World Bank 2011, 5). UNHCR appreciate that “at the end of 2013, 51.2 million people were forcibly **displaced** due to violence”. (UNHCR 2013, 2) Developing countries host 86% of the world’s refugees adding an additional burden to their weak economy by providing additional social services. Refugees may compete with local citizens for scarce resources inducing tensions (Gomez& Christensen 2010, 7). **Poverty** represents a challenge to overcome in conflict. It is estimated that the average agriculture production losses reach 12% per year. “War, therefore, by increasing the gap between food production and need, aggravates poverty and hunger, and consequently promotes continued dependence on food aid”. (UNEP 2006, para.3) One of the main problems in conflict affected states is related to **health**. Violence results in millions of people injured, traumatized and exposed to communicable and non-communicable diseases. (Roberts 2012) For instance, polio outbreak in Middle East during Syria conflict after being totally eradicated. (Vargha, 2014) Although getting an **education** is an universal human right, 40 million children from conflict affected states are out of school (War child, “Access to education”, para. 4). Proliferation of attacks on schools (3.600 in 2013 according to Tran 2013 para. 2), lack of personal documents, killing or injuring of teachers and pupils, flee of families, lack of financial support to pursue education, force children to renounce to school.

Conflict affects in a large measure another goal set in MDGs: **gender equality**. During conflict time, woman vulnerability increases opening the path to sexual abuses, force marriage, exploitation, domestic violence and trafficking. (Gomez& Christensen 2010, 12) Conflict has a negative impact on **environment**. Refugee camp can reshape the landscape by excessively use of local resources. “Habitat degradation, reduced access to water points [...], species loss, alteration of the natural food chain, and additional pressure on biodiversity” are other effects that conflict may have over the environment. (UNEP 2006, para.13)

**Conclusion:** Given the economic, social and human costs, as well as the negative impact on health, education, gender equality and environment, the new SDGs should include also the **prevention, management and resolution of conflict** as one of the main targets.

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