The Common African Position on post-2015: implications for peacebuilding

Following the Communique of Ndjamena released on 28 February, the Common African Position (CAP) on post-2015 now includes a pillar on "peace and security" on the basis of their "inextricable link to development". In this blog Sunil Suri of Saferworld and Richard Smith of ACTION for Conflict Transformation reflect on the evolution of the CAP. They highlight a number of important questions that remain, and call for continued dialogue to deepen ownership of the CAP among African countries. In particular, this means addressing any concerns and misperceptions about what the inclusion of peace within the post-2015 framework will mean in reality.

With the Common African Position adopting peace and security as its fifth pillar, the African continent has now added its voice to the growing consensus that in order to achieve sustainable and inclusive development that truly leaves no-one behind, the post-2015 development agenda should give special attention to the 1.5 billion people living in states experiencing or recovering from high levels of violence. This consensus is reflected in several key reports on the post-2015 framework (including the UN Task Team Report, the High-Level Panel Report, the UN Global Compact Report and the My World Survey) and by the statements of a diverse range of member-states and multilateral groupings, including the 28 states of the European Union, numerous Less Developed Countries, 18 G7+ countries and the 30 other states that agreed the Dili Consensus as well as several members of CARICOM.

The end of the beginning

The process of establishing the Common African Position (CAP) on the post-2015 development agenda has been exhaustive – starting well over two years ago in Accra, Ghana in November 2011. The first major milestone on the road to a common position was the 20th African Union (AU) Summit in 2012, which mandated the African Union Commission (AUC) "to identify Africa's priorities for the post 2015 development agenda". Subsequently, the AUC hosted three consultations on the post-2015 development agenda (in Kenya, Senegal and Tunisia). These consultations informed the first draft of the CAP, which was submitted at the 21st AU Summit in May 2013.

However, rather than endorse the document, the Summit resolved that the AUC "should continue to engage Member States" with a view to submitting an updated CAP "for consideration during the next Summit to be held in January 2014".

In parallel, a newly formed High Level Committee (HLC) chaired by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia was established with the purpose of consulting "as deemed necessary, so as to finalize the Africa Common Position". Accordingly, at the 22nd AU Summit in January 2014, a new draft of the CAP was shared among member states. While the CAP was adopted in principle, it was also decided that a new pillar on "peace and security" should be included. This required additional work to finalise the exact language of the new pillar, and at the end of February in N'Djamena, Chad, the Common African Position was finally launched.

Peace and security: from an 'enabler' to a 'pillar'

Peace and security has featured in most discussions on the content of the Common African Position, mainly being described as a critical "enabler of development". A good illustration of this is the

Outcome Document of the regional consultations on the post-2015 development agenda, which identified four key areas of focus for the post-2015 development agenda and an additional set of development enablers (described as "prerequisites" for the post-2015 development agenda) including:

> *Peace and security*: National governments and the international community must be resolute and united in their commitment to prevent the outbreak of violent conflict and support efforts to resolve this conflict through measures that promote and sustain peace and security.

This language was almost identical to that included in the May 2013 draft of the CAP, which again affirmed peace and security as a "development enabler". Similarly, the Outcome Document for the African regional consultative meeting on the sustainable development goals (SDGs) in November 2013 stated that the "achievement of equitable sustainable development requires an enabling international environment, backed by good governance, peace and security" [1]. This understanding of peace and security as an enabler for development was taken significantly further in the recently released CAP, which states "that peace and security is essential for the achievement of the continent's development aspirations" and specifically commits to "addressing the root causes of conflict" and "preventing the outbreak of armed conflicts".

The shift in thinking that has moved peace from being an 'enabler' to a fundamental 'pillar' of the CAP may reflect heightened awareness of the threats that conflict and insecurity pose to Africa's development. Recent developments in South Sudan and the Central African Republic (as well as previous high-profile crises such as that in Mali) have all served to highlight the ongoing vulnerability of African states. The importance of building peace and security is recognised in the African Development Bank's (AfDB) recently released High-Level Panel Report on Fragile States, which notes that "progress on security and justice is usually a precondition for progress in other areas". Another recent AfDB report observed, "more than 200 million Africans live in countries affected by conflict and instability", with "little progress" in these countries on food security, poverty reduction and gender equality. This desire to strengthen the AU's response and ability to address such challenges is apparent in the language in the CAP, which states:

> "We must take measures to prevent the outbreak of armed conflicts by: strengthening…the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), in countries emerging from conflict through effective partnership at regional and continent levels"

Despite this shift there are a number of indications that the debate about if and how to include peace and security remains contentious. Certain African countries and regional groupings have clearly been more in favour of its inclusion than others. For example, the draft Africa regional experts report on the SDGs reveals that the promotion of "peace, security and socio-political stability" was ranked as the highest priority (out of a total of nine) for the Central Africa grouping, but came last out of four for North Africa ("build lasting peace on a transparent basis") and eighth out of ten for West Africa ("ensure good governance, peace and security) – while not featuring at all as priorities for East and Southern Africa [2].

The differing levels of support for the inclusion of peace in the post-2015 agenda amongst African member-states were also on display at the Open Working Group session on peace issues in New York in February. For example, Uganda made an impassioned case for a development agenda that prevents

conflict, while a diverse array of states such as Senegal, Nigeria, Benin (representing West Africa) and Zambia (representing Southern Africa) all emphasised different aspects of the peace agenda. There has undoubtedly been lengthy internal debate leading to the adoption of peace and security as the fifth pillar of the CAP.

Outstanding questions

With the public release of Ndjamena Communique, several questions of importance remain. These include:

1. **Will Africa lobby as one bloc during post-2015 negotiations?** While the 22nd AU Summit Outcome Document called for Africa "to speak with one voice" at the UN General Assembly in September 2014, it cannot be assumed that this will happen – especially on the issue of peace and security, where it is clear that some African member-states are more supportive than others. While unity will be important if the CAP is to effectively influence the global debate, there are aspects of the debate on which African member-states will need to be given space to shape their own priorities. This balancing of national needs, interests and accountability to the collective position of the African Union is crucial for genuine ownership of the post-2015 agenda and will require a sophisticated and sensitive approach from African leaders.

2. **What do African member-states mean by 'peace and security'?** While the CAP specifically commits to "addressing the root causes of conflict" through tackling issues like social inequality and exclusion, inclusive governance, reducing discrimination and encouraging democratic practices – more dialogue is essential to build a common understanding of what these terms signify. In recent events on peace and post-2015 in South Africa, co-hosted by Saferworld, SALO and ACTION, it was clear that greater engagement is necessary to ensure the focus is on addressing the drivers of conflict and not just its symptoms. This entails clear definitions of key concepts and the design of peace and security targets on a range of issues including inequality, human rights, state-citizen relations and external stresses, such as illicit financial flows. Furthermore, there is a risk that other UN member states may resist African understandings of 'peace and security', which emphasise human security, as they may associate 'peace and security' with the role and responsibilities of the UN Security Council. Considering more appropriate language for achieving diplomatic progress on the CAP is therefore a crucial priority.

3. **Does the inclusion of peace and security in the Common African Position mean that the issue is no longer contentious?** By including a pillar on peace and security the Common African Position *has* demonstrated broad support for the issue. However, concern about what could happen if peace and security is included in the post-2015 agenda remains. During the recent events in South Africa, one senior South African official expressed concern that the post-2015 development agenda must "not serve as a pretext for regime change". Suspicions that global policy will be used to justify external interference in domestic affairs cannot be ignored. While such sentiments may appear misplaced, advocates for the inclusion of peace must be aware of and understand the background to these concerns. For example, the anxiety about regime change reflects the perception among some countries that the concept of "Responsibility to Protect" – supported by the South African government – was subsequently

misused in Libya to justify a NATO-led intervention in a sovereign African country. It is imperative to affirm the preventative rather than interventionist nature of what is proposed, and also to clarify that the post-2015 framework is non-binding, so it cannot be used to mandate intervention.

Building a truly Common African Position

The Common African Position provides essential guidance for those working for the inclusion of peace within the post-2015 development agenda. A clear and common articulation of what African member states want from the post-2015 agenda will be welcomed by traditional OECD donors and by emerging powers like Brazil, China and India. Raising awareness among civil society groups of what the CAP contains will be critical to building ownership and understanding of what has been adopted. Efforts to identify and develop an African 'people's position' on post-2015 that can feed into, strengthen and critique the official AU position will also be important. Bringing the declaration of the AU and the voices of Africa's citizens into harmony will strengthen African efforts to shape the priorities of the global debate on the post-2015 development agenda.

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In February, Saferworld, SALO and ACTION co-hosted two days of events in South Africa focusing on the role of peace within the post-2015 development framework.

Ahead of the events, Saferworld, SALO and ACTION along with three other leading South African organisations working on peace issues published a briefing on "Conflict and the post-2015 development agenda: Perspectives from South Africa". These activities were undertaken as part of Saferworld's Rising Powers and post-2015 project. Over the coming months, Saferworld, SALO and ACTION will continue their engagement on peace and the post-2015 framework both in South Africa and at the regional level.

[1] It is worth highlighting that there has been agreement at the highest-levels that the post-2015 development agenda should be "convergent" with the Rio +20 outcomes and as such it is worth examining both processes as they have served to inform one another.

[2] See page 12 for a side-by-side comparison of each region's priorities.