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1. Hypothesis

Goal 16 cannot be achieved without accelerated development impacts in areas such as governance and conflict. Innovation in these areas faces a number of hurdles in relation to the architecture for co-operation, the political-economy of donors, and traditional programming models. **Change is needed, including promoting more effective collaboration between development actors in order to fulfil the targets stipulated in SDG 16 by 2030.**

2. Introduction

Goal 16 is ambitious, and addresses areas that evidence suggests are crucial to economic progress, and human welfare; these are also areas that are fundamental to development sustainability. Increasingly the starkest problem facing aid actors is ‘un-development,’ the successes of human development being undermined by weak governance and consequent crises, violence and conflict. Yet, while the last 30 years have seen more people lifted out of poverty than ever before the same is not true in relation to rates of progress on institutional development. The calculations made for the 2011 World Development Report suggested that it will take 1000 years for Burundi to reach the same level of capability as Singapore. This disequilibrium of improvement, with governance failing to keep pace with human and economic development, means that by some measures roughly 50% of states affected by conflict and fragility are now middle-income.

Disappointing rates of institutional development mean that if we take the Goal at face value it represents an impossible challenge – some might argue that it is made feasible only by adopting arguable indicators. The scale of the challenge should not, however, become an excuse for lack of effort. Instead it is a call for a leap of innovation by governments and the development community. This leap forward can only be achieved with different kinds of relationships on issues such as political will – overcoming problems including isomorphic mimicry and collective action problems. It would need to see more agile and competitive forms of governance support, particularly in regions affected by violence and fragility. Overall governance and peacebuilding programmes will need to perform to levels of impact so far not seen in donor portfolio reviews.
Partnerships and improved working with multiple stakeholders will be central to any innovation. Donors are an important part of the discussion – but cannot deliver change directly. Discussions around architecture and collaboration therefore need to reflect the challenges of strengthening partnerships, while also improving the particular skills needed by each set of actors. This paper is initially intended for GovNet members, yet even within the sub-set of actors that makes up the donor community there is a wide range of approaches, models and priorities – with knock-on effects in terms of demands placed on partners. **This note therefore proposes a process to take stock of existing mechanisms for dialogue and collaboration and to consider options for improved co-operation.**

3. **Are we fit to meet the challenge?**

No single set of stakeholders, including donors can individually support achievement of Goal 16 - despite the very high spending power of some. For example the declining proportion of development finance accounted for by aid coupled to the scale of the challenge puts an onus on effectively leveraging support both through the ‘beyond aid agenda’ and a return to ideas of aid effectiveness. The leap of innovation necessary to achieve Goal 16 is therefore arguably more achievable if actors work collectively rather than separately – collaborating on lessons, evidence and opportunities for mutual support or division of labour.

At present the development communities with an interest in supporting delivery of Goal 16 are fragmented and are organised around varying agendas, despite very constructive efforts (particularly by UNDP) to encourage more joined up conversations. The communities involved (governance, anti-corruption, rule of law, conflict etc); meet within a variety of forums some of which have directly overlapping memberships, others bringing together different parts of the same government and organisational bodies.

Fragmentation can pose problems for focused and co-ordinated effort – it also hampers efforts to shares lessons and build up a credible evidence base, with communities acting unaware of innovations and approaches developed elsewhere. For example GovNet has sponsored new research on innovation in programming, and has engaged with development movements promoting new approaches such as Doing Development Differently and Thinking and Working Politically, but few of these discussions have dealt in depth with problems
of conflict and fragility. Conversations tend to remain siloed and ‘sectoral’ despite the increasing evidence of multi-dimensional problems that cut across traditional boundaries.

Experimentation with new forms of conversation have tended to resonate more strongly with middle-income and developing countries than with traditional donor actors. The Effective Institutions Platform is unusual in acting as a multi-stakeholder platform on governance issues – providing a forum for discussion on innovation across traditional boundaries of donor/partner/civil society. The platform has grown strongly in relation to the middle-income, low-income countries and civil society groups but has stalled in terms of donor membership and support. The platform underlines the challenge of new approaches; the promotion of new models of learning by EIP (through its peer to peer approaches) does not fit with traditional programming frameworks. EIP’s problems highlight the hold of ‘Plan A’ approaches over experimentation: innovation, particularly at scale brings risks, even if the alternative is underperformance on goal 16. EIP is one example of partnerships, but innovation for Goal 16 faces a number of hurdles in relation to architecture for cooperation, the political-economy of donors, and traditional programming models.

4. What would improvement look like?

An important initial principle for change is that new forms of conversation and/or new processes are not the answer in themselves to delivering Goal 16. The central issues are innovation and the acceleration of impact in our partnerships around governance and public sector reform. Process and architecture are therefore relevant in as far as they can stimulate and support innovation – building stronger partnerships for action and bridging gaps in knowledge management. Secondly the challenges of fragmentation play out at multiple levels (such as whole of government approaches, or within individual communities such as governance, and also across the various communities engaged with Goal 16).

Strengthening partnerships for innovation suggests that the international development discussion for delivery of Goal 16 should build on existing conversations and aim to create a safe space across communities in which actors can engage together on innovation. The space for dialogue should seek to address knowledge management (shared lesson learning) and the promotion of creative experimentation in approaches (scaling up principles outlined in the PDIA approach). The key principles for improved collaboration might include:

- looking at the whole problem not our particular symptoms, joining up across agendas
- better collaboration around partner political will and pace of reform, leveraging our influence
- better use of mutual evidence, maximising our knowledge
- keeping each other honest on progress – realistic monitoring that tells a grounded story
- an ability to speak with wider audiences, bringing together stakeholders from developed and developing contexts.

These principles do not necessarily need new structures, and there is value added in the specialist conversations that currently exist, there is also a risk in creating ever more forums and networks that simply complicate further a fragmented discourse. Instead a possible first-step is simply a willingness to take-stock of current avenues for broad conversations and to look at stronger dialogue
between the various forums. This paper suggests a stock-take, perhaps initially centred on the donor community, to enable ideas on approaches to emerge. The process would aim to identify approaches that reflect implementation priorities, avoiding the risk of a policy industry disconnected from the real challenge of implementation. Any stock-take and reform should aim to deliver discussions capable of supporting:

a. Global Monitoring

The indicators currently in discussion for goal 16 are weak, some are based on perception evidence that only touches on narrow aspects of the overall problem (e.g. corruption), and others are methodologically beyond current systems of quantification (e.g. illicit financial flows). The proposed measure for target 16.6 (institutional effectiveness) rests on a hypothesis of good performance (budget out-turn) that can be questioned in terms of actual effectiveness of operation (critics might say that it easily gamed, and difficult to triangulate - due to problems of causality and attribution).

Therefore, over time, development actors will need to determine tools for monitoring and accountability that provide a useful feedback loop on performance and progress. Discussions are already underway on improved measurement and institutional indices – building on the progress made through the World Bank's ISPMS process. In tracking progress towards SDG 16, the global monitoring framework needs to produce one holistic report on progress towards the respective targets – independent of less reliable indicators – so that actors have a reliable guide to inform practice.

b. Review and Reporting

The objective of a review mechanism is to provide mutual accountability among development actors for their commitments to collaborate for delivery of the goal. This includes the political analysis of the monitoring of results in the context of the promises, pledges and commitments made by the member states. Any review mechanism should also feed into the overall SDG review mechanism in the form of the UN HLPF as well as to the overall discussions within the GA by publishing progress reports on Goal 16. An annual joint report will allow the development community to profile achievements, outline challenges, and transparently engage with all stakeholders on the progress to date. This process should enable decision-makers and relevant stakeholders to gain a clearer picture on the efforts needed to reach the targets, thus influencing the political priorities and implementation efforts of UN member states.

c. Supporting a leap of innovation

Unlike other SDG communities the Goal 16 actors have no proven methodologies to deliver their targets – the problems involved cannot be solved by building infrastructure or increasing provision of a particular service. Goal 16 requires significant improvements in creative experimentation and collective lesson learning and knowledge management. Governance and fragility already stimulate significant investment in research and evaluation, which could be better assessed, synthesised and shared.

The promotion of collective innovation is a collaborative venture and requires safe spaces for debate on approaches, and agreement of joint-action and division of labour. Supporting a leap of
innovation therefore requires effective analysis of approaches, and an ability to forge improved partnerships.

d. Independent and Multi-Stakeholder Platforms

Having for the first time adopted an agenda which is based on broad-based ownership by the member states, civil society and the private sector as a result of a highly participatory process, the review of the SDG needs to take different stakeholders into account. These stakeholders include other government departments in developed states, developing countries, and civil society. Different approaches can deliver improved multi-stakeholder collaboration, through large shared forums, or improved dialogue between forums. The Goal 16 community should enter into such conversations collectively – bridging existing sectoral divides in addition to traditional boundaries of donor, partner and civil society. The idea of multi-stakeholder conversations does not necessarily preclude continuing groups of communities (such as GovNet), but rather poses a challenge for how different communities interact. Such multi-stakeholder discussions offer a level of participation from CSOs and PSOs, which cannot be achieved through an intergovernmental body alone.

e. Financing of Implementation

Recent studies are coming to the conclusion that the implementation of the SDGs will need additional effort in terms of investment. In the first instance, implementation and the resource allocation for it, is the responsibility of the individual nation state. As agreed in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, domestically mobilized resources should be the main channel, supplemented by transfers from the international level (e.g. ODA) and investments from the private sector. Global initiatives to support raising the necessary funds should be welcomed. Financial commitments should be targeting the most in danger of being left behind, relying on the results of the monitoring and reviews. Although in-line with the political commitments made within the global framework, any such initiative does not need to be anchored within a global structure, but should be developed on a needs basis.

Options for Next Steps:

An immediate question for any stock-take is whether to start the process as a big-tent conversation, or initially focus on defining the needs and challenges of particular communities. This paper recognises that either approach is possible, however as a starting point initial conversations within communities may be practically more feasible, converging into a broader discussion over a set timeframe.

For GovNet members, in considering the particular discussion needs of the donor part of the development community, the agencies involved might explore these issues through any or all of the following approaches. These options should probably start as actions by donors, using internal policy resources and independent experts:

1. Donor Working Group – A small group of donors could meet to brainstorm on needs and options and mutually develop a proposal for circulation to the wider community. Such a group should operate with secretariat support offered by its own members.
2. Hire a consultant to review options – An independent consultant/s could be used to review current approaches, assess options and lay out ideas on effective collaboration for innovation around Goal 16.

3. Joint conference – A big-tent discussion could be held, either separately as a donor community or with partner countries to discuss the future architecture for collaboration.

Ultimately improved collaboration across the various parts of the existing discussions may prove to be the most effective way forward. An opportunity to discuss forms of co-operation and share lesson-learning is, however, itself a positive step towards the innovation needed to delivery Goal 16. Overall the conversation on what will be needed to meet the challenge is well-worthwhile as we look ahead to substance of agenda 2030.