

Guidelines for Crisis and the MDGs (compliment to the Addendum to the MDG Guidance Note on Country Reporting on MDGs)

Crisis and MDGs: Assessment of impact of violent conflict, fragility and disasters on the achievement of the MDGs

Introduction

Violent conflict, fragile environments and disasters caused by vulnerability to natural hazards can eradicate development gains overnight and can present a major impediment to the achievement of the MDGs. Among countries with the lowest levels of human development, more than half are in violent conflict, or emerging from it. Similarly, the poorest populations are the most vulnerable to disasters as they are often left to settle on the riskiest locations and have least access to measures of prevention, mitigation and preparedness.

In conflict-ridden countries, capacity at both the level of the individual and institutions, has often been depleted, the effectiveness of the state compromised and community resilience severely challenged, opening up opportunities for predatory behavior, corruption and crime. As the rule of law disintegrates and security and justice institutions fail, human rights are often violated and armed violence fills the void. This leads to destruction of lives, property and infrastructure, closing of schools and clinics, displacement of people from their homes and blocking access to basic social services, thereby perpetuating the cycle of violence and poverty. Whilst violent conflict and fragility can undermine development, persistent poverty and unequal distribution of development benefits can also be seen among its underlying causes. Some conflict and crisis-affected countries have, despite disparate challenges, been able to overcome these obstacles and managed to restore the rule of law and governance, and to prevent, manage, and transform violent conflicts peacefully. Understanding how and why is clearly critical.

Disasters due to vulnerability to natural hazards exact an enormous toll not only on lives, but also on livelihoods, homes, basic social services and community infrastructure. These losses materially affect the prospects of disaster-prone countries of achieving the MDGs. Globally, it has been documented that people furthest down the economic ladder live disproportionately in the most drought prone areas¹, that the overwhelming majority of people affected by climate-related disasters live in developing countries², and that disaster-related deaths occur disproportionately in low and medium human development countries³.

Without disaster risk reduction measures, the rush for growth can trigger haphazard urban development that increases the risk of large-scale fatalities during an earthquake. Trends such as increasing human settlement and investment in high-risk coastal areas are placing greater numbers of people and economic assets in danger of being affected by cyclones, storm surges and flooding, especially given the prospect of climate change. Further, there is increasing awareness of the existence of geographically overlapping disasters and conflicts and the impact that these can have on already highly vulnerable populations. According to the Overseas

¹ Source: CIESIN, Columbia University

² Source: Human Development Report, *Fighting Climate Change: Human Solidarity in a Divided World*, 2007/08, UNDP

³ Source: *Reducing Disaster Risk: A Challenge for Development*, 2004, UNDP

Development Institute/Humanitarian Policy Group (ODI/HPG), between 1999 and 2004 at least 140 disasters have taken place in contexts also experiencing conflict⁴.

Conflicts and violence constitute a critical factor of vulnerability to disaster losses, as they erode national capacities to manage existing risks. Conversely, the recurrence of disasters is likely to weaken the capacity of a given society to manage tensions effectively. Population growth, urbanization and poorly managed economic development increase exposure to natural hazards. In addition, climate change will generate new hazard patterns, which in turn will generate additional risks to development.

Purpose & Rationale

This note follows the UNDG Addendum on 2nd Guidance Note on Country Reporting on MDGs and aims to provide guidance to [Member States/UN system] to enable them to undertake an assessment of the impact of crisis, i.e. violent conflict, fragility and disaster, on MDG achievement, as well as on in-country response capacities and response strategies. The MDG country reports are important both from an advocacy perspective, but also to ensure the 2010 MDG Review Process is properly grounded and cognizant of the impact of crisis on the MDGs. Because clarity and simplicity are important in this endeavor, country reports should not exceed 20 pages, and should be equipped in large part by existing data (including the HDI), allowing for a crisis lens to be overlaid on the progress of MDG achievement. [Make reference to structure of report contained in Addendum on 2nd Guidance Note.]

Quantifying the impact of conflict and disaster on the achievement of MDGs has not been systematically undertaken. Only rudimentary correlations are known and a more thorough analysis – concluded at the country level – will lead to a better understanding of the relationship, for instance, between the outbreak of conflict and poverty ‘spikes’ or dysfunctional institutions, between the patterns in fragile or post-conflict societies and their impact on the achievement of the MDGs, between the contribution of disaster reduction measures to the MDGs, or between the conflict-disaster nexus and its impact on the MDGs.

Guidance

Below is a step by step approach to undertake the assessment that i) briefly takes stock of the dynamics of conflict, fragility and disaster in a given country; ii) assesses the impact of violent conflict, fragility and disaster on the MDGs; and iii) analyses the existing institutional and social response capacity. [NB: Results from the analysis which may not fit well within the MDG report could still be used to inform the acceleration strategy for MDG achievement.]

Step 1: Understand the Crisis Dynamics

Based principally on a quick desk review of existing quantitative and qualitative data, develop a broad profile of the crisis dynamics in the country in order to understand some of the chief crisis-specific impediments to MDG achievement. This undertaking would include: identifying the main actors, their relationships, victims and perpetrators; the status of institutions responsible for justice, security and civil protection; the instruments of violence; the primary drivers of

⁴ ‘Natural Disasters and Complex Emergencies’ Margie Buchanan-Smith and Ian Christoplos. <http://www.odihpn.org/report>

conflict and disaster, and risk factors (including socio-economic inequality and discrimination) and the context-specific ‘exacerbating factors’. [Reference to inequality analysis – see step 2 below.]

The distribution of conflict/violence and disaster is often highly uneven within a given country as is progress on the MDGs. For example, at the national level, many countries may be making good progress in achieving MDGs 1-4, however, in urban slum areas or pastoral communities the picture often looks very different with, for example, few residents achieving primary education. The same may be true in areas dominated by ethnic or religious minorities. Accordingly, mapping the regional distribution of crisis and MDG achievement will also be an important task.

Regarding conflict, it will also be important to understand ‘non-traditional’ conflict scenarios, for example, situations of contested political transition processes, since these are likely to have a significant impact on the achievement of MDGs. Executive paralysis, the development of shadow economies and polarisation of institutions and communities can continue to impact dramatically on the regional distribution of MDG achievement in cases in which violent conflict is not present or dormant. A basic understanding of the political economy of conflict in such situations will be an equally important task.

Disasters occur when vulnerable societies or communities are exposed to potentially hazardous events (such as extremes of rainfall, temperature or wind speed or tectonic movements), and when people are unable to absorb the impact or recover from the hazardous impact. While it is commonplace to talk about natural disasters, vulnerability is conditioned by human activities. Reducing the number and effects of disasters means tackling the development challenges that lead to human vulnerabilities that prefigure disaster. The accumulation of disaster risk and the unequal distribution of disaster impacts prompt a questioning of the development paths that have been taken by countries more or less at risk from disaster. Disasters destroy development gains, but development processes themselves play a role in driving disaster risk. It will be important to further examine these dynamics between disasters and development.

Lastly, it will be crucial to - wherever possible - examine the causal linkages between conflict and disaster and the impact of this nexus on the MDGs. Conflicts and violence constitute erode national capacities to manage existing risks. Conversely, the recurrence of disasters is likely to weaken the capacity of a given society to manage tensions effectively. Unsustainable development in the form of population growth, urbanization and poorly managed economic development increase exposure to natural hazards.

Step 2: Impact Analysis of violent conflict, fragility and disaster on MDGs and Development

The MDGs direct development planning towards priority goals. Each of these goals will interact with crisis risk. On the surface, these goals will contribute to a reduction of human vulnerability to conflict and disaster. But it is the processes undertaken in meeting each goal that will determine to what extent risk of conflict and disaster is reduced. This implies a two-way relationship between the kind of development planning that can lead to the achievement of the MDGs and the development processes that are currently associated with an accumulation of crisis risk. Unless crisis risk considerations are factored into all development related to the MDGs, efforts to increase social and economic development might inadvertently increase risk of

conflict and disaster. At the same time, the realisation of existing (let alone future) levels of risk will slow down and undermine efforts to achieve the MDGs. It will be important to examine this two-way relationship.

It is widely recognized that conflict, fragility and disaster can increase poverty by creating, inter alia, displacement, deaths, gender based violence and unemployment. Soon thereafter, children are denied education and women denied maternal health care as resources are diverted to crisis-related expenses and key infrastructure is destroyed. Without a basic level of security and protection of rights, citizens cannot get involved in sustainable economic activities. For example, violence against women impacts not only on MDG 3 (gender equality and empowerment of women) but also has a negative impact on MDG 1 which includes food security. Better understanding this impact is the focus of the second step which should identify the major channels through which conflict and fragility are impacting upon MDG achievement, as well as in economic and broader developmental terms. The economic impact on GDP and the wider development impact is important because armed violence can burden the state with an unacceptable cost; resources that could have otherwise been spent on education or healthcare.

In undertaking an impact analysis it will also be useful to draw upon any ‘Trend and Inequality Analysis (see page 4 of Appendix to 2nd Guidance Note) that may have been undertaken as part of MDG reporting. Where a trend analysis of MDG achievement has already been undertaken, this could be usefully cross-referenced with a trend analysis of conflict and disaster, utilizing conflict, crime and disaster indicators (e.g. direct conflict/disaster deaths and homicide rates – assuming such reliable data exists)

Another important aspect will be to measure the impact of limited resilience of societies because of, for example, civil wars or the absence of mechanisms for reconciliation in post-conflict societies, on the sustainable achievement of MDGs. Very often, these ‘soft’ factors are not being taken into account when measuring the general capacities for development of a society, even though they have a significant impact not only on peace and security but also on general development parameters in many post-conflict societies.

Similarly, recognizing the enduring impact of conflict, fragility and disaster on institutional capacities is essential for assessing the impact of crisis on the MDGs. In many cases, crisis may destroy the very institutional integrity required to build a country’s capabilities to meet the MDGs, such as the education system. Furthermore, conflict and disaster may weaken the ownership of the development process and the ability of national partners and states to mobilize domestic resources for development purposes and organize development activities. In other situations quantitative progress may be made towards MDGs through external or donor inputs. For example, in certain humanitarian emergencies baseline indicators on health have risen for IDP populations.

It is readily acknowledged that in many states affected by violent conflict, fragility and/or disaster, official data is weak or even non-existent. The impact analysis should, therefore, draw heavily on high-caliber qualitative material that can be used as an analytical and interpretative tool; sources might include UNCT programme activity reports and desk analysis, perception surveys and, where relevant media material.

Step 3: Determine existing response capacities

This step should look at the institutional and human resource capacity in both the government as well as civil society to mediate and transform violent conflict, to prevent, mitigate and respond to disaster, and to recover from crisis and move towards long-term development. This includes the capacity to engage in government-civil society relations, to ensure access to justice, to provide security and to increase resilience. In particular it should analyze how the bottle-necks to development (outlined in the impact analysis) have been overcome, or might be overcome with specific changes.

More specifically, the assessment should look at the ability of national and local institutions to identify obstacles to deliver services to populations affected by conflict and disasters, to develop appropriate strategies and action plans, and to reach crisis-affected populations. It will also be important to assess capacities to mediate tensions that may arise from competing demands for limited resources and services. Similarly, the assessment should look at existing peace building and disaster reduction mechanisms (e.g. local level crisis management structures) and how these have an impact on MDG achievement.

In many contexts, delivery of basic services and public goods underpinning progress towards the MDGs may not be channeled through government institutions. The detailing of response capacities should also extend to a qualitative analysis of how equipped civil society is to respond to these challenges; and how resilient communities themselves are to crisis. Finally, the analysis needs to identify which programmatic interventions have worked (or not) in which particular situations in the specific country context and why.