

Editorial

For the past year, the world's policy makers and civil society have focused on two ambitious multilateral compacts – the climate change accord reached last December in Paris and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development approved last September at the United Nations General Assembly. Both of these agreements are critical to going from the world we have to the world we want.

The investment of so much human and capital resources in these historic efforts is essential. But at the same time, there is a very real risk that attention will be diverted from an equally pressing issue – the necessity of confronting the nexus of poverty, violence and fragility. Even the most well-meaning advocates can lose sight of the persistent vulnerabilities created by weak institutions, political violence, extremism and poverty in countries and regions prone to fragility, violence and conflict.

The central truth is that, if the challenges faced by these countries are not met, progress on combating climate change and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals will be stalled and millions of people will remain mired in poverty and conflict, the migration crisis will not be resolved, and violent extremism will continue to increase.

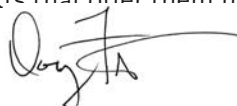
Figures from the new OECD report, *States of Fragility 2016: Understanding Violence*, tell the story. The data show that 2014 was the second-worst year for fatalities since the end of the Cold War; 2015 was the third worst. Conflict-related deaths totalled 167 000 in 2015, with 55 000 of those in the Syrian Arab Republic.

As anyone who follows the news from these regions knows, the most vulnerable people are civilians who live in weak states and those carrying out the violence are most likely to be militias of one stripe or another.

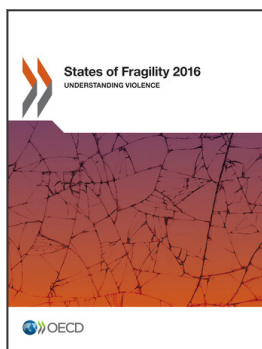
Breaking this deadly cycle requires nothing less than rethinking development assistance. What does that mean? It means developing a new, multidimensional model to measure and monitor fragility. The goal is to understand the forces behind the conflicts and poverty, from the rise of urban militias to widespread corruption. Only by analysing what is broken will we know how to fix it. And it means targeting development finance in fragile contexts and conflict zones across all sectors to fill gaps and concentrate efforts.

Only when policy makers and their partners in civil society and the private sector fully understand the risks will they be able to co-ordinate their efforts to reduce the gravest dangers and provide vital hope for populations who are at the biggest risk of being left behind.

Building a sustainable planet, from expanding education and closing the gap between the rich and poor to reducing the impact of climate change, is a vital goal. But it will not be accomplished unless equal attention is paid to the plight of people trapped in seeming intractable conflicts and fragile contexts that offer them no hope of a better life.



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