



ASIA PACIFIC ALLIANCE FOR DISASTER MANAGEMENT SRI LANKA (A-PAD SL)

Prevention in Action- Global Forum 2021: Development Pathways for Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding.

Session 6- Broadening the Partnership for Prevention and Peacebuilding: The Role of the Private Sector in Peacebuilding

Background: Preventing Conflicts and Peacebuilding

The 16th Sustainable Development Goal aims to foster peaceful and just societies. The world has a long way to go in achieving this goal by 2030 with nearly two billion people living in countries affected by conflicts and fragile contexts steeped in violence. The COVID-19 pandemic threatens to exacerbate and worsen conflict from 2021 onwards. The world has to deal with unemployment, increased crime rates, citizen dissatisfaction, all of which threaten to destabilize the political stability and peace of nations. In such a context, deliberation on peace-building and conflict prevention is imperative.

The Prevention in Action Global Forum is a platform organized by the UNDP aimed at gathering peace-builders, policymakers, civil society, academics, experts across governments and in think tanks to share knowledge on best practices and lessons learned on conflict prevention and peacebuilding. The forum encourages the promulgation of innovative solutions on how nations can best prevent conflicts and secure conditions of peace through the exploration of partnerships for prevention.

The 6th Session of the Prevention in Action Global Forum considered partnerships for prevention specifically focusing on the role of the private sector in peace-building. The following was the schedule of the session with the exception of Carole Kariuki Karuga, CEO of Kenya Private Sector Alliance who was unable to attend the session.

Opening reflections-

Luis Felipe López-Calva, Assistant Administrator and Regional Director for Latin America, UNDP

Participants:

Lidet Tadesse Shiferaw, Policy Officer Security and Resilience Programme, European Centre for Development Policy Management

Carole Kariuki Karuga, CEO, Kenya Private Sector Alliance (KEPSA)

Firzan Hashim, Country Director, Asia Pacific Alliance for Disaster Management

Moderator-

Joseph D’Cruz, Special Advisor for Strategic Planning & Innovation to the Administrator, UNDP

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Brief: Session 6- Broadening the partnership for prevention and peacebuilding: The role of the private sector.

Luis Felipe López-Calva, Assistant Administrator and Regional Director for Latin America, UNDP:

The session commenced with Mr Luis Felipe López-Calva stressing the need for effective governance and a robust rule of law to sustain peace and stable economic conditions. Certain conditions need to be created to enable the private sector to flourish and one of those would be the strengthening of the rule of law. Such a scenario allows for the full exercise of human rights and allows for sustainable development. There is a need for the construction of a development model that involves responsible production and consumption by the private sector, along with the inclusion of a human rights based approach to practices within private sector companies. An example of this would be COVID-19 rapid self-assessment tests that consider how human rights have been upheld and impacted through business operations. This would promote sustainable development at a micro and local level by incorporating it within the private sector. The UNDP and civil society organizations can educate the private sector on international agreements and human rights conventions.

The private sector can introduce initiatives that contribute towards sustainable development at the micro-level. A Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) is a novel initiative that allows firms to gauge the financial and living conditions of their employees. This can provide a useful indicator for companies to then set standards and goals to work towards the reduction of the MPI of their own employees.

Lidet Tadesse Shiferaw, Policy Officer Security and Resilience Programme, European Centre for Development Policy Management:

Lidet Tadesse Shiferaw separated her discussion into two stages: conflict prevention and sustaining peace post conflict. The private sector can be involved in conflict prevention through peace campaigns, specifically in the form of financing peace initiatives. In the post conflict stage, the primary role of the private sector would be to kickstart the economy, rebuild infrastructure and service delivery.

Ms.Shiferaw mentioned that peace-builders should not take private sector engagement for granted as in some contexts private sector engagement may not be constructive. In fact, she noticed that there is a lacuna in the literature on peace-building from the perspective of someone working within the private sector. She highlighted the importance of conducting research on the point of view of the private sector: what do their companies gain from peace-building initiatives?

According to Ms Shiferaw, there is no good recipe on how to engage the private sector in a positive manner as it is quite contextual. In most cases, one would expect the private sector to be involved in creating conditions of peace and revenue generation for the government. The least that can be done by peace-builders and the government is to ensure that no additional harm is caused by the private sector and that they operate in a conflict sensitive manner.

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Firzan Hashim, Country Director, Asia Pacific Alliance for Disaster Management

Mr Firzan Hashim emphasized that, though the private sector can play a remarkable role, the primary responsibility of peace-building lies with the government. The strength of the private sector is that it is well-integrated into society and allows for local peace-building initiatives. Through platforms such as A-PAD and the Connecting Business initiative, the government can collaborate with the private sector to effectively respond to a crisis.

The private sector can access resources or geographical areas where the government, UN or INGOs may have a limited capacity to do so. Mr Hashim mentioned that this is precisely the manner in which the private sector stepped in during the 2019 Easter attacks. A church in Batticaloa was bombed and there was no way in which the humanitarian sector could access them and provide them with aid. A large supermarket chain used A-PAD as a platform to connect with the UN, to provide food, non-food and pharmaceutical items to be delivered to the homes of affected families. Along with this, HSBC worked with A-PAD to provide long term support ranging from financial to psycho-social support to families affected by the Easter attacks.

The private sector is also a neutral entity removed from various ethnic and religious tensions, especially in the context of Sri Lanka. Mr Hashim stressed the need for conflict sensitive business practices and the institutionalization of peace-building in the same way that DRR has been embedded into their practices. Since, the private sector is a massive generator of employment and revenue for the government, it holds several of the youth of the nation. This is a ripe opportunity to educate these young people through widespread institutionalized peace-building initiatives.

Joseph D’Cruz, Special Advisor for Strategic Planning & Innovation to the Administrator, UNDP

Mr Joseph D’Cruz wrapped up the discussion by recognizing that the private sector has a tremendous amount of potential to positively impact peace-building and conflict prevention in countries. The private sector possesses the resources, the capacity, local knowledge and infrastructure that the government and peace-builders can capitalize on. In order to support the private sector, Mr D’Cruz reminded us of the important of creating a context and environment in which the private sector can act in a beneficial manner one of these would be through good governance. It is important for the government to not only support the private sector but in some cases constrain its actions when it steps out of bounds and instigates conflict instead of mitigating it. The role of the UNDP and civil societies such as A-PAD is to provide platforms that would allow individuals in the private sector to work together with the government in a way that is safe and fruitful.

Points to Consider:

- Encourage practices within the private sector that promote sustainable development such as the inclusion of a Multidimensional Poverty Index.
- Urge the private sector to develop conflict sensitive practices.

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- Institutionalize peace-building activities into the private sector: peace-building could be a necessary aspect of corporate social responsibility.
- Develop mechanisms for peace-builders, the government and the civil society to assess whether a situation calls for private sector engagement as in some contexts private sector engagement may cause more harm than good.

Pictures:

