IMPLEMENTING THE NEW DEAL FOR FRAGILE STATES

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While the views presented in this paper are our own, we express our gratitude to those members of g7+ governments, donors, and civil society who participated in the interviews and those who subsequently provided comments on the draft report.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It has been nearly three years since the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States (“the New Deal”) was endorsed at the Fourth High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan in 2011. Given the minimal progress of fragile states in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and that conflict and fragility are part of the deliberations on the post-2015 global development agenda, it is appropriate to assess New Deal implementation to date and see what early lessons can be learned. This review is intended to provide insights on current efforts and provoke thought and discussion on how implementation could be improved.

Since the New Deal was endorsed in Busan, a group of fragile states known as the g7+ has emerged to champion support for fragile states. The group started in 2010 with seven members but by May, 2014, its membership spanned 20 countries from four continents. The g7+ represents the first time a genuine constituency of fragile states has begun to engage with one other and with the international community about the causes of fragility and how to address it. Despite the modest progress that has been made and the enthusiasm of New Deal focal points among donors, civil society, and g7+ pilot countries, implementation of the New Deal to date is characterized by unmet conditions, unrealistic expectations about timeframes, and a lack of sustained dialogue about the causes of conflict and fragility. Overall, the Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals (PSGs) are being adopted into national development plans (Figure 1), but donors and civil society have concerns about the g7+ pilot countries’ commitment to use these goals as the basis for an inclusive and sustained dialogue about the causes of conflict and fragility. Conversely, although some elements of the TRUST component (Figure 1) are being implemented, g7+ pilot country governments have concerns about donors’ commitments to share risk and increase the use of country systems. Progress has been made in the implementation of the FOCUS elements (Figure 1), in terms of the number of fragility assessments conducted and compacts or mutual accountability frameworks established, but concern exists at the global level that there has been an overemphasis on the technical exercises and insufficient effort put toward political dialogue at the country level. The effort put into technical processes should not overshadow sustained political dialogue, and the tendency to rely on conditionality as the basis for New Deal partnership should be consciously avoided.

Greater investment should be made in rolling out the New Deal to reduce the amount of confusion surrounding it at the country level. This would perhaps best be accomplished by building the capacity within the differ-
ent stakeholder groups, and especially by bolstering dedicated staffing for the New Deal. Donors and the g7+ should increase their domestic advocacy and educate stakeholders about the expectations inherent to New Deal participation, the potential risk-benefit tradeoffs, and the underlying assumptions about their willingness to do things differently. A combination of fewer conditions, increased investment, more inclusive political dialogue, and better domestic advocacy could render the New Deal a transformative approach to addressing the challenges and opportunities that exist in fragile and conflict-affected states.

This paper is an independent assessment of New Deal implementation. It is based on a review of New Deal documentation and interviews with focal points in g7+ pilot countries, lead donor agencies, and civil society. The interviews were conducted during April, May, and June 2014. This review focuses on the original seven pilot countries that volunteered to implement the New Deal: Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Liberia, South Sudan, Sierra Leone and Timor Leste. The review also includes Somalia, given that a compact was developed there in 2013.

COMPONENTS OF THE NEW DEAL

Building on the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, the 2007 Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations, the 2010 Dili Declaration, and the 2011 Monrovia Roadmap, the New Deal was born out of the recognition that development efforts were not sufficiently addressing the root causes of fragility.

Fragile and conflict-affected states gained a voice in how development assistance should be delivered with the formation of the g7+, a voluntary coalition of now 20 developing countries that are in various stages of recovering from conflict and fragility. In 2010, representatives of the g7+ and bilateral and multilateral donor partners, known collectively as the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding, agreed on a set of PSGs and thus laid the foundation for the New Deal that was formally agreed to in 2011. Civil society was brought into the dialogue as “the third partner” in 2012, but has struggled to obtain the same roles and decision-making power as the other members.

The New Deal is predicated on participating countries adopting the five PSGs:

1. Fostering inclusive politics
2. Establishing security
3. Increasing access to justice
4. Generating employment and improving livelihoods
5. Managing revenue and delivering services

These goals are considered the foundation for making progress on the MDGs and for building resilience in fragile and conflict-affected states, as well as the programmatic areas from which g7+ countries and donors are expected to determine priorities. An interim list of global indicators for the PSGs was put forth in April 2013 to be selectively piloted at the country level; however there has been no use of these indicators to date.
The more action-oriented steps of implementing the New Deal fall under the **FOCUS** component and include: conducting a **Fragility assessment**, creating **One vision and plan**, establishing a **Compact**, **Using the PSG’s to monitor progress**, and **Supporting political dialogue and leadership**. The systematic assessment of the causes of a country’s fragility at the beginning of New Deal implementation is intended to bring together relevant stakeholders—political leaders, civil society, private sector, academia, and donors. Based on the findings of the fragility assessment, one national vision and plan is intended to address the short, medium, and long-term priorities for peacebuilding and statebuilding. The plan, meant to be a living document, should be reviewed at least annually and adjusted to maintain relevancy and drive the resiliency effort. The compact is intended to be an agreement between the government, civil society, and donors on how the groups will work together to accomplish a limited number of key priorities from the plan. It details how and when aid should be delivered and is intended to improve coordination, harmonization, and alignment.

The third component of the New Deal, **TRUST**, prioritizes delivering visible results quickly and thereby fostering confidence between citizens, the state, and international partners. Donors acknowledged that the risk of not engaging fragile states outweighed the risk of engagement and pledged to reduce aid volatility, increase predictability, and improve the speed and flexibility of aid delivery. The percentage of aid delivered through country systems would increase and a proportion of the funds would be used for capacity development. Recipient governments committed to reform, including strengthening their public financial management systems and
transparency throughout the process. Building fiduciary and administrative capacity within country institutions with the help of donors was to be a priority for partner countries.

FINDINGS

Implementation Status of the New Deal Components

The Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals. The review found that implementation of the PSGs varies by g7+ pilot country. Each country faces a different type and level of fragility, and some countries are addressing these issues under other existing frameworks. Integration of the PSGs into existing plans and frameworks has in some cases proven to be contentious at the country level because some stakeholders believe that there has been a proliferation of frameworks and indicators that countries (g7+ governments and donors) are expected to incorporate. No country has stepped forward yet to selectively pilot the interim PSG indicators; therefore, they are not yet serving as a coherent measure of overall country progress and trends on the PSGs.

Donors and civil society organizations (CSOs) have a very different view from the g7+ pilot countries about the implementation status of the PSGs. The pilot countries generally spoke about the PSGs in terms of the extent to which they have been successfully incorporated into their national plans. Donors and CSOs were of the view that the PSGs are intended to be the basis of an ongoing dialogue—both within g7+ countries and between g7+ countries and donors—that has not occurred as expected across the pilot countries. The absence of significant dialogue has led partners to doubt government commitment to the New Deal in several countries. This doubt is reinforced by perceptions that civil society is not accepted as a full partner in the New Deal and has not been meaningfully engaged on the PSGs and causes of fragility.

Thus, the g7+ pilot countries believe that the PSG issue has been addressed, while donors and CSOs are concerned that the PSGs have been lost in the process and the political dialogue has not been sustained or in some cases has not materialized at all.

Country-led Pathways out of Fragility. When the FOCUS component of the New Deal was established at the global level it was conceived as a linear process of activities and deliverables, and it did not adequately emphasize the importance of political dialogue serving as the foundation of the New Deal.

Five of the seven pilot countries have conducted fragility assessments (DRC, Timor-Leste, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and South Sudan). The quality of the fragility assessments has varied significantly. In most cases, they are seen to have been one-off exercises that have not served as the basis for sustained dialogue about resilience and the causes of conflict and fragility. Of the five g7+ pilot countries that have developed a country-led fragility assessment, Sierra Leone is the only country that has systematically conducted the FOCUS steps by conducting a fragility assessment, creating a national plan, and signing a compact (referred to as the “New Deal Mutual Accountability Framework”) with donors.

Several pilot countries rely on an existing mutual accountability framework that predates the New Deal and defines roles and responsibilities and provides a basis for funding commitments, but does not necessarily focus
all efforts on a limited number of PSG priorities identified through a joint fragility assessment. Despite their incompleteness, pilot countries believe that adopting an existing accountability framework qualifies as New Deal progress, so long as the framework addresses a part of the New Deal. However, civil society notes that the donor-government accountability structure in these frameworks typically does not provide for the involvement of CSOs, which have the mandate to hold government accountable on behalf of citizens. Donors view the prescribed fragility assessments and compact developments as having been dominated by technical processes and deficient in meaningful political dialogue, raising concerns about the potential lack of genuine political commitment to the PSGs among the g7+ pilot countries.

The perceived lack of political dialogue, the incomplete structure of mutual accountability frameworks, and tendency for technocrats to negotiate the compact as a kind of technical “deal” have reinforced the sense that New Deal implementation is focused on donor-government conditionality rather than about the PSGs.

**Building Mutual Trust and Strong Partnerships.** Despite the fact that most of the TRUST elements are not new and are rooted in previous aid effectiveness commitments, the findings of this review indicate a significant misalignment of expectations related to implementation of this component.

Pilot countries consistently discuss the TRUST component in terms of the extent to which donors have demonstrated willingness to increase their tolerance for risk by increasing their use of country systems, while other aspects of TRUST are seldom mentioned. The expectation by the g7+ is that the approaches taken by donors at the country level should have begun to noticeably shift after more than two years of implementing the New Deal, but progress to date is viewed as limited. In April 2014, the g7+ issued a statement that reflects a sentiment repeatedly expressed during our interviews—that “…little change has been evident on the part of development partners in these areas…”

For their part, donors do not disagree with the perceived lack of progress on the TRUST elements but believe that the timeframe is simply too short to have made the progress expected by the pilot countries. Donors maintain that programming and implementation modalities are often approved years in advance and it is too soon to expect new program approaches to have been implemented. They also state that their respective parliaments have increased oversight of aid budgets and of aid delivery modalities since the 2008 global economic downturn, in response to heightened budgetary pressures, public outcry to reduce government spending, and increased media scrutiny. Donor tolerance for risk is under substantial domestic pressure.

Domestic pressure on risk tolerance is compounded at the country level where programming decision-makers within embassies and development organizations are often located. They have generally not received from their organizations clear internal guidance on New Deal implementation and how they are expected to commit to aligning their development programming according to the PSGs and the TRUST principles, and how the FOCUS elements should guide their approach. Before new approaches to aid programming are likely to take root at the country level, development agencies must first educate their own governmental colleagues about the types of risks affecting their aid and the potential trade-offs between the institutional risk of fiduciary failure and the benefits of potentially improving programmatic approaches. The process of broadening understanding and acceptance within donor governments of New Deal processes and dynamics is likely to take several years, if
not longer, but is a prerequisite to increasing the use of country systems and accepting the higher risk tolerance expected by the g7+. It is not evident that the timeframe for changing partner government risk tolerance has been clearly communicated to, and understood by, the g7+ countries.

Constraints Encountered

There are a number of challenges to the New Deal identified in interviews with representatives of g7+ countries, donor organizations, and civil society. New Deal processes have devolved too quickly into focusing on the technical aspects. As a result, there is:

- insufficient attention to the political dialogue
- a lack of whole-of-government buy-in in g7+ countries
- a lack of knowledge among donors at the country level about the New Deal and how their organization should participate
- inadequate involvement of civil society
- a lack of adequate resources

On the first point, there appears to be consensus that the New Deal, which was intended to deal with the inherent political drivers of conflict and fragility, has quickly evolved to the technical level and forsaken the all-important political dialogue, both within countries and between the g7+ and donors. Among donors, the main challenge is thought to be the over-emphasis placed on the New Deal’s technical activities rather than on a sustained political dialogue about the causes of fragility and how to address them. Most of the g7+ pilot countries have prioritized rapidly conducting a fragility assessment, typically during a two-day workshop, and establishing a compact without necessarily initiating meaningful, inclusive national dialogue on the PSGs and the causes of fragility. Several donors were concerned that the technical activities risk becoming meaningless if they do not have holistic high-level political buy-in and commitment as a foundation. The processes are not being used to bring together and reconcile competing interests within a country, and donors are not assigning high-level policymakers to participate in New Deal activities and attend meetings with the International Dialogue.

Similarly, there is concern over the absence of a whole-of-government approach to the New Deal among g7+ counties. Implementation of the New Deal requires actions by a range of government ministries, but the ministries of finance are the principal interlocutors in the New Deal and too seldom are other ministries engaged. g7+ pilot countries are also experiencing this disconnect between the New Deal commitment made by their own governments at the global level and the level of awareness and ownership at the country level among ministries and agencies working directly on issues involved in the PSGs. For example, in Liberia, although President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has expressed her strong support for the New Deal, the ministry of finance is the only ministry fully engaging with donors on the subject and the engagement has been hindered by a lack of consensus about process and expectations. Mobilizing the necessary whole-of-government support for the New Deal is seen to require a sustained, high-level political buy-in among both g7+ and partner governments. This is particularly difficult in light of the temporary nature of high-level political tenure, as ministerial-level political figures are replaced all too frequently in some countries.
For both donors and pilot countries a major issue is the limited policy guidance within their organization on the importance of and how to implement the New Deal. Most donors indicate that their prevailing development policy documents now include a fragile states component. However, only a limited number have developed internal guidance related to the New Deal and disseminated it to their country offices. g7+ pilot countries state that donors at the country level are generally aware of the New Deal and willing to engage on the subject, but they lack a good understanding of how to implement it and of the global commitments made by their headquarters. This is seen as particularly challenging given that programmatic decisions are often made or initiated at the country level.

Another important issue identified during the interviews with both donors and implementing countries is the shortage of resources available to support New Deal implementation. The resource shortage was described in terms of insufficient staffing in embassies and donor agencies at the country level to consistently participate in New Deal dialogue and activities, with existing staff already working 50 to 60 hours per week before the added burden of the New Deal. For the pilot countries, the resource shortage was described in terms of the lack of technical expertise at the country level, among both the countries and donors, about the New Deal and how to adapt implementation requirements to the country context. They report that the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has offered to recruit short-term technical assistance when requested to do so by the countries, but finding technical experts with relevant knowledge and experience has proved to be a challenge.

A final major challenge is the inadequate role assigned to and played by civil society. At the beginning of the process that created the New Deal, civil society was not present but is now seen by many of those involved as critical to its success, especially in helping to reconcile conflicting interests and holding government accountable. However, civil society faces several constraints, including lack of resources and technical knowledge of how to be involved at the implementation stage. There is a contradiction within civil society’s involvement in the New Deal. Civil society wants to be seen as independent but is concerned about that independence being compromised by joining with government in the New Deal process. Some government officials view themselves as the legitimate representatives of the people and so discount or even resent the role of civil society organizations and react negatively to civil society’s participation and critique of government actions.

Critical Success Factors

There is a consensus among all stakeholders that high-level and whole-of-government involvement in the political dialogue surrounding the PSGs is a critical element for success and should be established before conducting the fragility assessment to ensure ownership of the process and the outcome. A key element of this involvement is a clear statement of support from the head of state of the g7+ country to add domestic legitimacy and political importance to the New Deal process as well as drive donor prioritization of New Deal components. Additionally, other individuals serving as “champions” of the New Deal process, within both the pilot country government as well as within donor and civil society organizations, is also seen as instrumental in achieving what progress has been made to date.

An organized and engaged civil society that can be an active partner in the dialogue process, convey citizens’ concerns, and hold the government accountable is another factor that is reported to be important, although
such deep engagement with civil society has not adequately occurred in the pilot countries. Civil society participation is also seen as critical because it can be a bridge between diverse and often conflicting communities at the local level.

It is important that sufficient resources be invested from the beginning of the New Deal implementation process, including allocation of dedicated staff and recruitment of technical assistance when necessary. Without the resources to mobilize the professionals required to work on the process elements of the New Deal, such as the fragility assessment and compact, little progress has been made in some countries. Where more resources have been allocated to the process and have been complemented with political buy-in, the implementation process has moved much quicker. An example of this is Sierra Leone, where the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID) provided support to conduct the fragility assessment to the ministry of finance’s Development Assistance Coordination Office, an advisor from the Overseas Development Institute supported the process, and President Ernest Bai Koroma was directly involved by signing the New Deal Mutual Accountability Framework.

As the donor experience around the TRUST component illustrates, an important success factor is educating stakeholders about the nature of the risks that exist in fragile states. Key issues include how best to manage risk and how a preoccupation with reputational and fiduciary risks can occur at the expense of programmatic gains and ultimately result in strategic failure.

**Impact of the New Deal**

While still young, the New Deal is making noteworthy impact. It has brought together a group of countries that are experiencing or have experienced conflict and fragility, creating a forum for peer-to-peer engagement and learning, and it has given them a collective voice within international fora. The New Deal has focused the attention of donor countries and international dialogue on the dynamics of conflict and fragility and on how the donor community can play a more engaged and constructive role in helping countries move towards stability and economic growth. It has brought greater attention to the importance of governance, personal security, and justice to the development arena. Although not sufficiently, it has raised the profile and importance of civil society in helping to bring about reconciliation. It has called attention within g7+ countries to the importance of making politics inclusive. Again, with insufficient results to date, it has made donors at the global level pay greater attention to the importance of predictability and timeliness of assistance, use of country systems, better understanding risk, and improving alignment with national priorities.
RECOMMENDATIONS

A combination of fewer conditions, increased investment, more inclusive political dialogue and better domestic advocacy could still render the New Deal a transformative approach to addressing the challenges and opportunities that exist in fragile and conflict-affected states. Steps that could advance the New Deal include:

- First and foremost, the New Deal process—and the dynamics of conflict and fragility—are inherently political. That needs to be acknowledged and kept at the fore of dialogue and implementation. The effort put into technical processes should not overshadow a sustained political dialogue.

- Civil society can play a critical role in both national political dialogue and in local implementation. Civil society needs to be acknowledged as an important partner in the New Deal processes and extended the respect and resources required for it to play that role, which it can do while still maintaining its independence.

- Fragility assessments must be locally owned rather than solely produced by external technical experts.

- As top-level policy deliberations increasingly are dealing with the dynamics of fragile states, donors in particular should develop and disseminate specific internal policy guidance on what New Deal implementation means for their organization at the global and especially the country level.

- The tendency to rely on traditional aid conditionality as the basis for New Deal partnership should be consciously avoided.

- Given the inadequate knowledge about the New Deal throughout g7+ country governments, within donor agencies, and among civil society, relatively small investments in development and dissemination of better information and operational guidance could go a long way to broaden knowledge and better understanding among stakeholder groups about the purpose of the New Deal, who should be involved, their roles and responsibilities, and establishing priorities. Greater investment should also be made in rolling out the New Deal to reduce the amount of confusion surrounding it at the country level.

- Donors and the g7+ should increase their domestic advocacy and educate stakeholders at home about the expectations inherent to New Deal participation, the potential risk-benefit tradeoffs, and the underlying assumptions about their willingness to do things differently.

- Given that existing staff is overtaxed, working long hours, and covering multiple issues, donors and g7+ governments should increase the number of staff they have dedicated to participating and supporting the New Deal process as well as increase the availability and use of technical assistance to bridge expertise gaps and increase organizational capacity.

- A standardized methodology should be developed to conduct independent evaluations of New Deal implementation in each pilot country, the results of which should be presented to key stakeholders in that country, aggregated among countries to discern trends and lessons learned, and disseminated widely.
CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Some elements of the PSGs—inclusive politics, citizen security, access to justice, state revenues—have largely been absent from the core focus of traditional development programs. How these issues are approached in the context of New Deal countries—how they are handled in the most difficult circumstances—can be instructive and helpful in bringing them into the mainstream of development activities. The same is true of the focus on risk and using country systems. Fragility exists along a continuum; many developing countries experience it in one degree or another. Fragile states magnify the number and size of the issues and thereby provide rich opportunities to address problems that directly affect peoples’ lives as well as lesson-learning that can be useful for countries located elsewhere on the continuum.

The New Deal is forcing donors to confront more directly the issue of risk and to recognize it is necessary to distinguish between different types of risks and the trade-offs between them. If in advancing the New Deal donors and g7+ discover ways to manage the risk inherent in using poorly developed local systems, this will contribute to transitioning the development process to greater local ownership. There is a major trade-off for donors inherent in the New Deal—potentially higher institutional risk (fiduciary and reputational) in return for potentially greater programmatic reward and better outcomes. Donors are reluctant, however, to accept too much risk because of scrutiny from parliaments and the media. Donors and civil society need to educate their home parliaments about this risk/reward tradeoff, including the risk of non-engagement.

If donors accept the principle of transparency in their operations in g7+ countries, as some have begun to do, there is no reason this should not characterize all their assistance activities. This positive example and donor nudging can help move governments, and for that matter civil society, into accepting the imperative of transparency.

There is growing acknowledgement that development is inherently political and that too often the solutions are restricted to technical solutions and ignore the political dynamics in a country. Among the significant impacts of the New Deal is the focus it brings to the critical role of governance and the importance of bringing together disparate communities in countries that are fragile and in conflict.

The MDGs, as important as they are, do not deal with the political element of development—with governance or fragility—and these issues are surfacing front-and-center in the wide-ranging discussion on the post-2015 agenda. The report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda correctly includes as two of its twelve illustrative goals: (1) good governance and effective institutions and (2) stable and peaceful societies. The voices in support of including a goal on governance are growing, but so is the push-back. Some governments are objecting to a goal on governance on grounds of state sovereignty and non-interference, but they more likely just prefer not to be held accountable for their governance practices.

If governance and the challenges of countries facing fragility and conflict are to come into the mainstream of development, and if we want to make progress on human and political development in fragile states, it is critical that those engaged in the New Deal expand their community into a critical mass that will ensure these issues form part of the new set of global goals.
### ANNEX 1: LIST OF PERSONS INTERVIEWED

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contact</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Position</th>
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### Endnotes


