

Beyond the New Deal: Global Collaboration and Peacebuilding with BRICS Countries

Development in fragile and conflict-affected contexts is both complex and contested. The New Deal for Engagement with Fragile States, endorsed by 35 countries and six organisations, is the current focus of efforts to harmonise aid approaches. Yet, BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) are charting their own individual approaches for promoting development and peacebuilding in conflict-affected states.

This policy brief examines opportunities for Western donors to deepen collaboration with BRICS countries, and suggests that focusing on peacebuilding, aligning financial assistance in post-conflict reconstruction, and furthering cooperation in peacekeeping are all entry points to extend cooperation beyond the New Deal.

Reluctant collaborators: BRICS engagement with the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding

In recent years the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding has been the locus of multilateral efforts to formulate coordinated aid approaches in fragile and conflict-affected states. It was established as a mechanism for consultation and deliberation on why the existing international aid and development regime was failing. The Dialogue includes the g7+ countries, a body representing the governments of at least 19 fragile and conflict-affected countries, which was established at a 2010 Ministerial-level meeting in Dili.

The Dialogue was instrumental in developing the New Deal for Engagement with Fragile States, which established five Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals (around inclusive political settlement and people's access to security, justice, service delivery and employment). OECD-DAC donors support the governments of fragile and conflict-affected countries to meet these goals by adhering to a new set of commitments to provide and manage aid. Aid recipient countries sign 'country compacts' with donor countries and engage in mutual confidence-building measures,

such as institution building and governance reforms.

The International Dialogue made a concerted effort to include BRICS members and China and Brazil decided to join. However, their participation has been patchy to date. For example, Brazil sent a junior delegate to the first International Dialogue meeting in Dili, East Timor, in 2010, but then did not participate in the second or third meetings held in Monrovia, Liberia, in 2011 and Washington DC, USA, in 2013.

While the New Deal has been broadly welcomed by OECD-DAC donors and 'fragile' countries, BRICS countries have not signed up despite their widening engagement in these countries, including through technical assistance, debt cancellation or reduction, foreign direct investment and security cooperation.

Given the reluctance of BRICS countries to engage with the International Dialogue, it is unsurprising that they have not endorsed the New Deal. Beijing and Brasília have viewed the New Deal as an OECD initiative that seeks to socialise OECD and non-OECD donors alike into existing western-dominated aid structures. Western attitudes to justice, interventionism, accountability,

transparency and the role of conditionality differ from those of BRICS countries, mainly due to their diverging developmental experiences. Rejecting the discourse of 'failed states', BRICS countries have objected to the 'fragility' and 'vulnerability' assessment criteria developed through the International Dialogue.

The fact that China, Russia and India are all grappling with ongoing domestic insurgencies has also shaped their rather critical stance on the New Deal and, more generally, formed their positions with respect to international efforts to promote stability and ease conflict in what are deemed fragile states. The complex politics underlying the positions of different BRICS countries in fragile and conflict-affected states is evident in Syria (see box on page 3).

Toward greater cooperation in fragile and conflict-affected states

The diplomatic, security and economic contributions of BRICS countries are crucial for lasting peacebuilding and development in fragile and conflict-affected states. While they may have shied away from greater involvement in the International Dialogue and New Deal, there are three areas where greater cooperation is possible between OECD donors and BRICS countries: promoting a focus on peacebuilding, including support to regional organisations, financial assistance in supporting reconstruction and peacekeeping operations.

1 Greater cooperation in peacebuilding

BRICS countries have, in general, rejected intervention framed in terms of 'statebuilding' and rescuing 'failed states'. Most of them adhere to principles of national sovereignty, non-interference and non-intervention, very much in line and in tradition with the policies of the Non-Aligned Movement. BRICS foreign policy remains strongly grounded in the 'Bandung principles', whose adherents underscore the integrity of sovereign states and their opposition to external interference. However, there are

cases of BRICS countries supporting statebuilding activities in certain political contexts, including Brazil in East Timor and South Africa in the Democratic Republic of Congo (although they would not describe this as 'statebuilding').

Support to domestic peacebuilding efforts dwarfs statebuilding as the main thrust of BRICS engagement in fragile and conflict-affected countries, as shown by the active involvement of Brazil and South Africa in the UN Peacebuilding Commission. For the first time in its history, China deployed combat troops as part of a UN mission in Mali alongside the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS). China also contributed non-combat troops to the African Union/UN Hybrid operation in Darfur (UNAMID).

2 Financial aid in post-conflict reconstruction

Most BRICS countries (except South Africa) concentrate their aid spending in rehabilitating infrastructure in war-ravaged societies. China believes that reforms aimed at reducing poverty and instability through economic development should be prioritised in conflict-affected states. In fact, it argues that the establishment of liberal democratic systems is not a peacebuilding requirement and that each country should be free to form a political system and governance structures that are appropriate to their context. India has funnelled much of its assistance to Afghanistan, focusing on infrastructure development, education, and health. Brazil focuses on the rehabilitation of railway infrastructure and technical training linked to agricultural development as shown in its recent interventions in Mozambique.

3 Strengthening UN peacekeeping operations

India is one of the top three contributing countries to UN peacekeeping operations, behind only Bangladesh and Pakistan. A number of Indian security experts hold senior positions in the UN Department of Peacekeeping

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Operations. The Centre for United Nations Peacekeeping in New Delhi has trained over 400 officers from more than 70 countries and has ongoing instructor-exchange programmes with other peacekeeping training centres in Australia, Germany and Canada. Brazil has also assumed a more important role, leading the peacekeeping component of the United Nations Stabilisation Mission In Haiti (MINUSTAH).

China's peacekeeping contributions to UN missions have also increased in recent years and it now contributes more troops and police to UN peacekeeping missions than any other permanent members of the UN Security Council. The Chinese government has shown greater interest in funding and coordinating training facilities where Chinese peacekeeping

contingents can come into contact and share knowledge and technical expertise with troops from other nationalities. In 2010, Chinese peacekeeping police and US troops carried out their first joint patrol in Haiti. The European Union (EU) and its member states have also intensified cooperation with China in a number of security-related fields. This cooperation has emphasised 'soft security' activities such as strategic dialogues, military-to-military diplomacy and educational exchanges, port visits, peacekeeping training, and some joint military exercises. China has established formal defence-related consultative dialogues with France, Germany and the United Kingdom. The EU has sought to strengthen ties with China in developing the African Union's Peace and Security Architecture.

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Contradictory positions on Syria's civil war?

The involvement of BRICS countries has been significant in shaping international efforts to address Syria's ongoing war, and will be pivotal to its eventual resolution. They have all opposed any outside military solution, particularly any action that is not authorised by the UN Security Council (UNSC). Brazil has urged the UNSC to order an immediate end to the flow of arms into Syria, Russia was supported by fellow BRICS countries for its deal with Washington on chemical weapons while China sent experts to help oversee their inspection and destruction.

The BRICS are broadly aligned in supporting inclusive political dialogue, endorsing the Joint Communiqué of the Geneva Action Group at the BRICS Summit in March 2013. As early as 2011, India, Brazil and South Africa issued a declaration calling for an 'end to violence' and an 'all-inclusive, transparent, peaceful political process' – blaming both sides for the unrest, and offering to send their own envoy to help mediate talks.

However, the BRICS' 'non-interventionist' positions are complicated by their pre-existing bilateral trade, security and diplomatic ties with Syria. Bilateral trade with China increased to almost US\$2.5 billion in 2010, a surge of nearly 12 per cent over the previous year, just before the conflict broke out. Currently China is Syria's main importer. The partnership between Damascus and Moscow also runs deep. Russian defence industry contracts are valued at more than US\$4 billion. Some observers argue that a prolonged conflict would actually be in Moscow's interest given the potential for increased arms sales. Syria and its neighbours are increasingly a destination for Indian investment and joint ventures, while Syrian President Assad's regime has backed India's position on Kashmir and supported its aspirations for a permanent UNSC seat. Brazil, which also seeks a seat on the UNSC, has been careful to show 'pragmatism' and has studiously avoided staking out a position that could be interpreted as being aligned with one side or the other.

Policy recommendations

Engagement between OECD-DAC and BRICS donors must focus on trust building and there are a number of areas in which Western donors can cultivate stronger cooperation with the BRICS countries.

- **Collaboration in peacebuilding** by providing further political support, financial and technical assistance, and troop deployments to peacebuilding efforts headed by regional organisations.
- **Financial aid and post-conflict reconstruction**, being the preferred focus of intervention for BRICS countries, is an entry point for developing dialogue on the pre-requisites for longer-term stability and peace. OECD – DAC donors have a role to play in promoting conflict sensitive approaches in reconstruction and investment as well as adherence to international codes relating to land investment and resource extraction, which are often part of broader packages of reconstruction support.
- **Strengthening UN peacekeeping operations.** Building on BRICS countries' substantial contributions to UN peacekeeping operations to date, OECD – DAC donors can improve both collaboration and coherence by renewing their own commitments to UN-backed efforts. This may include cooperation in providing training and technical expertise as well as funding to UN peacekeeping operations.

Further reading

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Saferworld (2012) *Rising Powers and Conflict, Addressing Conflict and Violence from 2015*, Issue Paper 3, London: Saferworld.

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Credits

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