
Sustainable Development and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). A Comparative Analysis.

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Abstract

Nature has placed before humanity abundant resources for their needs, but not for their unstinting accumulation. This suggest that in spite of the ever increasing rate of human population, if the global resources are judiciously and equitably managed, it will serve the needs of the immediate and succeeding generations. Unfortunately, because of the acquisitive greed of some people and groups, these resources have been subjected to a level far beyond the reach of the greater majority. Consequently, this has created a widening inequality, and a rising frustration. It is against this backdrop that the United Nations Organization (UNO) initiated the MDGs in order to enhance human security. This paper seeks to compare SD and MDGs and examine to what extent the two policies can ensure human development in the 21st century. In carrying out this study, our sources of data collection were restricted to secondary sources. These include literature review, examination of UNO reports, conferences, official bulletins and gazettes.

It was discovered that SD and MDGs complements each other. But this can be possible only if the States can develop the political will to adhere strictly to the implementation of the conditions that would make this a reality. We therefore, recommend that SD and MDGs should be an integral part of each country's development agenda. It should also be mainstreamed in the school curriculum so that successive generations would key into its philosophy for continuity and social internalization.

Keywords: *Humanity, Development Agenda, Population, Millennium Development Goals, Sustainable Development*

Introduction

The global community is facing some intimidating complexities, twists and turns from the late twentieth to the twenty-first centuries. These challenges range from multi-dimensional poverty, climate change and its corollary greenhouse effect and unsustainable consumption. The Rio+20 Out-come Document was mindful of this fact when it declared that Developing countries in particular are vulnerable to the adverse impact of climate change and including persistent drought and extreme weather events, sea level rise, and ocean acidification, further threatening food security and efforts to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development.

The contention here is that with fast growing population, depletion of natural endowment and environmental despoliation, it is likely that humanity may face a dead end in the years ahead. The global architecture which is fundamentalist in orientation, in collaboration with predators in power from the Third Word, particularly Africa have consciously created a differential access to the basic necessities of life such that persistent conflict, and excruciating poverty is now the lot of millions of people.

Karach, Besada and Shaw (2016:233) noted that Sub-Saharan Africa have done less well than countries in other regions in increasing export share, and despite increased remittances, we are experiencing a worse current account position than countries in other regions. As the world entered the twenty-first century, it became necessary that some urgent action has to be taken to save the human family. This is in accordance with Preamble of the United Nations (UN) Charter, which among other things is to promote sound progress and better standard of life in larger freedoms. This historic commitment has been consciously followed since 1945 when the organization emerged. Therefore, this paper seeks to compare Sustainable Development and MDGs, and how they can be harnessed to achieve sustainable development.

Conceptual Clarification

A proper understanding of the concepts in this paper is important for clarity and objectivity. These are Sustainability and Development. The Black Law Dictionary states that to sustain is to support or maintain, especially over a long period of time, to nourish and encourage, lend strength to (Garner, 2014:1585). Therefore, sustainability is the process of sustaining something so that its lifespan can be prolonged. It also involves conservation and prudent use of resources. On the other hand, development simply refers to the process of sustaining the multiplicative wellbeing of the people. It is people -focused and measured not by economic growth, but the extent to which the welfare of the people is enriched. Hence engagement of long term thinking, placing appropriate value on nature and drive to equity becomes a desideratum. Many scholars such as Asante (1991), Adedeji (2000), Nault (2009) and Rodney (2009) have come to the conclusion that development should be directed towards satisfying the interest of the society. Hence, Amartya (2008:90) defines it as;

the removal of major sources of unfreedom, poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities as well as intolerance or over activity of repressive states.

The whole essence of any development project is to create a congenial environment for people to participate in driving the affairs that concern them. Eliciting popular support generates a climate for social reproduction and capacity building. This was why Rodney (2009:1) noted that it is a human- centered process that involves increased skills and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and wellbeing. For Rodney (2009), therefore, to abandon development is to jettison good governance, mortgage human freedom and consign society to brutal inequalities. Indeed, development is a vital channel through which democratic etiquette is mainstreamed in governance. Development exposes humanity to an array of choices and emboldens them to deepen their creative and artistic ingenuity. According to Adedeji (2000:209).

We need to set in motion a development process that puts the individual at the very centre of the development effort, a development process that is both human and humane without necessarily suffering the discipline that goes with development but which enhances man's personality, a development process that does not alienate man from his society and culture but rather develops his self-confidence in himself and identifies his interest with that of his society thereby develop his ability and willingness for self-reliance.

It is obvious from the above quote that inherent in development is discipline, self-confidence and self-reliance. Igbuzor (2009:2) further stated that it is about how discipline

drives the human spirit to triumph over odds of the poverty trap, physical geography, fiscal trap, governance, cultural barriers, geopolitics, lack of innovation and the demographic trap. These are building blocks for the consummation of development. On December 4, 1986, the UN convinced of the importance of development to peace-building and human security declared it as a human right. It noted strongly that everyone is entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized. Article 2(1) of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Development clearly stated that the human person is the central subject of development and should be the active participant and beneficiary of the rights of development. The people must not only participate in the process, but freely enjoy the proceeds accruing from it. It should not be a bolt from the blue, conceived, packaged and delivered without the involvement of those meant to enjoy the project. The emphatic focus on the human being was also echoed in the African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation adopted at the International Conference on Popular Participation on the Recovery and Development process in Africa, held in Arusha, Tanzania in 1990. Paragraph 7 stated that

We therefore, have no doubt that at the heart of Africa's development objectives must lie the ultimate and overriding goal of human-centered development that ensures the overall wellbeing of the people through sustained improvement in their living standards and the full and effective participation of the people in charting their development policies, programmes and processes and contributing to their realization.

Sustainable development therefore, means meeting the basic needs of the present as well as the future. It connotes serious adherence to some kind of rules so that natural resources can be managed, protected, and preserved for generation unborn to enjoy the right of development. In this scenario, economic prudence, social inclusion and environmental protection becomes buzzwords, and mutually reinforcing pillars of sustainable development. This was highlighted in the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Brazil, otherwise known as Rio+20. It abhors hemorrhaging of state resources as in Africa, the unsustainable pattern of consumption by the global hegemonics and human-induced climate change that has imposed environmental discomfort like coastal squeeze, flooding and disruption of the ecosystem.

It is not surprising that global attention has been concentrated on the concept in the twenty-first century. This is to save humanity from a global catastrophe. To circumvent such a calamity, we must be systematic in our thinking and understand that an organic link exists between us and other world which is limited in time and space.

SD and MDGs

The etymology of SD can be traced to the seventeenth century. In 1662, John Evelyn noticed the depletion of forest resources, and called for the sowing and planting of trees as a national duty of every Londoner. This commitment was aimed at stopping what he called a distractive exploitation of natural resources. Influenced by Mr. Evelyn's example, in 1713 other writers like Hans Carl Von Carlowitz, Jean Baptiste Golbert and George Ludwig Harling joined in the campaign to conserve the environment. It was these efforts that led to the idea of managing the forest for sustained yield. The aftermath of this campaign was the Forest Reserve Policy and the emergence of Environmental Protection Movement in the 1960s.

In 1972, the club of Rome formed in 1960 produced a report titled – *The Limit of Growth*. It noted that economic growth could not continue indefinitely because of resource depletion. Therefore, there was need for some kind of global equilibrium. Inherent in all these attempts is the issue of sustainability so that humanity would not be placed in a chaotic trajectory. This is predicated on the carrying capacity of nature’s endowment, and the practicalities of facing the challenge arising there from. As a development process, it is guarded and underpinned by the values cherished by the Society (Mawere, 2014:122). In fact, meeting the basic needs and enriching the wellbeing of the people becomes an impossibility without the respect of these values. This is why it is often said that SD is centered on the sustainability of humanity and its creation. As the World Commission on Environment report noted,

Sustainable development is a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the diversion of investments, the orientation of technological development and institutional change are made consist with future as well as present needs (Mawere, 2017:326).

The importance of SD in the twenty-first century can be gleaned from the fact that it has become a point of departure for many national and international conferences. Out of the seven aspirations of African Union (AU) Agenda 2063, the first one is aimed at building a prosperous Africa with inclusive growth and sustainable development.

The MDGs, which is also linked with development arose out of the United Nations Millennium Conference, which took place from September 6 -8, 2000 in New York. The outcome of this meeting was the Millennium Declaration through Resolution 55/2. The Declaration which was couched in futuristic terms detailed the concern of world leaders to ensure peace and development in the world. It mentioned eight themes through which this global task can be achieved. These include, values and principle, peace, security, development and poverty eradication, protecting our common environment, protection of the vulnerable, meeting the special needs of Africa and strengthening the UN, human rights, democracy and good governance section 27 declared that:

We will support the consolidation of democracy in Africa and assist Africa in their struggle for peace, poverty eradication and sustainable development, thereby bringing Africa into the mainstream of the world economy.

One major fallout of the Declaration was the MDGs. It focused on eight goals and eighty-nine targets through which the vision of the Declaration can be actualized in Africa. These goals constitute part of the common enemies of the developing countries and inhibiting their development. It was hoped that the pivotal date for the reduction of these goals to half would be 2015 (See table 1).

Table 1: The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

S/N	Goals
1.	Eradication of poverty and hunger
2.	Achieve Universal Basic Education
3.	Promote gender equality
4.	Improve maternal health
5.	Combat AIDS, malaria and other diseases
6.	Reduction of child mortality
7.	Ensure environmental sustainability
8.	Develop global partnership for development

Igbuzor (2012:194)

MDGs can be seen as a historic and effective global effort to save humanity from an irreversible tipping point of social catastrophe, and circumvent the extinction of climatic sensitive resources. It was a blue print to galvanize government and the private sector towards a sustainable reduction of extreme poverty (Karach, Besala, and Shaw, 2016:315). The Goals will fast track the global connectivity and understanding. Hence, Karach, et al (2016:29) noted that they can be regarded as essential in building global partnership to address poverty and human progress and provide bench marks for tackling extreme poverty in all dimensions. Therefore, tackling extreme poverty is to promote social progress, and lay a foundation for capacity building. These would ultimately uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity at the global level. According to Oduro (2012:381),

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were fully outdoored in September 2000 with the adoption of Millennium Declaration by Heads of States and Government. The genesis of MDGs goes back to the mid-1990s when the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development decided to investigate what development strategies would lead to effectiveness of aid.

Regrettably by 2015, the expected progress was not registered. While Latin America and Asia recorded impressive results, Sub-Sahara Africa (SSA) was lagging behind in almost all the Goals. Agarwal and Pirzada (2016:35) noted that economic growth in Sub-Saharan Africa lagged behind in other regions over the past decades; 1965-2011. This poor performance contrasts with earlier hope that SSA had the potential for rapid growth. The challenge of job creation, ‘bulge’ of educated youth, multidimensional poverty and entrenched inequalities remain huge obstacle to poverty and entrenched inequalities remain huge obstacle to the realization of MDGs more than a decade after. The 2014 World Development report, noted that SSA was lagging behind others in meeting MDGs targets. The report also indicated that SSA has the highest maternal mortality ratio in developing regions, with 510 deaths per 100,000 live births, compared to the global average of 210 deaths per 100,000 live births (Wakiaga, 2016:32). In Nigeria, Igbuzor (2012) stated that

The 2014 report which was Nigeria’s first report in the MDGs states that based on available information, it is unlikely that the country will be able to meet most of the goals by 2015, especially the goals related to eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, reducing child and maternal mortality and combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.

The future of MDGs to meet its expected targets prompted Karach, et al (2016:45) to aver that a development state has become relevant, at least in the SSA. This scenario prompted the thinking for a Post-2015 Development Agenda. According to Ban Ki-Moon, former UN Secretary-General (UNSG) on the Post-2015 Development Agenda,

We are at a historic crossroad and the directions we take will determine whether we will succeed or fail on our promises. With our globalized economy and sophisticated technology, we can decide to end the age-old ills of extreme poverty and hunger. Or we can contribute to degrade our planet and allow intolerable inequalities to slow bitterness and despair. Our ambition is to achieve sustainable development for all (Ban Ki-moon, 2014:3).

He further noted that the Post-2015 Development Agenda was a People’s Agenda, a plan of action for ending poverty in all its dimensions, irreversible everywhere and leaving no one

behind. To achieve the vision of leaving no one behind, series of processes and consultations took place. This includes the 2010 High-Level Plenary Meeting of UN General Assembly (UNGA). It was this meeting that called for accelerating progress and ways of achieving the UN Development Agenda beyond 2015. During the Rio de Janeiro Conference from June 20-22, 2012 in Brazil, on Sustainable Development called Rio+20, it produced the Rio+20 Outcome Document. The document noted that:

We are resolved to establish an inclusive and trajectory intergovernmental process on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that is open to all stakeholders, with a view to developing SDGs to be agreed by the UNGA.

This Resolution led to the setting up of a 30 member Open Working Group (OWG) by the former UNSG on January 2013 to prepare a proposal pursuant to the Rio+20 Resolution. The membership cut across seventy countries of the UN and distributed in this order; Africa 7, Latin America and the Caribbean 6, Western Europe and others 5, Asia and the Pacific 7 and Eastern Group 5. In July 2012, the SG set up a High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. This Panel was made up of 27 members. It was chaired by the President of Indonesia, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and co-chaired by immediate past President of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, and the former United Kingdom Prime Minister, David Cameron. Their terms of reference among others enjoined the Panel to conduct its work on the basis of a rigorous analysis of credible shared evidence. The Panel should engage and consult widely with relevant constituencies at national, regional and global levels. In preparing its report, the Panel took cognizance of the Millennium Declaration and the Rio+20 Outcome Document. Its report was anchored on five transformative principles.

- i. Leave no one behind
- ii. Put Sustainable Development at the core
- iii. Transform economies for jobs and lucrative growth
- iv. Build peace and effective, open and accountable institutions
- v. Forge a new global partnership.

The UN System Task Team (UNTT) was also set up by the SG on September 2011, to support the system wide consultations for the Post-2015 Development Agenda. UNTT was made up of 60 UN internal agencies and entities and co-chaired by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) and UNDP.

Its mission was to assess ongoing efforts within the UN System, consult relevant stakeholders and define a system-wide vision and road map to support the deliberation on Post-2015 development UN Agenda

Its report *Realizing the Future We Want for All*, was hinged on three principles and four core dimensions. These include human rights, equality, sustainability, inclusive growth, social development, environmental sustainability, inclusive economic development, peace and security respectively. Karach, et al (2016:248) noted that the UNTT identified peace and security as critical, and a major component of it, and highlights the need to seek culture of peace and tolerance. It is important to state that UNTT represented the voice of the UN System in the ongoing consultation for inclusive and participatory Post-2015 Development Agenda. Africa did not remain aloof in these consultation spree. Through the African Union (AU), its contribution was encapsulated in the Common African Position (CAP) to the Post-2015 Development Agenda. CAP is predicated on six pillars, namely,

- (i) Socio-economic transformation and inclusive growth

- (ii) Science technology and innovation
- (iii) People-centered development
- (iv) Environmental sustainability, natural resource management and disaster risk management.
- (v) Peace and security
- (vi) Finance and partnerships
- (vii)

It must be emphasized that the Post-2015 Development Agenda provided a unique opportunity in the discussion of global affairs that concern all. It was therefore, not surprising that these grassroots consultations led to the promulgation of the Sustainable Development Goals on September 25, 2015 by the UNGA, commonly known as the 2030 Agenda Transforming the World. The Goals are seventeen and 169 targets (see table 11).

Table II: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

S/N	Goals
1.	End poverty in all forms anywhere.
2.	End hunger, achieve food security, improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.
3.	Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all ages.
4.	Ensure inclusive and equitable education and promote learning application for all.
5.	Achieve gender equality and empower all women and gifts.
6.	Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.
7.	Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and renewable energy for all.
8.	Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.
9.	Build resilient infrastructures, promote inclusive and sustained industrialization and foster innovation.
10.	Reduce inequality within and among countries.
11.	Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.
12.	Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.
13.	Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impact.
14.	Conserve and sustainably use the oceans and seas and marine resources for sustainable development.
15.	Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forest, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.
16.	Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.
17.	Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

<https://www.dfae.admin.ch/post2015/en/home/agenda-2030/die-17>. Retrieved on 11/5/18.

From the above, we can see that the world is on the move to a sustainable trajectory. According to the Preamble of 2030 Agenda,

The Agenda is a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity. It also seeks to strengthen universal peace in larger freedom. We require that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty is the greater global change and

indispensable requirement for sustainable development. We will also build upon the achievement of the MDGs and seek to address the unfinished business.

In what seem to be a relay of the reason for the Post-2015 Development Agenda, it further stated that,

Almost fifteen years ago, the MDGs was agreed. These provided an important framework being made in a number of areas. But, the progress has been uneven, particularly in Africa, least developed countries land locked developing countries and small lowland developing states, are some of the MDGs remain off-track, in particular those related to maternal newborn and child health and to reproductive health.

A critical examination of the two goals will deduce a common concern to ensure a global transformative change through sustainability. They represent a basket of lofty and ambitious attempt to direct the attention of the globe to the urgent challenge facing humanity. More important is the concern on climate change, eradication of poverty and diseases like malaria, HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis, gender equality and global partnership. In spite of the communalities that exist within the two Goals, they differ in many ways. The marked differences undoubtedly represent their history and coverage. One glaring difference between the two Agenda is the number of Goals. While the MDGs have a limited eight goals that of SDGs was expanded to 17 goals and 169 targets covering a wide range of subjects (see table I and II). The ostensible reason for this disparity must have been in the manner the former emerged, in the basement of UN headquarters and drawn by a group of experts directed only to the developing countries. This is in contrast with the SDGs which had wide range consultations including civil society groups, and more importantly, it applies to all irrespective of global economic disparity.

It was against this backdrop that Woodbridge (2016:2) asserted that MDGs applied to the global south and they played minimal role in their design. Consequently, the MDGs were perceived by several critics as a platform that was imposed on the developing countries by the more developed. In the same vein, Easterly (2018) noted that the MDGs committed a very wrong idea about how development happens, patronizing and magically free of politics. It is not about Western saviours, but home-grown efforts linked to a general extension of political freedom (wikiprogress.org/articles/pverty-development/how-do-the-sds-differ-from-the-mdgs. Retrieved on 25/1/18).

The rigorous and painstaking processes that preceded the emergence of SDGs gave it a holistic and comprehensive toga, and as David Hulme of the Brooks World Poverty noted, SDGs will be another evolutionary step in getting people around the world to think a little bit more as global citizens and think about poverty, inequality, sustainability, dissemination, consumption, and do something. It is interesting that SDGs cover the entire humanity, thus expunging the lingering dichotomy between the developing and the developed world. It is a demonstration of the fact that the burden of practicalizing SDGs will be borne by all UN member states.

This is in contrast with MDGs that is completely donor-centric. It is this donor-dependence that has exacerbated African development crisis for many decades. Even when promises are made, they are not kept. Wakiaga (2016) pointed out that:

The commitment under the Monterrey Consensus and the pledges made by the G8 countries at the Gleneagles Summit are yet to be met. The Make Poverty History Summit held at Gleneagles in 2005 pledged to increase aid to Africa by \$25 million per year.

It would have been difficult for imperialist countries to freely give aid to developing countries without mainstreaming their imperialist agenda. It may be argued that the strict adherence to this agenda couched in neo-liberalism was largely responsible for the below average performance of MDGs. A major contrast between MDGs and SDGs is that the former neglected the fact that any development process that does not recognize the freedom of people is an illusory. This was why it relied on the top-down approach which does not lend itself to popular participation. It was anchored on the assumption that the masses are ignorant of what they want, hence, higher authority has to prod them along. But this authoritarian approach was jettisoned by the SDGs, by ensuring a bottom-up approach which in a sense gave the people opportunity to participate in the discussion of their own affairs. For instance, Goal 16 among others is committed to providing access to justice for all and build effective, accountable inclusive institutions at all levels. It is a declaration that provides a unique opportunity for a broad-based consensus building in taking the challenges facing the global community.

It was this non-recognition of human rights that prompted David Mephan, United Kingdom Director of Human Rights Watch to aver that the MDGs not rooted in human rights mainstream development policy failed to challenge systematic pattern of discrimination and disadvantage-violation of rights that keep the people. It may be emphasized that the unilateral and paternalistic manner that heralded the MDGs is a reinforcement of the discarded modernization theory. It believes emphatically in the fundamentalist global apartheid dominated by a few hegemonics that have suddenly assumed the status of unmoved movers, and their ideas almost acquiring a fetish-like rigidity (Mawere, 2017:203).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Post-2015 Development Agenda which climaxed into the SDGs demonstrated a genuine concern by the global community to ensure that the world's greatest challenges are tackled head on. It is an affirmation that sustainable existence can only occur with human ecosystem equilibrium. This is the minimum condition for a transformative, people-centered and planet sensitive development agenda. The underlying assumption is that the earth's resources are not inexhaustible, therefore, sustainable management becomes imperative so that the interest and rights of future generation would not be in jeopardy.

Interestingly, SDGs was built from the crucible of MDGs. MDGs as we noted, was part of the fallout of the Millennium Declaration. The two Goals represent an affirmative action to ensure a harmonious humanity. It cannot be disputed that MDGs made some significant achievements within the decade. For instance, primary and secondary school enrollment and representation of women were high. Leantier (2016:126) noted that Rwanda is one whose quotas were instituted resulting in a 63.8% of women in Parliament following the election of September 2011, which is four times higher than the world average.

Nevertheless, Africa is still bogged down with some development challenges. The 2014 UNDP report on MDGs stated that progress in MDGs has been sluggish, and as at 2010 about 48.5 percent of the people of Africa are still living on less than \$1.25 per day. It was against this

background that the Post-2015 Development Agenda was kick started. Karach (2016:13) had opined that

A Post-2015 Development Agenda must meet the minimum threshold consensus to galvanize development efforts and guide global and national development priorities.

The rigorous and meticulous development priorities that orchestrated the SDGs, left no one in doubt about its efficacy in realizing its vision. Here lies the core difference between the two Goals both in content, coverage and acceptance. It is estimated that SDGs will gulp about \$172.2 trillion (£110.67 trillion) to accomplish. This is a mindboggling and huge amount, but with the burning zeal to make global development for sustainability an article of faith, it is hoped that financing this Agenda will not pose some insurmountable difficulties.

In conclusion, therefore, the success of this noble Agenda is dependent on expunging political expediency from its process.

Recommendations

Based on the above, we make the following recommendations.

- i. The 2030 Agenda should remain a recurring mantra in the national policies and programmes of UN member-states.
- ii. The office of the UNSG should always liaise with the relevant regional bodies for monitoring and evaluation of SDGs. Countries that derail could be given a minimum sanction within the UN canopy.
- iii. Civil society groups, students and educational institutions should as a matter of compulsion make this Agenda part of their curriculum so that the younger generation would be abreast of the ongoing efforts to save today for tomorrow.
- iv. Financing the Agenda should be spread across UN member states and regional bodies based on capacity and responsibility.
- v. The UN system should double its efforts to reduce conflicts which expose the fragility of states. This is where the New Deal for Engagement for Fragile States becomes extremely important.

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