LSE !deas

Aspiration or ambivalence?

The frustrated ambitions of business partnerships and the SDGs

Critics argue that the focus on global partnerships as a key implementing tool for the 2030 Agenda has sidelined more salient investigations into how partnerships might work in national and local contexts.

Pischikova 2014; Beisheim et al 2014). There is no systematic analysis of how the private sector engages vhsg sgd RCFr nudq`kk+ nq sgqntfg LROr rodbhĭb`kkx (Abshagen et al 2018; IPI and One Earth 2018).

Critics argue that the focus on global partnerships as a key implementing tool for the 2030 Agenda has sidelined more salient investigations into how partnerships might work in national and local contexts. They caution that the challenges inherent to partnership as a concept, and as an instrument ne bnkk`anq`shud `bshnm+ `qd hmduhs`akx l `fmhĭdc in conflict and fragile contexts, and that these challenges have been largely overlooked (Lange 2015; International Alert and Oxfam 2017). What does exist in the empirical literature shows that in such areas partnerships among broad constituencies of business, government, civil society, local communities, international organisations and other institutions are rare, and have struggled 'to achieve broad and lasting impact' (Beisheim and Simone 2018:499); that they mainly exist within the donor-recipient mode of operation, mostly operate within the scope of private businesses philanthropy, and have 'limited interaction vhsg knb`k bn l l tmhshdr adxnmc rodbhĭb oqnctbs nq service transactions' (Kolk and Lenfant 2015: 426; Peterson et al 2013).[1] Nonetheless, SDG- related MSPs are envisaged as complex formations which bind corporate partners into long term collaboration to provide integrated local solutions to problems that connect development, security and governance in conflict affected and fragile areas.

Given the modest state of knowledge on partnerships in these types of environment, is the challenge facing SDG-related MSPs solely a matter ne l `fmhstcd> Nq `qd sgdqd `krn rodbhĭb cxm` l hbr that influence their effectiveness and legitimacy and how they fare in meeting the transformative ambition dmrgqhmdc hm sgd RCFr+ vnqjhmf sn sgd admdĭs ne communities affected by conflict and fragility? It appears that there is a substantial difference between vision and reality surrounding these governance arrangements at local level , and that delivering on the promise of partnerships for the SDGs requires a new analysis and new modalities of engagement with local communities.

BUSINESS ACTORS IN CONFLICT AFFECTED AND FRAGILE AREAS: TO ENGAGE OR NOT, AND WHAT TO EXPECT?

The private sector tends to shy away from conflict affected and fragile areas, understood as synonymous with disorder and instability-- features that are the very antithesis of business's ingrained need for some modicum of predictability based on law and order, that is typically provided by a functioning state. Ats fhudm sg`s sgdqd hr nesdm rhfmhĭb`ms tms`oodc business potential in those areas, or simply a limited bgnhbd enq bn l o`mhdr sn qdknb`sd `v`x eqn l cheĭbtks environments, commercial incentives to remain are strong. Whether it is transnational (TNC) or local companies, their staying power is consequently considerable albeit generally poorly understood (Lamb et al 2015).[2] Global attention is drawn to examples of companies- mainly TNCs in extractive industries- that are entangled in the dynamics of war and violence through colluding with conflict actors to ensure their can continue to operate even despite adverse conditions. More broadly, in the recent study by International Alert and Oxfam (2017:10) it is argued that breakdowns and distortions in formal channels of engagement, may make business and civil society organisations reliant on political connections on all sides of the conflict, in order to operate. The implications of such practices for the prospects of partnering with other social actors to produce admdĭsr hm sdq l r ne sgd RCFr g`ud addm ax `mc k`qfd overlooked in the debates about MSPs in conflict and fragile situations.

An important point to note is that a disorder perspective on local governance in areas affected by violent conflict and fragility is misleading. What to an outside observer may seem as disorder caused by the absence of functioning government institutions, often constitutes distinct arrangements and political economies that shape local people's experience of wellbeing, safety and security, although such `qq`mfd l dmsr l `x onrd ` rhfmhĭb`ms bg`kkdmfd to partnership and collaboration. Far from being 'ungoverned', areas of violent conflict and fragility- sometimes also referred to as areas of limited rs`sdgnnc, `qd fnudqmdc cheedqdmskx 'AɋqydkQhrrd and Draude 2018; Clunan &Trinkunas 2010). In effect,

a myriad of social actors on the ground exercises some form of public authority with variable levels of effectiveness and legitimacy among different sections of the local population (Risse and Stollenwark 2018). Those actors may include besides the state, which if not absent is generally weak or failing, various armed formations, traditional authorities, faith-based and other non-governmental organisations aligned in different constellations at the local, regional and national level. Armed groups have often provided public goods amid open violence, to some sections

governing elites and their extended networks cannot be assumed in such opaque contexts.[3] Neither can it be taken for granted that local civil society represents local popular interests and demands, or that it operates as an independent force to hold the government (and companies) to account. Civil society itself is diverse and often polarised mirroring conflict fault-lines among some of its segments. It is also heavily geared towards funders' agendas and does not necessarily deal with more pertinent local issues. Conflict and weak governance also lead to the disarticulation of local communities. Thus, given the fluid identities of key stakeholders and their multiple and shifting hmsdqbnmmdbshnmr+ hcdmshexhmf sgd admdĭsr ne o`qsmdqhmf enq d`bg chrbqdsd `bsnq oqdrdmsr ` rhfmh " ! lokd in the coceptualdisation ofrvdtt

to take place within an overall framework of global norms and regimes that support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda by states and companies (for instance the norms and standards laid out by the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights). The implementation of those norms at the country level is the responsibility of national government as the foremost interlocutor in the emerging meta-governance of MSPs. However, in a context of weak governance and a culture of non-compliance associated with dysfunctional state institutions and a lack of democratic governance, this important trestle is likely to be either absent or at best unreliable. The risk is that partnerships become stranded, isolated

ENDNOTES

Partnerships in fragile contexts are also a nascent area of study Kolk and Lenfant 2013: 47.

A notable example of the latter is a thriving business sector in Somaliland.

A case in point is Myanmar where the separation between the private sector and the state is non-existent.

To that end, policy guidance on how business should behave in conflict-affected and fragile areas has proliferated (Ford 2008: 40).

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