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New Models of Development Cooperation: The G7+ and Fragile-to-Fragile Cooperation

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Trends in conflict and fragility are changing. New regions and an increasing number of middle-income countries are experiencing instability.¹ But many of the problems in conflict-affected and fragile situations remain, including in the g7+ group of fragile states. Several of these countries are still low-income and aid dependent, and a majority of them are not expected to reach the goal of halving poverty by the end of 2015, nor to reach several other Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).² Most continue to experience the same shortfalls of international engagement year after year. Fragility has proven to be resilient, with several countries experiencing recurrent and protracted crises.

Traditional North-South development cooperation, with its formal, highly regulated, risk averse, and high-transaction systems,³ has delivered limited results in conflict-affected and fragile situations. This is despite the volume of aid – which according to the OECD amounts to over 38 per cent of Official Development Assistance (ODA) – and efforts to make it more effective.⁴ The practice of South-South Cooperation (SSC) has increased in recent years, partly in response to the limitations of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC)-led approach to aid; that is, one dominated by the global North. In its dominant form, however, SSC is largely practiced by middle-income and emerging economies, which also may not be well placed to represent the poorest and most fragile of contexts.

The g7+ has emerged in the past few years as a group of conflict-affected countries that aim to support each other in addressing their own fragility, including through the idea of Fragile to Fragile (F2F) cooperation. F2F cooperation has emerged partly in response to the perceived deficiencies of existing forms of cooperation. While it remains to be seen whether the g7+ and F2F cooperation can provide a robust and meaningful solution to these issues in practice, it is nonetheless an important evolution within the global development context.

This paper examines the emergence of the g7+ and the F2F approach, and discusses the extent to which, at this early stage, it might provide a different and necessary form of support from the established models of the DAC, SSC and triangular cooperation. It also situates the g7+ and F2F within the context of the post-2015 development agenda, notably in relation to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The g7+: A New Constituency

The g7+ is a voluntary association of 20 countries that have been affected by conflict and are in transition to longer-term development.⁵ Created in 2008 at the Accra meeting on aid effectiveness, its aim was to become a new political voice advocating for global change in the international peacebuilding and aid architecture, including more effective support for country-led transitions out of conflict and fragility. The initiative developed out of a concern that traditional development cooperation was delivering modest results in conflict-affected and fragile environments, and that it was based on unequal power dynamics. Moreover, the aid effectiveness agenda had not taken sufficient account of the particular challenges of these contexts. For example, initiatives such as the Fragile States Principles, developed by the OECD-DAC,⁶ had not involved countries affected by conflict and fragility in their design and implementation, and had not significantly changed donor behavior in order to enable more effective support.⁷

The g7+ sought to address this situation and to change the relationships with traditional aid donors, represented by the DAC, and multilateral partners such as the UN, World Bank, and regional banks.⁸ In addition, the g7+ members aimed to create a new platform for knowledge transfer and peer learning between countries combating fragility.

The leadership of the g7+, based in the global South, reflects these aims. The current Chair of the g7+ group is Sierra Leonean Finance Minister Kai-fala Marah, and the g7+ secretariat is in Timor-Leste, whose former Minister of Finance, Emilia Pires, had chaired the group since its creation.

The core of the g7+ agenda is F2F cooperation, which it defines as support between its member countries, and is based on three main pillars:⁹

1. Supporting g7+ member countries to implement the New Deal (see below);
2. Peer learning, knowledge generation and capacity development around peacebuilding and statebuilding;
3. Supporting g7+ member countries dealing with acute and emerging crises.

New approaches driven by the g7+ and F2F cooperation

The substance of what the g7+ is articulating is not necessarily new. It has long been recognized that fragile states have unique structural problems that require specialized attention. Indeed, donors committed – at least in theory – to many of the changes advocated for by the g7+ in the Paris (2005) and Accra (2008) Declarations on Aid Effectiveness, the Busan (2011) agreement on effective development cooperation, and the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States (The New Deal).¹⁰ The key development is that the fragile countries themselves are now advocating for these changes, and are also demanding the lead in their prioritization and implementation.¹¹

Thus, the g7+ is the first – and so far the only – platform that brings together countries, led by senior level political leadership, that share similar experiences of fragility and its associated challenges.

What is potentially different about the F2F concept?

The concept of F2F cooperation originated in the g7+ secretariat, and was bolstered by bilateral visits among leaders of g7+ countries. There are not yet sufficient examples and evidence to determine whether it is a viable and effective approach, or if it can or should aspire to be upheld as a model of cooperation. In particular, it is unclear how F2F aligns with either the model of ‘traditional’ DAC cooperation, which largely inspired it, but

Table 1 - OECD/DAC development cooperation and F2F: main differences

OECD/DAC cooperation	F2F cooperation
<i>Formal</i> - Formal framework that builds on international agreements, policies, standards, established reporting mechanisms, and monitoring. It has its own dedicated bodies within each donor, and the DAC to bring it all together.	<i>Informal</i> - Informal framework based on solidarity among members, and the discontent with traditional development cooperation. Members do not have dedicated capacities to engage with F2F cooperation. The Secretariat in Dili supported by external capacities is the main driving force.
<i>Technical and political</i> - Although the aim of development cooperation is ultimately political, the aid delivery industry is overwhelmingly technical and bureaucratic, as in most instances it is delivered through administrative departments. At the same time, it has domestic accountability mechanisms through the ODA reporting system and parliamentary oversight bodies. Political action is often driven by domestic demand as ultimately politicians are accountable to their own constituency and not that of partner countries.	<i>Political</i> – The high-level political engagement of a few countries and individuals has been the main driving factor behind the g7+ and F2F. Overall the approach appears as rather individually driven, and accountability seems to refer mainly to the principle of solidarity among g7+ members.
<i>Funding/aid</i> - Disbursing aid to support the MDGs is the <i>raison d’être</i> of the traditional DAC model of cooperation. The fact that aid is at the center of the relationship between donors and recipient countries, and the history of development cooperation has created at times unhealthy North-South power dynamics. It is not a relationship among “equals”, and often it is not an effective relationship. The expectations raised by the aid effectiveness agenda in 2000 of greater national ownership and leadership of development agendas have only partly been delivered.	<i>Other resources/experience</i> - F2F mainly builds on members’ experiences. Implementing F2F cooperation, however requires external funding, which so far the g7+ has raised mainly through traditional donors (with few exceptions). F2F aims to be cooperation among equals, based on solidarity and respect.
<i>Process heavy</i> - Development cooperation tends to be heavy, inflexible, slow to mobilize, and has conditions attached. It does not necessarily address the key priorities as identified by country level actors.	<i>Opportunistic and fast</i> – A key feature of F2F cooperation, the way it has been conceived, is that it aims to be fast, pragmatic, and responsive to needs as they emerge and to problems that are not finding other solutions. It has no conditions and few rules attached. Whether this will be possible is yet to be demonstrated.

from which it aims to distance itself (see table 1), or that of SSC. F2F is arguably a hybrid approach, situated somewhere between SSC and triangular cooperation.¹² This is because it aims to build upon and to promote SSC, whilst still being partly dependent on western donors for support and expertise. The Memorandum of Understanding between the g7+ and the International Labor Organization, which promotes South-South, triangular, and F2F cooperation around labor issues, is a good example of this hybrid model.¹³ It should be noted, however, that SSC can (and in some cases already does) provide the space for cooperation among fragile countries, and the extent to which F2F cooperation can supersede this function remains uncertain, if this is the intention at all.

Nonetheless, the g7+ ambition for F2F appears to be as an independent, full-fledged model of cooperation. At least initially, the development of the F2F framework has drawn on the support of DAC countries and multilaterals, either in terms of funding or for access to knowledge and technical capacity. The Overseas Development Institute, for instance, has been providing core capacity to the g7+ since its inception. Consequently, there are few examples – aside from that of Timor-Leste – of g7+ countries using their own resources (financial, technical, and political) to support other g7+ members. Furthermore, the position of countries such as Brazil and India vis-à-vis the g7+ and the F2F approach is unclear, and mainly driven by those countries' broader political interests and positioning within the UN system, through the G77 group, among others.

There is little evidence available as yet of how F2F cooperation has been delivered, what difference it has made, and what lessons we can learn. Below are some examples that draw largely on g7+ documentation and declarations by g7+ representatives in various international fora.

One example of the application of the F2F concept has been the direct support given to g7+ countries facing particular challenges under the leadership of the group's successive Chairs, Timor-Leste and Sierra Leone. This has included high-level political engagement to increase international support, beyond humanitarian aid, to the Central African Republic and South Sudan, and early mobilization of assistance to the Ebola-affected g7+ members. Ministerial level visits to g7+ countries have also been part of a proactive strategy to promote high-level cooperation and support across the group.

On a bilateral level, Timor-Leste has put F2F cooperation into practice by providing financial, technical, and political support to Guinea-Bissau in preparation for the critical 2014 elections that ended the transitional period following the 2012 coup d'état. Another concrete example is the sharing of experience and advice with South Sudan on natural resources management. But these appear to be rather isolated cases and evidence of their impact, as suggested earlier, is anecdotal.¹⁴ Some trends are suggested through noteworthy examples, however. For instance, in the case of Somalia, Timor-Leste went ahead with engagement whilst DAC donors – who had committed to support g7+ countries through the New Deal – have on occasion found it more difficult to even visit the country, let alone mobilize timely and appropriate responses. Direct experience with a fragile transition, exposure to the limitations of international support, a deep understanding of the importance of capturing political opportunities to stabilize a fragile situation, and a sense of solidarity, appear to have been some of the elements that pushed Timor-Leste to act and to take the associated risks. Furthermore, Timor-Leste mobilized its top leadership, establishing strong collaboration at the highest political level in order to take quick decisions and to provide continued support. Unlike much DAC aid, the assistance was not a one-off package of support provided through lengthy technical transactions, supervised by overseas programme officers. But again, this appears to be a rather isolated example and one that needs to be further assessed. Besides Timor-Leste and the current involvement of Sierra Leone as Chair, engagement by other g7+ members appears patchy.

Finally, an interesting aspect of the concept of F2F is that, at least in theory, it is more aligned to the concept of country ownership and leadership promoted by the New Deal than other forms of cooperation (particularly the DAC, but also governance forums such as the G7 and G20). However, the country-owned and -led approach, inclusive of civil society and other sectors, advocated by the New Deal and at the foundation of the g7+, does not seem to have materialized thus far.¹⁵

To conclude, a mix of factors – many of them in line with wider SSC practice – appear to be at the origin of the g7+ efforts and the emergence of F2F cooperation. These include the desire to promote a different narrative of fragility, a broad dissatisfaction with existing models of cooperation and Western-led peacebuilding and state building approaches, and a rejection of the Western donor-recipient dynamic. The result is that new

perspectives and ways of working are being tested. While it remains unclear whether F2F cooperation represents a fully-fledged new model of development cooperation, or whether it is simply an emerging component of both traditional (i.e. DAC) cooperation and also South-South initiatives, the few examples illustrated above show a desire, systematically voiced by the g7+ leadership in international fora, to break from existing forms of cooperation. The extent to which these rather spontaneous efforts will translate into a more structured cooperation model in its own right, or be scaled up as a modality of existing forms of cooperation, remains to be seen.

Challenges ahead

The g7+ is a young enterprise that operates in a complex environment. Its members are diverse and are at different stages of development and fragility. They have a range of capacities and resources, established relationships with partners in their own countries, and different approaches to engaging across the g7+ group and internationally. They also differ in their understanding of what the g7+ and F2F are about.

A key challenge ahead for the g7+, and for partners engaging with the group, relates to the fact that the g7+ is a relatively small constituency that in some ways overlaps with more established and representative groups such as the G77 and other regional organizations. In addition, the relationship between the g7+ and parts of the development community, in particular those represented by the OECD-DAC, has at times been confrontational. The use of the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding – which the g7+ co-chairs – as a vehicle to voice their discontent, as opposed to an opportunity to advance their own agenda in partnership with development actors, was an illustration of this dynamic. Key institutions, including the UN, have also so far failed to fully engage with the g7+, in particular through the New Deal.

Thus, the g7+ has yet to show whether it will become sustainable, strong and effective enough to make significant progress towards its goals, in particular that of helping its member countries transition out of fragility.

What role for the UN

What is the role of the UN in engaging with F2F cooperation, especially if it emerges as a model of cooperation in its own right?

Based on the above considerations, the UN has advantages and disadvantages in engaging with the g7+ and with the concept of F2F cooperation. The main opportunity is that the g7+ and the concept of F2F provide a platform to support enhanced cooperation among a group of conflict-affected and fragile countries that otherwise might not exist. The main challenge is that the g7+ has yet to show whether it will become sustainable, strong and effective enough to make a difference on the international and national arena and whether the F2F approach is a viable vehicle to achieve its goals.

In the meantime, the UN could consider support to the g7+ and F2F, through its existing SSC and triangular cooperation mechanisms, in two broad areas:

- a) **At the country level**, specifically provide support to g7+ and F2F cooperation in countries dealing with acute or recurrent crisis and/or that have difficult access to other forms of support.

For example, financial and technical support, through a dedicated Trust Fund or by mobilizing existing funding mechanisms such as the Peacebuilding Fund, could enable more regular and substantive peer learning, including by encouraging the participation of civil society.

- b) **At the global level**, explore and assess opportunities to facilitate the g7+ voice and role within key UN bodies and processes, bearing in mind internal UN political dynamics.

This could include addressing – and rectifying – the often challenging relationships between g7+ members and more established development coordination mechanisms. A concrete effort could be to explore what role the g7+ and the concept of F2F could play in relation to the implementation of the SDGs in conflict affected and fragile situations and, as appropriate, to support such role.

What are the implications for other areas of future challenges?

The UN may want to consider the implication of the F2F approach and the g7+ in addressing other emerging issues that pose important challenges for national and international actors, such as climate-induced challenges faced by coastal farm states, low elevation coastal zones, small islands, and highly urbanized and urbanizing areas.

Two main considerations deserve attention in this regard:

- Would support to the g7+ and F2F cooperation indirectly push other countries to promote similar approaches, thus leading to the creation of issue/challenge-specific groups, with related structures, agenda, and models of cooperation? Would this result in endless fragmentation that limits opportunities to mobilize the most effective responses to global challenges? And will this ultimately challenge the idea of a universal SDG agenda?
- Or could the g7+ and F2F approach serve as an example of new, targeted cooperation that enables countries that share similar challenges to work better together and be more influential within the international system?

Conclusion

The g7+ provides a vehicle for a group of conflict-affected and fragile countries to channel their

needs and expectations within international fora. However, western donors and to a lesser extent emerging actors, in addition to more powerful actors and groups such as the G77, continue to dominate the development scene. It will continue to be difficult for a group representing a cluster of predominantly small countries, to find a space and voice to affect these dynamics. Strong leadership by successive g7+ Chairs and an increasingly effective secretariat, the key driving force behind the g7+, may not be enough to deliver tangible and sustainable results. In the meantime, the UN should consider supporting the g7+ and the F2F approach, as part of its existing engagement with SSC and triangular cooperation, with a focus on country-level F2F initiatives and supplementing their capacity to influence key global processes. Ultimately, however, considering the existence of other country specific and global challenges vying for international attention, the question remains open as to whether a separate g7+ and F2F approach will serve to complement, or distract from, the universal agenda of the SDGs.

Endnotes

¹ OECD (2015) *States of Fragility: meeting post-2015 ambitions* (OECD: Paris); Institute for Economics and Peace (2015) *Global Peace Index 2015*, available at http://static.visionofhumanity.org/sites/default/files/Global%20Peace%20Index%20Report%202015_0.pdf.

² OECD (2015) *States of Fragility*, op cit.

³ These are some of the findings that led to the consideration of conflict affected and fragile situations as a category of countries deserving special attention within the OECD-led aid development process. Addressing these and other challenges was at the origin of the creation of the International Dialogue for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (see www.pbsbdialogue.org) and of the g7+. The New Deal for engagement in fragile states (2011) was specifically designed to change some of these feature that characterize aid delivery in fragile states.

⁴ OECD (2014) *Fragile States 2014: Domestic Revenue Mobilisation in Fragile States* (OECD : Paris).

⁵ Members of the g7+ countries are: Afghanistan, Burundi, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Comoros Islands, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea Bissau, Haiti, Liberia, Papua New Guinea, Sao Tome and Principe, Sierra Leone, the Solomon Islands, Somalia, South Sudan, Timor-Leste, Togo, and Yemen. See www.g7plus.org.

⁶ OECD (2007) *Principles for good international engagement in fragile states and situations* (OECD: Paris), available at <http://www.oecd.org/dacfragilestates/the10fragilestatesprinciples.htm>.

⁷ OECD (2011) "Monitoring the principles for good international engagement in fragile states and situations", Monitoring Survey 2011 Fact-sheet, available at <http://www.oecd.org/dacfragilestates/47278529.pdf>.

⁸ This ambition is articulated in the founding documents of the g7+ group, the Annex to the Dili Declaration, April 2010, and was reiterated in the New Deal and in most official documents of the g7+ group (see www.g7plus.org).

⁹ g7+ Policy Note on Fragile to Fragile Cooperation, available at http://static1.squarespace.com/static/5212dafbe4b0348bfd22a511/t/55366914e4b030782ad01b10/1429629204012/f2f_for+web-eng-reduced.pdf.

¹⁰ New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States, International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding, 2011, available at <http://www.pbsbdialogue.org>.

¹¹ Seth Kaplan (2013) "Are the G7+ and Donors Heading for a Clash?", *Fragile States*, available at <http://www.fragilestates.org/2013/06/14/are-the-g7-and-donors-heading-for-a-clash/>.

¹² OECD (2013) "Triangular cooperation, what's the literature telling us?", Literature review prepared by the OECD Development Co-operation Directorate (OECD: Paris).

¹³ G7+ (2014) "The g7+ signs a Memorandum of Understanding with the International Labor Organisation", available at <http://www.g7plus.org/news-feed/2014/3/24/the-g7-signs-a-memorandum-of-understanding-with-the-international-labor-organisation>.

¹⁴ See <http://www.g7plus.org>.

¹⁵ See International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (2014) New Deal monitoring report, available at http://www.pbsbdialogue.org/media/filer_public/a5/df/a5dfd621-00a5-4836-8e20-8fff3afd1187/final_2014_new_deal_monitoring_report.pdf.