

## Report: Reimagine Stability and Development in Africa

Friday 30 September 2022, 14:00 – 16:00

IDLO: Hofweg 9-E, The Hague

### Highlights

- On Friday 30 September, KPSRL organized a roundtable together with UNDP and the Dutch MFA on their stabilization approaches in politically volatile or sensitive contexts, esp. in the Sahel and West Africa.
- The advice was to stay engaged with governments during volatile transitions; focus on the content of reform and inclusive governance, instead of the kneejerk reaction to cut ties or only work with non-government actors at a local level.
- Technocratic labels of humanitarian aid, stabilization and development hinder localized approaches; focus instead on the ‘how’ of jointly identifying needs and co-creating solutions and work from there, thereby strengthening the nexuses.
- Unlock the potential of regional actors in providing a guide for or a check on national governments, especially in a time where multilateral organizations are rebalancing.

### Summary

On Friday 30 September, KPSRL organized a roundtable in the context of a visit of UNDP’s Ahunna Eziakonwa (Assistant Secretary General and Regional Director Africa Bureau) to The Netherlands. The session aimed at looking at (1) exchanging effective stabilization approaches in addressing root causes for instability, as well as (2) responses during times of volatile change.

UNDP started the conversation with a broader narrative for Africa. Although in “[a world of worry](#)”, UNDP stresses that Africa holds great potential with its young work force, huge internal market and opportunities to leap frog development (more sustainably). Important factors to meet such potential lie in localization, regional actors and the nexuses between humanitarian aid, stabilization and development. Although recent coups make Western policymakers question popular democratic support, UNDP describes a still growing demand for – functioning – democracies, with many improving examples.

#### Effective programmatic approaches

UNDP requested input on their approach with stabilization programmes in the Lake Chad Basin and the Liptako Gourma regions on community security, livelihood opportunities and basic infrastructure in areas recovered from violent extremist.

Participants appreciated the ‘localized’ emphasis on trust between local leaders and their communities (especially in border regions). More discussion was on the (lack of) difference between such an approach and, for example, peacebuilding (PB) interventions – while stabilization efforts on the other hand operate in the sphere of humanitarian aid (HA). HA is easier to sell politically, but has its own constraints. These technocratic labels hinder proper localization; perhaps the ‘reimagining’ (as the title states) is in developing an approach for interventions that jointly identify needs and co-create solutions, instead of developing a specific stabilization, PB or HA programme.

There were also concerns about the sustainability of stabilization interventions; how to get the national government to continue funding after international actors leave? This is a case-by-case question, where potential increases with a stronger and more decentralized in-country government, combined with potential to start raising revenues – and of course with buy in from the start.

### **Donor responses to unconstitutional change of governments**

The MFA shared their dilemma of staying engaged with governments for sustainable impact (instead of going ‘too local’ or niche), while not necessarily wanting to support their legitimacy.

Participants firstly indicated it’s not a pick-and-choose kind of situation; one can support local actors while working with (local) governments to be more inclusive and responsive to needs – ideally this always happens simultaneously anyway.

Additionally, the regional level is thought to be a key factor to be unlocked here; local and regional are disconnected, while the regional level can keep national actors in check when undermining local peace and stabilization processes. As the discussion progressed, it was noted that the breakdown of multilateralism could also be a point of ‘reimagining’; rebalancing international systems and less ‘two-faced’ engagement of Western countries defending international principles, while doing something else in practice.

Regional actors are also a key player in UNDP’s Transition Facility, about which UNDP shared its concept. It helps countries with a roadmap (e.g. elections, dialogue) in their transition towards new governments.

### **Conclusions**

A recurring point was to stay engaged and constantly look for the opportunities during volatile change, instead of only seeing it as a risk. Actually, even the pre-transition situation might have been a democratic façade that now unravels. State building is an iterative, imperfect process; we shouldn’t expect all positive change at once but look for the opportunities with every transition. The key is to pay attention to how relationships are built; stability requires building resilient communities and networks of relationships - which can only be supported by staying engaged in volatile situations.