Fragile states

Topic guide
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About this guide

GSDRC Topic Guides aim to provide a clear, concise and objective report on findings from rigorous research on critical areas of development policy. Rather than provide policy guidance or recommendations, their purpose is to signpost policymakers and practitioners to the key debates and evidence on the topic of focus, to support informed decision-making.

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1. UNDERSTANDING FRAGILE STATES

1.1 Introduction: Fragile states on the international agenda

So-called ‘fragile states’ and how best to engage with them have emerged as a key priority in the international development community. This concern has surfaced from the confluence of several factors, including (i) an emphasis on human security and peacebuilding; (ii) a concern with the relationship between state effectiveness and development; and (iii) a belief that underdevelopment and insecurity (individual and international) are related.

One billion people, including about 340m of the world’s extreme poor, are estimated to live in this group of between 30-50 ‘fragile’ countries, located mainly in Africa, that are ‘falling behind and falling apart’ (Collier, 2007). There is now consensus that without a strengthened model of international engagement, these countries will continue to fall behind.

It is recognised that delivering aid in these contexts cannot be ‘business as usual’, and that fragile situations require a co-ordinated, cross-sectoral approach that combines support to state-building and peacebuilding and uses whole-of-government approaches. But fragile states are ‘under-aided’, even against allocation models that take their performance into account. Aid flows are excessively volatile, poorly coordinated, and often reactive rather than preventive.

The fragile states agenda is surrounded by a great deal of critical debate. The term itself is highly contested – some argue it implicitly contains normative assumptions of how states should perform and a misguided notion that all states will eventually converge around a Western model of statehood. But in spite of the many criticisms of how fragile states have been conceptualised, few would dispute the severe impacts this group of states impose on the security and well-being of their populations.


This seminal book argues that the real challenge of development is the small group of countries at the bottom that are falling behind and often falling apart. These countries, and the billion people who live in them, are caught in one or another of four traps: the conflict trap; the natural resources trap; the trap of being landlocked with bad neighbours; and the trap of bad governance in a small country. Whilst these traps are not inescapable, standard solutions will not work: aid has been ineffective, and globalisation has made things worse. A new mix of policy instruments is required, supported by a bold new plan of action for the G8.


How can security, governance and economics be synthesised so as to secure the development of fragile states? This article argues that in order to address fragile situations effectively, a new framework is required that goes beyond the development model. This new framework involves building security, legitimacy, governance and economy. It is about securing development – bringing security and development together to smooth the transition from conflict to peace and to embed stability so that development can take hold.


Some 1.5 billion people live in countries affected by repeated cycles of political and criminal violence. This report argues that breaking these cycles involves a) strengthening legitimate national institutions and governance to meet citizens’ key needs; and b) alleviating international stresses that increase the risks of conflict (such as food price volatility and infiltration by trafficking networks). It is important to: refocus assistance on confidence building, citizen security, justice and jobs; reform the procedures of international agencies to accommodate swift, flexible, and longer-term action; respond at the regional level (such as by developing markets that integrate insecure areas and pooling resources for building capacity); and to renew cooperative efforts between lower, middle, and higher income countries.
This report offers a new tool for assessing fragility that is more comprehensive than the traditional single categorisation of “fragile states”, and recognises the diversity of risks and vulnerabilities that lead to fragility. It identifies countries the most vulnerable in five dimensions of risk and vulnerability linked to fragility, and asks how likely they are to achieve the UN Open Working Group’s post-2015 goals and targets in those five dimensions: 1) violence (peaceful societies); 2) access to justice for all; 3) effective, accountable and inclusive institutions; 4) economic foundations; 5) capacity to adapt to social, economic and environmental shocks and disasters. The report concludes that making headway on the targets will require building a new portfolio of tools and interventions, and an understanding of the role the international community should and can play in assisting this process.

Why fragile states matter

Impact on development, poverty and growth

Fragile states are often characterised by ongoing violence and insecurity, a legacy of conflict, weak governance and the inability to deliver the efficient and equitable distribution of public goods. They have consistently grown more slowly than other low-income countries, and the rate of extreme poverty is rising within them. They lag behind in human development indicators; with a 50% higher prevalence of malnutrition, 20% higher child mortality, and 18% lower primary education completion rates than other low-income countries (World Bank, 2007).


This paper looks at the relationships between fragility and conflict-affliction and economic performance, focusing on foreign direct investment (FDI). Although fragile states share many commonalities, their economies do vary in composition and size. From extreme conflict and political strife to simple under-development, there can be great risk from investing in these fragile states. This perceived risk to the investor can be offset by large potential gains, particularly in natural resources. Nearly half of fragile countries suffer some form of conflict. However there does not appear to be a clear and significant negative correlation between conflict and foreign investment among developing countries. The FDI flowing into developing countries is largely for natural resource industries, specifically oil, gas and minerals. Although the relationship between resources and conflict is less statistically clear, the resource curse provides one theory by suggesting that an abundance of natural resources, and especially a dependence on them, can lead to corruption and conflict instead of economic growth. Natural resource investment solely for extraction purposes should also be closely examined as this investment may not have as positive or substantial an effect on economic growth as outwardly perceived.


This study looks at the relationship between state fragility and rural development. Using Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Yemen, Nepal and Bolivia as country cases, the evidence presented in the study suggests that there are some particular and big challenges for rural development in fragile states. State fragility — disaggregated along the dimensions of state authority, legitimacy and capacity — affects levels of rural poverty, public service delivery and violence against women in a number of ways, making the achievement of rural development on the whole more difficult. The lack or limitations of development in rural areas in fragile countries, in turn, enhances the fragility of the state overall, creating a kind of vicious circle of fragility that is difficult to break.

Impact on vulnerable populations

It is widely acknowledged that fragility most negatively affects the poorest and the most vulnerable groups in society, including women and children. These groups experience the greatest impacts in terms of increased risk of violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect, loss of livelihood, threats to personal safety, poverty and malnutrition.

How do mass violent conflict and a fragile environment affect households? How do poor households cope with such an environment? This paper analyses the channels through which mass violent conflict and post-conflict fragility affect households. It highlights how a fragile environment impairs a household’s core functions, boundaries and choice of income generating activities.

**Regional and global implications of state fragility**

Fragile states have been linked with a range of transnational security threats and humanitarian concerns, including: mass migration, organised crime, violent conflict, communicable diseases, environmental degradation and, more recently, terrorism. Some argue fragile states have direct ‘spillover’ effects on neighbouring countries, including reduced growth and destabilisation. The negative impacts of fragility across borders are often considered as justification for international intervention. Nevertheless, relatively little empirical analysis has been conducted on the ‘costs’ of fragile states, and some research has questioned the notion of a direct causal link between fragility and threats to international security.


What are the costs of state failure? What implications do these costs have for sovereignty? This paper estimates the costs of state failure for failing states and their neighbours. It finds that the total cost of state failure is very large and borne mainly by the neighbours of failing states. There may therefore be good reason to vest sovereignty in the region or sub-region rather than the state, empowering international intervention in the process.

Since September 11, the ‘spillover effect’ – the presumed connection between weak states and a variety of transnational threats such as terrorism, weapons proliferation and organised crime – has been a key motivation behind foreign and aid policy. But is there any evidence to support the ‘spillover’ assertion? This paper explores the links between weak states and global threats, concluding that whilst weak states do often incubate global threats, this correlation is far from universal. A deeper understanding of the underlying mechanisms linking the two is required.


Many states fail in their responsibilities to their citizens, but those states which are fragile, failed or weak are particularly liable to render their citizens vulnerable. This issue of Forced Migration Review attempts to go behind the definitions, typologies and indicators of fragile states to explore some of the concepts and realities. The articles look at a variety of cases where displacement and state fragility go together or where countries are emerging from conflict-related displacement and fragility. They also discuss some of the humanitarian and development responses.

http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5k49dfmjpmv-en

Fragile states contributed 18 million migrants and 8 million refugees in 2000. More than 20% of these migrants and more than half of the refugees settle in other fragile states. Thus, migration is likely to be both a consequence and a possible cause of conflict and fragility. This paper asks why people from fragile states would want to move to another fragile state. Is it simply that they have no other options? The study analyses a new set of global data on the sources and destinations of migrants, revealing that economic factors, such as the pull of higher incomes in destination countries, are important. The paper concludes by discussing how migration from fragile states in search of higher incomes and greater wellbeing is an important development strategy that should be supported.

This brief argues that Africa’s fragile states create political and security environments that enhance the leverage of Islamist extremists in their ongoing struggle with moderates for influence. Countering extremism in Africa, therefore, cannot be separated from building stronger, more legitimate states. Robust state security operations can neutralise extremists in the short term. However, they are an insufficient long-term counter-extremism strategy unless coupled with opportunities for moderates to engage in the political process. In fragile states, maintaining moderate Islamist support for the state should be a central stabilisation objective.


This report takes Yemen as a case study in looking at the specific challenges (notably security challenges) found in fragile states. It reviews the problems in Yemen in detail, warning of the very serious consequences, in the country and further afield, should it fail. However, it also stresses that military and security assistance alone will have only limited effect in solving Yemen’s terrorist problem. It is crucial to understand Yemen’s deeply entrenched problems and treat it as a fragile state rather than just a security risk.


This paper argues that while attention is being paid analytically to the opportunistic environment that armed conflict and fragility create for transnational terrorism, this is not translating into effective response strategies. For that to happen, experts need to better understand the dynamics between these forces, and the policy debate needs to consider the interrelationships and how to address them.

### 1.2 Definitions and typologies of fragile states

This section introduces the range of terms used to describe ‘fragile states’, and critical perspectives on their evolution and usage.

#### Definitions of fragile states and contexts

Whilst there is no internationally-agreed definition of the term ‘fragile states’, or ‘fragility’, most development agencies define it principally as a fundamental failure of the state to perform functions necessary to meet citizens’ basic needs and expectations. Fragile states are commonly described as incapable of assuring basic security, maintaining rule of law and justice, or providing basic services and economic opportunities for their citizens.

The OECD has moved beyond a single categorization of fragile states towards a more universal approach for assessing fragility that captures diverse aspects of risk and vulnerability. Its 2015 States of Fragility report proposes a working model for analysing all countries’ risks along five clusters of fragility indicators; 1) violence; 2) access to justice for all; 3) effective, accountable and inclusive institutions; 4) economic inclusion and stability; and 5) capacities to prevent and adapt to social, economic and environmental shocks and disasters.

Increasingly, weak state legitimacy is understood to be a key defining characteristic of fragility. States that fail to meet basic needs and to keep societal expectations and state capacity in equilibrium can also fail to establish reciprocal state-society relations or create a binding social contract. DFID has defined fragile states as: ‘those where the government cannot or will not deliver core functions to the majority of its people, including the poor’ (DFID, 2005). However, acknowledging that this definition is narrow, it complements this with the definition of fragile states given by the Centre for Research on Inequality and Social Exclusion: ‘failing, or at risk of failing, with respect to authority, comprehensive service entitlements or legitimacy’ (CRISE 2009).

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1 DFID (2008), Scoping a long-term research programme on conflict, state fragility and social cohesion: Annex B – Key Concepts and Definitions. [link]
There has been much criticism of the emphasis some development agencies have placed on state ‘will’ to perform certain functions, on the grounds that ‘will’ is a normative concept. Some alternative, non-normative definitions of fragility focus instead on the volatility of state institutions, for example describing fragility as ‘institutional instability undermining the predictability, transparency and accountability of public decision-making processes and the provision of security and social services to the population’ (Andersen and Engberg-Pedersen, 2008). It is increasingly common for development agencies to conceptualise fragility in relation to its opposite – resilience. Resilient states are able to maintain order and stability, keep societal expectations and capacity in equilibrium, and survive and ameliorate the negative effects of external and internal shocks.

This brief addresses three main questions: What is state fragility? How is the concept used in international development? What are the advantages and disadvantages of using the term?

Evolution of the term: From ‘fragile states’ to situations of fragility

The fragile states terminology has been much maligned as stigmatising and analytically imprecise. Many see the term ‘fragile’ as a pejorative and inherently political label reflecting Weberian ideals of how a ‘successful’ state should function. At the empirical level, it arguably does not adequately differentiate between the unique economic and socio-political dimensions of states. Others contend that in practice, state fragility is not an ‘either/or’ condition, but varies along a continuum of performance, as well as across areas of state function and capacity.

In recognition of the empirical and normative shortcomings of the term ‘fragile states’, development agencies are now increasingly favouring the broader terminology of ‘fragility’ or ‘situations of fragility’. These terms are also seen to better capture the fact that fragility is not exclusively determined by the nature and boundaries of states – there is a need to look beyond the state to the state of society in both assessing and addressing fragility.

This paper aims to define the concept of ‘fragile states’ and make it operational for development policy. Fragility is defined as describing a country that is failing or at high risk of failing in three dimensions: (i) authority failures: the state lacks the authority to protect its citizens from violence of various kinds; (ii) service failures: the state fails to ensure that all citizens have access to basic services; (iii) legitimacy failures: the state lacks legitimacy, enjoys only limited support among the people, and is typically not democratic. By identifying the countries at risk as well as those that are actually failing, the authors hope this approach can provide warning of potential problems.

This report offers a new tool for assessing fragility that is more comprehensive than the traditional single categorisation of ‘fragile states’, and recognises the diversity of risks and vulnerabilities that lead to fragility. It identifies the most vulnerable countries in five dimensions of risk and vulnerability linked to fragility, and asks how likely they are to achieve the UN Open Working Group’s post-2015 goals and targets in those five dimensions: 1) violence (peaceful societies); 2) access to justice for all; 3) effective, accountable and inclusive institutions; 4) economic foundations; 5) capacity to adapt to social, economic and environmental shocks and disasters. The report concludes that making headway on the targets will require building a new portfolio of tools and interventions, and an understanding of the role the international community should and can play in assisting this process.

This paper proposes an approach to empirically identify country groupings that are each characterised by a distinct constellation of state fragility. It builds upon a theoretical framework that distinguishes three dimensions of statehood: authority, legitimacy and state capacity. It argues that current approaches towards measuring fragility do not properly account for the diversity of fragile situations. By assigning countries to certain problem constellations, this approach can lead to a better understanding of challenges in these countries; this approach is beyond the reach of one-dimensional approaches represented by many indexes on fragility.
The concept of fragility has gained an increasing relevance in development discourse. Nevertheless, it remains a fuzzy and elusive concept. This article presents a review of the literature, and identifies two main sets of definitions of fragility, which substantially differ in their focus and breadth. The limited consensus in the literature suggests that the concept’s analytical salience and operational value-added remain unclear. Nevertheless, the debate on state fragility has played an important advocacy role, and has offered methodological insights on the challenges donors face, and what external engagement can realistically achieve.

**Strong/weak state terminology**

Whilst the concept of fragile states is relatively new to the international agenda, there has been long-standing concern with understanding state failure in academic research. A range of terminology has emerged which characterises the relative strength or weakness of states on a continuum; from ‘weak’ and ‘fragile’ states at one end, to ‘failed’ and ‘collapsed’ states at the other. The meaning of all these terms is contested, many of them are seen to embed inherent contradictions, and in practice the terminology is inconsistently applied. Nevertheless, they can be broadly defined as follows:

**Weak states**: Weak states are poor states suffering from significant "gaps" in security, performance and legitimacy (Brookings Institution). They lack control over certain areas of their territory, and therefore (critically from an international security perspective) the capacity to combat internal threats of terrorism, or insurgency. But given that so-called ‘weak states’ may still be capable of repression, or may exhibit authoritarian tendencies, some see this term as inherently contradictory and misleading.

**Failing states**: This term is often used to describe states that are substantially failing their citizens and/or are failing to achieve economic growth. But it is contentious because it is confusingly applied both to states that are failing and those at risk of failing. It is criticised for masking the nuanced reality that states can be failing in some respects but not others.

**Failed states**: A failed state is marked by the collapse of central government authority to impose order, resulting in loss of physical control of territory, and/or the monopoly over the legitimate use of force. Crucially, it can no longer reproduce the conditions for its own existence (Crisis States, 2007).

**Collapsed states**: Collapsed and failed states are often used interchangeably for a situation where the state has entirely ceased to function (Crisis States, 2007).


http://press.princeton.edu/chapters/s7666.html

What is a failed state? How can a failed state be distinguished from a collapsed state? This chapter argues that a state’s success or failure can be assessed by looking at how effectively it delivers crucial political goods.

**Critiques of strong/weak terminology**

Strong/weak state terminology is often criticised for being too broad-brush, for implying that all states move along set trajectories, for representing an ‘end state’ when in reality states can recover from failure and collapse, and for offering no way of theorising about competing (informal) systems of governance.

Recently, there has been growing realisation that characterising ‘failed’ or ‘collapsed’ states as anarchic situations completely absent of order and systems of governance is misleading: A growing body of research has demonstrated how alternative (informal) forms of order, security and governance emerge and sustain themselves in the absence of a formal state.
What separates state collapse from conflicts and changes that occur without the state being destroyed? This chapter analyses examples of state collapse in African countries and identifies five signposts of proximity to state collapse. Contemporary collapse does not involve societal ‘civilisational’ collapse – societies continue to function and to offer sources of legitimate authority. State collapse is not a short-term phenomenon but rather a long-term degenerative process. However, it is not inevitable, and many states recover their balance and return to more or less normal functions.

**Donor typologies of fragile states**

Several development agencies use typologies of fragility, which categorise states according to the degree or nature of failure within them, in order to identify the possibilities and appropriate strategies for donor engagement. These typologies are criticised on the grounds they limit the diversity of fragile situations to a few categories, categorizing states is substantively normative, and interventions based on a categorization of countries may be harmful. Nevertheless, they are still seen as a useful way to understand (at the most basic level) state dynamics and trajectories, and how these may continually evolve.

**OECD DAC International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF)**

The OECD DAC International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF) uses a fourfold classification of fragile states: (i) post-conflict/crisis or political transition situations; (ii) deteriorating governance environments, (iii) gradual improvement, and; (iv) prolonged crisis or impasse.

**EU**


This article analyses the European Union’s notion of ‘state fragility’. Based on a document analysis covering the years 2001–12 and expert interviews conducted in November 2012, the article reveals that the EU has not (yet) decided on a clear-cut definition of ‘state fragility’. Three factors explain this lack of decisiveness: the EU’s complex institutional framework, which impedes policy coherence; developments at the international level that require the EU’s compliance; and the organisation’s diplomatic efforts to maintain cooperative relationships with aid-recipient countries that have been labelled ‘fragile’. The result is conceptual ambiguity that potentially reduces the EU’s capacity to respond to fragile situations.

**DFID**

DFID’s typology of fragile states includes 4 types of environments: (i) ‘Monterrey' cases of strong capacity and reasonable political will; (ii) ‘weak but willing’ where government capacity is an obstacle to implementing policy; (iii) ‘strong but unresponsive’ where state capacity is directed to achieving development goals; (iv) ‘weak-weak’ where both state capacity and political will are lacking.


Fragile states take many forms. What is the most useful way of defining them? This paper adopts a definition of ‘difficult environments’ grounded in the role of the state in development effectiveness. It argues that when assessing the willingness of a state to engage in partnerships for poverty reduction, there are two closely related notions: First, an explicit political commitment to policies aimed at promoting human welfare should be reflected in actions and outcomes. Second, there should be an inclusive approach that does not exclude particular social groups from the benefits of development. Based on these two key concepts, four broad types of environments are distinguishable.
World Bank

The World Bank similarly advocates differentiated approaches across a spectrum of classification, which is: deterioration, prolonged crisis or impasse, post-conflict or political transition, and early recovery or reform.


The World Bank identifies fragile states by weak performance on the Country Policy and Institutional Assessment (CPIA). Within this, it distinguishes a fourfold typology of business models, based on the extent of consensus between donors and government on development strategy, and the pace and direction of change.

Nature of the state terminology

A separate group of terminology describes states according to the prevailing characteristics or underlying causes of their perceived weakness or strength. Many of these terms describe informal systems of governance, power or order which exist alongside or within the structures of the formal state.

Neopatrimonial states

Patrimonialism – a term often used in reference to African states – was first conceived by Max Weber as a system of patron-client rule in which elites exploit public resources and distribute them to political followers in return for loyalty. Neopatrimonialism describes a situation in which patrimonial and formal bureaucratic rules co-exist.


Although neopatrimonial practices can be found in all polities, they have been a core feature of post-colonial politics in Africa. Neopatrimonial rule is an overarching concept that embraces a variety of subsidiary regime types. Its characteristic feature is the incorporation of patrimonial logic into bureaucratic institutions. The right to rule is ascribed to an individual rather than an office, and personalised exchanges, systemic clientelism and the use of state resources for political legitimation are the norm. Nonetheless, there is significant variation in the political institutions that have evolved in different African states as well as the degree of political competition and participation which is permitted.

Hybrid states

The term ‘hybrid state’ is used to denote one in which formal institutions operate alongside customary forms of governance. Rather than seeing any deviation from the Weberian state-centric model as being fragile or incomplete, the hybrid approach combining traditional and modern norms and practices, could provide for a stable, legitimate and contextually-specific form of state system.


This paper argues that the concept of state fragility that has gained prominence within the development and security agenda focuses very much on deficiencies and shortcomings of governance in so-called fragile states. In contrast, the concept of hybrid political order takes a more positive outlook by focusing on the strength and resilience of sociopolitical formations that are present on the ground, that work, and that provide public goods for people and communities.


The notions ‘fragile state’ and ‘failed state’ began to attract increasing attention from social scientists during the 2000s. As scientific concepts, they have been used to define and classify countries in which state institutions are unstable, contested, and dysfunctional. This paper focuses on critical approaches that have been disputing the heuristic dimension of these notions in recent years. Part 1 briefly presents some commonalities of the literature on fragile and failed states. Part 2 deals with five sets of critical ideas that have recently emerged in academic studies.
Part 3 pays particular attention to two opposed intellectual positions: the first proposes that the most controversial notions be discarded in favour of alternate concepts; the second one examines a better analytical framework that could help turn these fuzzy policy labels into rigorous concepts.

**Quasi states**

Fragile states are sometimes described as ‘quasi states’, which have de jure but not de facto sovereignty. These states achieve de jure sovereignty by virtue of their acceptance into the international system of states, but nevertheless are not recognised by their citizens as a legitimate public authority.


https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=8tc2UDYy-HAC&printsec=frontcover

How have notions of sovereignty changed in the post-colonial era? How do these changes affect the way development is done? This chapter explores these questions, using a distinction between ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ sovereignty. Quasi-states enjoy a right to exist and high prospects for survival, despite their weakness and illegitimacy. The author argues that this is a new constitutional mechanism. It has replaced colonial, military and diplomatic security arrangements, and is the basis of international aid.

**Warlord states**

Warlord states are ones where virtually all power is channeled through a very real and highly organised (but not formally recognised) patronage system based on rulers’ control over resources and violence. The term was coined in relation to African states (Reno, 1998 below) but has been taken up and debated in a range of contexts.


http://www.cornellpress.cornell.edu/book/?GCOI=80140100102810

This book shows why and how warlords undermine state sovereignty. Unlike the feudal lords of a previous era, warlords today are not state-builders. Instead they collude with cost-conscious, corrupt, or frightened state officials to flout and undermine state capacity. They thrive on illegality, relying on private militias for support, and often provoke violent resentment from those who are cut out of their networks. Some act as middlemen for competing states, helping to hollow out their own states from within. Countries ranging from the United States to Russia have repeatedly chosen to ally with warlords, but the book argues that to do so is a dangerous proposition. It examines warlordism in the Pakistani tribal areas during the twentieth century, in post-Soviet Georgia and the Russian republic of Chechnya, and among Sunni militias in the US-supported Anbar Awakening and Sons of Iraq programmes. In each case state leaders (some domestic and others foreign) created, tolerated, actively supported, undermined, or overthrew warlords and their militias. The book draws lessons from these experiences to generate new arguments about the relationship between states, sovereignty, ‘local power brokers’, and stability and security in the modern world.


Why is warlord politics so prevalent in Africa? Why do African rulers persistently give only lip-service to good governance, and weaken the organs of government? This chapter examines the political logic of weak states. Donor attempts to build strong African states fail because rulers’ power rests on outside factors not on the citizenry. Attempts to impose good governance as conditions of loans or aid rest on flawed assumptions about rulers’ interests, and are subverted by local politics.
2. CAUSES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF FRAGILITY

2.1 Structural, economic and political causes and characteristics

There are many theories about why states fail, or experience fragility, the majority of which are highly contested.

At a very broad level, fragility is the result of a dynamic interplay between internal factors (including violent conflict, poverty, economic and structural conditions, weak formal institutions), and external factors (including international political economy, regional and global insecurity). All of these are unique in any given context. Fragility is frequently associated (if not synonymous) with violent conflict and sustained poverty. Development agencies have largely adopted a functional understanding, often characterising fragility in terms of bad governance and weak state will or capacity. Increasingly, state fragility is also associated with weak state legitimacy.

Two key trends are discernible in the recent literature; firstly, the rise of the new institutionalism, prevalent among explanations of fragility by economists and some political scientists. These focus on individual actors and their incentives as the focus of analysis. A second trend is a growing recognition that fragile states are not only the result of internal ‘malfunctions’ but are situated within an international system and international political economy which also determine their relative fragility or resilience. Recently, there has been increasing concern about the impact of exogenous ‘trigger’ factors, including the global economic downturn, and climate change, on fragile states.

Overview of causes and characteristics of fragility

Although fragility is accepted to be multi-causal and multi-dimensional in any given context, some analysts place more importance on certain causal factors over others. The following groups of factors – which can be seen as both causes and characteristics of fragility – are among the more prevalent in the literature:

- **Structural and economic factors**: Poverty, low income and economic decline, violent conflict, presence of armed insurgents, natural resource wealth/lack of natural resource wealth, geography (‘bad neighbours’), demographic stress (including urbanisation).

- **Political and institutional factors**: Crises of state legitimacy and authority, bad governance, repression of political competition, weak (formal) institutions, hybrid political orders, institutional multiplicity, political transitions, succession and reform crises in authoritarian states, state predation, neo-patrimonial politics.

- **Social factors**: Horizontal inequalities, severe identity fragmentation, social exclusion, gender inequality, lack of social cohesion (including lack of social capital), weak civil society.

- **International factors**: Legacy of colonialism, international political economy, climate change, global economic shocks (including food prices).

These causes and characteristics are often described as self- and mutually-reinforcing. Some argue fragile states are caught in negative cycles or ‘traps’ of perpetual poverty and instability, prompting debate about the extent to which fragility is a long-term condition, and the likelihood of turnarounds.


How can fragility be described and understood? This chapter reviews the literature on the main drivers and consequences of fragility, focusing on the relationship between fragility and conflict. It argues that, in spite of the diversity of definitions of fragile states, there is consensus that they are characterised by authority, service entitlements and legitimacy failures. Previous armed conflict, poor governance and political instability, militarisation, ethnically and socially heterogeneous and polarised populations are key causes. The circular nature of these various factors is at the heart of the ‘fragility trap’ concept.
This seminal book argues that the real challenge of development is the small group of countries at the bottom that are falling behind and often falling apart. These countries, and the billion people who live in them, are caught in one or another of four traps: the conflict trap; the natural resources trap; the trap of being landlocked with bad neighbours; and the trap of bad governance in a small country. Whilst these traps are not inescapable, standard solutions will not work: aid has been ineffective, and globalisation has made things worse. A new mix of policy instruments is required, supported by a bold new plan of action for the G8.

This report sums up six years of research by the Crisis States Research Centre. It underlines the fact that aid and other forms of external intervention need to be better directed in so-called ‘fragile states’. The report, which includes country and city case studies in Africa, Asia and Latin America and analysis of regional conflict trends, looks at the drivers of violent conflict in the developing world and why some states and cities have fared better than others in avoiding large-scale violence or in rebuilding public and private organisations after war. It highlights policy-relevant findings under seven thematic chapters.

How does state failure come about, and how can donors help to prevent it? This article identifies five pathways to state failure: escalating ethnic conflicts, state predation, regional guerrilla rebellion, democratic collapse, and succession/reform crises in authoritarian states. States must possess legitimacy and effectiveness to remain stable. Donors should keep both factors in mind to avoid the problems that arise when states focus on one to the exclusion of the other. Goldstone finds that the two most influential variables for stability are the character of political competition and the extent of checks on the executive. Factionalised, restricted or repressed political competition is closely linked to instability.

Why do some countries remain fragile states? How can they get out of what is known as ‘the fragility trap’? The study suggests that three features – political instability and violence, insecure property rights and unenforceable contracts, and corruption – conspire to create a slow-growth-poor-governance equilibrium. It argues that, even if aid is seemingly unproductive in these weak-governance environments, it could be hugely beneficial if it is invested in such a way that it helps these countries tackle the root causes of instability, insecurity and corruption.

**Structural and economic factors**

**Conflict**

Some argue what distinguishes fragile states from other states experiencing ‘underdevelopment’ is violent conflict. Many states considered to be fragile have experienced conflict. The relationship is often described as circular: conflict both creates and is created by the weak authority and legitimacy of states. Much of the literature on the causes and characteristics of fragility is closely related to theories about the causes and characteristics of conflict.

Comprehensive discussion of the causes of conflict can be found in the GSDRC conflict guide: gsdrc.org/topic-guides/conflict/

**Economy**

There is substantial evidence of a correlation between low levels of economic development and state fragility. The strength and basis of the economy – for example in terms of whether or not it is diversified, whether it is concentrated on enclave sectors or more broad-based, historical patterns of economic growth (inclusive or exclusive), trade openness and levels of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) – are frequently cited as impacting on the strength and resilience of the state. OECD (2010) argue that low levels of economic production, characterised by particularly low levels of agricultural productivity and little investment in manufacturing, are root causes of fragility.
European University Institute, 2009, ‘Economic Factors can Magnify Fragility’, Chap. 2 in Overcoming Fragility in Africa: Forging a European Approach, European Report on Development
http://erd.eui.eu/media/fullreport/ERD%202009_Chapter%204_EN_LowRes.pdf
This chapter analyses economic processes that characterise fragile states and are linked to symptoms of state fragility – from weak governance and corruption, to predatory behaviour and conflict. It also explores how these factors can interact to make states more fragile – or create virtuous circles of faster growth and stronger institutions. The aim is to highlight timing and time consistency in dealing with the different aspects of fragility.

**Natural resources and unearned state income**

A good portion of the literature on fragility has been concerned with the impact of natural resource wealth on political governance and economic growth. The ‘rentier state’ model argues that natural resource wealth makes democracies malfunction because it removes the need for the state to make bargains or pacts in support of a social contract and encourages the politics of patronage. Some contend natural resource wealth also leads to conflict over control of those resources. Extensive research, thorough econometric analyses and case studies have been carried out on the relationship between natural resources, poor development and fragility, but the idea remains highly contested. Some call for a more nuanced understanding to better account for why some states with natural resource wealth are more stable than others. Others argue that not having natural resource endowments can actually lead to state failure because it reduces incentives to form a central authority.

DIIIS, 2008, ‘Fragility and Natural Resources’, Danish Institute for International Studies
How can fragile states make the most of their resource endowments without falling victim to resource conflicts or authoritarianism? This policy brief advocates a re-examination of the link between natural resource governance and state fragility in order to better understand why many states fall victim to the ‘resource curse’. Donors can help fragile states make the most of their resource endowments by seeking to improve the internal governance environment through greater transparency and capacity and the external market environment through more incentives for foreign investment and more equitable trade conditions.

How useful is the idea of a ‘resource curse’ in understanding the causes of conflict in low and middle-income countries? This paper critically examines this argument on both methodological and empirical grounds. It finds little convincing evidence that mineral abundance in itself causes conflict, and argues that the most influential models of conflict offer only a superficial understanding of the causes of conflict in poor economies.

Dibeh, G., 2008, ‘Resources and the Political Economy of State Fragility in Conflict States’, UNU-WIDER, Helsinki
www.wider.unu.edu/publication/resources-and-political-economy-state-fragility-conflict-states
How does resource availability affect governance incentives? This paper examines political and governance systems contributing to fragility in resource-rich states such as Iraq and resource-poor areas such as Somalia. In an ethnically divided or tribal society, a consociational democratic state will arise if resources are larger than a threshold value; the level of resources available influences groups’ desire to establish a central state authority. A consociational political system following war can strengthen rather than weaken rent-seeking coalitions.

**Cities and fragile states**

New research is exploring how cities – as social, economic, political and spatial entities – can promote or prevent the unravelling of the state. Over the past two decades, many cities around the world have become characterised by rising forms of violence, insecurity and illegality. Increasingly, cities are considered to be constitutive of state fragility but also important sites for state reconstruction and development. Historically the relationship between cities and states has been recognised as important. City development and the growth of urban systems have played significant roles in state formation and transformation. Yet cities can develop a relative autonomy from states, particularly when they are ignored or bypassed by state resources and processes, with risks for state stability. For example, city economies might be animated by regional rather than national markets that lie outside the reach of states and their fiscal capacity. National governments and elites often fail to invest in cities at the expense of local and national
economic development. Ignoring the interests of the majority of urban citizens can increase the potential for urban conflict. Equally, state crisis and conflict can fuel urban conflict, further weakening state capacity and legitimacy.


http://usj.sagepub.com/content/50/15.toc

The articles presented in this Special Issue draw on five years of research by the Cities and Fragile States programme of the LSE’s Crisis States Research Centre. The research examines the relationship between cities, states and conflict in conflict-affected parts of the developing world. The starting-point was the neglect of cities in contemporary discourses of state-building and state fragility, despite the fact that it is widely accepted that cities have historically played a critical role in processes of state consolidation, transformation and erosion. The research found that cities are still central to such processes, but in much more complex ways. The volume notes the increasing trend towards civic conflict, which is fundamentally urban in nature. It considers the circumstances under which urban political processes can channel social conflict into nonviolent forms of civic engagement that can stimulate dynamic and inclusive development in fragile settings. It also examines how, by contrast, in some circumstances conflict in cities is effectively deferred or suppressed rather than channeled into non-violent politics. It concludes by reflecting on what these shifting conflict dynamics and their urban ramifications mean for state building and state fragility.

**Political and institutional factors**

**Neo-patrimonialism**

Many have argued neo-patrimonialism has undermined the functioning and institutionalisation of formal political systems in fragile states, particularly in Africa. Chabal and Daloz (1999) describe the informalisation of politics and the neo-patrimonial nature of reciprocity and exchange in Africa as ‘the instrumentalisation of disorder’. But some dispute the assumption there is a negative relationship between neopatrimonialism and economic growth (di John, 2007). Others controversially argue that patrimonialism does not necessarily preclude state-citizen accountability.

**Chabal and Daloz, 1999, ‘W(h)ither The State?’, Chapter 1 in Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument, African Issues, James Currey, Oxford**

https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=7O8WB-kzewC&printsec=frontcover

This chapter argues the state in Africa was never properly institutionalised because it was never properly emancipated from society. This is due to both historical and cultural factors. The weakness and inefficiency of the state has been profitable to African elites. The severity of the current economic crisis in Africa is unlikely to favour the institutionalisation of the state. Political elites, bereft of the means of their patrimonial legitimacy, urgently seek the resources that the informalisation of politics might generate. Such heightened competition is apt to bring about greater disorder, if not violence.


How and why do kleptocracies (regimes based on personal rule) last so long in some developing countries, despite the lack of a significant support base? How can the study of policymaking in weakly-institutionalised societies help to understand the emergence of these regimes? This paper proposes a model to describe the strategies of many kleptocratic regimes, and includes historical case studies from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Dominican Republic.


http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/african_studies_review/v052/52.1.pitcher.html

Is ‘patrimonialism’ really the source of Africa’s poor governance? This article argues that contemporary conceptions of patrimonialism and neopatrimonialism as negative regime types associated with corruption, clientelism, and autocracy are based on a fundamental misreading of theory. Weber’s ‘patrimonialism’ is, rather, a specific form of authority derived from traditional sources of legitimacy and based on a mutual understanding of responsibilities between the ruler and the ruled. Casting aside these misconceptions will allow African scholars to better analyse the character of African states, without falling back on the notion of African exceptionalism.
Elite incentives and elite predation

Some research focuses on the relationship between elite incentives and forms of political order created through them (e.g. elite bargains, and coalitions) as critical to understanding state fragility. Underlying this is the notion that states will be stable only if the incentives of rulers and citizens are to preserve order. The relationship between rewards from predation and incentives for violence is critical. New research is looking at whether inclusive, as opposed to exclusive, elite pacts may be more capable of maintaining political order than others because they help to accommodate social fragmentation and provide a disincentive for violent rebellion.


http://cmp.sagepub.com/content/25/4/297.abstract

Why did so many African states fail in the late 20th century? This article emphasises the material and political needs of state elites, their failure to act in the public good and the short time horizons of and narrow resource base on offer to politicians. Political order is a choice. Recent history shows that African leaders can choose to behave as warlords or as statesmen and that citizens can choose to arm themselves or to live peacefully. Order prevails when both rules and citizens choose to employ their respective capabilities to the creation and maintenance of wealth. A state exists when these choices form equilibrium.


Sub-Saharan Africa is the world's most conflict-intensive region. But why have some African states experienced civil war, while others have managed to maintain political stability? This paper argues that the ability of post-colonial states in Sub-Saharan Africa to maintain political stability depends on the ability of the ruling political parties to overcome the historical legacy of social fragmentation. Inclusive elite bargains' involve a ruling party that integrates a broad coalition of key elites by defining inclusive access to state structures (jobs) and state resources (rents). ‘Exclusionary elite bargains’ involve a narrow coalition of elites who define exclusionary access to state structures (jobs) and state resources (rents). ‘Inclusive elite bargains’ permit the maintenance of political stability, whereas ‘exclusionary elite bargains’ give rise to trajectories of civil war.


This essay offers an interpretation of the rise and fall of Zimbabwe's political economy through the lens of leadership. Of special interest are the actions of elite coalitions that link political parties, the state bureaucracy, and the security sector. It argues that, over time, the civil-military coalition within Zimbabwe’s former ruling party placed its own political survival and welfare above broader developmental goals. In consolidating state power, leaders undermined the rule of law and alienated the labour movement and civil society, which went on to form a rival opposition coalition. The paper also sheds light on the limits of externally driven, hastily negotiated and reluctantly accepted political settlements. Lacking strong leadership commitments, the rules underpinning political settlements in Zimbabwe never took root, inhibiting the country's progress toward democracy and development.


http://www2.lse.ac.uk/internationalDevelopment/research/crisisStates/download/wp/wpSeries2/WP552.pdf

What factors facilitate inclusive political settlements and developmental coalitions within a hybrid political order? This study suggests that in South Africa, state-making and peacebuilding has been facilitated by: (1) the creation of an administrative machinery that can contain customary authority institutions within a broader polity; (2) political structures that channel the ambitions and grievances of traditional leaders; and (3) a system of local government that draws on the experience and access of chieftaincies to bring development to hard-to-reach areas. Key factors are inclusive coalitions and the commitment to development of influential political leaders able to forge broad coalitions through their links to multiple institutions.
Political transitions

Transitions between leaders can be destabilizing in fragile situations. Uncertainty and collective fears of the future, stemming from transitions, may result in the emergence of nationalist, ethnic or other populist ideologies and the susceptibility to violent conflict. In this context, elections can become arenas of violent contestation and can trigger instability.

http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/01436597.2015.1037830

Why have some states considered fragile recovered, while others remain fragile for long periods? The article identifies three categories of countries: those in a fragility trap, those that have exited it, and those that fluctuate between fragility and stability. Country Indicators for Foreign Policy (CIFP) data are used to examine state transitions for each category. One state from each category is then subjected to further country-level analysis. The findings reinforce the view that state transitions do not follow a unique path and that effective engagement in fragile states requires different approaches across cases.

http://afraf.oxfordjournals.org/content/108/430/1.abstract

What were the origins of the crisis that grew out of the disputed Kenyan presidential election in December 2007? What lessons does the case of Kenya have for other states with regard to the debate on democratisation and sequencing? This article examines the wider lessons and implications of the Kenyan election crisis for other states undergoing political liberalisation. It argues that the case of Kenya shows that political liberalisation is a high-risk activity that can produce unintended side effects. The processes of democratisation and reform can be undertaken simultaneously, but require institutional reforms not yet undertaken by many African states.


What factors generate election-related violence in fragile states? How can the international community address these? This study suggests that social structure, political competition, the competence of the electoral administration and the degree of professionalism in the security sector contribute to election-related violence. International influence at mid-rank levels among the perpetrators of violence is limited. Donors therefore need to take a pragmatic approach by working with parties to develop pre-election peace pledges and by tracking violent incidents.

Further resources on the relationship between elections and fragility can be found in elections in post-conflict or fragile environments in the GSDRC’s political systems guide.

2.2 Social and international causes and characteristics

Social factors and the social context of fragility

State-society relations

Many argue the nature of the state cannot be separated from the nature of societies, and that state fragility therefore has to be understood in terms of state-society relations. Migdal’s seminal work in this area starts with the premise that there is often disjuncture between the state’s rules of the game and the operative dictates of society. In order to achieve social control (the primary determinant of state strength), states have to become a real and symbolic aspect of people’s daily survival strategies.
Further resources on the breakdown of the social contract and corruption in conflict-affected states is available in chapter one of the GSDRC’s conflict guide.

**Social cohesion**

Societies in fragile states are often polarised in ethnic, religious or class-based groups, often as a result of a legacy of conflict, or, some argue, colonialism. Critically, these societies are often dislocated from - and ambivalent towards - the state. Some argue identity fragmentation results in fragile states lacking the virtuous cycles of cooperation, trust, reciprocity and collective well-being that are vital in forming the social contract. Others argue states work best when they are structured around cohesive groups that can capitalise on their common institutions and affinities.


http://www.fragilestates.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/FFS-Chapter-3-pp-35-46.pdf What has caused the difficulties experienced by fragile states? This chapter explores the roots of state fragility and the role of foreign aid in sustaining past dysfunction. Two structural problems – political identity fragmentation (often based on arbitrarily drawn state borders) and weak national institutions – reinforce each other. They undermine state legitimacy, interpersonal trust and the formation of robust governance systems and encourage neopatrimonialism. Fragile states’ formal institutions need to be reconnected with the local societies upon which they have been imposed.

**Social exclusion**

Social exclusion, particularly based on identity in terms of gender, ethnicity, class, or religion, has long been viewed as a critical underlying cause of conflict and fragility. Where societal or political groups are excluded from the state or its key institutions, they may seek to challenge the state. Failure to manage such challenges through political negotiation may lead these groups to have recourse to violent opposition. Denials or violations of rights based on social exclusion and discrimination can therefore lead to fragility. Within this, some research has focused on links between youth exclusion, violence and fragile states.


http://www.scienceandworldaffairs.org/PDFs/Vol2No2_Douma.pdf How can states in sub-Saharan Africa better provide for the needs of their populations and reduce inter-group violence? This article examines poverty and conflict escalation in Niger and Senegal. It argues that during the post-colonial period, the sub-Saharan region has witnessed a substantial number of violent conflicts, mostly within states between contending ethno-political entities manipulated by rival political elite groups. The problems within these so-called fragile or failed states are closely related to a lack of a ‘social contract’ between incumbent elite groups and constituent ethnic communities, which leads to political fragmentation. This is exacerbated by the interaction of diverse social, ethnic and resource exploitation-related issues.


http://www.gsdrc.org/docs/open/CON66.pdf What factors contribute to youth exclusion and increase the likelihood of youth engagement in violence? This report examines existing evidence and analysis on the links between youth exclusion, violence, conflict and fragile states. It
highlights factors which can contribute to youth violence, and makes recommendations for DFID’s work on youth exclusion and violence.

Castillejo, C., 2012, ‘Exclusion: A hidden driver of Pakistan’s Fragility’, NOREF Policy Brief. www.peacebuilding.no/var/ezflow_site/storage/original/application/4af7f48e3c7c27fe10ab62c0911ec8b9.pdf This policy brief argues that deeply entrenched patterns of political, social and economic exclusion are fuelling Pakistan’s fragility. It identifies four main axes of exclusion most clearly driving Pakistan’s fragility: the political and economic exclusion of some regions by the political centre; the exclusion from access to land experienced by much of the rural population; the profound exclusion and violence faced by religious minorities; and the exclusion of many young people and women, which contributes to Pakistan’s demographic instability.

Further discussion of social exclusion as an underlying cause of conflict can be found in chapter one of the GSDRC’s conflict topic guide.

**Horizontal inequalities**

Recent research has analysed how horizontal inequalities can be manipulated to engender political violence. Horizontal inequalities are inequalities between groups (defined by identity, such as ethnicity, religion or caste) across economic, social and political dimensions. These can lead to resentment and tensions, and can foster group mobilisation. Mobilisation may initially be peaceful, but where this has no effect or is put down violently by the state, it can lead to violent conflict.

Stewart, F., Brown, G.K., and Langer, A., 2008, ‘Major Findings and Conclusions on the Relationship Between Horizontal Inequalities and Conflict’, in Stewart, F. (ed.), Horizontal Inequalities and Conflict: Understanding Group Violence in Multiethnic Societies, Palgrave Macmillan http://www.palgrave.com/us/book/9780230516809 How direct is the link between horizontal inequalities (HIs) and conflict? This chapter outlines the numerous factors which determine the impact HIs will have on a country’s stability. The evidence comes from a comparison of case studies of countries which have experienced violence and those which have avoided it. Severe HIs are particularly likely to be a source of conflict when they remain consistent across dimensions. HIs are best analysed as multidimensional indicators – for instance, abrupt changes in political HIs, when other HIs are at extreme levels, are more likely to trigger conflict.

Further discussion of identity politics can be found in chapter one of the GSDRC’s conflict topic guide.

**Weak civil society**

Fragility is also seen to erode the foundations and the structures of civil society. In turn, weak civil society, and its lack of capacity to act as a check on the accountability of leaders, creates an environment conducive to the continuation of fragility.


Chabal, P. and Daloz, J.P., 1999, ‘The Illusions of Civil Society’ in Africa works: Disorder as Political Instrument (African Issues), James Currey, Oxford https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=708WJB-kzewC&printsec=frontcover Current thinking on the post-colonial state in Africa stresses the need to cut back or bypass the state, which is seen as inefficient and predatory. Can civil society perform the role of reforming the political realm that is currently expected of it? This chapter argues that the dichotomy between state and civil society, which is taken for granted, does not reflect realities in Africa.

When states fail, do mass-based social movements develop to address the ensuing social problems? This article looks at the situation of Nigeria's Bakassi Boys and the Oodua People's Congress and suggests that, contrary to expectation, reformist insurgencies fail to develop in failed states. The cause of this failure is found in the legacy of patronage politics. Specifically, the ensuing popular movements favour those who pursue their own economic interests, marginalizing those with more ideological agendas.

International factors

International political economy

Exogenous factors, including the legacy of colonialism and international government and/or corporate interests, may create or reinforce fragility. Many have argued that historically, colonialism undermined the basis of state legitimacy and disrupted the formation of the social contract in Africa.


This paper explores two specific critical risks posed by globalisation for conflict-affected and fragile countries. The first is that it has enabled a vast expansion of the global marketplace for illicit goods and services that rides on the coat-tails of its licit cousin and offers easy access to resources such as ideas, funds, weapons, services, recruits and even loyalty. The symbiotic nature of the licit and illicit activities that globalisation enables makes it highly complex to combat illicit activities without impinging on licit ones. Second, globalisation has enabled dominant economic and political ideas to be more intrusively ‘imposed’ on societies dependent on external support but without either adequate fit or adequate consent. The paper advances three elements of an international agenda that could counter the volatility such countries face as a result.


Why do states collapse, and why do some states seem to collapse more readily than others? Are failing models of state-building in some way to blame? This paper examines the links between fragile states and models of state-building. It argues that in order to understand and respond to situations of state collapse it is important to understand the specific trajectories of failing states.

Vulnerability to external shocks

Fragile states are vulnerable to external shocks (e.g. spikes in food and oil prices) because they lack the essential capacities to control or mitigate the negative effects on their economies and their citizens. This has been a long-standing concern, but recent research is focusing on the links between climate change, environmental degradation, resource scarcity and state fragility. Many argue climate change has the potential to overstretched the adaptive capacities of fragile states, which could potentially lead to mass displacement, destabilisation and ultimately violence.


This report identifies seven compound climate-fragility risks that pose serious threats to the stability of states and societies in the decades ahead. These are: local resource competition; livelihood insecurity and migration; extreme weather events and disasters; volatile food prices and provision; transboundary water management; sea-level rise and coastal degradation; and unintended effects of climate policies. Based on a thorough assessment of existing policies on climate change adaptation, development cooperation and humanitarian aid, and peacebuilding, the report recommends that the G7 take concrete action, both as individual members and jointly, to tackle climate-fragility risks and increase the resilience of states and societies to them.

This report looks at the particular challenges faced in addressing climate change in the context of fragile states. It identifies approaches for adaptation in fragile states and for building resilience and peace among socially vulnerable groups.


Whilst countries which are currently politically unstable and suffer from pre-existing conflicts have suffered severely from the financial crisis, decreasing income streams could even push some previously stable countries towards fragility. Thus, there is a perilous risk that the crisis could precipitate new instances of fragility and erode many of the gains made over the past decade by post-conflict states in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Further resources

DFID is funding a seven-year Justice and Security Research Programme, due to end in March 2017. It seeks to provide a better understanding of the relationship between ‘official’ and ‘hybrid’ governance structures.

http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/jsrp/
3. MEASURING AND ASSESSING FRAGILITY

This section introduces some of the most widely used statistically based indexes and political economy methodologies for understanding the nature and risk of state fragility.

Despite some convergence and overlap, large variations exist in how donors and international agencies measure state fragility, and which countries are classified as fragile. These various classifications have been widely criticised as arbitrary, methodologically questionable, and lacking in transparency, and for producing only a snapshot of the condition of a state a particular point in time, rather than explaining how change occurs.

Nevertheless, some maintain there is value in measuring and classifying fragility, in that it helps us to understand causality, to monitor changes over time, and to pre-empt crisis by recognising and responding to deteriorating situations.

3.1 Indexes of state fragility

A plethora of analytical frameworks and instruments have been developed to measure certain dimensions and indicators of state fragility. These often culminate in lists or indexes of fragile states which are organised in a hierarchy according to their performance against certain state functions. The overarching aim of these indexes is to record a state’s past, present and future performance, and its performance relative to other states, to provide policymakers with an objective reference point against which to track trends.

But indexes are often criticised for being subjective, arbitrary in terms of where they draw the line between performing and non-performing institutions, and for inconsistencies within and between them. Also because aggregate scores do not adequately illustrate how state capacity varies across functions.

This Guide presents a comparative analysis of cross-country fragility indices. It assesses their conceptual premises, methodological approach and possible uses.

Country Policy and Institutional Assessment (CPIA) - World Bank

The World Bank’s Country Policy and Institutional Assessment (CPIA) is the most prominent and widely used index. It rates the quality of a country’s policies and institutional arrangements against a set of criteria grouped in four clusters: (1) economic management; (2) structural policies; (3) policies for social inclusion and equity; and (4) public sector management and institutions. CPIA scores are used by the World Bank, and the OECD DAC to determine aid allocation and to categorise states that are fragile or Low Income Countries Under Stress (LiCUS). A major criticism of this prominent index is that it equates fragility with ‘underdevelopment’.


Country Indicators for Foreign Policy (CIFP) - Carleton University

The CIFP fragility index posits that a state needs to exhibit three fundamental properties – Authority, Legitimacy, and Capacity – and that weaknesses in one or more of these dimensions will have an impact on its overall fragility. Structural indicators are grouped into six clusters: Governance, Economics, Security and Crime, Human Development, Demography, and Environment.
Fragile States Index - Foreign Policy / The Fund for Peace

The Fragile (formerly Failed) States index is based on 12 indicators of vulnerability: Demographic Pressures, Refugees/IDPs, Group Grievance, Human Flight, Uneven Development, Economic Decline, Delegitimisation of the State, Public Services, Human Rights, Security Apparatus, Factionalised Elites, and External Intervention.

Fragile States Index
http://fsi.fundforpeace.org/
http://library.fundforpeace.org/fsi16-report

Index of State Weakness in the Developing World - Brookings Institution

This index uses 20 economic, political, security and social welfare indicators to provide an aggregate rating.

2008 Index of State Weakness: http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2008/02_weak_states_index.aspx

3.2 Risk assessment and early warning

Assessing the risk of state failure is seen as critical for facilitating a preventative rather than curative international approach. There has been much analytical work on preventive forecasting, most prominently by the Political Instability Task Force (PITF), which has developed global models and datasets for predicting state instability and failure using four key indicators: regime type, infant mortality, armed conflict in neighbouring countries and state-led political discrimination.

Yet it is acknowledged that there remains a wide gap between the preventative forecasting literature and meaningful policy-related results. Early warning rarely translates into early response. Recently, the OECD has stressed the important role of regional and so-called “third generation” (e.g. internet-based) early warning systems as well as the need to work with local actors on the ground, both as ‘early warners’ and as the first line of response. They also call for a more effective global and regional early warning architecture to overcome the problem of a fragmented approach.


Engaging in fragile and conflict-affected states inevitably involves risk. In these states, the politics are volatile, institutions weak, and security often precarious. This report provides an overview of how donors have approached risk management in a number of fragile and conflict affected states, drawing on case studies of Democratic Republic of Congo, Nepal, Somalia and South Sudan. The findings highlight that risk aversion is a common tendency under certain conditions—when donors face reputational and political pressures from within their own country, where their knowledge about the partner country is limited, and when institutional incentives favour short-term activities over long-term results. Yet the report also shows that there are ways of working that overcome these hurdles, and provides a number of examples of informed risk taking in situations in extreme fragility.


What is the best way to assess the risk of state failure? What are the key indicators that a state is likely to fail? Authored by a member of the United States Government’s Political Instability Task Force (PITF), this paper draws heavily on PITF’s research and modeling. PITF’s recent models are 80 to 90 per cent accurate in predicting state failure.
This report reviews recent literature on early warning and response to assess their value and their role in the prevention of violent conflict and for peacebuilding. It concludes that early warning and response systems require further support to ensure their future relevance.

This summary table lists the risk factors considered by different assessment frameworks.

This chapter examines fragility in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) with a focus on identifying risk indicators for early warning. It argues that SIDS have very specific individual vulnerabilities related to their economic conditions, governance, and international links. Few have all of the problems in extreme in comparison to larger countries; this suggests that SIDS could benefit from very specific and targeted policies where the problems are very specific and not compounded by other risk factors.

3.3 Social and political economy analysis in fragile contexts

Some argue measuring institutional performance against benchmarks is a managerial response that depoliticises state failure. Political economy analysis can complement institutional assessments, highlighting competing rules of the game in (and between) the formal and informal institutions often prevalent in fragile settings. It can identify shifting coalitions that contribute to or prevent state collapse; the nature and sources of state capacity, authority and legitimacy; and how and why rent seeking and patrimonial political systems can either contribute to, or undermine, state stability. A state-society analytical framework can identify the underlying causes of weak interaction between state institutions and citizens, and facilitate a thorough understanding of the complex power dynamics that characterise state-society relations. For these reasons, a historically-informed assessment of the ‘state of the state’, including the nexus of state-society relations, is now widely recognized as vital in order to better inform development interventions in fragile situations.

How useful are current conceptions of state failure for dealing with problems of state fragility? This article argues that the international community has adopted an overly technocratic notion of the state, which does not view power and conflict as intrinsic to the phenomenon of the state, conflates politics with governance and masks the political nature of state-building. It concludes that a new framework is needed, one based on system-level analyses of social cleavages and their impact on the state and state institutions.

http://www.gsdrc.org/publications/political-economy-methodologies/
This report looks at various political economy approaches and methodologies, including new political economy; institutional economics; drivers of change/politics of development; sustainable livelihoods; and early warning models and conflict analysis. While not all are designed specifically for fragile state contexts, the concepts and approaches are applicable to many differing situations.

This article provides a critical review of recent literature that has attempted to define what a ‘failed state’ is and explains why such states emerge. It argues that aggregate indices of ‘failure’ are misleading due to the wide
variations of capacity across state functions within a polity. The focus on ranking states also distracts attention from the dynamics of state capacity. Moreover, many of the definitions either compare reality to a Weberian ideal, or assume that violence is ‘development in reverse’, both of which are ahistorical and unhelpful as a guide to policy. The second part of the article assesses the contributions of functionalist, ‘new war’ and neo-Tillean approaches to explain state failure. The article finds that while these theories take concrete historical situations seriously, they have important shortcomings.

Donors tend to promote better governance by promoting capacity in executive government, representation and accountability through parliament, an autonomous civil service, and an active civil society. These are largely conceived out of Western experience and can be too ‘supply-driven’. Many experts are now trying to improve these approaches by looking more closely at power dynamics and incentives for change. In line with these efforts to ‘take context as the starting point’ for engagement, the State-Society Analytical Framework (SSAF) directs attention towards (i) the Foundational Factors, (ii) the Rules of the Game, and (iii) the ‘Here and Now’ issues that determine the nature of the challenges.

Mezzera, M., and Aftab, S., 2009, ‘Pakistan State-Society Analysis’, Initiative for Peacebuilding and Netherlands Institute of International Relations (Clingendael), The Hague
The analysis in this report originates from the application of the ‘State-Society Analytical Framework’ (SSAF), a methodology developed by the Democratisation and Transitional Justice Cluster of the Initiative for Peacebuilding, to the Pakistani context. Structured around three main analytical dimensions, SSAF aims to identify the underlying causes of weak interaction between state institutions and citizens, and to achieve a thorough understanding of the complex power dynamics that characterise state-society relations.

Further resources
Further resources can be found in the GSDRC Reading Pack on Thinking and Working Politically.
4. AID EFFECTIVENESS IN FRAGILE CONTEXTS

4.1 Aid Allocation, donor policy and co-ordination

It is now widely acknowledged that conventional aid instruments and principles of aid effectiveness are difficult to apply in fragile situations. This section introduces the particular challenges surrounding aid allocation, co-ordination, and alignment in fragile situations.

Aid allocation in fragile states

Recent years have seen a historic shift from a focus on aiding ‘good performers’ towards a greater recognition that fragile states should not be neglected and exposed to the risk of becoming ‘aid orphans’ (McGillivray, 2006). In spite of this, research has shown that fragile states continue to receive disproportionately less aid, and more volatile aid flows, than other low income countries. States with weak authority and legitimacy receive less aid than states with low capacity (Carment, 2008). Yet calls for increased aid to fragile states often spark concerns about the effectiveness and absorptive capacity of aid in environments where institutions are weak.

To draw attention to the risks of fragile states being marginalised in aid flows, the OECD-DAC reports on the allocation of resources to these states:

This publication takes stock of a) the evolution of fragility as a concept, b) analyses of financial flows to and within fragile states between 2000 and 2010, and c) trends and issues that are likely to shape fragility in the years to come.

Further information on resource flows to fragile states is available on the OECD-DAC website.

Principles for international engagement

The OECD-DAC’s principles for good engagement in fragile situations stress that aid should be flexible, long-term, harmonised, and integrated in such a way as to bridge humanitarian, recovery and longer-term development phases of assistance. The principle of ‘do no harm’, meaning not reinforcing societal division or engendering corruption, is also seen as central to good international engagement in fragile states. The Accra Agenda for Action adopted at the 3rd High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness reinforces these principles, committing donors to monitoring their implementation.

This brief outlines the following principles for good international engagement in fragile situations: 1. Take context as the starting point; 2. Ensure all activities do no harm; 3. Focus on state-building as the central objective; 4. Prioritise prevention; 5. Recognise the links between political, security and development objectives; 6. Promote non-discrimination as a basis for inclusive and stable societies; 7. Align with local priorities in different ways and in different contexts; 8. Agree on practical co-ordination mechanisms between international actors; 9. Act fast… but stay engaged long enough to give success a chance; 10. Avoid pockets of exclusion (or “aid orphans”).

This report presents the results of the Second Monitoring Survey on the implementation of the Fragile States Principles (FSPs). The evidence presented shows that progress in fully implementing the Fragile States Principles remains partly off-track and will require a concerted effort over a number of years ahead to achieve the expected results and impact. The report provides development partners with recommendations that will enable more targeted and country-led change, alongside broader policy reforms by international actors, to foster better engagement in situations of fragility.
INCAF, 2011, ‘New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States’, OECD, Paris
http://www.pbsbdialogue.org/media/filer_public/07/69/07692de0-3557-494e-918e-18d00e9e7f3/the_new_deal.pdf
The ‘New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States’ is based on the belief that a new development architecture and new ways of working, better tailored to the challenges of fragile contexts, are necessary to build peaceful states and societies. The New Deal proposes key peacebuilding and state-building goals, focuses on new ways of engaging, and identifies commitments to build mutual trust and achieve better results in fragile states. The New Deal was developed under the aegis of the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding, a forum bringing together conflict-affected and fragile countries, international partners and civil society to catalyse successful transitions from conflict and fragility. Since 2011, the New Deal has been endorsed by more than 40 countries and organisations as part of the new Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation. The New Deal is now the main international policy framework that sets the standard and principles of engagement among these countries and organisations.

The New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States essentially endorses a set of principles proposing key peacebuilding and state-building goals, coherent and coordinated engagement to support country-owned and country-led transitions out of fragility, and commitments for mutual trust and results orientation. This critical reflections paper explores the mutual accountability element with respect to the role of civil society actors. In particular, this paper raises questions on legitimacy, participation and inclusion, and asks whether the intended impact, namely to increase space for political dialogue, actually becomes reality on the ground. With a view to the Swiss commitments it also asks about the (complementary) role and responsibilities of the different actors, governmental and civil society, local and international, in the implementation of the New Deal.

Harmonisation and alignment

The Paris Declaration principles of harmonisation and alignment are seen as vitally important for building country ownership and developing state legitimacy in fragile situations. But the context of fragility often makes these principles particularly difficult to apply. Alignment and ownership are problematic where states lack capacity and/or legitimacy. Often there is no nationally-owned development strategy behind which donors can align. Evaluations of the applicability of the Paris Declaration in fragile situations suggest that needs assessments, joint planning and prioritisation tools and joint donor offices have supported greater harmonisation, alignment and ownership.

http://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/evaluationoftheimplementationoftheparisdeclaration.htm
What are the challenges of applying the Paris Declaration in fragile and conflict-affected situations? This report examines aid effectiveness and state-building in fragile states and includes case studies of Afghanistan, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Nepal. A harmonised approach by development partners is particularly relevant in fragile situations, and shared approaches to context, conflict and risk analysis are required.

Extreme poverty is forecast to become increasingly concentrated in fragile states. The New Deal for Fragile States aims to improve international engagement with them, and includes commitments to increase the use of country systems. Donors thus face a trade-off between the fiduciary risk of using country systems and the risk of undermining the state by bypassing them. This can be addressed by better assessing where country systems can be used and better mitigating risk through improved programme design. Rather than rely on broad, backward-looking indicators, donors can identify where risks are manageable and acceptable. Additional safeguards can be applied to allow extensive use of government systems. Pooled funding can help donors share risk, coordinate support and reduce overhead costs. However, the design of a pooled fund must be carefully tailored to reflect its specific context and objectives.
Whole of government approaches

It is increasingly recognised that external assistance in fragile situations should be designed and implemented in a coherent, coordinated and complementary manner both across departments within donor governments as well as between national and international organisations. The range of actors involved, the complexity of aid instruments, and the interconnectedness of governance, economic and security needs in fragile states necessitates close collaboration among diplomatic, security, economic and development actors. But there are significant impediments to donors adopting so-called ‘Whole of Government Approaches’ in fragile situations, including the different and often conflicting objectives, mandates, approaches and resources among ministries. Development and foreign policy objectives, for example, are not always coherent or complimentary.

Whole of government approaches are in their infancy, and there are risks that coordination within capitals can drive out co-ordination between capitals (OECD-DAC, 2008). Evidence suggests that considerable gaps remain between what has been agreed in principle and the practice of implementation.


How can a Whole-of-Government Approach (WGA) be implemented by development practitioners to address the specific needs of fragile states? This study assesses the mechanisms and processes that contribute to effective WGAs in fragile states. Drawing on recent field-level case studies, the paper assesses the appropriateness of the Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and makes recommendations for putting them into practice.


How can the international community advance the implementation of a Coherent, Coordinated and Complementary (3C) approach in fragile states? This paper outlines the findings of previous OECD-DAC studies on whole of government approaches as well as the main recommendations of three thematic meetings in 2008. While progress has been made, a number of challenges remain, including how to develop common objectives for diplomatic, defence, security, finance and development actions.

Donor policy

Donor policies on fragile states are often grounded in OECD-DAC principles, reflecting the international consensus on the need for coherent and joined-up approaches, for increased and sustained engagement in fragile situations, and for adapting to context.


This report outlines the key messages and recommendations from a meeting series on ‘Development, Security and Transitions in Fragile States’. Donors should understand better the key features of transition in each situation through frequent political economy analysis, strengthening personnel skills and reducing staff turnover. An improved international architecture with more integrated and coherent approaches among different actors is needed. There is also a need to recognise the scale of the tasks involved and ensure missions have the necessary resources, strategies and support to carry them out, to work with political settlements and engage with and build on local civilian capacity. The international community needs to be much more realistic about what it can achieve and to recognise that transition processes require long timeframes and depend largely on domestic processes and actors.


The World Bank differentiates its assistance strategies in different types of fragile states and situations based on the direction and pace of governance change. From a financing perspective it classifies fragile states into one of four groups, depending on whether they are receiving WB assistance and the type of funding.
What factors should donors consider when identifying an approach to reverse decline in fragile states? How do fragile states differ from those that are stable and able to pursue development? This paper outlines a strategy for its engagement with fragile states. It details how USAID can respond effectively by identifying strategic priorities, initial directions for programming and a new management and administrative approach.


Oxfam, 2013, ‘Civil Society in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States’, Oxfam Policy Compendium Note
This note explains how external governments and international institutions must do more to build civil society in fragile states, through aid and technical assistance, and diplomatic influence, particularly where civil society space is threatened by repressive legislation or other restrictions.

**Aid instruments**

The choice of aid instrument in fragile situations is often based on a context-specific assessment of government capacity and level of consensus on policy priorities. There is much debate about the conditions under which the conventional aid instruments of general budget support (GBS) and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) can work in fragile settings. A critical concern for donors is how to manage fiduciary risks whilst wherever possible channeling funds through government. Recently there has been some success with multi-donor trust funds, national programmes, social funds community driven development, and the formation of national compacts, all of which are viewed as ways to align donor funds behind national and community priorities.

This study examines the rationale, challenges of and conditions applied to budget support to fragile states; the effects of budget support on spending and the delivery of social and agricultural services; and the ability of parliaments and civil society to hold governments and donors to account for public spending. It highlights the current volatility of General Budget Support provision, and emerging good practices.

Donors use a multiplicity of aid instruments in fragile states, with varying characteristics and levels of success. There are six categories of aid instruments in common use: general budget support; sector budget support; government-managed pooled funds; jointly managed trust funds; project support; and support to and through non-state actors. This paper presents evidence, analysis and evaluation of the use of aid instruments in fragile states, based on a literature review and questionnaire responses from members of the OECD International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Working Group on Aid Instruments. It highlights the importance of factors including: a mix of aid instruments (based on context); aid that is speedy, flexible and predictable; longer-term capacity-building; use of government systems; and aligning aid with the budget. It reflects the state of the literature and the international discussion as of June 2011.

This is the output from DFID-commissioned research into the use of pooled funding to support service delivery in fragile and conflict-affected states (FCAS). The aim was to distil practical knowledge from existing studies and to capture practitioner experience to produce: a) an updated summary of current knowledge and knowledge gaps (from a policy perspective) in a policy briefing note (Part I of the report); b) more detailed practical guidance for
those working on establishing/managing pooled funds for service delivery in FCAS (Part II of the report). The research team reviewed existing literature and selected for detailed review 16 pooled funds which covered a variety of countries, fund managers, and approaches to service delivery. The team’s review of case-study documentation was supported by extensive interviews with people involved in the funds, and sought to learn equally from successes and failures.


‘Compacts’ are instruments that allow national and international partners to agree on the most urgent priorities requiring a collective effort in support of post-conflict peacebuilding in a particular country, and identify how, and from which sources and instruments, implementation will be financed. Focusing on the case studies of Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Liberia, and Timor-Leste, this paper examines the impact that first-generation compacts had on setting priorities, contributing to improvements in aid flows, and advancing the mutual accountability of governments and international partners. The research demonstrates that compacts can be effective, but that their effectiveness has been mixed.

http://ageconsearch.umn.edu/bitstream/12818/1/pr050005.pdf

What type and mix of aid instruments are currently being used in difficult environments? How can donors work more effectively in fragile states? This paper describes the limitations of current approaches to aid instruments and discusses the emerging understanding of their use within fragile states. In addition, a selection of aid instruments that may be more effective in achieving objectives in difficult environments is highlighted.

https://global.oup.com/academic/product/fixing-failed-states-9780195398618?cc=gb&lang=en# What is the best way achieve global stability and prosperity? This chapter argues that a stable world requires functioning states in order to overcome challenges to the political and economic system. Domestic and global leadership must find a new approach to transform states so that they provide security and prosperity for their citizens and also act as responsible members of the international community. The study terms this a sovereignty strategy. A long-term state-building strategy tailored to specific contexts should be an organising principle for the international community. It requires harnessing collective energies and capital.

4.2 Aid effectiveness, measuring impact and lessons learned

Critical views on donor engagement and aid effectiveness

Much of the criticism leveled against overseas aid to fragile states converges on the perceived disjuncture between, on the one hand the principles of good engagement, and on the other their inconsistent or lack of application on the ground. A number of commentators are concerned about the capacity and role of multilateral institutions in determining and sustaining a co-ordinated/harmonised approach. Some argue security objectives dominate development interventions in fragile states, and that whole of government approaches have exacerbated this.

Many call for improved mechanisms for donor accountability, and for donor strategies to better allow for local participation and ownership, and to be guided by a better understanding of local issues. Top-down, 'one-size-fits-all' approaches and short-term 'gap filling' systems are seen to undermine long-term capacity building. Some have argued that there is a critical need for a new approach to fragile contexts that sees development as a local, endogenous process, and that international actors should seek to catalyse rather than to direct this process. More broadly, others argue that aid alone is not sufficient for addressing the complex needs of fragile states, and that donors need to pursue a more comprehensive approach that combines development, foreign and defence policy priorities, international political economy and trade.
The study analyses the strengths and weaknesses of current EU engagement in fragile states, and in particular its support to conflict prevention and periods of transition. It examines the limitations of the instruments and methods implemented by the EU to address the problems of fragile states, and identifies what could be done to improve them. Key weaknesses of the EU’s programmes in fragile and conflict-affected states include insufficient analysis of the causes of fragility, ineffective early warning systems, and insufficient coordination with other international actors.

http://www.clingendael.nl/sites/default/files/20081100_anten.pdf
What are the likely future trends for fragile states? What policy implications do these trends have for international actors? This paper examines the reasons for international interest in fragile states and past and future trends in state fragility. It argues that state fragility will probably increase in the coming decades and that focusing on state-building is not sufficient to address this problem. Instead, the industrialised states will also have to effectively address external factors leading to state fragility that they themselves are largely responsible for.

Chatelaine, Switzerland https://www.care.de/uploads/pdf/CI_Position_Accra_Conflict_Fragile_States.pdf
Violent conflict and ‘situations of fragility’ represent significant challenges for aid effectiveness. This briefing paper argues that applying traditional development approaches in an unchanged fashion in such contexts simply does not work. Aid can have unintended interactions with conflict – both to exacerbate or mitigate violence or the potential for violence. Aid reforms need to place a much greater emphasis on conflict sensitivity and human rights-centred approaches to aid.

Browne, S., 2007, 'Aid to Fragile States: Do Donors Help or Hinder?' UNU-WIDER Discussion Paper, no. 2007/01,
United Nations University - World Institute for Development Economics Research, Helsinki
https://www.wider.unu.edu/publication/aid-fragile-states
Does donor aid to fragile and poorly-performing states do more harm than good? This paper examines the aid relationship with respect to Burma, Rwanda and Zambia. It offers eight principles for donors to observe in engaging more productively with fragile states. Influencing political will and supporting development capacity are two of the most important ways in which donors can help move a state from fragility towards stability.

Despite efforts to become more conflict-sensitive, the Bank’s approach to conflict-affected and post-conflict states focuses more on ‘doing things differently’ than ‘doing different things’. This is partly due to a continued reluctance to overtly work on political issues.

http://www.international-alert.org/resources/publications/working-grain-change-grain
This report articulates four generic features of how the standard approach to development interacts with fragile and post-conflict states in ways that are conducive to failure: emphasising form over function and allowing de jure
changes (isomorphic mimicry) to be counted as success; wishful thinking that does not acknowledge the very long time needed to build capability (as it involves a transition across rules systems); promoting premature load bearing in the scope and intensity of actions expected; and using inadequate ‘big’ or ‘small’ approaches to development. It asks if there is a middle way out of the ‘big stuck’ – the combination of unfavourable domestic conditions plus unhelpful external actors that can create an environment in which fragile states remain fragile, with low capability and at risk of recurrent conflict, for a very long time. Both ‘big’ and ‘small’ approaches to development have failed in their own ways, and the question is whether there is another approach that is ‘just right’.

Gender mainstreaming

Men and women are affected differently by the poverty, lack of access to justice, and physical insecurity that often characterises fragile states. In principle it is widely accepted that donor strategies for engagement in fragile situations should be based on and be sensitive to an understanding of these differential impacts. But progress on mainstreaming gender into development aid in fragile states has been slow.

This publication provides an overview of the key issues, challenges and opportunities for ensuring more systematic consideration of gender issues in state-building in fragile and conflict-affected countries. It makes the case for gender-sensitive state-building based on the inherent value of gender equality as well as its contribution to better development outcomes and the achievement of peacebuilding and state-building goals. The report also spells out some of the contextual challenges and operational constraints that stifle progress in this area. Based on a series of empirical examples of donor practices, the report distils key success factors and concrete entry points for tackling these challenges and achieving a more effective, politically informed approach to integrating gender into state-building.

Gender analysis

Gender analysis can help identify the differential impacts of fragility on men and women, how gender affects access to resources and power and social and cultural constraints on promoting gender.

This paper provides guidance on carrying out a GSEA, suggesting a structure, methodology and analytical framework. It emphasises the importance of a GSEA to ensuring that DFID’s policies and programmes are effective in reaching excluded groups.

Measuring impact

Evaluation and assessment are critical for understanding and improving the effectiveness of aid in fragile states. But many argue that existing methodologies, tools and approaches cannot meaningfully determine the impact of interventions in these very complex, often volatile, environments. In practice, monitoring and evaluating in fragile settings present huge methodological and logistical challenges. There is often a lack of or unreliable data, or it is unfeasible or too dangerous to collect it. Added to this, it is inherently difficult to demonstrate causality or attribution in volatile situations, or to measure changes in key factors such as state legitimacy or inclusion.

Whilst there is an emerging consensus that clear objectives and measures of progress for fragile and conflict affected states are needed, such measures are yet to be set. Developing statistical capacity in fragile situations is key to supporting better monitoring and evaluation; a key concern recently taken up by Paris 21.

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) in situations of conflict and fragility is an emerging and continually developing field of practice. This paper reviews some of the emerging practices and lessons. Part I discusses what should be
monitored at different levels, from country plans, through sectoral programmes down to individual projects. Part II provides practical guidance on particular M&E challenges in fragile contexts.


Donors using Performance Based Allocation (PBA) systems face two difficult issues: how to strengthen incentives to produce and document development results, and how to increase flexibility for fragile states. This paper suggests: 1) implementing short feedback loops to incentivise more attention to results and to monitoring and evaluation; and 2) establishing an additional performance-based fund to allow successful projects to be scaled-up. It proposes a venture-capital model of aid in fragile states – which aims to scale-up successes while accepting that not all projects will be successful. Donors supporting fragile states need to ask not “How much should be allocated?” but “Where can we really add value?”

Further resources on monitoring and evaluating interventions in conflict-affected areas can be found in the GSDRC’s conflict guide.

Lessons learned and implications for improved donor practice

A number of evaluations of aid programmes in fragile states stress the need for aid to prioritise a limited programme of reform, to be based on sound political analysis, to be responsive to a varied and volatile environment (including flexible funding arrangements), and to be delivered in a way that is inclusive and accountable. Other common themes include the need to focus efforts on potential change agents, and to develop locally appropriate strategies. Whilst there has been some progress with multi-donor trust funds (MDTFs) and pooled technical assistance funds, both of these instruments require improvement.


This report brings together the findings from nine Country Programme Evaluations, focusing on fragile states. The countries covered are Afghanistan, Cambodia, Nepal, Pakistan, Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan and Yemen.

http://ieg.worldbankgroup.org/Data/reports/chapters/fcs_overview.pdf

The World Bank has identified support to FCS as a strategic priority, critical to achieving its mission of poverty alleviation and shared prosperity. This review of International Development Association countries establishes that the World Bank’s portfolio performance in low-income FCS has improved since 2001 compared to low-income countries that are not fragile. Progress is evident in several areas, but Bank Group engagement in FCS is a long-term agenda with several challenges and constraints yet to be overcome.


This special evaluation study (SES) assesses the support provided by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to countries in fragile and conflict-affected situations (FCAS). Is ADB’s approach in FCAS countries relevant? Has the approach been properly resourced? How have the countries that have exited FCAS status performed compared with current FCAS countries? And what are the lessons from general implementation performance? The SES includes a broad review of strategy as well as data analysis and specific country-based examples.


This report examines the challenges of engaging with fragile states, using as examples Mali, Myanmar, Somalia and South Sudan. It argues that the concept of fragile states covers such a diversity of countries and problems that it is of limited utility as a unit of analysis. Donors have floundered in their efforts to help states emerging from crisis. There are few examples of success and even fewer than can be applied elsewhere. It calls for a fresh look at fragile states and for new approaches to be tried out in the field. Donors must be willing to step beyond their comfort zone, interacting with a broader set of partners both in the informal sector and at the subnational level. Most of all, they
should think strategically about how to overcome structural societal divides rather than pursue process-driven measurable outcomes that may ignore the root causes of instability.

Donor agency officials working on development assistance programmes in highly corrupt and weak governance environments face the challenge of making a difference in citizens’ lives. At the same time, they have to manage the risks to development effectiveness — and their reputations — from pervasive corruption and weak governance. Based on his extensive experience in the governance and anticorruption field, as well as drawing on work of other practitioners, the author offers operational advice on addressing these challenges.

http://www.opml.co.uk/sites/default/files/FCAS%20infrastructure%20final%20report_1.pdf
This study examines the available evidence on the experience of international support to improving infrastructure in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. It draws on a literature review and case studies (focusing on DFID-supported infrastructure programmes in Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Nepal and South Sudan). The study identifies the main causal relationships by which infrastructure programmes may contribute to economic growth, poverty reduction and improved access to services, as well as their relationship to processes of stabilisation, peacebuilding and state-building. Although the evidence base is in many areas weak, some clear conclusions emerge about the strengths and weaknesses of past engagement, and lessons for the design and implementation of more effective infrastructure programmes.

Case studies: Aid that works?

The following case studies describe successful interventions in fragile states. They consider the conditions necessary and the types of reforms that can help transition out of fragility.

How can development agencies work with weak governments in fragile states? This chapter looks at the design, implementation and governance outcomes of development initiatives in Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Despite numerous challenges, much can be achieved through a consultative approach linked with democratic decentralisation efforts. The potential for constructive action is greater at and just above the local level than at higher levels in the political system.

Can donors “do development” in recent post-conflict settings? Can aid achieve sustainable results in a poor governance framework? This document looks at four programmes that have been successful in war-torn settings. The case studies from Timor-Leste, Northern Uganda, Cambodia, and North-Western Afghanistan are assessed in terms of their poverty reduction and governance impacts.

This paper analyses the preconditions for sustained policy turnarounds in failing states. It focuses on the explanatory variables of resource rents, education, and aid, distinguishing between finance and technical assistance. Overall, these variables have significant and large effects on the duration of state failure. Appropriate donor intervention can radically shorten state failure, whereas additional finance, whether from aid or resource rents, has the opposite effect.

Further resources
OECD-DAC International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF)
5. STATE-BUILDING IN FRAGILE CONTEXTS

5.1 State-building models and prioritisation and sequencing

State-building has recently been adopted as the central objective of international engagement in fragile situations. The growing prominence of state-building on the international development agenda in part stems from the realisation that improvement in development indicators is unlikely to be achieved in fragile situations without the establishment of both a basic level of security and a functioning state.

State-building is broadly understood as an ongoing, long-term, and endogenous process of establishing and/or developing effective and legitimate state institutions and state-society relations. The OECD-DAC defines state-building as: ‘purposeful action to develop the capacity, institutions and legitimacy of the state in relation to an effective political process for negotiating the mutual demands between state and societal groups’ (OECD-DAC, 2008). Central to this understanding is the critical importance of positive state-society bargaining underpinning the formation of the social contract.

International donors are increasingly applying a state-building lens to analysing and addressing fragility. But the idea of state-building as a framework for development assistance remains controversial. Many caution that international actors can and should only have limited influence in endogenous processes of state formation. Critics of international engagement argue that state-building is undertaken with the underlying aim of transferring institutional models based on an ideal type of well-functioning state, and that this offers little room for alternative models of statehood.

State-building and peacebuilding

State-building and peacebuilding are conceptually distinct, with complementarities, trade-offs and tensions between the two. The need for international agencies to adopt an integrated approach to state-building and peacebuilding in fragile, conflict-affected states is increasingly recognised in academic and policy circles. The following two supplements explore this development:

- State-building and Peacebuilding in Situations of Conflict and Fragility looks at the links (and tensions) between state-building and peacebuilding, how these activities interact, and how they can be approached in practice. http://www.gsdrc.org/topic-guides/statebuilding-and-peacebuilding/


State-building models

For the most part, the model of state-building promoted by the international community has entailed three main prongs: supporting the legitimacy and accountability of states through democratic governance (holding elections and constitutional processes); economic liberalisation/marketisation; and strengthening the capacity of states to fulfil their core functions in order to reduce poverty. These activities are seen as essential for the development of ‘reciprocal relations between a state that delivers services for its people and social and political groups who constructively engage with their state’ (OECD-DAC, 2008). This ‘responsive’ model of state-building is distinguishable from ‘unresponsive’ state-building, which is characterised by rent-seeking and political repression and can lead to conflict (Whaites, 2008).


While support to state-building is increasingly seen as a means to assist in responding to and preventing fragility and conflict, it is a relatively recent and as yet loosely defined concept in the context of development assistance. This report aims to address this conceptual shortcoming and bring greater clarity to the policy discussion on fragility,
resilience and state-building. It proposes that state-building needs to be seen in the broader context of state-formation processes and state-society relations. It sees state-building as a primarily endogenous development founded on a political process of negotiation and contestation between the state and societal groups.


Why do some states manage state-building better than others? How can development actors support positive state-building? This paper argues that improved understanding of state-building can increase the impact of aid, while lack of understanding reduces its benefits. Two conceptual frameworks, or models, for state-building dynamics are evident: The first is a model of how state-building can work to produce capable, accountable and responsive states – namely responsive state-building. The second is a model of unresponsive state-building – a set of dynamics likely to lead to states affected by problems such as endemic rent-seeking or political repression. The models are based on three elements – political settlements; survival functions; and expected functions.


How can countries escape the vicious cycle of fragility and move towards a virtuous cycle of confidence building and institutional transformation? This chapter sets out a framework that involves: 1) restoring confidence; 2) early attention to the reform of institutions that provide citizen security, justice and jobs; 3) reform approaches that allow for flexibility and innovation; and 4) marshalling external support and resisting external stresses. This endogenous spiral of confidence building and institutional transformation should be continually expanded. It must also be adapted to context. Outsiders can help by reducing external stresses as well as providing support.


This synthesis paper draws on studies of Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guatemala, Kosovo and Pakistan. It highlights the ‘political marketplace’ in which power-holders compete and collude. Donors need to be constantly sensitive to the shifting structures of power, interests and incentives that may capture and subvert new formal governance arrangements. They must ensure that a shared strategy aimed at building a common-interest state is created, and provide sufficient resources for this while avoiding contingency-led decisions. They need to withstand fierce political competition and rapidly changing alliances by supporting constitution-building processes, political party development and participatory public debates. And they need to support service delivery and official accountability while understanding that a grassroots-level, bottom-up approach, too small-scale to be attractive for the interference of larger players, may do least harm and be more effective.

Some argue that there may be tensions embedded in the international state-building model in the sense that the three elements (as outlined in the DFID discussion paper and emerging policy paper) may not always be mutually reinforcing, or may be undermined by political economy factors. There is also some divergence of opinion about whether state-building is necessarily a development activity. Some argue that resilient states do not necessarily preside over economic growth and poverty reduction (many encounter so-called ‘resilient stagnation’). Conversely, what allows states to preside over economic growth may not necessarily be the same as what is required for responsive state-building.


This paper seeks to contribute to a more conceptually informed understanding of state-building, adopting a political economy perspective. In addition, the paper suggests that donors face (at least) three significant challenges in their engagement with state-building. These include political economy challenges, such as corruption and neo-patrimonialism; a knowledge gap about what works in providing external support for various state-building domains; and tensions embedded in the state-building model that the international community is currently pursuing.

An alternative ‘developmental states’ model of state-building questions the focus on the development of democratic institutions and good governance as necessary for poverty reduction, suggesting that economic transformation and
elite consensus are the more critical elements of state-building. But the relevance and applicability of the developmental state model to fragile situations is highly controversial.

Can the developmental success of East Asian countries be used as a road map for low-income economies run by weak states? According to this paper, the national and historical context of fragile states means that it is difficult to export the experience of states like South Korea or Taiwan. However, there are important lessons to be learned. Active state intervention, strategic economic policies and a hands-off approach by the international community are all crucial components in kick-starting fast economic growth.

Others assert the importance of nation-building when rebuilding institutions in post-conflict societies.

How can sustainable peace be built in fragile states? This study shows that while donors have largely focused on state-building, stability requires a deeper process of nation-building. External actors are restricted to using state-building as a means of enabling nation-building. They can assist in the establishment of rule of law, create a fertile investment climate for economic regeneration and agree an exit strategy. However, only the partner country can take the active lead role in nation-building.

Another important stream of research contrasts the experience of developed countries or ‘open access orders’, with developing countries or ‘limited access orders’ (North et al 2007). While open access orders are characterised by government monopoly of violence and free economic and political competition, power in limited access orders is divided amongst elites. North et al (2007) argue that applying unmodified institutional forms or mechanisms that exist in open access orders (such as property rights or democratic governance) can be destabilising and may risk generating violence.

Why do existing development approaches based on transfer of western social and political dynamics to non-western countries often fail? This paper proposes a conceptual model of developed countries, or open access orders (OAOs) and developing countries, or limited access orders (LAOs). OAOs organise themselves around competition and a government monopoly over violence. Since they do not have a secure state monopoly on violence, LAOs organise themselves to control violence among elite factions which divide the country’s economy among themselves. Development reforms will fail if they attempt to create OAOs in societies ill-prepared for such fundamental change in their social and political dynamics.

Prioritisation and sequencing

An appropriate prioritisation and sequencing of state-building processes and functions is seen as important in low capacity contexts where there are likely to be limited resources and therefore a need for high levels of (donor) co-ordination. One key debate concerns whether a certain level of security is required prior to the establishment of democratic institutions. The OECD-DAC contends that the first priority in state-building should be a form of political governance through which state and society can reconcile their expectations of one another, which determines whether security is provided in a way that meets the needs of citizens (OECD-DAC, 2008).

This paper sees state-building as an internal political process of state-society bargaining. Donors therefore need to focus first and foremost on political governance. This includes the local political processes that create public institutions and generate their legitimacy in the eyes of a state’s population. Fragility arises primarily from
weaknesses in the dynamic political process through which citizens’ expectations of the state and state expectations of citizens are reconciled and brought into equilibrium with the state’s capacity to deliver services. Disequilibrium can arise as a result of extremes of incapacity, elite behaviour, or crises of legitimacy. It can arise through shocks or chronic erosion, and be driven alternately by internal and external factors. Resilient states are able to manage these pressures through a political process that is responsive, adjusting the social contract.


What is the relationship between liberalisation, institution building and peace in countries that are just emerging from civil conflict? This book examines post-conflict operations between 1989 and 1999. Its introductory chapter outlines the author’s argument that while peace-builders should preserve the broad goal of converting war-shattered states into liberal market democracies, peacebuilding strategies need to build effective institutions before liberalization takes place.

http://cps.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/39/9/1059

Is democracy feasible in sub-Saharan Africa? Which aspects of state-building are most important? This research shows that new democracies emerge only in the context of effective states. The scope of state infrastructure and the delivery of welfare services have little impact on democratisation. But the establishment of a rule of law is critical to building democracy. Because the legitimacy of the state is itself a reciprocal product of democratisation, African states and African regimes should be understood together.


How can the process of state reconstruction be understood? This paper examines state reconstruction in Uganda, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo in light of Tanzania’s experience of establishing a stable state. Overall, it argues that a ‘state in the making’ lies somewhere between ‘traditional’ forms of organisation and the modern state and formal economy. Its conclusions cast doubt on the idea that state-making is best pursued through modern liberal democracy.

Further resources on the timing of elections in post-conflict and fragile situations are available in the GSDRC Political Systems Topic Guide.

See also the GSDRC Topic Guide on Sequencing Reforms in Fragile States.

5.2 State functions and legitimacy

State functions

Whilst there is consensus that a resilient state must be able to deliver certain functions which meet citizens’ needs and expectations, there is a great deal of debate about what these functions should be, and whether it is possible to establish a hierarchy between them. DFID and other donors distinguish between state ‘survival’ functions and ‘expected’ functions which are essential to meet public expectations and ensure state legitimacy. DFID does not propose a hierarchy between these, as action in both areas is required to generate a positive state-building dynamic. The literature offers various combinations of ‘core’ functions, the more common of which are: a monopoly over the legitimate use of force; revenue generation; safety, security and justice; basic service delivery; and economic governance.

Relatively little evidence-based work has been done to substantiate the arguments about which core functions states should perform or prioritise. Importantly, expected functions will differ according to the historical and cultural factors that shape state-society relations in different contexts. Many view the discussion as essentially political, since it questions the proper role and size of the state vis-à-vis other authorities and groups in society.
Political settlements

Recent research has questioned the recurrence of state fragility or resilience. A political settlement can be understood as: ‘the forging of a common understanding, usually among elites, that their interests or beliefs are served by a particular way of organising political power’ (Whaites, 2008). These often unarticulated, negotiated agreements usually extend beyond elites to bind together state and society, provide legitimacy for rulers, and can prevent violent conflict from occurring. Recent research has emphasised that the inclusiveness of the political settlement affects the potential for political stability.

Donors typically support political settlements through formal power-sharing mechanisms, elections, parliamentary strengthening, and constitution-building processes. But many stress that although political settlements may adopt the structures of the ‘modern’ state and be underpinned by a constitution, in practice the power relations behind the settlement may be very different.

This special issue investigates the emergence, dissemination and reception of the notion of ‘state fragility’. It analyses the process of conceptualisation, examining how the ‘fragile states’ concept was framed by policy makers to describe reality in accordance with their priorities in the fields of development and security. The contributors to the issue investigate the instrumental use of the ‘state fragility’ label in the legitimisation of Western policy interventions in countries facing violence and profound poverty. They also emphasise the agency of actors ‘on the receiving end’, describing how the elites and governments in so-called ‘fragile states’ have incorporated and reinterpreted the concept to fit their own political agendas. A first set of articles examines the role played by the World Bank, the OECD, the European Union and the g7+ coalition of ‘fragile states’ in the transnational diffusion of the concept, which is understood as a critical element in the new discourse on international aid and security. A second set of papers employs three case studies (Sudan, Indonesia and Uganda) to explore the processes of appropriation, reinterpretation and the strategic use of the ‘fragile state’ concept.

This paper explores what political settlements are and why they are now at the centre of donor efforts to foster more peaceful and effective states and societies. Analysing available research, the paper finds that, at least in the short to medium term, more inclusive political settlements at the elite level are crucial to avoid the recurrence of violent conflict, and to lay the foundations for more peaceful political processes. The literature also suggests that, over the long term, states and societies underpinned by more open and more broadly inclusive institutions are more resilient and better at promoting sustained and broadly shared prosperity. However, there is a big gap between these two findings: further research and learning are needed on how to bridge this.

Why do some states manage state-building better than others? How can development actors support positive state-building? This paper locates the political settlement within a proposed state-building model. It argues that improved understanding of state-building can increase the impact of aid, while lack of understanding reduces its benefits. Two conceptual frameworks, or models, for state-building dynamics are evident: The first is a model of how state-building can work to produce capable, accountable and responsive states - namely responsive state-building. The second is a model of unresponsive state-building - a set of dynamics likely to lead to states affected by problems such as
endemic rent-seeking or political repression. The extent to which the political settlement is inclusive or exclusionary is a critical factor in determining whether state-building is responsive or unresponsive.


How do election processes contribute to stability after civil war? This research compares state-building in Cambodia, South Africa, Afghanistan and Liberia. It argues that electoral processes are necessary in moving beyond violence. However, the way elections are carried out is critical. Sequencing, design and the extent of international oversight are the key variables that determine the extent to which electoral processes contribute to capable, responsive states or to captured, fragmented and weak states.


What are the impacts of political settlements on creating peace? What is the best way to support peace processes to produce inclusive and robust political settlements? This paper explores issues around the renegotiation of the political settlement within war-to-peace transitions. During such transitions there are opportunities to shift the terms of the political settlement. To engage with these challenges in ways that benefit the poor and marginalised, greater understanding is needed of the political processes involved and of links with conflict.


This paper presents a ‘political settlements framework’ that involves consideration of political settlements in conflict-affected and fragile areas; of how settlements are maintained; of how they change; of their historical evolution; and of settlements at subnational levels. It suggests that development organisations need to use such analysis to adapt their strategies. These should promote the best-case scenario in the short term, while investing in long-term programmes that will promote inclusiveness, development, and stability. Practical approaches to influencing political settlements are also outlined.


In fragile states, economic recovery and growth should be a core priority of donors. Fragile states present specific challenges and opportunities for empowerment: failings in state authority, legitimacy and capacity, weak social and human capital, and high levels of inequality and exclusion. Donors often overlook non-state and informal institutions that regulate daily life, and it is critical to find ways to work with them and link them to the state. Approaches to empowerment used in low income countries are also relevant in fragile states. Priority interventions may include humanitarian aid, supporting inclusive peace agreements and political settlements, strengthening social capital and inter-community co-operation and restoring the dignity and identity of war-affected populations.

Security and justice

Justice, security, and the rule of law are core functions of the state, and essential prerequisites for enabling economic and social development. The state is responsible for protecting its citizens from violence, for ensuring suitable mechanisms of redress, and for the protection of rights. Fragile situations are often characterised by an acute lack of security and justice and, in many cases, the state itself is the primary perpetrator of violence and insecurity.

Security and justice matter to the poor and other vulnerable groups, especially women and children, because bad policing, impunity, and corrupt militaries mean that they suffer disproportionately from crime, insecurity, interpersonal violence and fear. Restoring or building a minimum level of security is therefore a priority for international support to fragile situations.
How should international actors contribute to the support of justice and security in fragile states? This paper analyses the providers, processes and objectives of fragile states’ justice and security services, and reviews lessons learnt by donors in this area. It argues that international actors should take a multi-layered, context-specific approach to fragile states, developing the capacity of the state, but also enabling it to engage with non-state justice and security providers.


Integrated, comprehensive and inclusive armed violence reduction (AVR) programmes are an emerging and growing area of development practice around the world. This paper discusses the components of a multi-level AVR approach. Adopting integrated AVR programmes requires understanding the multi-faceted, multi-level nature of armed violence, application of rigorous diagnostics of local situations and incorporation of local ownership at all levels of programme design and implementation.

Further resources on international peace and security architecture can be found in chapter 5 of the GSDRC’s conflict topic guide.

**Economic recovery and employment-centred growth**

*Economic recovery*

There is broad consensus that creating economic opportunities for citizens is a critical state function, and many argue that economic recovery is a vital, although often under-emphasised, aspect of state-building in fragile states. The OECD (2010) argue basic growth in productive activities – for example, credit programmes, infrastructure, and extension services – are a necessary condition for developing a tax base and therefore central to state-building processes, but that overall these sectors have not figured prominently in donor policies. Much of the literature acknowledges that the predominant form of economic activity, and employment, in fragile states is likely to be informal (operating outside of formal rules).

Many fragile states have significant internal and external imbalances – large fiscal deficit, trade deficits and debt arrears. Addressing these macroeconomic imbalances is often a first priority in economic recovery strategies. But a key challenge for donors is how to move from short-term projects, which often raise expectations and disappoint later, to more sustainable, long-term and state-lead economic recovery. Recent research suggests that a balanced strategy combining emergency employment, income generating activities (including private sector development) and the creation of an enabling environment through legal and regulatory reforms, is necessary to support more durable economic growth.


How can economic activities contribute to stability as part of an integrated reconstruction strategy in fragile states? This report examines: (1) emergency employment for high-risk and vulnerable groups; (2) income generating activities, private sector development and micro-finance for communities; and (3) creating an enabling national environment for growth. All three ‘tracks’ must be considered and worked on from the start, and this process should be led by the country itself as soon as possible. Where the international community needs to ‘come in’, and what activities to emphasise, will depend on the country context.

How can the international community best support economic recovery after conflict? This chapter examines a community-based approach to stimulating economic activities in countries emerging from conflict. It contends that economic recovery is quicker and more sustainable when it is built on ‘indigenous drivers’; local actors have the strongest long-term incentive to engage in activities conducive to sustained economic recovery. The indigenous drivers approach allows people and communities, as well as national institutions, to establish the priorities for post-conflict recovery and for reforming institutions.

Effective Public Financial Management (PFM) in fragile states is a critical foundation for basic economic governance and in establishing the performance, legitimacy and accountability of functional states. Extreme poverty is increasingly located in these countries, which face multiple challenges of ongoing conflict, instability and resource constraints, both financial and human. One of the most common barriers to progress identified by DFID in its Country Poverty Reduction Diagnostic was weak core state capacity in tax, budgeting, and financial management, and the direct impact of this on the ability to implement policy and deliver public services. This package of readings builds on those cited in the Public Financial Management reading pack. While the broad principles of PFM in all countries also apply in fragile states, there are a number of areas which require special attention. This note summarises these areas, highlights case study material that provides specific insights, and identifies areas of focus for those engaged in and supporting PFM reforms in fragile states.

This report examines how fragile states in Africa can work towards addressing the causes and drivers of fragility by better managing natural resources across sectors. It is a reference for fragile states in Africa, Bank staff, and development partners that highlights key challenges, themes, opportunities, and approaches for managing natural resources in fragile states. Delving into key natural resource sectors, crosscutting issues, and programming approaches, it provides options for designing and implementing natural resource–related initiatives in ways that build resilience.

Like other fragile sub-Saharan African countries, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone are seeking to harness their natural resource potential in the context of ambitious development strategies. This study investigates options for scaling up public investment and expanding social safety nets in a general equilibrium setting.

Entrepreneurship could provide a crucial underpinning for stability in conflict-affected regions via job creation and improved human security. Entrepreneurs in fragile regions urgently need support in the form of enabling environments and innovative approaches that reward their creativity and risk-taking. To bolster entrepreneurs’ chances for success, policymakers should consider: redirecting foreign assistance; re-focusing private sector development interventions; re-conceptualising state-building; and re-valuing individuals.

Further resources on the role of private sector development in supporting economic recovery in post-conflict and fragile states can be found in chapter 4 of the GSDRC’s conflict topic guide.

See also the GSDRC topic guide on economic development in fragile and conflict-affected states.

**Employment-centred growth**

International interventions in post-conflict and fragile states have been criticised for failing to direct sufficient attention and funding to livelihood and employment generation. It is often assumed that long-term growth through macroeconomic stabilisation can be relied upon for job creation. Instead, many argue long-term employment generation will likely rely heavily upon private sector development.

This systematic review identifies and synthesises the current literature on the evidence of the impacts of employment creation on stability and poverty in fragile states. The review assesses the empirical evidence available, in terms of content and quality, and identifies critical research gaps, proposing priority areas for future research in this area. It found that, despite the centrality of employment creation as an instrument to promote stability in the fragile states policy discourse, no robust qualitative or quantitative evidence was found to illustrate this relationship in the literature. Currently there is not a strong evidence base from which to assess the efficacy of direct employment, enabling macro-policies, or the promotion of self-employment on stability.

GIZ, 2015, ‘Employment Promotion in Contexts of Conflict, Fragility and Violence: Opportunities and Challenges for Peacebuilding’, GIZ, Bonn

This paper presents evidence that links employment promotion to conflict, fragility and violence, drawing on literature and practices in the field of employment promotion in these contexts. The aim of the paper is to reveal the peacebuilding-potential of employment promotion in overcoming fragility and conflict on the one hand (working on conflict, fragility and violence) and the particular challenges for employment approaches in these settings on the other hand (context-sensitivity / working in conflict, fragility and violence).


The world’s poor – and programs to raise their incomes – are increasingly concentrated in fragile states. This paper reviews the evidence on what interventions work, and whether stimulating employment promotes social stability. Skills training and microfinance have shown little impact on poverty or stability, especially relative to program cost. In contrast, injections of capital – cash, capital goods, or livestock – seem to stimulate selfemployment and raise long term earning potential, often when partnered with low-cost complementary interventions. Such capital-centric programs, alongside cash-for-work, may be the most effective tools for putting people to work and boosting incomes in poor and fragile states. The paper argues that policymakers should shift the balance of programs in this direction. If targeted to the highest risk men, such programs should be expected to reduce crime and other materially-motivated violence modestly. Policymakers, however, should not expect dramatic effects of employment on crime and violence, in part because some forms of violence do not respond to incomes or employment. Finally, this review finds that more investigation is needed in several areas.

Further resources on the role of livelihoods and employment in supporting post-conflict economic recovery can be found in the GSDRC’s conflict topic guide.


Most resources on job creation focus on short-term job creation and income-generation in conflict-affected contexts. There is, however, some discussion on how to link short-term job creation efforts with longer-term action that lays the foundation for sustainable jobs and development (e.g. by incorporating private sector development and skills training). The following are the most commonly cited elements integral to sustainable job creation; an enabling framework for economic growth and sustainable job creation a consultative process; market development and value chain analysis; a private sector development strategy; skills training and labour market analysis; public sector involvement.

Pompa, C., 2014, ‘TVET and skills training in fragile and conflict affected countries’, ODI, EPS-PEAKS.
http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/pdf/outputs/EPS/TVET_and_skills_training_in_fragile_and_conflict_affected_countries_60.pdf

This literature review examines the existing evidence of the benefits of providing TVET in fragile and conflict affected countries. The paper provides a conceptual framework for employability and describes some of the main characteristics of training under conflict scenarios. It then proceeds to analyse the existing data and provides a summary of some of the emerging best practices and lessons learnt on the topic. The annex provides a sample of
evaluations of TVET and skills development programmes in different fragile countries that can help provide further insights on the issue.

Tax and state-building

Many argue that taxation is a critical aspect of state-building. The ability to raise revenue and manage public expenditure are core state functions which underpin the formation of the social contract. Revenue raised through taxation, rather than through aid, arguably better supports state accountability to its citizens and, in turn, state legitimacy. Taxation and public expenditure are also important redistributive mechanisms which can allow the state to correct horizontal and vertical inequalities over time. Nevertheless, some argue that donors have paid insufficient attention to supporting taxation in fragile states, partly because reforming tax administration is a highly complex and ultimately political undertaking.


This article provides practical implications for adopting a state-building approach to tax reform. It identifies seven operating principles (political inclusion; accountability and transparency; perceived fairness; effectiveness; political commitment to shared prosperity; legitimisation of social norms and economic interests; and effective revenue-raising) as the essential characteristics for state-building taxation, and offers recommendations on potential reforms to implement them.


Taxation is fundamental to sustainable development, as it supports the basic functions of an effective state and sets the context for economic growth. This paper argues increased revenue generation cannot guarantee improved development outcomes unless it is accompanied by simultaneous efforts to enhance state capacity and build public engagement and accountability. The paper proposes measures broadly aimed at building a national dialogue about taxation and supporting the building of more integrated administrative structures.


Ending extreme poverty means supporting fragile states. Yet aid to fragile states is falling. Many fragile states are under-aided. The least developed fragile states have few other sources of finance. Greater domestic revenue is needed to plug the development finance gap. Mobilising revenue matters for generating public income – and for state-building. Fragile states face several challenges in raising domestic revenue. Action is needed to stem revenue lost through illicit activities. Support for domestic revenue mobilisation in fragile states is essential. Development actors should encourage broad-based, simple and transparent revenue systems.


How far has the recent global wave of tax reform contributed to state-building in poorer countries? The conclusion of this paper mirrors other general globalisation arguments: there are good things to report, but worrying problems in the poorest and most dependent countries. The reform agenda is least appropriate to those countries most in need of the state-building to which the taxation process has contributed in other places and times. Governments in poorer countries have little choice but to go along with a reform agenda reflecting the priorities and needs of the more powerful actors in the international system. The contemporary tax reform agenda does not address the more urgent problems that the poorest countries face.


Sources of state revenue have a major impact on patterns of state formation. This article investigates how far the quality of governance in developing countries might improve if states were more dependent for their financial resources on domestic taxpayers. It argues that we can best understand patterns of state formation in the South by
exploring the different context in which they were formed in comparison with that of earlier western European states.

The literature indicates that rebuilding and supporting state capacity is critical but not sufficient. Institution building needs to be closely linked with reforms of both revenue and expenditure policies. Ultimately state revenues should be able to sustain state expenditure policies without donor support. The challenge, however, is that the tax base in fragile environments is often too small (or overly reliant on natural resources) to sustain these expenditure demands. Research suggests careful thought needs to be given to how, ultimately, different aspects of a state’s tax and expenditure policies will be drawn together. Research also suggests that donors will benefit from adopting a political economy approach to taxation in fragile states rather than a purely administrative approach. Tax reform policies need to be based on thorough political analysis and assessment of the political sustainability of reforms.

http://www2.lse.ac.uk/internationalDevelopment/research/crisisStates/download/wp/wpSeries2/WP842.pdf

How do patterns of taxation affect state capacity and production? What is the relationship between elite bargains and taxation patterns? How do aid flows and multilateral donor reforms affect state-building? This paper examines the political economy of taxation in a range of countries. It argues that the process of tax collection is a powerful lens through which to assess power distribution and the legitimacy of the state and of powerful interest groups in civil society.

State legitimacy

Fragile states often experience crises of legitimacy in the sense that citizens may not accept the state’s basic right to rule. State legitimacy and the development of trust between state and society have long been considered a critical dimension of state-building processes in the political science literature. But many argue that state legitimacy has often been poorly understood or overlooked by external actors aiming to support these processes.

The OECD-DAC identifies an opportunity for state-building to create a ‘virtuous cycle of legitimacy’ in the sense that: i) legitimacy is necessary for the process of state-building because the ability of the state to manage state-society expectations depends on its legitimacy in the eyes of its population, and ii) state-building and the delivery of certain functions which benefit people strengthens citizen confidence and trust in the state and in turn reinforces its legitimacy. But many argue there are tremendous limits on the capacity of external actors to influence state legitimacy, and very little empirical evidence of how donors can support state legitimisation.

The literature denotes various types of legitimacy (including grounded, embedded, charismatic, international, self-legitimacy, performance) and sources of legitimacy (including performance against certain functions, representation, accountability, citizenship, rights). Understanding what state legitimacy means in different contexts is a critical concern for external actors. Some argue a state-building process is most likely to generate legitimacy for the state when it is inclusive of all major political forces and open to the participation of the public.

This brief offers a concise introduction to the core elements of the concept of state legitimacy. It addresses four questions: How is the concept of legitimacy best understood? Why is it important? How do states accrue legitimacy? And what policy implications follow from this?

This paper suggests that people’s ideas about what constitutes legitimate political authority are fundamentally different in Western and non-Western states. Non-Western states typically have several political authorities (both traditional and non-traditional) competing for legitimacy. Legitimacy derives from four sources: input or process, output or performance, shared beliefs, and from international legitimacy. These different sources of legitimacy interact and no state relies on a single source of legitimacy. Trying to strengthen state capacity and legitimacy in very fragile environments by imposing or supporting the creation of rational-legal political institutions is unlikely to work.
Donors need a detailed, empirical understanding of how multiple and conflicting sources of legitimacy play out in a given context. They should then consider how best to support more constructive state-society engagement and address trade-offs when local perceptions of legitimacy conflict with international norms.

What is the nature of state legitimacy in fragile situations? How can legitimacy be fostered in such situations? This report suggests that legitimacy concerns the very basis for how state and society are linked and by which the state’s authority is justified. Interventions in fragile situations must therefore focus on relations between state and society and must be adapted to context. Neither the same type of legitimacy nor the same type of (end-) state can be established everywhere.

Kaplan, S., 2008, ‘Fragile States, Fractured Societies’, Chapter 3 in Fixing Fragile States: A New Paradigm for Development, Praeger Security International, London https://global.oup.com/academic/product/fixing-failed-states-9780195398618?cc=gb&lang=en#What has caused the difficulties experienced by fragile states? This chapter explores the roots of state fragility and the role of foreign aid in sustaining past dysfunction. Two structural problems – political identity fragmentation (often based on arbitrarily drawn state borders) and weak national institutions – reinforce each other. They undermine state legitimacy, interpersonal trust and the formation of robust governance systems and encourage neopatrimonialism. Fragile states’ formal institutions need to be reconnected with the local societies upon which they have been imposed. The key to fixing states is to legitimise the state by deeply enmeshing it within society.

Papagianni, K., 2008, ‘Participation and State Legitimation’, Chapter 3 in (eds.) C T Call and V Wyeth, Building States to Build Peace, Lynne Rienner, Colorado https://www.rienner.com/title/Building_States_to_Build_PeaceHow do postwar countries gain legitimacy in the eyes of political elites and the public? This study argues that state-building should be approached as a process (not an event) to legitimate new state institutions. It should also be seen as a process that meets the criteria of inclusion and participation. Although inclusive and participatory political processes do not necessarily lead to legitimate outcomes, when managed well, they have a significant chance of bolstering the legitimacy of postwar states.

How can state-building be improved? This paper argues that successful state-building may be possible if the international community adopts a new framework. It presents a relational concept, using Somalia and Somaliland as case studies, and identifies alternative ways to rebuild state legitimacy.

An important emerging issue concerns how poorly designed donor interventions can undermine state legitimacy and exacerbate rather than mitigate the conditions for violent conflict. Particularly in reference to Afghanistan, some have argued that intervening from the outside to build a state carries with it the risk of undermining the legitimacy and sovereignty of the very state donors are trying to secure and build. Specifically, donor interference in the management of budgets and resources is likely to undermine legitimacy rather than build state capacity (see Ghani and Lockhart, 2005 above). Donors should ensure that interventions are based on a sophisticated understanding of the political economy and processes of legitimation in countries where they are operating.

How can donor interventions hinder or assist state-building processes? This report from the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee draws on country case-studies to examine five key areas of state-building. Donors operating in fragile states need to analyse where their own countries’ strategic objectives contradict state-building objectives and where state-building objectives are themselves at odds. Donors can assist state-building by promoting: (1) inclusive political processes; (2) state legitimacy; (3) constructive state-society relations; (4) social expectations that are realistic but push states to do more; and (5) the development of sustainable capacities to carry out state functions.

See also the GSDRC topic guide on the legitimacy of states and armed non-state actors.
5.3 Strategies for external engagement

Working within local contexts and institutions

Understanding informal institutions and forms of order and authority within and beyond the nation state is critical for understanding the feasibility of state-building interventions. Many studies have demonstrated how local institutions and traditional authorities are resilient, can endure state failure or collapse, and determine the everyday realities of poor people, particularly in remote or peripheral areas beyond the state’s reach. Some call for state-building interventions to better account for and tap into the potential for positive social change through these institutions on the basis they often carry legitimacy with the population, and that where formal state institutions do not match well with them, they will not endure. Recently there has been renewed attention on the ‘mediated state’ model, in which a central government with limited power and capacity relies on a diverse range of local and informal authorities to execute core functions of government and mediate relations between local communities and the state.

But others caution that local institutions should not be idealised. There are considerable challenges in addressing fragility when dominant social structures and local institutions may perpetrate violence, vulnerability, or predation. Some studies have identified a risk that state-building interventions can perpetuate weak, unstable or criminal institutions.


This report draws on country examples to illustrate how elements of public authority are being created through complex processes of bargaining between state and society actors, and the interaction of formal and informal institutions. Instead of prioritising reform of formal institutions, development practitioners should look at the structures, relationships, interests and incentives that underpin them. In the short-to-medium term it may be more useful to explore whether relationship-based arrangements could offer a way to make progress as opposed to helping build rules-based public authorities. Donors should prioritise international action to improve financial regulation and constrain criminal activity. They could do more to facilitate dialogue between politicians and investors and support collective action by business associations. Policymakers should be more alert to ways in which the design of public programmes influences opportunities and incentives for collective action to demand better services. Efforts to improve local governance need to take more account of informal village-level institutions. Tax reforms should prioritise equity, transparency and improved collection.


http://www2.ids.ac.uk/futurestate/pdfs/AnUpside-downViewofGovernance.pdf

This paper surveys the literature on development and non-state actors (NSAs). It sets out the evidence for the merits of engaging politically with NSAs by incorporating them into governance and state-building programmes, and examines the challenges this may pose. The paper finds that how practitioners engage with an NSA often depends on normative judgements such as whether the influence of NSAs is positive or negative. Engagement is also hindered by the lack of a coherent view in the development community about whether donors and practitioners should engage with such actors. Yet the evidence suggests that truly inclusive and sustainable political settlements will need to involve any NSAs able to exercise significant economic, political, or social influence on the development process, regardless of whether this influence is positive or negative.


This paper argues that current approaches to state-building rest on a narrow understanding of the sources of political order, focusing too heavily on the technical and bureaucratic functions of the state. It proposes instead that emerging states be viewed not as fragile entities lacking capabilities but as hybrid political orders whose sources of legitimacy are often more socially and culturally rooted. The reality is that state institutions co-exist with and depend on the family, religious, economic and cultural institutions. While the state, in the final analysis, has a coercive capacity to determine outcomes which other institutions lack, this does not mean that state institutions are the
primary determinant of integration, security, welfare or legitimacy. These factors are much more critically determined by other institutions within the society.

Why has state-building in Somalia failed so often? This research suggests that the problem lies in the type of state that both external and local actors have so far sought to construct. Somalia needs to develop a mediated state in which a central government with limited power and capacity relies on a range of local authorities to execute core functions of government and mediate between local communities and the state.

When sub-Saharan African government institutions do not function as expected by international aid agencies, they are often labelled dysfunctional. This article explains the ‘logic’ behind neopatrimonial practices. Donors must begin to act politically – to confront directly the political logic that undermines economic development and democratic consolidation.

Further resources on state-building in fragile states are available in the GSDRC state-building and peacebuilding topic guide supplement.

The Overseas Development Institute (ODI) led a consortium on Africa Power and Politics that explored ways of exercising power and doing politics that work for development.

Addressing exclusion

Social exclusion is a key cause and characteristic of state fragility. Supporting opportunities for enhancing excluded groups rights and their participation in governance is therefore viewed as a critical aspect of state-building by donors. Some view a rights-based approach to programming as crucial in the achievement of long term and sustainable empowerment of marginalised groups.

Severe horizontal inequalities (HI), or inequalities among groups, are undesirable in themselves and can lead to violent conflict. International donors sometimes acknowledge HI as important, but instead privilege more conventional policies that can actually lead to a worsening of HI. The paper distinguishes between direct, indirect or integrationist policies. Direct policies target particular groups explicitly to improve their access to particular resources; indirect policies are universally applicable policies designed to have the effect of reducing HI; and integrationist policies aim to bring groups together, reducing group identities and enhancing national ones. All three can play a role, but indirect policies and integrationist ones are particularly appropriate as direct polices can arouse severe tensions. Policies such as those on infrastructure, industrial promotion and training, should seek to reduce both regional and ethnic inequalities in market opportunities. Likewise HI policies should complement other development policies. It is important that policy-makers are conscious and sensitive of the context in regard to HI and the tensions and controversies that may arise from policies, especially redistributive policies.

This paper reviews a range of policies which could contribute to reducing HIs in the political, socio-economic and cultural status dimensions.

This report discusses the merits and challenges of working with human rights in the context of fragility and conflict-affected situations. Drawing on the 2011 World Development Report on Conflict, Security and Development, it examines how human rights can play a role in institutional processes and socio-political dynamics in supporting
transitions out of fragility and conflict. The findings point to a need for a context-appropriate approach to integrating human rights into development interventions in fragile and conflict-affected situations.

Countries in which child marriage is most prevalent tend to be among the poorest and least stable. All but one of the top ten countries with the highest child marriage prevalence rates is on the OECD list of fragile states. Child marriage does not cause fragile states, but it does reinforce poverty, limit girls’ education, stymie economic progress, and, as a result, contribute to regional instability. There is a wide gap in data that assesses the degree to which fragile contexts perpetuate child marriage; as a result, there is also a gap in informed intervention. Data on child marriage in fragile states will help produce more effective and targeted interventions to assist the youngest and most at-risk members of communities in crisis.

Directing the energy of youth towards reconstruction is a challenge and requires rapid interventions in the areas of education, family life and health, economic empowerment and civic participation.

Youth unemployment in fragile contexts is increasingly highlighted as a security concern and therefore as a priority policy area. This report looks at youth unemployment from a peacebuilding perspective. Through field research in Liberia and Sierra Leone, the report analyses several themes central to understanding the peace-related dynamics of employment programming: the framing of the (un)employment question in relation to the economy; the definition and role of youth; the politics and institutional dynamics surrounding the issue; and the nature of relationships between key stakeholders. Reflecting on these areas, three key findings emerged as follows: a) the need for more realistic analysis and problem framing; b) need for more honest discussions with all stakeholders; and c) need for more innovation in the way the challenge is approached.

For further reading, see also: 'Tackling social exclusion' in the GSDRC social exclusion guide; 'Protecting minority rights' in the GSDRC conflict guide; and 'State fragility and human rights' in the GSDRC human rights guide.

Gender and state-building

Gender roles and relations can determine opportunities and obstacles to state-building. Many argue early attention needs to be given to gender equality and to increasing women’s voice in political, social, and economic development in fragile and post-conflict settings. State reconstruction can provide opportunities to shape new social, economic, and political dynamics that can break existing gender stereotypes. For example, recent research has shown how the redrawing of the boundaries of authority between the formal state and customary governance systems can provide new citizenship opportunities for women. Not focusing on gender early on can entrench systems that discriminate against women which are much harder to challenge later.

At the operational level, however, gender is often not seen as a high priority by donors in the early stages of post-conflict state-building, and may be ignored in the design of interventions. It is important to understand the linkages between gender and fragility, and the implications of failing to take gender into account (including the potential to inadvertently reinforce discrimination).

How can women’s citizenship in developing countries be strengthened? In many African countries women have little contact with the formal state and their lives are governed by customary governance systems that seriously limit their rights and opportunities for political participation. This is particularly true for women in fragile states, where the formal state is weak and inaccessible. Based on field research in Sierra Leone conducted by FRIDE and CGG, this Working Paper examines how processes of post-conflict state-building have redrawn the boundaries of authority
between the formal state and customary governance systems, and thereby provided new citizenship opportunities for women. The paper explores the changes that are taking place in women’s rights, women’s political participation and women’s mobilisation in Sierra Leone, in the context of state-building. It also makes recommendations for how donors can support the strengthening of women’s citizenship within their support for state-building in Africa.


How well is gender equality being promoted in Afghanistan? This study argues that gender mainstreaming is not being substantively implemented in the Administration, although it is the government’s principal strategy for promoting gender equality. Mainstreaming is a valuable tool and could be more effectively executed. It is the responsibility of the Government of Afghanistan (GoA), and of its leaders in particular, to ensure that its written commitment to promote gender equality in the GoA Gender Mainstreaming Policy is supported by its activities and practices.

**Strengthening citizen engagement**

Many caution that any reconstruction process must allow for active citizen participation, particularly from periphery populations, in order to enhance its legitimacy. Donors need to therefore balance the top-down focus on institution-building with the strengthening of bottom-up access to institutions and accountability. Civic participation is also seen to strengthen state legitimacy. Citizen-centred or community-based approaches (CBA) are increasingly advocated as ways to develop local governance capacity and social capital.


How can the international community help to rebuild state-society relations in post-conflict situations? This study argues that current donor approaches to state-building are too narrowly focused and too fragmented to fully address the “invisible” yet critical processes of state-society relations. It recommends the adoption of a governance framework based on the concept of the public sphere in order to foster positive collaboration and engagement within post-conflict societies.


http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/PDF/Outputs/CentreOnCitizenship/drccitizensperspective.pdf

How can a citizen-centred approach to development build effective states by improving relations between state and society? This paper gives an overview of current debates and analyses citizens’ own views on these issues. It argues that a state’s legitimacy is strengthened by civic participation, which often grows up around local issues, and can be empowered through donor support.

The National Solidarity Programme (NSP) in Afghanistan is a high-profile example of a citizen-led reconstruction effort which aimed to empower communities, improve community relations, and increase public faith in the system of government. However, other research warns about the challenges of making these structures sustainable, coherent and effective and in developing their relations with non-state actors and customary governance systems.


Decentralisation and state-building

There is considerable disagreement about whether and how decentralisation should be pursued in fragile environments. Decentralisation is often supported on the basis that it can positively impact on centre-periphery relations and bring government closer to the people. But many studies have found that informal political institutions can subvert the decentralisation process in fragile states, and some caution that the relationship between state resilience and decentralisation is not yet well understood. A long-standing concern in the state-building literature has been the need to balance the development of strong central institutions with the need for the state to have a local presence, but without local agencies becoming autonomous from the state.

http://www.gsdrc.org/docs/open/con65.pdf

How can fragile and post-conflict states stabilise themselves and transition toward socio-economic recovery? This paper argues that developing countries and donors should eschew ambitious idealised visions of good governance in favour of pragmatic approaches aimed at achieving "good enough governance". Drawing from evidence from stabilisation efforts in Iraq, it concludes that implementing this new strategy requires looking beyond the centre to the critical role of sub-national levels of government in post-conflict reconstruction.

Engberg-Pedersen, L., 2008, ‘Local Governance in Fragile States’, DIIS Policy Brief, Danish Institute of International Studies, Copenhagen

This policy brief argues that early support to local governance in fragile states is vital for enabling socio-economic development in the countryside, but comprehensive political, fiscal and administrative decentralisation reforms are rarely the way forward. In situations where non-state actors fill the gaps left by absence of government, comprehensive decentralisation risks reproducing state fragility. Ignoring informal non-state authorities can considerably undermine efforts to reform local governance in fragile states. Overall, donors should not be overly ambitious and should adopt a properly sequenced and integrated approach.


What are the prospects for decentralisation in post-war Sierra Leone? This paper analyses the interaction between the different elements of local government, finance, and the diamond trade in Sierra Leone and offers guidance for post-conflict reconstruction at a local level. It argues that the reconstitution of the politico-economic networks surrounding diamond extraction outside of local government may lead to the alienation of the same groups that led the rebellion over the last few years.

http://www.gsdrc.org/publications/decentralisation-and-statebuilding/

Decentralisation and the building or restoring of sub-national government institutions can significantly alter centre-periphery relations. Much of the literature cites the potential for these processes and structures to contribute to improving state-citizen relations and advancing state legitimacy. However, the contribution that decentralisation and sub-national government can make to state-building is influenced to a great extent by the nature of the political settlement and the political economy of the country. Much of the literature and case studies from around the world stress that decentralisation frameworks and the development of new local institutions cannot in themselves counter entrenched political economies. Political contexts and actors that are present particular challenges include neo-patrimonialism, fragmented political power, traditional and non-state actors and exclusionary settlements.
5.4 Assessments of external engagement and lessons learned

Critiques and dilemmas of external engagement

International actors confront a range of dilemmas in engaging with state-building processes. Many see inherent tensions and contradictions between external assistance and the need to develop local ownership, between universal values and local expectations, and between short-term imperatives (such as elite bargains) and the development of longer-term state institutions. At the practical level, donors need to reconcile the need for long-term but not open-ended engagement, ensure policy coherence and divisions of labour within and between donor governments and agencies, and be mindful that aid instruments do not undermine state legitimacy.


The challenges facing situations of fragility and conflict are daunting. The purpose of this note is to outline a framework for the selection, design and implementation of World Bank interventions in such difficult contexts. It builds on the three dimensions of governance – authority, capacity and legitimacy – and adapts them to the context of fragile states. The primary audience for the work is frontline staff working on country programming.

Paris, R., and Sisk, T., 2007, ‘Managing Contradictions: The Inherent Dilemmas of Postwar State-building’, Research Partnership on post-war state-building, International Peace Institute, New York https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/iparpps.pdf How can legitimate, effective institutions best be built to create peaceful states? This research suggests that state-building has become a central focus of multidimensional peace operations in war-torn societies. But efforts to construct legitimate, effective state institutions are full of tensions and contradictions. Understanding these tensions and contradictions is essential for anticipating many of the practical problems that international agencies face in the course of state-building operations and for devising more nuanced and effective state-building strategies for future missions.


This article shows that there are fundamentally different theoretical points of departure for the state-building debates: one that focuses first on institutions (defined as a Weberian perspective) and one (following Durkheim) that argues for a greater focus on social cohesion as a prerequisite to effective state formation and consolidation. It shows how academic and policy-making conceptions of the state impact on understandings of state collapse or weakness, and therefore the policies and practices of state-building. A specific reading of Max Weber’s sociology has come to dominate the state-building literature. Defining the state by its physical and institutional basis and its strength by its institutional grasp over the society, the institutional approach equates state collapse with the collapse of state institutions, and state-building with institutional reconstruction. Showing that this orthodoxy can be contested, this chapter has sketched an alternative approach to the institutional approach, based on Durkheimian sociology.


Why did the civil wars in Somaliland end while Somalia’s continued? This paper asks why large-scale violence was resolved in the internationally unrecognised ‘Republic of Somaliland’ but not in the rest of Somalia. The case of Somaliland offers insights into why some domestic power struggles – including violent ones – build the foundations for relative political order while others perpetuate cycles of economic malaise and political violence.


Is institution building the best way of reconstructing collapsed states? What can be done to avert failure in reconstruction efforts? This paper critiques the model of state reconstruction currently adopted by the international community. The article compares exogenous state-building (using the examples of Mozambique, Cambodia and
Bosnia) with endogenous efforts (for example, Uganda, Ethiopia and Eritrea) and finds that exogenous, donor driven attempts are more expensive and tend to focus on building institutions rather than establishing power. The author criticises donor state-building techniques as focusing more on imported ‘best practice’ than local solutions, as being overwhelming for the country in question and for not being resourced adequately enough to see donors’ goals realised.

https://muse.jhu.edu/journals/international_security/v032/32.4.englebert.pdf
Why have international efforts to reconstruct public institutions in failed and collapsed states in Africa enjoyed such little success, particularly in establishing self-sustaining state institutions? This article examines the obstacles to successful reconstruction in the failed states of sub-Saharan Africa. It argues that three flawed assumptions underpin international efforts to rebuild failed states in Africa and recommends a greater reliance on indigenous reconstruction efforts.

‘Do no harm’ state-building

A ‘do no harm’ approach to state-building encourages external actors to mitigate the potential for aid to result in unintended harmful outcomes. Underlying this principle is the need for interventions to be based on sound contextual analysis to better facilitate external alignment behind endogenous processes. Donors are increasingly thinking about what a ‘do no harm’ approach to state-building means in any given context, so as to avoid some of the well-documented pitfalls of engaging in these complex and highly political processes.

How can donors ensure they do no harm? How can they be sure they intervene constructively in fragile situations? This book provides practical guidance based on comparative case studies of six countries (Afghanistan, Bolivia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Nepal, Rwanda and Sierra Leone) and a comprehensive literature review. It addresses how the interventions of OECD countries may risk undermining positive state-building processes, and makes recommendations as to how this may be avoided.

How can a sustainable, legitimate and effective state be established in Afghanistan? As it moves from a transitional framework to a longer-term development framework, insurgency, opium and popular discontent threaten to undermine progress and further destabilise the country. This paper argues that while these threats require short-term action, sustainable solutions depend on improved governance, which in turn requires realistic state-building goals. Aid dependence, donor-driven assistance, limited state control over resources and budget assistance all present difficulties for state-building in Afghanistan.

State-building case studies and narratives

Many argue it is vital for external actors to understand the historical trajectory of state-building in any given context, and the potential for path dependence, in each specific country context in which they are operating. State institutions are formed through long-term processes of state formation and through interactions with geographic and political economy characteristics, and ethnic and religious factors. The case studies below demonstrate how forms of the state can change over time in response to these internal and external factors. Some recent studies have sought to account for why some states faced with similar economic and structural conditions are resilient, whereas others fall into fragility.

This paper aims to illustrate the state-building dynamics outlined in DFID’s contribution to the OECD DAC Task Team on State-building, ‘States in Development: Understanding State-building’ and thus test the propositions developed in
the DFID Working Paper on responsive and unresponsive State Building through a comparative case study of the political settlements in Cambodia and Laos. The original hypothesis for this study was that Cambodia has made greater progress in becoming a responsive state than Laos. This paper uses the contrasts and similarities between the two countries to assess the usefulness of the State Building framework, to assess the nature of responsiveness, and to offer recommendations for adapting and strengthening the framework on state building.


This paper focuses on the case study of Angola and aims to analyse whether the international community’s engagement in Angola is transforming, or rather reinforcing, the current status quo of state-society relations. With particular attention to the EU, it takes into account official development cooperation, especially projects aiming to promote good governance, as well as economic engagement and political relations. The paper argues that the impact of international donors’ engagement in the field of governance and state-society relations appears to be quite limited and driven by the Angolan elite’s interests, rather than being supportive of concrete governance reforms or improving the political and economic participation of the population and more fluent state-society relations. Furthermore, the economic interests of foreign actors in Angola seem to override the commitment to achieve good governance and transparency. Although there are important entry points for international actors to exert a positive influence, what is crucial but still absent is a deeper level of donor commitment to bring about real democratic change and consolidation in Angola.

http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~db=all~content=a907905354

This article critically examines the discourse surrounding fragile states in relation to the security—development nexus. It draws on the case of Haiti to problematise key assumptions underpinning mainstream approaches to resolving concerns of security and development through the contemporary project of state-building. In contrast, it suggests that a focus on the social and political relations constitutive of social struggles provides a framework for a better analysis of the historical trajectory of development in—and of—fragile states. The article concludes by considering the salience of this relationally conceived interpretation of the security—development nexus for gaining insight into the alternative visions of progress, peace, and prosperity that people struggle for.

http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~db=pair~content=a912306683

Using evidence from the case of Congo, focusing in particular on the eastern Kivu provinces, this article argues that the enduring presence of warlords, and the influence of their international supporters, remains inadequately addressed by current practices of post-conflict state-building. The dominant contemporary model of state-building currently focuses on the promotion of liberal democracy as a way of avoiding future conflict, highlighting in particular the key role of elections. Simultaneously, it emphasises the importance of security and developing a state monopoly on violence. However, in the pursuit of both these ends in Congo, warlord politics and interference from regional powers continue to pose significant challenges. In conclusion, the experience of the Kivus indicates that an approach recognising multiple sovereignties or emphasising significant decentralisation may be more appropriate. Without such a shift in emphasis the notion that Congo is, or will soon become, an empirically functional state is perhaps wishful thinking.

lse.ac.uk/internationalDevelopment/research/crisisStates/download/wp/wpSeries2/wp232.pdf
Mozambique has been described as a model of ‘state resilience’ as the ruling Frelimo party has managed to maintain power through years of economic collapse and civil conflict. However, such a description can be misleading and this paper argues that in most senses, apart from the symbolic, the state largely collapsed through much of the country during the civil war (1977-1992). By tracing the social formation of the elite who eventually went on to dominate the Frelimo party leadership the paper demonstrates how they were able to maintain internal unity and survive the trials of the post-independence period. However, the social basis of the unity that has maintained the Frelimo party is also very exclusionary, and in many ways unique to themselves. Thus, instead of a model of state resilience the paper
argues that it is the Frelimo party that has survived, but that the reestablishment of the hegemony of the party-state could deepen the divisions and inequalities that helped fuel civil war.


International state-building interventions frequently invite controversy and the United Nations Transitional Authority in East Timor (UNTAET) was no exception. Can international intervention succeed where local participation is excluded? Should a ‘peace-maintenance’ mandate involve bestowing sovereignty on the United Nations? This paper reviews the governorship style of intervention exercised by the UN in East Timor, highlights the problems associated with such a total form of international administration and recommends a ‘participatory intervention’ doctrine for future enterprises.

**Further resources**

OECD DAC: Conflict, fragility and resilience

International Peace Institute: state-building

Institute for State Effectiveness

Princeton University is running a research partnership on Innovations for Successful Societies, in response to demand for problem-focused knowledge and practical “lessons” on the organisational designs, recruitment procedures, and management practices that yield accountable and capable government in volatile political settings.
6. SERVICE DELIVERY IN FRAGILE CONTEXTS

6.1 Tools and approaches to service delivery in fragile contexts

This section introduces some of the challenges, dilemmas and lessons learned in supporting the delivery of basic services in fragile contexts.

Failure to deliver basic services including security, health, education and justice is understood as both a cause and characteristic of fragility; states that fail to meet a society’s basic needs and expectations are seen to inherently lack legitimacy and resilience, and fragile situations in turn give rise to the deterioration and fragmentation of services. The impacts of fragility on service delivery are widely documented, and include; inequitable coverage and access, the proliferation of non-state service providers (including international NGOs), and the breakdown of long-route accountability.

The impetus for donors in supporting the delivery of services in fragile states is not only meeting basic human needs, but supporting the state-building imperative, specifically, the development of reciprocal state-society relations, state legitimacy, and meaningful accountability relationships. In this sense, donors are increasingly thinking in terms of how and to what extent the delivery of services can address the root causes of fragility. But many caution that using services to address inequity and social exclusion are highly political undertakings.

Service delivery models

Ensuring the quality, sustainability and accessibility of basic services in fragile contexts, particularly for the poor, presents a series of dilemmas and challenges for donors. These include the need to balance short-term delivery mechanisms with the development of long-term (state) capacity and institutions (the so-called ‘twin-track’ dilemma in that the two tracks imply different activities) and the potential for donor involvement to distort accountability relationships.

In supporting service delivery in fragile states, many call for donors to better understand access constraints, target marginalised groups, build on local residual capacity, and support local community-based approaches, community voice and civil society oversight. Some recent analysis has stressed the potential for more systematic use of public-private partnerships and contracting-out as models for basic service delivery in fragile states.


While virtually all polities enjoy uncontested international legal sovereignty, there are wide variations in statehood, that is, the monopoly over the means of violence and the ability of the state to make and implement policies. Areas of limited statehood are not, however, ungoverned spaces where anarchy and chaos prevail. The provision of collective goods and services is possible even under extremely adverse conditions of fragile or failed statehood. The paper specifies the conditions under which external efforts at state-building and service provision by state and non-state actors can achieve their goals. It focuses on the extent to which external actors enhance the capacity (statehood) of authority structures in weak states, or directly contribute to the provision of collective goods and services, such as public health, clean environment, social security, and infrastructure. It argues that three factors determine success: legitimacy, task complexity, and institutionalization, including the provision of adequate resources. First, legitimacy: politically relevant audiences in the target state must accept the legitimacy of efforts by external organizations. Second, task properties: the simpler the task, the more likely it is to be provided. Third, institutional design: appropriate resourcing and higher legalization increase the prospects for effective state-building and service provision.


How can service delivery be strengthened in the context of a fragile state? This report reviews evidence on the impact of state fragility on service delivery. Donors should tailor interventions to context, maintain a long-term focus
on governance and state-building and manage transition and hand-back sensitively. Efforts at national government level need to be balanced with programmes linked to local authorities and communities.


What has been the international community’s experience with pro-poor service provision in fragile states? This report examines the existing literature and synthesises information from three new sectoral reports to create a comprehensive picture of donor engagement in service provision in fragile contexts. While service provision in these environments is an increasingly prominent feature of donor interventions, significant challenges remain in balancing short-term and long-term objectives and tailoring engagement to the particular circumstances of each context.


How can international development organisations balance short-term provision of services with longer-term institutional goals? This informal discussion note analyses service delivery in Low Income Countries Under Stress (LICUS). It looks at how to deliver services quickly to vulnerable groups, while engaging in the long-term task of rebuilding public institutions. There must be a thorough analysis of the specific country context and the creation of linkages between public institutions and aspects of service delivery from the start.


What are the challenges faced by external actors in supporting service delivery in difficult environments (SDDE)? This paper asks what type of approaches, and what conditions, improve human development outcomes and build pro-poor government-led systems in fragile states. It argues that the international community should emphasise service delivery as a key entry point to further development in difficult environments.

See also the OECD’s handbook on contracting out government functions and services in post-conflict and fragile situations.

**Case studies and lessons learned**

The following case studies draw lessons from experience of delivering basic services in fragile contexts.


http://www.gsdrc.org/docs/open/eb96.pdf

What are the challenges for service delivery in difficult environments? What lessons can be learnt from the conflict areas of Nepal? How effective are different strategies for delivering services to the poor and the vulnerable? This report describes the different approaches development agencies have used to support service delivery in Nepal and highlights key areas for future support.


http://www.eldis.org/fulltext/CFCI-Sudan-casestudy.pdf

The UNICEF-sponsored Child-Friendly Community Initiative (CFCI) represents an integrated, multi-sectoral and community-driven approach for the delivery of basic services to poor and vulnerable people in Sudan. What are the main achievements of CFCI? How does it differ from other donor interventions aiming to enhance service delivery? This case study examines the effectiveness of the CFCI approach in Sudan and attempts to draw lessons for donors on service delivery in other fragile states.
PATHS, 2008, ‘Strengthening Voice and Accountability in the Health Sector’, Partnership for Transforming the Health Sector, Nigeria

How can greater voice and accountability for citizens bring about improved health services? This Technical Brief reviews several voice and accountability initiatives supported by the Partnerships for Transforming Health Systems Programme (PATHS) in selected states in Nigeria. It concludes that the creation of formal mechanisms of voice and accountability can be effective in opening space for citizen-state accountability and improving service responsiveness. Further work is however needed from the government on strengthening accountability mechanisms for these initiatives to be fully successful.

http://www.basics.org/documents/Early_Recovery_Fragile_States_Zivetz_Final.pdf

What are the impacts of foreign assistance on state stewardship of the health sector in early recovery fragile states? How can foreign aid encourage better state performance? This case study finds that donors have undermined state capacity to regulate service delivery by creating a two-track system. Promising approaches to support state stewardship include: contracting with NGOs; equity funds; civil service performance-based reform; sectoral plans; and budget support. Increased donor harmonisation is important.


Development projects impact on the lives of beneficiaries both in predictable and unpredictable ways. In societies in conflict, they can inadvertently contribute to divisions or unintentionally fuel violence, or they can help address the causes of conflict. This report documents how two water projects in Uganda became more conflict-sensitive, and as a result, brought many additional benefits to the recipient communities. It highlights the experience and lessons learned from promoting conflict-sensitive development in two water projects, and seeks to contribute to a broader understanding of how these approaches can be used by development actors in water and other sectors.

http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-3-540-76707-7_16

Fragile states are often unable to provide water services to the majority of their people, especially the poor. So, how can international agencies work effectively in these environments to provide the infrastructure for safe drinking water? This study analyses the effectiveness of German donor involvement in the water sector of Yemen. Its success lies in the combination of support to sectoral reform at the national and regional level, and decentralised and commercialised services at the local level.

Further resources about service delivery in fragile states can be found in GSDRC’s service delivery topic guide.
6.2 Sector strategies

Security and justice as basic services

Security and justice are both core state functions and essential services or ‘public goods’, often described as prerequisites for development. Restoring or building effective and reliable justice systems in post-conflict and fragile states is widely argued to be essential for preventing a renewal of violence. In fragile contexts, security and justice systems are often weakly institutionalised and frequently provided by non-state actors. Recent policy analysis has encouraged donors to support the state in engaging positively with non-state security and justice providers, and to draw on their strengths as legitimate actors at the community level.

Ball, N., Scheye, E. and Van de Goor, L., 2008, ‘From Project to Program: Effective Programming for Security and Justice’, Netherlands Institute of International Relations (Clingendael), The Hague
http://www.clingendael.nl/sites/default/files/20071211_cru_occ_ball.pdf

Security and justice activities in fragile states involve considerable risk. In such environments, what is the way forward for reform? This report looks at security system reform (SSR) in fragile ‘post-conflict’ and fragile ‘rebuilding’ states. It suggests that donors should provide support in three linked stages, which would enable immediate needs to be met while longer-term programming is developed. An iterative approach would strengthen the relationship between state and non-state service providers and service users.

http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14678800701692944#.VvGc9ib7GkA

What is wrong with a state-centric approach to Security Sector Reform? This paper examines the value of an alternative approach to SSR policy, namely a multi-layered one in post-conflict and fragile state environments. It argues that there is a state-centric bias in current SSR policy and practice. This contradicts development principles of a ‘people-centred, locally owned’ approach in post-conflict and fragile state contexts. A more realistic and operationally sound method of attaining state-building and strengthening state capacities is imperative.

See also the GSDRC’s topic guide on Safety, security and justice.

Health in fragile contexts

Fragile environments are often characterised by weak and disrupted health systems. Health system strengthening (HSS) initiatives in fragile states typically aim not only to support the achievement of the health MDGs and national health targets but also to ensure that the delivery of national health services takes place in an equitable, accountable and sustainable manner despite very difficult, often conflict-affected, contexts. Health systems strengthening is often co-ordinated through a Basic Package of Health Services, as recently demonstrated in Afghanistan.


What are the best approaches to strengthening health systems in fragile states? This report surveys current health strategies to examine the feasibility of health system strengthening in fragile contexts and to shed light on emerging ‘good practices’ and challenges for health issues in these environments. Its findings suggest that while there is great diversity in the approaches taken to strengthen health systems, successful interventions share common elements of community integration, partnership, and long time horizons.

http://www.academia.edu/12833390/Delivering_Health_Services_in_Fragile_States_and_Difficult_Environments

What is needed to extend appropriate, effective healthcare to the under-served in fragile states and difficult environments? This paper argues that flexibility, understanding of a given context, the establishment of trust, and long-term commitment are key to improving health outcomes. Based on decades of experience of delivering
healthcare to marginalised groups, this paper outlines 13 key principles aimed at policy makers and implementers. Case studies are drawn from six countries with large under-served populations (Burma/Myanmar, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Peru and Somaliland), but the results are applicable to all communities.


What are the main factors that threaten health equity and health care equity in conflict and post-conflict fragile states? Which populations are most vulnerable to worsening inequity under these situations? What strategies can reduce the impact of these factors? What are the roles of different actors at national, regional, and global level in developing and implementing these strategies? This paper is an initial exploration of a complex topic. It identifies a number of important issues related to the use of the equity concept in conflict-affected settings, including the key drivers of health inequity, as well as some useful strategies for addressing equity in both conflict and post-conflict settings.

Further resources
DFID’s Health & Education Advice & Resource Team (HEART)

Education in fragile contexts

It is estimated that fragile states account for over half of all children out of school in the world (International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), 2009). In fragile contexts, education provides opportunities to increase social and economic stability and is vital for achieving economic growth and recovery, reducing poverty, and improving health, living conditions and livelihoods. But many agencies argue education is not being prioritised in humanitarian and development aid, and that donors are not living up to the promise of Education for All.


To what extent are the goals of Education for All being achieved in countries affected by armed conflict? This report shows that there is not only a lack of provision of education but also a failure to protect education systems and their students, and to devote sufficient funds to education in reconstruction and peacebuilding programmes. It argues that educational challenges in conflict-affected states are largely unreported, and that education in such contexts merits a far more central place on the international development agenda.


What are the recent trends in donor support for education for children living in conflict-affected fragile states (CAFS) and those caught up in emergencies? This third annual Last in Line, Last in School report finds that although donors have increased their focus on meeting the education needs of children in these countries and situations, there is still a long way to go. If trends continue, CAFS will not receive the levels of basic education aid needed to achieve the education Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education (UPE) until 2034.


This paper looks at how development assistance in fragile states can enhance access to education for the poor and vulnerable, improve governance and increase aid effectiveness. It recommends strengthening the evidence base, principles, monitoring and evaluation, and co-ordination of work in this area.


How can the effectiveness of education aid in fragile states be assessed and improved? This paper presents an assessment framework based on OECD principles of co-ordination, state-building and ‘do no harm’. The framework is applied to four approaches to education aid (sector-wide approaches, trust funds, social funds, and UN-led
approaches). No single approach will provide all the answers. Planning structures that include a wide range of stakeholders are particularly important in fragile state contexts.


www.equip123.net/jeid/articles/8/MillerGrandvaux-EducationFragilityANewFramework.pdf

The Education and Fragility Framework positions education at the center of four key areas of influence related to economic, governance, security and social domains. Education is viewed within the context of specific root causes of fragility or conflict such as organised violence, corruption, exclusion and elitism, transitional dynamics, insufficient capacity and public disengagement. Each of these issues can be addressed through education. In all cases, the premise is that if education can contribute to a given driver of fragility, it can also contribute to finding its remedy and thus to promoting stability.

**Further resources**

Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies
International Institute for Educational Planning

**Water and sanitation in fragile contexts**

Fragile states are often unable to provide water services to the majority of their people, especially the poor. Many argue the water sector is a good entry point for state-building activities in fragile states, since it is non-ideological and generally in high demand. Much of the literature encourages donors to balance short-term (humanitarian) with medium to long-term support, and to develop the capacity of the state to undertake a supervisory and regulatory role regarding small, non-state providers of water and sanitation services.

**Welle, K., 2008, ‘Improving the Provision of Basic Services for the Poor in Fragile Environments: Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene - International Literature Review’, Overseas Development Institute, London**


How can donors and partner governments best support the provision of water, sanitation and hygiene in fragile environments? This literature review is one of three sectoral reports from ODI on service delivery in fragile states. It confirms that water supply service delivery in fragile states remains limited. Documentation on sanitation and hygiene issues in these environments is virtually non-existent. The water sector is a good entry point for state-building, but approaches depend on the type and context of state fragility.


This country report is part of a one-year DFID-funded research project implemented by Tearfund and ODI. The research project explores the links between service delivery of water supply and sanitation and the wider processes of state-building and peacebuilding in fragile and conflict-affected states (FCAS). For the Tearfund project sites in DRC, researchers identified how the WASH service delivery modality (what, who, how) in each project site manifested itself across a number of potential routes for influence on peacebuilding and state-building. They found that impact – positive and negative – is conditioned by the country context: the causes of conflict and armed violence, and the nature of the state in DRC, shape the limitations and opportunities for Tearfund to impact peacebuilding and state-building. In DRC, there is not a strong, intuitive link between the WASH sector and peacebuilding and state-building: water is not a driver of conflict, and the government is only marginally involved in providing water and sanitation services.

**Social protection in fragile contexts**

Social protection is increasingly being seen as an appropriate and affordable response to address long-term poverty and vulnerability. Supporting fragile states to deliver basic social protection to their citizens could play an important role in promoting pro-poor growth in a number of ways. Cash transfers have been effective in fragile and conflict-affected states, offering a protective mechanism which can be administered quickly and relatively easily, with immediate impact. Where ‘normal’ systems have been disrupted, or do not exist in fragile states, there is also an
opportunity for testing innovative ways of delivering transfers. However, state institutions in FCAS may lack requisite capacity, political will, or health and education services.


What is the state of the evidence on social protection in fragile states? This review finds that the evidence base is quite weak, with patchy data, and poor-quality normative literature, with only scattered empirical examples. It shows that social protection in FCAS is delivered predominantly by non-state actors, usually INGOs or UN agencies, with projects that are generally small-scale, with limited coverage and delivering food- or cash-based assistance. Government social protection systems are often weak, and generally do not go beyond cash transfer programmes of limited coverage or World Bank-led social funds. Where they are more developed they are often ineffective, and people regularly pursue informal social protection strategies.


This paper examines the key issues around options for social protection in fragile states, drawing on a longer analytical report. It argues that the objectives for social protection in fragile states are essentially the same as in development contexts and that what is needed is adapting instruments, financing and delivery capacity to cope with fragility. The current situation in fragile states is far from ideal. Financing is short-term, unpredictable and not harmonised, delivery capacity is limited and, until recently, food aid has been the dominant response mechanism. The paper attempts to set out options which might enable international assistance for social protection to move beyond this status quo to deliver longer term, more predictable financing, for an appropriate range of actors to provide a wider range of social protection instruments.


Like other fragile sub-Saharan African countries, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone are seeking to harness their natural resource potential in the context of ambitious development strategies. This study investigates options for scaling up public investment and expanding social safety nets in a general equilibrium setting. First, it assesses the macro-fiscal implications of alternative fiscal rules for public investment, and, second, it explicitly accounts for redistribution through direct cash transfers. Results show that a sustainable non-resource deficit target is robust to the high uncertainty of resources output and prices, while delivering growth benefits through higher public investment. The scaling-up magnitudes, however, depend on the size of projected resource revenue and absorptive capacity. Adding a social transfer raises private consumption, suggesting that a fraction of the resource revenue could be used to expand safety nets.

6.3 Service delivery and state-building

The role of services in state-building

Donors are increasingly concerned with the relationship between service delivery and state-building. This encompasses two related elements: i) how the delivery of basic services can best support state responsiveness, state legitimacy and social cohesion and ii) how donors can support the development of state capacity to deliver or co-ordinate services. Underlying this is a belief that service delivery is ultimately the responsibility of the state, and an intuition that the visible presence of services extends the state’s reach and authority, supports state legitimacy and strengthens the social contract. Related to this, some argue that addressing the equitable delivery of services across disparate groups could help repair societal fractures. Nevertheless, little research has been done in this area to date, and much of it has been cautious about confirming any such causal links.

The state-building imperative encourages donors to consider the impact of their aid delivery mechanisms on the development of state capacity. Many call for donors to better manage the potential trade-offs between delivering
services quickly through parallel structures that in some cases may bypass the state, and the long-term development of state capacity and accountability between service providers, government and citizens (rather than to donors).


This review synthesises and assesses the available evidence on social protection and basic services (health, education and water) in fragile and conflict-affected situations. It then identifies six key themes emerging from the analysis of evidence: the resilience of people and communities; (in)effective engagement between states and non-state providers; what do we know/not know about building stability and states; ‘citizenship building’ – accountability and the importance of demand; conflict sensitivity, conflict mitigation and peacebuilding; and international engagement – who should do what and when? The review also explicitly highlights weaknesses and gaps in the evidence base.


Received wisdom holds that the provision of vital public services necessarily improves the legitimacy of a fragile or conflict-affected state. In practice, however, the relationship between a state’s performance in delivering services and its degree of legitimacy is nonlinear. Specifically, this relationship is conditioned by expectations of what the state should provide, subjective assessments of impartiality and distributive justice, the relational aspects of provision, how easy it is to attribute (credit or blame) performance to the state, and the characteristics of the service. This questions the dominant institutional model, which reduces the role of services in (re)building state legitimacy to an instrumental one. A more rounded account of the significance of service delivery for state legitimacy would look beyond the material to the ideational and relational significance of services, and engage with the normative criteria by which citizens judge them.


What role can public service delivery play in state-building? This article explores lessons from Western European history to argue that the design of public services is a far more political matter than is often recognised. Rather than being a neutral process, a historical review of service provision shows that it has been used as a political tool for building state legitimacy and concepts of nationhood. The paper concludes that donors need to rethink their approaches to service provision in fragile states in light of these findings.

**Addressing social exclusion through service delivery**

There is increasing recognition that service delivery initiatives in fragile states should aim to ameliorate the negative effects of exclusion on certain groups over the long term. But issues of targeting and programming for marginalised and vulnerable groups in service delivery are highly complex and political.


In many Asian countries, poverty reduction is undermined by inequality and insecurity. Achieving the Millennium Development Goals in these countries requires effort from governments and development agencies to help excluded groups access health and education services. This paper uses examples from across Asia to identify ways of tackling social exclusion.
Non-state service providers in fragile states

The absence or weakness of state services in fragile situations usually means the majority of services are delivered by non-state actors (including donors, international and local NGOs, traditional and commercial (small and large) service providers), particularly in the early recovery phase. Many recent studies have argued this results in the fragmented and uneven provision of services. In addition, many donors are concerned that the delivery of services through non-state providers negatively impacts on the development of state legitimacy and capacity. Recently, donors have become concerned with how states with weak capacity can effectively perform the indirect ‘stewardship’ roles of managing, co-ordinating and financing non-state providers of basic services. Related to this is the issue of transition from non-state to state provision, specifically, how non-state providers can support the development of state capacity for direct provision in the long-term.

GSDRC Helpdesk Report, 2009, ‘Non-State Providers of Health Services in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States’
Most mechanisms that use NSPs to deliver services are only being applied at a very small scale in fragile states. There is some evidence that the most widely used mechanism—contracting—can increase service use, increase service quality, improve efficiency, reduce service fragmentation, and support strengthening of national capacity. The basic package of health services (BPHS) contracting approach, in particular, is often cited as an effective mechanism for health service delivery in fragile states. However, some observers have voiced concern that contracting can promote precipitous decentralisation, erode NSP independence, and actually fragment the health system given that NSPs are seldom able to provide an overall framework in which to operate.

GSDRC Helpdesk Report, 2009, ‘Non-State Providers of Education Services in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States’
NSPs are generally viewed as key service providers and as more pragmatic, flexible and adaptable than state structures in fragile states. By allowing communities to identify their own priorities they are often seen as having the potential to empower communities, set up local governance structures and strengthen social accountability mechanisms. There are also drawbacks however. As NSPs often operate outside government regulation, there is a danger that some may be providing low-quality education. In addition, they can also be disconnected from policy development in the wider sphere. Gender issues—in terms of awareness of oppressive attitudes and exploitative employment practices—are also a concern.

http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/123270075/abstract
The OECD questions whether non-state services in fragile states may delegitimise the state in the eyes of citizens, arguing that ‘state-building’ depends on governments’ engagement in service management. This article reviews the available evidence to identify what types of engagement are feasible and most likely to contribute to service delivery, or not to damage it. It considers the capacity requirements and risks associated with state intervention through policy formulation, regulation, contracting and mutual agreements. It concludes by identifying ways of incrementally involving the state, beginning with activities that are least likely to do harm to non-state provision. The article is based on a study commissioned by the UK Department for International Development through the Governance and Social Development Resource Centre, available at: www.gsdrc.org/go/emerging-issues#nsp

DFID commissioned a cross-country study of non-state provision of basic (primary) education, primary and community health-care, and water and sanitation in 2005. Findings, including lessons learned for donors for supporting non-state providers, are available on the website of the International Development Department at the University of Birmingham.
7. DFID GUIDANCE ON WORKING EFFECTIVELY IN FRAGILE STATES

DFID has published guidance documents aimed at assisting DFID country offices and other international agencies to develop more effective responses to the challenges they face when working in conflict affected and fragile situations.

www.gsdrc.org/docs/open/CON75.pdf
This paper outlines DFID’s integrated approach to state-building and peacebuilding in fragile and conflict-affected countries. The approach is based on four objectives:
- Address the causes and effects of conflict and fragility, and build conflict resolution mechanisms
- Support inclusive political settlements and processes
- Develop core state functions
- Respond to public expectations

This note seeks to share good practice on measuring and managing for results in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. It builds on a stock take of DFID experience in six countries.

DFID has also produced a series of Briefing Papers based on the OECD-DAC Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations, providing guidance on:
- Analysing conflict and fragility
- Do no harm
- Links between politics, security and development
- Promoting non-discrimination
- Aligning with local priorities
- Practical coordination mechanisms
- Act fast … but stay engaged
- Risk management
- Monitoring and evaluation

A summary note of these briefing papers is also available:

www.gsdrc.org/docs/open/CON85.pdf

The UK Government committed to spending 30% of Official Development Assistance (ODA) in fragile states by 2014-15, which represents a significant increase over previous spending levels. A review looks at how DFID has taken this forward, to assess whether it will achieve impact for intended beneficiaries:

DFID, 2015, ‘Assessing the Impact of the Scale-up of DFID’s Support to Fragile States’.  