



## Fragile states and the international response: in pursuit of security or development?

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In the pursuit of security and development in Africa, more and more reference is being made to the concept of fragile states. This paper explores the meaning of this concept and considers the attention that is being paid to it as a consequence of integrating security and development into the policy of the major donor countries. In an African context state fragility is a cause of numerous conflicts, but also a major focal point of peace processes and donor interventions. This paper is intended to be a warning against a too narrow focus on security in the process of combating fragility. It pleads for an integrated policy, based on the pursuit of sustainable development and emphasises the strengthening of the authority and power of the state and the promotion of local economic and social development.

### Fragility as a new paradigm?

The attention paid to “fragile states” is relatively recent. The disappearance of blind economic and military support that was one of the direct results of the end of the Cold War created difficulties for many regimes in the early nineties. In numerous cases this led to the proliferation of armed conflict and humanitarian crises that were soon described as “complex political emergencies”, or humanitarian emergency situations caused by political processes such as state decay and armed combat. Although such situations were prevalent in Africa, they are not to be considered as an exclusively African phenomenon (i.e. Afghanistan, Irak, Pakistan). It soon became clear though, that the international community was barely capable of providing an answer to these crises. Humanitarian and military interventions in Somalia or Rwanda

had hardly any success, due to a lack of political will to respond and to a lack of adequate means and instruments, but also as a result of a total lack of knowledge of the complex causes of these new processes of political instability and violence. This gradually changed by the end of the nineties. An increased willingness of the international community to intervene and greater understanding of such crises explain the availability of a broad operational framework today. However, another tendency is also discernible. While such conflicts were mostly approached from a humanitarian perspective in the nineties, in the post 9/11 era these crises are mainly seen as a threat to global security, and therefore also to our own security. This does not only affect the way in which we understand these crises, but also has an impact on the type of actions undertaken to solve them. States are increasingly described, both by analysts and donors, in terms of the concept of fragility. This concept rests on a number of development indicators, the governance capacity, and the prevailing security conditions yet these conditions tend to dominate our understanding of fragility.

This approach certainly has a number of advantages. It allows us to see the direct relations between security, governance and development, thereby facilitating a more coherent policy framework with real impact on the different causes of state fragility. Attention to fragility also ensures that the social and political context within which processes of state (re)construction take place, is adequately considered. However, we must beware of some major obstacles. Even though the fragile states concept is generally accepted, there is less agreement as to what states are fragile. A general definition of fragility is lacking and there is no consensus about the parameters needed to measure the degree of fragility. The great diversity in causes and expressions of fragility is obviously partly to blame for this lack of consensus of vi-

sion. Today, states that hardly function (e.g. the Central African Republic), states characterised by a high level of corruption (e.g. Nigeria) or by a very repressive regime (e.g. Sudan) and states that are in a post-conflict situation (e.g. DR Congo, Afghanistan, Burundi, Ivory Coast) are all described as fragile. The agenda of donors to fragile states is just as diverse and inadequately defined – in part because of geo-political considerations. This, amongst other things, causes interventions to have limited structural impact and accounts for the poor coherence and coordination between the programmes of the various international actors and donors. The awareness that these states are a special challenge both in terms of development and security, has been translated into a huge diversity of actions and strategies, including large scale military interventions. Both the OECD/DAC (*Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations*) and the World Bank (*Engaging with Fragile States*) have developed an integrated strategy, while major donors such as the EU (*Towards an EU response to situations of fragility*) have also formed or prepared their own vision and policy units working to develop an integrated, or even a ‘whole of government’ approach.

A major tendency is that there is a shift in policy towards a focus on security. Even though fragile states are challenges in terms of security, development and good governance, donors now mainly tend to work progressively towards an improvement in security conditions. There is nothing wrong with that in itself, when the pursuit of development is also part of this search for security. Unfortunately, this is increasingly not the case. Just after the end of the Cold War, civil wars and processes of state decay were still considered to be a development problem and challenge. Violence and insecurity were seen as obstacles to development, a lack of development increased the chances of conflict, which in its turn resulted in a further slowdown of development processes. This supposed vicious circle became more and more the focal point of development work. The attacks of September 11th and the subsequent “Global War on Terror”, however, led to a redefinition of the relationship between security and development, with the result that official development cooperation also became part of the new search for global security. Since then, fragile states have become threats to global security. Such situations are no longer considered a humanitarian or development issue, but mainly a security problem, more so because they could be safe havens for terrorist groups or international criminal networks and could cause major migra-

tion flows. The practical translation of this vision was increased interest from development organisations such as the OECD/DAC in conflict prevention, peace building, security sector reform (SSR), etc. A number of instruments such as the International Criminal Court and concepts such as the “Responsibility to Protect” (R2P) principle relating to states’ responsibility regarding the protection of their own population against serious forms of violence were developed simultaneously. These provide a new framework for interventionism. In its European Security Strategy (2003), the European Union outlines that “...security is a precondition of development. Conflict not only destroys infrastructure, including social infrastructure; it also encourages criminality, deters investment and makes normal economic activity impossible”.

Another example is the strategy note that defines the Danish Development Assistance’s priorities (“security, growth and development” (2004)), which starts from the same perspective: “Security is a necessary precondition for development. A contribution to the reestablishment of security and the promotion of peace, in countries and regions where there previously was systematic violence, crime and terror, is an investment in poverty reduction and economic growth [ . . . ] Denmark is one of the first countries to establish clear principles for development activities against terrorism.”

### Fragility in an Africa context

This tendency can also be observed in the policy vis-à-vis African states, even though we have to recognise that most donors still base themselves on the development model and, for instance, continue to have fighting poverty and sustainable development – through the MDG framework as major goals. Nevertheless, a shift can be observed in favour of development aid aimed at improving the general security conditions and strengthening the governance and administrative capacity of fragile states. Programmes of peace building, support for security sector reform, state development, adequate administration and the strengthening of peace keeping capacities (African Standby Forces) are increasingly important in the development policy of, among others, the European Union (EU) and European states. Today much attention is therefore paid to supporting political stability and security through SSR.

Such support is essential for the institutional reconstruction of numerous fragile states. But when

these attempts at SSR do not go hand-in-hand with a well-considered development policy, its sustainability is questionable from the outset. Also, even though this vision leads to increased involvement in Africa, it is doubtful that this will bring the possibility of development in this continent a single step closer. Guinea-Bissau, for example, is already going through the fourth internationally supported reform of its security sector; things have gone wrong in the past due to a lack of capacity, but also due to a lack of the required development and political conditions. The current exercise is also going through a rough patch since the liquidation of both the chief of the defence staff and the President.

The current situation in Burundi serves as an illustration for the need for a broader and more pragmatic approach. The developments in Burundi which followed the successful elections of 2005 demonstrate that a long-term approach is absolutely necessary in fragile states if results are to be achieved, especially when dealing with a post-conflict situation. Moreover, this approach must not only improve the security conditions, but also produce enough impetus to increase the chances of sustainable development. Still, international efforts in Burundi are mainly aimed at SSR and the development of democratic governance through organising elections. Even though these elections were a major step in the process of political stabilisation and consolidation of the new state institutions, the legitimacy of the democratisation process in a post-conflict situation largely depends on the improvement of the population's standard of living. In Burundi, this peace dividend has not been achieved for the population as of yet. The socio-economic perspectives are not really changing and factors of socio-economic instability are not dealt with as a priority. The causes are the lack of political will and technical capacity to implement such a policy. Initiatives by the international community have only limited impact on these political processes, despite the dominant position of the donors in the financing of the Burundian state. After the 2005 elections, international interest in Burundi has returned to normal – i.e. has diminished considerably, reflecting the short attention span of donors. The elections for 2010 are announced in a context of increasing political tension that could undermine the gains of the stabilisation of these last years.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) the international community, instrumental in brokering the 2002 power sharing agreement, invested

heavily in the 2006 elections. These resulted in the election of a president and a new administration both on a national and provincial level. Efforts were also made to reform the security system through internationally supported SSR and DDR programmes. A progressive political rapprochement between Congo and its neighbouring countries was established, especially through the international conference for the Great Lakes Region and the CEPGL which may lead to further regional stability and integration. Nevertheless, despite these international efforts we have to conclude that the necessary conditions for a stable state in DR Congo are far from reached. Large parts of Eastern Congo remain very unstable due to the failure of the demobilisation process and the continuing presence of local and Rwandan armed groups. The government's authority remains very limited due to a lack of resources, but also due to the prevailing mentality of the administration based on clientelism and corruption, while the population suffers due to a general lack of economic progress and development. SSR has not produced significant results and security remains a key challenge with a government that doesn't seem willing or capable of providing governance.

In both cases the engagement by the international community has lacked both vision and a profound understanding of the different levels of conflict that affect Burundi and the DRC. Especially in the DRC the peace-process remained stuck at the national and regional level, without looking into the deeper dynamics of conflict at a local level. This and the lack of understanding that the local actors involved have played the different (international) agendas to maintain a profitable status-quo have resulted in the continuing instability and war. A key area in which this has been apparent is SSR.

### **The need for a coherent policy**

A policy aimed at fragile states, therefore, has to be well thought out and should not only be restricted to the pursuit of security through SSR and DDR programmes. "Quick fix" solutions or encouraging and supporting peace processes without paying attention to underlying causes of state fragility may lead to a certain form of stability, but above all have the effect that existing contradictions and causes are consolidated and threaten to come to the surface again in the medium or long run. What really matters is that the social contract between civilians and the state is restored by strengthening the capacity of fragile states to take care of the necessary secu-

ity, welfare and political expression and representation. This is obviously a very ambitious agenda and the danger exists that the attention paid to one of these sectors may well have a negative impact on the other sectors. The objective of holding elections in post-conflict situations is a good example of the above. Even though they are a necessary condition for democratisation, they can lead to increased tension when they are organised too quickly or rashly. As the example of Kenya, amongst others demonstrates, elections remain of moment of tension and potential instability. In this context, therefore, the following recommendations are proposed:

- ◆ every attempt to strengthen fragile states shall be based on *solid knowledge of the structural causes and dynamics* leading to this fragility. Fragility has to be approached in an inclusive manner, meaning that we need to investigate what lies at the basis of the weakness of governmental and administrative authority, the non-existence or poor performance of state institutions, the lack of development, the existence of tensions and sources of conflict, as well as the behaviour of the political elites. The policy pursued shall be regularly evaluated on the basis of a thorough analysis of the evolution of these structural causes and dynamics.
- ◆ Programmes aimed at the fragility of the state, should in the first place attempt to *increase the state's ability to strengthen itself* before dealing with the consequences or manifestations of this fragility. Even though today in peace processes attempts are made to promote the proper functioning of the state, such interventions are often restricted to the conversion and strengthening of the security system and the organisation of (democratic) elections.
- ◆ The attention paid to fragile states will only lead to results if enough support can be guaranteed *long-term*. Strengthening weak states is a very complex challenge and requires sufficient involvement, both in terms of resources and time. Several examples in Africa show that it is not enough to facilitate a peace agreement, organise democratic elections and strengthen the security system, but that a longer term vision is also required which pays attention to security, development and governance. This is in opposition with an international community that acts like a fire brigade, forgetting early warning and obsessed with exit strategies based on end dates rather than and end state.
- ◆ Donors have to attempt to *coordinate their actions* with the objective of achieving a *coherent policy*. It is of crucial importance that donors aim

for a coherent policy in relation to fragile states. Not only between donors, but also between different institutions of the same donor (whole of government approaches), there are large differences in definition and focus. Even though coordination mechanisms are often active during transition processes which have to guarantee coherence and can simultaneously exert enough pressure on the existing political class, these instruments are often no longer active after organising elections. Moreover, non-traditional donors make sure that traditional donors have a lot less impact on the local political elites. The conditional nature of support should therefore be crystal-clear, especially because post-conflict situations are often characterised by a high level of regime-instability and new forms of structural violence. Experience also demonstrates that the newly elected regimes leave little room for active involvement by the donor community.

- ◆ Actions to strengthen the state will obviously not have any impact when the local political elites obviously lack the will to implement the required reforms. The support of civil society and the private sector can therefore also be a way of creating or strengthening internal structures that can exercise pressure. However, donors tend to support these actors mainly in the pursuit of development, which makes them not so much a political force capable of enforcing reforms, but rather enable them to take over government tasks and further marginalise the state.

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