



“We cannot grow a tree from the top!” Agenda for action in contexts of fragility

Over the last couple of years, fragile and conflict-affected countries have climbed on the international aid community's agenda. Plagued by recurrent cycles of weak governance, poverty and violence, these countries are home to many of the world's poorest people longing to freedom from want and freedom from fear and furthest away from achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

As is stated in the World Bank World Development Report 2011, the problems of fragile states spread easily: They drag down neighbours with violence that overflows borders, because conflicts feed on narcotics, piracy, and gender violence, and leave refugees and broken infrastructure in their wake. Their territories can become breeding grounds for far-reaching networks of violent radicals and organized crime and areas of unregulated extraction of scarce resources. Donor governments, including the Netherlands, increase their engagement in contexts of fragility to fight poverty and improve human security in these contexts as a right thing to do but also to foster regional and global peace, security and stability, which is a national security interest.

In line with this growing attention for fragile and conflict-affected situations, the Peace Security and Development (PSD) Network was initiated in 2007, bringing together academics, policy makers, civil society organisations and the private sector, all of whom are working on issues of peace and development in fragile contexts. This wide variety of actors has joined forces to mobilize and strengthen knowledge on effective and conflict-sensitive engagement in fragile contexts.

The PSD Network has identified a set of **policy principles that should be taken into account when engaging in fragile contexts:**

- Interventions should be based on country specific analyses at the local level and a limited set of human security priorities that form the core of coherent policies and programmes.
- Inclusive processes and dialogue between state and non-state actors aiming at rebuilding a social contract should be at the core of interventions in (post-) conflict and fragile states.

¹ Quote from paramount chief in Nzara County, Western Equatoria State, South Sudan, 2011

- In order to ensure conflict-sensitive engagement in fragile contexts, interventions need to be based on a sound conflict analysis, while the relationship between peace-building and development work should be closely monitored to optimize results and avoid dysfunctional effects;
- Interventions in fragile contexts should be gender-sensitive (including masculinities) and engage informal or hybrid forms of leadership, including specifically engaging female and youth leadership. As a result, development initiatives can be strengthened significantly by cultural and gender sensitivity and acknowledgement of the key role of non-state actors and traditional social relations;
- The international community has to take into account the potential contribution of the private sector to their engagements in fragile contexts. These can exceed mere investments to include technical assistance in strengthening the enabling environment for job creation, economic growth and equity.

Agenda for Action in contexts of fragility

The title of this agenda refers to the impossibility of enhancing peace, security and development in fragile contexts through engagement with the national level exclusively or by adopting solely a state-centric approach. Also the length of the engagement is important. The PSD Network found that it is impossible to solve political problems in fragile contexts with short-term technical programmes only. Rather, policies should be built up from the grassroots while, at the same time, including legitimate sub-national governance structures as well as national representative governments. All of these actors, at all levels, are the agents of change and transformation. These policies should be allowed enough time to come to fruition. Accordingly, we identify the following three key agenda points for future action:

1. Strengthening operational cooperation in contexts of fragility

- Collective agenda's for action (both policy, civilateral and research) should be formulated closer to the fragile contexts and practical possibilities of donors and recipients alike. This will not only bring knowledge and action closer together but also closer to the partners in the affected areas and the prospective beneficiaries. Ideally, the partners and beneficiaries in those areas need to be more in the driver's seat or at least become co-responsible for programme design, planning and execution. Initiatives shared and jointly owned in advance, enhance effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. This requires transparency and debates about agendas and constraints of cooperating partners, and implies starting work only if based on added value for the fragile contexts. Multi-stakeholder platforms have proven to be a suitable mechanism to organize the necessary interaction between the relevant stakeholders and thus help better identify and include the interests, perceptions and expectations of the end-users and beneficiaries, e.g. Knowledge platforms.

2. Strengthening the link between macro- and micro-level interventions

- The notion that macro-level policies in and for fragile states should constructively interact with micro-level realities is widely accepted. The PSD Network found empirical evidence that this remains a challenge for international actors in the field. Perceptions and interpretations of international programmes at the local level are often most impact in the field and therefore have to be taken into account. We therefore recommend investing in practical knowledge of the local level. It is evident that the vital link between macro- and micro interventions requires policies guided by a clear choice for the interests of citizens in fragile contexts and presupposes willingness to policy coherence and a commitment to the often hybrid arena of actors in fragile states.
- We reaffirm our commitment to engage sub-national actors in fragile states such as civil society organizations, private sector actors, universities, local governments, etc. Fragile contexts require long-term engagement with political processes at all levels. Engagements of this kind can be promoted by building, supporting and also joining a variety of relevant coalitions in fragile contexts and internationally.
- Programmes in fragile states should account for their contribution to human security. Indicators should be formulated with local networks of civil society organizations that monitor and report on human security conditions including at the local level. We therefore suggest investing in networked knowledge at the embassy level.
- The developments we envisage are both the product of substance and process. We therefore urge to seek coherence between the contents of the thematic programmes and the procedural principles that need to be followed, or between 'what you do' and 'how you do it'.

3. Strengthening the exchange of knowledge on engaging in fragile contexts

- Despite financial pressures on the aid budget, the international community should continue its efforts to support processes of transition, pro-poor growth, and stabilization in fragile and conflict-affected situations. In order to strengthen the effectiveness of interventions by proper knowledge management, all actors involved should continue to invest in the exchange of ideas and lessons learned through knowledge networks or platforms.
- The Minister for European Affairs and International Cooperation of the Netherlands wants to develop Knowledge Platforms for each of the four key policy spearheads for Dutch international cooperation (one of which is 'Security and Rule of Law'). We advise to save the inclusive breadth and depth of the networks developed so far to avoid loss of knowledge and experience.
- We hereby gladly offer the services and results of the PSD Network to make the Minister's plan into a success and support his efforts to establish a functioning knowledge structure relevant to fragile and post-conflict contexts.
- We also would welcome the opportunity to have a dialogue with the Minister in order to exchange ideas on how to develop an effective new Knowledge Platform on 'Security and Rule of Law'.

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