DIIS REPORT

FRAGILE SITUATIONS
CURRENT DEBATES AND
CENTRAL DILEMMAS

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Summary

This synthesis report seeks to provide an overview of current debates and central dilemmas in relation to fragile situations, based on work commissioned by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and carried out by the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS). The study contains four general chapters on significant aspects of fragility and twelve policy briefs discussing different development issues in relation to fragility. The synthesis report draws out the main lessons from the study so as to provide the reader with a general introduction to the topic and to the particular challenges and dilemmas that characterise fragility and support to fragile situations.

The perspective of the report is based in development research and development thinking. Other viewpoints could have been adopted, e.g., foreign policy analysis, a human rights approach, global security thinking, etc. Characteristics of the perspective adopted include a concern with poverty-reduction, emphasis on the linkages between the local, national and global levels, and a political-economy framework for analysis.

The report is organised as follows. Section 2 discusses why the concern with fragile situations has emerged and the origins of thinking on fragility. In Section 3 an attempt is made to define the meaning of fragility and specify when it is useful to talk about fragile situations and fragile states. Section 4 takes up major issues in understanding fragile situations. It seeks to provide an overview of significant distinctions between different fragile situations, and it identifies important dilemmas that cannot be resolved at a general level, but need to be addressed in terms of their contextual specificities. The role of the international community is briefly discussed in Section 5. Finally, Section 6 provides a set of recommendations with respect to the guiding principles for the engagement of Denmark in fragile situations.

The interest in fragile situations and states in recent years has not appeared out of the blue. Different concerns and different lines of thought have, each in their particular ways, coalesced around the state and fragility (Cammack et al. 2006). One concern has to do with poverty reduction and development assistance, where the difficulties of getting policies right have received increased attention over the last twenty years. Another concern is related to violent conflicts, human security and humanitarian aid, where instability in several countries has stimulated reflection on the causes of social and political breakdown. A third concern has emerged with regard to global

security, where state collapse has been perceived as a major cause of various regional and global security threats.

There is little agreement over what precisely constitutes a fragile situation. Definitions vary and emphasise different elements. The problem is, of course, that fragility (whatever that means) comes in many different varieties and is the product of numerous factors. From an action-oriented perspective, the challenge is, on the one hand, that a broad definition that may include all potentially fragile situations is likely to cover a very large proportion of the low-income countries, thus making the definition less meaningful, and on the other hand, that a narrow definition facilitating the elaboration of operational directives is likely to neglect both important fragile situations and important causes of fragility.

Many actors are increasingly converging on DAC's definition of fragile states according to which: "States are fragile when state structures lack political will and/or capacity to provide the basic functions needed for poverty reduction, development and to safeguard the security and human rights of their populations" (OECD 2007). While providing a relatively clear focus for external involvement in fragile states, the definition suffers from at least three weaknesses. First, it directs attention strongly towards the state, thereby ignoring the fact that fragility may exist outside the state and that the state, despite willingness and capacity, may be unable to manage the fragile situation. Secondly, the reference to a lack of political will is not only harmful to diplomatic relations and cooperation, it is also analytically difficult to apply. Thirdly, the definition disregards the point that international phenomena may affect fragile situations. Fragility is seen as a national question, one possibly with international repercussions, but nonetheless to be understood and explained within the specific state.

For the purposes of this synthesis report, fragility is defined as follows:

> institutional instability undermining the predictability, transparency and accountability of public decision-making processes and the provision of security and social services to the population.

Institutional instability is understood as unclear and contradictory rules, norms and practices. Public decision-making covers decisions affecting a broader group than the decision-makers. In many societies, public decision-making is not the exclusive realm of the state. Other actors, such as customary chiefs, civil-society organisations, etc.

make decisions that influence large social groups, and there is, accordingly, a need to integrate non-state institutions into one's definition of fragility. The definition also highlights a lack of legitimacy and insufficient basic services as central elements of fragile situations. Moreover, the definition implicitly emphasises that profound changes brought about by internal or external actors or processes are likely to produce fragility.

The term 'fragile states' has been criticised on two grounds. First, the term indicates that certain states are in generally fragile conditions. However, states may be strong in some respects and weak in others, and fragility may be significant in parts of a country and not in others. Thus, the term risks glossing over significant differences between different states that are characterised by institutional instability. Secondly, and importantly, the characterization of a state as fragile creates resentment because use of the term is seen as questioning the independence and sovereignty of a state. The derived notion of state-building is also criticised by some, partly on the grounds that states cannot be built from the outside, but need to be formed in interaction with society, and partly because the notion begs for detailed engineering by donors, thereby undercutting the state's independence. These two criticisms of the concept of fragile states have led some to prefer the notion of fragile situations.

The vocabulary of fragility indicates that it is an either–or phenomenon: either a situation is fragile, volatile and unstable and may evolve in many different directions, or else it is relatively stable, with a manageable level of insecurity, reasonable service delivery, etc. Basically, this is an erroneous understanding. First, the social sciences have substantial difficulties in explaining or for that matter predicting sudden changes. Non-fragile situations always risk a sudden collapse due to the convergence of parallel developments with unforeseen consequences. Secondly, fragility is a matter of degree. Typically, processes and relationships can gradually improve or worsen, thereby creating a less or more fragile situation respectively. Thirdly, higher and lower levels of fragility may coexist in a society, a state or a given territory. Thus, the category of fragile states is not a separate group of countries that is qualitatively different from other countries. Most countries, and in particular low-income countries, will exhibit various signs of institutional instability, which may or may not push them into the group of so-called fragile states.

State–society relations are often understood as being formed around functional linkages between state institutions and the lives and organizations of citizens, non-citizens, corporations and other private entities within the national territory. But whether and

how these relations actually function and lead to expected outcomes has to do with how the state is perceived in terms of its authority and legitimacy.

Authority may be understood as 'the ability to establish a presumptive right to speak and act', a process that implies consent and legitimacy, which nevertheless cannot be disassociated from the underlying possibility of using force and coercion. Authority depends on the recognition, in the society, of institutions, statements and representatives as being authoritative, and as such governance has to resonate with norms, values and imageries that work as sources of legitimacy in the society. One of the key problems associated with the notion of fragile states is that the authority of the state is contested, the state itself perhaps at risk of being overthrown through armed conflict, or having recently emerged from armed conflict with serious challenges for the reestablishment of its authority.

Moreover, fragile situations are typically characterised by several sets of non-state authority that engage in governance relations. There is no single formula for understanding these non-state forms of authority. They may at times act with or on behalf of state institutions or representatives, while at other times they oppose and challenge the state. As long as the revenues and capacities of states remain low, and permanent and sustainable systems of service provision, security and law enforcement therefore remain out of reach, the most accessible alternative is to support the development of heterogeneous, multilevel systems of governance which somehow build on, and 'make do' with, existing forms of organization and de facto non-state authorities.

There is no one-to-one relationship between poverty and fragility. However, it is important to understand the link correctly. Limited resources are an obvious feature of states in most low-income countries. Therefore, it is not surprising that increasing demands for better services from the population, greater influence from civil society, better policies from the private sector and more reforms from donor agencies create the conditions for states to become fragile. A useful response from donor agencies is to consider how their own demands impact on the state's capacity and to improve the state's ability to respond to the demands of national constituencies.

Furthermore, inequalities between groups in terms of ethnicity, religious belonging, regional identity, etc. may well bring about social tensions and violent conflict. When fragilities are shaped by such inequalities, aid should seek to make national governments more responsive to the demands of marginalised groups. Donor agencies may

also try to channel resources through various non-state institutions to cater for the needs of these groups.

Finally, severe economic crises can be a significant element of fragility because existing rules, norms and practices may be seriously jeopardised by important and rapid falls in the living standards of large parts of a population. Economic crisis is possibly one of the elements of fragility that international donors can address most easily. Mitigating measures of various kinds are most useful in such situations, and they are likely to be much less politically controversial compared to interventions in conflicts and governance issues.

Global structures are also important in relation to fragility. The end of the Cold War changed the conditions for many developing countries and their political regimes in several ways. The two superpowers no longer supported their respective allies, and aid became much more interventionist by spelling out conditions, typically in great detail. It has also been suggested that globalisation increasingly undermines processes of state consolidation. Moreover, international companies, particularly in the extractive industry, have a grim record of cementing the political power of oppressive governments, exacerbating inequalities or worse, intensifying and prolonging civil wars. Emphasising Corporate Social Responsibility is one response that is also likely to benefit such companies themselves.

In order to provide an overview of fragile situations, and based on a perspective of external engagement, the synthesis report suggests three significant distinctions:

1. Intensification or reduction of social tensions and violent conflict
2. Low or high levels of policy formulation and implementation capacity
3. Existence or absence of a government in policy agreement with the international community

The issues of social tensions and violent conflict are typically, but not exclusively, matters of intra-societal groups and actors. The state may play a role on the side of one of the conflicting parties, and capturing control of it may be the object of the contention, but the parties to the conflict often have a social base outside state institutions. Where the issue of past or future violent conflict is central to the understanding of fragility, it is accordingly important to analyse the social base, political strength and major concerns and interests of the various social groups and actors involved.

In societies heading for violence, diplomatic and other interventions that can change the likely pay-off from conflict are useful, as they can reduce the incentives stimulating and creating spoilers benefitting from unrest. It is also important to assess what can be done with respect to maintaining poverty-focused policies, state capacity and social-service delivery. In post-conflict societies, a major concern is whether the defeated party has been eliminated altogether or still may provoke conflict. In the latter case, external engagement should focus on creating a viable co-habitation of the conflicting parties so that the defeated party gains something that it stands to lose in a renewed conflict.

Policy formulation and implementation capacity is strongly related to the state–society relationship. Ideally, this relationship should be organised in a manner conducive to activities in both the state and society. With respect to external engagement in states with low levels of capacity, three points appear to stand out. First, it is worth considering supporting policies and practices that are likely to improve the state–society relationship. Strengthening the delivery of social services is one possibility, but making state administration more responsive, less politicised and less influenced by corrupt practices is undoubtedly a key issue in relation to increasing the state's legitimacy. Secondly, compensating social groups that stand to lose from reform measures may facilitate necessary changes that can break political deadlocks and pave the way for more poverty-focussed policies. Thirdly, a long-term perspective on capacity-building is required, implying a sequencing of institutional reforms and other measures to improve state performance.

In terms of external engagement in a fragile situation, it is of great importance whether a national government is in place and whether such a government is in overall policy agreement with the international community. If these two conditions are not met, donor agencies will have to consider other forms of assistance than the prevailing ones based on government–to-government cooperation. Where governments are in disagreement with the international community, donor agencies will have to assess whether this disagreement is ideologically based or has to do with despotism and self-enrichment. If ideologically based and if the government enjoys national legitimacy, donor agencies should be careful not to jeopardise principles of self-determination and pluralism when considering external engagement. If the disagreement is related to a government seeking to enrich itself and its allies at the expense of the population, donor agencies face serious dilemmas regarding how to support legitimate non-governmental actors, especially if the government is legitimised through formal election results.

Where fragile situations are characterised by a more or less total absence of national government and state, it is imperative to identify the actors carrying out the functions normally ascribed to the state. Such situations present a number of dilemmas, which cannot be answered at the general level, but the following points may provide some direction. First, fragile situations in general and fragile situations of little or no state authority in particular are characterised by actors and processes that are ambiguously related to issues like poverty-reduction, democratisation, human rights and development. A particular actor, say customary authorities, may help in solving conflicts and providing security while perpetuating the subordination of women and young people. Thus, one may as well depart from the point of view that certain values and principles will be compromised in any engagement in these situations. Secondly, the short run and the long run will have to be in constant dialogue: neither the one nor the other is the right perspective to use in fragile situations, as these are volatile and can develop in many different directions. Thirdly, legitimate authority should be the guiding principle rather than formal Weberian bureaucracy. When authority is exercised in a manner that people accept and support, donors should build on this, rather than go for new institutions in a situation of an already high level of institutional instability.

It is increasingly understood that the quality and efficiency of international efforts are hampered by the fragmented nature of the so-called international community which intervenes and engages in fragile states and situations. The term 'international community' is short-hand for a wide and diverse range of actors, who in various ways are attempting to promote international standards and universal values in developing countries, fragile situations and post-conflict settings. Those who act on behalf of the international community thus broadly share the same normative framework. However, the reality on the ground is that the international community is not a unitary actor, but a highly fragmented community that contains widely conflicting views on both general policies and concrete interventions.

The fragmented nature of the international community has spurred a growing acknowledgement of the need to increase the coordination, coherence and consistency of the international engagement in developing countries. The OECD/DAC principles for good engagement in fragile states were explicitly formulated to complement the Paris Declaration and provide guidance on how to engage effectively in situations where alignment behind government policies is *not* an immediate option. This underlines first, that aid effectiveness remains a core concern for donors – also when engaging in fragile situations – and secondly, that donors are struggling to identify concrete

modalities and mechanisms for engaging in a long-term, coordinated and coherent fashion in fragile states and situations. However, successful coordination is not merely a matter of sharing information and agreeing on who does what and where, but is essentially a matter of prioritizing different objectives and deciding what matters most right now. Coordination is political.

1. Introduction

Fragility, fragile situations and fragile states are concepts that have been rising on the agenda of international development assistance in recent years. While seemingly reflecting concrete and challenging realities in which progress and prosperity may disappear even from the hopes of poor people, the concepts are infused with different meanings by different actors, and some observers are worried that they bring little added value to the understanding of contemporary development challenges; that they may gloss over important insights made in the context of, e.g., conflict prevention or capacity building; or that they serve merely to isolate problems related to poverty and insecurity so that they do not spread to the rich parts of the world.[1] A more positive interpretation of the debate would be to argue that the concern with fragility may help increase the awareness of the specific challenges that people living in poor, volatile countries face.

This synthesis report seeks to provide an overview of current debates and central dilemmas in relation to fragile situations, based on work commissioned by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and carried out by the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS). The study contains four general chapters on significant aspects of fragility and twelve policy briefs discussing different development issues in relation to fragile situations. The synthesis report draws out the main lessons from the study so as to provide the reader with a general introduction to the topic and to the particular challenges and dilemmas that characterise fragility and support to fragile situations.

It should be noticed that the perspective of the report is based in development research and development thinking. Other viewpoints could have been adopted, e.g., foreign policy analysis, a human rights approach, global security thinking, etc. The characteristics of the perspective adopted include a concern with poverty reduction, an emphasis on the linkages between local, national and global levels, and a political-economy framework for analysis. The last point corresponds to an increasing interest within development assistance in the politics of development, most notably exemplified by DFID's 'drivers of change' approach and SIDA's power analyses.

The report is organised as follows. Section 2 discusses why the concern with fragile situations has emerged and the origins of the thinking on fragility. It touches upon

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[1] Or, as Mike Duffield notes, "to contain and manage underdevelopment's destabilizing effects" (Duffield 2007: ix).

the question of whether there is anything new in the discussion of fragility, or whether the same well-known wine concerning conflict, instability, weak state capacities, etc. has simply been poured into a new bottle. In Section 3 an attempt is made to describe what fragility is all about and when it is useful to talk about fragile situations and fragile states. An interesting issue in this connection is whether there is a qualitative or just a relative difference between fragility and its opposite. Section 4 takes up major issues in understanding fragile situations. It seeks to provide an overview of significant distinctions between different fragile situations, and it identifies important dilemmas that cannot be resolved at a general level, but need to be addressed in terms of their contextual specificities. In the subsequent Section 5, the role of the international community is briefly discussed. External actors do not always play a positive role in fragile situations, and the current configuration of the so-called aid architecture presents particular challenges for support to fragile situations. Finally, Section 6 provides a set of recommendations with respect to the guiding principles for Denmark's involvement in fragile situations.

2. The emergence of the interest in fragility

The interest in fragile situations and states in recent years has not appeared out of the blue. Different concerns and different lines of thought have each in their particular ways coalesced around the state and fragility (Cammack et al. 2006). One concern has to do with poverty reduction and development assistance, where the difficulties of getting policies right have received increased attention the last twenty years. Another concern is related to violent conflicts, human security and humanitarian aid, where instability in several countries has stimulated reflection on the causes of social and political breakdown. A third concern has emerged with regard to global security, where state collapse has been perceived as a major cause of various regional and global security threats.

While these three lines of thought have a long history, the end of the Cold War around 1990 created significant changes in the global context, with strong implications for poor, developing countries (Krause and Jütersonke 2007; Rosser 2006). With the fall of the Iron Curtain, the two superpowers stopped financing regimes in poor countries, with the consequence that external military and economic support to potentially unstable societies was cut. The resources needed to suppress opposition and contain conflicts were accordingly no longer available. While the superpowers also stopped financing insurgency movements like the US support for the Contras in Nicaragua, on balance the new unipolar world meant that regimes in poor countries could no longer rely on external support to maintain their rule. Moreover, a democratic wave swept Africa by the early 1990s, rendering the use of coercive force against the opposition more difficult. New rules of the political game were quickly introduced and had to be respected to some extent if aid were not to be cut. At the same time, development donors became more and more concerned with 'good governance' in a very broad sense. The pressure for all kinds of public-sector reforms increased significantly. These changes all implied a rapid weakening of existing political institutions and the introduction – not least by external actors – of new institutions, which in itself proved a cause of fragility.

Therefore, it is reasonable to focus on the last twenty years when trying to understand the emergence of the interest in fragility. Before turning to a short discussion of the three lines of thought and their evolution, the question is raised of whether poor countries are becoming increasingly heterogeneous.

2.1 An increasing differentiation of poor countries?

A recent publication (Collier 2007) forcefully argues that, since the beginning of the 1970s, greater economic differentiation between poor countries has emerged. In the 58 countries identified as the home of the bottom billion of the world's population in terms of social and economic prosperity, growth in per capita income has been substantially lower compared to the middle- and low-income countries where the four billion people 'above' them are living. The growth rate on average in the 1970s was 0.5% against 2.5% for the four billion. In the 1980s it was -0.4% against 4.0%, and in the 1990s it was -0.5% against 4.0%. Only recently has the average growth rate for the bottom billion improved slightly to 1.7%. Paul Collier takes the argument further by stating that initially average income in some of the bottom-billion countries was actually higher compared to some of the four-billion countries, but as the bottom-billion countries were caught in stagnation and decline due to various traps, their average income is now one fifth of that of the four billion. Thus, the gap in income is growing between the bottom-billion countries and the other countries that were poor at the beginning of the 1970s.

This observation corresponds largely with the generally held view that Sub-Saharan Africa is falling behind while, with a few exceptions, countries in Asia and Latin America are managing fairly, if not very well. Paul Collier argues strongly that this differentiation between poor countries has nothing to do with Africa and Africans as such, but with objective conditions that pose severe challenges to a number of countries, including some outside Africa. Taking the countries for which we have data in Sub-Saharan Africa, it can be noted that, between 1994 and 2003, 22 countries experienced a per capita growth rate above 0, while 24 countries fell below. Some had substantial growth rates which can largely be attributed to the marketing of oil and other natural resources (e.g. Angola and Sudan), and others had relatively less impressive growth rates, but these may reflect a more equitably distributed growth. On the other side of the fence, 14 countries have experienced two-digit percentage declines in per capita income in the same period. However, a majority of these countries improved their Human Development Index between 1990 and 2005.

Therefore, it is not possible on the basis of these data to identify a clear-cut differentiation of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. However, it can be concluded that individual countries develop very differently and that labelling them all as fragile will obscure this diversity. Still, when one leaves Collier's global level of economic statistics and approaching the different development patterns of individual countries, it becomes difficult to separate countries in one group characterised by fragility and another

group without it. For instance, Angola, a country seen to be fragile by most standards, experienced significant per-capita growth rates in the period 1994 to 2003. Although the subsequent discussion describes how current thinking on development, human security and global security has converged around the notion of 'fragile states', a rigorous distinction between fragile and non-fragile states seems unsustainable.

2.2 The role of the state in development

The state has always played a significant role in thinking on development. Some have seen it as the primary agent of change taking the initiatives needed to lift poor societies out of poverty, build socially coherent nations and provide the conditions for modernisation. National political leaders in most post-colonial states have for long regarded the state as the authority to which all other actors, including private enterprises, social groups and civic organisations, should be subordinated. Others believe that the state constitutes an important obstacle to development and that the poor results in terms of development in many countries since decolonisation can largely be explained by its detrimental role. During the 1980s and 1990s, the World Bank and the IMF focussed on the implementation of Structural Adjustment Programmes, which as major components included privatisation, liberalisation and cutting down the public sector. However, in the late 1990s the World Bank began to revise its views on the state by emphasising the role of an effective state in processes of development. This revision was spurred by the identification of four different state developments with significant social, political and economic implications:

- "The collapse of command-and-control economies in the former Soviet Union and Central and Eastern Europe
- The fiscal crisis of the welfare state in most of the established industrial countries
- The important role of the state in the "miracle" economies of East Asia
- The collapse of states and the explosion in humanitarian emergencies in several parts of the world." (World Bank 1997: 1).

It was increasingly recognised that getting institutions and policies right was a critical precondition in establishing an enabling environment for economic and social development. At the same time, most OECD donors emphasised people's participation and the democratisation of political life. All of this created the now well-known good-governance agenda, including a strong focus on human rights. Today, getting the state right has almost become the essence of most development assistance, as the

state is believed to be the key to social, economic and political development. When formal state institutions increasingly fail to function in accordance with international standards for good governance and human rights, the focus on the state and on the causes of fragility become all the more pronounced. For donor agencies, this has implied a new focus on the political will and administrative capacity of the government and on the wider relationship between state and society.

In addition to its role in aid discourses on development, the state has strengthened its importance due to the changes taking place in dominant aid modalities. More or more resources are being channelled through basket funding mechanisms, sector-wide approaches and general budget support, making the state almost the only entry point for donor agencies. Part of the predicament for the donor community posed by fragile states is related to this because the mechanisms for providing long-term aid cannot be utilised in situations where formal state institutions are very weak or inefficient.

2.3 Human security and violent conflicts

The current discussion on state fragility draws upon the concerns over civil wars and complex emergencies that emerged on the global agenda in the 1990s. Crudely speaking, the end of the Cold War had two major implications for domestic conflicts in developing countries. First, it meant that the conflicts were no longer seen primarily through a bipolar lens; no longer did they serve as proxy-wars for rivalling superpowers. Secondly, and closely related to this, it led to a drastic change in the forms of international intervention. The Cold War practice of propping up competing regimes and allies was replaced by multilateral efforts aimed at ending conflicts and building a sustainable and lasting peace. At the forefront of these efforts was a dual desire to protect civilians against atrocities committed by the warring parties and to ensure that the people living in the war-torn territories would be able to enjoy security and stability in the future. These concerns have come to be known as human security.

The concept of human security shifts focus to the level of people as a *supplement* to the more traditional state-centric security concerns. It essentially argues that human security and state security are mutually supportive in the sense that one cannot be maintained without the other. This underlines the close relationship between the concepts of human security and state fragility. Both are expressions of the idea that only states in which people can live lives 'free from fear' (including from state repression) will be stable and safe in the long-term. States which do not provide this for their people are inherently fragile and at risk of or already exposed to civil disobedience or

rebellions. From this perspective, building effective, legitimate and resilient states is the best way to improve human security across the globe.

This linkage is clearly expressed in the expanding set of donor policies on security sector reform (SSR) which have been formulated in the past decade. According to the OECD/DAC, SSR is one element in the attempt to "help partner countries establish appropriate structures and mechanisms to manage change and resolve dispute through democratic and peaceful means" (OECD 2005: 11). The key objective is to ensure that the security sector (most notably the army and police) is capable of meeting the security needs within that society in a manner that is consistent with democratic norms, good governance and the rule of law. In fragile situations – especially post-conflict settings – increasing attention is being paid to this objective. However, not least as a reflection of the situation in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is also increasingly understood that it is one thing to reform national security institutions that are already functioning and working, albeit imperfectly, but quite another to build a national security sector that is able to provide security throughout the entire territory in countries where the state has either lost or never enjoyed a legitimate monopoly of violence.

2.4 Spill-over and global security

In recent years, a growing consensus has emerged on linking state fragility to transnational threats and global security concerns. Notwithstanding various differences in analysis and recommendations, key policy papers such as the US National Security Strategy, the EU Security Strategy and the UN High-level report on Threats, Challenges and Change all regard failed or fragile states as a security threat – not only to the people living in the area, but to both global and regional security alike. As opposed to traditional security threats, the threats arising from state fragility consist not so much of particular actions of a state itself, but rather of their inactions or the processes that are allowed to take place within its territory due to its weakness. The danger associated with state fragility is thus that it may exacerbate other, more tangible threats, including arguably terrorism and transnational organized crime.

While it remains contested whether or not the linkages between state fragility and international terrorism are as direct and strong as suggested in the policy discourse, few dispute that transnational criminal networks and activities such as piracy and trafficking in arms, drugs and people tend to operate more freely in areas where formal state institutions are weak and the state has little or no effective control over

its territory. Such 'ungoverned territories' present a major obstacle for attempts to solve transnational problems through increased global cooperation and regulation. In order for international regimes to work, there must be a responsible national counterpart on the ground which cannot only sign up to conventions, but also be held accountable for applying them. The international community – which primarily consists of states – simply needs effective states in order to address problems that are considered common.

This does not only apply to security threats such as terrorism and crime, but essentially to all phenomena that travel across borders. State fragility is thus being linked to almost the entire variety of 'new threats' that have emerged on to the global agenda since the end of the Cold War. This includes issues such as migration, communicable diseases, and general instability and disorder. In all of these issues, state fragility tends to be seen as either a direct cause of a contributing factor to the problem at hand. The newest threat on the global agenda – climate change – has yet to be linked substantially to questions of state fragility. To the extent that there is a debate, it is on whether climate change will act to destabilise weak institutions further and/or whether weak institutions will increase the human costs of climate change, e.g. in low-lying poor countries such as Bangladesh. It is not – as in most other issues – a debate on whether or not state fragility is contributing to climate change. This is not surprising, considering the very low levels of fossil energy consumption in fragile states, yet it is worth pondering whether the fact that fragile states are not seen as part of the problem may lead to them not being included in the solution either.

3. What is fragility?

There is little agreement regarding what precisely constitutes a fragile situation. Definitions vary and emphasise different elements. The problem is, of course, that fragility (whatever that means) comes in many different varieties and is the product of a diversity of factors. From an action-oriented perspective, the challenge is, on the one hand, that a broad definition that covers all potentially fragile situations is likely to include a very large proportion of low-income countries, thus making the definition less meaningful, and on the other hand, that a narrow definition facilitating the elaboration of operational directives is likely to neglect both important fragile situations and important causes of fragility.

3.1 Current definitions and understandings of fragility

Many actors are increasingly converging on DAC's definition of fragile states, according to which: "States are fragile when state structures lack political will and/or capacity to provide the basic functions needed for poverty reduction, development and to safeguard the security and human rights of their populations" (OECD 2007). While providing a relatively clear focus for external involvement in fragile states, the definition suffers from at least three weaknesses.

First, it directs attention strongly towards the state, thereby ignoring the fact that fragility may exist outside the state and that the state, despite its willingness and capacity, may be unable to manage the fragile situation. Implicitly, the definition also assumes that fragility can best be solved through a strengthened state, a point reinforced by one of the DAC principles for good international engagement stating that donor agencies should "focus on state-building as the central objective" (OECD 2007). Private actors, social movements, civic organisations, etc. are not ascribed any major role in creating turn-around and progress.

Secondly, the reference to a lack of political will is not only harmful to diplomatic relations and cooperation, it is also analytically difficult to apply. It provides the definition of state fragility with a certain rubber-band quality, as there are no clear criteria for determining the extent of political will that is needed to move into or escape fragility. Determining whether a given state lacks political will or not thus essentially calls for a judgement that depends strongly on the eye of the beholder. Thus, the reference to a lack of political will can be used to classify states that pursue

nationally legitimate policies as fragile just because they do not ascribe to the policies that most donor agencies heed. This underlines the fact that the concept of state fragility is based on particular political ideas about what a state should be, making the analytical usefulness of the concept doubtful.

Thirdly, the definition disregards the point that international phenomena may affect fragile situations. Fragility is seen as a national question, possibly with international repercussions, but to be understood and explained within the specific state. The causes of fragility are primarily seen to rest within the individual fragile state. However, as indicated above in Section 2 and discussed further below, global conditions may influence and spur fragility as well as shape possible solutions. Moreover, the definition's national focus hides the point that external engagement is not neutral or apolitical. Some external actors are quite explicit about their political objectives in explaining their engagement, but even in the best of all worlds, where external actors are only concerned about peace and prosperity, social groups and actors in fragile situations are bound to perceive external actors in a political light. In such a situation, external engagement may, despite good intentions, provoke reactions that further strengthen fragility. Thus, it is erroneous to regard the emergence of fragility as a purely national phenomenon.

There are many other statements seeking to clarify what fragility is about. Conspicuously, most of them are not clear-cut definitions, but rather tentative proposals identifying one or another significant element of fragility. DFID, for instance, states that its "working definition of fragile states covers those where the government cannot or will not deliver core functions to the majority of its people, including the poor" (DFID 2005: 7). This understanding concentrates on the delivery of social and security services, but does not emphasize, e.g., political representation. The World Bank puts more emphasis on violent conflict, both in its attempt to develop a typology[2] and in its understanding of fragility: "Fragile states is the term used for countries facing particularly severe development challenges such as weak institutional capacity, poor governance, political instability, and frequently on-going violence or the legacy effects of past severe conflict" (World Bank 2007: 2).

A recent strand in the thinking about fragility is the concern with state–society relations, 'the social contract' and state legitimacy. The point is to move from fragility to resilience where a state is able to cope with change (Jones et al. 2008). While

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[2] See the chapter by Stepputat and Engberg-Pedersen for a discussion of this and other typologies.

undoubtedly a very important issue (described in further detail in Section 4.1), the approach tends to narrow the focus on what actions the state may take to increase its legitimacy. An analysis of the political economy of a fragile situation may, however, suggest that other actions are needed to ensure peace, progress and poverty reduction. The 'state' and 'society' may not be the two homogeneous entities that need to interact better. Different influential social groups and actors are likely to cut across the state–society distinction, some of them basing their power partly on control over state institutions, others having access primarily to other institutions and resources. In fragile situations where the state is absent or very weak, non-state authorities often perform state-like functions with respect to the provision of security and social services. Given that conflicts of interest and spoilers are likely to be primary driving forces behind fragility within a specific structural setting, these need to be identified rather than focusing on 'the social contract' *per se*.

Another idea that has recently come up is to link external engagement in fragile states with a human rights approach. The argument is relatively simple in the sense that it suggests that state-building should be undertaken from a human rights perspective. The key problem in fragile states is the lack of sound and legitimate state–society relations, which can only be created if the state focuses on fulfilling citizens' political, economic and social rights.[3] Defining citizens as 'rights-holders' and state officials as 'duty-bearers', the human rights perspective on fragile states offers a strong normative view of the role of the state. One observer concludes: "A human rights framework thus puts issues such as politics and power relations, state accountability, state-society relations, and genuine participation at the centre of state-building efforts. A focus on vulnerable and excluded groups and the principles of universality, equality and non-discrimination, as well as participation and inclusion, are particularly relevant here" (Menocal 2008: 5). The quotation amply demonstrates that a human rights framework can bring up a number of very important issues in relation to fragile situations. However, one may worry whether a strong normative approach like this is useful in all kinds of fragile situations if the political economy analysis mentioned above is accepted as a point of departure. "A focus on vulnerable and excluded groups and the principles of universality, equality and non-discrimination" may not be accepted by all powerful groups in a fragile situation, and if it is implemented forcefully

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[3] The notion of citizenship can be used to exclude non-citizens from enjoying the rights of citizens. However, in the present context, the term is used in the theoretical tradition describing state–society relations as a contractual relationship between the state and its citizens. The term is used in this respect and not to exclude anyone.

in the short run, it may cause more harm than good. Moreover, a human rights approach lends itself to idealistic attempts to put everything in order, while a pragmatic approach is much more likely to adapt to the particular weaknesses of fragile situations (Webster 2008).

For the purposes of this synthesis report, fragility is defined as follows:

> institutional instability undermining the predictability, transparency and accountability of public decision-making processes and the provision of security and social services to the population.

Institutional instability is understood as unclear and contradictory rules, norms and practices. Public decision-making covers decisions affecting a broader group than the decision-makers. In many societies, public decision-making is not the exclusive realm of the state. Other actors, such as customary chiefs, civil society organisations, etc. make decisions that influence large social groups, and there is, accordingly, a need to integrate non-state institutions into the definition of fragility. The definition also highlights a lack of legitimacy and insufficient basic services as central elements of fragile situations. Some institutional instability may be manageable, but when it jeopardises the legitimacy of public decision-making and the provision of basic services, it merits being described as a fragile situation. Moreover, the definition has the advantage of emphasising that profound changes brought about by internal or external actors or processes are likely to produce fragility. In addition, significant immediate causes of fragility include violent conflicts, low state capacity and self-interested political regimes. These are not included in the definition, but they are widely acknowledged as being important with respect to fragility, and they are likely to bring about institutional instability, with significant implications for public decision-making and service provision.

3.2 Fragile situations and fragile states

As the presentation of definitions demonstrates, the discussion of fragility has been very focused on states. Weak states, collapsed states, 'rogue' states and similar terms have received increasing attention within development studies and assistance. As the concerns with human and global securities have also ascribed a more important role to the existence of an effective state, the discussion of fragility has taken place under the heading of 'fragile states'. Recently, however, some unease with this term has emerged.

First, states may be strong in some respects and weak in others. In a very recent study, Frances Stewart distinguishes between *authority failure*, where states lack the authority to protect their citizens from various kinds of violence; *service failure*, where states fail to ensure access to basic services for all citizens; and *legitimacy failure*, where there are no accountability mechanisms linking the state and its population. With all sorts of methodological challenges, the study concludes that no country fails on all three dimensions, though five fail on two dimensions and 43 on one. Moreover, the correlations between the three dimensions are either weak or absent (Stewart 2008). All this indicates that fragile states are rarely fragile in all respects and that they typically possess important levels of capacity on certain dimensions. Furthermore, fragility may be quite significant in parts of a country and not in others. Where rebel movements dominate or where the state is absent, fragility may exist without the state as such being fragile. In many countries, the presence of the state is much more felt in the capital and other major cities, while remote areas experience substantial service failures. The degree of state fragility varies accordingly throughout many countries.

Secondly, and importantly, the characterization of a state as fragile creates resentment because use of the term is believed to question its independence and sovereignty. The derived notion of state-building is also criticised by some, partly on the grounds that states cannot be built from outside but need to be formed in interaction with society, and partly because the notion begs for detailed engineering by donors, thereby undercutting the state's independence. At a moment where harmonisation, alignment and ownership have become essential concerns to ensure effective aid and poverty reduction, this criticism of the concept of fragile states and of the whole discourse on fragility, including the now increasing concern with human rights as a basis for engagement in fragile situations, is of considerable importance. If donor agencies pursue policies and a rhetoric that provoke antagonism and a sense of being deprived of one's independence among political leaders who are genuinely seeking to develop their countries, external engagement in fragile situations may easily end up being counterproductive. Accordingly, there is a strong case for adopting a careful non-ethnocentric language that appeals to actors in fragile situations who are contributing to stability, poverty reduction, etc. when donor agencies develop principles, strategies and concrete actions in relation to fragility.

These two criticisms of the concept of fragile states have led some to prefer the notion of fragile situations. Indeed, the widely recognised DAC principles for good international engagement refer to fragile states *and* situations. However, as state-building is the primary response by DAC and others to situations of fragility, the concept of

fragile states is still retained by many. The concept may be useful in specific contexts, such as post-conflict situations, where everybody agrees that the state is particularly fragile and where a government with the ambition of renewing the state has taken power. Then, however, the concept is not used in a generic sense to describe a whole range of substantially different countries. For this purpose it is generally more useful to talk about fragile situations.

3.3 Qualitative differences between fragile and non-fragile situations?

The vocabulary of fragility indicates that it is an either–or phenomenon: either a situation is fragile, volatile and unstable and may evolve in many different directions, or ,else it is relatively stable with a manageable level of insecurity, reasonable service delivery, etc. Basically, this is an erroneous understanding. First, the social sciences have substantial difficulties in explaining or for that matter predicting sudden changes. The unfolding of the elections in Kenya in 2007 and the subsequent turmoil were not foreseen by many. This is a good example of a situation understood to be non-fragile and then evolving rapidly into one of fragility. In other words, non-fragile situations always risk a sudden collapse due to the convergence of parallel developments with unforeseen consequences. Even the most stable societies have to operate with this possibility of rapid deterioration.

Secondly, fragility is a matter of degree. Typically, processes and relationships can gradually improve or worsen, thereby creating a less or more fragile situation. Institutional instability may be more or less sharply pronounced, for instance, when a government goes from suspending democratic elections of local governments to abolishing the constitution altogether, or when service provision goes from being a contested terrain between different service providers to being a legally regulated field with relatively clear roles ascribed to the different actors. The many different measurement tools developed to indicate the degree of political instability, the degree of state capacity (CPIA), etc. also testify to the point that societies are ranked on a continuum from instability to stability, from low to high levels of capacity, etc. Moreover, these measurement tools often have a totally arbitrary cut-off point below which societies or states are described as fragile.

Thirdly, as mentioned above fragility may exist in some areas of life and not in others, or more precisely, higher and lower levels of fragility may coexist in a society, within a state or in a given territory. Accordingly, there is not one continuum along which

all fragile situations can be plotted. When comparing countries, one country may be less fragile than another on one dimension, but more fragile on another. There is thus ample room for quite complicated pictures of fragility that do not lend themselves easily to comparison or categorisation.

The general conclusion from this is that the category of fragile states is not a separate group of countries that is qualitatively different from other countries. Most countries, and in particular low-income countries, will exhibit various signs of institutional instability which may or may not push them into the group of so-called fragile states. Therefore, it is useful to consider the problem of fragility as a much wider issue relevant to many developing countries, and not only to the relatively limited group of states labelled fragile.

However, a small qualification of this general conclusion is pertinent. Fragilities may be so outspoken, e.g., in situations of violent conflict, or of such a particular nature, e.g., when regimes in power totally disregard their populations, that, from the point of view of external engagement, the implications are so far-reaching that one may talk about qualitative differences between these situations and development assistance to less fragile situations. The same analyses are required, but the relevant tools and support modalities are likely to be radically different. Moreover, it has been argued that certain countries face particularly difficult challenges, such as being landlocked with 'bad' neighbours or being caught in a natural resource trap, which can account for the fragility of these countries (Collier 2007). Such difficulties of a natural or physical character suggest that the fragility of certain countries is qualitatively different from other, less fragile situations. This point further strengthens the need to carry out analyses of the specific contexts in which fragility unfolds.

4. Significant issues in understanding fragile situations

The purpose of this section is to identify and discuss key issues that typically have a major impact on fragile situations and processes. The first issue has to do with the making of authority and legitimacy in the relationship between state and society. As already mentioned, this topic is increasingly seen to be at the core of fragility. The second issue taken up for debate deals with economic development and poverty reduction. This does actually not lie at the centre of current discussions of fragility within development assistance, which is a bit surprising. The third issue concerns the role of global structures with respect to fragile situations.

Having discussed these broader issues, the section goes on to provide an overview of fragile situations by identifying three distinctions with respect to (i) levels of social tensions and violent conflict, (ii) levels of policy formulation and implementation capacity, and (iii) levels of policy agreement between governments in fragile situations and the international community. Based on a general interpretation of the literature on fragility, these three areas of concern can be seen to be decisive for understanding fragile situations. The overview is presented with an emphasis on relevant actions by external actors and on the dilemmas that donor agencies are likely to face.

4.1 State–society relations? Issues of authority and legitimacy

State–society relations are often understood as being formed around functional linkages between state institutions – issuing laws, solving conflicts, providing health, education, security and safety, regulating markets, leveling taxes, obtaining knowledge for planning, organizing elections etc. – and the lives and organizations of citizens, non-citizens, corporations and other private entities within the national territory.[4] But whether and how these relations actually function and lead to expected outcomes is very much a question of how the state is perceived in terms of its authority and legitimacy.

Authority and legitimacy are much more difficult and slippery issues to tackle – in theory as well as practice – than the capacity of state institutions, or even the 'willingness' of governments to serve and protect their populations. We may understand

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[4] 'Society' is increasingly extending into sites, networks and activities outside the territory. We have to be aware of the abstraction involved in the use of the notion of society as if it is one, homogeneous (nationalized) entity corresponding to the national territory.

authority as 'the ability to establish a presumptive right to speak and act', a process that implies consent and legitimacy which nevertheless cannot be disassociated from the underlying ability to use force and coercion (Abrahamsen and Williams 2007: 240). But, as the collapse of the USSR demonstrated so convincingly, a monopoly of the means of violence is not enough to maintain authority. Authority depends on the recognition, in society, of institutions, statements and representatives as being authoritative. As such, governance has to resonate with the norms, values and imageries that work as sources of legitimacy in society.[5]

One of the key problems associated with the notion of fragile states is that the authority of the state is contested, the state itself perhaps being at risk of being overthrown through armed conflict, or having recently emerged from armed conflict, with serious challenges for the reestablishment of its authority (see Buur 2008). Another key problem is the fact that various overlapping and often contradictory sources of legitimacy are at play at the same time, which create different sets of expectations for the representatives and actions of the state, e.g. between custom, patrimonial and legal-rational logics, that are impossible to reconcile (see Jung 2008).

The final and perhaps most comprehensive problem – or feature – of many fragile situations is the existence of several sets of non-state authority that engage in governance relations within the territory and population of the country. Here we have to distinguish between different situations. In many post-colonial states, and in particular in states with a legacy of colonial, indirect government, different forms of communal authorities, chiefs and local strongmen exercise authority on the basis of shifting and mixed sources of legitimacy. In line with the current templates for decentralization, some states have tried to extend their reach into rural areas by recognizing and seeking to regulate and domesticate these forms of authority, which are somewhat misconceived as 'traditional' authorities (Kyed and Engberg-Pedersen 2008; Buur and Kyed 2007).

This state recognition (or production) of local non-state authorities coincides with the general drive of neo-liberal development strategies towards the privatization, outsourcing and decentralization of functions that have otherwise been associated with the central state, such as the provision of services and security. This does not necessarily entail a loss of authority by the state, provided that state institutions have the capacity

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[5] In this sense, authority is an effect rather than an entity (ibid.).

to set standards, develop and monitor contracts, and ensure schemes of accountability. However, when these processes take place without the state being in control, this may well create new balances in which state institutions lose authority.

Thus, in many fragile situations we will find urban as well as rural 'frontiers' or 'margins' of the state where the state's authority depends on negotiations and alliances with non-state actors, a process which has been conceptualized as 'the mediated state' (Menkhaus 2007). We are dealing here with a vast range of organizations comprising vigilantes, NGOs, local strongmen, youth brigades of political parties, ethnic militias, local branches of transnational religious communities, private security companies, community defenses, warlords, etc. They may, however, all engage in different forms of governance, enjoy widespread legitimacy within their domains, and even exercise command over life and death and in this way defy the sovereignty of the state as the ultimate arbiter within its territory.

There is no single formula for understanding these non-state forms of authority. They may at times act with or on behalf of state institutions or state representatives, while at other times they oppose and challenge the state. They have therefore been described as 'twilight institutions' (Lund 2006) that blur the boundaries between state and society, as well as between the licit/illicit and civil/military distinctions. As long as the revenues and capacities of states remain low, and permanent and sustainable systems of service provision, security and law enforcement therefore remain out of reach under the current conditions of globalization, the most accessible alternative is to support the development of heterogeneous, multilevel systems of governance which somehow build on, and 'make do' with, existing forms of organization and de facto non-state authorities.[6] This, of course, is a difficult alternative that breaks with the ideals of uniform services and equal access to rights for all citizens across the national territories. But taking departure in de facto practices of rule may be more productive under such circumstances.

4.2 Economic decline and poverty

Starting with a qualification, it should be emphasised that there is no one-to-one relationship between poverty and fragility. In certain poor countries fragility has

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[6] For the security sector, see Andersen et al. 2007. Taking the Afghan security sector as an example of the very real dilemmas of state building, the plan to develop national security forces – and thereby release NATO from its costly engagement – is hardly sustainable. In 2004-5 alone, the expenses for the security sector ran at 500% of the state revenue or 25% of the GNP, as compared to a global average of 4% (Sedra 2007).

not manifested itself, while fragile situations may occur in countries that are relatively better off. This may be the reason why the discussions of fragility have been relatively silent on how poverty and economic decline influence fragile situations. This issue and the issue of how particular groups are affected by fragility are taken up below.

Limited resources are an obvious feature of states in most low-income countries. When the national budget in these countries hardly exceeds the budget of a large local government in Denmark, it is not surprising that increasing demands for better services from the population, for more influence from civil society, for better policies from the private sector and for more reforms from donor agencies create the conditions for states to become fragile. The pressure on very scarce resources is so significant that tensions are bound to build up, making institutional instability a very possible outcome. A useful response from donor agencies is to consider how their own demands impact on the state's capacity and to improve the state's ability to respond to the demands of national constituencies.

Another important issue has to do with social, political and economic inequalities, and particularly the perceived aggravation of inequalities in a society. If such inequalities, which are not justified by widely held social norms, exist and worsen, especially between groups defined in terms of ethnicity, religious belonging, regional identity, etc., they may well bring about social tensions and violent conflict, although this is far from inevitable:

> Group inequality provides powerful grievances which leaders can use to mobilise people to political protest, by calling on cultural markers (a common history or language or religion) and pointing to group exploitation. This type of mobilisation seems especially likely to occur where there is political as well as economic inequality, so that the group leaders are excluded from formal political power while the mass of group members are economically deprived. Examples in which group inequalities have been a factor in provoking conflict include Côte d'Ivoire, Rwanda, Northern Ireland, Nepal, Chiapas and the Sudan, to mention just a few. (Brown and Stewart 2006: 6-7)

When fragilities are shaped by worsening inequalities, aid should take this into account and seek to make national governments more responsive to the demands of marginalised groups. Donor agencies may also try to channel resources through various non-state institutions to cater for the needs of these groups.

Valuable natural resources appear to be another factor influencing fragility. Where the exploitation of natural resources is not controlled by the state, the scope for armed groups to loot these resources is large. This may even be linked to secessionist movements combining criminal activities with political ideologies. Valuable natural resources are also associated with states that are capable of controlling their territory, as resource rents may here fuel authoritarianism, repression and political regimes that are indifferent to questions of accountability, service provision and poverty reduction (Nordstrøm 2008; Collier 2007).

Youth has been identified as a group that is particularly worth supporting in fragile situations. This is based on the belief that young people may constitute both a threat and a means to peace and stability. During violent conflicts many young people often end up in the larger cities, and when peace has been reintroduced, they are reluctant to go back to their rural communities of origin. They may have grown a taste for urban values, they may fear retaliation due to their role during the conflict, they may support the family at home from the city, etc. Whatever the reason, the challenge is to provide training and employment for large numbers of uneducated, poor and sometimes traumatized young people, who, given just a few opportunities, can contribute substantially to post-conflict progress (Munive 2008).

Though gender relations have become an important issue in much development assistance, they play no significant role in discussions of fragility. However, fragile situations impact differently on women and men. Violent conflicts can have devastating effects on both sexes, but the effects are likely to be different partly because stereotyped norms of masculinity are reinforced during wars. Notably with respect to health, women generally suffer disproportionately from poor services. In the fields of education and employment the evidence is mixed, but the absence of many men from households during conflicts sometimes opens up new spaces empowering women and challenging men's identity as the breadwinner. In post-conflict situations, there may be opportunities to rebuild institutions in a more gender-balanced perspective (Koch 2008).

The importance of remittances from diasporas has become shared knowledge in general development assistance. They are, however, no less important with respect to countries that are characterised by fragility. Figure 1 below (taken from Hansen 2008) demonstrates convincingly that remittances surpass aid in a substantial number of these countries, which may be related to large emigration due to the difficulties people face when fragility prevails. Remittances have many positive effects, including

in relation to poverty reduction, but they may also spur social tensions between those who receive them and those who do not. Moreover, diasporas sometimes prolong and radicalise conflicts by supporting the various parties financially (Hansen 2008). Accordingly, the role of diasporas needs to be integrated into analyses of fragile situations, not least given the very significant sums they command and are able to remit to their home countries.

Linked to large-scale emigration from societies influenced by fragility is the question of the brain drain. A concern with the brain drain is particularly large in relation to post-conflict societies where the need for skilled labour is conspicuous. Though the percentage of highly-skilled people abroad may be substantial (according to one source, 63% of the doctors educated in Liberia have migrated), such figures typically cover very low absolute numbers (approximately 200 doctors have been trained in Liberia during a 40-year period). Thus, the challenge is to train more people rather than to prevent the few from migrating (Mortensen 2008).

Figure 1. Remittances, official development assistance and foreign direct investment in 2005 in 15 countries marked by fragility
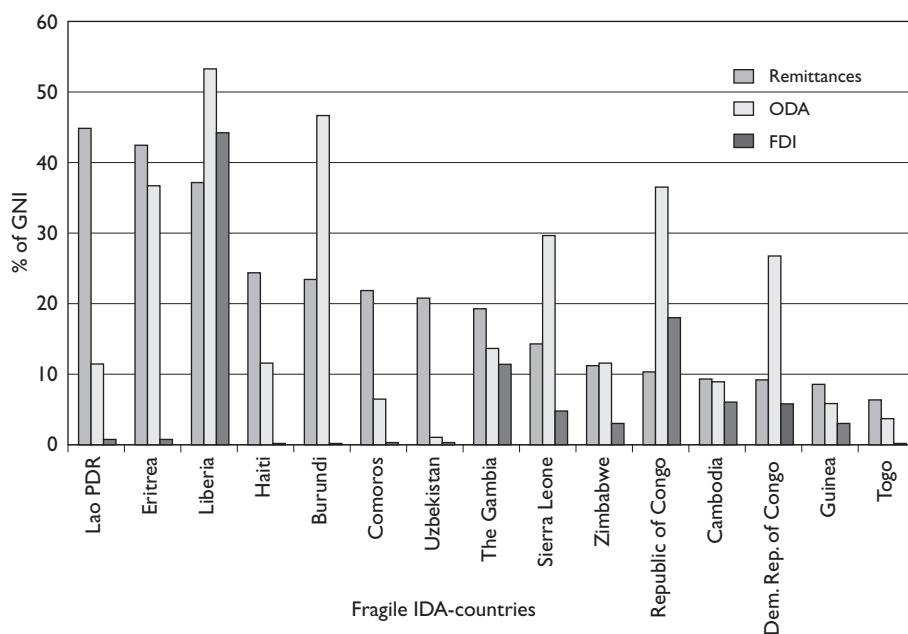
Sources: *Global Development Finance,* The World Bank, 2007; *IDA - List of Fragile States,* The World Bank, 2007; *Sending Money Home,* IFAD, 2007; *Aid Statistics,* OECD-DAC, 2007.

Finally, severe economic crises should be mentioned as a factor likely to stimulate fragility. Such crises could be the result of rapid changes in global economic and financial markets, of tensions producing the return of large numbers of migrants, of "electoral failures" creating a political impasse, etc. Economic crises can be a significant element in fragility because they may cause important and rapid drops in standards of living of large parts of a population. In such situations, existing rules, norms and practices are likely to come under heightened pressure, thus paving the way for institutional contradictions and fragility. Moreover, if economic crises hit some groups disproportionately compared to others, there is the potential for grievances and social tensions. Economic crisis is possibly one of the aspects of fragility that international donors most easily can address. Mitigating measures of various kinds are most useful in such situations, and they are likely to be much less politically controversial compared to interventions in conflicts and governance issues. There may also be scope for some policy advice with respect to economic management, although the IMF has been strongly criticized for its policy suggestions to the countries hit by the Asian financial crisis in 1997.

4.3 Global structures

As noted above, the end of the Cold War changed the conditions for many developing countries and their political regimes in several ways. The two superpowers no longer supported their respective allies, and aid became much more interventionist by spelling out conditions of a typically detailed nature. Donor concern with good governance and a long list of different reform measures can be seen as having contributed to institutional instability defining fragile situations. Without pretending to provide neither a detailed nor a comprehensive account of the subject, a few points can be made to suggest that global structures are not without importance in relation to fragile situations.

It has been suggested that, in a number of respects, globalisation increasingly undermines processes of state consolidation. In the field of security provision, certain states in low-income countries have only limited control over their territories, and they often face gangs and rebels with easy access to arms and plenty of opportunities to sell looted goods in global markets. In the field of representation, the same weak states have to rely on international workers, whom globalisation easily makes available, in positions where well-consolidated states never would accept foreigners. At the same time, weak states are significantly influenced by diasporas which are only to a certain extent part of the states' constituencies. And in the field of wealth, the

policies of economic liberalisation forced upon weak states have deprived them of the "requirements for successful engagement in the global economy", the conclusion being that "the dynamics of the global system itself have undermined the mechanisms – force, representation, and capital – through which states have to be maintained" (Clapham 2002: 793-4; see also Wade 2003).

International companies, particularly in the extractive industry, have a grim record "often cementing the political power of oppressive governments, exacerbating inequality, or worse, intensifying and prolonging civil wars" (Patey and Kragelund 2008). In countries with valuable natural resources, extraction of these by international companies typically contributes a substantial part of the national budget. In Sudan, for instance, more than 60% of total government earnings stem from oil revenues. Where the state is controlled by one party to a violent conflict, international companies cannot avoid contributing to the conflict through taxes, legitimisation, etc. Emphasising Corporate Social Responsibility may be a response which is also likely to benefit the companies themselves.

Another invention after the Cold War has been the International Criminal Court, which was established in Rome ten years ago to prosecute war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide, etc. in countries that were unwilling or unable to do so (Mennecke 2008). The Court is a strong manifestation of the international trend qualifying the independence of nation states. Despotic leaders should feel less and less certain that they can get away with their deeds. Whether this will help get rid of despots remains to be seen.

4.4 Distinctions and dilemmas: An overview of fragile situations

From a perspective of external engagement in fragile situations, three significant distinctions can be made:

1. Intensification or reduction of social tensions and violent conflict
2. Low or high levels of policy formulation and implementation capacity
3. Existence or absence of a government in policy agreement with the international community

First, none of these distinctions is absolute. Tensions may intensify in some areas and cool in others. State capacities can be high in some respects, but not in others, and policy agreement is also a relative concept. Thus, these distinctions are not absolute,

and actors engaging in a fragile situation will have to analyse carefully the nature of each of these distinctions. Secondly, the distinctions cut across each other. Social tensions may intensify in countries with both high and low state capacities and with governments in both more and less policy agreement with the international community. Thus, theoretically, these distinctions give rise to eight clearly different situations, but given the murky nature of concrete realities and the lack of hard-and-fast boundaries, it would be erroneous and misleading to use the distinctions as the basis for a typology. However, the distinctions provide a basis for considering certain kinds of external engagement in particular fragile situations.

4.4.1 Social tensions and violent conflict

The World Bank distinguishes between "four main business models for engagement" that emphasise the dynamic nature of fragile situations (World Bank 2005: 13). A society may head for violent conflict, be engulfed by such a conflict, have just escaped from it or have put it squarely behind it. This has clear implications for how external engagement should be organised. Fragility in the context of an intensification of social tensions should be addressed in an entirely different manner than fragility in the context of a peace agreement and ameliorating security conditions.

The issues of tensions and violent conflict are typically, but not exclusively, a matter of intra-societal groups and actors. The state may play a role on the side of one of the conflicting parties, and capturing control of it may be the object of the contention, but the parties to the conflict often have a social base outside the state institutions. Where the issue of past or future violent conflict is central to the understanding of fragility, it is accordingly important to analyse the social base, political strength and major concerns and interests of the various social groups and actors. In particular situations, the state has been thoroughly captured by one of the parties to the conflict, and people sympathising with opposition forces are likely to regard the state with much scepticism. This calls for careful approaches to state consolidation and state-building in hostile environments where NGOs and various traditional authorities may play a bridging role (Buur 2008).

In societies heading for violence, diplomatic and other interventions that can change the likely pay-offs from conflict are useful, as they can reduce the incentives that stimulate and create spoilers benefitting from the unrest (Krause and Jütersonke 2007). In situations of deterioration, it is also important to assess what can be done with respect to maintaining poverty focused policies, state capacity and social-service

delivery. The more these can be preserved during crises, the more it will be possible to accelerate progress once a solution to the conflicts has been found. On the other hand, investments in capacity development and social services may be lost during a subsequent conflict. Where donor agencies are already engaged in countries heading for insecurity and violence, assistance strategies should be reconsidered and possibly reoriented, given that the conditions are no longer conducive for development. Thus, it is important that donor agencies possess the analytical capacity to determine whether conditions are deteriorating and to what extent the likely result will be violent conflict.

In post-conflict societies, a major concern is whether the defeated party has been eliminated altogether or still may provoke conflict. In the latter case, external engagement should focus on creating a viable co-habitation of the conflicting parties so that the defeated party gains something that it stands to lose in a renewed conflict (Rosser 2006). In post-conflict situations, the need for assistance is typically vast in many different areas. Speed and flexibility are often of great importance if external engagement is to reap all the benefits of its presence. This calls again for a thorough understanding of the particular processes and contextual factors of the fragile situation. Exploiting the knowledge and experience of "neutral" actors on the ground or actually being present even during crises and violent conflicts are ways that will considerably strengthen external agencies when engaging in post-conflict reconstruction.

With respect to policies, state capacity and social services, it is also important to take a point of departure in the needs and practices already in place. State capacity, for instance, may be so weak in post-conflict societies that non-state actors perform certain functions typically ascribed to the state. A one-sided focus on building state capacity may accordingly create new tensions. This is particularly important in relation to local governance issues where the state and formal local government institutions may be completely absent. Donors should not push for comprehensive decentralisation reforms in such a context, as this will challenge actors who are currently playing an important role in local governance. It is more useful to begin strengthening the provision of social services, while duly recognising how such initiatives are likely to influence the development of local governance practices. At the same time, one should, of course, also be aware that the strengthening of practices outside the state may also undermine the role of the state in the longer run. Thus, the support to non-state actors in providing services that are typically ascribed to the state should be undertaken with due recognition of national policies regarding the long-term division of labour between the state and other actors (Kyed and Engberg-Pedersen 2008).

4.4.2 *Policy formulation and implementation capacity*

This issue does not concern only the technical capacity to formulate and implement policies, but also the level of legitimacy with which citizens perceive state action. The issue of legitimacy is important in both democratic and functional respects. A legitimate state is evidently needed to enable democratic decision-making to take root because citizens can only embrace democracy if they believe that the institution that is meant to carry out the decisions of the elected leaders will loyally do so. Moreover, a legitimate state is able to implement unpopular policies, such as taxation, which may be needed for the common good. It is accordingly much more effective than an illegitimate state.

If the issues of social tensions and violent conflict have much to do with intra-societal social groups and actors, the issue of state capacity is strongly related to the state-society relationship.[7] Ideally, this relationship should be organised in a manner conducive for activities in both the state and society. Thus, state capacity reflects the ability of the state to manage the state–society relationship, and this is done not least by providing the necessary conditions for social and economic development and by responding to people's needs. Such actions can build the legitimacy of the state, again providing it with a necessary space for carrying out its political and administrative activities. In many low-income countries, society does not possess the strength needed to force the state to respond to people's needs or to create an enabling environment. It is therefore in many cases up to state actors themselves to decide how to manage the state–society relationship.

In the past fifteen to twenty years, many donor agencies have become increasingly concerned about getting policies right, particularly in states with low levels of capacity. Sometimes, donors have pursued far-reaching, ideologically based reforms that correspond little to national realities or to the interests of influential social groups. For instance, the privatisation of state enterprises and lay-offs of public employees are initiatives that challenge actors with political leverage, and this is far from appealing to political leaders in fragile states. In other cases, donors push such a large number of reforms simultaneously that they undermine the limited capacity of the state.

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[7] State and society are not separate entities existing in different worlds and meeting only occasionally for tea: they are mutually dependent and embedded in each other. However, certain activities are typically referred to the state while others are confined to society, and in many low-income countries the distinction between state and society is a strong discursive reality.

With respect to external engagement in states with low levels of capacity, three points appear to stand out. First, it is worth considering supporting policies and practices that are likely to improve the state–society relationship. Strengthening the delivery of social services is one possibility, but making the state administration more responsive, less politicised and less influenced by corrupt practices when issuing permits, addressing conflicts, collecting taxes, regulating natural resources and production, etc. is undoubtedly a key issue in relation to state legitimacy (Orre and Mathisen 2008; Therkildsen 2008). Subordinating the forces exercising the state's monopoly on violence to the law is another point that is likely to improve people's perceptions of the state. Such initiatives are by no means absent from current support to states with low capacity, but one may wonder whether they receive sufficient attention compared with macro-economic reforms and institutional democracy.

Secondly, compensating social groups that stand to lose from reform measures may facilitate necessary changes that can break political deadlocks and pave the way for more poverty-focussed policies (Rosser 2006). This issue points to the fact that a policy of increasing state capacities may have its adversaries and may involve trade-offs in terms of the political support that the leadership enjoys. It also highlights the fact that capacity building is not at all apolitical, particularly when it involves institutional changes and management of the state–society relationship.

Thirdly, a long-term perspective on capacity-building is required, implying a sequencing of institutional reforms and other measures to improve the state's performance. Organisational change and the introduction of new institutions are typical elements in public-sector reforms, and they are demanding initiatives that resource-poor, over-burdened and often politicised bureaucracies have to run alongside daily routines and unforeseen, suddenly emerging business. Given that fragile states are characterised precisely by institutional instability undermining the predictability, transparency and accountability of public decision-making processes, it is essential to support bureaucracies in building capacity incrementally in a way that does not reinforce institutional instability. For instance, institutional reforms in areas like decentralisation, privatisation, public financial management, service delivery and human rights should not be considered and promoted in isolation from each other, as they often are. Weak state administrations cannot cope with many such cross-cutting reforms at the same time, and, moreover, it is possible that their simultaneous implementation will produce negative but unintended consequences rather than positive synergies. Thus, donor agencies should analyse the usefulness of particular reform measures

using a broad perspective on state capacity development in general. Though highly relevant within its specific sphere, a reform measure may accordingly be untenable in a larger picture and should be postponed to a more convenient moment. All this is especially important in fragile states with low levels of capacity, where fragility may be the result of factors other than a lack of capacity (Webster 2008).

In fragile situations with relatively high levels of capacity, fragility is often caused either by social tensions and violent conflicts (see above) or by a government pursuing policies that jeopardise social stability, the economy or relations with other countries (see below). In such situations, and if fragility persists, state capacity is likely to start deteriorating. Notably, it is to be expected that the legitimacy of the state will fade, and some of the earlier mentioned considerations regarding external engagement may become relevant. High levels of state capacity will, however, influence how fragile situations unfold. First, for a conflicting party in control of the state or for a government that is pursuing selfish interests, state capacity is an important asset. In low- and medium-income countries, a strong state is a decisive force that is able to control most parts of society. Opposing actors inside or outside the country will have few possibilities for changing the situation apart from a clear military victory. Secondly, influential social groups and actors are likely to be found in and around the state. They could be school teachers, employees of public enterprises, local governments, etc. all having much to lose if social and economic conditions worsen. While hardly being able to influence political developments, these groups could be a moderating factor on the regime in power.

4.4.3 Governments and policy agreement

In terms of external engagement in a fragile situation, it is of great importance whether a national government is in place and whether such a government is in overall policy agreement with the international community. If these two conditions do not prevail, donor agencies will have to consider other forms of assistance than the prevailing ones based on government-to-government cooperation. This may be quite problematic in situations where the national government is hostile to external actors, but it may also be rather demanding in situations where there is no government in place.

Where governments are in disagreement with the international community, donor agencies will have to assess whether this disagreement is ideologically based or has to do with despotism and self-enrichment. If ideologically based and if the government enjoys national legitimacy, donor agencies should be careful not to jeopardise principles of self-determinism and pluralism when considering external engagement.

Policy disagreements may cover legitimate differences of opinion regarding sound development policies, and populations and countries should be supported in finding their own development paths.

If the disagreement is related to a government seeking to enrich itself and its allies at the expense of the population, donor agencies face serious dilemmas regarding how to support legitimate non-governmental actors, especially if the government is legitimised through formal election results. One possibility is to support population-focused activities such as the delivery of social services, although this could be said to ease the pressure on the government. Another possibility is to support various civil-society organisations through international NGOs, but it could also be considered to strengthen opposition forces in ways comparable to the support given to the ANC before the ending of apartheid in South Africa. These alternative options should be analysed in their concrete contexts, but their practicability will also depend on the political inclinations and capabilities of donor agencies.

The other side of the coin of when disagreement prevails has to do with the way particular donor agencies are being perceived by major stakeholders in the fragile situation. If an international actor has little relevant capacity or is perceived to be significantly biased – no matter whether rightly or wrongly – it is a strong argument that the actor should renounce its ambitions to intervene. Fragile situations are typically so volatile that the DAC principle of doing no harm should prevent the actor from engaging itself in direct support. One possibility is to make resources available for a multi-donor trust fund or a multilateral institution supporting activities in the fragile situation.

Where fragile situations are characterised by a more or less total absence of national government and state, it is imperative to identify the actors carrying out the functions that are normally ascribed to the state. Such situations present a number of dilemmas. To what extent should donors work with non-state actors such as clan leaders, traditional chiefs, rebel movements, etc. in providing some sort of security within given areas or with embryonic state structures that may become sufficiently powerful to enforce a monopoly of security provision in the long run? To what extent should donors compromise on human rights policies when engaging with various actors who have a dubious past, but who are impossible to bypass in the short run? To what extent should donors alleviate the various negative human consequences of violent conflict with the certain knowledge that this will support the political strength of

particular spoilers? To what extent should donors engage in fragile situations where there is no legitimate authority in power?

These questions cannot be answered at the general level, but the following points may provide some direction. First, fragile situations in general and fragile situations with no or little state authority in particular are characterised by actors and processes that are ambiguously related to issues like poverty reduction, democratisation, human rights, development, etc. A particular actor, say customary authorities, may help in resolving conflicts and providing security while perpetuating the subordination of women and young people. Thus, one may as well depart from the point of view that certain values and principles will be compromised in any engagement in these situations. The question is not whether or not, e.g., human rights policies will have to concede to other concerns, but to what extent (see Webster 2008). Secondly, the short run and the long run will have to be in constant dialogue: neither the one nor the other is the right perspective to use in fragile situations, as these are volatile and can develop in many different directions. What is being done in the short run is definitely going to influence the long run, but the ideal long-term objectives may suggest unacceptable and impractical short-term action (Kyed and Engberg-Pedersen 2008). Accordingly, it may be necessary to head east today to see the sun set in the west tomorrow. Thirdly, legitimate authority should be the guiding principle rather than formal Weberian bureaucracy. When authority is exercised in a manner that people accept and support, donors should build on this rather than go for new institutions in a situation of an already high level of institutional instability (Buur 2008). Donors must take the burden of adjusting to unfamiliar territory and not transfer this burden to people who are struggling to cope with fragility.

If a government is in place and in overall policy agreement with the international community, external engagement becomes much easier. Conventional aid modalities and approaches are much more relevant, and the scope for harmonisation and alignment much larger. Yet, the fragility of the state may call for care and adaptation when making use of conventional methods. It is particularly important to assess the sustainability of the government in power, and measures to boost its internal legitimacy could be considered as a specific response to the fragility.

Summing up this attempt to provide an overview of typical fragile situations, it is worth highlighting the dynamism and volatility of these situations, formed as they are by violent conflict, state capacity and political power. Much is at stake – people's survival – but the potential for progress is also large. When violent conflict is sup-

pressed, an enormous human energy may be released; when states become more capable, responsive and legitimate, people can begin to feel part of a national community; and when political power is used to form and implement poverty-reduction policies, the poor can start hoping for a better future.

5. The international community

The discussion on fragility is underpinned by the assumption that institutional arrangements have a profound influence on larger questions of development and security. It is thus widely agreed that there is a linkage between the character of a country's institutional framework and the level of human, economic and political development in that country. However, this basic idea that 'governance matters' does not only apply domestically: it is increasingly understood that the quality and efficiency of international efforts are hampered by the fragmented nature of the so-called international community which intervenes and engages in fragile states and situations. Numerous policy papers, lessons learned reports and academic studies underline that when international efforts so often fall short of their stated objectives, this is partly because they are being pursued in an uncoordinated and incoherent manner.

The term 'international community' is short-hand for a wide and diverse range of actors, who in various ways are attempting to promote international standards and universal values in developing countries, fragile situations and post-conflict settings. Those who act on behalf of the international community thus broadly share the same normative framework. The reality on the ground, however, is that the international community is not a unitary actor, but is a highly fragmented community that contains widely conflicting views on both general policies and concrete interventions.

The fragmented nature of the international community has spurred a growing acknowledgement of the need to increase the coordination, coherence and consistency of the international engagement in developing countries. Since 2005, the Paris Declaration has provided the overall framework for OECD donors' attempts to improve the efficiency of their aid efforts by first, lining up behind government policies and national institutions, and secondly, 'getting their own act together' through coordination and harmonisation. It is widely agreed that aid which is delivered in an uncoordinated manner and attached with idiosyncratic procedures and requirements imposes high transaction costs on recipient countries and risks overburdening already weak administrative structures. This is not least the case in fragile states and situations, where local capacity and governance structures are very weak.

The OECD/DAC principles for good engagement in fragile states are explicitly formulated to complement the Paris Declaration and provide guidance on how to engage effectively in situations where alignment behind government policies is

not an immediate option. This underlines first, that aid effectiveness remains a core concern for donors – also when engaging in fragile situations – and secondly, that donors are struggling to identify concrete modalities and mechanisms for engaging in a long-term, coordinated and coherent fashion in fragile states and situations. The principles do provide some guidance regarding what constitutes 'good engagement', but only little operational guidance on how to translate the principles into practice. This need not be a problem, as necessary innovation will have to take place on the ground in order to reflect the particularities of the specific context. Such a bottom-up approach to identifying flexible and shared arrangements for working together, however, requires a high degree of autonomy at the country level. It may thus demand significant procedural changes within the various international agencies and actors.

This shows that the difficulties of ensuring that the international community's engagement in a given fragile situation is both coordinated, coherent and consistent with local priorities and needs have organizational as well as political roots. Different donors and agencies have different interests, mandates and objectives for their engagement. This often translates into different analyses of the situation on the ground and different assessments of what constitutes appropriate action. It is thus not surprising that, e.g., the IMF's emphasis on fiscal stability often clashes with agencies that are more concerned with maintaining a certain level of public spending on social services. Successful coordination is thus not merely a matter of sharing information and agreeing on who does what and where: it is essentially a matter of prioritizing different objectives and deciding what matters most right now. Coordination is political.

In post-conflict settings, the dynamics of ensuring concerted international efforts tend to be different than in 'ordinary' situations. When the international engagement includes both civilian and military actors, it becomes even more difficult to ensure coherence and to identify a shared vision and strategy for all actors. On the other hand, as was evident at the 2005 World Summit decision to establish the UN Peace-building Commission (PBC), the problem is widely acknowledged, and efforts are being made to address it. In addition to the PBC, which is an institutional attempt to rally the international community as a whole and address the strategic deficit, several more operational changes have occurred within the international peace-building architecture. The need to approach the transition from war to peace as a multidimensional process is strongly reflected in the newly adopted Capstone Doctrine for UN Peacekeeping Operations, and UN peace operations are now conducted as 'integrated missions' that – ideally – build on a shared vision among all UN actors as to the strategic objectives of the United Nations presence at the

country level. Furthermore, the UN and the World Bank have strengthened their cooperation considerably in recent years and formulated shared tools for post-conflict engagements. Efforts are also being made to increase cooperation between the UN and regional organisations, including most notably the AU and the EU. While progress is incremental and slow, the current momentum to improve peace-building efforts seems likely to keep the issue on the agenda.

The search for international consistency in fragile situations – whether post-conflict or not – is further complicated by the emergence of 'new' donors and actors, who need not necessarily ascribe to the overall normative framework that unites (however loosely) those acting on behalf of the international community. In particular, China's growing involvement in Africa has raised concerns in the OECD donor community. Only a little is known on the role (potential and real) of non-DAC members, such as Brazil, India, China and Saudi Arabia in addressing fragility. It is, however, increasingly understood that traditional donors often have limited capacity to exercise political influence in critical situations, and that non-OECD countries are becoming more significant, both politically and economically, in a number of regions of state fragility. It seems clear that in some cases, their role runs contrary to the priorities of the DAC community, yet it is important to recognize that non-Western states have relevant and credible contributions to make on the basis of their own experiences in fostering development and security. The international community is thus faced with the dual task of strengthening coherence among its like-minded members, while simultaneously reaching out to actors who are less likely to care about the same priorities.

6. Recommendations

1. The guiding principles for Denmark's engagement in fragile situations should provide broad orientations for bilateral and multilateral settings. The principles need to be translated into concrete actions on the basis of a thorough analysis of specific situations.
Fragile situations are so diverse that the guiding principles cannot be directly operational. The guiding principles should be based on a conceptual understanding of fragility and should provide a general framework within which specific fragile situations can be analysed and addressed. Instead of building on some sort of typology, the principles should include a non-exhaustive list of issues that need to be taking into account when considering engagement in a concrete fragile situation.

2. In defining fragility, the guiding principles should attempt to capture fragile situations, not just fragile states, in a vocabulary that is shared with pro-poor actors in fragile situations. In order to do so, the principles should apply a broad understanding of governance that does not exclude or ignore the role of non-state and informal actors.
While acknowledging the DAC definition of fragility and its concern with low state capacity and lack of poverty-focussed political regimes, the guiding principles should adopt a terminology that is shared with most, if not all actors in identifying fragility. The principles should also acknowledge that, in understanding fragility and finding solutions to it, the focus should include the state, but also go beyond it. In most fragile situations, public decision-making and service provision are not the exclusive domains of the state, but include a variety of non-state actors. Partly for this reason, the principles can benefit from emphasising the term 'fragile situations'.

3. The guiding principles should conceptualise fragile situations in terms of (i) social tensions and violent conflicts, (ii) policy formulation and implementation capacity, and (iii) policy agreement between governments and the international community.
While the international donor community lacks a precise agreement on the major elements of fragility, the guiding principles should identify the three issues mentioned above as central dimensions of fragile situations. Depending on their concrete manifestations, each dimension can stimulate fragility to a greater or lesser extent.

4. The guiding principles should recognise that fragile situations are influenced by a large variety of structures and processes.

To enable analyses of concrete fragile situations to capture the variety of factors that form and influence fragility, the guiding principles should recognise a number of issues that are only beginning to get substantial attention in relation to fragile situations. These issues include notably (i) authority and legitimacy in state-society relations; (ii) economic decline and poverty; and (iii) global structures.

5. The guiding principles should reflect the fact that fragility is a relative concept and that particular situations can be more or less fragile.

Although certain countries face qualitatively different challenges compared to others, the fragility of particular situations is likely to be a matter of degree. Relatively stable low-income countries with some state capacity and some poverty-focussed policies are not beyond the risk of becoming fragile. While severe fragility due to, e.g., violent conflicts calls for particular forms of external engagement, these forms of engagement based on a thorough understanding of powerful actors, conflicts of interest, power struggles, etc. are not irrelevant in less fragile situations.

6. The guiding principles should emphasise a pragmatic approach to fragile situations.

A significant characteristic of fragile situations is their volatility, thus rendering fixed long-term plans less useful, as processes of social change under these circumstances are basically unpredictable. In such contexts, an inflexible approach pursuing fixed objectives is likely to be harmful. Accordingly, the principles should promote a pragmatic approach that accepts context-specific, second-best responses to the dilemmas, trade-offs and compromises that characterise fragility.

7. The guiding principles should emphasise that external engagement in fragile situations must respond to the specific needs and circumstances of the context.

Because fragile situations are often characterised by substantial risks of violent conflict, it is essential to carry out external engagement with great care and avoid ill-adapted initiatives that may trigger off unintended negative consequences. Short-term concerns of stabilisation will often have to dominate long-term development objectives. Furthermore, fragile states typically have little capacity to respond to many different donors each pursuing specific concerns. The guiding principles should therefore emphasise the need for simple and robust coordination frameworks at the country level, based on a common in-depth understanding of the country situation. Specific policy concerns of individual donors should be managed within such a framework.

8. The guiding principles should promote a politically sensitive, risk-robust, flexible and goal-oriented approach to external engagement in fragile situations.

Given the diversity, volatility and highly political nature of fragile situations, a corresponding approach needs to be developed. This approach should be able to identify the finer, context-dependent political processes that impact on fragility, and enable implementing actors to take substantial risks and act quickly and flexibly through administrative procedures adapted to the requirements of fragile situations. Moreover, clear goals for external engagement are needed, based on a careful balancing of short-term and long-term concerns. The goals should enable implementing actors to solve the many dilemmas that they are likely to face. The guiding principles should determine the contours of this approach.

9. In relation to direct Danish engagement in fragile situations, the guiding principles should emphasise the need for high-capacity, country-based Danish representations.

Where Denmark wants to engage on a bilateral basis, high-capacity country-level representation and direct contacts with all major actors is essential to facilitate participation in a coordinated approach at the country level and to ensure a sufficient understanding of the country situation.

10. The guiding principles should make room for different forms of engagement in fragile situations.

Multilateral institutions, NGOs and multi-donor support funds provide possible forms for Danish engagement in fragile situations. Where Denmark has little historical experience with a particular area or country characterised by fragility, there is a need to identify actors and channels being able to provide effective support, should Denmark decide to engage herself.

11. The guiding principles should emphasise the need to strengthen the capacity of specific multilateral institutions with respect to support to fragile situations.

Support to fragile situations is often complicated by perceived and real biases, particularly when it is provided by bilateral donor agencies. In this respect some multilateral institutions have a comparative advantage, as they are perceived to be furthering international development concerns rather than country-specific or regional interests. At the same time, multilateral institutions are restricted by their mandates and often less able to address the political issues at the heart of fragility. Given these limitations, the guiding principles should emphasise the need to strengthen multilateral agencies to permit effective and development-focussed external engagement in fragile situations.

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