Joint meeting of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP
3 June 2016

Working in fragile contexts, including in middle-income countries

Background paper prepared jointly by UNDP (co-coordinator), UNFPA, UNOPS, UNICEF (co-coordinator), UN-Women and WFP

I. Introduction

1.   Achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will require a strong and coordinated approach to addressing fragility and building peaceful and resilient communities. By 2018, most of the world's extreme poor and approximately 30 per cent of the world's children will live in States affected by fragility. Poverty, food insecurity, water scarcity and protracted conflict, coupled with weak social services, gender inequality, ethnic disparities and poor governance, are among the main drivers of fragility. Population mobility, including urbanization and international migration, can be associated with fragility, whether as a driver or as a coping mechanisms for households seeking well-being and security. People living in fragile contexts, particularly women and children, are highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, natural disasters, economic crises, conflicts, malnutrition and health emergencies.

2.   The global discourse is moving away from identifying 'fragile States' to focusing on 'situations of fragility'. This understanding of fragility[1] is forward-looking and allows for: (a) nuanced understanding of the various levels of risk probability and degrees of impact in any society; (b) marshalling national and international advocacy and support for prevention and preparedness and addressing the root causes of fragility; and (c) broadening the scope of analysis and bridging the humanitarian-development divide in addressing fragility at subnational, transnational, regional and global levels. The subnational dimension of fragility is particularly relevant in middle-income countries where there may be effective institutions, functioning social protection systems and cohesive communities coexisting with pockets of fragility. Countries with a high concentration of fragile conditions must, however, be given special attention.

3.   In 2011, in collaboration with the United Nations, the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD-DAC), the World Bank and the African Development Bank, the g7+ group of self-identified fragile States, as members of the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and State-building (IDPS), agreed to the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) represents the United Nations in the IDPS, serves as the host for the New Deal Implementation Facility and coordinates the New Deal Task Team.

4.   Building on the New Deal and other efforts, the Committee on World Food Security adopted the Framework for Action for Addressing Food Security and Nutrition in Protracted Crises in October 2015, and acknowledged that its implementation necessitates action from all stakeholders. As noted in the recent report to the Secretary-General of the High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing, "success or failure to achieve the [Sustainable Development Goals] will depend upon whether or not we are up to the challenge of managing fragility and risks".[2] The Secretary-General has called for concentrating overseas development assistance (ODA) to countries most affected by fragility to improve the likelihood of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.[3] In 2016, the IDPS renewed the New Deal for another five years and called on the international community to seize the momentum of the 2030 Agenda to address the root causes of fragility. Also,

---

[1] OECD draft working paper, *Towards a multidimensional concept of fragility*, January 2016.

[2] *High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing Report to the Secretary-General: Too Important to fail—addressing the humanitarian financing gap,* January 2016, p. 5.

[3] United Nations, *One Humanity Shared Responsibility: Report of the United Nations Secretary-General for the World Humanitarian Summit.*

complementing the global agreements, the Dead Sea Resilience Agenda is an example of middle-income countries responding to a protracted crisis.

5. These experiences have provided a better understanding of the processes, tools and mechanisms required to collaborate on the five inter-linked Peacebuilding and State-building Goals identified as pathways out of fragility: inclusive politics; security; justice; economic foundations; and revenues and services. Although Sustainable Development Goal 16 is universal, it was inspired by the success of the Peacebuilding and State-building Goals. More than 30 agencies have come together under the auspices of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG)[1] to adopt mainstreaming, acceleration and policy support (MAPS), a resource for United Nations country teams in supporting the implementation of Agenda 2030 within the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF).[4] MAPS is complemented by the Sustainable Development Goals 'readiness for fragile situations' initiative.[5]

II.   Key issues and challenges

6. Although the emerging concept addresses the stigma associated with 'fragile States' and the momentum to address fragility is high, the following strategic and operational challenges will need to be addressed through a coordinated approach among Governments, United Nations agencies, donors, civil society organizations, private sector agencies and affected communities.

A. Limited access to high-quality disaggregated data needed to assess vulnerabilities and target marginalized population groups

7. It the Sustainable Development Goals are to succeed, vulnerable populations must be accounted for, the performance of development actors and state authorities must be aligned with the people's development aspirations, and programmes must be well targeted for results. Obtaining quality data from fragile situations, especially those not accessible to state authorities, can be difficult and even dangerous. Promising advances in big data and remote sensing allow for complementing official statistics in fragile situations, though these sources too suffer from inadequate accuracy or major security-related challenges.[6] Lack of transparency and the politicization of data further complicate the deficit, as does limited data literacy among the population. In many fragile situations, data management systems – infrastructure, technology, human resources – have either been destroyed or are non-existent. This is especially true at the subnational level. As Sustainable Development Goal target 17.18 makes clear, disaggregated data

---

[4] United Nations Development Group, 'Support to Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams'.

[5] This initiative was introduced by UNDP through the United Nations Working Group on Transition and invited all United Nations agencies to collaborate in its implementation. Consultations on the initiative are still ongoing. The initiative aims to support countries in fragile situations to: (a) mainstream the 2030 Agenda in their development strategies, policies and programmes, taking into consideration the constantly shifting dynamics of fragile contexts; (b) strengthen delivery and monitoring capacities; (c) identify the drivers of fragility and violent conflicts and other risks to delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals and support targeted programmes to address them, starting with the Peacebuilding and State-building Goals of the New Deal; (d) identify bottlenecks and enablers to Sustainable Development Goal implementation, and develop a strategic and sequenced approach to implementation that reflects the local context; (e) coordinate development partner support and enable country partners to raise the resources necessary to implement priority Sustainable Development Goals; and (f) any other relevant support that might be requested.

[6] Remote sensing is not guaranteed to be 100 per cent accurate. Some values from the Syrian Arab Republic have suggested only a 30 per cent accuracy rate for remote infrastructure sensing (i.e., hospitals identified as having been damaged or destroyed were in fact only partially constructed and have never been completed and put into operation; it is impossible to tell the condition of infrastructure such as power generating turbines by looking at the condition of the building they are housed in).

– by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts – are necessary for implementation of all the Goals at the local and national levels.

B. National development planning and international investment in development are exposed to multiple risks, including poor-quality and/or inadequate long-term planning, relapse into conflict, climate-related disasters, pandemics, political instability, weak delivery capacity, structural inequality, corruption and unpredictability of development financing.

8.   Without the robustness of demand-based planning, even a single shock can erase years of development progress and set a country back, as the Ebola crisis in West Africa demonstrated. Implementing time-bound development programmes is difficult and there is no guarantee that anticipated outcomes can be achieved. International development actors and donors are usually risk averse, suspending development support to fragile environments once crisis erupts. Development efforts have not yet sufficiently integrated prevention-focused approaches to risk management. A core concern in this regard is to manage risks and build resilience, especially, to climate change. The nexus of climate change, peace and development has come into sharper focus in recent times, with climate change already creating new levels of fragility around the world, from climate-induced migration to the threat of long-term droughts and reduced food and water security. Climate change is now among the largest drivers of fragility in middle-income and least developed countries, threatening to roll back hard-won development gains for hundreds of millions of people.

9.   Since the adoption of the Hyogo Framework for Action in 2005, more than 1.5 billion people have been affected by disasters, with women, children and young people in vulnerable situations disproportionately affected.[7] It is important to address the gender inequality of risk, strengthen disaster risk governance systems and promote community resilience for the effective implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

C. Decision making that does not take disparities, inequalities and inequities based on gender and age into account

10. Fragile environments, particularly those in or emerging from violent conflicts, are often polarized. Political space is recreated in enclaves of identity-based interests that vie against each other for state resources and power. An estimated 26 million women and girls of reproductive age are living in emergency situations, far more in high-risk and fragile settings, with little attention to sexual and reproductive health needs. Women face multiple types of discrimination, especially when the legacy of violent conflict and weak rule of law and institutions exacerbate impunity for sexual and gender-based violence. Insecurity and violence impede the participation of women and girls in political life, economic recovery and educational opportunities, despite the passage of Security Council resolutions, including resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security. Although there has been remarkable progress, the culture of inclusion has yet to be sustained. There have been focused efforts to support women's election to political office. Once women are elected into political office, however, they often lack the material and social support required to withstand the harsh male-dominated political space or to prioritize women's collective interests over party interests. Support to girls' education has yet to be scaled up beyond the primary level

---

[7] Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2015–2030.

in most fragile situations. A 2015 study showed that only 6 per cent of aid to fragile States is allocated to gender equality.[8]

D. Insufficient emphasis on linking humanitarian and development action in protracted crisis situations

11. National and international efforts to address fragile, protracted crisis situations rarely take a holistic approach that advances the humanitarian-development nexus. Responses have tended to focus on addressing the humanitarian manifestations of crises rather than on prevention, building resilience and sustaining peace.

E. Infrastructure deficit

12. Basic infrastructure that enables sustainable development, facilitates interactions across groups and attracts private sector investment remains inadequate and poses a major challenge in fragile situations. Energy, transportation, telecommunications and water and sanitation infrastructure are often non-existent or in deplorable conditions. Social infrastructure such as health services, schools and markets is also severely affected.

F. Low private sector development in fragile situations

13. Private sector investment can create jobs, drive infrastructure development and strengthen the sense of normalcy and peace. Many countries in fragile situations do not have access to international credit markets, however: the fragmented political environment creates unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles; basic infrastructure such as roads and energy either do not exist or are in deplorable conditions; rule of law, civil registration and other information systems and respect for property rights are weak; local finance and banking systems do not exist or are weak, and the human resource pool is very low. Private sector investment is therefore rarely attracted beyond the extractive industries. This is further aggravated by criminal entrepreneurs, who undermine state authority and reinforce corrupt bureaucratic systems.

G. Limited predictability and flexibility of funding and financing mechanisms

14. ODA plays a significant role in exiting fragility and eradicating poverty in all its forms.[9] In some countries affected by fragility, ODA constitutes 55 per cent of gross domestic product.[10] To achieve tangible results and leverage sustainable development, however, aid must be significant, targeted, catalytic and sustained. Today's aid model poses a number of challenges, particularly in

---

[8] OECD DAC Network on Gender Equality, 'Financing UN Security Council Resolution 1325: Aid in Support of Gender Equality and Women's Rights in Fragile Countries,' March 2015.

[9] See Jeffrey Sach's the *End of Poverty* (2005) where he argues that with targeted ODA investment of the volume sufficient to address the challenges of fragility, we can end poverty and fragility in our lifetime. William Easterly in his book, *The While Man's Burden*, blames the way aid is administered to be fueling red-tape bureaucracy, corruption and the lack of sustainable development progress in fragile situations. Paul Collier, in his book, *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries are Failing and What We Can Do About It*, makes the case that the bottom billion, many of whom are in fragile environments, are trapped by violent conflicts, the misuse of natural resources, the insecurity of whole regions and the small and insignificant size of fragile state economies.

[10] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. *Fragile States 2014: Domestic Revenue Mobilisation in Fragile States,* Paris, OECD-DAC, 2014.

regards to addressing fragility. Aid is generally fragmented, relevant to the national interest of the donor country, heavily earmarked and short-term. Some donors invest in countries with which they have historical ties, which has concentrated aid in few States and left most States in fragile situations as aid orphans.[11] Another challenge is the growing number of donor countries using ODA to prevent violent extremism and respond to increased migration, which acts more on the symptoms than on the root causes and prioritizes response over prevention.

H. Limited support to the subnational level

15. One of the main challenges to the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals was the lack of grassroots support and buy-in. Local governments and local actors need to play an important role in delivering the development agenda through the provision of services. Until recently, the issue of local governance and service delivery in fragile and conflict-affected settings has suffered from "systematic neglect" by the international community and as a result, donors resources affected directly to subnational governance issues in fragile conflict States remains marginal.[12] The importance of restoring the capacity of local governance systems, and in particular local governments, in the aftermath of conflict for stability and recovery and of empowering them to increase the resilience of local communities, is now widely recognized. Promoting the inclusion of hitherto excluded groups, such as women, youth or ethnic minorities, in all aspects of local governance forms a part of the same approach.

III. Lessons learned

16. Over the last few years, United Nations agencies have learned the following critical lessons in tackling the root causes and drivers of fragility that need to be taken to scale to strengthen the development impact.

A. Strengthened and coherent humanitarian, peacebuilding and development actions can accelerate the exit out of fragility and build resilience.

17. A cogent response requires robust evidence derived from shared analysis and vision. A shared understanding by all actors (including political, peace and security, human rights, gender equality, development and humanitarian actors) of the context, the root causes of fragility and the immediate and longer-term needs and priorities in protracted and conflict-related crises is imperative to identifying, designing and implementing programmes appropriate to context. In the Horn of Africa, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development leads joint planning that draws on common data management and early warning platforms. The Resilience Analysis Unit jointly supported by UNDP, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP), is providing integrated analysis that is informing policies and actions and protecting the foundations for development. Through the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan designed in response to the Syrian crisis, United Nations agencies are jointly planning and programming to address the humanitarian situation. The common platform between the European Union, the World Bank Group and the United Nations has led to a coordinated response to post-disaster and post-conflict recovery in more than 35 crisis-affected countries, including in the context of the recent Ebola

---

[11] Ibid.

[12] Only 1.2 per cent of total ODA to a group of 39 fragile States in 2014 (OECD/DAC data).

crisis in West Africa. Implementation of the New Deal in Somalia has brought the international development system together to achieve coherent development, peacebuilding and resilience outcomes.

18. Lessons from these efforts demonstrate that with a coherent and harmonized approach, the right incentives to strengthen national and local leadership and sufficient investment in human resource capacity, basic social services and rule of law institutions, the potential for achieving sustainable development results is much higher. The World Bank has observed that reduced fragility or the exit from fragility have positive (peaceful and economic) spill-over effects on neighbouring countries, as well as globally.[13]

B. Inspiring and inclusive national and local leadership can help remove barriers to sustainable development and end fragility.

19. At the early stages of development planning, investments in data management systems and capacities for human resources, technology and emerging local leadership (particularly of women and youth) can accelerate development in fragile situations. Consulting and raising the voices of the most marginalized groups and communities regarding how vulnerability is addressed and how development support is designed and delivered, is critical to sustainability. The implementation of the Secretary-General's commitment to allocate a minimum of 15 per cent of all peacebuilding funds to gender equality has catalysed support to development of women's leadership.

C. Expanding social protection systems in fragile contexts can reduce risks and (re)build confidence in national systems.

20. Work led by several organizations including UNDP, UNICEF, WFP and the World Bank, shows that it is possible to develop and strengthen social protection systems in fragile and conflict-affected areas such as Afghanistan, Burundi, Somalia, South Sudan, Yemen and State of Palestine. Even when no social protection system is in place, humanitarian response has advocated for and driven the development of nascent systems.

D. Increased use of innovation and technology can advance development and reduce fragility even in humanitarian crisis situations.

21. Low-cost mobile technology is increasingly useful for engaging communities in participatory approaches, collecting and analysing data in real time, transferring cash to affected people and strengthening local markets and service delivery systems. Enhancing the role of women in innovation and science and technology initiatives can strengthen the resilience of communities. For example, issuance of ID cards with a microchip to displaced women can reduce transaction costs, ensure that women and men benefit equally from humanitarian assistance and reduce the likelihood of gender-based violence. It also provides both a civil and financial identity to displaced women to facilitate their engagement in early recovery efforts and to bridge humanitarian and development efforts.

22. Innovative approaches such as African Risk Capacity, the R4 Rural Resilience Initiative and Index for Risk Management offer strategies for risk reduction, risk sharing, risk transfer and prudent risk-taking to help address fragility. RapidPro technology is enabling real-time monitoring

---

[13] International Development Association, 'Operational approaches and financing in fragile states', June 2007.

and engagement with citizens at scale. A number of Governments have adopted tools to seek out community perspectives to help formulate programmatic activities (clarifying life-saving messages around Ebola in Liberia and Sierra Leone using U-Report), and for real-time monitoring and dialogue (teacher attendance, student attendance, sanitation and school violence in Uganda, Central African Republic, Nicaragua, Papua New Guinea, Peru and Zimbabwe using EduTrac).

E. Addressing constraints to peace can leverage and sustain development gains.

23.   The Peacebuilding and State-building Goals were designed based on the understanding that removing constraints to peace can accelerate development. According to the independent review of the New Deal, the application of these goals in the g7+ countries contributed to progress towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. United Nations agencies have jointly targeted constraints to peace through the Global Focal Point on Rule of Law and joint peacebuilding strategies and programmes. The deployment of peace and development advisers has provided analysis to resident coordinators and United Nations country teams and supported the design of peacebuilding, conflict prevention and social cohesion projects. Experience in protracted crises evidences that the lack of or interrupted education significantly contributes to cyclic and protracted intergenerational vulnerability and fragility,[14] and that education inequality contributes to fragility and is a driver of conflict.[15] Regular functioning of the school system signals stability and a return to normalcy and builds the foundation for peace and investment in the future. The UNDG has adopted a conflict and development analysis tool, currently being applied in a number of countries, to inform the UNDAF.

IV.   Conclusion

24.   The interdependencies in our complex world demand an end to siloed, short- to medium-term planning for collective and coherent actions drawing on lessons learned. The UNDG MAPS approach and the planned collaboration of UNDP, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UNICEF, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), WFP and other United Nations entities to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in situations of fragility therefore represents an ideal opportunity.

25.   The renewed commitment to linking humanitarian, peacebuilding and development actions must be accompanied by the development of evidence-based national plans that build on joint multi-hazard risk assessment and analysis and aim to build resilient systems and communities.

26. Overall, the proportion of funding to fragile situations needs to be increased and all humanitarian, development and peacebuilding resources need to be used optimally to build national capacities and institutions, shrink humanitarian needs and generate foreign direct investment and domestic revenues over the long term. Special attention will be required to gender-responsive programming and adopting a forward-looking risk management approach. Efforts to advance resilient post-crisis recovery also need to be accelerated.

---

[14] Overseas Development Institute, 'A common platform for education in emergencies and protracted crises: Evidence paper', 11 March 2016.

[15] Family Health International 360, 'Horizontal Inequality in Education and Violent Conflict: Literature Review', Washington, D.C., Learning for Peace and UNICEF, February 2015.

27. Governments grappling with fragility need support to create an enabling environment to attract and regulate private sector investments through de-risking, finding innovative solutions for underwriting the high insurance cost of doing business in fragile environments, and avoiding companies that are transferring the burden.

28. Ultimately, success will depend on the institution of systems that respect human rights and dignity, are aligned with the aspirations of women and young people, provide safe spaces and education for children, and, are accountable to those most vulnerable to risks and shock.

Annex. Possible questions and issues for discussion during the joint meeting of the Executive Boards

1. How has the collaborative efforts of the United Nations helped countries to address fragility to advance the Millennium Development Goals and how can lessons learned from that effort be leveraged to advance the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in fragile situations?

2. What innovative approaches are needed to strengthen financing for the Sustainable Development Goals in fragile situations?

3. What are the barriers to private sector investment in fragile situations and how can ODA be leveraged to incentivize private sector investment?

4. What are the key elements we need to look at if we are to base our work in a sound risk analysis, risk sharing, and risk mitigations? What are the environmental and climate change dimensions of fragility?

5. How can preparedness and prevention measures be applied more systematically to address the drivers of fragility and reduce the burden of impact on populations at risk?

6. What are the opportunities for collaboration in the adoption of conflict-sensitive approaches to programming?

7. What are the gender and inequity dimensions of fragility and how can we address them collectively to advance the Sustainable Development Goals in the context of leaving no one behind?

8. How does investment in the overall well-being of children create reduce fragility and build the foundation for a better future?

_____