

## **Policy response to situations of fragility**

### **Position paper**

#### **Introduction**

**EU-CORD** is a network of Christian Organisations in Relief and Development. It was formed in 1998 with the goal of serving the poor more effectively and improving the conditions of disadvantaged people in the developing world. By 2007 the membership has grown to 15 Relief and Development NGOs from 9 European countries with a total annual turnover of €300 million. Some member organisations of EU-CORD are active in the field of relief (e.g. Mission East, MedAir and MAF), others concentrate more on rehabilitation (e.g. ZOA) or development (e.g. Woord & Daad, Tearfund UK, Stromme). Based on our experience in those countries, we would like to share our view on how to respond to situations of state fragility.

#### **The notion of fragile states**

The EC issues paper comments that no reference should be given to fragile states, but merely to situations of fragility to which a country is exposed. This distinction is important. However, this remains not very clear throughout the remainder of the paper. In practice the connotation of fragile states is heavily ingrained in the broader debate. Therefore it is important to define on a per case basis what the causes are before any strategies are applied.

In a context of (post-)conflict, situations of fragility have their impact, and perhaps even their cause, at the local level of communities. In situations of (post-)conflict, deterioration of social structures and corresponding mechanisms of local co-operation and governance are often seen. As a result, healthy interaction between local state actors and local civil society is under pressure, which makes individuals of those communities vulnerable, as normal mechanisms for claiming positions and access to resources are no longer working.

#### **Characteristics of situations of fragility**

In many cases a combination of the following factors characterise a situation of fragility.

##### *Conflict-related factors*

- Cyclical conflicts with often regional aspects
- Insecurity, warlords, warring parties, lawlessness, gender based violence
- Circulation of big quantities of fire arms
- Potential conflicts between host population and migrants over access to natural resources like land and forests/wood

##### *Politics and governance*

- Absent or weak traditional leadership structures
- Absent, weak or non-impartial governments – locally and centrally (which may lead to a power vacuum and/or corruption)
- Weak civil society, few solid local or national NGOs
- Disconnection of formal civil society actors from their traditional constituency

##### *Physical factors*

- Destroyed infrastructure and presence of mines and UXO's

##### *Social factors*

- Trauma due to conflict experiences
- Generation of demobilised young people who turn their back to rural peasant agriculture
- Marginalising of vulnerable groups (women, HIV/AIDS, patients, orphans, etc.)
- Negligence of basic human rights, especially of people in vulnerable positions
- Low social cohesion which is expressed through low trust, despair and vengeance

### *Migration*

- (Internal) displacement, also causing disturbance of balance in local power relations, thus contributing to fragility

### *Role of international actors*

- Distortion of local economies by humanitarian interventions
- Aid providers finding it difficult to shift from emergency to long term development.

### **Difference between crisis and fragility**

A situation of crisis differs from a situation of fragility in the sense that a crisis results in a breakdown of essential state capacity to deal with the situation. A situation of crisis requires an urgent, comprehensive and multifaceted response and interventions from a wide array of different partners. A situation of fragility is one that exists either before a crisis, when specific targeted actions could and should be initiated to redress the fragility, or after a crisis for accompanying measures of reconstruction, and protecting devices to avoid any risk of a fall-back into past problems. As it is with relief, reconstruction and development, crisis and fragility cannot always be differentiated as characteristics overlap.

### **Long-term substantial commitment**

The political will and moral conviction to be engaged in situations of fragility is a big issue. Until recently the assumption was that states and international organisations demonstrate risk avoidance in the choices they make. However, new research shows that the same phenomenon can be seen among (I)NGO's.

A clear lesson to be drawn from interventions in fragile states, is that a long-term, substantial commitment is required if we want to see progress come about. Though not without restrictions, we can say that the international interventions in the Balkans have been among the more successful, compared with experiences elsewhere. One of the factors which explain that relative success, is the long-term, large-scale political, military and civil presence from international organisations. Experiences from international organisations show that e.g. capacity building of core institutions in a fragile state takes at least ten years. Even for rehabilitation programmes, which normally precede regular development projects, 5-7 years engagement is a reasonable term.

If the willingness, the resources and the support for long-term, substantial commitment are lacking, we might seriously question whether we should become involved. Breaking off after a short time might make the situation even worse. Fragile states cannot realise sustainable development without donor assurance of resources over the long-term. Therefore, donors need to sign up to multi-year engagements.

From the requirement of long-term commitment also follows that countries and organisations with limited resources must make limited choices. A good example is the Netherlands, which selected only a handful of fragile states in which it wants be involved. Though this conclusion does not fully apply to big international organisations like the EU, it is particularly relevant for individual countries and for (I)NGO's.

### **'Security first'**

Quite often much attention is paid to developing democracy in fragile states. In our opinion democracy is not the first 'collective good' to be sought. Putting democracy first may even further destabilise a fragile state, as recent history shows. If we want to build strong and stable democracies, some prior conditions have to be met:

- Creating security and stability
- Developing a vital civil society, without which the state has no countervailing powers nor the possibility for providing resources (see also below, 'Political fragility and economic fragility')
- Arriving at a certain level of economic development. Only after economic resources are strengthened and people's first needs can be met, politics comes in view. One of the roads to economic growth is

stimulating business development/private sector development, to which we will come back below ('The specific contribution of NGO's).

- Achieving a certain level of literacy and education, without which democracy is vulnerable to popular manipulation.

To conclude, promoting democracy will not in itself promote development. Democracy and development are initially even unrelated processes. First and foremost, the focus should therefore be on stabilisation and development. Up to now, insufficient attention has been paid to the issue of how to support countries when they are not yet fit for immediately introducing a full-fledged democratic system. EU-CORD recommends that, where democracy is lacking, more use be made of traditional systems of mediation. Such systems should be supported instead of being undermined in any rush to build a new legislative or judicial structure. Besides, more attention should be given to build the capacity and internal cohesion of governance structures. The challenge for policymakers is to explicitly rank priorities for fragile states, instead of automatically making a first priority of democratisation in the Western sense.

### **Political fragility and economic fragility**

Political fragility almost by definition goes hand in hand with economic fragility, and it often increases economic inequality. In situations of fragility people do not have (equal) access to resources (land, water etc.). A favourable environment for investments is lacking and consumer confidence is low, thereby discouraging entrepreneurs. EU-CORD wants to draw attention to the importance of market development at a much earlier stage in (post-)conflict situations. As research has shown, private sector development can have a positive impact on peace and confidence building processes. Besides the role of enterprises in reducing economic fragility and increasing the supply of scarce goods, their contribution to peace building can vary from deliberate non-discriminatory employment policies to establishing joint business ventures across conflict lines. Up to now (inter)national donors and NGO's that support Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise Development seem to have underestimated the positive role that such enterprises can play. The cyclical nature of conflicts, which was mentioned above, strongly argues in favour of earlier and more profound efforts to strengthen the private sector as soon as the situation permits it. It could provide people with more opportunities than return to rebellion and it could lower the probability of recurring conflict. In order to stimulate entrepreneurs to take the risk of investing under unstable circumstances, initially a greater use of subsidies, matching grants and direct payments will be needed. Only at a later stage a transition to more commercial and sustainable activities will be possible.

### **Regional approach**

Quite often instability and fragility don't halt at the border. A well-known example is the spill-over of the crisis in Darfur to Chad. EU-CORD members have the conviction that without an effective regional approach, the fragile area may move like waterbed, as is presently the case in Afghanistan and North-West Pakistan.

A regional approach could have the following elements:

- Strengthen regional organisations to take responsibility for security issues; as long as they are not able to take that responsibility fully, cooperate closely with them (cf. UN/AU in Sudan);
- Promote regional economic integration;
- Take the needs of the whole region involved into consideration when deciding how to provide development assistance;
- Establish regional peace-building conferences.
- Promote and support programmes that follow a cross-border approach in supporting migrants.

### **Need for flexible response**

All too often the international community seems struck in rigid procedures and inflexible concepts. In many cases there is a need for rapid response and for a 'tailor made' approach. We do not need blueprints, we need a good toolkit and criteria for using those tools at the right moment.

1. The change from relief to reconstruction to development is rarely a linear process. In a number of situations of fragility we see recurrent cycles of conflict. Because of that, the international actors involved need to be able to switch from one approach to the other back and forward, e.g. like is done in Sri Lanka by Woord & Daad and ZOA.
2. A flexible response presupposes smooth coordinating mechanisms for international donor involvement. In case of an upswing of the crisis, international and bilateral donors should first assess the needs of the population, then map the presence of (I)NGO's in the area, and consult them on the short run, in order to adjust, synchronise and optimise their interventions. If anything should be avoided, it is that international actors stand in each other's way, like one can see in Afghanistan where ISAF presence sometimes hampers or even frustrates the work of NGO's.
3. Mechanisms should be developed which enable organisations to take over from each other depending on the phase of development in which a fragile country finds itself. However, experience with such take-overs is still limited and a lot has to be learnt.

### **The specific contribution of NGO's**

If we want to see fragile states becoming more stable and stronger, they need to be strengthened from within, though with support from outside. In many cases bilateral support will be complicated, because the fragile state's government might completely lack the capacity and/or the will for reforms. Cooperation with a fragile state's government can undermine the credibility of the donor country. In such situations the most logical choice is to strengthen civil society via NGO's from outside. Foreign NGO's can be important here because of their direct relationship with civil society organisations.

Examples are:

- When no alternative exists, providing collective goods which the government (alone) cannot provide, e.g. education or health care;
- Supporting the local government authorities in an effort to establish district master plans and to build up local capacity;
- Creating confidence and organisational capacity in Community Development Committees and user groups and help them to establish a line of communication with higher echelons in the administrative organisational structure.

To maximise the added value of those organisations, projects and programs should not only address 'soft' activities like capacity building and training, but also entail hardware components as people need to see concrete improvement in their lives and environment. It is particularly the balanced combination of the two that is important in the combination of relief and reconstruction in a context of (post-)conflict.

EU-CORD asks special attention for the potential role of churches in fragile situations. There are many examples of churches which functioned as anchors in situations of high fragility and socio-political crisis. Sometimes they were the only structure in civil society which survived in a period of conflict. Creating ownership for interventions could be smoothed by acknowledging the role that faith community leaders can play, for example in shaping public opinion and in taking initiatives to cross conflict-lines.

### **Safety and the role of NGO's**

Especially organisations which focus on relief and rehabilitation, help to bring about the conditions which enable forcibly displaced people and direct host communities to define, control and improve their own situations and processes. The 'enabling conditions' for these people in war and (post-) conflict zones to define and improve their own situation and process could be specified as follows:

- basic stability and peace in the areas where they have found (temporary) shelter or where they have (re)settled. This can be verified through basic rule of law, criminality figures comparable to other regions in the country and a basic form of mutual recognition among former players in the conflict(s)
- internal cohesion in the communities concerned and increased ability in self-organisation and governance, which is expressed by agreed and accepted community leadership, active inclusion of very vulnerable subgroups in the wider community (women, widows, elderly, etc.)
- basic capacities developed by the communities and their organisations, as well as competent intermediate local organisations involved in the program, to claim, receive and protect the rights to resources, information and assets essential for building peaceful, secure, and sustainable livelihoods.

Coming to the NGO's themselves, we would underline that not only for development, but also for rehabilitation, there needs to be a minimum of social and political stability for the foreseeable future. Though NGO's themselves can contribute to stabilisation, without that relative stability, sustainable rehabilitation and development projects are impossible.

In this respect the difference between working with expatriate personnel and working with indigenous personnel deserves attention. Working with expatriate personnel (protection by presence), can have the relative advantage of independence. On the other hand, INGO's face more limitations when it comes to the security of their personnel. A more familiar approach is working through indigenous personnel, lots of LNGO's being supported by Western NGO's from abroad. An advantage of this approach is that involvement of indigenous people is guaranteed from the very first moment and that they face less strict security limitations. However, for donor NGO's a red line is crossed when the safety of the LNGO workers in the area cannot be guaranteed. The receiving LNGO's must therefore have the capacity and the flexibility to adapt to worsening situations. Besides, whenever NGO's (whether local or international) work side-by-side with international military missions, it is important that they coordinate their activities (CIMIC) and develop their safety plans in coordination with stabilisation forces. There should be clarity about each other's mandate and responsibility. The essence is that military missions create 'safe havens' for NGO relief and rehabilitation work as soon as possible. A quick start for rehabilitation may also provide more legitimacy to the military presence in the area.

### **EU Division of Labour framework**

The EU Division of Labour framework should especially be applied to smoothen in-country donor coordination. There is a lot to gain in this respect, with many conflicting interests that do not always benefit the target group in the end.

### **'Fragility' as part of the aid allocation criteria**

Good governance has often been stated as a paramount criterion to allocate aid money to a certain country. The remainder was allocated to humanitarian aid. It is however important to acknowledge that parallel processes take place. That is why 'situations of fragility' is an important concept versus 'fragile states'. If good governance at national level is not guaranteed, why should it not be possible to work via (local) NGOs and with local government authorities? Strengthening local civil society in situations of (post-) conflict actually contributes to good governance. Especially at the grassroots level long-term involvement normally leads to the highest impact. So in short, fragility should be part of the allocation criteria but then in terms of 'situations of fragility', and not as a paramount criterion, but as a guiding principle, a goal to work towards. Equally important is that the right aid modality be chosen. EU-CORD prefers flexible instruments that leave ample room for channelling funds through NGO's, when bilateral or multilateral aid does not lead to optimal results.



### **Use of current implementing modalities**

The existence of the pooled funding mechanisms like Multi Donor Trust Funds, Common Humanitarian Fund, Common Humanitarian Appeal, and CERF do help in coordinating the aid, but have significant drawbacks when it comes to timeliness, predictability, accessibility and efficiency of aid allocations. It looks like being an easy way to spend the development aid with very small administrative load for the donor countries themselves. Required improvements to mobilise funds are:

- Accessibility by NGOs
- Timeliness
- Predictability
- Real sense of partnerships with NGOs (and not merely viewing the NGO as a sub-contractor)
- Taking out unneeded echelons in the aid structure (UN agencies that take off their administrative cost allowance, but leave the implementation to NGOs).

### **Contributions**

The following EU-CORD members contributed to this position paper.

Woord & Daad Netherlands

ZOA Netherlands

Tearfund UK

### **For more information**

Richard Weaver

Advocacy Coordinator

EU-CORD

Rue Archimede 57

1000 Brussels

T: +32 (0)2 734 64 50

F: +32 (0)2 734 53 50

[richard.weaver@eu-cord.org](mailto:richard.weaver@eu-cord.org)

[www.eu-cord.org](http://www.eu-cord.org)

Evert-Jan Brouwer

Advocacy Coordinator

Stichting Woord & Daad

Spijksedijk 16e

Postbus 560

4200 AN Gorinchem

Tel. +31 (0)183 611800

[e.brouwer@woordendaad.nl](mailto:e.brouwer@woordendaad.nl)

[www.woordendaad.nl](http://www.woordendaad.nl)