Societal Dynamics & Fragility

Engaging Societies in Responding to Fragile Situations

THE WORLD BANK

SOCIETAL DYNAMICS & FRAGILITY:
Engaging Societies in Responding to Fragile Situations

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I. INTRODUCTION

Extreme fragile situations are now home to at least a quarter of the world's people. In the worst cases - where fragility has given way to open violence - people are more than twice as likely to be malnourished, more than three times as likely to be unable to send their children to school, twice as likely to see their children die before age five, and more than twice as likely to lack clean water. It is unsurprising that not a single low-income country in these circumstances has been able to achieve even one Millennium Development Goal (World Bank 2011). In addition, many fragile situations generate spillover effects such as trafficking in illegal goods and persons, and corruption, which threaten the stability of neighboring countries (OECD 2005, 2010).

The label “fragile” is applied to a diverse range of contexts, from conflict-affected countries such as Afghanistan and Somalia, to weak institutional settings like Haiti and Guatemala. There is also a growing recognition that pockets of fragility can exist even where overall state capacity is solid, such as informal settlements in middle-income countries, or in sub-national regions experiencing violent conflict (OECD 2008, DFID 2010, World Bank 2011).

There is no consensus on a specific definition of fragility; nor is there an agreed-upon list of fragile states or situations. Generally speaking, **most donors define fragility as a problem of weak state capacity, legitimacy or will to deliver basic services** (OECD 2010, DFID 2010, USAID 2005). Seeing fragility in this way, the dominant policy response to fragile situations

has been state-building – increasing the capacity of the state to fulfill core functions.

This study views fragility as not only a problem of state capacity, but also of relationships in society. That is, while some elements of fragility emanate from the state, others are deeply rooted in *societal dynamics* – the way individuals and groups interact and the relationships that form out of these interactions.

Fragility is not a static condition, nor is it an all-or-nothing experience. **Fragility can best be understood as a continuum:** societies can experience extreme state failure and violent conflict at one end, and varying degrees of fragility other points in the continuum. The continuum does not imply a linear process, as societies can jump around to different points as societal dynamics shift.

Where a society falls on the fragility continuum is directly influenced by its degree of social cohesion – understood as the overall quality of relationships across groups. More cohesive societies enjoy higher levels of trust and collaboration, which provide the framework for groups to interact constructively on common goals, and avoid or move away from the lower end of the fragility continuum.

II. STUDY METHOD & APPROACH

This work is the product of collaboration among experts on fragility, violence, and social dynamics. There were three phases. First, the study team convoked a variety of practitioners, academics and donors to assess the state of research and policy, and to develop lines of inquiry. Next, the team commissioned five background papers on relevant themes, to understand the relationship between particular societal dynamics and fragility.

The analytical phase was followed by in-country work in five sites: Liberia, Central African Republic, Yemen, Indonesia (Aceh) and Haiti. These countries were selected to reflect varying degrees and experiences of fragility, and to provide regional balance. A political economy analysis was conducted for each country in order to examine the different societal dynamics at play, and design the fieldwork. In each country, a national-level workshop was held with different experts on the topic as well as the country context. Finally, focus groups and

SOCIAL COHESION

Social Cohesion describes the nature and quality of relationships across people and groups in society, including the state. The constituency of social cohesion is complex, but at its essence social cohesion implies a convergence across groups in society that provides a framework within which groups can, at a minimum, coexist peacefully. In this way, social cohesion offers a measure of predictability to interactions across people and groups, which in turn provides incentives for collective action.

key informant interviews were conducted in selected communities to explore how different dynamics played out on the ground, and to understand grassroots perspectives on the dynamics that were considered most relevant.

III. KEY FINDINGS

Building social cohesion is crucial for reducing fragility

Viewing fragility as partly a result of dysfunctional relationships in society changes the way the role of the state is envisioned in fragile situations. The state is clearly a primary actor in all contexts, including those that are fragile, but it is not the only actor, and may not always be the most powerful actor. The state is formed by interactions with members of society, who bring their own ideas, meanings, cultures, interpretations and priorities to the state. When the state is seen as embedded within society, it becomes evident that to address fragility, one not only has to look at the state and its capacities, but at the relationships between groups in society. **Addressing fragility therefore means putting social cohesion at the center of development efforts.**

Social cohesion is understood in this study as a *convergence across groups in a society*.

There are varying definitions of social cohesion, but all coincide on the idea that it has to do with the quality and nature of connections between people and groups. At its essence, social cohesion embodies a convergence across groups, which provides an overarching structure for collective life that helps ensure predictability and certainty, even if it does not guarantee that all groups will agree on all issues. At a minimum, convergence across groups offers the incentive for groups to coexist. As the degree of convergence builds and groups see their interests mesh with those of other groups, they become more connected to these groups, and

FRAGILITY

Fragility can be understood as a problem not only of state capacity, but also of dysfunctional relationships across groups in society, including the relationship of different groups with the state. Rather than a static condition, fragility is better conceptualized as a dynamic continuum, along which societies can experience extreme state failure and violent conflict at one end, and a more cohesive society moving up continuum. The continuum need not imply a linear process, as societies can move around the continuum as they respond to different shocks or opportunities.

ultimately have more incentive to collaborate. Convergence across groups thus serves as an essential element for collective action.

Building a convergence across groups requires certain conditions. For groups to converge, they need to believe that it is better to collaborate than to confront each other. They need to trust in the fundamentals of the system in which they operate, even if they still distrust the motivations of other groups. Convergence across groups also needs to persist over time: although groups may converge in the short term, for example when fighting a war or over-

YEMEN: Convergence around a tradition of dialogue

An important part of Yemeni identity, rooted in tribal traditions, is a culture of dialogue. This tradition of dialogue is a shared intersubjective meaning, in that it provides a point of common reference and a spirit of dialogue and solidarity. The practice of daily qat chewing, in particular, creates a space where ideas can be debated and discussed. This spirit is also present in other “mini-publics,” such as those associated with mosque sermons and lessons, newspapers, radio broadcasts or television, constituting, “lively communities of argument, distinct modes of democratic being and acting in which participants often orient their addresses to and receive information as part of a broader public of anonymous citizens” (Warner 2002 quoted in Wedeen 2008: 3).

This deep tradition of dialogue, as part of a unified national identity, has perhaps been enough to keep the country from falling into full civil war. However, it has not been sufficient to move the society away from fragility. This symbolic national identity, while strong, has not been strong enough to supersede regional loyalties, which remain the most relevant for most Yemenis. Even during times of crisis, the national identity has not been strong enough for people to abandon local identities. As Wedeen (2008:47) notes, “Yemeni nationalists often espoused and continue to create new, more encompassing identifications without abandoning their local interests, their divergent political allegiances (as royalists, republicans, and socialists) or their sense of place.”

Photo: Scott Wallace/The World Bank

throwing a dictator, this type of short-term convergence does not automatically result in social cohesion. A convergence also needs to include a broad range of groups in society. A convergence that is not 'inclusive enough' may create grievances that cause those who are excluded to react, potentially generating more fragility. Finally, convergence needs to be based on some common understanding of the (often subconscious) rules that determine how a society functions – what this study refers to as *inter-subjective meanings*. If the points of convergence include various, qualitatively different, or competing concepts, the convergence is unlikely to last.

Some particular societal dynamics are especially prone to derailing the potential for convergence. These dynamics undermine social cohesion by creating a climate of insecurity and unpredictability. They include, first, pervasive distrust, which generates unpredictability by encouraging self-interested behavior instead of cooperation. Second, chronic violence impedes convergence by eroding social networks and isolating people from each other.

Many times, measures that are expected to indirectly work toward convergence – for example those geared toward increasing economic growth – can actually undermine convergence. It is often assumed that interventions to reduce poverty and generate economic growth will strengthen social cohesion. There are plenty of examples where this has indeed happened, but at least as many examples where it has failed. In truth, the impacts of these interventions can be positive or negative depending on how they interact in a particular context.

Perceptions of injustice across groups can undermine social cohesion

A key finding of this work is that social cohesion is greatly weakened when groups in a society perceive that their situation is un-

fair, or that they have not been treated fairly in the past, compared to other groups. These perceptions of injustice are a critical factor in the success or failure of development interventions. A project or policy outcome may result in equal distribution of resources by objective measures, yet still be perceived as unfair by different groups. This is, in part, because groups differ in their conceptions of fairness. That is, the same development outcome can be perceived as fair, or not, by different groups because of the criteria they use to assess fairness. These perceptions of unjust treatment may correspond with measureable inequalities, such as income inequality, but not always.

The work for this study indicates that it is how people *perceive* the inequalities they experience– as unjust treatment of their group, or not, and how hard it is to effect change – that seems to affect whether the situation will be disruptive for society. The sense that one's group has been mistreated can motivate an individual to act even when that individual would not otherwise have taken action, and even if that person does not suffer injustice directly. The fieldwork for the study suggests certain contextual factors that can exacerbate perceptions of injustice: the rigidity of group identity boundaries, the potential for power groups to manipulate boundaries between groups, historical legacies of social divisions, and the perpetuation of trauma.

Rigid boundaries around group membership can exacerbate perceptions of injustice relative to other groups. This rigidity determines how easily people can move from one group to another. If individuals who are part of a disadvantaged group are not able to affiliate with a different group associated with a more advantageous social or economic position, their perception that they are being treated unjustly can intensify. Some social orders have actively enforced these group boundaries – for example racial slavery in the United States, or the Apar-

HAITI: Hardening of group boundaries over time

Photo: Romel Simon / World Bank

In Haiti, marked divisions between groups remain an important obstacle to building a convergence in society. These divisions have their roots in the post-independence period. The most obvious division that exists in Haitian society today is between blacks and mulattos (lighter skinned progeny of white plantation owners in colonized Haiti and their slaves). This division is, in the words of one of Haiti's ablest thinkers (Jenkins, 2002), Alcuis Charmant "the supreme evil of our Republic and virus that ravages it, and the road to its ruin (quoted in Jenkins, 2002).

The mulattos from the colonial period were part of the elite – a notch above the black – economically well-off and better educated as compared to the

blacks, as the plantation owners usually educated their progeny and often signed over land titles to them. Therefore, in spite of institutional discrimination against them, many mulattos became wealthy landowners, establishing themselves as a viable class. Consequently, after independence, mulattos established themselves as well-off urban-based traders in export commodities while blacks became self-reliant horticulturalists who took up residence in the mountains (Fick, 1990).

Over time, these distinctions originally based on phenotype became firmly enshrined in the Haitian economic and social order. In today's Haiti, the elite class is separated from the poor majority by language, culture, religion and economic status. Creole remains the dominant language among the majority, while French is viewed as the language of the Haitian elite. With out-migration, English is also gaining prominence among the Diaspora. Similarly, the division across religion also runs along the line of class and color. Voodoo – an amalgam of the animist cults of West Africa infused with Catholic ritual – is the dominant system of belief in Haiti. The elite, however, proclaim their adherence to Christianity (Jenkins, 2002). Consequently, Haiti has become divided into lighter-skinned, urban, economically well-off, educated, French-speaking, dominantly Christian class and black, rural, poor, Creole speaking class who predominantly believe in Voodoo. These divisions between the 'haves' and 'have-nots' were further reinforced by external intervention (specifically the American Occupation's favoring of lighter-skinned elite in Haitian politics) and by Haitian political actors who have either mobilized popular resentment among the majority (black) population, or served to preserve power among the lighter-skinned elite.

Given the rigidity of the Haitian social order, it is virtually impossible for a person born into the poorer group to fathom joining the elite. As recently as 1990, the Haitian civil registry was still issuing two distinct birth certificates designating citizens as either paysan (peasant) or citadin (urban-dweller/elite). This rigidity remains a serious source of social fragmentation, particularly among youth.

heid system of South Africa. In other cases, this is not systematic, but more subtle, as in the case of the Roma in Eastern and Central Europe.

Rigid boundaries around group identity often contribute to the internalization of stigma. Groups that have suffered discrimination and deprivation over time may come to accept this injustice as inevitable and unchangeable. It often takes an external trigger event to provoke a rethinking of this kind of systematic discrimination. For example, the Indian caste system was internalized for centuries by most of society. Social cohesion was strong among lower castes, even as they were marginalized from broader society. Increased contact with other cultures with globalization, however, has sparked some questioning of the caste system, which has threatened social cohesion between different classes.

The perception that one's group has suffered unjust treatment by others may create more social cohesion within the group, which can have positive and negative outcomes. This process tends to reduce competition within the group, and often means that members are more likely to make personal sacrifices for the group. When they see their primary possibilities for social or economic advancement to be linked to the advancement of the group as a whole, they may be more likely to engage in collective action toward these ends. This can take non-violent forms, such as the Civil Rights movement in the United States, or the Indian independence movement. However, if groups increasingly define themselves in opposition to other groups – that is, if the identity built on the perception of injustice becomes a factor that isolates them from other groups – the outcomes are more likely to be social fragmentation and violence.

The markers that differentiate groups, which become the impetus for perceptions of injustice by identifying an out-group, evolve over time. It is not only the 'natural' markers, such

as ethnicity, religion and race, which define the boundaries between identity groups. These boundaries also evolve through interactions between groups. This process is illustrated by the case of Haiti (see text box).

The dynamism of group identity boundaries implies that both the process of group formation and the markers that divide the group from others can be manipulated. This manipulation usually touches on some feeling of injustice toward other groups or toward the state. History is thick with accounts of power elites drawing on inter-group tensions to foment resentment against particular groups, usually in an effort to gain or hold on to political power.

As inter-group tensions rise, any action by other groups that is perceived as an infringement on group identity has the tendency to add to the sense of injustice in members of that group. These infringements only add fuel to the fire for political actors hoping to capitalize on the hardening of group boundaries. Threats to a group's language, religious beliefs or culture can be especially destructive for social cohesion. The case of Aceh illustrates this in the accompanying text box.

Events in history, and specifically incidents that have caused trauma, seem to have a particularly important effect on perceptions of injustice. Colonization, for example, has shaped the relationship among citizens and between citizens and the state in a large number of countries around the world. In other countries, a history of state oppression has made it very difficult for certain groups of citizens to trust the state.

The experience of trauma by groups, if left unaddressed, is a powerful vehicle for deepening perceptions of injustice across groups. Trauma deepens divisions in society in several ways. First, it impacts trust by transforming the

ACEH: Infringements on group identity fueled conflict

Photo: Curt Carnemark / World Bank

Photo: Ray Witlin / World Bank

Photo: Ray Witlin / World Bank

The Free Aceh Movement (GAM) rebellion began in 1976, aiming to secure the territory's independence from Indonesia. The Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), signed by representatives of GAM and the Government of Indonesia in August 2005 brought an end to the GAM's separatist rebellion. Under the MoU, extensive autonomy was granted to Aceh and supporters of the former guerilla movement were able to run for local government office. A vast literature on the Aceh conflict agrees that the swell of support for the Free Aceh Movement that drove the conflict came from the feelings of injustice that Acehnese felt against the Indonesian government primarily relating to economic discrimination. As the conflict progressed, the behavior employed by the state to curb unrest in the area reinforced these feelings of injustice, creating a strong perception, "among many Acehnese that they have repeatedly been treated unjustly, betrayed and deceived by the Indonesian state" (Aspinall, 2010: 17). Violence committed by security forces against movement supporters served only to further reinforce the movement's cohesion. The prior history of conflict in Aceh, the stock of historical myths and hardened identities that this history provided reinforced these perceptions of injustices, and in turn reinforced the identities themselves.

These feelings of antagonism against the state were evident from the field work that was conducted for this report. An female ex-combatant in a focus group in Pidie – an area that experienced massive violence during the conflict – expressed her feeling of injustice, which led her to participate in the conflict, as follows, "The issue of injustice was an important cause of tensions between Aceh and Jakarta. Jakarta did not keep most of its promises, which triggered the disappointment among Acehnese." During an interview, a leader of the Free Aceh Movement also expressed this issue of injustice and reiterated that injustice toward the Acehnese by the Indonesian government was one of the main drivers of conflict. He also stated that the Helsinki MoU and subsequent peace settlement has acknowledged these injustices, and is therefore a first step toward peaceful coexistence.

relationships both in the public sphere (between groups, between society and the state and within communities) as well as the private sphere (within families, between generations). Trauma can also contribute to the increase of harmful behavioral patterns, such as rape, domestic violence and the general normalization of violence, as people re-enact the traumatic events.

Trauma can deepen perceptions of injustice, hardening the distinctions groups draw between “us” and “them.” These perceptions become embedded in the way traumatic events are remembered. Narratives can be constructed around traumatic events that paint them as attacks against group identity, and mobilize a deep sense of injustice against the enemy group. These narratives may be used to justify revenge against other groups in order to restore the group’s honor or dignity. In some cases, master narratives of violence are entwined in nation-building processes and become central to national identity. Such processes serve to reinforce inter-group cohesion, but they also create deep divisions with those who are excluded from the narrative. Trauma can thus be both a source of cohesion as well as fragility.

Improving the quality of interactions between institutions can strengthen social cohesion

Much attention has been devoted in development policy and research to the strength and effectiveness of institutions. The study probed this issue, and found that, **in general, people were less affected by the effectiveness of individual institutions than they were by the quality of interactions between them.** This was particularly the case regarding interactions between customary and state institutions. In many cases a particular institution may be quite effective in serving its particular function, yet be unable to interact constructively with the state system. These unconstructive interactions

have a cumulative effect in reinforcing divisions between different groups in society.

In Aceh, the study documented the perception that formal and customary institutions have integrated their functions so as to interact constructively most of the time. These constructive interactions hold great potential to reinforce convergence across groups. Customary institutions (*adat*) in Aceh play an important role in coordinating communities’ social life. In the post-Suharto era, a series of laws were passed that granted special autonomy to Aceh. In this context, *adat* institutions were revived and recognized by the state. This recognition implied the state paying the leaders of *adat* a stipend, providing them with equipment (for example, motor bikes) and formalizing their role in dispute resolution. Perceived positive effects associated with these changes included an increase in the flow of resources to communities, and a broadening of the jurisdictions for customary institutions. For example, the formalization of the customary role of the Sea Commander was perceived to have a positive aspect on the community life. The Sea Commander can now resolve disputes in which the conflicting parties belong to other villages with the help of state authorities.

At the same time, there were tradeoffs in the loss of discretion in decision-making when customary laws were codified into formal law in Aceh. It was perceived that much of the specific context would be lost in this process, because formal law would need to apply standardized rules for particular offenses, instead of allowing for considerations such as the relationship between the parties in a dispute, or the harm done to the community by a particular action.

In the other four field sites, more problematic interactions were observed between state and customary institutions. In Liberia, the existence of two parallel systems of customary and state law provoked confusion about which

Forum Shopping in Liberia

At the time of Liberia's founding two different sets of systems of laws were recognized in the constitution – statutory law that was to govern 'civilized' Americo-Liberians and missionaries, and customary laws to govern 'natives,' non-Christian, indigenous Africans. The natives could not access statutory law and, conversely, village chiefs could not adjudicate a dispute to which an Americo-Liberian was a party. Although the constitution, statutory laws and common law of the formal legal system now apply to all Liberians, the customary Rules and Regulations Governing the Hinterland still refer to the adjudication of cases for 'civilized people' and 'natives' (International Crisis Group, 2006: 7). The dual nature of the legal system is recognized within current statutory law.

The fieldwork for this study revealed that the competing existence of these two forms of law has resulted in a great deal of legal ambiguity about the role of the customary legal system and its place in Liberia's overall justice sector. The fieldwork for this study documented similar dynamics. People in the communities recognize that there are two types of laws. However, many Liberians do not understand formal statutory law. Seminar participants stressed that the parallel existence of customary and formal institutions allows the powerful to choose the system that best serves their interest for a given issue, while others have fewer alternatives.

Liberian customary land tenure is based on three fundamental concepts. The first concept is that customary group connection to specific land areas in Liberia is based on the idea of early and later arrivals. The distinction between groups (including their descendents) who arrived first in certain areas of the country, and the chronology of the founding of particular settlements versus those who arrived later, is a primary customary land concept that serves as a foundation for other customary legal arbitration in relation to land. Such descent laws are then used to exclude outsiders or restrict in certain ways their rights to land. First-comers in this context are believed to have almost ultimate legitimacy in a customary sense, to rights to land. In many cases this concept provides the basis for those in the first-comer group to make laws affecting the transfer of land, inclusion and exclusion of others, and what rights various segments of local inhabitants have and do not have; such as the right to build houses, farm, plant trees and bury the dead. The second postulate that sets customary belief apart from formal institutions is that land cannot be subdivided or inherited privately, and that lineage lands belong to the dead, living and unborn. Under this arrangement, land rights are vested in communities and are prohibited from sale.

Statutory law does not recognize these principles. For example, the ownership of land by a group or clan is not recognized by the state just because that group had settled on that land. The provisions in statutory law claimed that land that was owned by 'native' Liberians according to customary institutions actually belonged to the state, when land had clearly been occupied and used for a long time under customary law. Therefore, the land was 'public' or 'non-private.' According to the statutory law, therefore, this land could be sold by the state for various purposes.

The inherent conflicts between the two systems have created deep and volatile animosity between people who prefer or refer to different systems of law. The parallel existence of different forms of law also created ambiguity, which in turn allowed opportunism, manipulation, and expropriation through conversion of 'non-private' holdings into private holdings.

system to use, and reinforced the disadvantages of marginalized groups who did not clearly understand the workings of the formal system. The problem of ‘forum shopping’ was also observed, as people chose to take a dispute to the system they had best access to, or that was most likely to rule in their favor, often resulting in competing rulings. The accompanying text box describes this in more detail.

In Yemen, problems of the loss of accountability were observed, resulting from the cooptation of customary leaders into the formal state system. In this case, tribal sheiks were brought into the formal system and awarded stipends, access to land and other privileges in exchange for their loyalty to the central government. The sheiks were effectively converted into representatives of the state to their communities, whereas previously, their power had derived exclusively from the support of their constituents. This dynamic had the effect of isolating the sheiks from their communities, and reinforcing divides between the state and social groups.

Finally, the collapse of both customary and state institutions was observed in CAR and Haiti, leaving people without recourse for resolving disputes, obtaining basic services and other needs. In both cases the weakness of state institutions stemmed from the legacy of slavery and a history of a predatory, extractive state presence in much of the country. In CAR, the resurgence of the use of witchcraft was seen as a consequence of weak formal institutions and declining informal institutions, such as the *Nganga*, that previously had been able to keep the predatory use of witchcraft in check.

In Haiti, a general avoidance and distrust of the state was observed as people sought to protect themselves. As in CAR, Haitians have over time developed a strong distrust and skepticism toward the state. Generally speaking, “average citizens from all walks of life are more likely to seek to protect themselves

from such [state] institutions, rather than to approach them either as putative service providers or good-faith arbiters in everyday affairs,” (INURED 2011: 19). The idea that the state is something one must guard against comes from a historical role of the state as an outsider, and as an extractive presence.

The avoidance of the state by many Haitians is rooted in a legacy of a predatory state presence. Contact between many Haitians and the state in the past was limited to the presence of the military, as an instrument of control and surveillance, and government tax collectors. Both were understandably unpopular. These functionaries have since been replaced by local, elected representatives, and there is a perception that things have improved as a result. However, even with these improvements, the average Haitian perceives little benefit in terms of resource distribution, as the proceeds from decentralization are quite small, or may be siphoned off for uses other than the intended ones. In addition, there is a sense that new political processes intended to increase popular participation have instead simply replicated the top-down approaches of the past. The scarce presence of the national police in many rural areas is sometimes perceived as evidence of the limited and strained interactions with state institutions (INURED 2011).

Civil society institutions potentially have an important role to play in fragile situations, by improving the quality of interactions between customary and state institutions. Civil society is a very heterogeneous category and will reflect a diversity of views, motivations and capabilities in a particular context. They occupy a middle ground between customary and state institutions. In the best case scenario, they can bring people together around interests, purposes and values, thus creating links among individuals and groups across social and cultural cleavages. In fragile situations, this important

Institutional breakdown in CAR

In CAR the state and the customary institutions are both weak, leaving large gaps in service delivery, conflict resolution and mechanisms for collective action. The state has a long history of predation, reaching back to the 17th and 18th centuries, with the slave trading kingdoms situated in present day CAR and nearby regions, and continuing through a particularly oppressive colonial order. For much of its history, the main state presence in CAR has been in the form of armed men representing central authority at the local level - rendering justice, resolving disputes and being paid and fed in exchange. The population learned how to handle this presence over time, by escaping, or by negotiating a variety of arrangements with authority that looked like anything but a social contract.

In these circumstances the interaction between the customary systems and the state today is extremely weak. The state has made some attempts to expand its reach by formalizing the local chieftaincy system, but in practice the system works in a very imperfect fashion. To a certain extent, both the state and the customary systems are too weak, especially in rural areas, to interact efficiently, leaving many local problems unresolved.

One manifestation of the weakness of both customary and state systems to resolve local problems in a constructive manner is the increasing use of witchcraft. In the fieldwork, there was sense that this resurgence of witchcraft -itself a product of a deep institutional void - was overwhelming the capacity of customary institutions to deal with its negative effects. In the past, witchcraft had been used, but there were informal systems in place to handle allegations of witchcraft and resolve the underlying conflicts. People complained that, now, the traditional chiefs had disappeared and were replaced by people with much less legitimacy and ability to resolve the problems of the community. There was a sense that the traditional healers, the Nganga, were no longer able to effectively address witchcraft and other social problems because they themselves had lost their knowledge. This lack of social regulation of witchcraft allows people to prey on each other and made some groups particularly vulnerable, especially women and children.

role is often de-prioritized because of the need to employ civil society organizations to help deliver essential services.

Rigid relationships in society that cannot adapt to rapid social change are a source of fragmentation in society

Globalization, urbanization, and technological innovations are just a few of the factors creating rapid changes in contexts around the world. **The speed of change caused by some of these**

emerging issues can affect relationships between groups, potentially negatively impacting social cohesion. Rapid change seems to impact certain types of relationships more than others. For example, rapid change is often also linked to migration, whether it be forced migration/displacement, or economic migration. Migration itself changes the societal dynamics in a context, putting groups of individuals together that may have not interacted in the past. As groups start to interact, they may or may not share common understandings or ideas of where their community should be headed, or

about the rights and responsibilities of people living in a specific place. These new interactions can (at least initially) create perceptions of injustice or unfairness as local populations expect things to remain as they were and new populations have different expectations. The interaction between these different groups can also create demands that existing institutions may not meet, either because of a lack of capacity or because of a lack of mechanisms for these institutions to serve the needs of different populations.

Rapid changes also affect the relationship between youth and elders. In traditional settings, especially, roles and expectations of people in different age groups are largely predefined. Socialization processes can be rigid and based on local norms. As a context changes and exposure to outside influences increases, however, youth may also change their expectations and may want different roles in their communities. This can create rifts between young people and elders, as elders believe that the young still have to “pay their dues” and follow the rules, while young people demand change and may even decide to take action to make those changes possible. It is particularly problematic when youth decide to participate in alternative forms of socialization that are problematic. Young people, for example, sometimes join gangs or other armed groups in an effort to transition to adulthood in alternative ways.

Just as with generational power relationships, **rapid social changes often deliver powerful shocks to existing gender power dynamics.** In many fragile situations, the structures governing gender norms are too rigid to adapt effectively to rapid social change. In these contexts, the rules that regulate how men and women interact are in flux or are directly challenged, which can be very disruptive for society. In some cases this is because the economic role of men as providers is challenged by shifts in the global economy. In others, the challenges

come from exposure to other systems of gender norms, as people travel more and are exposed to other cultures through the expansion of global communication technologies.

These challenges to gender roles create important opportunities, but also leave men and women vulnerable, in different ways. The growing economic empowerment and independence of women can be a huge achievement for families and societies. In many cases families adapt smoothly to the shifting power dynamics. However, if women’s economic and social empowerment is perceived to come at the expense of men’s economic and social status, it can provoke a sense of injustice by men against women, and potentially fuel a backlash.

IV. Strategic Recommendations

Viewing the problem of fragility from the perspective of societal dynamics opens up many possibilities for programming in fragile situations. **In particular, this approach calls for targeting interventions beyond the state, to address fragile relationships across groups in society.** This is, perhaps, more easily said than done. The dominant approach to fragile situations – that of building core state capacities – is well-established among donors and policymakers. The tools available to practitioners are designed to work with the state as the central actor in fragile situations. Expanding the focus to give more attention to societal dynamics will require adapting these tools where possible, and developing new ones.

This study advocates for an approach to fragile situations that recognizes social cohesion as a clear objective of development policies. Resumption of growth and reducing poverty are important but not sufficient, and policies to support growth and poverty reduction will not succeed if they also do not contribute to social cohesion. Working towards improved social cohesion requires ensuring that perceptions of injustice and unfairness are addressed, and also creating space to facilitate constructive connections between institutions, especially customary and traditional structures, as well as civil society institutions.

Researching Societal Dynamics

The focus on societal dynamics needs to be based on solid research. Research in fragile

environments is understandably challenging, given unreliability of data and other difficulties. **Understanding the dynamics at play will require asking a different set of questions than are normally asked, to focus on the fundamentals of how a society ‘works.’** This means asking questions about the elements that divide or bring people together in society, and the historical factors that have created or worsened these relationships. It requires looking at the state as one actor among many in the society, instead of using the state as a point of departure.

A society-centered approach sits at the intersection of political and social analysis. Political economy analysis is increasingly being seen as a very relevant analytical tool in fragile environments to capture the interactions between political and economic processes, especially the distribution of power and wealth between different groups, and their impacts on fragile (and non-fragile) situations. In fragile environments, however, the nature of societal dynamics is complex and multi-layered, which necessitates going beyond political economy analysis to include social analysis as well. Ideally, both types of analysis should be carried out together, in order to inform one another.

Some research tools may be particularly useful, in order to get at the layers of dynamics that are at play in a particular society. In some cases participatory methods may be useful in getting people to articulate their own perceptions and place them in historical context. Depending on cultural context, people may prefer to speak in groups or as individuals, and

this needs to be assessed in each environment. In some cases the composition of interview or focus groups will need to reflect divisions in society (for example by gender, or age, or ethnicity) while in others it may be more useful or possible for groups to mix. Regardless of the specific tools used, it will be important to combine different methods and triangulate them in the analysis in order to capture the different dynamics at play.

Addressing Perceptions of Injustice across Groups

Taking measures to address perceptions of injustice of some groups relative to others is important in building social cohesion. When groups perceive they are being treated unfairly, they may feel little incentive to build relationships with other groups. These perceptions may correspond to measurable inequalities across groups, such as income inequality, but not always. Perceptions of injustice can also be related to feelings of being disrespected by other groups, whether for their culture, their race or other differences. These feelings of being treated unjustly and/or disrespected can be immensely socially disruptive for society overall. It is equally important for practitioners to be aware that they bring their own biases and perceptions about what is fair and just to their work, and these may not align with the perceptions of the communities where they work.

Perceptions of injustice can be more effectively addressed when people have access to means of resolving conflict that are in line with how they assess fairness and justice. In contrast to the Western conception of justice based on individual rights, most traditional justice mechanisms are driven by the need to maintain social order and the continuity of life in the community. The scope of the resolution of a conflict usually extends beyond individual perpetrators and victims to include their fami-

lies, and redress mechanisms may focus more on addressing the particular harm done than on punishment. Inserting other conceptions of justice into dispute resolution mechanisms - for example, those based on individual litigation - may be ineffective at best. At worst it can increase dissatisfaction and prolong conflicts.

Accommodating different ideas of what is fair means engaging the most helpful elements of different justice and conflict resolution practices. This will necessarily involve engaging customary dispute resolution mechanisms, where they are important for people. Some groups will prefer to approach state institutions to resolve conflict, and others will seek out customary mechanisms. It can be helpful to clearly articulate the type of matters that are expected to be resolved via the formal legal system, and the accompanying procedures, and to clearly define the relationship of customary authorities with state structures. Rather than applying a set of reforms at once, it can be useful to strategically engage some aspects of customary structures—at least in the initial stages of the engagement. This incremental approach, which respects customary traditions and incorporates both punitive and restorative aspects in its articulation, can provide the necessary legitimacy to the reform effort, and open the door for broader engagement.

It is also important to address the perceptions people have of the overall social and economic environment. Perceptions of injustice often arise from the sense that the disadvantages groups face are structural in nature. In contexts of high social inequality, people from disadvantaged groups come to feel that no matter what they do as individuals, they will not be able to surmount the structural obstacles their group faces. Even those individuals who are able to achieve some social and economic mobility may still identify strongly with the disadvantaged group and be motivated to act on its behalf.

The NGO Association Des Femmes Juristes in CAR

The association is a group of women with training in law who assist poor and often illiterate women in obtaining a fair trial. They help mediate between various systems of justice, provide access to the formal system if possible, and if not, ensure that women have a fair trial through local mechanisms. By mediating between the formal justice system and traditional mechanisms for conflict resolution, this NGO helps provide more culturally appropriate and accessible means of addressing conflicts. In effect, the NGO creates a space for women as individuals or as groups to voice their concerns and help them navigate various systems of conflict resolution.

Directed action to address inequalities across groups can send a strong signal to the affected groups and other groups that things are going to change. The type of actions to be taken will depend on the causes of the perceptions that need to be addressed. Many times this will involve improving service delivery to populations that have not had adequate coverage in the past. In other cases, it may involve building more inclusive systems to increase tolerance for languages or cultures that have historically been excluded. Whatever the measures to be taken, it is important to accompany such actions with public campaigns or consultations in which the state can explain the rationale behind the policies, and get feedback on potential unintended consequences.

Taking action to address perceptions of injustice may mean preferential treatment of a particular group in the short term, to ad-

dress past injustices. For example, in a post-conflict situation, governments and donors often begin reconstruction by targeting the areas that suffered the most direct damage to infrastructure and services. However, it may also be worthwhile to include some programs that benefit groups that incurred less damage, if these actions can help to address perceptions of injustice.

Employing participatory processes in service delivery can go a long way toward striking a balance between effectiveness and fairness. Participation mechanisms help in giving a stronger sense of participation in the broader society by marginalized groups. There are many reasons why providing top-down services without the participation of the local population threatens to reduce the effectiveness of services and the population's sense of fairness. Without participation, there is less opportunity and means to adapt the services to the needs of the beneficiaries, and to reflect the cultural and social particularities of the group.

Accommodating diverse identities can go a long way in addressing group-based perceptions of injustice. Steps can be taken to develop the necessary social infrastructure that can accommodate diversity and promote tolerance in society. Often, these start with building more inclusive language and education policy. Projects that support an inclusive view of history in the education system, that encourage teachers to teach in a way that respects various minority cultures, can go a long way to reduce fragility. This means not to reinvent the past, but to describe the past in a balanced way, for example by trying to explain various groups' positions, avoiding stereotypes in teaching history, and training teachers in inclusive curricula.

Many countries have also found it useful to build monuments, museums, cultural centers, and generate official dialogue that acknowledges the contribution of certain

groups to the nation. This approach has been actively used in the United States to support inclusion of the African-American population, for instance. In cases in which minorities have been oppressed, or even massacred, integrating various groups' history into education and official documentation is a very important step toward greater cohesion.

Healing trauma is also necessary in addressing perceptions of injustice. Many times, perceptions of injustice are deeply rooted in trauma experienced by groups. Trauma can be a powerful source of division in society, and interventions to heal trauma across groups can go a long way in building social cohesion. Healing trauma must necessarily begin with establishing a minimum of security for affected groups.

Restoring livelihoods can also be a key part of healing trauma and mending divisions across groups. In many cases, the loss of livelihood often associated with traumatic events, especially violence, becomes part of the experienced trauma. This is particularly strong for displaced populations, who lose part of their identity as they are forced to leave their place of residence, but also lose access to their means of making a living. They may find themselves in new environments that are hostile to them, and where they lack the needed skills or social networks to enter the job market. Some projects have had successful outcomes in looking for ways to address the needs of the larger community within which the affected group is located, so as not to be seen as favoring an affected group. Such initiatives can also be more effective if they mobilize affected groups in ways that integrate them into the broader community and society.

Improving the Quality of Interactions across Institutions

One of the defining features of fragile settings is that institutions connect only weakly

with each other, or connect in antagonistic relationships that undermine effectiveness. **A key function of state institutions is to facilitate dialogue across groups in society, and provide an overarching framework for those interactions.** There are plenty of examples where states have deepened divides in society by not playing this role well, for example through capture of grass-roots organizations by political actors, withholding information as a means of maintaining power, or by playing different institutions against each other, to name a few. However, where states *do* play this role well, it can help synchronize the efforts of different institutions so that they don't work at cross purposes. Of course, the state cannot do this alone. Civil society organizations play a key role as well, as do customary institutions and the private sector.

Multicultural Education Reform in Papua New Guinea

In 1993, the Department of Education of Papua New Guinea implemented educational reforms that introduced native language instruction for the first year of school. By 2001, 369 indigenous languages were introduced in the program, and a third of elementary school children began education in their native tongues. Although the success of the program in improving overall education levels in PNG is largely anecdotal at this point, it has demonstrably increased educational access and resulted in lower drop-out particularly among female students. Lower secondary school enrollments doubled, and upper secondary numbers quadrupled over the decade following the introduction of the reform (Litteral 2004). The reform has the potential to improve social cohesion by providing a sense of belonging to the multitude of tribal groups making up the country.

Improving overall security to address trauma in Aceh

Three decades of civil war in Aceh, Indonesia, claimed up to 30,000 lives and resulted in US\$ 10.7 billion of economic damages and losses (MSR 2010). The impacts of violence on communities' mental well being is shown by two comprehensive studies conducted by IOM and Harvard Medical School shortly after a peace agreement brought the war to an end in 2005 (Good et al 2006). The studies show just how profound the effects of the conflict were on civilians in Aceh. The first assessment randomly sampled 596 adult respondents in 30 villages in three high conflict districts. Seventy-eight percent of the sample reported having lived through combat experiences, 38 percent had had to flee from burning buildings in their community, 41 percent reported that a family member or friend had been killed, and 45 percent reported having their property confiscated or destroyed. Twenty-five percent of men and 11 percent of women reported being tortured, and 36 percent of men (14 percent of women) were attacked by a gun or knife.

These experiences led to massive levels of psychosocial trauma of a similar level to that observed in post-conflict Bosnia or Afghanistan. There was a highly significant relationship between the number of traumatic events experienced and both depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. The youngest (17-29) and oldest (54 and above) were at the highest risk. The second study, conducted six months later in July 2006, extended the research to another eleven districts in Aceh. It found that even in 'lower conflict' areas, experience of traumatic events was very high.

A comparison between the two studies also shows the impact of increased security on psychological symptoms. In February 2006, the first study indicated that 47% of respondents reported seeing perpetrators of crime and violence (pelaku kejahatan) as a continuing stressor, and 30% reported experiencing physical or psychological attacks or threats (penyerangan) and 21% robbery (perampokan) since the peace agreement. Despite the cessation of formal conflict, continued insecurity remained a challenge to recovery of individuals and communities (Good et al 2006). The second study, conducted

in July 2006, after security had drastically improved, suggested that with increased security and reduced levels of current stressors, general psychological symptoms and collective anxiety were reduced significantly. This did not mean that signs of trauma related to past experiences of trauma had disappeared but individuals were able to start moving forward (DelVecchio et al 2007).

Source: Pouligny (2010)

Photo: Curt Carnemark / World Bank

Institutions, especially well-functioning state institutions, play an important role in mediating across different groups in society.

Mediation is understood as providing spaces, mechanisms or, more broadly, institutions that allow for different groups to address their differences peacefully and to build convergence. This role includes conflict resolution, but is not limited to it. It will undoubtedly look different in different contexts, because it involves bridging different inter-subjective meanings, different values and views of the world, as well as political interests and power competitions.

There are some very practical operational approaches that can support mediation.

Building on the existing spaces where mediation happens in a particular context is fundamental. For example, in many places, markets for selling food and other goods are an extremely important space for mediation. Other options involve creating spaces for dialogue and mediation as permanent features of local and central government structures in the form of consultative councils, permanent mechanisms for citizen's consultation, or support for activities that involve various socio-cultural groups in discussing public policy issues. Mediators can be NGOs, local leaders or people working for local government agencies, but ideally will be people or organizations that are cognizant of the various inter-subjective meaning systems at play and can help bridge from one to the other (such mediators are used in Afghanistan's National Solidarity Program, for example). These mediators can be indispensable in helping project managers engage internal societal dynamics, and ensure that some sub-groups that might not have voice have a way to express themselves.

Local governance interventions have a central role to play in building trust between state and society, creating a sense of justice and fairness, and improving connections between institutions. In fragile environments, the central state system is usually too far away

and their representatives too disconnected from local realities to be able to create the basic trust to establish a sense of rights and responsibilities in relation to the state. Community Driven Development (CDD) operations can play an important role in improving local governance, when they are designed based on a vision for local governance and when they help establish a framework for local institutions to grow and establish bridges in a way that is inclusive and responds to the real needs of the population. An example is the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (see text box).

CDD programs need to start by understanding and addressing the most pressing needs of communities, which may not always be service delivery (as is often assumed).

Of course some of these needs will focus on getting clean water, having access to health centers and sending children to schools. But other issues have to do with identity and social networks, and thus involve less tangible, but no less important, project goals and outcomes. The fieldwork for this study showed that resolving local conflicts, especially disputes over land and conflict within families were important priorities. Basic security – feeling safe within one's neighborhood or community – was another important need.

Embedding conflict resolution into CDD design and implementation can help strengthen relationships in communities.

In the more successful CDD projects, mediators/facilitators are often in the community to facilitate interactions between groups and institutions. Specific redress mechanisms to handle disputes that occur over project implementation appear to be fundamental in building confidence and increasing ownership over the interventions.

Creating positive interactions between institutions requires a variety of different measures.

First, it requires that spaces be created for mediation and voice. The space should allow for various institutions to connect positively

Community Mobilization and Institution Building - The Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund

Launched in 1999, the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF) is an autonomous, private sector organization with a mandate from the Government of Pakistan to alleviate poverty in the country. PPAF is designed to reduce poverty and empower the rural and urban poor in Pakistan through the provision of resources and services to the poor, especially women. This is being achieved through an integrated approach that includes building institutions of the poor and then providing them with micro-credit loans, grants for small scale infrastructure projects, training and skill development and social sector interventions. The PPAF has already provided 1.9 million micro-credit loans; 16,000 grant supported community infrastructure schemes and provided capacity building for 232,000 individuals in skill development and managerial training.

The PPAF has established strong outreach mechanisms at the village level by building partnerships with more than 70 partner organizations that have in turn organized over 92,000 community organizations in 32,000 villages/rural and urban settlements in 112 districts of the country. The PPAF has a strong focus on engagement and empowerment of the most vulnerable and marginalized. Partner organizations are given the responsibility to ensure that every community they work with also develops human and institutional capacity through the creation of community organizations that are led and managed by members. Organizations work with community leaders, tribal leaders, sadars, and landlords to reach the ultra poor households in their communities. Communities are also required to support the formation and subsequent activities of women's groups as well as youth related projects and activities. The PPAF continues to sensitize its partner organizations and encourage them to facilitate linkages between community organizations and the various tiers of local government. Synergies developed between the community organizations and public sector programs are expected to help efforts to alleviate poverty. The PPAF and its partner organizations are positioning community organizations to further leverage resources from local government programs.

Sources: *Project Appraisal Document on the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund Project III*; <http://go.worldbank.org/10Q8EAFMCO>; and the letter from CEO of PPAF, Qazi Azmat Isa

Photo: Curt Carnemark / World Bank

Photo: Curt Carnemark / World Bank

and in a way that leads to positive collective action. Opening space for mediation is not easy, and requires time and imagination. Rethinking approaches to local governance and CDD so that it contributes directly to an improved connection between various types of institutions is central. Many CDD operations are based on principles that do not support the essential role of strengthening local institutions and creating spaces for mediations. This would require focusing less on delivery of services and much more on strengthening local governance and supporting the local level institutions than matter for the people on conflict management, local decision-making and other issues. Finally, it requires supporting civil society, as it plays an essential role in strengthening a sense of citizenship and improving the state-society relationship.

Civil society has a central role to play in connecting people to the state, and supporting this role should be prioritized in fragile situations. In fragile situations, civil society organizations are often the only – and/or the most effective – actors that can connect to communities in fragile situations. In some cases their human resources and infrastructure rival that of the government, and their relationships with communities are often closer. In the name of efficiency, donors often capitalize on this capacity by contracting civil society organizations to deliver services to communities. Yet over the long term, this tendency can stretch the limited resources of such organizations and hinder them from playing their larger role in connecting the state with its citizens. Local experts from civil society organizations may be trained by donors in vital tasks for this role, only to be lured away to work for international organizations with higher salaries, causing a brain drain from local civil society. In addition, with few human and financial resources at their disposal, civil society organizations in fragile situations are often vulnerable to co-optation by power elites.

Civil society organizations should be encouraged to play the most important role of connecting individual and group across the fractures that exist in society and with the state. For donors to prioritize this role for civil society presents potential tradeoffs in terms of service delivery, but promises a much more enabling environment for service delivery in the long run. Donors can support this important role through specific measures, such as building communications infrastructure, strengthening the capacity of civil society to use media such as radio stations and newspapers, and even improving transportation infrastructure. Other supportive interventions could include pushing for greater accountability of the state through participatory budgeting, transparency in resource allocation, and similar measures.

Improving the quality of interactions between institutions also includes building the capacity of the state to engage productively with groups in society. In much of the donor emphasis on state building in fragile settings, this capacity is often given less attention. Yet the evidence from this study and others shows over and over that this capacity is fundamental to building the kind of relationships in society that can support an effective state.

Fragile relationships between society and the state are exacerbated in places where the state has acted in ways that have deepened social divisions historically. Where states have engaged in predatory behavior, authoritarian policies, pitting different groups against each other, exclusion of certain groups, and other divisive measures, trust needs to be rebuilt. In many conflicts the state is one of the main perpetrators of violence, and the associated trauma from this can cause divisions that span generations, even centuries. The state might be captured by some social dynamics, operating according to rules of a specific group. It can be highly influenced by some customary institutions such as secret societies in Africa

Colombia's Victims Law: Reaffirming the Social Contract between State and Citizens

One of the main constraints for economic growth, development, and inclusion in Colombia is the protracted armed conflict that has affected the country for several decades. Some of the most vulnerable are the estimated 3.7 million internally displaced people.¹ Colombia ranks second worldwide for the number of IDPs after Sudan. Most IDPs live in extreme poverty, having been forced to migrate to large cities after losing their land, savings, assets, sources of livelihoods, and socioeconomic networks.

Photo: Charlotte Kesi / World Bank

To address this issue, the Administration of President Santos has passed a new Victims Law (2011) that addresses the restitution of IDPs assets, primarily land. This represents a major departure from past administrations' approach by asserting the role of the state as the provider of justice to the victims of conflict and on addressing land rights as one of the main triggers of past and current violence. The law also introduces the concept of collective reparation and recognizes the relevance of increasing provision of social services and livelihoods rehabilitation in areas of return/

integration of displaced people. The Colombian government has also prepared an ambitious rural development plan to promote formalization of property rights (among other things) in rural areas (to be presented to parliament over the summer) as an essential complement to the implementation of the Victim's Law.

Through this law, the Colombian government aims to go beyond merely addressing the humanitarian needs of IDPs, to restore and strengthen the social contract with citizens, and to reestablish the state presence as a guarantor of the rights of citizens. The law also sends a message that justice will be provided to victims of displacement, and that land seizures will not be tolerated.

The World Bank has played an important role in developing institutional capacities that will now support the implementation of the Victims Law, including the Protection of Patrimonial Assets of IDPs Project, funded through the State and Peace Building Fund. During the first phase of the project, methodologies, procedures, and tools for the protection of land of displaced people were designed and tested in five violence-affected regions of the country.

or clan organizations in the Middle East. Unless the state strives to operate by rules that are more neutral to different groups, it will not be able to establish a relationship with society that will be legitimate.

In building state capacity to engage society, several points are important. First, state institutions tend to respond positively to high expectations. If people expect state entities to deliver public goods effectively, those state enterprises tend to do a better job. It is important to signal a clear departure from the previous way of doing things, especially when the credibility of public organizations may have suffered due to poor performance. For this purpose, it may be useful to locate public sector reforms within a broader framework of governance reforms that has the support of the highest level of government.

Delegation of authority through some form of decentralization is a crucial part of strengthening states' ability to engage groups in soci-

ety. Such reforms are more effective when they engage citizens very closely, giving them ownership of the changes. Greater engagement with citizens will not only provide them with more ownership but allow for the better incorporation of local values and norms. This necessarily involves a more horizontal process, where governance tasks are distributed across groups in society, including non-governmental groups, and where citizens are more empowered to participate in governance and accountability measures.

Finally, it is important to design participatory mechanisms with a good understanding of the power dynamics and belief systems in a particular community. If ignored, these structures could perpetuate inequalities and exclusion. For example, in communities where displaced individuals are not considered 'citizens', they are unlikely to even be mapped as community members, preventing their inclusion in the participatory decision-making process.

Examples of Positive State and Society Engagement

Mark Robinson (2007) attributes the success of municipal reforms in Bangalore (Bangalore Agenda Task Force—BATF) to its close engagement with local NGOs and the private sector from the very early stages of the reform effort. The reform process also allowed for broader public participation through publicity campaigns, consumer surveys, and other participatory mechanisms. The reforms were successful leading to improved operations, greater public accountability, and improved taxation and budgetary controls within municipal agencies. Robinson attributes most of the success to the accountability and transparency mechanisms put in place through active citizen engagement. Similarly, he finds a scheme to provide better access to credit for rural women in Karnataka (Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas—DWCRA) benefiting from the close engagement with members of civil society and local communities. He argues that both the BATF program and DWCRA scheme managed to mobilize the civil society and the private sector to influence public opinion, politics and the policy process.

Photo: Scott Wallace / World Bank

In addition to directly contributing towards specific reform goals, positive engagement with society can also contribute towards improving state-society relations. Michele Bruni's (2008) examination of Nicaragua's public sector reform experience demonstrates how citizen engagement could improve the overall public perception of government. Though the reforms themselves

were not widely successful (due to "the failure to engage the legislative branch in the process"), the author found the participatory and consultative aspects of citizen engagement helping "foster a broader definition of the concept of the state and of the public administration beyond the concept of government" (Bruni 2008, 348). In fact, despite limited success of the reforms themselves, the author found the efforts at consensus building through a participatory and transparent process, improving people's perception of the level of corruption in the state administration and improving their expectation of better economic prospects. "The main impact of the campaigns was to change the public's perception of a fragmented public administration, to increase public expectations for a better personal economic situation in the future by 7.6 percent, and to change the attitude of the media towards Nicaragua's public life, thus decreasing the level of conflict and focusing more on development goals" (Bruni 2008, 347).

LOOKING FORWARD: Placing society at the center

This study has aimed to produce a more comprehensive understanding of the problematic of fragility, by taking society as the point of departure. It has presented the problem of fragility as one not only of state capacity, but also of troubled relationships in society that do not support an effective state. Seen in this way, it becomes clear that all societies contain elements of fragility, even where the state is functional overall.

Building state capacity to deliver services in fragile situations is only one aspect of a broader range of needed interventions. Measures to build social cohesion, particularly by addressing perceptions of injustice across groups and by improving the way different institutions interact and connect with each other, are equally

important. Designing these operations is by no means simple, and will require existing tools to be adapted and new ones to be developed. However, the human costs of neglecting societal dynamics in fragile situations are already too high. Placing society at the center of development practice is essential to tackling the urgent problem of fragility.

Finally, it is important that the focus on societal dynamics be taken up by governments and civil society, and not remain a conversation among donors. Governments and other national and local actors will need to take the agenda forward in order to develop context-specific solutions to their different problems.

Photo: Scott Wallace / World Bank

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