

‘Governance in
fragile states’

Seminar report



Colophon

This seminar was part of the process entitled 'Singing a New Policy Tune', which is being carried out within the framework of the Development Policy Review Network (DPRN) and implemented by MDF Training & Consultancy in collaboration with Vice Versa/Lokaal Mondiaal. With a view to stimulating informed debate and discussion of issues related to the formulation and implementation of (Dutch) development policies, DPRN creates opportunities to promote an open exchange and dialogue between scientists, policymakers, development practitioners and the business sector in the Netherlands. For more information see www.dprn.nl and <http://taxrevenues.global-connections.nl/>

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‘Governance in Fragile States’ seminar report

An informed group of people working in the broader development sector attended the ‘Governance in Fragile States’ seminar on 4 May 2010. This seminar is part of the ‘Singing a New Policy’ process (www.singinganewpolicytune.nl), organised within the framework of the Development Policy Review Network (www.DPRN.nl) by MDF Training & Consultancy in collaboration with Vice Versa/Lokaal Mondiaal.

The central question discussed during the seminar was: **Is the selection of intervention channels based on the context of fragile states?** Speakers and the public were asked to respond to this question during the morning and afternoon programmes.

Morning programme

1. Presentation by Seth Kaplan

Mr Seth Kaplan, author of *Fixing Fragile States: A New Paradigm for Development* (Praeger, 2008), was invited to elaborate on his views on state building in fragile states and how the different (aid) channels intervene in fragile states. After his presentation, participants asked a number of provoking questions. The main issues raised were:

- Social cohesion is important for building a development-oriented state (long-term process, friction with present), while local people’s capacity and people should also be cohesive (e.g. for elections to work);
- Fixing fragile states need a new approach which is more rooted in indigenous capacities and institutions;
- Fragile states have two structural problems: political identity fragmentation and weak national institutions. Government should be accountable towards local needs;
- Problems of fragile states are deep-seated and interwoven; only long-term policies might have an impact;
- International development aid is narrow and has an inflexible agenda for fragile states;
- International organisations and NGOs should act as a catalyst in fragile states, not as implementing parties. The ‘fragile nations’ should themselves take action. International NGOs are often disempowering rather than empowering governments;
- Look at the balance sheet: what does and does not work? How can sustainability be created and locals be empowered? If there is a clash of interests and values, working with local actors can create a framework for dealing with broader issues over time;
- It is important to identify conflicts and understand how states function and spend more time diagnosing (to be carried out by people from the respective countries) in order to come up with strategies. DFID, for example, spends a large amount of money on research.
- Local capacity building should be at the top of the aid agenda with a view to teaching and training local people how to analyse their country’s problems and how to infiltrate local government;
- MDGs only work in functioning states (MDGs can often be a distraction).

2. Presentation 'Peace Building and Stabilisation Unit'

Mr Hans Wesseling of the 'Peace Building and Stabilisation Unit' of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was invited to tell the audience about the Dutch Strategy paper 2008–2011 entitled 'Security and development in fragile states'.

The Dutch policy is based on an integrated approach and focuses on three areas:

1. Enhancing the security of citizens;
2. Contributing to a legitimate government with sufficient capacity;
3. Creating a peace dividend.

The Ministry focuses on a specific number of countries and acts as an enabler between different intervention channels. Decisions on intervention channels are based on a context-specific approach and on international presence. The main channels are multilateral organisations and non-state/civil society actors that work with local partners. Budget support is used only in the case of Burundi. The Dutch strategy focuses on complementarity and synergy of channels.

3. Panel discussion: introduction of cases & intervention channels in fragile states

A panel of five experts was invited to discuss the central theme of this seminar.

Ivan Briscoe (research fellow political economy of post-conflict countries, Clingendael) argued that conflicts, lawlessness and a weak state (including low state funding) have affected development and fragility in Guatemala. Guatemala is a low-middle income country, with Social Welfare Programmes, where aid is only 1.5% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Although there are strong civil society organisations, it continues to be important to support the dialogue between government and indigenous people.

Farah Karimi (executive director of Oxfam Novib) indicated that Oxfam Novib has been working in a number of fragile states for some time (20–25 years). Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) have a long-term view and strategies that can contribute to development. CSOs can make a difference, particularly in fragile states. Although CSOs could undermine the role of state (e.g. when they take over certain functions that should be performed by the state), they continue playing an important role in empowering people and in holding (local) government and international donors accountable.

Paul Mbikayi (advisor in the Congo Network) indicated that political leadership should be cohesive and inclusive. He recommended putting 'enemies' around the same table and working with local partners to find common ground if there is a clash of opinions. One of the participants indicated that CSOs and external parties can intervene between different parties (e.g. Israeli and Palestinian majors). Mr Mbikayi argued that the legitimacy of the state is related to accountability, and that it is therefore important to consider 'to whom you are willing to pay taxes'. Political, moral and financial authority is a 'western' system which should include local input. Farah Karimi also stressed the importance of cohesive political leadership. In Rwanda, for example, there is a lack of strategy, but there is local leadership that contributes to development.

Gerrit Holtland (Afghanistan expert) argued that the Afghanistan state is still very fragmented and that there is need for a long-term strategy and for cohesion. Furthermore,

the international community should have a common agenda. If there are too many different agendas (as in the case of Afghanistan), development cannot take place.

Hans Wesseling (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) indicated that state building should be balanced. Governments should take responsibility for certain sectors such as health and education. These sectors are important as regards building up a government's accountability for its citizens.

Other points that were discussed included:

- Fragility is related to the legitimacy of the government. Health and education strengthen the government's legitimacy;
- Illegitimate states vs. illegitimate governments and the need to identify longer-term sources of government legitimacy;
- State and borders are changing consistently, but the way this is happening is a problem. Even a powerful state can be fragile tomorrow;
- Strategy is important, but political leadership is even more important because it determines 'how development happens'.
- 'Fragile states' are on the agenda for geopolitical reasons. The panel discussed what is nationally driven and what is donor driven;
- Capacity building is important: the national ministry should be assisted by international advisors (however, in some countries there is too much 'international' advice, while in some countries, such as Chad, there is almost no international advice);
- Local governments should also be legitimate, and change should be made at local level. National policies should support local development and stability;
- The role of government is long-term institutional building. According to Seth Kaplan, it should work both horizontally and vertically.

Afternoon programme

4. Plenary discussion on issues raised by panel

In a plenary session after the lunch break, the public was invited to take part in the discussion with the panel and ask questions. Participants gave their own examples, to which the panel members responded. This discussion has been interwoven in the statements above.

5. Working groups on case studies

The working groups started with an inventory of the character and strengths and weaknesses of the different channels (multilateral, civilateral, bilateral, private and other) in a specific setting. Afghanistan, Guatemala, Sudan and DR Congo were selected as cases to be discussed in the working groups. After an inventory of (and discussion on) different opinions, a debate followed on the possible synergy between the channels and how their efforts could be better harmonised, keeping in mind the lessons shared by Seth Kaplan and the panel members.

Conclusions drawn from the working groups were shared in the subsequent plenary session, in an attempt to answer the two central questions posed to the working groups:

- What mix of channels could work for specific interventions in a particular setting?

- How could harmonisation be facilitated among channels to achieve a joint result?

The participants were free to join the case group that was of greatest interest to them. This resulted in two working groups (Afghanistan and Sudan) and two working groups being cancelled due to insufficient interest (Guatemala and DR Congo).

Results from the working group on Afghanistan

This working group drew up an inventory of 'what works and what does not work':

- The majority of citizens are dissatisfied with current government, although they appreciate community solidarity programmes and local government programmes implemented by the World Bank and NGOs.
- Traditional Afghanistan ways may work. If, for instance, leadership is needed, the Sharia provides a strong legal system based on local leadership structures. This causes a culture clash between donors and citizens. However, old structures should not be romanticised.
- Security is a precondition for development, interlinked with intervention. Peacekeepers are currently too politically involved.
- What does work in Afghanistan is (1) long-term capacity building (formal and informal education, vocational training), (2) entrepreneurship of citizens (citizens initiate agriculture businesses and/or work with micro loans from the World Bank and there is a self-resilient private sector), and (3) a working health system.
- A discussion took place as to whether state building is a nationally led process (on which level to support government?). The need to link up with Afghanistan ways of state building was stressed. The 'West' is driven by a culture of fear which affects development aid and state building. The most effective approach may be to bring educated people into the government system because decentralisation takes a long time.
- Finally, forget about international assistance, let entrepreneurship flourish. Increase employment and stimulate involvement of the private sector (take risks).

Results from the working group on Sudan

Discussions in the working group on Sudan evolved around:

- Sudan's historical background (1973–1983 interbellum).
- A critical NGO report about the multi-donor trust fund from which resources are slowly dispatched and which is difficult for NGOs to access.
- The consequences of budget cuts in Dutch aid to Sudan and EU/ACP treaty problems.

The following strengths and weaknesses of the various intervention channels in Sudan were identified:

- **Bilateral channels** are the easiest to be held accountable, but discontinuity plays a role after political changes. Although they are more accountable in theory, information is sometimes hard to obtain, while geopolitics, capacity and bureaucratic procedures intervene in bilateral agreements. The most important actors are the US and China.
- **Multilateral channels** are slow and NGOs and citizens have limited access to funds. Accountability is difficult to track and there is a lot of bureaucracy and limited control. Power politics hamper the work and create interdependencies. Although multilateral channels have the benefit of economies of scale, the question is how to link strategically with the host country.

- **Civilateral channels** claim to use local knowledge and their effectiveness is generally recognised. However, what about their legitimacy? CSOs can be bureaucratic too.
- **In the private sector** multilaterals (e.g. UN) are undermining local initiatives/private sector development (i.e. the UN has its own planes/food products), trade and dignity. On the other hand, private channels make peer-to-peer learning possible and generally link with real market needs. A distinction should be made between real private initiatives and donor contractors.

The working group concluded that there is a need for channel coordination and for working with specialists from all channels.

6. Final words

Seth Kaplan closed the seminar by summarising several points discussed throughout the day that he considered as the most striking ones:

- The need to work in a context-specific way (devise country-specific strategies);
- The need to consider how legitimacy can be created: government should be competent;
- Solutions cannot be enforced, working top-down and against existing values is not feasible. There is a need to consider and work on the basis of people's worldviews.
- Nothing is efficient in policies (either in the Netherlands, or fragile states), and aid might not work due to policies. This should always be taken into account, as well as different interests of governments in the North and South and the citizens.
- We cannot 'fix states' on a short term basis, but should focus on the micro level with a long-term view. National policies should assist micro development.
- 'The art of modelling through': there are no clear-cut answers and there are different interests. We should work with existing means and resources.

Appendix 1 – List of participants

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