

# Fragile states: Working to build resilience



Enabling poor rural people  
to overcome poverty

Fragile states are home to nearly 30 per cent of the world's poor people. Though measures of fragility vary, such countries typically lack some of the basic tools of nation-building: good governance, strong policies, skilled personnel, functional infrastructure and services, educated citizens, an active civil society and a competitive private sector. Civil and border conflict is an all-too frequent reality. Poor people living in rural areas of fragile states are particularly vulnerable as they have very limited means to cope with the situation created by fragility.

Countries may be fragile in some respects and not others, and they may also move in and out of that condition. In this precarious environment, communities and families lack resilience, leaving them highly exposed to natural and human-caused disasters. The challenges of reducing poverty and achieving the Millennium Development Goals are particularly daunting. The need to expand support and ensure that aid is effective in fragile states was highlighted in the Accra Agenda for Action.



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Working effectively in fragile states requires a long-term, context-specific approach. For IFAD this means:

- Designing flexible but simple programmes that build community and government capacity
- Increasing the focus on women, indigenous peoples and vulnerable groups such as displaced households and returning soldiers
- Paying greater attention to mitigating and responding to natural disasters and conflict
- Strengthening resilience, land rights and natural resource management
- Harmonizing cofinancing procedures to reduce government transaction costs
- Building in-depth country knowledge, including through country offices and direct supervision of programmes, to guide programme design and implementation

Experience has shown that partnerships and knowledge-sharing are crucial to working in vulnerable states. For example, although IFAD is not a relief organization, cooperation with other agencies can help bridge the gap between emergency relief and development activities. The new IFAD Guidelines for Disaster Early Recovery address this aspect, because states that have suffered disastrous setbacks to development can become 'poverty traps' unless there is a swift transition from relief to longer-horizon recovery programmes.

Despite the challenges facing fragile states, reflected in the often lower success rates of development projects, well-designed and closely managed programmes can help rural people to rebuild their livelihoods and prevent large segments of the population from slipping into poverty.

# Haiti: Fragility compounded by crises

Haiti has long suffered from political turmoil, recurrent natural disasters and extreme income inequality. Weak institutions and lack of infrastructure and skilled personnel severely limit development capacity. With high levels of soil erosion and land degradation, Haiti is also acutely vulnerable to climate change.

Haiti imports up to 60 per cent of its food and 80 per cent of its rice. Even before the 2010 earthquake, nearly 2 million Haitians struggled to get enough to eat. About half of the country's 9 million people live on less than a dollar a day.

“Central to the lack of development – and the nation's never-ending battle with poverty and instability – is the risk factor,” says IFAD's country programme manager for Haiti, Marco Camagni. “Reduce the risk profile of your average Haitian, and you reduce the risk for the nation. And the best way to reduce risk is to protect natural resources, build savings, diversify incomes and increase education.”

Since 1978, IFAD has funded seven programmes and projects in Haiti at a total cost of US\$160 million, with US\$90 million in IFAD funding. Between 2008 and 2010, IFAD provided US\$10.2 million for seeds and tools, enabling 240,000 smallholder farmers to improve their food security and their incomes. IFAD's mandate complements the government's priorities: Haiti's 2007 poverty reduction strategy paper identifies agriculture as the first pillar of pro-poor growth, and its agriculture plan emphasizes creation of economic opportunities for rural people.

Improving a country's resilience is a lengthy process. It involves developing human capital and physical infrastructure, and grass-roots organizations and community involvement are key. IFAD's Haiti country programme, which focuses especially on women, includes:

- Helping communities formulate development plans and collaborative irrigation management schemes



- Introducing technologies and equipment to improve agricultural productivity, especially irrigation infrastructure and roads
- Supporting the establishment of community gardens and small livestock projects
- Promoting access to financial services by setting up local microfinance groups

The 2010 earthquake was Haiti's third emergency in two years. In the aftermath of the quake, IFAD identified three major challenges: First, in the most affected zones, major efforts were needed to reconstruct livelihoods and rebuild capacity for food production. Second, in the areas not devastated directly but facing a significant inflow of migrants without previous experience in agricultural production, innovative solutions to tackle food security and employment had to be found. The third challenge was to ensure the right balance between short-term needs and longer-term development.

IFAD's immediate response began with a US\$50 million debt relief programme. We then provided a grant of US\$2.5 million for post-earthquake irrigation systems rehabilitation, food security and employment generation. This grant programme will reach 12,000 households representing about 60,000 people in the Departments of West and Nippes (Southern Haiti), the areas most directly affected by the earthquake. Since its launch, roughly 66,000 miles of irrigation systems have been rehabilitated, and over 120,000 days' worth of work generated. In addition, the annual work programmes of the three ongoing projects in the country were adjusted to respond to new needs of beneficiary families and to boost agricultural production and income in some of the country's poorest areas.

## The Sudan: Civil unrest and drought corrode resilience

Three decades of civil unrest, coupled with recurrent drought, left the Sudan ranked near the bottom of the 2010 Human Development Index, at 154 out of 169 countries.



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## LINKS

Rural poverty in Haiti  
<http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/web/guest/country/home/tags/haiti>

Rural poverty in the Sudan  
<http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/web/guest/country/home/tags/sudan>

Poverty is deeply entrenched, particularly among small-scale farmers who practise rainfed agriculture. Sudan's people face severe inequalities in access to education, sanitation, clean water, infrastructure, natural resources, income opportunities, justice and political protection.

The Sudan faces numerous challenges. Population growth is high. Poor natural resource management has had a negative impact on fragile ecosystems, resulting in erosion, loss of soil fertility and damage to watersheds. A further threat is presented by climate change impacts such as water scarcity. Low agricultural productivity and volatile food prices are hampering household food security. Farmers lack technical knowledge and access to credit and to distribution and marketing channels.

Yet gross national income per capita has more than tripled over the past decade, growing from US\$340 in 2000 to US\$1,220 in 2010. Agricultural spending as a proportion of the national budget almost doubled, increasing from 10 per cent in 2000 to 18 per cent in 2007 – a hopeful sign in a country where agriculture is the main livelihood of 60 to 80 per cent of the population.

IFAD-supported projects in the Sudan have shown that development in war-affected states can work. Since 1979, these projects have benefited almost 500,000 households. We have invested a total of US\$257 million in financing for 19 programmes and projects with a total value of US\$604 million. All of our initiatives are community driven and focused on achieving self-reliance, and they actively engage women in the development process.

IFAD-financed programmes have helped increase agricultural production and provide crucial infrastructure while aiding communities to assert traditional rights to resources and promote good local governance. More than 700 community associations have been formed, including village development committees, water users' associations and savings and credit groups. Availability of extension services has improved. Around 30,000 households have gained access to social services such as health centres and schools. These are crucial components of resilience.

In July 2011, the southern region of the country became the Republic of South Sudan. In both countries, IFAD will continue to concentrate on tackling issues that underlie conflict and aggravate poverty. Our response will include support to the agricultural sector, land reform, equitable distribution of resources and participation of communities in decision-making.



IFAD is an international financial institution and a specialized United Nations agency dedicated to eradicating poverty and hunger in rural areas of developing countries.

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