

## Spotlight 4: Fragile situations

### The development challenge posed by fragile situations

Given the increasing prevalence of civil strife, insecurity, population dislocation and natural and human-made disasters, prospects for inclusive transformation in fragile situations require attention. Fragile situations experience the most intractable development issues. Addressing the effect that fragility has on development is a priority for the international community.<sup>63</sup>

Structural and rural transformations occur in fragile situations, but are usually not inclusive and the livelihoods of poor and excluded rural people often are disrupted. This contributes to displacement or increased rural-urban migration (or both), spurred by the need for security, work and access to basic services. If structural and rural transformations are inclusive and accompanied by inclusive governance and institutions, then they are perhaps less likely to be undermined by fragility. Nonetheless, in areas with ongoing armed conflicts within states, across borders or at a regional level, or where conflict is entrenched within or between political movements, they can shape economic and social development across rural and urban spaces. Those areas usually require development interventions, tailored to their context and drawing on experience and the key international principles of engagement. These include humanitarian principles, the “do no harm” approach, and the 11 Principles of the Framework for Action of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS 2015).

This Spotlight draws on evidence from experience by the IFAD and the wider literature to review the ways in which fragility poses critical challenges to achieving inclusive structural and rural transformation. It argues that fragility should be addressed case by case, with interventions based on solid analysis.

### Some differences in fragile situations

During the past 10 to 15 years, international development organizations, such as the OECD, the World Bank and the African Development Bank, have sought to adapt programming and investments to the development challenges in fragile situations. Most definitions of fragility emphasize several common features – weak policies, institutions and governance, insecurity and conflict, very limited capacity of the state to deliver basic public services and environmental hazards and natural disasters.<sup>64</sup> Fragility also relates to the state of society and social relations. The rural poor (often in remote locations) are particularly at risk, severely food insecure and highly dependent on government services (IFAD and IOE 2015).

Fragility is a complex phenomenon that can affect transformations in a variety of ways. It may, for example, impede the efficient flow of resources to industrial and urban-based economic activities, obviating higher productivity and incomes. It may also exacerbate rent-seeking behaviours.

According to OECD criteria, the world had 47 fragile states and economies in 2013 and in 2015 it had 50 (OECD 2013). Those fragile situations were home to 1.4 billion people – 20 per cent of the world’s population (and 43 per cent of the global population living in absolute poverty).

More than half of these situations were in Africa.<sup>65</sup> A large proportion of IFAD-financed programmes in Africa – more than 50 per cent in the Near East, North Africa, Europe and Central Asia – are in situations<sup>66</sup> that have recently been or are now considered to be fragile.

The sources of vulnerabilities vary sharply in four very different country contexts,<sup>67</sup> from natural disasters to social unrest, resource competition and conflict (box S4.1). All of the countries selected in box S4.1 are considered fragile according to OECD data. These were selected based on a review of critical factors of fragility, key data on poverty and development trajectories, and a purposive choice to reflect a *diversity* of fragile situations across Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean.

**BOX S4.1 Profiles of the factors of fragility in four countries**

*Bangladesh* is not in violent conflict or emerging from it and has had high economic growth in recent years. Yet the country continues to have high vulnerability to natural disasters (cyclones, storms, floods, etc.), particularly in zones affected by extreme weather events and climate change risks, although its management of these disasters is becoming more effective. It also has political contestation and unrest, and marked inequalities that affect women, youth and poorer groups.

*The Democratic Republic of the Congo* suffers from organized armed conflict in some regions, such as the northeast and particularly in border areas, widespread poverty and inequality, vulnerability to natural disasters, political disruption, weak government and civil society institutions, major governance challenges at national and local levels, widespread corruption and clientelism, heightened vulnerability to personal violence and crime, many displaced people, natural resource competition among population groups, incapacity of government to deliver basic functions and services to most people, weak public financial management and an absence of structural and rural transformation.

*Haiti* is not a country in conflict or emerging from it. However, high vulnerability to climate-related shocks and natural disasters (hurricanes, earthquakes and storms) is exacerbated by environmental degradation. It also has high levels of poverty and vulnerability, social discord and violence, weak institutions, political instability, widespread corruption, inability of government to deliver basic functions and services to most people, many displaced people in camps since the 2010 earthquake and an absence of structural and rural transformation.

*Sudan* experiences recurrent erratic weather conditions induced by changes in climate (variable rainfall, droughts, floods, temperature anomalies and extreme temperature shocks) (Calderone et al. 2013; IFPRI 2006). These render smallholder farmers and rural people depending on agriculture vulnerable and contribute to competition among diverse users of increasingly scarce natural resources (particularly between nomadic and semi-nomadic herders and crop producers). Vulnerabilities also include environmental degradation, high levels of poverty and vulnerability in rural areas, fragile emergence from violent conflict in certain areas and continuing crises, for example in Darfur. The number of internally displaced people, although still high, has decreased sharply, as has the frequency of disasters since the independence of South Sudan in 2011 (see also IFAD IOE 2014).

Sources: Calderone et al. 2013; IFPRI 2006; IFAD and IOE 2014.

### Key issues in fostering inclusive rural transformation in fragile situations

The diversity of fragile situations seen in box S4.2 needs to be fully understood to establish the approaches that have proved most successful in similar contexts.<sup>68</sup>

*Key issue 1:* In countries emerging from conflict, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sudan, conflict-sensitive programming based on more comprehensive knowledge (IFAD and IOE 2015) is critical in efforts for inclusive rural transformation. Such situations are particularly vulnerable to a recurrence of violence. Nearly one quarter

of all comprehensive peace agreements fail in the face of a relapse into conflict and an even higher proportion experience debilitating crises of governance and high levels of violence (especially against women) (UNDP 2010). Supporting inclusive rural transformation in countries recovering from conflict inevitably requires a long period – often longer than where fragility is related to a one-off natural disaster.

*Key issue 2:* Conflict sensitivity of projects and programmes should be in line with the key international humanitarian principles enshrined in several United Nations General Assembly Resolutions (humanity, neutrality, impartiality

and independence; UN OCHA 2012), the “do no harm” approach and the 11 Principles of the CFS Framework for Action (CFS 2015). Gender inequalities at all levels need to be addressed, as women and girls in conflict-ridden countries are often much more exposed to physical, sexual and domestic violence, exploitation and discrimination, for example in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (UNDP 2014; Dzinesa and Laker 2010). In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, inclusive development remains elusive for women, girls and young people; gender equality and freedom from violence and sexual exploitation are far from being achieved there (ibid.). Congolese women are observed to suffer from very low levels of economic and political power, exclusion from decision-making processes, a relative lack of education and training, and a lack of access to productive assets (see UNDP 2014).

*Key issue 3:* The participation of rural people and their organizations in decision-making and resource management is as important in fragile situations as in other settings, to promote both social cohesion and stronger

institutions. However, this must be matched by the institutional development of government administration at national and local levels. Inclusive governance, participation, gender equality, decentralization, transparency and accountability are essential both to mitigate conflict risks and to build the capacities of rural organizations in managing land and natural resources.

*Key issue 4:* Natural disasters and climate threats exist in all the four countries that served as case studies to underpin the arguments in this Spotlight. Such threats require support for research and local knowledge, greater awareness of climate issues among all stakeholders and increased investment in adapting to climate change and making rural people less vulnerable to shocks, and disaster preparedness and response built into programmes. Policy support and greater intersectoral coordination among ministries are needed to provide equitable access to vital natural resources.

*Key issue 5:* In many fragile situations, especially where public-sector capacity is weak, private actors and non-governmental

#### BOX S4.2 Establishing conflict resolution centres to address natural resource competition in Sudan

Conflict sensitivity in fragile situations should be in line with humanitarian law and the ‘do no harm’ approach. It requires paying special attention to addressing the impacts of conflict and violence on women and girls, such as the degree to which they are exposed to physical, sexual and domestic violence (see CFS 2015). As shown in the case of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, gender inequalities at national, local and organizational levels and specific challenges related to violence, exploitation and discrimination faced by women and girls in fragile situations need to be addressed to contribute to building social cohesion. Conflict resolution centres, as have been developed in Sudan, can be an effective tool to mediate competition and conflict between natural resource users and foster inclusive approaches to natural resource use and management that allow wider benefit-sharing. In Kordofan, Sudan, IFAD has sought to bolster social cohesion, empower women and build local capacities. It has supported local communities and their leaders to establish and manage local conflict resolution centres to address conflicts over land and natural resources in a context of environmental degradation and unequal intra-household distribution of roles. Nomadic and semi-nomadic herders have access to mobile teams of agricultural service providers and project resources are available to mobile and settled communities. A reduction in conflicts between settled farmers and herders has been observed in this area and fewer cases of conflict are being reported to the conflict resolution centres.

Sources: CFS 2015; IFAD 2015.

organizations deliver significant services to support inclusive rural transformation. Because of weak public institutional capacity in Haiti, private service providers often are contracted to carry out investment activities and, in some instances, to manage parts of development projects. However, this approach does nothing to enhance community capacities, can raise administrative costs sharply and diverts resources from their intended beneficiaries. Special efforts are required to ensure that different ethnic, tribal and indigenous peoples maintain their rights to resources (particularly land and natural resources) to avoid inequalities or exclusion, which feeds competition, conflicts of interest, conflict or instability (see IWGIA 2012).

*Key issue 6:* In fragile situations where natural disasters are the most significant source of fragility, such as Bangladesh, inclusive rural transformation may still be seen outside the disaster zone. That country's capacity to manage such natural hazards has dramatically improved, with far fewer casualties from floods and cyclones than in the 1970s. In Haiti, the United States Agency for International Development, the World Bank, and IFAD have all published examples of how the lives of individuals or small groups in rural areas have been transformed with support from external interventions. Nevertheless, these studies do not demonstrate the achievement of a sustained structural and inclusive rural transformation at a larger scale than individuals or small groups of programme beneficiaries. According to Oxfam (2012), after the 2010 earthquake, agricultural and rural development programmes could have had a more positive effect if they had not adopted unsustainable, short-term interventions.

*Key issue 7:* In the Democratic Republic of the Congo development assistance remains fragmented, limiting opportunities for synergies. Development and relief actors need to operate in closer partnership (CFS 2015).

*Key issue 8:* Border areas are often the most socially and economically dynamic ones. Cross-border mobility can enable rural people to find sufficient security to continue

remunerative agricultural and rural economic activities. However, when conflict and instability are widespread in border regions, rural people – particularly the excluded – can be more vulnerable, insecure (with the cross-border movement of armed groups) and excluded from development processes, for example marginalized forest peoples living between Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone (see Hussein and Gnisci 2004; Grimm et al 2015).

### **Policies and actions to promote inclusive rural transformation in fragile situations**

Several key messages stand out for fostering inclusive rural transformation in fragile situations:

- *Rural transformations are observed in fragile situations, yet they often are not inclusive nor do they bring about structural transformation.* However, efforts by governments and development programmes to foster inclusive transformation can contribute to successful inclusive structural and rural transformation and reduce the risks of countries and regions becoming more fragile.
- *Governance, institutions and participation are weak.* Most have weak institutions and civil societies, raising questions about the legitimacy of government bodies. Therefore, it is a challenge to ensure effective country ownership and the participation of marginalized groups in decision-making processes, yet these are vital. A fundamental question relates to how international financial institutions can best engage in fragile situations where government legitimacy is questioned and where the primary instruments for development assistance remain loans and grants channelled through government. Institutional capacity building is needed in these contexts, but expectations of impact in the short term should be modest.
- *Programming should be informed by a better understanding of context.* Rural development policies and programmes need to be tailored to the fragile situation based on regularly updated analysis. Deeper situational analysis, including of the political economy, is vital for

interventions (CFS 2015; Seddon and Hussein 2002).

- *Gender, ethnic and generational vulnerabilities have to be tackled.* Excluded groups may be especially vulnerable, requiring special attention in programmes.
- *Natural resource competition and conflict require particular focus.* Forums or customary institutions for equitable natural resource management and conflict resolution need to be set up or strengthened.<sup>69</sup>
- *Regional and cross-border issues.* Regional dynamics have been shown to be very important, for example in the Middle East, the Horn of Africa, the Sahel and West Africa. When conflict and instability are widespread in border regions, rural people can be more vulnerable, insecure and excluded from development processes.
- *Rural development policies and programmes – and international interventions – should be informed by international best practice.* They should systematically take into account principles for engagement in fragile situations and protracted crises, and they should be tailored to the characteristics of rural contexts.
- *More flexible programming and greater capacity of programme management staff are required.* These resources are essential to respond to rapidly changing environments.

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