

Capacity development in fragile environments

The concept of the 'fragile state' entered the development discourse when, in the early 1990s, governance in Somalia disintegrated. Thousands of people fell victim to violence and millions faced starvation. Fragile states, however, were not given much attention in development policies. Donor countries concentrated their aid on fewer countries, particularly on those with good governance.

This changed drastically after the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York on 11 September 2001. Suddenly, the issue of fragile states appeared as a priority issue on the development agenda; it is likely to stay there for a long time. Before this event (which has come to be known as 9/11), working in fragile states was often considered a thankless effort and a waste of resources; it is now clear that the development needs of some fragile states cannot be ignored. Since 9/11 many donors have developed strategies and approaches to working in and with these countries.

The causes of the instability in each country are diverse, though the resulting environment is volatile and chaotic. It is hard to know where to start to transform such insecurity into stability. As Derrick Brinkerhoff explains in the feature article, there is no blueprint for achieving development goals in fragile states, only guidelines for effective capacity development.

For the international community, the state is a key entry point. However, by definition, the fragile state is extremely limited in its absorption capacity. It is vital to carefully prioritise the targets for capacity development initiatives. Fragile states in particular are forced to decide which core capacities of the state must be strengthened in order to quickly establish the government's role as a national unifier.

In the short term, the need to re-establish service provision prevails over the need to strengthen the state's core capacities. In our guest column, Juana de Catheu points out that the fragility in a country can be such that in the early stages of recovery nearly all government roles need to be outsourced. This can even include core state functions such as maintaining law and order, financial management and customs management. While taking over temporarily, the international community must be prepared to support and strengthen emerging capacity where it crystallises.

A secure national environment is vital to success. Minister Toga McIntosh, Liberia's Minister of Planning and Economic Affairs, talks about the importance of demobilising ex-combatants in order to prevent the country from slipping back into conflict. Building the state's capacity to provide security can be a powerful source of state legitimacy. Olaf Juergensen illustrates this with the example of Mozambique. By clearing the main roads of mines, the government of Mozambique gained legitimacy which further cemented the process of national peace and

security. With examples from Iraq and the Moluccan Islands, Peter Brorsen shows how crucial security is to enabling a government to engage with civil society in a relationship of trust.

Public financial management and procurement is another important state capacity that needs to be strengthened at an early stage. Sanjeev Gupta of the IMF explains how fiscal institutions are a mechanism for coordinating foreign assistance; they enhance the capacity to absorb more aid and hence enable capacity development in all other sectors.

The division of roles between state and non-state actors is another recurring debate in the support to fragile states. John Wood explains how, in Haiti, civil society organisations received lots of support from the international community to provide humanitarian assistance to the poor. In many cases, these organisations function parallel to state institutions. Some consider this a problem, while others see it as a solution. Minister McIntosh argues that among the non-state actors in Liberia, the division of roles can also be murky. With over 90 international NGOs and nearly 700 local NGOs in a small country, capacity development efforts in Liberia have become fragmented. This is compounded by the fact that many NGOs tend to compete with the private sector.

Ambrose James and Frances Fortune show the positive role civil society organisations have played in Sierra Leone. The authors describe the important contribution of these organisations during the elections in the country.

The collection of articles in this issue of *Capacity.org* shows that, in fragile situations, responsible leadership and the skill to unite people behind a shared vision are fundamental to achieving stability. These capabilities can neither be outsourced nor built; they must be nurtured at every available opportunity.

By Heinz Greijn, Editor-in-Chief