FIT FOR FRAGILITY: PRACTICE TO POLICY

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BETTER POLICIES FOR BETTER LIVES

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Abstract

Engaging in fragile settings is challenging, but there is much to learn from the work DAC members are doing to support fragile contexts on the ground. Drawing on case study research and a secondary literature review assembled as part of the Fit for Fragility project, this chapter offers guidance for navigating these substantively, strategically and institutionally complex environments. Though organisational fitness challenges are most visible at country level, they often reflect the quality of engagement by all parts of the organisation, from the local to the global level. Beyond individual organisations, the challenge also resides in strengthening coherence by ensuring effective coordination and – where relevant – collaborating across the Humanitarian Development Peace Nexus. Being fit for fragility, in this sense, is strongly contingent on being fit for collaboration.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CSPPS	Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (OECD)
EAP	East Asia and the Pacific
GPEDC	Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation
HDP	Humanitarian-Development-Peace
IDPS	International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding
INCAF	International Network on Conflict and Fragility
NDP	National development plan
ODA	Official development assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

Executive summary

Progress towards sustainable development is lagging in fragile contexts, where poverty and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are likely to deepen inequalities and vulnerabilities. The global, systemic shocks caused by the pandemic are only just beginning to manifest themselves at scale; however, their implications for fragile contexts will likely be sustained and severe. Reversals of development gains as a consequence of these shocks could also affect peace and security beyond national borders. Donor engagement and financing must therefore acknowledge these realities. More than ever, we need to be fit for fragility.

Helping countries to address the drivers of fragility and achieve self-reliance is not only a matter of funding; it also requires long-term partnerships, smarter programming and an appetite for risk. It is important to ensure complementarity and coherence between diplomatic, development, peace and humanitarian interventions, in accordance with the DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus (OECD, 2019[1]). This will necessitate strategic approaches adapted to the multidimensional challenges and volatile dynamics of fragile contexts, and engagement with a heterogeneous mix of individual stakeholders, with different strategies, operating modalities and priorities.

While a solid framework of global principles for effective engagement in fragile settings has emerged over the last decade, it has proven more successful as a normative yardstick than at transforming realities in the field. Many bilateral and multilateral partners have turned their attention to translating commitments into action, adjusting their policies and mechanisms to the operational realities of fragile contexts. This has led to broad demand for more practical guidance. The "Fit for Fragility" project aims to fill this gap while also contributing to the DAC's revived focus on aid effectiveness.

This is a critical time to translate policy into action in fragile settings. Fragile countries could be particularly vulnerable to COVID-19, given pre-existing obstacles to ensuring the functions of territorial integrity, security and basic public services. Overcoming these challenges will require focus, careful co-ordination, government leadership, a shared understanding of conflict drivers and vulnerabilities, and management of expectations.

This paper analyses specific challenges to operational effectiveness in fragile settings, and provides opportunities to improve the fit between organisations and context. Evidence and lessons are drawn from the project's four country case studies conducted in the Central African Republic, Chad, Honduras and Liberia. These case studies were selected from a list of available options to encompass a diversity of country situations, development co-operation constellations and coordination arrangements, as well as key operational challenges.

The analysis is grouped into four areas of attention: strategic planning, country-level engagement, organisational processes, and global trends and frameworks. Good practices and opportunities for more effective international engagement in support of successful reduction of fragility and vulnerabilities are highlighted wherever possible.

The "Fit for Fragility" project has highlighted six key messages:

There are no easy answers to fragility

International partners experience the inherent complexity, volatility and uncertainty that characterise fragile contexts in which they operate on a daily basis. These development actors are fully immersed in the complex realities they are seeking to help change. Being fit for fragility entails matching organisational features with the requirements of complex operational environments.

Effective engagement in fragile contexts begins with good analysis

Acknowledging complexity and interrelated causalities is essential for effective engagement. However, the search for nuance should facilitate focused action, not produce paralysis. Adaptive management and iterative learning and analysis can boost effectiveness.

Being fit for fragility means being fit for collaboration

Effective collective action demands the presence of essential co-ordination structures and a nexus mindset across all relevant actors. It also requires sustainable partnerships built on trust, mutual accountability and risk-sharing. In this regard, the adoption in February 2019 of the DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus offers additional strategic impetus for change.

Back office functions must align with field needs

Adapting to rapid changes requires the effective use of existing flexibility within the back office functions of international partners, where funding, procurement, contracting and programme management are frequent sticking points.

Avoid adding to the burden on fragile contexts

Ensure that collective action does not become mired in too many priorities, use existing mechanisms and allow national stakeholders to take their rightful place.

The fragility landscape is evolving, and so must we

Global developments such as the increased role of South-South partnerships and the COVID-19 pandemic are changing the fragility landscape and the role played by official development assistance (ODA). Maintaining an effective framework for all partners on fragility issues – including through North-South dialogue – is essential to ensure that co-operation remains relevant and continues to add value.

1 Fit of Fragility: Improving operational effectiveness

How can we ensure effective international engagement in fragile settings characterised by volatility, uncertainty, complex multi-causal relationships and ambiguous information?

Recent years have seen a rise in awareness of the serious threat that fragility poses to implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This has been accompanied by a body of new policy literature with recommendations for a more effective approach in fragile contexts – including the OECD *States of Fragility 2018* and the UN-WB Pathways for Peace study. The adoption in February 2019 of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus (OECD, 2019[1]) offers additional impetus for strategic change. In order to seize the current winds of change, donors need to understand which features of ODA in fragile settings would benefit most from priority attention in order to ensure the greatest impact.

This policy attention to fragility has been complemented by the emergence of an extensive body of commitments, frameworks, tools and organising entities over the past decade to guide development co-operation in fragile contexts and progress towards SDG 16: Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies (GPEDC, 2018[2]). Indeed, the Fragile States Principles (OECD, 2007[3]), the Dili Declaration (IDPS, 2010[4]) and the IDPS Peace Vision (IDPS, 2019[5]) – to name but a few – have helped set the course for global efforts, anchored in a vision of shared responsibilities and mutual accountability. However, while such frameworks and principles have served as a useful normative yardstick, they have proven less successful at transforming the realities of fragile contexts in partner countries (Lamb and Mixon, 2013[6]).

As many bilateral and multilateral partners turn their attention to translating commitments into action, adjusting their policies and mechanisms to the operational realities of fragile contexts, there appears to be broad demand for more practical guidance. Accordingly, operational effectiveness as applied here to fragile contexts extends beyond its definition in aid effectiveness principles, to incorporate a whole-of-government perspective directed at modalities and decisions at headquarters and country level. In this context, international engagement in fragile contexts is effective if it contributes to reducing needs and vulnerabilities, managing risks and addressing social exclusion.

The "Fit for Fragility" project aims to help fill the knowledge gap in this area and to contribute to the DAC's revived focus on aid effectiveness. It was commissioned by the International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF), a policy network for evidence-based policy guidance, better programming and common influencing on conflict and fragility, which draws together OECD DAC members, UN agencies and international financial institutions. Under its 2019-20 work plan, INCAF has promoted "institutional fitness" for effective work in fragile environments, and emphasised the need for "systemic fitness" of the overall aid system in fragile contexts, including contextual and programmatic effectiveness.

The paper draws from four country case study visits in the Central African Republic, Chad, Honduras and Liberia, conducted between April and September 2019 (see Annex B), as well as a secondary literature review of lessons from effective international engagement in fragile contexts. As such, this paper aims to provide evidence-based policy orientations to decision makers in DAC member states – both at headquarters and country level – on ways to improve operational effectiveness in fragile contexts.

Box 1.1. What practical measures can decision makers in DAC members take to better adapt their organisation to fragile and crisis-affected settings?

The paper addresses this central question at four levels: strategic planning, country-level engagement, organisational processes and the global normative framework with regard to effective engagement in fragile settings.

In an ideal world, DAC members would be free to adjust their institutional setup and working processes to fit each context, allowing them to respond rapidly, stay engaged, collaborate and be flexible. However, windows for institutional reform are a rare commodity. The current study therefore focuses on guidance to harness the strengths of existing systems and mechanisms for effective results.

Fragile settings as complex operating environments

Operating in fragile settings has dual implications for development co-operation. While fragility can be understood as a multidimensional societal problem to be addressed (OECD, 2020[7]), the same features constitute the daily reality in which development actors seek to deliver results. In other words, development actors are immersed in the complex realities they seek to change, rather than functioning as external observers. To be "fit for fragility", development co-operation actors must ensure that their strategies and modus operandi are adapted to the features of such operating environments, which are characterised by substantive, strategic and institutional complexity.

Box 1.2. Systems thinking applied to programming: Managing complexity day to day

1. Substantive complexity

Decision making in fragile contexts occurs in situations of volatility, uncertainty, complex multi-causal relationships and ambiguous information. While programmatic goal-setting in these environments is often complicated by lack of available data and evidence, more information is not always a panacea. Indeed, fragility presents itself as a complex web of systemic interdependence that cannot easily be broken down into clear-cut frames of reference or joint problem definitions. As a result, people and personalities matter, and knowledge is not given but negotiated. It is impossible to enumerate an exhaustive set of policy courses; there is no "immediate or ultimate test" to assess alternative policy options (Head and Alford, 2015[8]); and solutions are generally "one-shot", with limited opportunity for learning by doing (Ramalingam, Laric and Primrose, 2014[9]).

2. Strategic complexity

Fragile contexts are characterised by strong interdependencies between stakeholders, both national and international. The wide variety of strategies and activities deployed by these actors, each of which has its own agendas and priorities, limits the effectiveness of development co-operation. Because actors are autonomous and bound by often unclear or weak relations of accountability, the overall aid system in these contexts is highly resistant to attempts to reduce or manage complexity. As a result, various and sometimes conflicting strategies and programming may develop (Hill et al., 2012[10]) .

3. Institutional complexity

In many fragile contexts, informal networks, institutions and economies shape the day-to-day reality of local political, economic, and social activities and relationships. In contrast, international development efforts often focus on formal institutions and systems. The result is a complex, multi-layered framework of formal and informal systems in which official laws and policies can be quite detached from day-to-day programmatic realities. Within this framework, actors operate according to often competing or unclear sets of rules and procedures, adding to the unpredictability of outcomes. At a lower level of analysis, fragility also impairs co-ordination among service delivery systems, generating a disconnect between citizens' expectations of the state and the state's capacity to deliver. This disconnect is often amplified when efforts to modernise or decentralise state institutions are not accompanied by shifts in resource allocation from the centre to the periphery.

The need for processes to be aligned for operational effectiveness

Being fit for fragility entails matching organisational features with the requirements of complex operational environments. This paper explores how the day-to-day manifestation of complexity in fragile settings can inform engagement among international partners.

Starting with an analysis of country realities, development co-operation actors can take steps to adapt to fragile and crisis-affected settings, where their work aims to reduce overall vulnerability and unmet needs, strengthen coping capacities, and tackle root causes of crisis and fragility. For effective results, they should harness the strengths of their existing systems and mechanisms by utilising available levers at four levels: strategic planning, country-level engagement, organisational processes and the global normative framework (Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1. Fit for fragility: Aligning processes for operational effectiveness

Strategic planning:
Make long-term goals stick

The big picture comes first
Planning must identify the key drivers of fragility, actors' comparative advantages, and a collective vision of the desired end state.

Use the available room for flexible programming
Programming must be able to adapt to risks and unknowns in the short term while sticking to the long-term strategy.

Keep the analysis simple – not simplistic
Acknowledge complexity in systems and prioritise activities with multiplier effects.

Organizational processes:
make the system work smarter

Strengthen diverse teams with incentives and rewards
Organisations must create the right incentives to attract the best teams to tackle fragile settings' complex realities.

Keep processes solution-oriented
All steps of the back office's value chain must be geared towards optimum field support.

Leverage system-wide capabilities
Tackling multidimensional fragility requires that multiple areas of expertise across the system to come together.

Plan your exit as carefully as your entry
Achieving sustainable outcomes and avoiding relapse require frequent re-evaluation of objectives – not a box-ticking approach.

Fit for fragility:
Improving operational effectiveness

Reducing overall vulnerability and the number of unmet needs, strengthening risk management capacities, and addressing the root causes of conflict.

Country-level engagement:
identify and invest in partners

Local ownership is essential and must be inclusive
There are always partners to be found in national institutions as well as across societal and geographic areas.

Acknowledge and address political challenges
Addressing deep-rooted drivers of fragility is often a politically sensitive exercise with an important role for diplomacy.

Invest in durable partnerships
Stable partnerships, based on trust and a joint commitment to long-term outcomes, are indispensable to adaptive programming.

Make co-ordination simple and multi-level
Co-ordination is a trade-off between transaction costs and benefits. Examples of good practice offer a simple recipe.

Global framework:
take a fresh look at the dialogue

Assess implications of evolving global realities
The landscape of fragility is evolving, and so must global thinking. Take stock of new trends and their ramifications.

North-South dialogue on fragility remains essential
Renew and sustain North-South dialogue on fragility.

Invest in collaboration and interoperability
Being 'fit for fragility' is in first instance being 'fit for collaboration'. To make systems work together, the devil is in the detail.

Note: This figure was prepared by the OECD based on information gathered in the process of writing this report.

2 Strategic planning: Make long-term goals stick

Engaging in fragile settings is a strategic exercise in managing trade-offs – between short and long term, big picture thinking and technical complexities, needs and means, among others. As the case studies in the Central African Republic, Chad, Honduras and Liberia show, political, economic and social volatility in fragile settings have the potential to distract national stakeholders and development partners from developing a long-term vision for development planning. In the absence of such a long-term vision, issues tend to become increasingly endemic and change stalls.

Investing in initial context analysis is therefore essential to setting the course for further engagement, while navigating the terrain. When clear objectives flow from a sound general analysis of the operational environment, it becomes possible to balance the key challenge of short-term uncertainties with longer-term goals and further address the concomitant drivers of fragility. The objective is thus to stick to long-term goals while managing short-term realities.

The big picture comes first

Development practitioners working in fragile contexts increasingly recognise that technical programmatic solutions, even if well formulated, are often insufficient to achieve the desired result. The field studies carried out within the framework of the "Fit for Fragility" project confirm the need for underpinning programming with a clear theory of change, anchored in systems thinking. In each of the countries visited, many development and civil society actors interviewed struggled to articulate such a vision regarding the country's development trajectory. Indeed, as Desai and Forsberg (2020[11]) point out, "fragility does not emerge out of thin air, but rather through a complex interaction of risks and coping capacities within a system: thinking in systems can help actors move beyond symptoms of fragility to target its root causes, thereby informing more holistic and effective policy responses to fragility." Attention to power dynamics and political economy is about being politically informed and understanding the political consequences of assistance at both the local and national level.

While political processes, informal institutions and power relations played a critical role in the success or failure of development interventions in each context, they were not included systematically in the initial context analysis. Each field study incorporated a conclusion pointing to the need for a thorough review prior to engagement, and recognising multidimensional fragility as a core feature of the context. Such an initial analysis is essential in order to define the strategic objectives of engagement, based on their comparative fit and their guiding theory of change.

For example, interviews in the Central African Republic highlighted concerns about poor contextualisation in programming, increasing the risk for staff and targeted communities. A humanitarian or development project must be appropriate for the context. A solid analysis of the different dimensions of fragility including a conflict sensitivity analysis can considerably reduce protection risks and deliver better results that are accepted by the people concerned. Each specific context requires adapted and innovative responses, which are sometimes adversely impacted by financing partners' pressure to disburse funds. Similarly, in

Honduras, development actors and civil society representatives interviewed for the project reported a lack of attention to historical, anthropological and gendered drivers of fragility, as well as the analysis of the political economy of relevant key issues. Improved analysis would improve cognisance of these underlying dynamics in interventions and engagements in order to address them through programming.

Since development activities serve to complement national systems, a clear vision of the desired end state should include notably an understanding of what an effectively functioning "social contract" between resilient state and society systems would look like. The Central African Republic case study, for example, concluded that political deadlines, peace agreements and electoral cycles should not distract the government and development partners from developing a long-term vision for development planning. Similarly, the Chad case study highlighted the need for a more explicit collective vision of how ongoing programming contributes to building sustainability and fostering social cohesion.

A specific challenge to adequate context analysis occurs when development actors and civil society fail to recognise the applicability of the fragility label in their operating context, as was observed in Honduras. This failure can prove detrimental to the impact and effectiveness of international engagement. Indeed, while Honduras exhibits heightened risks across all five of the OECD fragility framework's dimensions, it tends to be overlooked as a fragile context due to its Central American and middle-income status. Development partners and civil society representatives noted that greater fluency with the concept of fragility would strengthen the joint analysis of Honduras' drivers of fragility, as well as inspire more realistic timelines and scenarios for progress.

Box 2.1. Essential elements of the initial context analysis

Evidence compiled from case studies conducted in the Central African Republic, Chad, Honduras and Liberia as part of the Fit for Fragility project suggests that the initial context analysis should include the following essential elements:

- key multidimensional risks, vulnerabilities and coping capacities
- national institutional context and strategies
- dynamics of power and social exclusion
- the activities and plans of other relevant actors.

Use the available room for flexible programming

Flexible programming and finances are crucial in rapidly evolving contexts. For example, geographically earmarked funding is a major constraint to tracking population movements, including returns, which may leave the most vulnerable unassisted. Compliance systems can also be a major impediment to flexibility. Accordingly, international partners must seek to build flexibility into their programming. In the Central African Republic joint funding mechanisms such as the Bekou Fund and Minka provide a vehicle for programmatic flexibility. Pre-positioned response capacities, such as the UNICEF-led Rapid Response Mechanism, offer another avenue for joint investment in flexible mechanisms. In addition, adaptive programming functions as an important means to ensure flexibility and iterative learning in these fluid contexts.

From the perspective of a financing partner, the inclusion of contingency scenarios in programming and the integration of flexibility into design, procurement and contracting, allows programming to evolve with the context, obviating the need for a complete overhaul. The goal is to manage rather than avoid risks, adopt adaptive programming practices, and seize potential opportunities for collective learning and

change. This approach makes it possible to adhere to long-term goals while managing short-term realities. Examples from CAR and Honduras feature several issues that obstruct flexibility among development actors, such as pressure to disburse or lose funds, programme quality standards that are ill-adapted to insecure or otherwise unstable environments, and short-term project-based financing that impedes the ability of operational partners to develop a long-term vision and retain staff. The approach also includes the analysis of power dynamics and risks, vulnerabilities and existing opportunities.

Working in fragile settings, notably in partnership with national counterparts, often highlights trade-offs between donor objectives of long-term sustainability and short-term accountability and effectiveness. A review of operational challenges in the case studies also highlighted the concern among country-based international partners that their interpretation and measurement of effectiveness often creates a bias for diminished risk appetite and go-alone strategies. Indeed, developments in the operational context may result in slow progress, no progress or indeed regression, whereas development partners often measure their success through results frameworks focused on visible short-term impact. With pressure growing for donors to demonstrate results, it is important to pay attention to measures of effectiveness that are relevant and adapted to the context.

Keep the analysis simple – but not simplistic

Fragile contexts often present conflicting signals which can be hard to capture in a single narrative or "call to action". Avoiding simplified binary thinking and finding ways to capture nuances is often a key challenge in communications between those operating in the field and decision makers. In Honduras, for example, one person interviewed aptly remarked that "Honduras is 50 shades of grey, and Headquarters likes things to be black or white." The country case study emphasised the utility of donor frameworks, strategies and tools that are nuanced to the reality of different types of fragility – not just countries that are either "in crisis" or "not in crisis". Similarly, as Liberia is no longer perceived as a first-tier country in terms of fragility following the departure of UN blue helmets, in-country international stakeholders are struggling to present a narrative that will sustain attention. The current situation presents a set of mixed signals, and while Liberia holds significant untapped potential for development, its complexities and challenges must also be understood and addressed.

Finding the right balance between nuanced analysis and strategic clarity is not just a matter of advocacy; acknowledging complexity and interrelated causalities can lead to paralysis, instead of facilitating focused action. To avoid this scenario, partners should couple systems thinking with iterative learning and a "good enough" approach, allowing clear goals to build to complex solutions. Selecting achievable goal outcomes is an essential part of this challenge. As seen in the Central African Republic case study, there is an inherent tension between the pressure on development actors to report short-term positive results on the one hand, and the challenges of capacity building, which require long-term investment in technical assistance and education on the other.

3 Country-level engagement: Identify and invest in partners

In all four visited countries, most DAC members tended to have a limited presence. This restricts their capacities and means to navigate complex landscapes, and heightens the importance of investing in joint action, leveraging partnerships and ensuring a realistic approach.

Local ownership is essential – and must be inclusive

In each context, allies for peace can be identified within the political and administrative structures. In Liberia, for example, there is recognition of the value of identifying and partnering with "niche" and sectoral administrative entities, in which there are assurances of national ownership and technical competence, notably in the agriculture sector. However, bilateral co-operation must also involve a diversified, whole-of-society approach, with attention to stakeholder perspectives in geographical centres, as well as the periphery. This means refocusing programme design to permeate multiple societal levels and regional areas. The case study conducted in the Central African Republic – where the legitimacy of the government is paramount for stability – highlights the importance of this focus. In order for the state to regain legitimacy, it must deliver across the country. To achieve this in Central African Republic, the state must ensure a minimum administrative presence and service delivery for the population outside the capital, Bangui, even in the eastern areas, which have a low population density.

It should be noted that for many donors, the choice of modalities (budget support, sectoral aid, projects under direct management, etc.) is determined more by globally set preferences than by analysis of the political economy, absorption capacity and development trajectories. In Honduras, three main approaches are currently being employed to address the difficulties and sensitivities that the context presents: (i) work closely with the government and engage in political dialogue; (ii) maintain an arm's length approach to government institutions and broaden support to civil society and other groups; and (iii) attempt to depoliticise engagement through technical programming.

In some cases, fragile settings display a strong disconnect between policy formulation in the capital and practices in the periphery, impeding coherent policy implementation as well as the replication of innovative practices. Approaches that focus only on the centre often exclude partners that might have more legitimacy and direct influence, though lacking in resources or funding. A whole-of-society approach can reinforce the legitimacy of the central government. Conversely, an approach driven by finding credible partners risks becomes opportunistic, encouraging lopsided efforts driven by means rather than ends.

Building partnerships with local governments can be beneficial to ensure local legitimacy and access. However, it can also lead to a more fragmentary approach which, in turn, creates barriers to programme longevity, state-society relations and overall effectiveness (OECD, 2018[12]). The integration of civil society engagement and bottom-up approaches into programme design can provide opportunities to build trust and encourage inclusive policy making, while expanding knowledge bases (de Coning, 2013[13]); and, in Liberia and Honduras, have been shown to contribute significantly to filling gaps in contextual analysis and fragility-informed programming. In wider contexts, evidence has shown that bottom-up approaches with a

specific focus can lead to more effective programming overall (de Coning and Gelot, 2020[14]; Poole and Culbert, 2019[15]). By emphasising the inclusion of diverse geographical and societal components in project implementation, development actors can build truly long-lasting and reliant partnerships.

International actors must actively work to avoid over-interference that does more to undermine overall development goals than strengthen short-term responses. Thus, local actors must determine their needs and respond accordingly. In this way, bottom-up approaches can help international actors transition away from outdated, neo-colonial views of development.

Acknowledge and address political challenges

Some of the most critical drivers of fragility are also among the most politically sensitive. Creative, coherent and context-specific approaches can help overcome political sensitivities. An illustration of this can be found in Honduras, where actors have sought creative solutions to tackle important but controversial issues, such as human rights, corruption and the rule of law, while mitigating risks to other ongoing development programmes. Some partners seek to provide a level of protective distance from the broader co-operation portfolio, while other actors place governance and human rights objectives at the very centre of their engagement, weaving them throughout their entire portfolio. This not only affords the benefit of finding synergies across programmes, but also allows the pursuit of higher-order strategic and political objectives while still delivering more standard programming.

A certain level of political will always be necessary to ensure the success of development projects – and the use of conditional approaches, such as debt for development swaps, can prove advantageous. In many instances, the desire to "stay out of politics" is unattainable, and creative approaches designed to do just that can achieve the opposite effect, as can be seen in the Honduras case study. However, donors diverge in their approaches when it comes to addressing politically sensitive aspects of fragility: some cluster these elements into programmatic focus areas, while others mainstream strategic priorities throughout their programming. Each approach has its pros and cons. Common factors of success include the search for creative programming solutions and the ability to adjust modalities to context.

Ensuring linkages between development and diplomacy is vital in this regard. While actors recognise the need to safeguard humanitarian space, they must also acknowledge and address the political causes of humanitarian needs and vulnerabilities. Honduras provides an example of how a political-technical divide and communication deficit can impede crossover and linkages between technical experts and high-level leadership, thus undermining the ability to underpin technical-level discussions with strategic decisions.

Development actors should not shy away from political capital but should instead harness it with assistance at the headquarters level. Additionally, due to the hyper-politicisation of fragile and conflict-affected situations (FCAS), donors must assess their own political desires in order to determine the kind of support they want to pursue. By establishing a link between diplomacy and development, politically sensitive challenges can be tackled in ways that galvanise support from both national government actors and operators at headquarters. Evidence from the case studies shows that engaging partners in political dialogue enables development actors to strike a balance between political accountability and supporting government sovereignty. Key drivers of fragility are often sensitive and political in nature. The effectiveness of DAC members hinges on clearer and more coherent engagement strategies that bring their political and development objectives and approaches into closer harmony.

To an extent, challenges remain regarding the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus, which often reflect tensions between political agendas – focused mainly around security and stabilisation – and needs-based humanitarian assistance. Addressing these challenges requires a whole-of-government approach (Dalrymple and Swithern, 2019[16]). Trilingualism – or the ability to overcome the barriers between the relative actors in the HDP Nexus – builds linkages between development and diplomacy, and enhances

coherent approaches, while also addressing the need for linkages across the HDP Nexus. Training staff in trilingualism can help to overcome tensions between political sensitivities and humanitarian assistance (SIPRI, 2020[17]). As seen in Chad and Honduras, political awareness can even be a benefit when ensuring operational effectiveness. Indeed, political solutions are essential in order to address many of the drivers of fragility, and may necessitate building partnerships with local governments and developing a legitimate government presence.

The notion of developing "legitimate politics" is not new (IDPS, 2010[4]; IDPS, 2011[18]), and evidence from Liberia shows that government legitimacy can be crucial to implementing effective programming within fragile contexts. To exclude political considerations from programming discussions would be detrimental to the development of whole-of-system or whole-of-government approaches. The complex nature of fragility means that political sensitivities must be taken into consideration and incorporated into the overall programme design, in order to build a more coherent approach.

Invest in durable partnerships

Sustained partnerships and informed risk-sharing – notably with implementing partners – offer possibilities to build trust in otherwise often unstable environments. Lessons from the Liberia case study highlight the importance of mutual trust for promoting flexibility in programming and agreements, while remaining sensitive to the balance between accountability and sovereignty. Other lessons include the need to adjust donor expectations related to risk acceptance, to identify the comparative advantages of key partners, and to invest in technical assistance and education in order to increase mutual accountability and responsibility sharing – and not just at the central level. This approach will build trust among development partners while enabling the formation of true partnerships capable of sustaining operations following mission drawdown (Eade, 2007[19]).To make risk-sharing a reality, financing partners should reward adaptive programming and collaboration, not just results.

At a geographical level, partnerships must extend beyond the centre. In the Central African Republic case study, for example, state presence must be established outside the capital city, to avoid the state from being perceived as an external actor in the country's development. A minimum administrative presence is therefore needed to represent the state, including the police, justice, security and social services. While partnerships with national governments can provide significant opportunities for all, the role of civil society organisations cannot be understated. Civil society's critical role as an intermediate body and partner for development is often complicated by fraught and/or conflictual relationships with the government, absorption capacity challenges and questioned legitimacy. Similar issues often affect the media. In Honduras, moments of crisis have sometimes functioned as windows of opportunity, during which donors can capacitate civil society, encourage robust civic participation and broker improvements towards inclusive policy making.

Make co-ordination simpler

Co-ordination is frequently complex in fragile contexts, which are characterised by multiple priorities, limited national co-ordination capacities and myriad actors operating in the same space. There are three levels of co-ordination, all of which are critical and must be interlinked: 1) strategic co-ordination (including joint political messaging and strategic objectives); 2) operational co-ordination (harmonised and complementary programming); and 3) technical co-ordination (peer learning and standard setting). Systems thinking and co-creation of programmes can be used to build bridges across the HDP nexus and overcome trilingualism barriers between actors within each pillar of the nexus while maintaining local focus.

Co-ordination for its own sake can be a drain on human resources, which are already scarce in many fragile settings. It is therefore essential to focus such activities on areas where they will generate more effective and efficient programming. As the Central African Republic case study shows, if co-ordination devolves into a multitude of meetings without a main focus or tangible results, key actors may disengage.

Good knowledge management is essential to ensuring co-ordination, especially when briefing staff additions to field operations. Moreover, despite the substantial share of ODA in the resource mix of many fragile settings, lessons from Honduras and Liberia show that national governments often do not accord sufficient attention to donor co-ordination. Additionally, the absorption capacity of central governments in fragile settings suffers greatly in situations of highly centralised decision making, constant or drastic rotations of political appointees, and/or lack of mechanisms for effective dialogue with donors. Outside of the present case studies, the lack of dialogue and cross-cutting thematic work remains a challenge towards operational effectiveness (ODI, 2019[20]). This situation emphasises the need for programme strategies that are supported by international actors but executed locally.

Staff must have the capacity to devote time and resources to co-ordination. Adherence to eight principles can help build staff capacity: 1) staff operating with unity of objectives, 2) alignment with local priorities, 3) risk management, 4) division of labour, 5) avoidance of gaps and overlaps, 6) cost/benefit of "transactions", 7) context-specificity, and 8) privileging the use of existing co-ordination mechanisms over the creation of new ones. Co-ordination mechanisms can focus on strategic priorities and shared analysis or issues; they can also be developed on a geographical basis. To be effective, these mechanisms must be complemented by an effective system for exchanging information on programmes, funding, timetables and gaps. An example of this type of system is discussed in Box 3.1.

Box 3.1. "Country platforms" as collective mechanisms for co-ordination and iterative learning

Enhanced co-ordination through joint iterative planning and learning is the foundation for building improved, system-wide coherence in fragile settings. While there exists no one-size-fits-all solution to make multi-stakeholder co-ordination effective, examples abound of successful platforms.

One attempt to standardise co-ordination is the country platforms initiative, which provides core elements that can be applied to fit each context and build on existing systems. Country platforms serve effectively as government-owned frameworks that incorporate a built-in accountability mechanism for all partner organisations and agencies. They act as a vehicle for more collaborative, resilient, adaptive and scalable approaches, with the main goal of improving collaboration and co-operation between development partners in addition to improving national partnerships.

Country platforms are structured around three levels of co-ordination:

- **A high-level steering group** helps foster coherence between various national strategies and translates their goals into achievable plans, maintaining a long-term perspective. It also provides the basis for strategic-level mutual accountability among partners and mobilises the resources required to fulfil joint strategic objectives.
- **Sector-level co-ordination** is led by line ministries and technical experts and is critical to determining resource flows and managing organisational overlaps or gaps in programme implementation.
- **A secretariat** works to facilitate overall joint development processes.

Somalia provides a model for how country platforms can help enhance co-ordination. Although international partners were co-ordinating meaningfully within Somalia prior to establishment of the platform, there was a notable lack of local inclusion in development programming. The country platform was created as a way to overcome this challenge in the context of the creation of the National Development Plan (NDP) in 2017. Somalia's country platform helped to narrow significantly the number of development priorities, shifted development programming from a donor-led to government-led model, and offered an inclusive governance structure to oversee the achievement of activities under the NDP, supported by a dedicated pooled fund (Papoulidis, 2020[21]).

4 Organisational processes: Make the system work smarter

Seen through the lens of country-level engagement, organisational processes are the stage for back office practices used to align and control headquarters-based operational support. These include the procedures for planning strategy and operations, setting budgets, measuring and rewarding performance, and reporting progress and conducting meetings. It is fair to say that, historically, and despite a recognition of the importance of context-specific approaches, most DAC members have relied on the same organisational model to operate in settings across all degrees of fragility. In the most fragile settings, the requirements of this approach tend to overwhelm longer-term strategic goals of country engagement. This explains why the desire to "do development differently" is particularly strong for donors working in fragile contexts (Gulrajani and Honig, 2016[22]).

Nevertheless, while some organisational design models seem better suited to evidence-based adaptive management and iterative learning in fragile settings, profound organisational reform with a view to adopting new paradigms often seems out of reach. Rewiring the underlying institutional framework only seems possible under rare circumstances, while each effort to reform existing systems also comes at a cost in terms of short-term efficiency and impact. An alternative approach is to make the best of existing frameworks, accounting for comparative advantages and seeking complementary among partners.

Strengthen diverse teams with incentives and rewards.

As the country case studies illustrate, extremely fragile contexts are often characterised by limited national absorption capacity and gaps in trained national capacities. These contexts often necessitate the deployment of significant numbers of experienced international staff. Development partners face great difficulties in filling positions, resulting in high turnover, which in turn affects institutional memory and reduces the quality and speed of implementation. For international staff, incentives to apply for positions in fragile contexts are not always perceived as commensurate with the hardships involved. Better rewards for commitment, tenacity and entrepreneurship are needed to make fragile contexts an attractive option to staff with the right mix of expertise and competencies. One financing partner in Honduras, for example, specifically requested that field staff include one objective in their annual performance review related to informed risk-taking. Not only does this approach prevent staff from being penalised by their institution for taking risks, it actively inspires them to do so. However, in order to truly maximise the effectiveness of such ad-hoc field approaches, it is important that the broader incentive structure does not cancel out their positive effect.

The strongest teams are those with diversity built in. The recognition that international staff's expertise cannot be optimised without local knowledge means ensuring that local voices are not just present, but also central to a team's development. Carefully managed, such participation can deliver mutually beneficial gains for both the team and its interlocutors in a fragile context, in terms of design (better programmes), cost effectiveness and legitimacy (locally and people-focused) (Slim, 2020[23]).

The increasingly protracted nature of many fragile contexts means that short-term solutions to this challenge are inadequate. The examples from Central African Republic, Chad and Liberia all underscore the importance of improving the retention of international and national staff in development organisations, including (when relevant) in remote areas beyond the capital.

Donor effectiveness is also contingent on their ability to attract experienced international staff in a difficult environment. However, the strategic relevance of fragile contexts for achieving global development goals is poorly reflected in incentive structures. Creating attractive conditions also presents issues of inter-organisational co-ordination, with the non-family duty station status determination by the United Nations identified in both Liberia and Central African Republic as an important constraint on the ability of other international partners to attract staff members with families.

Keep processes solution-oriented

Flexibility and adaptability to future risks are crucial when operating in fragile contexts. However, in recent decades, a combination of structural and cultural elements has reduced the flexibility of parts of the aid sector. While some structural changes are intended to facilitate the efficient, timely and rigorous delivery of aid, they sometimes have the opposite effect, particularly when associated with organisational cultures that favour standardisation over responsiveness.

Several interlocutors in Liberia, for example, reported that increased professionalisation and standardisation of processes at headquarters had reduced operational flexibility in the field. This underlines the importance of maintaining an organisational culture that permits the use of discretion within regulatory limits. "In the past", stated one interviewee, "one was allowed to take action if there were no explicit rules against it. Now, if the rules do not explicitly allow it, it is perceived as forbidden". Similar concerns were raised in other countries visited. In Honduras, actors reported instances where the effectiveness of innovative approaches to calculated risk-taking and adaptive programming was cancelled out by the impact of procedural requirements (procurement, tendering, budgeting, etc.).

High-level decision makers have a role to play in making organisational culture more attuned to field needs. Headquarters should, to the extent possible, take their cues from the field, making use of the full range of bureaucratic flexibility to adapt processes to the context. For work across the HDP Nexus in Central African Republic and Chad, for example, the "devil is in the details" (e.g. contract terms, logical frameworks, targeting criteria, funding cycles, etc.). All involved staff must therefore be sensitised to the operational realities at the end of the value chain of which they form a part. Part of this approach could include introducing staff performance indicators at headquarters that measure the quality and relevance of support provided to country-based offices. The need to empower field offices through enhanced delegation of authority and decision making was also identified as a useful measure.

Taking cues from the field also means deferring to the opinion of country-based personnel when establishing the course of action on starting or closing operations. At the level of individual activities, cases were reported of programming proposals developed at country level being overruled by headquarters based on different analyses of the country context. Similarly, broader decisions on engaging or disengaging from a fragile setting should to the extent possible be the product of a joint analysis involving both headquarters and field offices.

Leverage system-wide capabilities

The multidimensional and often engrained nature of fragility across many contexts requires more varied and intense analytical efforts and a broader toolset than typical development programming can offer. In Honduras, for example, development actors and civil society representatives interviewed for the project

noted that a better understanding of historical, anthropological and gender-specific fragility factors, and the specific political economy of each issue, would allow for more effective engagement.

Such an approach requires international partners to be able to tap into sets of expertise and skills beyond the traditional development realm. This implies the promotion of coherent and effective engagement across all involved pillars of public administration, guided by common objectives and field needs. Beyond a whole-of-government approach, investing in a whole-of-society approach offers a way to mobilise expertise and capabilities from civil society and academia. In practice, this requires more focused attention to overcoming silos both within and between organisations.

Plan your exit as carefully as your entry

In terms of their exit strategy for post-crisis settings, international partners should avoid disengaging at the first signs of improved security and political stability. Progress should be rewarded with redoubled financial efforts and stronger inclusive partnerships. The country case studies of Central African Republic and Liberia show that diminished international attention can quickly lead to setbacks. After a crisis, acute humanitarian needs remain and are compounded by development and stability needs, making an even greater case for support. As the situation improves, however, it is important that partners elaborate a vision to accompany the partner country on its new, post-crisis path and define evolving requirements in terms of local ownership, authority and service delivery. For conflict-affected contexts this means analysing the components necessary for successful transitions to sustainable outcomes (OECD, 2020[24]).

Looking back on the period of UN peacekeeping in Liberia, which ended recently, some interlocutors saw a missed opportunity to address issues that, while important, seemed less pressing in a context where security was a priority. (See also (United Nations, 2018, p. 113[25]) As a result, these issues now seem deeply entrenched and more difficult to address, creating a much more volatile context than anticipated when the peacekeeping mission closed its doors. Meanwhile, diminished international attention has led to reduced capacity on the part of international actors to mobilise high-level diplomatic engagement, while some Liberian counterparts debate the disincentive for peaceful coexistence created by the perceived international disengagement from their country. Similar challenges were raised in Central African Republic, where the level of international support seems conditioned on the existence of violence.

Exit strategies should form part of the initial planning and programme design process. This approach not only links short-term goals to long-term goals, but enables donors to strategically plan funding and build long-term, sustainable partnerships with local actors or external stakeholders.

5 Global framework: Take a fresh look at the dialogue

Despite the changing landscape of fragility arising from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is broad consensus on the substance of the development agenda and principles, as well as general agreement among DAC members that aid effectiveness, including in fragile settings, needs renewed attention.

Assess the implications of evolving global trends

Development co-operation in fragile contexts is increasingly under pressure from alternative models of international engagement. Some members of civil society and government in the visited countries expected broader engagement with DAC members not limited to financial aid and ODA disbursements. This was most notable in Liberia, where some civil society and private sector stakeholders expressed a desire to see engagement on the part of DAC members translate into "more than charity alone". Typical donor planning cycles are often too short and institutional frameworks too constraining to accommodate the type of large-scale projects able to propel economies such as Liberia. A longer term development co-operation horizon and increased efforts towards diversifying the resource mix might allow bilateral and multilateral partners to set more ambitious targets and increase their impact.

Moreover, while ODA has varied over the years, there has been increasing demand for other forms of assistance from development partners and ODA than the traditional modalities of development co-operation. These partnerships, and the delivery modality of ODA, have changed – they no longer revolve around increases in financial aid or ODA-dependent relationships; rather, they emphasise the creation of relationships on an equal footing. Local actors want a more customer-driven approach, rather than one that merely meets their minimum requirements (OECD, 2019[26]). This means adjusting financial aid to fit the context rather than adjusting the context to match existing ODA support.

In the light of the COVID-19 crisis, there is also a need to assess the international development system's capacity to absorb several major emergencies simultaneously. The systematic shock of COVID-19 has highlighted the inability, or lack of preparation in absorbing multiple crises at once. It has affected all levels of global societies and has exacerbated fragility (OECD, 2020[27]; OECD, 2020[28]). The medium-term impact of the pandemic on humanitarian aid is still being determined; however, it has become clear that delivery modalities – and ways of thinking about how to deliver – must adapt to positively affect fragile contexts. This point has been a topic of much discussion at the Spring 2020 International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF) Task Team Meeting (INCAF, 2020[29]), in addition to regular meetings attended by INCAF, the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (IDPS), the g7+, and the Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (CSPPS). Additionally, the pandemic has highlighted the need to formulate how best to address immediate humanitarian crises without foregoing long-term development progress – a trend that has been emerging for a while (DuBois, 2018[30]) – and deliver aid through modalities that are not sector reliant and cut across all dimensions of fragility.

Other global trends over the past five years include a renewed focus in many nations on national priorities and interests at the cost of development co-operation. This has resulted in reluctance to engage in development projects oriented towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with attention instead being refocused towards sectors and projects that have direct links to stated political priorities, either regionally or thematically. Additionally, there is a need to examine how fragile contexts have been affected by this global political shift, especially as the majority of fragile contexts were listed as authoritarian in 2019 (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2020[31]). One such consequence of this shift could be an increase in the politicisation of ODA delivery and a corresponding decrease in the ability of development actors to collaborate or interact with those governments. Regardless, the need to address political sensitivities within fragile settings remains consistent.

North-South dialogue on fragility remains essential

Fragility represents one of the greatest threats to achieving the SDGs and Agenda 2030. Over the past ten years, various initiatives and normative frameworks have been developed and put into action by the international community to overcome this threat and to increase development effectiveness in fragile contexts. Despite these examples, however, the space for dialogue around effectiveness is narrowing (Brown, 2020[32]). Dialogue does exist in the form of South-South co-operation and triangular co-operation. However, these spaces are not inclusive of both the North and the South and provide only limited opportunities to enhance shared analysis and joint approaches to fragile settings across key players beyond the providers of traditional ODA. Additionally, these venues for discussion generally focus on commitments, rather than dialogue (Bracho, 2017[33]). (Re-)enlarging the global space for dialogue and encouraging its use, notably on aid effectiveness and partnerships, conflict prevention and peacebuilding, is essential to effective engagement in fragile contexts. While global dialogue has implications for country-level discussions, these implications extend further into high-level multinational forums such as the United Nations Security Council.

Such dialogue must also take the form of two-way conversations (i.e. North-South rather than North to South), further emphasising the need for inclusive partnerships (OECD, 2011[34]). The lessons of the Busan Partnership, of establishing substantial partnerships and the importance of continual dialogue between partners and donors, are pertinent here in terms of development effectiveness. Finding the space for dialogue remains essential in regards to finding what has or has not worked in terms of programme design and implementation in fragile contexts.

Invest in collaboration and inter-operability

To a large extent, being fit for fragility also involves being fit for collaboration. As seen in Chad, donors in the capital appear eager to co-ordinate on implementation, but their institutional priorities and frameworks are not always optimised for co-ordination. Some of the building blocks for such collaboration exist at the country level. The close-knit donor community is working on the same types of analyses and developing similar logical frameworks, and the political will exists to drive co-ordination at country-level. However, procedures and institutional mechanisms at headquarters (e.g. dispute resolution and auditing mechanisms, and other legal frameworks) often present practical impediments to co-ordination. These structural constraints run counter to the shared goals of improved flexibility and coherence. Continued attention to ensure better interoperability between DAC members is crucial to increasing the impact and effectiveness of collective engagement. DAC networks can provide clear pathways into sustainable collaboration on specific thematic issues such as gender, governance and environment.

Even in settings with a limited donor presence, the international community's capacity to jointly implement effective advocacy around critical time-sensitive issues often hinges on the existence of stable and

effective mechanisms for dialogue with national decision makers and international co-ordination of good offices. All four case studies highlight trends for effective programmatic collaboration that emerged from areas with strong and recognised national or donor leadership, or organically from specific joint programming priorities.

Identifying the operational bottlenecks between field level and headquarters is crucial to ensuring organisations are fit for collaboration. Investing in joint workshops or peer learning can help build collaboration and strengthen co-ordination. Sectoral/thematic donor co-ordination is often highly non-committal, fragmented across sectors and insufficiently connected to strategic policy dialogue. In Chad and Honduras, for example, the focus on sectoral/thematic co-ordination is perceived as having limited opportunities for cross-sectoral analysis. Co-ordination across thematic areas can greatly improve interoperability between donor agencies and fill operational gaps in comparative advantage.

In this regard, the ongoing momentum for implementation of the DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus offers an opportunity for applying transferable approaches to new contexts.

6 "So what?" Takeaways for decision makers for enhanced field effectiveness

In recognition of the significant challenges linked to working in fragile contexts, humanitarian, development and peace actors should continue to implement the DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus and share their experience and knowledge, so that they can consolidate successes and respond more effectively to failure. Failure to deliver expected results in fragile contexts shapes the reality for all organisations and people operating and living in fragile contexts. Addressing fragility in fragile contexts is complex and frequently presents wicked problems that test even the best approaches. As DAC members strive for better outcomes, failure can be sustained as part of the process of engagement, as long as it is matched by organised learning reactions, effective communication, and a willingness to adapt and change approaches as needed.

People living in both fragile and non-fragile contexts must be sensitised to the importance of addressing issues of fragility. A multi-level communication deficit on this issue could undermine Agenda 2030 and compromise effective action in fragile contexts. Where they exist, communication strategies to address fragility issues often focus on technical audiences and specialised media. Similarly, strategic leadership has a larger role to play in ensuring that organisational models are adapted to the operational challenges of fragile contexts. Leadership can also play a role in fostering public support and political will for coherent and risk-tolerant response efforts. There are sufficient examples to show how linking stakeholders at international, national and local levels can add legitimacy, credibility and effectiveness to processes and technical approaches in fragile contexts. This underscores the important contribution of strategic decision makers in improving engagement among international partners in fragile contexts. Actors across the HDP Nexus must continue to invest and innovate to improve communication strategies around general budget support issues in fragile and non-fragile contexts.

Ultimately, the Fit for Fragility project's case studies demonstrate the continued validity of many pre-existing ideas about how to strengthen operational effectiveness in fragile contexts. A fundamental question for further study therefore remains, why development co-operation actors have not been more successful at implementing these ideas in recent decades. Part of the answer is offered in this paper's introduction: there remains a need to translate of broad policy prescriptions into more practical, easily digestible guidance for field practitioners. However, whether the development co-operation system as a whole can become more fit for fragility through a renewed focus on operations without any broader rethink of its core systems, mechanisms and toolbox, likely deserves further study.

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Annex A. International commitments on effective development co-operation

When developing guidance for enhancing international engagement in fragile contexts, it is necessary to take into account key international commitments for effective development co-operation over the past 15 years. Although these commitments have been analysed extensively elsewhere (Abdel-Malek, 2015[35]); (GPEDC, 2018[2]), the main elements and implementation challenges associated with these commitments are summarised here, as they informed the research undertaken for the Fit for Fragility project. Figure A.1 presents a timeline of key international commitments from 2003 to 2016, including specific commitments made in relation to fragile situations and conflicts.

Figure A.1. International commitments for effective development co-operation: An overview
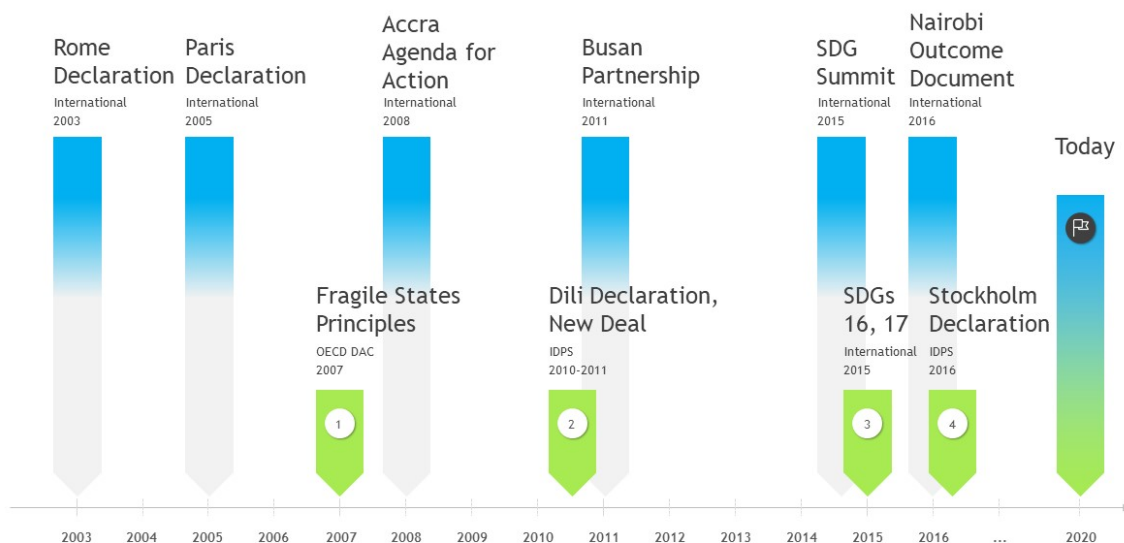
Notes: 1) The World Humanitarian Summit (2006) represented an additional important milestone, with a specific focus on humanitarian emergencies – surfacing in many instances in fragile settings. 2) The present figure uses the commonly accepted shorthand names for the presented international summits and commitments. Names in full, in chronological order, are: the Rome Declaration on Harmonisation (2003); the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005); the Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations (2007); the Accra Agenda for Action (2008); the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation (2011); the Dili Declaration on Peace-building and State-building and the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States (2010-2011); the Sustainable Development Summit and Goals (2015); the Nairobi Outcome Document (2016); and the Stockholm Declaration on Addressing Fragility and Peace-building in a Changing World (2016). 3) Whereas the existing body of international commitments for effective development co-operation in fragile settings can be traced back to the "Rome Declaration" (2003), specific attention to fragile contexts started with the "Fragile States Principles" (2007).

Of the international commitments reflected in Figure A A.1, five are particularly relevant for fragile settings and protracted emergencies (GPEDC, 2018[2]).

The "Fragile States Principles" (2007), an abbreviation for the "Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations", are a product of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC). They take the form of ten principles on engagement in fragile contexts with the aim of doing no harm. Specific elements pertaining to effectiveness in fragile settings include: context specificity, avoiding harm, effective governance, prevention and non-discrimination.

The Dili Declaration on Peace-building and State-building and **the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States (2010-2011)** emerged in the aftermath of the Busan Partnership and laid the foundation for the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (IDPS). They represent an effort to bring specific commitments on fragile contexts into harmony with the new aid architecture. They include five peacebuilding and statebuilding goals (PSGs), five FOCUS principles and five TRUST principles. Novel elements in the Dili Declaration include language on capacity development, flexibility, planning processes and political dialogue. The New Deal included the PSGs as well as attention to legitimate politics, security, justice, economic foundations, and revenues and services.

Sustainable Development Goals 16 and 17 were adopted by the UN General Assembly as part of the broader SDG framework in 2015. They reflect a focus on "Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions" and "Partnerships for the Goals", respectively, both of which have particular relevance in fragile settings. An annual SDG follow-up and review mechanism exists to monitor progress.

The Stockholm Declaration on Addressing Fragility and Peace-building in a Changing World (2016) was adopted by the IDPS a year after the World Humanitarian Summit and followed the publication of the associated report of the UN Secretary-General, *One Humanity, Shared Responsibility* (United Nations, 2016[36]). The Stockholm Declaration renewed the commitment of IDPS members to implementing the 2030 Agenda in line with the principles and commitments set out in the New Deal and considering the specific situations of fragile contexts.

Annex B. Case studies – overview

The case studies used in this paper were commissioned as part of the 2019-2020 workplan of the International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF), which brings together OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) members, UN agencies and international financial institutions.

The overall objective of these studies was to address challenges to improving operational effectiveness in fragile and conflict-affected situations. This paper utilises their findings to provide evidence-based policy guidance to decision makers in DAC members at both headquarters and field level on improving operational effectiveness in fragile contexts.

Between April and September 2019, the following case studies were conducted for the project:

- Honduras (April 2019)
- Central African Republic (July 2019)
- Chad (September 2019)
- Liberia (September 2019).

The country case studies were selected among the fifty-eight countries identified as fragile in the States of Fragility report 2018. For this selection, INCAF members took into consideration the regional spread between the four possible cases, in-country election cycles and security risks, as well as a balanced distribution between extremely fragile, chronically fragile, low-income and middle-income fragile contexts.

Each country visit lasted one week and encompassed a combination of bilateral interviews and focus group meetings with INCAF members in-country, their partners, as well as government focal points and civil society representatives. The aim of these meetings was to obtain as holistic a view as possible on what what practitioners feel is required to effectively tackle countries' respective drivers of fragility. On the last day of each visit, a small informal roundtable was held with INCAF members to discuss key impressions emerging from the visit.

The findings of the Fit For Fragility project were presented initially to INCAF members at the 1st quarter 2020 INCAF Task Team Session for discussion and were later revised based on their inputs.

Annex C. Key findings from the Honduras case study

Conceptualisations of fragility must remain broad

Honduras exemplifies multidimensional fragility, exhibiting heightened risk across all five dimensions of the OECD fragility framework. However, despite its inclusion in the OECD's fragility frameworks for 2016 and 2018, and the considerable challenges it presents, Honduras is still not widely considered a "fragile" context. Instead, it exemplifies the many different shades or "states" of fragility. As a middle-income context in a region not typically included in recent fragility or conflict conversations, it is easy to overlook the evident contextual facts which demonstrate that Honduras is indeed fragile. Beyond mere categorisation, the "fragility" label has implications for the analysis performed there and the language used around difficulties, as well as the sequencing and types of programming and approaches deemed appropriate. Lack of overall acceptance of the fragility label hinders HDP actors in Honduras from maximising their potential, because they are not fully adapted to the realities or special needs of a fragile context. A broader understanding of fragility should also be accompanied by greater sensitivity to the importance of a "do no harm" approach and a "politically smart" way of working.

The Honduran context requires more varied and intense analytical efforts in order to capture its fragility

One benefit of Honduras being categorised and considered as fragile by a greater proportion of the international community would be the additional analysis into root causes that usually accompanies this categorisation. For instance, macro-economic reports paint a very different and more positive picture of Honduras' trajectory than international and civil society actors spoken to for this project felt was justified or accurate. The majority of interviewees cited lack of in-depth analysis as a hindrance to wider acknowledgement of Honduras' complexity. Development actors and civil society representatives noted that a deeper understanding of historical, anthropological and gendered drivers of fragility, and in particular political economy analyses of certain key issues – for example, the country's corruption epidemic – would enable interventions and engagements to be more cognisant of these deeper dynamics and the potential effects (both positive and negative) that programming might have on them.

The reports that do exist tend to focus on a single issue and lack a systems-based approach to weave together multiple threads into a coherent picture – one which highlights commonalities and interlinkages and explains how these systems function. The reports also tend to focus only on the most extreme manifestations of Honduras' fragility, such as various forms of social violence (homicides, femicides, etc.), without exploring the more profound structural drivers and impacts of this violence, and their impact on multiple other drivers of fragility in the country.

In addition, many of the development and civil society actors interviewed struggled to articulate Honduras' home-grown coping capacities and sources of resilience. This places Honduras in unique territory vis à vis a typical approach to fragility, which would work to strengthen these positive elements. Development actors' approaches would thus strongly benefit from additional analytical reflection and identification of

these positive entry points. People interviewed for this study also repeatedly emphasised that enhanced analytical capacities should not be led by consultants who visit to the country for limited periods, but instead be led from within Honduran civil society and, notably, represent all segments of civil society, including the views of the most marginalised groups.

A vision for the future is needed to drive change

In contrast to many fragile contexts where dynamic situations quickly render analyses out of date, one of the challenges noted in Honduras was a generalised lack of dynamism. Change and progress are very slow and the context evolves only gradually despite considerable development interventions and the volatility of the government itself, which is characterised by high levels of turnover with each electoral cycle. Development partners and civil society representatives interviewed felt that many Hondurans lack not only a comprehensive narrative of violence that integrates multiple and structural causes, as well as other pressing issues affecting many people's lives, but also a shared vision of the future.

This absence of a common and shared vision of change, especially one that integrates perspectives from across different groups, makes formalised civil society, and citizens more broadly, difficult to motivate and collectively mobilise. Honduran society, both government and citizenry, was also frequently described as a difficult context for working at depth on certain issues such as gender, and the fact that people would often "rather flee than fight". The current focus on migration should therefore be understood as part of this wider context.

Development partners and civil society representatives also noted that citizens in many of the most vulnerable places in Honduras are traumatised by years of dealing with endemic poverty, extremely high levels of violence, and extreme economic, political and social uncertainty. The low momentum for change becomes more understandable if these contextual considerations are taken into account. While it is broadly recognised that change in fragile contexts must be driven nationally if it is to be truly successful and sustainable, this scenario is difficult to envision in Honduras over the short term. Likewise, the current volatility of the region has also further reduced donors' appetite for transformational change that could potentially be destabilising.

In Honduras, three main approaches are being used to address contextual difficulties and sensitivities

INCAF members vary in their programmatic approaches to operating in the highly politicised Honduran context. However, three main approaches were observed, although there was some overlap between them, as well as on certain issues. The first approach involves members working closely with government and engaging them in dialogue around a variety of issues. This level of co-operation provides entry points through which donors can support reform with their programming, not only by creating incentives for change, but also by benchmarking progress. One example of this approach is the European Union's practice of providing budget support to enable policy dialogue, with a view to identifying areas of complementarity between priority issues for the government, and areas of longer-term interest such as climate change and the sustainability of development impacts.

However, for some international actors, working closely with a government that many consider to have close ties with corrupt networks of political elites, is perceived as reinforcing an unacceptable status quo. Such an approach could further entrench negative dynamics and potentially reduce the impact of collective political pressure that could otherwise be used more effectively to push for reform. Instead, these actors take an arms-length approach to working closely through and with government institutions that also allow support for a broader variety of national institutions with their programming, in particular civil society.

The last approach is that taken by INCAF members, who prefer to keep their engagements purely technical, preventing them from being drawn into sensitive political discussions. Of course, it is debatable whether any activity that takes place in such a politicised environment can truly be neutral.

While no consensus was reached on the best approach for effective programming, there was agreement that the variation of approaches used by INCAF members negatively affected the ability of the international community to utilise their collective weight to push for change.

Support for strengthening civil society is a priority

Despite the lack of a common programmatic approach, everyone interviewed for this study agreed that – precisely because of the politicisation of society – supporting, strengthening and empowering all segments of civil society is a priority. Civil society is currently fragmented and overstretched, and is thus unable to strategically or proactively address the seriousness of the challenges they face. Because of the fraught relationship between government and civil society, many INCAF members felt a responsibility through their programming – whether directly or indirectly – to foster dialogue and a more constructive relationship between national actors.

Building the capacity of civil society in any fragile context is not easy – and donors acknowledged challenges in identifying organisations to support these efforts beyond the "usual suspects", as well as in finding the right level of accompaniment to allow for flexibility and independence. However, in Honduras, moments of crisis can be windows of opportunities, and civil society must be capacitated to seize these as they arise. For instance, acceptance of the Mission to Support the Fight against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras (MACCIH) was frequently referenced as an example of a situation becoming so dire that pressure was placed on the government to accept a greater degree of oversight and reform than they would otherwise under normal circumstances. The use of current programmes and projects to encourage more robust civic participation, and the ability to serve as a broker and facilitator between civil society at large and the government, were clear ways in which INCAF members felt they could ensure a much greater degree of sustainability for their engagements in Honduras.

Programmatic focus for controversial issues vs. mainstreaming a strategic vision throughout

Finally, the lack of clear and obvious entry points to work on sensitive issues has pushed donors to find creative ways to address them through their programming. Conversations with INCAF members highlighted two notable examples. The first is GIZ's Reform Fund, a mechanism that allows donors to address important issues such as human rights, corruption and the rule of law, without impacting ongoing development projects. This mechanism provides some protective distance from the broader co-operation portfolio and facilitates a greater appetite for risk, which is often necessary to address potentially controversial issues. The second example is an approach undertaken by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. Instead of separating programmes of a more sensitive nature, they place governance and human rights objectives at the centre of their engagement, weaving them throughout their entire portfolio. This approach affords them a vantage point to identify synergies across programmes, and allows them to pursue higher order strategic and political objectives while delivering more standard programming. Additionally, this mainstreamed portfolio approach guards against engagement becoming too "projectised" or siloed in different sectors.

Fragility classification also impacts institutional coherence and the potential of field offices to adapt

In many fragile contexts, there is a mismatch between the ambition of headquarters and field-level realities. This mismatch is more apparent in Honduras as many donor institutions have not officially classified the country as "fragile". This has made it more difficult for respective country offices to adapt as appropriate. As one person interviewed put it, "Honduras is 50 shades of grey, and headquarters likes things to be black or white". In fragile contexts that are more widely accepted as such, appropriate systems are in place to address existing challenges. However, several INCAF members remarked on the lack of a paradigm in their institutions matching the Honduran context. This points to the need for donor frameworks, strategies and tools that are more nuanced to the reality of different types of fragility, rather than approaches that label countries as either "in crisis" or "not in crisis".

National staff working on analysis and programming is also seen as a way to ensure that the reality of the context is integrated more closely into institutional approaches. National staff are highly valued in all INCAF teams and contribute greatly to filling gaps in contextual analysis and fragility-informed programming.

Development actors also noted the importance of a mission culture that accepts the realities of the context and finds ways to address them while balancing the priorities and needs of headquarters. However, this balance is often more explicit in contexts that are widely accepted as fragile.

Leadership plays a huge role in generating unique and tailored ways of working, particularly in places where such approaches have not been established by headquarters. In Honduras, such a "fragility sensitive" culture and way of working can take a while to set-up, but in several cases appears to have outlasted the initial mission leadership. This indicates that adapted behaviours, if given a catalytic push, can have real staying power if not actively dismantled by successive leadership.

Calculated risk and adaptive approaches can be incentivised, provided that other institutional procedures do not work against them

In addition to ensuring that field office culture fosters the type of engagements required to address fragility, two further examples of structures put in place to support staff emerged from the research. The first of these, USAID's "Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA)" approach functioned as an effective set of practices that did not rely on the application of a "fragility" classification to be applicable. This approach has helped reduce risk over the long-term through built-in trial and error, an important component in places where the need for high levels of flexibility might not be immediately obvious.

In a second example, a donor specifically requested that field staff include one objective in their annual performance review related to informed risk-taking. Not only does this approach prevent staff from being penalised by their institution for taking risks, it actively inspires them to do so. However, in order to truly maximise the effectiveness of both of these innovative approaches, it is important that other procedures do not introduce transaction costs that cancel out their positive effect – for example, those related to procurement, tendering, budgeting and so on.

Political-technical coherence is considered less mandatory than in more typical fragile contexts

As in many fragile contexts, the elite – particularly the corrupt elite – within government was frequently cited by interviewees as a major barrier to greater focus on important (and sensitive) issues that are central to progress on addressing fragility and building resilience. However, in contrast to contexts where governments are openly adversarial or oppositional, in Honduras, the common refrain is "you never have

a bad meeting with the government": they typically say yes, while in reality making few changes. While this makes for more pleasant interactions with officials, in some ways it makes it more difficult for the international community to advocate for reforms without seeming obtrusive.

In general, despite the money it brings to the country and state coffers, technical/development co-operation is considered to have less leverage over the Honduran government than political pressure. This implies a need for having clear strategies for engagement in place – ones that unite the two strands of co-operation and ensure that they are complementary to and supportive of the same objectives (albeit in different ways). However, the success of a more aligned approach will ultimately be dictated by the risk appetite of INCAF member representatives, notably at the political level, and their comfort with assertively pursuing reforms. It was noted that – perhaps because Honduras is not widely considered to be fragile – many political colleagues favoured a less risky approach because bilateral agendas and commercial interests take precedence over addressing fragility and potentially "rocking the boat".

Thematically organised donor platforms allow for more focused coherence, but are still used mostly for communication rather than co-ordination.

The G16 "mesas", at the technical level, were frequently cited as a useful structure to facilitate the sharing of information, and to raise awareness about certain approaches and programming. While the thematic focus of the mesas seemed to work well, however, and constituted an effective platform for donor communication around a specific issue/topic, those interviewed felt that further progress could be made on pushing for more actual co-ordination and, ultimately, co-operation. Furthermore, in relation to the political-technical divide mentioned above, technical participants noted a lack of crossover or linkage with the political level of the G-16. The impact of the mesas could be amplified if higher-level leadership were to support discussions undertaken at the technical level.

As in most places, deeper levels of joint working are less dependent on formalised structures and more dependent on personalities and the individuals involved, as well as "like-mindedness" and donor priorities. An alternative or additional approach to co-ordination is organisation based on a subnational focus. One such example is the Alliance for the Dry Corridor or La Mosquitia, which focuses on two of Honduras' most vulnerable regions. In both examples, focused co-ordination (around either a theme or a subnational territory) appears to provide space for more targeted conversations than is the case in general donor co-ordination fora. However, several donors noted that co-ordination could be further improved through greater government involvement and specific guidance and oversight regarding the areas and manner in which they would value increased co-ordination among the international community.

Few entry points for change mean that new partners must be brought into the fragility conversation

Honduras serves as a perfect example of the need for a broader perspective in terms of identifying partners, among the ecosystem of actors in a given context, to better address fragility. Direct incentives and entry points with government are few and far between, and civil society is still building the necessary capacity to mobilise. Accordingly, INCAF members agreed on the need to look further afield in order to build partnerships and coalitions for change. In particular, given their legitimacy with the government, the private sector is felt to be under-utilised in applying pressure for reform. As their interests and growth opportunities become increasingly affected by instability and uncertainty, it is hoped that they may function as a lever to push government to strengthen all facets of the rule of law.

Likewise, it was suggested that the media could be brought on board as key players in helping to steer the country's journey towards greater resilience. In order to play this role, however, the media will require support to develop their independent and professional capacities and must be sensitised to the importance

of their task, which involves not only reporting on Honduras' challenges – for instance, violence and migration – but also communicating positive messages. As described above, many people interviewed for this study struggled to articulate Honduras' coping capacities and sources of resilience, but the media could catalyse efforts to reflect on this issue and contribute to positive public discourse and the cohesion of a more active civil society by presenting a picture that is more balanced.

Broader agreement on multidimensional fragility in Honduras would actively facilitate more systemic and strategic international engagement

Another benefit of a multidimensional fragility approach is that it allows for the design of country strategies – both within a single donor institution and system wide – that are more holistic and integrated. Without this overarching framework, many actors in Honduras are pursuing individual portfolios that do not necessarily add up to a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. On this basis, the European Union (EU) is currently spearheading efforts to establish a joint strategy, based on likeminded European actors working more closely under a broad umbrella of EU values, which still allows individual approaches and instruments.

This does not imply that other programmes are not successful or having a positive impact, but addressing a challenge as profound as fragility requires a collective effort, work across multiple sectors, and a balanced and mutually reinforcing approach that does not focus solely on symptoms. For instance, while reducing high levels of homicides and other forms of violence is commonly agreed to be a clear priority, this violence is an outward manifestation of multiple rooted cultural, socio-economic and political issues. Therefore, any gains on the security front will be unsustainable if they are not accompanied, first and foremost, by progress on justice reform, as well as efforts to tackle the root causes of such violence, which extend far beyond the capacity of the security sector to address. Adopting this perspective would help INCAF members comprehend their collective contribution to addressing these issues at a more systemic level.

If managed well, the current focus on migration could present an opportunity for a more integrated discussion on ways to approach Honduras' multidimensional fragility more comprehensively, especially as there is strong evidence of migration's multiple drivers. If the international community could establish common messaging around migration and reiterate this messaging more forcefully, the current "crisis" could be considered strategically in this light, with a view to reframing the narrative around the need for a more holistic approach to address push factors. Unfortunately, the political imperatives and urgency attached to the issue will make this challenging.

The international system in Honduras exemplifies the critical importance of donors finding common ground and forming a critical mass, at the very least around certain key topics and in spite of their own individual bilateral interests. Such an approach would enable them to utilise their collective political weight to identify priorities, benchmarks and red lines that actively promote greater resilience.

Annex D. Key findings from the Central African Republic case study

Responses must fit the context

Peace agreements and other events open up opportunities to restore the legitimacy of the state, thus enabling political order, peace and stability, and development. In an environment of low capacity and limited public budgets, such as the Central African Republic, development partners and the wider international community can support the legitimacy of the state by first restoring its normative role, including through policy and sectoral strategies, and by ensuring that development interventions are aligned with these national orientations.

State legitimacy must be established outside the capital city, otherwise states can be perceived as external actors in their country's development. To demonstrate legitimacy, the state must be able to ensure a minimum administrative presence, including the police, justice, security and social services. To assist with deployment outside the capital, development programming must strengthen the government's leadership and visibility in the regions. All development actions must aim to demonstrate government leadership, including the perception of government leadership by the population.

There is a tension between the urgent need to achieve results and long-term capacity building. Weak local technical capacities in all sectors prevent full ownership of projects and limit the absorption capacities of government and the international community. Most basic services outside the capital, Bangui, are provided by humanitarian actors. In order to achieve rapid results, development actors must make use of implementation units within ministries or work independently of national systems. Humanitarian assistance relies heavily on international or national staff recruited in Bangui. Overcoming this tension requires long-term investment in capacity building, technical assistance and education.

A country's economic stability cannot depend solely on aid dollars. Strategies for managing public resources and taxation and boosting the business environment must be developed and implemented in order to encourage local production and the recovery of the private sector. Budget support has been useful to ensure state legitimacy, particularly through the ability to pay civil servants, and should be maintained until domestic income mobilisation can compensate for current deficiencies. To support this, budget support should be conditional on necessary tax reforms that improve the business environment, ensure transparent management and enhance the integrity of national institutions. The steps taken by the government to implement the directives of the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC) on the establishment of a programme budget (a transparent budget aligned with sectoral policies and accountable to the ministries concerned) represent a step in the right direction.

Strengthening the economic base and supporting the private sector through the creation of a favourable business environment is particularly important. A strong and healthy private sector can help to stabilise the economy and society, and mobilise domestic income through appropriate taxation. Reforms to increase the attractiveness of the Central African Republic to potential investors are particularly urgent. Similarly, the establishment of a private banking sector outside the capital is critical to the sustainability of state deployment.

Improving security is the basis for – and the chief indicator of – the success of the transition phase. Security for the population, government officials, and humanitarian and development actors will be the key factor in allowing the return of displaced populations and the implementation of critical infrastructure projects. In addition, the security of areas where natural resources are extracted can also have a major impact on the country's finances. However, security is not in and of itself sufficient to achieve stability objectives and a focus solely on security interventions can prove counterproductive if the state is viewed only from a military perspective. It is thus important that development partners support all the dimensions of stability, including aspects related to the police, justice, the economy and social services.

The international community is essential for long-term support

Post-crisis periods increase the need for external assistance. There is a risk that increased political and security stability in CAR may reduce interest and allocations from development partners. However, during critical transition phases, the reality is that acute humanitarian needs remain and are compounded by development and stability needs. Financial needs are therefore greater during transition periods than in crises, and financial efforts must be redoubled accordingly. Efforts are thus essential to ensure the Central African Republic remains high on the international agenda.

Political deadlines, peace agreements and/or elections should not distract the government and development partners from developing a long-term vision for development planning. Such planning must extend beyond electoral cycles or the timeframe of a stabilisation plan. The *Plan National de Relèvement et de Consolidation de la Paix* (RCPCA) is viewed as a useful strategic guide for the initial stabilisation phase in CAR, and represents a good practice that can be replicated in other contexts. However, it should be complemented by a long-term vision for the country, led by the government and incorporating the intentions of the international community. The reflection initiated by the government with the support of the United Nations Development Programme on the "RCA vision 2050" prospective study forms part of this framework.

The integrated mission and donors play complementary roles. The presence of an integrated United Nations mission is a unifying element and allows for consistent approaches. In particular, the role of *good offices,* shared between the donor community and the mission, is particularly important in fostering political dialogue. At the same time, bilateral and multilateral donors have a key role to play in supporting stability through their operations and financial mechanisms. In particular, the ways in which donors support the sectoral strategies of line ministries, deploy their co-ordination and monitoring mechanisms, and involve the government, must help ensure government visibility.

Co-ordination is complex in fragile, fluid and volatile contexts where everything is a priority, government capacity is limited, and political, security, humanitarian and development actors are present in the same space. If co-ordination devolves into a multitude of meetings without a main focus on tangible results, key actors may disengage. Other co-ordination approaches could be tested, for example around strategic priorities or issues, or on a geographical basis. National and international co-ordination at the macro level, for example, could be relayed at the meso level by prefects and sub-prefects, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity. To be effective, these mechanisms must then be complemented by an effective system for exchanging information on programmes, funding, timetables and gaps.

Institutional risks

Fragile contexts face a challenge in attracting the right staff. Extremely fragile contexts with weak national capacity require the deployment of a significant numbers of experienced staff. Development partners experience great difficulties in maintaining satisfactory staffing levels in unattractive environments, with high turnover, frequent illness, "R and R" leave and difficult living conditions complicating staff continuity.

This in turn limits the quality and speed of implementation, institutional memory, and the absorption capacity of both humanitarian and development operators. Concurrently, there is a strong geographical concentration of interventions in relatively attractive regions, aggravating the disparities these same interventions are supposed to correct.

Flexible programming and finances are crucial in rapidly evolving contexts. For example, geographically earmarked funding is a major constraint to accompanying population movements, including returns, which may leave the most vulnerable unassisted. Compliance systems are also a barrier to flexibility. Instruments such as the Bekou Fund, Minka or the RRM mechanism (UNICEF) are therefore widely perceived as positive examples of programmatic flexibility. Mechanisms that have integrated adaptation mechanisms (e.g. the UNDP criticality programme) are also useful in these fluid contexts.

A more coherent programmatic – rather than project-based – approach would be useful. The multiplicity of individual projects in the Central African Republic represents a challenge for the achievement of stability and development objectives and makes co-ordination impossible. Shifting to a programmatic approach could allow for better coherence of long-term actions and support the monitoring of strategies.

Poor contextualisation puts people at risk. A humanitarian or development project must be appropriate for the context. A solid analysis of the different dimensions of fragility including a conflict sensitivity analysis can considerably reduce the protection risks and deliver better results that are accepted by the people. Each context is specific and requires adapted and innovative responses that are not adversely impacted by the pressure to disburse funds.

The ability to create appropriate tools and start innovative partnerships is important in fragile contexts. The creation of the Special Criminal Court in the Central African Republic is a good example of an innovative partnership. The same is true of the partnership around RCPCA and within the framework of its governance mechanisms involving national and international actors

Donors must improve coherence along the Humanitarian, Development and Peace Nexus. In contexts where humanitarian and stability needs overlap, donor rigidity can create a separation – rather than complementarity – between humanitarian assistance and stability efforts. Indeed, funding requirements dictate whether field actors can work flexibly and adapt as needs shift. In the stabilisation phase, a programmatic rather than project-based approach should be put in place to facilitate progress towards stability goals.

Annex E. Key findings from the Chad case study

The impact of a radical top-down approach

Chad's system of governance is characterised by dominance on the part of the central government, especially following the advent of the Fourth Republic in 2018. Strong reliance on the highest levels of decision-making power is further accentuated by the extreme frequency of turnover among political and administrative officials. As a consequence, there is limited decision-making power at the technical level inside government structures.

Governance is thus a central factor in the creation of an enabling environment for international aid. Disempowerment of senior technical leadership means that specialised issues often require escalation to political levels, which in turn leads to their politicisation leaving little room to address second-tier concerns. Furthermore, regular replacement of individuals in key positions creates a quasi-chronic need to brief and build relationships with incoming national counterparts, increasing transaction costs and delaying implementation. Lastly, the extreme top-down approach produces a strong disconnect between the capital and the periphery: well-crafted national policies rarely make their way to the field, while innovative field practices are often not captured and replicated at the national level.

Searching for alternatives

As a response, donors are increasingly turning their attention to subnational levels of government, traditional authorities, civil society and the private sector. Technical assistance to subnational authorities (including the development of provincial or county development plans) offers significant potential to respond to community needs, align with local contexts and support the capacities of first-line providers of basic services. At the same time, there are concerns about fragmentation, further disconnect between subnational implementation and national development plans, and limited technical capacities at the subnational level. Risks associated with a subnational approach also include heightened geographic imbalances in development opportunities and diminished national cohesion. Traditional authorities, however, continue to serve as meaningful influencers for norm setting and entry points for local engagement, although their status might be under increasing threat in some parts of the country. The role of civil society organisations, meanwhile, is constrained by limited civic space, and any effort to strengthen civil society will be a long-term, sustained and iterative process. Last but not least, the private sector remains dependent on the Treasury, with limited prospects for change in the current business climate.

Underlying each of these alternative models of governance is the question of building sustainability and fostering social cohesion. Ultimately, Chad has a centralised system of government, and building development to scale will require central government engagement. An end state, in which the central government is not the main provider of basic services, might seem less plausible here than in a country with a less state-driven tradition.

Moreover, it will remain important for donors to balance the realities of the regional and domestic context. Donors acknowledge the strategic role of Chad for regional stability, and as they engage with the state, the broader regional context comes into play and affects national dialogue with the government. This

regional dimension affects mutual accountability between both sets of actors, and more importantly, frames the conversation on engagement with the government.

Working together for results

The Comité des Partenaires Techniques et Financiers (CPTF) is the central co-ordination mechanism for development actors. It provides a platform for high-level political dialogue, allowing donors to debate priorities and develop a common position externally, especially with the government. There are mixed views regarding its effectiveness. On the one hand, it allows for discussion of thematic issues, such as the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus in the Lake Chad area. On the other hand, its success as a framework for political dialogue has been limited, in part by the restricted options for presenting its position to the government. Questions have also been raised about the forum's broad attendance.

The CPTF's sectoral sub-groups, particularly in education, function as a helpful information-sharing platform. However, they require sustained, dynamic leadership, and some have noted that information-sharing and co-ordination opportunities occur outside of meetings only on a limited basis. Effectiveness varies across sector, with the success of sectoral sub-groups contingent on the degree of government and donor involvement. A net effect of this fragmented co-ordination is limited opportunities for cross-sectoral analysis. Furthermore, there is room for closer alignment of the development co-ordination architecture with the humanitarian cluster system. Fragmented co-ordination also affects data and information management. Development actors are spending more time gathering basic information about context, needs and ongoing activities from their peers on than focusing on "higher order" monitoring and evaluation, such as developing indicator frameworks, tracking project progress and results, and so on.

In contrast, the humanitarian community in Chad is well-established with a robust co-ordination architecture. As a result, there is a "humanitarian flavour" to co-ordinating along the HDP Nexus. Indeed, responsibility for data management, analysis and gap-filling has largely been taken up by the humanitarian community. This affects how projects are designed and which data and information are generated. In addition to co-ordination along the Nexus, there is a sense that humanitarian action continues to substitute for development, especially at the local level. The lack of state capacity or leadership is magnifying this trend. However, this reality is not sustainable. Development actors, with the state at the centre, are best positioned to lead a long-term collective approach.

At the project level, there is strong interest on all sides in working along the HDP Nexus. The field of innovative projects and plans is flourishing. But the devil is in the details: despite shared visions, donors and implementers must find creative solutions to overcome differences in operating methods and work to design operational parameters that allow for joint action (e.g. contract terms, logical frameworks, targeting criteria, funding cycles, etc.). If such details are not addressed, implementers may be left to deal with practical barriers to a nexus approach. This is a pragmatic consideration for donor agencies at the global level as well, especially among development and humanitarian departments. Operationalising co-ordination starts at the funding level and trickles down towards practical implementation.

Being fit for fragility also involves being designed for collaboration. Donors in Ndjamena appear eager to co-ordinate implementation, but their respective priorities, mechanisms and procedures are not necessarily designed to facilitate joint programming. This could lead to duplication of projects and over-saturation of particular areas, such as the Lake Chad Basin, while others are ignored. There are many examples of donors overcoming such institutional barriers through creative arrangements, but the next step must involve bringing such solutions to scale.

Annex F. Key findings from the Liberia case study

In Liberia, the goal to build a better tomorrow has been undermined by efforts to preserve the status quo.

Issues that were not necessarily prominent during the period of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) have now become more apparent. Structural challenges such as systemic corruption, capital flight, impunity, disenfranchised youth, trauma, and the need for justice and reconciliation have come to the fore. Lack of trust is embedded in society at multiple levels both among the local population and towards those in power, and is exacerbated by persistent impunity for war crimes. Meanwhile, corruption is widely perceived as a normalised element of social relations, despite being instrumentalised on occasion by national political actors.

In terms of addressing these issues, some interlocutors view the UNMIL period as a missed opportunity. Others feel that the current context – which represents an initial phase of a new chapter in Liberia's history – also risks becoming a lost opportunity to defuse social issues before they evolve into sources of conflict. Indeed, conflict prevention in fragile contexts often comes too late, leaving "conflict containment" as the only available option.

Unmet expectations are starting to manifest as social tension among the Liberian population. "Micro crises" are on the rise of which the 7 June 2019 protest is an example. Although the protest was peaceful some have expressed fears that economic hardship in the capital, Monrovia, might translate into further civil unrest. The protests are taking place against the backdrop of diminished international attention and, thus, reduced capacity on the part of international actors in Liberia to mobilise high-level diplomatic engagement.

Building trust takes time but is essential to effective partnership. At this early stage, efforts to consolidate mutual trust between the government and international partners are still marked by some tension between the principles of mutual accountability and ownership. Finding a balance between holding the national government accountable for its actions and respecting its sovereignty can also be challenging.

Mechanisms for public accountability, transparency and oversight could help foster trust in areas where it is currently lacking. Well-implemented systems of checks and balances along with internal oversight are key to increasing transparency, accountability and efficiency within government structures. These elements can also play an important role in strengthening the public voice through civil society organisations, which are also often susceptible to influence from political actors and increasing incidents of threat.

The need for government ownership has increased, but capacity to exercise leadership remains limited

Donors have encouraged the government to take a more assertive role in exercising leadership. With Liberia no longer in crisis mode – and in the context of a perceived historic culture of dependency – the

international community is eager to shift towards a partnership on more equal terms and to empower the Liberian government to pull its own weight.

Interlocutors have expressed a wish to see Liberia take the lead in the senior-level donor co-ordination mechanism (the CPG structure). Others have argued that Liberia should adopt responsibility for managing central co-ordination, as the current set-up presents difficulties for finding centralised information on bilateral and multilateral assistance and identifying gap areas. The Liberian Ministry of Finance has proposed an online tool via its Aid Management and Coordination Unit, but this is not yet operational.

The government's ability and willingness to exercise its role has been increasingly called into question. Interlocutors agree that the government's inability to exercise is role is due to a number of factors, including: (a) lack of political will and technical capacity; (b) lack of co-ordination among national structures which has a ripple effect on donor co-ordination; (c) discrepancies between the enactment and implementation of laws; and (d) broader political field of forces within which the government operates.

It is important to note that the recent replacement of political appointees in the context of the new government has created an impression of reduced institutional memory and policy expertise. There is also a perception that parts of the government are reluctant to accept advisory support.

Highly centralised power within line ministries, as a result of both the administrative organisation and the political system, creates bottlenecks in decision making. In today's Liberia, power in government is extremely centralised with ministers reluctant to delegate power. The thinly stretched schedules which result from this approach slow decision making, leading to considerable delays in the policy process. This also has a disempowering effect on lower-ranking civil service professionals.

Development assistance co-ordination currently consists of a mix of donor-led legacy structures and government-led mechanisms. The three principal components are: (a) the CPG, a senior-level multisectoral co-ordination meeting, under a rotating donor chairmanship and composed of country-level heads of co-operation; (b) sectoral groups led by co-ordinators from line ministries, convened with varying frequency (and often on short notice); and (c) subnational or sub-sectoral co-ordination mechanisms within some sectors, which operate with unequal success. To date, no mechanism has been put in place within the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning to co-ordinate donor engagement at a strategic level. In order to harmonise operational practices, development actors rely on a limited set of technical standards set by the government (notably daily subsistence allowance levels) as indicative benchmarks.

The fragmented nature of thematic and sectoral co-ordination platforms, lack of alignment with the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development (PAPD), the frequency of meeting cancellations and the limited use of established meeting management techniques across platforms have all been identified as challenges to the current co-ordination system. These challenges translate into high transaction costs for donor co-ordination.

Mechanisms for the co-ordination of good offices have been effective, but are at risk of collapsing. The international community has established an effective mechanism for high-level international co-ordination, managed through weekly informal meetings of the UN Resident Coordinator's Office. Thanks in part to the tight-knit nature of the international community based in Liberia, this mechanism has helped to coalesce the diplomatic community around common analyses and shared messaging. Until recently, these messages were transmitted to the government through direct engagement from the troika of UN, AU and ECOWAS Representatives. However, political engagement with national counterparts requires a relationship based on trust and continuity. The recent end of deployment of UN and AU Representatives and the impending departure of the ECOWAS Ambassador has put the troika on hold as an effective framework for strategic dialogue. Given the importance of a well-functioning system of good offices, some interlocutors have highlighted the need for better inter-organisational planning around leadership transition. Some suggestions for alternative mechanisms have included options such as support for peer-to-peer mentoring between national and regional actors.

Donors sense a growing need to communicate their expectations more firmly. Liberia's tight fiscal space is putting pressure on the government's ability to implement its programmes, causing it to turn increasingly toward the donor community for budget support. Before such commitments can be made, however, most donors must have confidence in the internal control mechanisms of government. In this context, the Article IV mission of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) served as a momentous occasion for policy dialogue on revenue mobilisation, rationalised spending (especially related to the new wage bill) and realistic budgeting. While the resulting government plans for harmonising the civil service payroll structure have been perceived as well-intentioned, there remains some debate among international actors about whether they are sufficient to restore the country's economic trajectory.

For future cases which require concerted advocacy efforts, respondents highlighted the importance of: (a) engagement strategies that target both the executive and legislative branches; and (b) ensuring a clear consensus position on technical issues with strategic ramifications – before they are brought to the attention of national authorities (including ensuring a shared understanding of issues, solutions and collective red lines).

As part of technical assistance offered to states, some donors deploy senior-level technical staff to government agencies to support and mentor policy makers. Such staff exemplify the type of senior-level international positions required for development in Liberia. However, the effectiveness of such assistance depends on the ability of donors to attract experienced international staff in a difficult environment.

As Liberia's prominence on the global agenda diminishes, bilateral partners have noted a decline in attractiveness for international staff. Incentives to apply (including idealism, reduced tours of duty, career growth opportunities and hardship allowances) are not always perceived as commensurate with the hardships presented by the context. These include the complex working environment and the risk that "Headquarters may forget you exist".

Family Duty Station status carries a particular weight in terms of the ability to attract a diverse set of experienced profiles and the potential for an influx of families to lift living standards. Due to its large presence, the UN's status determination often affects the international presence as a whole. Recently, the UN decided to extend Liberia's non-family status, notably because of the lack of adequate health facilities (leading to high medical evacuation costs for national and international staff), a deteriorating security environment, and the high costs and limited options for schooling. While the UN recognised that security and schooling would improve with the arrival of additional families, it considered that the health system would take several years to reach acceptable standards.

In choosing modalities for delivering assistance, donors must consider how they will measure impact

A fundamental choice facing donors is whether to help reform and rebuild the public functions of the state, or work in parallel with it. Given the limited international confidence in the systemic integrity of Liberia's government structures, the programming decisions of interlocutors tend to lean towards strengthening government systems in key social sectors, such as health and education, while exploring alternative modalities of delivery in thematic areas unrelated to essential services. This includes attempts to increase the inclusiveness of policy making through strengthening civil society. Beyond this broad generalisation, most respondents recognised the value of identifying and partnering with "niche" and sectoral administrative entities, in which they found assurances of national ownership and technical competence.

Donors have four main strategies at their disposal to mitigate risks to their programming: (a) channelling funds through the government, while monitoring results; (b) channelling funds through the government, while establishing conditional agreements and monitoring implementation; (c) working with the government

through direct implementation; and (d) bypassing the government altogether. Infrastructural grant aid projects are isolated from some of the risks involved in operating in fragile contexts.

Typical donor planning cycles are often too short and institutional frameworks too constraining to accommodate the type of large-scale projects able to propel economies such as Liberia into the 21st century. Liberia has one of the lowest rates of access to electricity supply globally, which functions as a substantive impediment to economic growth. Investment in the energy sector is also complicated by a combination of short-term timeframes, low-risk acceptance, high interest rates and low credit worthiness. One interlocutor noted that a commitment to long-term investments would allow bilateral and multilateral partners to set more ambitious targets and increase their return on investment.

In a global context of increasingly rigid internal procedures and frameworks, the development community in Liberia continues to look for ways to take full advantage of organisational discretionary margin to adapt to the context. Operating in fragile contexts requires flexibility; however, over recent decades, a combination of structural and cultural elements has reduced flexibility in some parts of the aid sector. On the structural side, several interlocutors note that the professionalisation and standardisation of processes, while intended to facilitate effective, speedy and rigorous delivery of assistance, has actually diminished their operational flexibility. This makes it all the more important for organisations to maintain a culture that allows for the use of available discretionary margins within regulatory boundaries. However, several interlocutors reported an opposing trend. "In the past", stated one interviewee, "one was allowed to take action if there were no explicit rules against it. Now, if the rules do not explicitly allow it, it is perceived as forbidden".

Meanwhile, different organisations have adopted programming systems and procedures that increase the possibilities of adaptive programming. During the mission, interlocutors reported increasing use of: (a) enterprise risk management as a tool for creating budgetary flexibility; (b) crisis modifiers; (c) government-to-government agreements allowing benchmark modification based on dialogue over progress; (d) systematic prioritisation of unearmarked funding and medium to long-term agreements; and (e) a culture of acceptance of implementers' failure and joint solution seeking.

In Liberia's data-poor environment, establishing needs and finding evidence of progress is a challenge. While organisations may have or can tap into implicit knowledge of the context, up-to-date data to back it up is often scarce. Liberia's data-poor environment is thus an impediment not only to advocacy and resource mobilisation for implementing partners, but also to shared analysis with donors. This produces a vicious cycle: poor data leads to under-reporting and ineffective advocacy, which in turn further limits field presence and the ability to report on the situation.

Implementing partners also report that donors are reluctant to fund data collection activities where government systems are theoretically already in place, regardless of whether these systems are functional.

The situation in Liberia cannot be easily reduced to a simple, sellable narrative

There is a risk that Liberia will be punished for its success. As the international community attempts to rise to the challenges associated with risk reduction and assisting those furthest left behind, it must find a balance between preventing crises and rewarding success. Having recovered from multiple shocks – including a devastating Ebola outbreak – and undergone a peaceful transition of power, some interlocutors feel that Liberia is being punished for its progress in the form of reduced attention. It is essential that the international community ensure a more rational and impartial approach to programming in fragile contexts.

Liberia's evolution also sends conflicting signals which are difficult to capture in a single narrative. As Liberia is no longer a first-tier country on the international political agenda, the in-country presence is struggling to present a compelling narrative that will maintain the required attention. Indeed, the current situation presents a set of mixed signals: some indicate progress and opportunities, some suggest a

worsening situation, and others signify structural issues that are difficult to resolve. While Liberia presents important untapped potential for development (notably in agriculture, natural and human resources), its complexities and challenges must be understood and addressed.

Nonetheless, Liberia remains on stable ground on terms of donor engagement, with some donors even looking to expand certain programmes. While humanitarian aid has narrowed over recent years, with diminished funding for UN short-term response activities, ODA overall remains fairly stable.