

Fragile states

FRAGILE STATES

What is a fragile state?

According to the OECD “a fragile region or state has weak capacities to carry out basic governance functions, and lacks the ability to develop mutually constructive relations with society. Fragile regions or states are also more vulnerable to internal or external shocks such as economic crisis or natural disaster” (1) . Fragility refers to a wide array of situation: countries in crisis, countries at war, reconstruction context, humanitarian and natural crises, situations of extreme poverty.

Indicators of fragility and vulnerability help define the countries considered as fragile.

1. **Political Indicators** which cover the de-legitimation of the state, progressive deterioration of the public service, widespread violation of human rights, security apparatus as ‘state within a state’, rise of factionalised elites and intervention of other states or external factors.
2. **Social Indicators** which cover demographic pressures, massive movement of refugees and internally displaced peoples, legacy of vengeance-seeking group grievance, chronic and sustained human flight, wellbeing and quality of life.
3. **Economic Indicators** which cover uneven economic development affecting fractions of the population.
4. **Environmental indicators** reflecting the risks of disasters generated by natural forces and/or interaction between the environmental dimension and human activities.

A harmonized list of “fragile states” has been set up by the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and the African Development Bank and it is updated every year. The one included here is from 2015. The list covers 33 countries of which 17 are African. However, since 2015 and linked to the preparation of the 2030 Agenda (SDG 16), a new approach to fragility has been defined (2). It applies to all countries and relies on five dimensions: (i) violence; (ii) Justice; (iii) Accountable and inclusive institutions; (iv) economic inclusion and stability; (v) Capacity to adapt to social, economic and environmental shocks and disasters. A list of the 50 most vulnerable states is then presented (3):

(1) OECD 2014 :Domestic revenue mobilisation in fragile states. OECD publishes on an annual basis since 2005 a report on fragile states. See “Fragile states 2015: Meeting the post 2015 ambitions”.

(2) Ibidem.

(3) Ibidem

Fragile states and NSDS

During the time of conflict, the preparation of an NSDS may be out of reach. Otherwise, NSDS must be constructed considering risk mitigation, protection of physical and statistical

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assets, data preservation through offsite backup, and preparation for the post-conflict situation returning to “normalcy”.

Preparation of a NSDS in fragile states will differ according to the context which is prevailing in the country under review. Two main situations should be considered:

- **Reconstruction**

After a return to “normalcy”, solutions to post-conflict situation aimed at restoring the statistical system would be undertaken. Each country situation is idiosyncratic depending on the nature of the conflict and the extent of damage which the statistical system has suffered during the period of conflict. The NSDS may need to be conceived as a mechanism for the reconstruction of human resources and physical assets where damage to the statistical institutions and data assets of the state has been extensive. In every case, however, building on assets which were “saved” from the conflict will be the first step to the ultimate reconstruction of the statistical system. The first concern will be the preparation of a diagnosis of the impact of the crisis on the most affected people (displaced people...), the factors of production available, the facilities (schools, hospitals...) and infrastructure, as reconstruction needs precise reference on the existing. The diagnosis will entail the assessment of the remaining capacities of the NSS and of the data archives which are available.

- **Prevention**

The preparation of a NSDS in a fragile state should entail a diagnosis of the situation prevailing regarding the sources of fragility. In the NSDS, a specific and important place should be given to the variables commanding fragility. Fragility means that the country faces important risks and the information system should take into account on a regular basis the situation of the variables reflecting the risks. The NSDS should include a monitoring system of the risks faced by the country, based on a set of appropriate indicators. When the indicators are not available, the NSDS should define an approach to provide the deciders and the main stakeholders with the information needed to take decisions. Such an information system (input for an alert system) may be very demanding for fragile states, which are often poor countries. The regional level may be more appropriate to respond to the challenges of vulnerability, a situation which may be shared by various countries in a region (for instance, natural or environmental risks in the Pacific Islands). The NSDS as a tool to prevent risks is relevant for countries in reconstruction. And the promotion of virtual archives to backup and protect data applies to countries in reconstruction and to fragile states, the former being also fragile states.

- **Other special considerations**

- Monitoring and evaluation on a more regular basis in-country and for the long-term process of capacity building in collaboration with regional organisations might be necessary and hence a shorter time frame for the NSDS could be considered with more frequent assessment points.

- The indicators included in the NSDS should focus on core statistics in particular the minimum set of economic statistics outlined by the Global Inventory of Statistical Standards of the United Nations Statistics Division as well as critical indicators designed to monitor recovery.

- Data dissemination will be particularly important in fragile states. The creation of a platform to make data available to organizations and contribute to coordination on

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the ground can be useful as multiple non-state actors may be involved in reconstruction activities.

- Fragile states will need specific technical and financial support from the international community in order to face the challenges linked to fragility.

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