

PEACEWORKS



Addressing Fragility in a Global Pandemic

ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL US STRATEGY

Corinne Graff, editor



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**FRAGILITY &
RESILIENCE**

ABOUT THE REPORT

In May, June, and July of 2020, the United States Institute of Peace convened a series of consultations with experts on implementation of the 2019 Global Fragility Act, which called for an interagency initiative to stabilize conflict-affected areas and prevent violence globally. This report examines the key lessons the peacebuilding field has learned about how to support vulnerable countries in preventing conflict and violence, and offers practical policy solutions for how to overcome the obstacles that have plagued past US efforts. It assesses the current global strategic environment for preventing internal conflicts and addresses how to promote local ownership and inclusion, ensure accountability, align US activities across diplomacy and development, establish mechanisms for closer international coordination, and measure progress.

Cover photo: Anti-government protesters gather in Bangkok on August 16, 2020, for the largest rally in the city since a coup in 2014. (Photo by Adam Dean/New York Times)

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Protesters in Bangkok demanding democratic change on October 16, 2020. (Photo by Adam Dean/New York Times)

Introduction

By Corinne Graff

The international community has coalesced around the need for new approaches to reduce conflict’s underlying drivers and increase resiliency to shocks. In the United States, this consensus has culminated in the Global Fragility Act (GFA).

Addressing state fragility and violent conflict is one of the central challenges of the modern era. Violent conflicts have risen in number, duration, and intensity since 1990, spurring the spread of violent extremism and one of the largest displacement crises in human history, causing untold human suffering. As a result, the international community has coalesced around the need for new approaches to reduce conflict’s underlying drivers and increase resiliency to shocks. In the United States, this consensus has culminated in the Global Fragility Act (GFA), an ambitious measure signed into law in late 2019 that aims to overhaul the way the United States engages in countries vulnerable to conflict—especially in fragile states, where the social contract between citizens and the state is severed, and societies are fragmented and prone to violence. If successfully implemented, this new framework could begin to transform US policy and assistance in fragile countries and provide an alternative to the multibillion-dollar state-building efforts that have been underway for far too long in places like Afghanistan and Iraq and have few results to show for it.

The Global Fragility Act requires the State Department, US Agency for International Development, and other federal agencies to launch a comprehensive strategy to

address fragility and reduce the risks of violence and conflict by targeting its drivers. To better align US policy instruments in support of prevention—including foreign assistance, diplomatic engagement, and security sector assistance—the legislation sets out the roles and responsibilities of each US agency, creating new mechanisms for oversight and coordination. The bill includes unprecedented new congressional authorities to allow policymakers to implement a ten-year preventive strategy that can adapt in response to evolving local conditions, based on close consultations between the legislative and executive branches. The legislation requires agencies to test their initial efforts in a small set of countries and regions, and to report back to Congress every two years not just on their progress, but also on organizational learning.

Adhering to the principles embedded in the GFA—including closer US interagency coordination, deeper integration and burden sharing with international partners on the ground, and more nimble policy and programs that are responsive to in-country conditions—has been an age-old challenge in conflict environments. Executing this new mandate presents enormous difficulties. We should expect setbacks and slow progress. Achieving results will require tackling the bureaucratic, political, and operational obstacles to more fit-for-purpose policies and programs in fragile states, and reinvesting in US civilian capabilities, which have been severely depleted. Because this is not a challenge that the United States can or should tackle alone, it will require reinvigorating US leadership and committing to building coalitions of partners to get the job done.

At the same time, this agenda has gained added urgency in the context of COVID-19 because the fallout from the pandemic will stress countries' social fabrics in ways that could deepen fragility and exacerbate protracted crises and have devastating consequences

for both the world's most vulnerable populations and international peace and security. Just as donors seek to respond to rapidly increasing health, food, and other emergency needs from the pandemic, it will be critical that this aid is in line with the new strategy and does not inadvertently stoke new tensions.

This report seeks to generate practical policy solutions for overcoming the obstacles to implementing a new US conflict-prevention strategy and country plans. Each article grapples with one of six key themes highlighted in the legislation:

- What new risks and opportunities does the current global strategic environment present for policymakers charged with developing and implementing a new strategy?
- Why is local ownership of conflict prevention initiatives and inclusion so important, and how can the US government maximize country ownership?
- What accountability challenges confront policymakers in these countries, and what mechanisms can help to overcome them?
- What solutions exist to overcome the age-old challenge of interagency coordination in fragile settings, including across both development and security assistance programs?
- What are the benefits of aligning US efforts with those of other international partners, and what are the most effective modalities of such coordination?
- Given the scope of the challenge of defining and measuring progress toward peace in fluid and volatile places, how should policymakers think about monitoring, evaluation, and learning?

Understanding the Global Environment



A Theory of Success for the Global Fragility Strategy

Patrick W. Quirk

Summary

The global strategic environment in which the United States will implement the global fragility strategy and country plans includes increased intrastate violence exacerbated by the pandemic and intensifying US-China competition coupled with Russian muscle flexing for influence. The question is what theory of change should guide US and partner efforts under the strategy, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Environment

In the run-up to the outbreak of COVID-19 in early 2020, fragility and associated violent conflict showed no signs of abating. Over the previous decade, intrastate violence and armed challengers in fact increased sharply.¹ Persistent violence extends beyond combat between the state and armed actors to include intragroup violence rooted in ethnic, political, and religious divisions, often fueled by criminal opportunities.² The pandemic is exacerbating these trends. Fragile states with strained health systems, fractured governments, and dwindling liquid assets struggle to contain the outbreak.³ The health crisis might temporarily hinder nonstate armed actors' operations but will not displace their ambitions. Grievances at the core of ongoing armed conflicts will likely worsen. Authoritarian regimes prone to using government resources to suppress dissent, sometimes violently, are stepping up these tactics and exploiting the crisis to consolidate power. The confluence of these factors magnifies the relevance and timeliness of the forthcoming global fragility strategy.

Meanwhile, competition between the United States and China is intensifying as the pandemic both spreads and tightens its hold. Revisionist Chinese Communist Party (CCP) attempts to place China at the center of a global order are a fundamental challenge to the United States. China's tactics in vulnerable countries—seeking maximum economic advantage and translating leverage into political influence—can exacerbate instability that the global fragility strategy seeks to address. The CCP's landmark Belt and Road Initiative not only weakens US influence in recipient governments but also, through opaque deals and associated corruption, has the potential to undermine democratic governance and underwrite fragility across the developing world. Meanwhile, Russia—no longer a great power by any modern measure—continues to harbor revisionist ambitions. The Kremlin uses its relatively small resource base to expand Russian influence abroad to distract from domestic failures and undermine the United States. Extending these strategies, the CCP and the Kremlin have exploited COVID-19 to secure their interests and accelerate attempts to discredit US leadership.

Washington needs to articulate its top short- and long-term priority national security interests, determine how fragility and violence impinge on them, and devise measurable metrics for holding itself accountable. Addressing violence and fragility should be a top priority in embassy planning rather than an afterthought.

Theory of Success

The United States is developing its fragility strategy in an environment of two interlocking dynamics: intrastate violence that has international consequences and interstate geopolitical competition that could exacerbate armed conflicts across the globe. The strategy needs to address both and build on existing policies, to include the 2018 Stabilization Assistance Review and the Trump administration's approach to fragile states. Setting a realistic goal and sound theory of success to achieve it is the keystone to any strategy.⁴ This is the most pressing conversation for US officials before turning to who does what, when, and where.

The goal should be enough of a reduction in violence and instability in strategically important countries or regions that the United States can secure short- and long-term American interests in these places.⁵ From there, Washington needs to address two questions. First, why does a specific place matter to US interests? Second, how can near-term wins in these places be balanced with longer-term realities and US interests?

This strategy is an opportunity for the United States to forcefully recognize that for too long it has made policy decisions with near-term objectives—primarily counterterrorism or security based—that have undercut long-term objectives. The document should balance the two. Even if the United States focuses only on countries or regions that matter most, it will not be able to achieve its goals alone. Burden sharing is essential. Washington needs to cooperate with like-minded allies and partners as well as work with and through multilateral organizations. Even as it works to reform multilateral fora such as the United Nations, it needs to assert its leadership in them to achieve results on reducing fragility.

The global fragility strategy needs to have a theory of success if it is to achieve its overall goal. Here is such a theory of change: If Washington balances near-term security gains with the conflict dynamics (and underlying fragility) required to secure longer-term interests, and if it develops an evidence-based understanding of priority conflict dynamics in countries negatively affecting its interests, and if it deploys diplomacy and foreign assistance—bilaterally and multilaterally—that effectively disrupts these dynamics, and if partner governments (local and national) demonstrate the political will necessary to address these dynamics, then it will reduce violence enough to secure its interests in these countries because it will have effectively disrupted those conflict dynamics that matter most.⁶

For each priority country it selects, Washington needs to articulate its top short- and long-term priority national security interests, determine how fragility and violence impinge on them, and devise measurable metrics for holding itself accountable. Addressing violence and fragility should be a top priority in embassy planning rather than an afterthought. In countries where stabilization is required, Washington should develop a political strategy of “strategic empowerment.”⁷ This approach involves supporting the local actor most aligned with US interests and values and most likely to be able to govern effectively and manage violence.

Recommendations

The political aspects of fragility and violence should guide the global strategy and country plans. Fragility is primarily the result of human actions and therefore inherently political. In crafting its strategy, the United States therefore needs to deploy preventive diplomacy and foreign assistance to disrupt conflict dynamics by publicly or privately targeting actors that enable violence or otherwise contribute to fragility.

Supporting good governance should be central because ineffective governance and corruption are drivers of violence. Washington needs to prioritize bolstering democratic governance and promoting transparency and accountability. US support for democratic institutions can help partner nations counter the efforts of foreign authoritarians to shape their domestic politics.

Finally, competition with global and regional authoritarian powers should be integral to the global fragility

strategy because these states contribute to fragility and vie for influence in countries wracked by it. The strategy needs to prescribe ways to address the way each country contributes to the problem. Relatedly, the strategy also needs both to assume that any US engagement will take place where its rivals are competing for influence and to adjust its overall engagement to account for such spoilers.

The Changing Strategic Landscape

Martha Crenshaw

Summary

In the Global South, weak states are already destabilized by internal violence and both domestic and transnational terrorism. The pandemic introduces additional dangers, both short-term and long-term. It is essential that the long-term strategic environment is taken into account in responding to the COVID-19 crisis as well as to more immediate risks.

Long-Term Risks

One great risk is that the pandemic and the response to it will facilitate and encourage civil and regional conflict, violent extremism, and terrorism over the long term.¹ The first potential problem is the lack of legitimacy, capability, and effectiveness of government institutions in fragile states. Poor governance, lack of credibility, inefficiency, and inequality will likely increase and be further exposed and exploited if local governments do not respond to a pandemic for which they are mostly ill prepared. The consequences of outbreaks among populations already displaced by fighting are potentially dire. Outside assistance is needed to ensure effective government responses, especially in health care, food security, housing, education, and humanitarian assistance.² International cooperation is preferable to bilateral assistance programs, which foster suspicions of expanding national influence in the interest of great power competition. Such efforts need to be compatible with both counterterrorism and counter-extremism prevention

measures, which often seem to be on a separate plane from aid as well as from each other.

The long-term economic and social consequences of both the COVID-19 crisis and the response to it also need to be considered. More people will live in poverty, unemployment will increase, more people will be displaced from traditional settings, conflict over scarce resources will increase, educational deficits are certain, corruption will deepen, and popular resentment will intensify.³ Food insecurity is already increasing. Drops in remittances from richer countries are affecting day-to-day livelihoods. Poverty, although not a direct cause of terrorism, contributes to an environment that fosters discontent that extremists can exploit. Illicit economies offer opportunities for terrorist groups.

Negative long-term consequences for state capacity in the security sector, leading to further instability, will probably be uneven. In Africa, capacity in the weakest

If millenarian and apocalyptic worldviews are reinforced, motivation for violence will increase because the need to act will be framed as immediate and compelling. People inclined to believe conspiracy theories or who are psychologically distraught are easily exploited.

states—such as Somalia or Mali—is likely to decline the most precipitously. They are likely to struggle to maintain order and defend themselves against revolt or from internal coups. Stronger states may become more repressive in response to disorder, which would increase popular discontent, make violent opposition more attractive, and have extreme humanitarian consequences (such as population displacement, human rights abuses, and incarceration rates). The military and police forces of strong states are likely to become bigger players in governing. Increased authoritarianism will mean more dissent.

Short-Term Risks

In the short term, the dangers to security in fragile states are also urgent. In the immediate future, which side will be hurt most by the physical impact of the virus, government security forces or their violent opponents? Security forces, both national and international, can be weakened by illness in the ranks (as well as fear of contracting the virus, leading to desertions, shirking, and other performance deficits) and distracted by increased security pressures. As counterterrorism defenses erode, opportunities for violent extremism expand. In the Sahel, attacks from Islamist groups are both undermining security and hindering service delivery from national governments, multinational forces, and humanitarian organizations. This in turn increases the likelihood of negative outcomes such as failure to manage the health crisis. On the other hand, transnational networks of armed groups might be weakened if movement across borders is restricted. But if dispersed groups must depend more on local support, they may emerge stronger by forging ties with local dissidents and responding to popular grievances. They could become more embedded in local communities and allied with local elites. However, they often alienate locals with their extreme religious and social strictures, and thus the outcome is hard to predict.

Alliances between jihadists and nationalists, ethno-nationalists, separatists, or tribal factions complicate conflict resolution even under noncrisis circumstances.

The pandemic also encourages belief in conspiracy theories and scapegoating, a common reaction to such a pervasive and invisible threat. Having an alien Other to blame is convenient. The effective risk is social fragmentation. If millenarian and apocalyptic worldviews are reinforced, motivation for violence will increase because the need to act will be framed as immediate and compelling. People inclined to believe conspiracy theories or who are psychologically distraught are easily exploited. The current crisis is also strengthening nationalist sentiment, xenophobia, and racism. Al Qaeda has called the COVID-19 pandemic divine retribution, for example.⁴ Violent oppositions can seize the opportunity to frame themselves as saviors or proto-governments competent to provide assistance when state government institutions fail.

Recommendations

The need for timely and decisive action in this crisis is clear and both short-term and long-term strategic outlooks are discouraging. The urgency of need and the responsibility that the international community shares should not be minimized.

An integrated response that includes the strategic elements described is imperative. A cohesive global approach that is coordinated and comprehensive is desperately needed. The need to act quickly should be balanced against the need to think about the problem of preventing further instability in weak states comprehensively, rather than through piecemeal approaches. As a corollary, security assistance should not strengthen military institutions at the expense of civilian institutions, for example, in public health and education.

Promoting Local Ownership and Inclusion

Leveraging the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda

Kathleen Kuehnast and Amanda Long

Summary

To amplify the US global fragility strategy's impact and prevent the "cascading crises" anticipated in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic from wreaking havoc on the world's most vulnerable people and countries, US policymakers working to advance the Global Fragility Act and the Women, Peace, and Security Act should combine forces. In the US fragility strategy and the ten-year country plans required under the act, policymakers need to integrate a proven method for improving global security—that is, a gender-inclusive approach to conflict resolution.

Women, Peace, and Security Act

In tandem with the new global fragility strategy, US policymakers are implementing the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Act, an innovative law signed in 2017 that seeks to help prevent and mitigate violent conflict by amplifying women's participation in decision-making processes. Reflecting UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, the WPS Act recognizes the disproportionate impact of conflict on women and the critical role women play in the security and stability of a state. It also requires a whole-of-government strategy on integrating gender considerations into foreign policy and supporting women's leadership in peacebuilding and conflict resolution. The lessons learned in the two decades since UNSCR 1325—and the commitments to empower half the population as allies and partners—will prove paramount to crafting a robust and enduring strategy to address global fragility.

The emphasis of the Global Fragility Act (GFA) on local ownership and civil society consultation offers one of the best opportunities for inclusive implementation of a

government strategy for mitigating fragility. The bill stipulates that the US government should facilitate "participatory, locally led programs, empowering marginalized groups such as youth and women" and ensure "participatory engagement by civil society and local partners in the design, implementation, and monitoring of programs."¹ Endorsing this approach is simple, but operationalizing it in a fragile environment or conflict setting is rife with challenges. The WPS agenda offers a useful guide.

To ensure that civil society consultations are meaningful, policymakers could benefit from the WPS model. In developing its strategy for facilitating women's engagement in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, the United Nations promoted National Action Plans on women, peace, and security, which eighty-six countries to date have published.² According to this framework, partner governments host inclusive consultative processes that recognize women as equal partners and allow them to shape their agendas in a safe, accessible, and empowering environment.



Hundreds of women marched ahead of Liberia's presidential election, in Monrovia, Liberia, on October 9, 2017. (Photo by Jane Hahn/New York Times)

Outside intervenors often conceive of local women in a conflict zone almost exclusively as either trainees or “subjects of research,” according to Liberia’s Nobel peace laureate and civil society leader Leymah Gbowee, rather than as experts in the problems at hand. To shift this perception, international interlocutors need to build inclusive listening sessions into their project designs and seek to understand and support local efforts already making strides to build peace. It is imperative that these listening sessions should recognize women as a diverse group—noting disparities in age, race, ethnicity, rural or urban backgrounds, and religion—and support networks among participants to sustain community engagement beyond the initial consultations.³

In applying these policies locally, the GFA’s implementers can build on a proven process for shaping development and peacebuilding programs that bolster local

leadership, allocate adequate resources to local civil society groups, and heed the critical insights of women and girls on the front lines of conflict. As US officials select priority countries in which to implement the fragility strategy, they should give preference to those that have developed a National Action Plan because these governments have already signaled a commitment to partnering with women to improve peace and security.

The GFA calls for a rigorous monitoring and evaluation framework grounded in learning and experimentation, one of the act’s most innovative—and most challenging—directives. It also establishes a ten-year horizon for evaluating the strategy’s long-term impact, or the extent to which this model helps address the root causes of fragility by creating the conditions for lasting peace. Evaluating this progress means identifying sound metrics for assessing a country’s progression

from fragility to stability; the treatment of women and girls needs to be a key criterion.

A solid body of qualitative and quantitative research demonstrates the positive relationship between gender equality and state security. Unequal societies are twice as likely to experience internal conflict: over nearly twenty years of peace processes, women's participation made peace accords 35 percent more likely to endure at least fifteen years. These data demonstrate two distinct but important points. One, women's status is a key predictor of state fragility or stability. Two, advancing women's rights is an effective way to reduce fragility. In practical terms, if 50 percent of the population is unable to contribute to societal stability, reducing fragility is an empty mandate.

Strategies that aim to reduce fragility need to analyze gender inequalities in that society from design to monitoring and evaluation. Relatedly, they need to evaluate the hurdles to and opportunities for bringing positive change for women—and do so by consulting both women and men early and often. Tools for that analysis are many and varied. The US Institute of Peace's Gender Inclusive Framework and Theory is a highly adaptable, easy-to-use analytic option to better understand the context and challenges for women and men, especially in fragile and conflict settings.⁴ The UN's Gender Inequality Index tracks the disparity between female and male achievements across three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment, and the labor market.⁵ Saferworld's Gender and Conflict Analysis Toolkit embeds gender indicators directly into a conflict analysis framework.⁶ The Peace Research Institute of Oslo and the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security created the Women, Peace and Security Index, which analyzes trends in women's well-being across eleven indicators focused on justice, inclusion, and security.⁷ Independently, these four examples offer both guides for gender analysis at the project level and concrete data on gender equality, both of which could be directly embedded in the fragility strategy.

To increase state stability—and in so doing women's security and prosperity—policymakers should measure the positive impact of the fragility strategy against a gender index, and integrate indicators from the suggested resources into its monitoring and evaluation framework. Identifying existing gender-sensitive systems at the country level, such as those run by National Action Plans, could help prevent project duplication and save money and resources.

Government Personnel Training

To limit the risk that humanitarian aid workers and international peacekeepers perpetuate cycles of conflict and fragility, the global fragility strategy should mandate pre-deployment training on gender sensitivity and codes of conduct. One woman in five displaced by violent crises experiences sexual violence—including at the hands of military personnel, humanitarian aid workers, or peacekeepers deployed to help them.⁸ If unaddressed, this abuse can undermine the legitimacy of peacebuilding efforts and exacerbate drivers of fragility and conflict.

In recent years, the United Nations and international NGOs have stepped up their efforts to tackle this scourge and improve accountability mechanisms. Governments, though, need to do more. The WPS Act took up the mantle by mandating gender-sensitive training for all US government personnel deploying to war-torn or conflict-affected locations. US agencies—Defense, State, Homeland Security, and International Development—signaled a commitment to executing this mandate in the strategies they drafted for implementing the WPS Act. The plans include training personnel—including both contractors and employees—in international human rights law, strategies for protecting civilians from violence and exploitation, and how women's equality advances state stability.

The forthcoming global fragility strategy and its ten-year plans for priority countries present an opportunity to take these efforts to the next level. In these plans, policymakers should build on the WPS Act's provisions mandating gender-sensitive training and learn from their shortcomings, or risk losing hard-won progress.

Recommendations

Insistence on women’s meaningful participation in civil society consultations is more than appropriate, but carries a caution against symbolic efforts by external facilitators and country programs that do not yield real dividends for women.

In selecting pilot countries, those that have already developed a National Action Plan on women, peace, and

security should be prioritized. Relatedly, monitoring and evaluating impact should include both gender analysis and gender-sensitive indicators.

Pre-deployment training on gender sensitivity and codes of conduct will both safeguard standards and ensure that military personnel, humanitarian aid workers, and peacekeepers do not perpetuate cycles of violence and fragility.

Ensuring Local Ownership “from the Inside Out”

Amy Potter Czajkowski

Summary

Local ownership and leadership are critical to preventing extremism and violent conflict and stabilizing conflict-affected states. The more ownership and agency for peace from those in the affected locale, the more contextual and sustainable the solutions for peace and stability. Organizations, governments, and funders come and go, but communities remain. What is known about promoting genuine local ownership from the inside out? Many lessons can be learned from a community-based peacebuilding program successfully brought to scale in Sierra Leone after that country’s brutal civil war, and that has since helped rebuild governing structures from the ground up.

Fambul Tok in Sierra Leone

For more than a decade, the Sierra Leonean nongovernmental organization Fambul Tok, the US-based peacebuilding foundation Catalyst for Peace (CFP), and communities across Sierra Leone worked together to develop processes and organizational structures that leveraged latent community assets.¹ This approach supported communities in leading their repair and development and resisting violence and extremism. The outside actors invited communities to identify their own answers and walked with them through this process.

This process of reconciliation, community organizing, and development is called Fambul Tok—the same name as the NGO. It started with a question posed to community members, asking them what it would take for everyone affected by war to have the opportunity to reconcile. The inclusive organizing led not only

to reconciliation but also to inclusive structures that eventually also advanced women’s leadership, conflict resolution, and development.

These structures and the local initiatives they started have continued, taking on a life of their own and leading to the chiefdom- and district-inclusive committees that guide local governments in working through local conflicts. The Fambul Tok district and community structures also inspired the Wan Fambul (One Family) National Framework for Inclusive Governance and Local Development, a national policy working to center community initiative in peace and development. This initiative sparked what has become a whole systems approach that puts community ideas and energy at the center of the national system, thus allowing for a political process that moves from the “inside of the community out” toward the national government and



A charity worker, center, from the GOAL humanitarian agency, educates children in Freetown, Sierra Leone, on how to prevent and identify the Ebola virus in their communities on September 18, 2014. (Photo by Michael Duff/AP)

international community. “Inside out” is a better metaphor than “bottom up” for ensuring local ownership because it calls attention to the repair work that needs to be done inside communities before external resources and investments can be used effectively—including to build up regional and national structures.

Although based in a specific time and place with its unique challenges and opportunities, the principles and strategies that guided this work in Sierra Leone from the inside out can inform other settings.

An inside-out approach draws on three principles. First is that everyone is part of a whole, connected system. Recognizing and bringing the parts into alignment taps into the power and agency of both the parts and the whole. Second is that mutual and respectful relationships are possible and necessary. Relationships are

the glue that bring the whole into alignment, whether in the community or between government, civil society organizations, and funders. Third is that answers are in the places they are needed. Contextually appropriate ideas, solutions, and resources anchor sustainable peace and development and are often present even when not immediately visible.

The metaphor of a cup, which represents a community, helps explain what an inside-out approach entails. When the community has experienced harm and violence (latent and overt), the cup is cracked—representing broken relationships between people and groups—and community capacities are diminished. When national governments or national or international organizations pour external resources (water) into the cup, the water flows through the cracks and is wasted. Because most people in and outside the community do not see the community

Unless the cracks in the community are seen, named, and addressed, the community and its resources (including relationships) remain invisible. When the community works together, using representative structures and inclusive processes, it finds answers on its own.

cup (the larger system), more water (resources, including taxpayer dollars) is often poured in when the initial efforts fail, which risks widening the cracks (exacerbating conflict) and depleting resources.

Unless the cracks in the community are seen, named, and addressed, the community and its resources (including relationships) remain invisible. When the community works together, using representative structures and inclusive processes, it finds answers on its own and can begin to address conflicts and issues that might lead to violence. Just as a repaired cup holds water—using resources effectively—so does a transformed community draw on the powerful resources it already has.

Four particular strategies have helped those outside a community (funders, organizations, and even governments) strengthen communities from the inside out.

The process of investing in a thorough, inclusive design process should involve asset mapping and reaching out to diverse voices. It also involves working at relationship development among all the people and groups needed to carry out the work of creating the community organizing core. The Fambul Tok process invited representatives from the community to form a leadership team to lead a process that involved the larger community to address harms and identify development priorities.

Supporting structures that represent the whole is essential. As the Fambul Tok process evolved, it became clear that structures were needed to bring more of the whole system into alignment—starting with communities, then working at the chiefdom, district, national, and international levels. Each level had different, complementary capacities. Sometimes the

structures exist and simply need to be reinvigorated, and sometimes they need to be created.

People often believed that they had nothing to offer and thus looked for answers and resources outside the community. Investing in relationships and accompaniment yields dividends. Fambul Tok staff worked with community volunteers to design a process to repair relationships and identify existing strengths and resources. As a funding partner, CFP “walked” with the staff as they worked on organizational development issues and strategy. CFP prioritized the time needed to work in alignment with program principles and maximize creativity, adapting requirements to support the evolution of the program. CFP and Fambul Tok collectively identified the roles that an outside partner and funder could play to support community initiative. Those roles included connecting community initiatives with international organizations, funders, and district and national governments, and supporting community policy initiatives. Outside action was valuable to the extent that it ignited internal capacity, such that resources could be offered (if needed) from the outside in ways that strengthened the initiative and met the needs of those on the inside.

Acknowledge the capacity of a community to repair itself even though community capacity and solutions may not be immediately apparent. Doing this may require rethinking the language used, which often runs counter to intentions. For example, when labels such as fragile are used to describe a person or country, they highlight weakness rather than the assets that are needed to strengthen a community and to elicit the answers that are waiting there. The Fambul Tok process progressed through eliciting the cultural strengths and experiences in a community that create unity, highlighting and elevating them, and giving them space to grow through the leadership of the community.

Recommendations

Adopting an inside-out approach to conflict prevention and peacebuilding taps into the strength elicited through repairing community relationships. The approach described in this article enables aligning local, national, and global structures with inclusive community structures at the center and as the driving force of creativity, solutions, and action. Although the model does not capture all of the functions of peacebuilding, governance, or development activities, it can provide a structure and foster the local leadership needed to conduct other initiatives.

Identifying the many points of engagement in a national or local context, keeping in mind that sustainability will require aligning the efforts with the larger system, is essential. In Sierra Leone, peacebuilding work started with consultations at the district level, which led to direct engagement at the community level. In another place, engagement may need to start at the national level and focus on development rather than reconciliation, finding creative ways to bring in community voices, and gradually deepening external engagement with communities. The goal should be to acknowledge the many parts of the national or societal system as valuable, and over time work toward alignment and integration with those systems.

Using Everyday Peace Indicators to Increase Local Ownership

Pamina Firchow

Summary

Local ownership, a policy term commonly used in the development and peacebuilding sectors, signals the degree to which local actors feel invested in and are involved in developing programs intended to support them. Various initiatives promote and foster local ownership. The experience drawn from the Everyday Peace Indicators approach and its initiatives helps identify concrete steps policymakers should consider when developing country strategies for strengthening the potential for local ownership.¹

What Is Local Ownership?

Historically, grassroots activists have always demanded to be included in policy decisions and have struggled over issues related to power and inclusion in decision-making. Policymakers thus use the term local ownership to refer to processes that foster inclusion of beneficiaries in consultation, design, implementation, and monitoring processes related to international development programs.² The goals are to promote local relevance of interventions, sustain activities beyond the presence of external actors, and promote mutually beneficial relationships between global and local actors.

Conflict resolution and peacebuilding are about altering power structures and relationships in a country and

its society. Especially in conflict-affected settings, local ownership is important because it is about power and inclusion. People need to have a stake in what they are receiving and feel responsible for the outcome if external projects are to succeed.³ Local people have to actively engage in the development of their own communities, as well as reflect and act on ways to improve their situations and foster peace. Local ownership can allow for openings to emerge in local power structures because locals are empowered to advocate for their needs and goals.

Local ownership presents challenges to foreign donors given the political and bureaucratic hurdles in both donor and partner countries. These hurdles can often impede true local ownership because the programming



Indigenous people march during a national strike in Bogotá, Colombia, on October 21, 2020. (Photo by Fernando Vergara/AP)

cannot address fundamental power disparities between the funders and the funded. This can lead to artificial and inorganic programming that is not sustainable in the long term. Funders are often reluctant to release control for fear of actual or perceived inadequate local capacity and excessive local corruption. Releasing donor control is key to local ownership, and positive accompaniment of the process is key to making it work.

Seven steps are crucial.⁴

Step 1: Who is local? The first step is determining which local actors are important and assessing the power relations likely to influence local inclusion. Multiple actors can fall into that category—national governments, subnational governments, national civil society actors, local civil society actors, and individuals, among others—and all can relate to each other through

various hierarchies and power relations. In an effort to work with locals, international peacebuilders often rely on the same group of urban and elite civil society representatives, which reinforces cycles of exclusion of marginalized groups and results in power imbalances.

Step 2: Go directly to the source. Policymakers need to consider establishing relationships with local civil society to work directly with national and community-based civil society groups. Working through international nongovernmental organizations creates a power imbalance between local and international NGOs and wastes precious resources by giving funding to brokers. Priority should be on developing relationships with local actors.

Step 3: Eliminate unnecessary bureaucracy. Policymakers should allow locals to lead the programming agenda and to encourage unrestricted funding

schemes. Involve external actors only when locals request technical support.

Step 4: Prioritize accountability to communities.

Policymakers should use participatory and collaborative forms of consultation, design, monitoring, and evaluation to encourage learning and innovation and to limit complex reporting requirements. (See below for a brief overview of the Everyday Peace Indicators, one measurement tool that allows for bottom-up reporting.)

Step 5: Less is more. Sometimes it is necessary to put more resources into fewer projects in order to ensure quality results. Focusing deeply on fewer efforts is key to the sixth and seventh steps, which are critical for local ownership to flourish.

Step 6: Accompaniment is key. Policymakers should put resources into developing collaborative and productive relationships over time with local stakeholder target groups, because trust is fundamental to fostering local ownership.

Step 7: Longer funding cycles (peacebuilding takes time). Lastly, policymakers should commit to supporting fewer efforts over a longer period to secure better outcomes. Demonstrating a track record of being a supportive, positive, and sustained presence in the peacebuilding community is essential.

Why Indicators Matter

A focus on indicators is critical because indicators hold authority and direction over international policy. Indicators can be used to a variety of ends, including accountability, advocacy, and impact of initiatives.

Everyday Peace Indicators (EPI) is a methodology created to help bridge the divide between everyday people and national and international elites. Local communities are the best source of knowledge for

identifying key signals and changes within their own context. This approach works with communities to produce indicators of difficult-to-measure concepts like peace. Indicators collected using EPI harness community knowledge and definitions to best measure social concepts such as peace, reconciliation, and justice. Because the indicators are generated by the people who have experienced them, they can be analyzed to clarify and explicate how communities understand the concepts, what changes they expect to see, and how to measure progress. Interventions can thus be better designed and implemented to effectively meet the needs of the communities. The methodology sustains local participation while ensuring local ownership of the data created, with local partners informing the research design, data generation, and monitoring process.

Recommendations

Policymakers need to think carefully about defining local target groups when developing programming targeted at local ownership. Is the target political leaders in a local municipality or community leaders in villages or everyday people in a neighborhood? Local power dynamics are complex and constantly evolving, especially in conflict-affected contexts.

Staying connected with communities and partners as much as possible is important. A particular concern is to be especially careful about spreading programming too thin. It is therefore important to focus on sustained, long-term work in a few locations to establish and build strong relationships.

Providing partners the space and time to ensure that they are accountable to the communities they serve rather than to donors and the international community is essential. Adaptable design, monitoring, and evaluation tools that may be unconventional but demonstrate compelling results when working in the peace and conflict sector should be encouraged.

Ensuring Accountability

Innovation, Learning, and Accountability

Susanna P. Campbell

Summary

To ensure that foreign assistance both is grounded in conflict-sensitive assessment, monitoring, and evaluation, and integrates true local and national ownership throughout the program cycle, US government agencies and departments need to combine top-down accountability with bottom-up innovation, learning, and accountability.

Top-Down Accountability

Top-down accountability sets priorities. Whether in compliance reports for accountants, program evaluations, or reports to headquarters or Congress, accountability aims to ensure that foreign assistance achieves the foreign policy aims of the US government and the people it represents. International aid is a foreign policy tool to achieve particular objectives. The objective of the Global Fragility Act is to prevent violent conflict and extremism. For the global fragility strategy to ensure that US foreign assistance focuses on preventing violent conflict and extremism, it must establish top-down accountability mechanisms that enable federal agencies and departments to prioritize prevention and peacebuilding over other competing priorities. These mechanisms can help US missions and agencies determine what types of interventions they implement. They cannot, however, ensure that the interventions will be effective. Top-down accountability alone will not prevent violent conflict or extremism. Effective peacebuilding and conflict prevention also require country-level innovation, learning, and bottom-up accountability.¹

Both preventing conflict and peacebuilding are inherently experimental in that the dynamics they aim to mitigate have not yet unfolded. Such efforts aim to change highly fluid conflict dynamics, and thus

whether they will work is at best uncertain. Each intervention is based on a theory of change that describes how the given intervention will contribute to peace.² To achieve the desired change, activities need to be adapted to and grounded in the particulars of the context, both when the intervention is designed and when it is implemented. To adapt an experimental intervention to a changing context, actors need to innovate and learn. To learn, implementing agencies need to be explicit about their theory of change, gather regular information about whether the intervention is achieving this desired change, use this information to question the relevance of the theory of change, and adapt the theory of change the intervention to better fit the changing context.³ This type of adaptive programming runs counter to common practice in most international development, security, and humanitarian agencies, but is necessary for effective peacebuilding and conflict prevention interventions in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

Learning has multiple meanings. It can refer to the intake of information but also to action taken (based on that information) to reduce the gap between the organization's aims and outcomes. It is the latter type of learning that matters most for intervention in fragile and conflict-affected states. To achieve complex outcomes



Government employees attend a class on victim protection as part of a USAID-funded project in Sonsonate, El Salvador, on May 25, 2018. (Photo by Meredith Kohut/New York Times)

in changing contexts, organizations need to question regularly whether they are achieving the change that they want to achieve, why, and why not. This requires double-loop learning, which demands that organizations, first, regularly process real-time information about a program’s success and failure in an open and nondefensive way, and, second, take regular actions to reduce the gap between the program’s aims and outcomes.⁴ Although double-loop learning matters in all contexts, it is likely to matter most in changing contexts characterized by uncertainty about exactly how the intervention should be implemented or whether it is even the appropriate intervention.⁵ Monitoring and evaluation can help double-loop learning, but can also hinder it if information about intermediary program outcomes is not considered by decision-makers, failures are hidden, or adjustments to reduce the gap between aims and outcomes are discouraged.

Bottom-Up Accountability

To identify whether a program is having its intended preventive or peacebuilding effect, implementing agencies need to establish relationships, feedback mechanisms, and trust with the national and local stakeholders most affected by the program. In other words, they need to create bottom-up accountability mechanisms if conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and preventing violent extremism programs are to be effective. This ensures that program staff receive feedback about what is working, what is not working, and what can be done to make it work better. Bottom-up (local) accountability requires that the local and national stakeholders who are most affected by the program are involved in the program, design, monitoring, and evaluation of the project.⁶ It requires that they are given the authority to hold the US government and its implementing partners accountable for achieving high-quality outcomes in their countries. Without

One of the important innovations of the act is biennial reporting to Congress. Setting targets that focus on the core priorities of the Global Fragility Act can help ensure that US foreign policy and assistance prioritize preventing violent conflict and extremism.

bottom-up accountability, the aid agencies' primary incentive is to spend money on the tasks outlined in the original project document, not to engage in the time-consuming work of ensuring that it fits with the changing preferences and needs of those affected by the conflict.⁷

Recommendations

Country plans need to outline an annual strategic and learning process rather than a programmatic plan. They need to define the annual process by which the United States and its implementing partners will gather comprehensive data, develop shared priorities to respond to that context, identify the theory of change associated with each priority, explain interventions for each priority, decide on the specific bottom-up accountability mechanisms for each intervention, and identify the shared decision-making body that will decide how to adjust and adapt the interventions in response to feedback.

One of the important innovations of the act is biennial reporting to Congress. Setting targets that focus on the core priorities of the Global Fragility Act can help ensure that US foreign policy and assistance prioritize preventing violent conflict and extremism. If the focus is only on meeting measurable targets established in Washington, however, it is clearly not on bottom-up accountability, learning, and innovation. The reports to Congress should focus on whether the US mission and its implementing partners are contributing to general

conflict prevention and peacebuilding aims. To demonstrate this, the reports should include a summary of how these aims are met, or not, in each context, using locally derived indicators.⁸

The reports should also detail changes to conflict prevention and peacebuilding interventions and the lessons learned from these changes as well as whether US missions and agencies implement strategies that involve an inclusive group of local stakeholders. By monitoring the how of effective preventive programming and implementation, Congress can help create the incentive for federal agencies and departments to engage in the difficult and time-consuming work of localized program design, learning, and innovation. It will also help create a knowledge repository of the lessons learned. If the goal of the ten-year strategy is to improve the functioning of US foreign assistance in fragile and conflict-affected states, each pilot country needs to continuously refine and improve its knowledge base by monitoring and reporting on its learning.

To improve the effectiveness of US interventions in fragile and conflict-affected states, the global fragility strategy needs to include clear top-down and bottom-up accountability objectives. The sets of objectives should be consistent with each other, and should be reflected in the ten-year country plans and biennial reports to Congress.

Promoting Good Governance in Security Sectors

Jodi Vittori

Summary

Corruption in the security sector in fragile states is frequently part of a strategy to help maintain political settlements, provide rent-seeking and patronage opportunities, and ensure that the security sector will help prevent popular calls for economic and political reforms. The result is often an entrenched sector incapable of defending the state against internal and external threats. This undermines US foreign policy and national security interests, including counterterrorism objectives. Thus, centering anticorruption and good governance in security assistance programs, helping facilitate citizen engagement, and adopting specific corruption risk assessments will be important in achieving Global Fragility Act goals.

Mitigating Corruption

Mitigating security sector corruption is, or should be, an essential element of implementing the Global Fragility Act (GFA). Any corruption, but especially in the security sector, undermines the ability of military, police, and intelligence forces to respond to internal and external threats. Correspondingly, it contributes significantly to state fragility and vulnerability to violent conflict. In countries already grappling with fragility and violence, global stresses associated with the response to COVID-19 add to the complexity. Meanwhile, the worldwide economic decline implies a dramatic cut in resources for both legitimate state use and patronage. Further, state elites may enable large security sector budgets and additional corruption to ensure that security forces help resist popular calls for greater resources for public health and economic assistance, thereby contributing to greater civil instability. The lack of oversight in financial sectors, clampdowns on free press and civil society groups, and lack of transparency in contracting in response to the COVID-19 pandemic only exacerbate these risks. Now that the GFA is enacted, the United States needs to curb predatory behavior by supporting defense and security institution building and by supporting accountability and transparency through robust parliamentary, civil society, and media oversight.

In many fragile states, the security sector is key to maintaining the regime and associated privileged elites because regime survival often largely depends on the

use or threat of violence against its citizenry.¹ Fragile regimes maintain power and seek legitimacy by appropriating the state's military, police, intelligence agencies, and quasi-state groups such as militias into networks of corruption and patronage. Unpopular regimes recognize potential disloyalty by security forces through, for instance, possible support for civil protests, popular uprisings, or even military coup d'états. Keeping the security sector loyal is thus often an overriding preoccupation. Defending the state from various internal and external threats may well be secondary.

Enabling corruption and permitting other predatory behavior by the military or the police helps ensure their loyalty. Corrupt procurement and service contracts are a way to pass money and other resources to favored security sector elites through kickbacks or even fake contracts. This has been the practice in places such as South Sudan and Afghanistan, where natural resource and other contracts are diverted as part of maintaining political settlements. The result of entrenched security sector corruption is often a hollowed-out sector, unwilling and incapable of defending the state against internal and external threats, allowing terrorism, insurgency, and criminality to grow into existential threats.

Corruption is made especially easy by the lack of transparency and accountability in security sectors. According to Transparency International,



People wait in line for food staples in Caracas, Venezuela, on January 26, 2019. (Photo by Meridith Kohut/New York Times)

In many countries with high levels of inequality and poverty, defense budgets are the largest areas of government spending, yet receive the least scrutiny or attention. A lack of accountability and the prevalence of knee-jerk secrecy in defense budgets can become an easy way for corrupt governments to hide money, extract kickbacks, and pay for extensive patronage networks.²

An analysis of the Transparency International Defense and Security Government Defense Integrity Index for 2020 shows that acquisition planning, parliamentary oversight, and auditor effectiveness are severely lacking in more than half of Middle East and North African countries.³

By implication, a strategy to gradually and deliberately improve the relationships between a regime, its security forces, and its population will be key to improving state legitimacy and resiliency. This must include training and incentivizing security sectors and their regimes to improve transparency and accountability.

The United States also needs to encourage political institutions, civil society, and public space for citizens to facilitate effective oversight as part of broader security assistance and good governance efforts.

Recommendations

Defense institution building should be front and center of any security assistance offered in priority countries under the GFA, and anticorruption programs mandated as part of all such programs. Reform needs to be a condition for assistance—including any arms or services associated with sales or “train and equip” programs—especially for fragile states not in full-blown conflict situations.

The Global Fragility Strategy should emphasize the need for the United States to help establish the conditions that enable a state’s citizens to better hold their security institutions to account. The State Department and USAID could assist in capacity building for parliaments and civil

society and in helping states develop effective anticorruption oversight of security sectors.

The strategy should also include clear guidance to all relevant agencies, instructing them to assess security sector corruption risks as a baseline and as part of measurement, assessment, and evaluation. Two indices—the TI-DS Government Defense Integrity Index and the World Justice Project’s annual Rule of Law Index—already account for issues related to security sector governance, and others can help in this process.

Finally, the strategy should address the impact of security assistance programs on corruption. The National Security Strategy and Defense Department doctrine, training, and campaign and operational plans should all address corruption in the security sector. The State, Defense, and Commerce Departments should review arms and dual use programs to align them with GFA country plans.

Examining Perceptions and Biases

Mareike Schomerus

Summary

In implementing the Global Fragility Act of 2019, policymakers will need to rely on their understanding of conflict drivers and how stabilization and conflict prevention occur. A shared understanding across government agencies is thus essential to aligning diplomacy, development, and defense activities. Equally important, however, will be to ensure that diplomats and development workers understand the contexts in which they are working and have the flexibility to adapt to the perceptions and realities of citizens in conflict countries.

Aligning Diplomacy, Development, and Defense

More than a decade of research by the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC) has demonstrated that how a citizen sees a situation is at least as important, if not more so, than what might seem like objectively measurable progress.¹ We call the many layers that influence how people experience a situation the mental landscape.² Further, how legitimacy is created in situations of fragility is often quite different from how interventions seek to support it, usually by improving service delivery.³ Perceptions matter on all sides. When policymakers rely on personal understandings and mental models of what constitutes an improving situation or legitimate institution or service, their interventions could make things worse.

The broad, innovative authorities provided to US policymakers under the new legislation should be used to

ensure that, rather than being dictated from Washington and imposed from the outside, stabilization and prevention programs and country strategies in particular countries reflect careful empirical research concerning what constitutes legitimacy and how citizens experience a situation in that context. When implementing Global Fragility Act (GFA) country strategies and interventions, US embassy staff should be encouraged to adopt reflective approaches and continuously adapt their programs to changes in how communities perceive programs. Although USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives may be positioned to carry out adaptive programming, policymakers need to recognize that support to building trust in government and state legitimacy is not a process that can be achieved on a project cycle, but requires an adaptive, multiyear country policy strategy, nimble management by the embassy team, and a commitment to research and learning.

Fragility in Context

The GFA does not define fragility but instead conceptualizes it as the *absence* of stability, that is, the conditions that might foster extremism and violent conflict, the processes that marginalize and exclude groups of people, and the institutions and actors that lack legitimacy. Part of the GFA's directive is for policymakers to pursue "an analysis of the conditions that contribute to violence and fragility."⁴ This analysis is prescribed at both the local and national level, but the overall GFA framing prioritizes the state as an organizing entity. This model of a fragile state, however, does not capture how many people in reality experience either "the state" or fragility. Someone living in a fragile situation may perceive and experience fragility as a stable state of certainty (existing powers tightly regulate exclusive access to resources) or as an unstable state of uncertainty (conflict situations can be very fluid).

The GFA stresses the need for "participatory, locally led programs empowering marginalized groups such as youth and women, inclusive dialogues and conflict resolution processes" and for context specificity.⁵ SLRC research indicates that policymakers' understandings of these concepts may be problematic; thus, policymakers should be encouraged to "reflect on whether their approaches are consistent with local articulations of the concepts."

Programs that support inclusion can overlook people's experience of violent conflict. That experience can shape perceptions and expectations of inclusion, including increasing the perceived standards of fairness.⁶ The sentiment of fairness is often outcome based. This sets up a particular challenge for programs and processes that aim to be inclusive and fair, yet can only be experienced as such if they produce a positive outcome for everyone against increased fairness standards.

Context specificity can become a reductive concept. External actors can easily overestimate how much they know about complex, deeply historicized situations of tension. Context-specific engagement can be reduced

to implementing what is considered best practice from the implementer's perspective. Facilitating positive change through a program might require local staff to abide by international norms and policy and program imperatives while seeking to do what they consider best for the local context.⁷

Empowerment is granting power to someone often without considering existing power relations. Policymakers should be encouraged to acknowledge the risks involved for actors in being empowered. The notion of empowerment is deeply linked to a notion of agency. Empowerment is expected to create agency and to allow locally driven mechanisms to advance community resilience, accountability, and stability. Empowerment assumes that groups or individuals are able to deviate from existing social norms without cost, such as by investing in education when it might break social norms. Taking the risk of an investment in the future requires trust in those who support such risk-taking; if such trust does not exist, taking a risk on the future becomes reckless.⁸ The lack of trust that can result can lead to further obstacles to change.

Recommendations

Diplomats and aid workers should be encouraged to conduct or commission empirical research about what makes institutions legitimate in specific contexts. Relatedly, policymakers in the field should take a reflective approach to implementing the GFA, including by articulating the mental models that underpin how they understand or imagine fragility, and ensuring that their policy and program interventions are informed by context-specific research.

Genuinely context-specific approaches require research and analysis on behavioral patterns and perceptions and on how the two interact in different contexts. Building trust in government and state legitimacy is a process and cannot be achieved on a project cycle, but requires instead sustained diplomatic and program engagement by donors.

Leveraging Programs and Diplomacy

Integrating Diplomacy and Development Programming

Sarah Rose

Summary

In the United States, coordination between diplomacy and development has been inconsistent, hampered at times by things like bureaucratic turf battles, limited funding, and ambiguous authorities. The Global Fragility Act promises to improve coherence between diplomacy and development efforts to address the root causes of fragility and violent conflict. It directs the State Department, USAID, and other agencies to develop a joint strategy around shared long-term goals and to coordinate their approaches to achieve them.

The Imperative

Fragility is often at least in part rooted in intentional choices by powerful elites to maximize their interests at the expense of the public's. The resulting political or social exclusion can generate grievances and create conditions for violence to emerge.¹ These dynamics suggest that promoting inclusion will likely emerge as a central objective in many Global Fragility Act (GFA) focus countries.

Achieving this objective will require alignment within and across the diplomacy and development spheres on social cohesion and inclusion goals and how to achieve them. Providing aid can help address perceptions of injustice by expanding service delivery, but people's perceptions of the state are colored by more than service provision.² Foreign assistance promoting good governance can also help, but funds are usually small and programs tend to provide technical solutions to discrete governance challenges rather than tackle the complex political dynamics at their root. Diplomatic modalities to encourage and foster inclusion and social cohesion are critical complements.³ Further, in the face of actions that reinforce exclusionary rule, even the

best aid programs will fall short of potential if US diplomats overlook shrinking civil liberties.⁴

Recommendations

Several operational and structural approaches would help facilitate better integration between aid and diplomacy. A first step in terms of operational coordination would be to lay the groundwork—and ensure accountability—for a coherent US government response to increasing patterns of exclusion, including democratic declines and closing civic space. To that end, each GFA country strategy should center around governance and include an agreed upon statement on what patterns of actions would prompt a US response and how agencies would coordinate their approaches.

The State Department and USAID each conduct political and conflict analyses, but the quality and comprehensiveness of these products vary, and the products are seldom shared across agencies in a way that fosters “singing from the same song sheet.” GFA implementation needs to ensure enough staff and resources to track key political economy and conflict

History has shown that interagency initiatives stall or break down over questions such as who has budgetary, policy, and legal leverage. How will agencies resolve disputes when they disagree?

questions in focus countries on an ongoing, iterative basis because point-in-time assessments are soon outdated. Similarly, embassy teams should allocate staff and resources to expand their connections beyond a well-known set of capital city–based, elite interlocutors to include second-tier influencers and informal political and economic structures.⁵ Further, political economy and conflict analyses, accompanied by recommended actions, need to be shared across agencies and, as appropriate, with other donors and partners involved in US-funded efforts.⁶

For political economy and conflict analyses to inform programming decisions, aid programs and diplomatic interventions also need to be flexible enough to adapt to new or improved information about changes in context or program performance. Indeed, more flexible programs are associated with more favorable outcomes, especially in fluid contexts such as fragile states. Adaptive programming has emerged as a priority at USAID and in the GFA, but because risk aversion and time pressure on staff may contribute to a preference for tried-and-true tools, embassy and mission leadership will need to promote more adaptive approaches. A shift toward more adaptive programming needs to be accompanied by a shift in expectations for accountability that entails less emphasis on counting outputs, more communication between implementers and overseers, greater attention to the feedback loops that inform program adjustments, and more focus on program outcomes.⁷

The GFA calls for compact-based partnerships in which donors and the partner country government agree to work toward shared, country-led objectives and outline each party's contributions toward these goals. Partner country contributions often include policy reforms that advance inclusion or shift political or economic risks. Diplomats can reinforce messaging around these reforms to secure buy-in, and aid programs can support

technical aspects of reform implementation. Tying aid packages to reform is another possibility.⁸ If done well and in the right circumstances, such an approach could both help empower reformers and improve aid outcomes, given that assistance tends to be more effective in more favorable policy environments. GFA implementation should explore opportunities to link aid to reform but needs to ensure that any conditions support local reform processes, allow local leadership over both their design and implementation, focus on outcomes rather than prescribed forms, and have a long enough timeline to build local support and participation. Conditions also need to be accompanied by a credible promise that funding will be withheld if reforms are unsuccessful. Bureaucratic pressure to spend down budgets and concern for strategic bilateral relationships can make this difficult, however, carrying implications for country selection. For GFA assistance to leverage reforms, selected countries should include those with a domestic reform process under way and where US strategic interests do not threaten to dominate funding decisions.⁹

The GFA outlines key roles and responsibilities for relevant agencies.¹⁰ Although this is a critical first step to harness better coordination, it is only a partial solution. History has shown that interagency initiatives stall or break down over questions such as who has budgetary, policy, and legal leverage. How will agencies resolve disputes when they disagree? How will agencies integrate complementary efforts that sit outside the initiative?¹¹ GFA implementing agencies need to review experiences with other successful (and less successful) interagency initiatives to identify sticking points and come to early agreement on how to address them.

In addition to defining agency roles, it will be important to set expectations for the relationship between coordination structures. The National Security Council

and other Washington-based interagency processes can help set priorities, liaise with Congress and multilateral actors, identify funding sources, and bring a cross-country comparative lens. But the country level is where bilateral relationships are formed and managed, where donor coordination takes place, and where strategies and programs are developed. Where mission-led leadership and processes are strong, Washington-led direction can interfere; in these cases, the US role should be supportive and more targeted.

The success of interagency processes clearly relies on the quality of individual agency investments. Lack of coordination within agencies, such as disagreements between functional and regional bureaus, can be a stumbling block. Designating a single agency broker responsible for corraling internal viewpoints can help bring a unified agency voice to interagency processes.¹² Including contributions to interagency coordination in staff performance evaluation criteria can also realign incentives toward more constructive engagement.

Supporting Security Sector Reform

Daniel R. Mahanty

Summary

As the US government formulates its strategy for addressing fragility, it needs to seriously consider its potential role in supporting security sector reform as both method and ends. The practical record illustrates the limitations of external assistance, yet analysts and practitioners have identified ways the United States can meaningfully support internal reform processes through political influence, technical support, and self-restraint.

Reorienting, Repurposing, and Rightsizing Security Institutions

The first-order question policymakers need to answer in situating security sector reform (SSR) as part of a global strategy for addressing fragility is whether the reform of security institutions serves the objective of preventing and limiting violence. The record seems clear. A consensus now recognizes the relationship between pervasive violence and inefficient or illegitimate security institutions. State security institutions are like others in that once they are reformed, the societies in which they exist are likely more stable and free from wanton violence, but the processes of reform can themselves have either stabilizing or destabilizing effects.¹ Yet reorienting, repurposing, and possibly rightsizing security institutions once designed to serve a rent-seeking elite and transforming them into representative, accountable, impersonal, and impartial service providers creates “winners” and “losers,”

oftentimes heavily armed ones.² It is this phenomenon to which the importance of recognizing the political character of security institutions is most attached.

This potential outcome should not deter policymakers from supporting reform. After all, the redistribution of security dividends from a dominant coalition to the public is very much the point of reform. Although changes in the security sector may introduce some risk of violence or political uncertainty, the failure to reform often introduces even greater risk to long-term stability. Well-designed processes can temper conflict dynamics by providing channels of communication between security service providers and the public, enhancing inclusivity, strengthening accountability, and improving responsiveness.³ Being aware of the reasonably predictable consequences of reform can reinforce the importance of political resilience to security-related setbacks and disruptions, to protecting those at greatest risk of harm

When the emphasis is prevention, Washington should support meaningful human rights–related reform of security forces, such as restraint in the use of force, humane detentions practices, legitimate forms of due process, conduct-related accountability, and stronger public oversight of security actors.

from change, to correctly sequencing reform efforts relative to other political processes, and to undertaking the bargains necessary to eliminate spoilers.

Although no universal model represents the optimal end-state of reform for states and societies of vastly different character, the reform process and its objectives can be bound by common principles. These include an emphasis on inclusion, the participation of civil society, accountability, transparency, professionalism, and the expectation that the legitimacy of the end-state of reform depends in no small part on the protection of human rights.

US Policy

Once the correspondence between SSR and violence prevention or mitigation is established, policymakers can begin to assess how best to ensure that US support results in sustainably improved performance and accountability. The report card on related US policy in other states is mixed, in large part because policy and practice have been uneven. Yet examples of successful US-led or US-supported security partnerships that led to meaningful reforms do exist, such as defense sector reform in Liberia.⁴ The most common critiques fall into one of four general categories. The United States prioritizes its relationships with, but not the legitimacy of, security institutions in the conduct of its foreign and national security policy; does not pay enough attention to second-order effects and unintended consequences when providing technical, operational, and material support to partner security forces; has treated SSR as primarily a technical rather than political exercise, understated the political role security institutions serve, and engaged on overly technical and transactional terms; or overstates its technical ability to transform security institutions but understates the totality of its political influence in promoting positive change.

Appropriately tailored strategies can address these critiques by recognizing the political nature of security institutions and reform processes, placing enough emphasis on correctly diagnosing the role played by security institutions and actors in fragility dynamics, focusing on the legitimacy rather than the strength of security partners, and understanding both the prospects and limitations of technical support.

Meanwhile, like any other form of development-focused engagement, programs in the security sector can work. The effectiveness of external interventions depends on how realistic and well-defined the objectives of a program are, the timing of an intervention, how well the program is designed (including pre-programmatic, localized needs assessments, and sustainment), and the degree to which the targeted stakeholders demand and “own” the intended outcomes of the processes supported by the intervention. Fortunately, Washington has no shortage of expertise on effective program design. The 2020 interagency Guidelines for Effective Justice and Security Sector Assistance in Conflict-Affected Areas clearly reflects contemporary international best practices, and USAID has developed a number of additional resources available to program managers for effective and conflict-sensitive program design and implementation. Binding policymakers and program managers to the principles reflected in this guidance could improve the likelihood that programs succeed.

The notion of introducing conditionality or selectivity to US security sector assistance has recently gained traction as a way to promote reform. So has the idea of enshrining mutual commitment through more formal “compact” arrangements, a design feature of the Global Fragility Act (GFA). Conditioning aid and formalizing arrangements can yield benefits, but before committing to either approach in promoting SSR as part

of its strategy for fragile states, policymakers should consider several points:

- Neither positive inducements nor negative sanctions are enough on their own to overcome internal incentives that shape the political status quo.
- It may be more difficult to apply conditionality in situations where the United States is diplomatically overleveraged as a result of its dependency on security assistance as a way to curry political favor with a partner.
- The most deserving and promising targets of assistance are not necessarily those with the most pressing need for reform and even more rarely those where the United States has an abiding strategic interest.

These caveats in mind, prospects for SSR should nonetheless figure heavily into US selection criteria for identifying GFA priority countries. The basis of selection for priority countries should include indications of nascent or ongoing reform processes that can be supported, the availability of reform champions within security institutions, and the existence of a civil society that can serve as a feedback channel and source of public oversight. Although the resulting short list of countries may not correspond completely with US strategic priorities, focusing on the best prospects will likely yield the greatest political and financial return on investment over time.

In these contexts, compacts that establish common terms of reference and shared objectives, clarify mutual

commitments, and determine the timeline for implementation are a sound basis for supporting reform.

Recommendations

The global fragility strategy should prioritize external support for SSR and an enabling environment for civil society, foster relationships with reform agents, and lead efforts to renew international attention to security governance and accountability. When the emphasis is prevention, Washington should support meaningful human rights–related reform of security forces, such as restraint in the use of force, humane detentions practices, legitimate forms of due process, conduct-related accountability, and stronger public oversight of security actors.

Policymakers need to be aware of the limitations of external interventions. They also should be aware of Washington’s power to influence when opportunities allow. When they are identifying GFA priority countries, prospects for SSR and timing should figure heavily into selection criteria. Policymakers also need to bear in mind that limited and targeted investments in reform processes otherwise owned entirely by the partner can have greater impact than large programs.

The global fragility strategy should call on leaders and policymakers to ensure US security cooperation and assistance activities—and, when possible, those of other donors—are consistent with stabilization and with preventing violence, and in no way exacerbate the risk of violence, corruption, or human rights violations.

Aligning Humanitarian and Development Action

Olga Petryniak and Jon Kurtz

Summary

If it is to bring greater coherence to foreign assistance objectives and mechanisms, the global fragility strategy needs to leverage its cross-agency mandate toward targeted conflict-prevention and stabilization efforts. Resilience offers a guiding framework and approach for aligning and improving international responses—humanitarian, peace, and development—to achieve the aspirations of the Global Fragility Act.

Implementation

The focus of the Global Fragility Act (GFA) on long-term conflict prevention and stabilization recognizes that the vision of the triple nexus—the blending of humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding assistance to address protracted, conflict-driven crises—can be realized only if the peace pillar is mandated, funded, and put effectively into practice. However, merely layering peacebuilding funds and activities atop ongoing humanitarian and development investments in conflict-affected settings will not bring the full promise of the GFA to fruition.¹

The \$42 billion in humanitarian and development assistance to the world's eighteen most fragile states in 2018 dwarfs the GFA's \$230 million offering. Humanitarian and development aid can directly affect prospects for peace, but only if intentionally designed to do so. A narrow focus on life-saving assistance by humanitarian action in prolonged crises can undercut local coping mechanisms and destabilize subnational economies. These factors can exacerbate the drivers of fragility, sowing the seed of future crises. Emphasizing economic growth, on the other hand, can reproduce the inequalities and ensuing grievances that lead to violence. Conflict prevention and stabilization will be influenced—reversed, stalled, or assisted—by humanitarian and development action. The global fragility strategy (GFS) needs to insist that advancing peace is part and parcel of these efforts in fragile, conflict-affected settings.

Resilience offers a framework for aligning and improving the coherence of international humanitarian, peace, and development responses to achieve the aspirations of the GFA.² The framework guides foreign assistance to strengthen sources of resilience to the shocks and stresses defining fragile contexts. In conflict-affected settings, this includes bolstering the capacity of institutions and communities to mitigate the drivers and effects of violence alongside other risk factors—climate events, economic disruptions, and now a pandemic—that exacerbate fragility.

Collective Action

The GFA aims to address long-term drivers of fragility and violence through “justice sector reform, good governance, and inclusive and accountable service delivery.” However, the dynamic nature of conflict limits the potential of playing this long game to gradually cultivate peace and stability. Increasingly frequent and often reinforcing disruptions—drought, food price spikes, a political transition, or even isolated violence—can quickly fuel political and social instability in contexts characterized by systemic exclusion, injustice, and grievance. This is particularly evident in a COVID-19 world.³

Ensuring that longer-term conflict-prevention and peacebuilding efforts are effective and take hold requires peace, development, and humanitarian actors to strengthen sources of resilience that could support near-term violence prevention measures—including conflict-sensitive responses—alongside longer-term



USAID humanitarian aid is stored at a warehouse on the outskirts of Cucuta, Colombia, on the border with Venezuela on February 19, 2019. (Photo by Fernando Vergara/AP)

reforms. For instance, in Nigeria’s Benue State, interventions focused on strengthening interaction, dispute resolution, and social cohesion between conflicting groups buttressed communities from a fresh wave of violence in 2018.⁴ Following the 2014–15 outbreak of Ebola that fueled a rise in public mistrust, mobilization and engagement of legitimate, local community structures in Liberia helped squelch harmful narratives, built public trust, and motivated communities to unite behind disease prevention and response measures.⁵

Working at local levels alongside a national agenda is essential to preventing and mitigating conflict. But questions remain as to which local capacities are most critical to strengthen. Two key sources of resilience are often overlooked or even undermined by external aid: strong social networks, including kinship structures, solidarity groups, and informal institutions; and local

markets, such as exchanges among producers, traders, suppliers, and urban entrepreneurs. When functioning, these relationships and institutions routinely enable communities to better cope in conflict settings, offer opportunities to reduce violence, and provide a requisite foundation for future prosperity.

The need to invest in local support systems is evident in South Sudan. Crisis-affected communities with strong, diverse social relationships shared information, extended psychosocial support, and exchanged food, labor, and cash. These factors allowed them to better adapt and maintain their livelihoods during conflict. Conversely, for internally displaced populations in designated Protection of Civilians camps, isolation from kinship networks and information sources limited their ability to return home or reestablish livelihoods—important preconditions for stability in South Sudan.⁶ In

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, analytical hubs conduct real-time tracking of rumors and misinformation related to COVID-19 that can incite violence, allowing response teams to tailor messaging campaigns that build community trust and reduce the risk of violence.

Syria, market actors quickly adapted to evolving crisis dynamics, and continued to provide critical goods and services in the midst of conflict. Households with access to functioning markets were found to have greater psychosocial and financial well-being—two outcomes that can advance peace in contexts where trauma and economic exclusion fuel cycles of violence.⁷

The GFA provides for “an analysis of the conditions that contribute to violence and fragility” in priority countries, including through proven tools for conflict analysis. However, many conflict and risk assessments have been too slow, too cumbersome, and too removed from subnational realities to inform appropriate action in dynamic, conflict-affected environments. The strategic resilience assessment for northeast Nigeria that Mercy Corps conducted on behalf of USAID in 2018 painted a vivid picture of how quickly threats evolve, frustrating aid efforts and invalidating strategies.⁸

Lessons from Nigeria highlight that rapid and continuous analysis must complement one-off assessments with timely and granular insights that can inform more agile programming to quickly adapt in rapidly changing contexts. For instance, Mercy Corps’ crisis analytics hubs in contexts such as Syria and the Democratic Republic of Congo integrate continuous field-based monitoring with open-source data and analysis by both subject-matter experts and highly sophisticated software. In Syria, this enabled teams to successfully predict the sites of armed conflict as well as safe zones, enabling the pre-positioning of assistance to conflict-affected communities. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, analytical hubs conduct real-time tracking

of rumors and misinformation related to COVID-19 that can incite violence, allowing response teams to tailor messaging campaigns that build community trust and reduce the risk of violence.

Recommendations

Successful GFA implementation requires collective action in three interdependent areas. First is to pair short-term violence prevention with efforts to transform structural drivers of conflict. Humanitarian and development investments in such actions can prevent states from regressing deeper into violence during crises and create the short-term, positive peace necessary for longer-term transformation.

Second is to support local market and social systems that can strengthen sources of resilience to the causes and effects of violence. The GFS should direct local investments to strengthen rather than undermine these systems, and expand access to them for women, youth, and other historically marginalized groups. Investments that strengthen market and social networks while ensuring conflict sensitivity can help address exclusion, constraints to resource access, and disruptions to local livelihoods in conflict environments. They thus offer essential leverage points for international responses to create enabling conditions for stabilization, recovery, and peacebuilding.

Third is to invest in rapid, real-time risk and resilience analysis. Such efforts can enable GFA implementation to stay ahead of unfolding events and most appropriately respond to evolving threats that have a direct impact on conflict dynamics.

International Coordination

Enhancing Country-Level Coordination

Jonathan Papoulidis

Summary

As the humanitarian and economic toll of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to grow, the United Nations has warned that the crisis may fuel conflicts around the world as well as increase starvation, extreme poverty, and forced displacement.¹ Given the context specificity of conflict drivers as well as aid fragmentation, effective country-level cooperation among political, security, and development actors will be vital to prevent further instability and build resilience in fragile states.

Evidence and Joint Accountability

Promoting effective cooperation in fragile states is an age-old challenge, but it is critical to overcome aid fragmentation, which stymies efforts to help countries overcome fragility. As the development and humanitarian community has learned for well over a decade, coordination is key to avoiding inefficient or wasteful aid allocations and overwhelming weak host-government institutions.² Even before the pandemic, the Global Fragility Act (GFA) called on agencies to “identify mechanisms to improve coordination between the United States, foreign governments, and international organizations” to better address the causes of fragility and violence. Recent lessons suggest that closer coordination on the ground in developing countries requires either establishing or strengthening two sets of mechanisms.

The first is a framework for conducting joint assessments and plans for preventing conflict and building resilience, a practice that has become more common in the development sector in the aftermath of conflict, and increasingly even in countries where conflict is only beginning to spread.³ To have sustainable impact, joint assessments should take place under the leadership of the host government—with UN and World Bank country teams providing strong support—and should include not only national

and local government representatives, but also the civil society actors that need to help drive the policy agenda. The assessment and planning phase should include a strategic-level, joint framework for evaluating progress toward policy objectives and holding the parties to account.⁴ That process should be enshrined in a diplomatic agreement. The methodology for the joint assessment needs to balance depth and analysis with speed.

Equally important but often underappreciated is the need to establish a robust cooperation structure—or country coordination platform—to guide the creation of these joint assessments and the strategies they produce and to oversee their implementation and adaptation. Although the need for evidence-based conflict assessments, robust strategies, and clear metrics for tracking progress is widely appreciated in the peacebuilding community, far less attention has been given to the country-based organizational structures and processes needed to enable coordination, strategic planning, and mutual accountability over time to achieve results.⁵ This lack of attention is surprising given the significant investments in fragile states and increasing calls to support a humanitarian, peace, and development nexus for greater coherence and coordination between diverse actors in these contexts.

Peace processes and programs have too often been designed based on externally imposed timelines and goals, as in South Sudan, where donors and the central government imposed a largely top-down approach that did not include local and civil society actors and failed to promote peace.

Country coordination platforms organize national and international stakeholders into a three-tiered structure that allows them to align their activities, including potentially large-scale operations and pools of funding.⁶ Critically, these platforms should not serve as top-down mechanisms for imposing externally determined policy prescriptions but instead actively incorporate feedback from local stakeholders and adapt policies and programs in the face of shocks and complex political economies.⁷ The GFA's most important directive is arguably that the US government adopt an adaptive management approach to conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and development in the context of more robust country coordination.⁸

For nearly two decades, country platforms have been tested across a broad range of fragile states, including Liberia, Haiti, Afghanistan, and the Central African Republic. In Niger, the platform played a key role in strengthening government and partner efforts for conflict prevention, peace, and security.⁹ In Somalia, the three-tiered model helped sustain peace efforts. Although Somalia's country coordination platform was not without challenges, recent analysis has shown how pivotal it has been to supporting the country's still fragile political settlement and state-building and development efforts, while helping prevent the country's slide back into full-blown civil war.¹⁰ At the same time, peace processes and programs have too often been designed based on externally imposed timelines and goals, as in South Sudan, where donors and the central government imposed a largely top-down approach that did not include local and civil society actors and failed to promote peace.¹¹

Recommendations

To advance the GFA, country coordination platforms need to be built or strengthened to prevent conflict and build resilience against future violence. They should consist of three key components. First is a high-level steering group led by the host country's president or prime minister that includes representatives from bilateral donors, multilateral institutions, implementing partners, and civil society. The steering group assesses progress on strategic direction and helps resolve collective action problems.

The second component is sector groups led by government ministry officials include stakeholders responsible for shaping and supporting policy across development and peacebuilding sectors. Finally, the country coordination platforms need a secretariat that can ensure the smooth operations of both the high-level and sector groups in countries where governments have limited capacity. This body can provide critical capacity, troubleshooting, and analytic support, such as by enabling the country platform to function by collating data from host-government institutions and international partners.

Washington should initiate or support a stock-taking exercise to learn from platforms in fragile countries such as Somalia, which will prove helpful to guide future US engagement in fragile contexts. This review should identify the authorities and mechanisms that are needed to allow the United States to engage in and support country platforms in fragile states.

Defining and Measuring Progress

Defining and Measuring Impact

Conor Seyle

Summary

The Global Fragility Act seeks to help the US government manage tensions between the diverse goals, priorities, and incentives of actors in stabilization settings. Implementation needs to include a measurement system that defines what success looks like. The key challenge is navigating tensions between collective impact and narrow problem focus, between the global fragility strategy and country plans, and between measurement activities and program goals.

Navigating Inherent Tensions

Consistent with current research, the Global Fragility Act (GFA) recognizes that sustainable stabilization and conflict prevention requires working across the security, political, and economic domains.¹ At the same time, stabilization programs require identifying a limited set of programmatic goals within each domain. That is, success needs to be defined at the country level across different domains, as well as at the project level.

The GFA requires a coherent global fragility strategy (GFS) that starts with the multiple causes of fragility and violence, and focuses on empowering local, national, and multilateral actors to address them.² Individual country strategies need to fit within the GFS, but specific needs of an individual country will require individual strategies. Measuring success therefore should be done in a way that supports assessment and advancement of the overall GFS yet allows it to be customized to local needs. How the measurements are conducted—who collects data, who is engaged in the process, and whether and how results are reported—can effectively change the

strategic goals of the program by having different impacts on local capacity and trust in implementers.

The GFA is not the first attempt to improve coordination in stabilization, and a significant body of research suggests that a persistent reason for the failure of such efforts relates to organizing the actual executors of the strategy. The success of the GFA will hinge in part on the collective commitment of the individuals tasked with executing it. Bringing these stakeholders—which should include representatives of the major implementing organizations as well as embassy staff and local actors from priority countries—into the development of the indicators and measurement plan can ensure alignment with the goals.

The tensions identified can be managed through a process that is both collaborative and designed from the outset to be modular and operable at the collective and project levels. One approach would be to develop a universal assessment framework that establishes specific content areas and indicators aligned with the GFS. This should include all major political, institutional, development, and security elements identified as part of

the strategy. The indicators should focus on outcomes of programs in terms of specific changes in local conditions rather than measure project activities. When existing data align with the strategy, indicators should be aligned to relevant data such as academic sources, national data sources, and international organizational assessments. This can help facilitate data collection and collective learning if the indicators are appropriate and work at both project and country measurement levels. Finally, development should be done with engagement and buy-in from key US government implementers and at least some engagement from representatives of priority countries or regions through meaningful consultations throughout the process.

The goals and assessment frameworks of country strategies should be developed with close engagement with local actors as well as partners in Washington, and they should be built on a subset of the universal framework to allow the development of strategies that map most closely onto the needs of that country. In doing so, designers should consider both primary indicators—those the program is designed to affect—and secondary indicators that may be affected incidentally to achieve the primary goals. Doing so helps manage the program-country tension.

Wherever possible, multiple methods and sources should be used for data collection, relying on local staff, civil society organizations, and academic institutions as part of the project. The actual process of data collection, if done with and through local institutions and other organizations, can help improve transparency and engagement with local communities as well as build local expertise in ways that can promote the overall GFA goals.

Each violence indicator in the following list is collectible at the local and national level. Most of the items are adapted from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), but in practice they should be developed with direct input from stakeholders, and individual projects should target identified specific indicators as well as any others their input might suggest.

- Battle deaths: number of events and reported deaths due to battle, disaggregated by state or nonstate perpetrator (ACLED)
- Explosive or remote violence: number of events and reported deaths due to explosives, artillery, drone attacks, or other forms of remote violence, disaggregated by state or nonstate perpetrator (ACLED)
- Violence against civilians: number of events and reported deaths from violence directed against civilians and perpetrated by organized armed actors, disaggregated by state or nonstate perpetrator (ACLED)
- Criminal violence: number of victims of intentional homicide per hundred thousand, by sex and age (SDG 16.1.1)
- Gender-based violence: proportion of ever-partnered women and girls age fifteen and older subjected to physical, sexual, or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous twelve months, by form of violence and by age (SDG 5.2.1)
- Perception of safety: proportion of population that feels safe walking alone around the area they live (SDG 16.1.4)
- Dehumanization or intergroup threat: to be identified (no current standardized measures)

Recommendations

Policymakers and implementers need to recognize that measuring program impact will reflect many of the tensions inherent in the GFA. It is thus essential to ensure that the process of developing the indicators is an inclusive and collaborative exercise. Identifying clear strategies to help reconcile some of these tensions needs to be integral to the measurement system. The GFS should direct agencies to develop a universal assessment framework that establishes specific content areas and indicators aligned with the GFS. The goals and assessment frameworks included in the country plans should reflect this universal framework.

Defining and Measuring Progress

Annie Pforzheimer

Summary

Meaningful monitoring and evaluation are essential to ensuring effective use of scarce national funds, staff, and political capital, but are impossible without a well-accepted definition of policy success. Short-, medium-, and long-term goals should be established and viewed as interrelated, recognizing that each level requires very different metrics. Measuring both programs as well as nonprogram activities, such as diplomatic outreach, will be critical.

Defining Success

Policymakers need to define success clearly enough for diplomats and aid workers to be able to act on guidance contained in the Global Fragility Act (GFA). Absent clearly defined goals, the task of evaluating progress and the effectiveness of taxpayer dollars spent under the act will be impossible.

The guidance the legislation offers on identifying priority countries could be used to define US policy goals, but this approach poses significant challenges. The GFA identifies three broad issues as relevant: US national security interests; reducing violence, fragility, or vulnerability to climate change; and advancing relationships with governments willing to work with the international community. In theory, these three categories could guide the development of baseline analyses in fragile countries and the measurement of progress under the global fragility strategy and country plans. Yet two of the three—US security interests and host nation willingness—are highly subjective and susceptible to abrupt political changes, which undermine planning assumptions. The third—levels of violence, fragility, and climate change vulnerability—is easier to quantify and measure, yet refers to complex concepts that offer few easy policy solutions. At the same time, the concept of violence itself is broad, and includes both data that are hard to find at the national level (victim surveys) and some data that are widely available in some countries, but not others (crime statistics).

An alternative approach would be to start from an existing definition, perhaps based on one of the analytical

frameworks referenced in the legislation. One example is the OECD's States of Fragility framework, which defines fragility as "the combination of exposure to risk and insufficient coping capacity of the state, system and/or communities to manage, absorb or mitigate those risks." Using this definition, success could be defined as fragility's opposite—that is, a scenario wherein state institutions are able to absorb social, political, and environmental risks without citizens having to resort to violence or migration. Subcomponents of this definition could focus on democratic institutions, and one metric might include the extent to which citizens peacefully accept certified election results even in a close race.

Ultimately, the definition of success should be based on a vision of what is achievable given genuine political will on both sides—in the host government and with the US government. Yet even in an ideal political scenario (when both sides are committed to success), when a situation is fragile, the unpredictable impacts of wars, environmental disasters, and worldwide economic downturns can have an outsized impact on a country's trajectory. The risk of such external shocks needs to be factored into any definition of success. A realistic goal would entail achieving a strong trend toward establishing institutions and mechanisms that manage risks and sustaining that progress over three to five years or—more realistically—a decade, as the GFA suggests.

In addition, dissemination and buy-in are essential to defining success. Stakeholders need to understand the stated goal and reasoning behind it; just as important,



An activist holds a sign that reads in Spanish "Thanks CICIG" at the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) headquarters in Guatemala City on August 31, 2019. (Photo by Moises Castillo/AP)

they need to understand that some objectives may need to be excluded or set as a lower priority. US policymakers, who may have both institutional and personal biases, often disagree on what broad terms such as stability mean, and many policy deliberations actually are on protecting bureaucratic spheres of influence. Involving key bureaucratic stakeholders in discussions can help overcome some of these divisions.

Once a consensus definition of success and possible indicators to measure progress are determined, consultations should begin with the congressional committees that drafted the legislation, and subsequently include other concerned committees with oversight over relevant US government agencies. Beyond these constituencies, consultations should be inclusive and extend to host nation authorities and civil society, in addition to the US private sector, nonprofit community, and media.

GFA-related strategic goal statements should be consistently part of US public statements on the country or region in question. This is vital, because sending the wrong message to host nation officials (for example, that the United States values counterterrorism cooperation over anticorruption efforts) by the embassy, US military, or visiting dignitaries undermines the impact of ongoing programs and policies. Sending the right message, on the other hand, can accelerate program impact by getting host nation stakeholders on board with politically risky reforms.

Whenever possible, using metrics collected by neutral third parties is preferred when showing macro trends over extended periods. In the highly politicized environment of US congressional appropriations, metrics collected by experts without a direct stake in the outcome of programs or funding tend to have the most credibility.

Furthermore, indicators such as the World Bank “Doing Business” rankings are likely to be collected regardless of US funding. Relying on third-party metrics collected on a worldwide basis also helps standardize elements of the US policy response across regions. One disadvantage, however, is that these metrics may be overly broad and fail to incorporate individual country contexts.

The timeline over which metrics can measure progress will of course vary, but the need for continuous congressional oversight will not, necessitating a variety of interrelated indicators. Third-party indicators can take years to show progress and reveal trends. At the other extreme are short-term metrics, such as the number of trainees in a rule of law program or hectares of narcotics under cultivation, which describe the efforts of the donor community to address fragility but may not be a good measure of impact. They may be necessary to demonstrate program investments, but program-level metrics often only get at a small fraction of the challenge of fragility. So, for example, the number of trainees does not answer either who is promoted as a result of a training program or who has the ability to use that knowledge in a system that may be corrupt to begin with. Metrics relevant to a single rule of law program also cannot show what percentage of the judiciary or portion of the institutional or administrative gap a program actually fills.

Interim metrics are needed to provide a link between program output metrics and outcomes. Such milestones can help Congress and the executive branch track progress, which is essential to achieving goals. For example, tackling corruption should progress year by year, beginning with diplomatic efforts to press senior politicians to agree in theory to anticorruption legislation, to assistance programs to help the legislature draft and pass a particular law, to working with ministries to promulgate regulations more broadly, and eventually to training the entire class of rule enforcers while promoting citizen awareness.

Many of the most effective actions Washington could take are nonprogram activities, such as diplomatic

interventions, public statements, outreach to vulnerable populations, and VIP visits, as well as multilateral resolutions, votes, and sanctions. For example, the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala had a strong measure of success, in part thanks to behind-the-scenes diplomacy, including phone calls by White House officials to pressure the Guatemalan government to allow the continuation of the international anticorruption body. Country baseline assessments and goal setting should measure the impact of nonprogram activities of categories such as “united international community positions” on multilateral advocacy or the frequency of access that marginalized groups have to the US ambassador. These categories are especially important for bringing about structural changes that programs alone cannot and are essential to showing the outcome impact, such as greater democratic freedoms.

Recommendations

The definition of policy success depends on a vision of what is achievable when genuine political will exists on both sides. A clear definition thus needs to be articulated in the global fragility strategy, and should be developed through an inclusive consultative process that ensures wide political buy-in. Stakeholders need to understand the stated goal and reasoning behind it and that some objectives may need to be excluded.

Metrics are also essential to success. Those collected by disinterested experts without a direct stake in the outcome typically have the most credibility. Meaningful long-term outcome indicators guided by third-party metrics and yearly interim measures showing progress toward that goal should be integral to the country plans and the biennial reports to Congress.

The fragility strategy should make clear that nonprogram activities—multilateral resolutions, diplomatic interventions, and the like—must be included in US efforts to advance GFA goals. Such efforts are essential both to structural changes and to demonstrating the outcome, such as greater democratic freedom.

Selecting Indicators

Paul Perrin

Summary

Far too often, monitoring, evaluation, and learning are conceptualized as an indicator and process issue, focused on finding the “right” indicators then building systems, evaluations, reporting, and approaches around these metrics. Despite the great merit in both a timely response and in a performance-based approach built on metrics to ensure accountability and learning in the Global Fragility Act’s implementation, acting too hastily and focusing only on indicator content entails significant pitfalls.

Adopting the STEPP Lens

In complex peacebuilding and stabilization contexts, monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) design must be approached multidimensionally. Rather than seeking the “correct” indicators to measure and how to measure them, decision-makers should consider adopting what can be referred to as the STEPP approach—a holistic approach to selecting indicators that embraces the complexity inherent to the Global Fragility Act (GFA). The approach comprises five interrelated domains: strategy and structure, environment, people, tools and technology, and processes. It encourages designers to pragmatically consider indicator suitability within the context of the proposed program. It applies equally to MEL system design at the global strategy level and within each GFA country. This approach will also help ensure that the mandate of local participation in system design addresses any local power imbalances.

The first step in designing a MEL system focuses on strategy and structure, that is, setting a conceptual framework and strategic boundary, including conceptual boundaries for fragility, organizational boundaries, and intervention boundaries. Far too often, systems and approaches have been designed in parallel with program strategy, often resulting in a disconnect between the information needs of the program and the information generated. When a clear strategy is developed first, the remaining indicator activities proceed in a focused and efficient way and offer opportunities for learning. The strategic framing of the GFA provides foundational information about critical indicators that may be included in

the system, but indicator formulation should not precede the strategy. Clarifying each system’s relationship to the overall MEL approach of the GFA will be critical in facilitating data and information interoperability and flow.

MEL does not unfold in a vacuum but exists instead within a set of contexts with practical, cultural, and organizational norms, constraints, and processes—its environment. Identifying the factors that inhibit or facilitate MEL at each level will be critical to understanding the appropriateness of certain metrics. Environmental, contextual, and organizational constraints can be identified early and an environmental opportunities plan can be developed.

In monitoring compliance and evaluating initiatives, it is important to differentiate between operational, tactical, and strategic activities. For example, experience has shown that strategic policy decisions are best informed by data and information synthesized across initiatives and contexts. An organizational policy cannot be established on the basis of monitoring and evaluation from a single project; policymakers are eager to find ways to aggregate data and learning across contexts, even when the data do not suggest such synthesis. Aggregating data contributes to an inherent tension between the need for flexibility in data collection at the local level (to allow for contextual information) and for standardization at higher levels of strategic analysis (to allow for information aggregation across contexts and settings). When this tension is either poorly understood or ignored, MEL cannot fully meet its organizational potential. One way to approach the tension is to create a typology of indicators, distinguishing

between three categories: *required*, a very small number of indicators required across all contexts and programs; *required if applicable*, some additional indicators deemed necessary only if certain conditions or intervention types were present; and *standard*, a library of standard indicators commonly used but not required under the GFA. The first two categories allow for targeted MEL. The third allows countries and programs to adopt and adapt existing indicators relevant to the local context.

MEL is an inherently human process. The various people involved throughout the MEL life cycle will have different preferences, personalities, perspectives, motivations, and capacities. Fundamental to understanding the people domain is identifying (in a stakeholder analysis) the key actors to be included in developing the system at each level. The analysis will identify international, national, and local individuals, groups, and organizations with a vested interest in program and learning outcomes, along with their respective information interests.

Each individual in the process should at least be supported by incentives and reduction of disincentives for participation, adequate understanding of their roles and responsibilities, adequate capacity building around these roles and responsibilities, and adequate resources and tools to perform their functions. Motivation and role clarity are equally important. Adequate resources should be planned for and allocated to ensure that these elements come together in support of the other domains.

Far too often, tools and technology are seen as a driving force for other MEL activities. The STEPP approach argues for the opposite: tools and technology can become solutions in search of a problem if selected before a policy challenge has been identified. The indicators themselves are tools, as are the data collection forms and systems that allow the requisite data points to be collected against the selected metrics. The development of these tools should be sensitive to the environmental context and reflect the needs and capacities of their users. Creating a comprehensive and consolidated tool

library for all of the indicators and accessible to all the individuals implicated in the people domain is essential.

Finally, a process should be established for integrating the components of each domain as part of a holistic MEL system. Building on the existing processes of each US government actor involved in GFA implementation will be key to interagency collaboration. For each pilot country, it is important to understand the processes whereby governmental and nongovernmental organizations generate and use information. In addition, a data flow map should be created for each indicator to specify whether and how data will be exchanged. MEL policies and procedures will also be needed, and should strike a balance between security and transparency imperatives. USAID's approach to using data responsibly could serve as a template for such a policy.¹

Recommendations

MEL is a multifaceted process. Because it is, recognizing that obtaining timely, useful, and accurate MEL data for the GFA will require more than merely selecting appropriate indicators is essential. An effective system must take all five of the STEPP domains described into consideration.

Approaching monitoring and evaluation through a STEPP lens enables policymakers to holistically assess the opportunities and challenges to making operational, tactical, and strategic decisions under the GFA. A comprehensive system like the one described here thus needs to embrace multiple levels.

The GFA is a complex, dynamic, and long-term mandate. Accordingly, it is important to ensure enough resources up front to permit the STEPP framework to be fully implemented. Resisting the urge to immediately deliver a MEL plan after launching the strategy would allow implementing diplomats and aid workers to fully work through the STEPP framework. An adequate up-front investment, though, will pay dividends across the life of the GFA's constituent projects, programs, and strategies.

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Notes

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THEORY OF SUCCESS, QUIRK

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PEACEWORKS

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In May, June, and July of 2020, the United States Institute of Peace convened a series of consultations with experts on implementation of the 2019 Global Fragility Act, which called for an interagency initiative to stabilize conflict-affected areas and prevent violence globally. This report examines the key lessons the peacebuilding field has learned about how to support vulnerable countries in preventing conflict and violence, and offers practical policy solutions for how to overcome the obstacles that have plagued past US efforts. It assesses the current global strategic environment for preventing internal conflicts and addresses how to promote local ownership and inclusion, ensure accountability, align US activities across diplomacy and development, establish mechanisms for closer international coordination, and measure progress.

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- *Constitutional Issues in the Afghan Peace Negotiations: Process and Substance* by Barnett R. Rubin (Special Report, November 2020)
- *Pathways for Post-Peace Development in Afghanistan* by Khyber Farahi and Scott Guggenheim (Special Report, November 2020)
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