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DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE INNOVATIONS IN FRAGILE CONTEXTS
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
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Mercy Corps | Catholic Relief Services | Counterpart International | International Foundation for Electoral Systems | International Republican Institute | National Democratic Institute | Pact

Democracy and governance (D&G) deficits —particularly weak state capacity, accountability, and legitimacy; exclusion or marginalization of population groups; and weak civic engagement — are drivers of fragility, conflict and violence (FCV). D&G assistance to address these drivers — and foreign policies that promote democratic, inclusive and responsive institutions — increase state capacity and accountability, and build good governance. These vital investments can help resolve the democracy and governance gaps and grievances that drive chronic fragility. Building state accountability, effectiveness, and legitimacy, alongside citizen engagement and inclusion, must therefore be part of any pathway from fragility to development.

However, traditional approaches to democracy and governance programming face unique challenges in FCV settings. Volatile and unpredictable contexts, difficulty identifying actors to work with, and challenges in defining and measuring success mean that approaches used in non-fragile settings may not have the same impact in FCV contexts. This paper argues that the field of democracy and governance interventions must therefore adapt to apply more usefully to fragile contexts, and surfaces examples of promising innovations.

Over the past ten years there has been an unprecedented spike in global conflict.[1] From 2006 – 2017, the total number of conflict-related deaths increased by 140 percent.[2] Conflict now drives 80 percent of all humanitarian needs globally.[3] This trend is set to continue and intensify. Thirty years from now, an estimated one in three people globally will be living in contexts characterized by FCV.[4] By 2030, nearly half of the world's extreme poor will be living in countries affected by fragility, conflict and violence.[5]

From June to October 2019, eight organizations who work on democracy and governance in fragile places convened to identify innovative practices and supportive policy changes.[6] Collectively, we work in 129 countries globally and in 54 of the 58 countries on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) list of FCV contexts. This convening

[1] World Bank Group, 'Overview: Fragility, Conflict and Violence,' https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/fragilityconflictviolence/overview.
[2] Institute for Economics & Peace, Global Peace Index 2019: Measuring Peace in a Complex World (Sydney, June 2019), http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2019/07/GPI-2019web.pdf.
[3] World Bank Group, 'Overview: Fragility, Conflict and Violence.'
[4] OECD, States of Fragility 2018: Understanding Violence; UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, World Population Prospects 2017.
[5] World Bank Group, 'Overview: Fragility, Conflict and Violence.'
[6] Mercy Corps, Catholic Relief Services, Counterpart International, International Foundation for Electoral Systems, International Republican Institute, National Democratic Institute, Pact

intentionally brought together 'traditional' democracy and governance organizations who have historically focused on elections, institutional strengthening, political parties, and civil society with development and humanitarian organizations who have approached governance work through community mobilization, peacebuilding, and multi-sectoral programming.

Findings

We identified two primary obstacles to collective progress in democracy and governance work in FCV settings. First, the unique challenges of operating in FCV environments means that 'traditional' D&G programming may not work: innovative practices are needed. Second, there is no collated evidence base of 'what works', and how successful interventions work, to achieve sustained democracy and governance gains in FCV contexts.

FCV contexts are by their very nature defined by fragmented and fluid patterns of authority. This defining aspect of fragility poses three kinds of challenges for designing and implementing D&G programming. First, the rapidly changing and unpredictable context within FCV settings poses challenges for both defining strategic objectives and operationalizing programs and portfolios that build towards those aims. In contexts such as Somalia and Afghanistan that are characterized by a simultaneous absence of state capacity, massive legitimacy gaps, and long-standing grievances, what does success look like for a D&G program? Second, organizations implementing D&G programs in FCV contexts face tremendous difficulties in identifying which actors to work with. In these settings, the traditional, well-defined set of D&G actors, such as established political parties or a functioning legislature, may be absent. Implementers may need to work with new types of actors, including traditional social leaders and armed groups. Finally, FCV contexts pose unique challenges for measurement in D&G programs, where standard metrics for institutional performance or political participation are less viable, due to the fact that success involves normative changes that play out unevenly over time.

The unique drivers and consequences of protracted fragility require new approaches. Operating flexibly and leveraging diplomatic tools can help address weak state capacity, accountability, and legitimacy. Identifying actors to work with and supporting them to change repressive or counterproductive behavior can strengthen civic engagement and build more inclusive institutions and societies. Developing effective tools for measurement can help demonstrate the impact of D&G efforts and build an evidence base over time of what works, and why it works, in FCV environments.

Progress on democracy and governance in the world's most challenging environments will require donors and practitioners to pair smart investments in democracy and governance programming with foreign policy that disrupts the development-diplomacy disconnect and creates an enabling environment for stabilization and innovation.

Recommendations to Multilateral and Bilateral Donors:

- **Leverage diplomatic tools to support good governance outcomes.** Donors should be prepared to leverage an array of diplomatic tools, including high-level political pressure, arms transfers, non-D&G assistance, investigative delegations or commissions of inquiry to pressure governments towards transparency, inclusion, or reform.

- **Layer good governance into humanitarian response, stabilization, and early recovery efforts**. Donors need to integrate democracy and governance efforts multi-sectoral programming targeting health, food security, and nutrition.

- **Improve trans-border programming**. Development and diplomatic actors should create joint initiatives that move beyond country-specific silos to seek truly regional responses to regional challenges. The UN Sahel Cross-Border Cooperation Assistance Programme (ACTS) offers one example of an institution moving beyond country-specific silos to seek a truly regional response.

- **Invest in more research to build evidence of 'what works' and 'how it works' in fragile settings**. To address the evidence gap and ensure cost-effective, targeted foreign assistance, donors should fund additional research to understand the impact of D&G programming on democratic practices and good governance outcomes.

Recommendations to D&G Practitioners:

- **Strengthen monitoring, evaluation, and adaptive management to ensure flexible interventions.** Ongoing analysis must feed into real-time programming to ensure interventions are conflict- and risk-sensitive and do not inadvertently exacerbate tensions.

- **Where possible, encourage trust-building between communities and government institutions.** D&G implementers should leverage their unique relationships to convene government actors and community leaders for building trust. NGOs should also model transparency and inclusion, and should develop early warning mechanisms to detect and defuse conflict between security services and communities at risk of violence.

- **Strengthen collective impact aggregation and influence**. D&G implementers need to provide policymakers with compelling, accurate, and aggregated data on the impacts of D&G investments over time. Organizations should collaborate to piece together a narrative of what has worked, what hasn't worked, and why, to help make the case for continued investments.