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## FRAGILITY:

## HELVETAS' ENGAGEMENT IN FRAGILE SITUATIONS

To work in fragile contexts is not so much a matter of choice for development actors as a matter of fact. According to the OECD (2014), more than one third of HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation's partner countries are fragile states. This Topic Sheet presents our core position with regard to "fragility" and outlines the preconditions and key principles for our engagement in fragile situations. When considering the trends over the last 30 years and the current prominence given to the topic of fragility, it may appear that we are at a crossroads in global governance, conflict and fragility trends. Helvetas is aware of the challenges of working in fragile contexts. A shift from reaction to prevention is possible if integrated approaches, including the collaboration between civil society networks, bi- and multilateral donors, regional NGOs and state actors, can be improved and based on effective, locally grounded strategies for the prevention of fragility and conflict.

## THE CONTEXT

The subject of fragile states and how best to engage with them has risen to the top of the international agenda. Some causes for concern are the rise of extreme poverty, increasing inequality and social injustice within fragile states, coupled with an anticipated growth in the number of fragile states. Middle Income Countries (MICs) increasingly fall within the category of fragile states too (OECD). There is thus more to fragility than simply poverty or “underdevelopment”.

Fragile states typically fail to provide public services efficiently and equitably to all social and ethnic groups within their boundaries. They are frequently characterised by political instability and insecurity due to the contested legitimacy of state authorities, a lack of capacity and issues related to the monopoly of force. In fact, a country's susceptibility to violence or legacy of armed conflict can be seen as a key factor in its fragility. Furthermore, responsive and accountable institutions, inclusive political settlements, and empowered marginalised and vulnerable social groups that participate in informal and formal decision-making processes would be crucial to helping a state emerge from this fragility.

The international community has responded to these mounting challenges by formulating principles for engagement with governments and promoting statebuilding and peacebuilding goals for fragile states.

## OUR POSITION

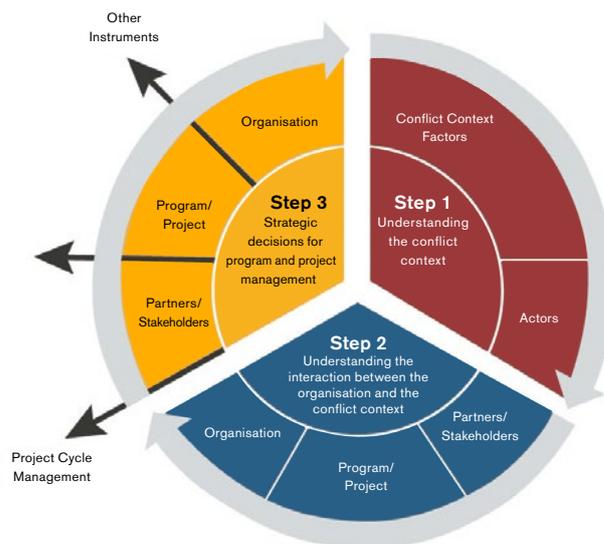
Helvetas recognises that we face specific risks, challenges and limitations as a development actor in fragile situations. These include the often-uncertain sustainability of our interventions, security threats to our staff and partners, and higher programme costs than when working in more stable circumstances.

Yet we strongly believe that an engagement in fragile contexts is not only necessary but also effective in the long run. Development work can achieve positive results if it acknowledges the relevant challenges and limitations and chooses specific approaches and interventions such as the “3 steps” for working in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

### Helvetas experience in Afghanistan

Conflict sensitivity as in the 3-Steps approach to work in fragile and conflict-affected situations is a must! This means carrying out detailed and regular conflict context assessment (actor mapping, sources of tensions/connecting elements, governance factors), in-depth coaching of staff on Resource Transfer and tracking Implicit Ethical Messages, which could erode trust and acceptance. Further crucial issues are adherence to multi-partiality and inclusiveness as well as gender, and strict engagement only on the precondition of a Code of Conduct acceptable to all stakeholders. If these principles are violated or cannot be upheld, there will be no pressure to spend the budget and a suspension of activities will be envisaged.

## 3-STEP approach to work in fragile and conflict affected situations



**Step 1: Understanding the (conflict) context**

**Step 2: Understanding the interaction between organisation and the conflict context**

**Step 3: Strategic choices**

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## WHY SHOULD AN NGO LIKE

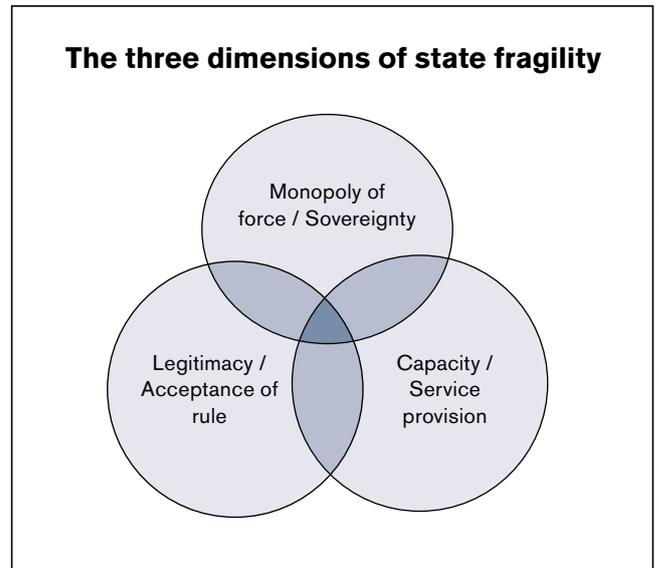
## HELVETAS ENGAGE IN FRAGILE STATES

## AND SITUATIONS?

- Working in fragile and conflict-affected situations is no longer a matter of choice for Helvetas, as more and more of our partner countries are becoming fragile (e.g. Mali, Madagascar and Guatemala).
- There is a general shift of poverty from stable/resilient to fragile situations, as well as from LICs to MICs due to rising inequality. It is predicted that by 2018 half of the poor will live in fragile states and two-thirds of the poor will live in fragile states by 2030.
- As an NGO, we are generally less influenced by state interests and conditions, and tend to be more grass-roots-based, with greater access to local populations.

- As an NGO, we have a special role to play regarding local level conflict resolution and analysis, as well as empowerment and feeding evidence into national advocacy and policy recommendations.
- Helvetas' presence in fragile and conflict areas can help to provide a protective shield against human rights violations.
- Helvetas is able to provide meaningful assistance to support self-help initiatives that strengthen local actors and partners for the long term.
- Helvetas's access to local populations can bring the opinions of affected populations to bear on policy discussions through evidence-based advocacy.
- An active civil society is essential in fragile states and has several vital roles to play. We therefore build on our strong partnerships with local civil society to promote capacity development and knowledge-sharing and to help them to pursue their own agenda.

plexity of situations within, and the differences between, these countries. For that it is more productive to think about fragility in terms of a multi-dimensional model. It is above all crucial to carry out thorough conflict, context and power analysis for fragile situations.



## DEFINING FRAGILITY

When it comes to classifying countries, we are guided by the annual lists of fragile states compiled by other organisations. These tables are a valuable “early warning” instrument with which to identify situations that require closer analysis. They obviously cannot capture the com-

plexity of situations within, and the differences between, these countries. For that it is more productive to think about fragility in terms of a multi-dimensional model. It is above all crucial to carry out thorough conflict, context and power analysis for fragile situations.

For example, Haiti shows very low levels of capacity. However, it scores fairly highly on legitimacy compared to Sri Lanka, where part of the population did not accept the (Rajapaksa) government (legitimacy) although government capacity is actually quite high. In Guatemala parts of the population do not accept the government, and the state does not have a monopoly of force, resulting in very high crime rates. Finally, there are states or situations where all three dimensions are in question, such as Afghanistan, DRC or Somalia; the state has completely broken down in these countries.

### Helvetas definition of “fragility”

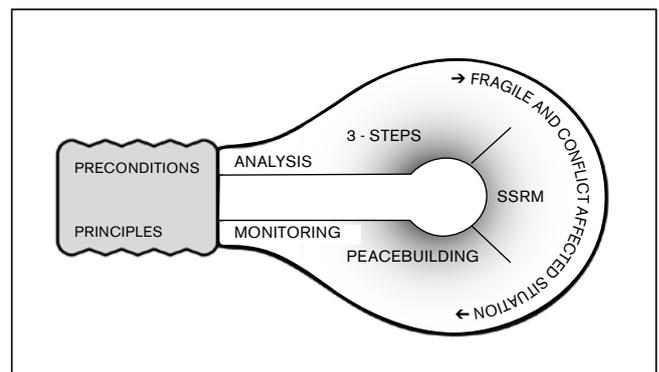
**Fragility** denotes states or situations that **lack sufficient ability** (or political will) to ...

- Provide **basic services** and promote sustainable and **equitable economic development** to their entire population (→ **capacity**)
- Gain their population's identification with the nation state and maintain the **rule of law** through inclusive politics (→ **legitimacy**)
- Maintain **control over all their territory** and protect their entire population from armed violence while adhering to human rights (→ **monopoly of force**)

Any, or all three, of these dimensions may predominate to varying degrees over different periods of time. They significantly concern the relationship between a state and its **entire population**, and they can also apply to larger (cross-border) regions or to limited areas within a country (commonly described as “**fragile situations**” or “situations of fragility”). Fragility contrasts with resilience, and fragility can be transformed into **resilience** in what is essentially a non-linear process.

## HELVETAS MODEL FOR ENGAGING IN FRAGILE ENVIRONMENTS

Considering the preconditions and principles for engagement, we will base our work in fragile situations on sound analysis, the 3 steps of conflict sensitivity, safety and security risk management (SSRM), and invest in peacebuilding and statebuilding wherever this can make a difference.



## PRECONDITIONS FOR ENGAGEMENT

### IN FRAGILE SITUATIONS

Fragile situations are often fraught with challenging security situations and high levels of mistrust within the population or between citizens and state representatives, as well as offering limited space for civil society initiatives.

Helvetas therefore regards the following as essential (pre)conditions for engaging in and regarding fragile and conflict-affected situations:

1. Helvetas will continue to engage, despite fragility and conflict, as long as there is space for development activities and our basic working principles and values can be upheld;
2. Helvetas will not start any new programmes in situations of open warfare or fully-fledged (civil) war;
3. Helvetas must be able to remain independent in its programme-related decisions, e.g. programming must (directly or indirectly) include ways to address the key drivers of fragility;
4. Our partners and beneficiaries are able to cooperate according to the principles of engagement (see “PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT” further below).



Group work on governance language formation in Boungou, Burkina Faso

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## PRINCIPLES FOR ENGAGEMENT

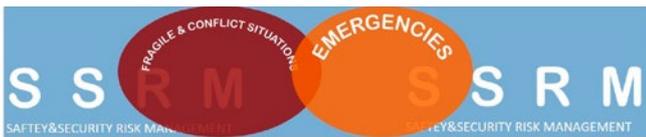
### IN FRAGILE CONTEXTS

- Helvetas lays emphasis on long-term commitment to its partners, supports community ownership, and promotes capacity building and flexibility in adjusting to changing circumstances.
- Helvetas will link governance and peace/fragility in its analysis and programming in order to do justice to the complexity of the issues and the linkages between them.

**An engagement in fragile contexts is necessary and possible. However, cautious and ongoing assessment of the necessary preconditions and flexibility are paramount as situations may change rapidly. Development work can achieve positive results by the degree to which it acknowledges the challenges and limitations and scrutinizes the choice of specific and meaningful approaches and interventions.**

- Helvetas rigorously adheres to a conflict-sensitive approach (3 steps): assessing projects' or programmes' intended or unintended impacts, and identifying entry points for positive transformation.
- Helvetas is dedicated to detailed conflict and fragility analysis, and strives to address the drivers of fragility and conflict to contribute to peace- and/or statebuilding.
- Helvetas adopts an “all-party” position and develops long-term relationships of trust among and beyond project stakeholders.
- Helvetas coordinates and communicates with all relevant stakeholders to achieve common goals and foster local ownership.
- Helvetas strives to include assessments of power relationships.
- Helvetas considers gender within a given context and addresses the specific vulnerabilities and needs of women and girls, while acknowledging the strengths of their social positions and supporting their capacities and resiliencies.
- In the event of severe emergencies, we are determined to make the most of our comparative advantage and contribute to effective relief through the Helvetas “Emergency Response” mechanism, following a “Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development” (LRRD) approach.

- Working according to a Rights Based Approach (RBA) and on the issue of human rights, Helvetas will favour a constructive (as opposed to confrontational) approach that emphasises the roles and responsibilities of each citizen and state actor.
- Helvetas invests in the recruitment and training of staff as well as the selection and capacity development of its partners. “Soft skills” in areas such as analysis, (non-violent) communication, dialogue, facilitation, and negotiation are paramount.
- Helvetas firmly supports a “security through acceptance” strategy. This builds upon a community-based approach to security, in which mutual trust and respect between project staff, partners and beneficiaries are crucial, as is keeping a low profile.
- Helvetas follows a comprehensive Safety, Security and Risk Management (SSRM) approach, which delineates clear responsibilities and competencies, and is linked to the 3-step process.



Simon B. Opladen

Installation of rainwater harvesting system in Bangladesh

### How can Helvetas Advisory Services support you?

- Provide support in raising stakeholder and staff awareness about fragility issues
- Assist country programmes with adapting strategies, programmes and projects to address fragility through peace- and statebuilding
- Provide examples and tools to address fragility by contributing to peace- and statebuilding

### Instruments and tools: reference list

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