

Fragile states and statistics

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Introduction

At the June 2008 Steering Committee meeting, the developing country co-chair presented a paper on “Fragile states and statistics”. He observed that, in almost all countries where there exists fragility, there are resource and power-sharing issues. These situations desperately require statistics. Population censuses are particularly critical to nation building and democracy as states emerge from conflict and elections are planned. Synergy between and sequencing of censuses and elections are key issues, but, as the developing country co-chair wrote: “Unfortunately what is common in all these instances is the characteristic crisis in which the dialogue takes place”.

Case studies were presented on censuses in South Africa, Mozambique, Cambodia, Sudan, and Afghanistan. Statistics can be a precarious and dangerous operation, though ultimately rewarding in a number of cases. The case studies refer to the killing of field workers doing mapping for the 2001 South African census and that (in Afghanistan) “operations as fragile as the census...depend on political calm and security”. In Sudan the success of the 2008 census was “largely successful because of the creation of the Monitoring and Observation Committee (MOC) and the way in which the MOC conducted the oversight function”.

The developing country co-chair advised that the African Symposium for Statistical Development (ASSD) has launched an initiative to focus on fragile states and specifically identified Angola, Côte d’Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and Sudan as priority countries.

It should be noted that, as the DAC discussion paper *Service Delivery In Fragile Situations: Key Concepts, Findings And Lessons* points out, “[n]o single definition of a ‘fragile state’ has been adopted by international consensus, but some common features can be identified. Fragile states suffer deficits in governance that hinder development. Conditions are too unstable for long-term planning and investment, with society focusing on short-term coping strategies to secure basic needs. Fragility may reflect the internal dynamics of the society, or it may reflect exogenous factors such as natural disaster or regional conflict. Operative definitions of fragility used by the DAC and several aid agencies emphasise the lack of *capacity* (capability, effectiveness) and *willingness* (will, legitimacy) to perform key government functions for the benefit of all” (p. 14).

What can PARIS21 partners do for fragile states?

It is clear that, in situations of crisis and conflict, statistics may not be a top priority for governments and their development partners and can be both precarious and dangerous to undertake. This raises the question as to when in the recovery process is it right for PARIS21 partners to try to intervene in statistics in fragile states, as well as how they can contribute.

Countries emerging from conflict have special needs and are likely to have little or no capacity to prepare an NSDS or even to carry out basic statistical activities. Substantial and extended technical and



financial assistance will be needed to put basic capacity in place and to carry out initial statistical programmes. Priorities are likely to include preparing basic statistical training programmes, conducting a baseline population count or census, and compiling basic economic and social statistics. Since the process of building institutional and human resource capacity will take some time, this kind of interim assistance may be needed for a number of years. This could be achieved through short- to medium-term projects that focus on priority data areas, that do not require new legislation or major administrative reform, and that help to deliver immediate results and develop implementation capacity. Assistance is likely to be needed to facilitate co-operation and co-ordination among donors, and to tackle weak demand for statistics as well as leadership and management constraints. In the medium term, the aim should be to prepare an NSDS and countries will need guidance to do this reflecting their difficult circumstances.

The Statistics for Results Facility (SRF) intends to support countries “where the capacity or environment to develop, agree and implement a comprehensive statistical strategy or improvement plan is limited, such as fragile states. In these countries a flexible, case-by-case approach will be taken, but the facility will aim to bring donors together around a common statistics and results agenda, and promote better co-ordination of support to statistical capacity building and data collection in the short term”. The SRF can also provide “financial support for the implementation of interim plans for statistical improvement in fragile states, or in countries where donors are absent and national partnerships cannot be formed.”

The Secretariat will maintain contact with the Secretariat of the DAC working group on fragile states, particularly in relation to data needs and usage; and seek to ensure that implications for statistics are included in their agenda. The Secretariat will also follow up on progress of the ASSD initiative.

The developing country co-chair recommended the creation of a PARIS21 group on fragile states and statistics. The Steering Committee is invited to consider whether this should be a formal PARIS21 task team or whether a small informal reflection group, comprising members of the Steering Committee and/or others they suggest, facilitated by the Secretariat, might offer a more flexible format. Proposed terms of reference for the group are to reflect on:

- What the PARIS21 partnership can do to support data production and usage in fragile states, taking both a short and medium-to-long term perspective.
- How best to lobby for resources to assist fragile countries, for instance, by:
 - prioritising fragile states in allocating the Statistics for Results Facility, including helping these countries to prepare for a system-wide approach to funding statistical capacity building
 - funding of immediate priority needs (*e.g.*, censuses, surveys, basic economic and social statistics and first steps in institution and capacity building, including training)
 - ensuring that neighbouring countries (*e.g.*, within sub-regional groups such as SADC) can support the fragile states when needed, including through advocacy and mentoring visits to fragile state and staff exchange programmes
- Commission guidance materials, including for example a note on designing and implementing NSDSs in fragile states
- Report back with advice and recommendations to the next PARIS21 Steering Committee meeting

Recommendations

The Steering Committee is invited to:



1. Establish an informal reflection group with the terms of reference outlined above to advise on how the PARIS21 partnership can assist fragile states.
2. Nominate a convener and other members of the Steering Committee and/or others suggested by them to join this group.
3. Agree on timing of a first meeting of the group.