The Aid Agencies and the Fragile States Agenda

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Introduction

Across academic disciplines and policy fields, challenges and responses are currently being framed in terms of weak and failing statehood and a consequent need for 'statebuilding.' This paper reviews one specific aspect of this trend- the concept of *fragile states* that has recently been put forward by development agencies. The term fragile state is used by donors to refer to states that are unable or unwilling to adopt policies and institutions believed necessary for development. Around this concept, a fragile states agenda- a framework for why and how donors should engage with such countries has been developed.

The current concern with 'state failure', of which the fragile state agenda is part, spans across different disciplines and is therefore preoccupied with a variety of issues. Broadly, a debate within the development field has focused on the role and capabilities of the state in bringing about economic development. Another debate originates in security and peacebuilding fields and looks at the ability of states in preventing and overcoming violent conflict. Yet one more debate has centred on the ability and willingness of states to upheld human rights. While all these discussions are framed in a language of state failure and state building, their focus is different- and correspondingly, their definition of 'failure' varies. Despite this, a *meta-narrative* of state failure has been established on top of the disciplinary debates. This meta-narrative presents all ills; human rights abuses, terrorism, poverty and violence as caused by a generalised condition of state failure. Solutions are equally generalised; statebuilding is conceived in a checklist manner, where enhancing state capability (and willingness) in all fields is widely assumed to be mutually reinforcing. Although rooted in the development debate, the fragile states agenda also draws upon this meta-narrative, claiming that fragile states' inability to promote development have ramifications for conflict, Western security and so on. Improving the state's ability or willingness to bring about development, it is therefore argued, will also support the states ability 'to deliver' in these other fields.

This discussion of the fragile states agenda thus proceeds in three main parts. The first part of the paper outlines some of the donor considerations that served as the setting for the fragile states agenda. Key elements of this setting includes the findings of the aid effectiveness paradigm that have served to defined a standard against which state fragility is diagnosed, a quest amongst donors for new approaches to 'ownership', and an increased focus within the development discourse on institutions, and more recently- politics. The second part discusses how the framework and strategies set out in the fragile states agenda resonates with the broader academic debates around the role of the state in development. Here, the paper argues that the agenda's endorsement of a specific institutional and policy framework is problematic both in relation to content (policies) and process ('politics').Thirdly, the paper assesses the claims that the fragile states agenda makes in relation to reducing conflict. Recognising such claims as part of a larger meta-narrative of state failure, the paper argues that this meta-narrative has obstructed a more historicised understanding of statebuilding. There is little evidence that state formation historically has been achieved through the simultaneous establishment of a set of functions associated with the modern state. In fact some of the objectives currently being promoted in the name of statebuilding can be conflicting in the short term. Therefore, statebuilding should be understood as a constantly renegotiated process driven and impeded by variety of social and political interests, rather than the attainment of a set of formal state qualities assumed to be in a linear relationship.

The Fragile State Agenda: evolution and key elements

Over the last two years, a number of donors such as the World Bank, DFID, USAID and AUSAID have developed strategies tailored to meet the challenges of states defined as "fragile". A common agenda for dealing with fragile states coalesced as the aid community decided on a set of principles, designed to serve as a framework for international engagement in fragile states at an OECD Senior Level Forum in January 2005[1]. The underlying assumptions and central arguments adopted by donors in relation to the fragile state concept can be summarised as follows:

Fragile states represent a particular challenge for donors, and therefore require specific attention and policy interventions. Because of poor leadership, lack of capacity or both, fragile states have inadequate or inappropriate policies and institutions. As a result, aid is not effective and traditional modes of development cooperation where donors align to partner government strategies do not work well. [2] *Moreover, the inability or unwillingness of fragile states to perform minimum state functions also have ramifications for internal conflict insofar as fragile states foster many of the underlying causes of conflict, including underdevelopment, discontent and a general absence of the rule of law. Fragile states also constitute a threat to international security by providing both the root causes and enabling environments for terrorism and other security threats, such as organised crime. Donors therefore cannot ignore these countries. Since previous donor approaches have been largely unsuccessful, new strategies especially designed to reduce the fragility of such states must be adopted.*

Focus on the State

The fragile states agenda partly departs from a renewed focus on state within the development community, which made its way into the mainstream debate in the mid-1990s. Where the so-called Washington consensus endorsed a set of neoliberal economic policies such as fiscal austerity, trade liberalisation, privatisation and market deregulation, thus focusing on reducing the role and influence of the state vis-a vis the market, the gradually emerging post-Washington consensus has emphasised the complementary role of state and market in providing for development. The post-Washington consensus holds that economic growth can only take place with the combined presence of sound economic policy *and* good institutions, and thus emphasises the need for 'institution-building.' For instance the 1997 World Development Report *The State in a Changing World* states that 'good government is a vital necessity for development'.[3] Economists associated with the post-Washington consensus have also been more positively inclined towards certain state regulatory functions and have stressed the importance of gradual economic reforms rather than rapid liberalisation.[4]

Overall, the set of policies commonly associated with the post-Washington consensus represents a modification, rather than a rejection of its predecessor, with little changes in monetary and fiscal policies, and a continuing endorsement of free trade, privatisation and market deregulation.[5] Yet the declaratory emphasis on the institutions and statebuilding is relatively new within the development community and has lent itself to a discourse framing the lack of development in terms of state failure: Mainstream development debate has increasingly come to assume that development is contingent on a specific kind of state,[6] which includes a benign and competent government and

[1]OECD/DAC (2005a)
[2] Picciotto et. al. (2005)
[3] World Bank (1997) p. 15
[4] See for instance Stiglitz (2002)
[5] Fine et. al (2001)
[6] Macrae et. al. (2004) p. 2

efficient and capable institutions, as well as liberal economic policies.[7] The absence of these (often highly specified) conditions is seen to constitute state failure in developmental terms.[8]

The aid effectiveness debate

The fragile state agenda must be understood as part of this overall focus with state failure within the development field. More specifically, however, the fragile states agenda has been driven by the so-called aid effectiveness paradigm. This paradigm has been preoccupied with providing criteria for identifying “poor performers”- countries with policies and institutions seen to be detrimental to the effective utilisation of aid. Such criteria have subsequently been used by the fragile state agenda to identify “state fragility.”

Researchers have long examined the effect of development aid on growth, but have produced little consensus.[9] Yet since the 1990s, a body of research associated primarily with economists working with the World Bank gained immense policy influence. Prominent within this aid effectiveness paradigm were Burnside and Dollar’s findings that aid had little effect on growth (which was seen as a key to poverty reduction) in the absence of good policies (inflation, budget balance and trade openness)[10] Later research by Collier and Dollar added the factor of quality of institutions. They concluded that aid is only effective in countries with good policies and institutions. [11] However, Collier and Dollar based their claims on different set of indicators than Burnside and Dollar, using the World Bank’s Country Policy and Institutional Assessment (CPIA).[12]

The aid effectiveness paradigm remains contested. Findings that aid does not have any effect on growth in the absence of good policies have not been widely replicated, [13] and the paradigm has also been challenged on methodological grounds.[14] In addition, the aid effectiveness paradigm assumes that development can be measured in terms of growth, something that is questioned by those who see development to be a wider end with regards to things such as security, political inclusion and education, in short- *human development.* More specifically, there has also been unease with the CPIA indicators. The CPIA is a tool that the World Bank uses to evaluate recipient countries. Its 16 different components assess economic management, public sector management and institutions, structural policies, and policies for social inclusion *(seeBox 1).*

[7] Macrae et. al. (2004) p. 2
[8] Ibid.
[9] Clemens, Radelet and Bhavnani (2004)
[10] Burnside and Dollar (2000)
[11] Collier and Dollar (2002)
[12] Hagen and Pedersen (2002)
[13] Lockwood p.46 (2005)
[14] See for instance Hansen and Tarp (2000), or Clemens et al (2004) Clemens et. al. suggest for instance that aggregate analysis of aid is inappropriate and that humanitarian aid and aid towards social development will necessarily have different short term effects on growth than aid directed towards productive sectors or state budgets.

BOX 1: 2005 CPIA CRITERIA

A. Economic Management
1. Macroeconomic Management
2. Fiscal Policy
3. Debt Policy

B. Structural Policies
4. Trade
5. Financial Sector
6 Business Regulatory Environment

C. Policies for Social Inclusion/Equity
7. Gender Equality
8. Equity of Public Resource Use
9. Building Human Resources
10. Social Protection and Labour
11. Policies and Institutions for Environmental Sustainability

D. Public Sector Management and Institutions
12. Property Rights and Rule-based Governance
13. Quality of Budgetary and Financial Management
14. Efficiency of Revenue Mobilization
15. Quality of Public Administration
16. Transparency, Accountability, and Corruption in the Public Sector

Source: World bank, CPIA Questionnaire 2005.

The CPIA ratings have been criticised for being arbitrary and subjective. While the evaluations themselves are becoming more standardised and transparent, [15] they ultimately rest on subjective judgements. Moreover their analytical and policy relevance is still questioned (see below).

Despite such controversies, the findings of the aid effectiveness paradigm have been very influential on policy making. Initially the aid effectiveness paradigm supported a move towards the so-called selectivity approach as donors (particular the World Bank and the US) channelled aid to a cluster of 'good performers' in an effort to maximize the output per unit of aid. In countries where policies and institutions were seen to be inappropriate, the state was circumvented and funds were channelled as short-term humanitarian aid. Soon, donors grew unhappy with the selectivity approach, seeing that such total disengagement from recipient governments could result in unacceptable human costs[16] and led to few long-term changes. It also frustrated institutional targets for aid disbursements. Adding to this was the widespread sense that such countries could constitute a security threat to the West, particularly after the 11 September attacks in the US and the subsequent 'war on terror'. Thus, a growing trend has been to emphasise the need to reengage with these "poor performers". In accordance with the premises of the aid effectiveness paradigm, however, donors have stressed that such reengagement must be designed with the intent to improve aid effectiveness in what have subsequently been defined as 'fragile states.'

[15] Since 2001, and following critique that ratings were overly subjective, the country teams who are doing the rating have been given written guidance in the form of criteria for rates between 1 and 6. They are also required to provide a written justification for given scores ('write ups'). Until recently countries' rating were only disclosed in the form of quintiles (1-5). However, from the 2005 CPIA rating onwards, the numerical ratings given for each of the 16 CPIA criteria have been disclosed for countries eligible for IDA assistance. The guidelines for CPIA ratings in the 16 fields are available at : http://siteresources.worldbank.org/IDA/Resources/CPIA2005Questionnaire.pdf

[16] World Bank: Fragile states-the LICUS initiative: Overview (http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/PROJECTS/STRATEGIES/EXTLICUS/0,,contentMDK:20176979~menuPK:511786~pagePK:64171531~piPK:64171507~theSitePK:511778,00.html#status_determined), DFID (2005a)

The drivers of the fragile state agenda have been the World Banks' Low Income Countries Under Stress (LICUS) initiative, the OECD/DAC initiative on "difficult partnerships" and the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), all of which are addressing 'state fragility' from aid effectiveness perspectives. Launched in 2001, The World Bank's LICUS initiative used the aid effectiveness debate as a starting point. Stating that LICUS countries are 'characterised by very weak policies, institutions and governance', the Bank's 2002 LICUS Task Force Report proceeded to identify the task at hand: Since 'aid does not work well in these environments', the Bank should 'facilitate policy and institutional change.'[17] For some time, the LICUS unit remained somewhat vague on the issue of definitions, refusing to commit to a definite list of LICUS countries. However, recently the Bank has stated that 'LICUS are fragile states with particularly weak policies and institutions, scoring less than 3.0 on the CPIA.'[18] The Bank now also uses 'fragile states' interchangeably with the LICUS term.

The notion that certain policies and institutions are needed for the effective utilisation of aid, and that these are expressed in the CPIA criteria, has underpinned other fragile states strategies as well. DFID defines fragile states as those 'where the government cannot or will not deliver core functions to the majority of its people, including the poor.'[19] This widely quoted definition does not specify what core functions could be. For this purpose, DFID draws upon the CPIA framework, generating a list of 46 Fragile States, consisting of the countries in the lowest two quintiles in the World Bank CPIA list, as well as a separate group of unranked countries. Similarly, the OECD/DAC launched an initiative on *difficult partnership* in 2001, stating that aid is 'less effective in poor policy environments'. The research agenda of this 'difficult partnership' initiative was to be cases where recipient governments do not have *ownership* or commitment to pro-poor policies. [20] Initially, the OECD/DAC did not make the content of such policies explicit, instead focusing on the implementation or non-implementation of the provisions in a country's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper.[21] More recently, the OECD/DAC initiative has started using the term fragile states and broadened its focus to also include states with 'insufficient capacity' as well as those seen be lacking in political commitment. It has also explicitly defined its caseload as countries with low CPIA scores.[22]

Ownership and 'political will'

The fragile state agenda as a whole expresses and consolidates a number of donor concerns. Whilst drawing upon current emphasis on strengthening institutions, the agenda is also an attempt to deal with donor dilemmas with regards to the *politics* of implementation, and often translates the resistance to externally initiated reforms - both with regards to institution-building and economic policy - as evidence of fragile statehood. According to the fragile state agenda, donors must actively work against national policy in cases where the government appears disinterested in adopting what the aid community considers appropriate policies and institutions. The agenda therefore represents an explicit modification of a central tenant of recent aid discourse, that of *ownership.* A key element of current aid modalities, ownership has nonetheless been an ambiguous and controversial concept. It emerged as a response to widespread criticism following the first generation of structural adjustment lending, which involved substantial economic policy reforms. At the time, the

[17] World Bank (2002)
[18] World Bank LICUS website:
http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/PROJECTS/STRATEGIES/EXTLICUS/0,,contentMDK:20176979~menuPK:511786~pagePK:64171531~piPK:64171507~theSitePK:511778,00.html
[19] DFID (2005a)
[20] OECD/DAC (2001)
[21]However, since the PRSPs are subject to IFI approval, their content is likely to be endorsed by the CPIAs.
[22] Morcos (2005)

adjustment programmes represented unprecedented interventions by aid agencies in the internal affairs of developing countries. Nonetheless, the aid community became increasingly aware that governments would not always implement the reforms that were a condition of aid and loan packages, even if this meant the withholding of aid.[23] There was also widespread criticism that these reforms were often implemented in a fashion that ran counter to the interest of the poor,[24] and that their underlying policy assumptions were unsound. Expenditure on social services was often cut, and it was argued that externally-driven adjustment undermined the accountability between government and the population in developing countries.

Introduced by the 1999 Poverty Reduction Strategy initiative, the concept of *ownership* was an attempt to reconcile these two (essentially opposite) set of concerns. Following the introduction of ownership, donors would no longer act as policemen towards recipient governments, instead they would *align* with strategies rooted in country priorities. This was intended to address the donor community's belief that government passivity and low involvement in reform design had undermined the impact and sustainability of aid programs.[25] However, ownership also entailed civil society consultations, to ensure that poverty reduction strategies took popular concerns into account. Simultaneously an instrument of democratic accountability and of implementation of donor-initiated reforms, the ownership approach has been criticised for being deceptive as well as politically naïve.[26] It has been pointed out that the notion of country-led approaches is misleading as long as key aspects such as macroeconomic policies remain non-negotiable. In practice, the idea that ownership will serve as an instrument for implementation is contradictory. If governments had been unwilling to implement reforms before, true ownership (at least by the government, if not the general population) would mean continuous non-implementation. To a large extent, donors denied this fact by treating implementation as a problem of collective action, rather than conflicting objectives. [27] On the other hand, it is argued that the idea that PRSP-driven civil society consultation and 'stakeholder analysis' can somehow be a catalyst for improved government and /or donor accountability is an overly narrow and naïve idea of political processes of change. [28]

In any case, donors eventually came to believe that the ownership approach was completely inappropriate in countries where the government proved absolutely unwilling to 'own' the compulsory reform agenda. This conclusion is integral the fragile state agenda. Fragile states documents argue that the obstacles that fragile states are facing can be divided into two main categories, those with weak capacity and those with a lack of political will. Donors must respond accordingly. For instance, the OECD/DAC principles for international engagement in fragile states state:

For governments where political will exists and capacity is the main constraint, supporting state-building means direct support for government plans, budgets, decision-making processes and implementing structures. In countries where political will is the main constraint, support for long-term state-building does not necessarily imply short-term support for the government - but it does mean moving beyond repeated waves of humanitarian responses to a focus on how to support and strengthen viable national institutions which will be resilient in the longer-term. [29]

[23] Lockwood (2005)
[24] Lockwood (2005)
[25] van de Walle (2006)
[26] Jerve (2002)
[27] Collier (2005)
[28] Jerve (2002)
[29] OECD/DAC (2005a) p. 2-3.

This conditional approach to ownership, which the World Bank and the UNDP has termed 'dynamic ownership,'[30] diminishes the scope for any genuine country influence, reducing ownership to a tool of donor coordination and smooth implementation reserved for 'willing' governments. This was perhaps a logical solution to the inherent tensions in the ownership concept. Nevertheless it is a controversial retreat from donor's long-stated commitment (however superficial) to development rooted in 'country priorities.'

In a bid to understand the underlying causes of lack of ownership and 'political will' for sustained change, the fragile state agenda also stresses the need to utilise political economy analysis. In recent years, the larger development community have started to use what is termed Drivers of Change (DOC) analysis, (also referred to as political economy analysis.) [31] The stated aim of this DOC analysis is to go beyond the level of individuals as champions of reform to examine the role of institutions and underlying structural features.[32] Much of the DOC analysis draws upon academic concepts and frameworks -notably from political science and anthropology. Often, the analyses themselves are carried out by academics with substantial country knowledge, and contain in-depth accounts of historical and political dynamics. [33] Thus in accordance with these wider trends, most of the fragile states policy documents refer to the need for political economy analysis in order to understand and address problems of political will. In cases where the recipient government is unwilling to implement policies that donors consider necessary for development - the agenda states that donors must utilise 'political economy analysis' to understand how to promote the desired change. However, as argued below, the fragile state agenda uses political economy analysis in a narrow and instrumental way, which greatly curtails the utility of such exercises.

The fragile state agenda and the broader development debate

Defining the inability or unwillingness of some states to provide the conditions necessary for development as fragile statehood implies that a consensus exists on a set of policies and institutions that will bring about development. As we have seen, agencies involved in the Fragile State initiative use CPIA indicators as a proxy for 'good institutions and policies'. However, some of the policy frameworks endorsed by the CPIA are contested, especially those regarding economic policy and the degree of state intervention in the market. This include the high CPIA ratings given for trade liberalisation (low tariffs etc.)[34], few controls or subsidies on prices, wages, land or labour, [35] and few restrictions with regards to public sector procurements.[36] These policies are part of neoliberal economics and have been controversial since they were first advocated by the international financial institutions in the 1980s. Examining the experience of successful developers in East Asia, scholars have found evidence that these countries have behaved in ways contrary to neoliberal economics by intervening in labour markets, land markets, product markets and financial markets, [37] and by using trade policy to protect infant industries at times. [38] Based on these findings, academics and activists have accused the international financial institutions for 'kicking away the ladder' and denying developing countries the space to pursue the same policies. It is therefore important to keep in mind

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[30] UNDP/ World Bank (2005) p. 4.
[31] OECD/DAC (2005c) p.3. Drivers of Change analysis have so far been used by DFID, SIDA and the World Bank.(ibid.)
[32] DFID (2004).
[33] See for instance, DFID's study on Uganda and the World Bank's study on Somalia.
[34] World Bank (2005a) p. 11-12.
[35] Ibid. p. 17-18.
[36] Ibid. p. 18.
[37] Lockwood (2005) p. 36, Kohli (2004).
[38] Lockwood (2005) p. 36, Kohli (2004).

that unwillingness to adhere to donor promoted economic policies is not a widely accepted manifestation of developmental state failure.

The social and institutional aspects of the CPIA criteria, such as equity, transparency and non-corruption, effective resource mobilisation and effective state administration are less controversial. Nevertheless, questions with regards to their *relevance* for development remain.[39] Some scholars argue that historical evidence does not support any causal connection between the policies associated with 'good governance' and economic development. For instance, Grindle points to the experience of China and Vietnam, where insecure property rights and contracts, as well as extensive corruption have coexisted with rapid economic development. She also suggests that while civil service reform was initiated in the US in the 1880s, it took up to another 60 years for that country to establish an effective civil service system.[40]

Increasingly, scholars comparing the different experiences of the fast growing countries in East Asia with for instance Sub-Saharan Africa countries have found that successful 'developmental states' cannot readily be reduced to certain policy or institutional models or the relative size of states. [41] In general, the extensive market interventions- at least prior to structural adjustment - by African states did not lead to development, whereas extensive intervention (although to various degree) amongst the East Asian developers did. Some researchers thus suggest that 'what has mattered more [than the size of intervention] is the quality of state interventions [in the market], which again has depended on analytical capacity, on resource mobilisation by the state, on the politics of the state and on the balance of material interests driving that politics.' [42] Hence, the debate surrounding the scope of the state intervention in development and appropriate institutional design has largely been complemented by a debate on the underlying politics and social basis of the state.[43]

The endorsement of the so-called drivers of change approach by donors must be seen as part of this focus on political dynamics. To a large extent, however, the donor community in general and the fragile state agenda in particular have incorporated what they refer to as political economy analysis into their existing frames of reference. In fragile states policy documents and much of the other DOC analysis, the political economy approach is used instrumentally as a tool of policy implementation. For instance, the 2002 LICUS task force suggests that donors must utilise socio-political analysis in order to identify constituencies for reform (i.e. towards improving CPIA-ratings) .[44] The paper warns against efforts towards reforms that are detrimental to powerful groups, who are likely to block them. Rather, the role of donors must be to communicate the benefits of reform in cases of ignorance, where those who might benefit does not realise it. [45] Similarly, the OECD principles refer to the 'drivers of change' approach, emphasising the need for 'sound political analysis' in order to identify whether constraints are related to capacity or political will and the different needs of countries recovering from conflict, political crisis or poor governance, etc. While the OECD principles appear more 'context driven' the direction of reform remains the same, and references to needs assessment testify to analysis of a technical, rather than political nature.

The assumption that the aid community has already identified *a priori* the changes required for development reduces 'political economy analysis' to an instrument of implementation, rather than

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[39] See Grindle (2005), Khan (2005) and Unsworth (2005).
[40] Grindle in ODI (2006).
[41] Cramer and Goodhand (2003) p. 133.
[42] Cramer and Goodhand (2003) p. 133.
[43] See, in particular, the ODI seminar series on developmental states http://www.odi.org.uk/speeches/states_06/index.html
[44] World Bank (2002).
[45]As an example, the paper mentions facilitating negations over privatisation between trade unions and the government, and the training of journalists in economic issues.(World Bank 2002 p. 18).

understanding.[46] Thus, insofar as 'political economy ' is an subject of analysis and explanation, non-implementation of reforms, such as reducing corruption and change of economic policy is often explained by 'bad leadership'- with elites' short -term quest for power and riches typically juxtaposed to a generalised concept of the public good- the latter seen to be embodied in the CPIA criteria. In the words of the OECD; in fragile states 'development objectives play little role compared with prolongation of power, with the result that partner governments do not have credible commitment to effective policies and their implementation.'[47] To the extent that this discourse analyses 'politics' beyond diagnoses of lacking political will and 'bad leaders', it often refers to neopatrimonialism. An influential concept within the 'politics of development debate,' the term is applied mainly with reference to Sub-Saharan Africa.[48] The neopatrimonialism thesis suggests that most African states are hybrid regimes, in which patrimonial practices are incorporated into bureaucratic practices. In particular, the notion that Africa's persistent neopatrimonialism is blocking the continent's transition to development has gained widespread influence. It is held that neopatrimonialism is inimical to development, as political legitimacy, rather than being premised on efficient state administration and delivery of public goods, builds on the distribution of patronage through personalized loyalty structures. However, on its own, neopatrimonialism is a description rather than a causal account of underdevelopment or 'state failure.' Outside of a historical and material context it risks being essentialist, promoting the idea that there is something inherently 'wrong' with African politics. Thus, historically grounded research have suggested that neopatriomonialism must be understood in the context of state formation in Africa, as a legacy of indirect rule,[49]and also as closely related to structural economic factors. For instance, the small size of the capitalist sector in developing countries vis- a vis self-subsistence and informal small-scale economic activities means that allocation of resources seldom takes place through the government budget.[50]

It is thus unlikely that a transformation to a *rational-legal state* can take place independently of an economic transformation. An integrated approach to political economy analysis i.e. one that puts the economy back into 'political economy', would question the idea that development can be achieved by 'skipping straight to Weber.'[51] i.e. solely through the transformation of politics towards publicly oriented leaders who exercise 'good governance'. For instance, Khan takes issue with such 'neo-Weberian' assumptions, arguing that there are '*no* examples of successful transitions to prosperity based on following the good governance route to reform'.[52] Instead he claims that a common feature of rapidly developing countries has been the ability of states to allocate resources to productive groups, and that state officials have often united with emerging capitalists on a profit-sharing basis. This suggests that the borders between politics and economics, and between selfish and development-oriented elites are more complex than the fragile states agenda assumes. More generally, Unsworth asserts that academics and policymakers are 'far from identifying the key causal linkages – between institutions and growth, growth and corruption, democracy and poverty reduction – and which reforms to prioritise in different country circumstances.'[53]

If donor engagement is to move beyond the one-size- fits- all agenda advocated by the fragile states approach, it is necessary to employ a two-way analysis that explores how change could be achieved based on analysis of existing social systems, rather an assumption that developmental states can be

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46 Some more historically grounded work on drivers of change goes beyond this- see for instance Unsworth (2005). However other state that 'donors know 'what' is necessary to realise [poverty reduction] but they do not know 'how' to bring about the changes' (Warrener 2004 p. iii).
47 OECD/DAC (2001)p. 4.
48 Chabal and Daloze, (1999) Bratton and van de Walle (1994).
49 Kohli, (2004).
50 Khan (2005).
51 Pritchett and Woolcock (2003).
52 Khan (2005) p.19. Emphasis in original.
53 Unsworth (2005).

reduced to the implementation of a universal institutional and policy model, which will produce the same effects in all cases. [54] This is the approach of more historically grounded political economy analysis.[55] Indeed, the starting point of a 'proper' political economy approach is the close inter-relationship among political, administrative and economic variables.[56] Such an approach precludes isolating 'politics' or bad leaders as an autonomous source of explanation or change, acknowledging that transformations cannot take place independently of structural and economic factors . However as long as the fragile state agenda commits itself to a fixed reform model it cannot incorporate the dynamic relationship between political and economic change.

Fragile states and conflict

The fragile state agenda makes frequent claims to address not only development but also conflict.[57] Such assertions run along two, interrelated themes. First, it is argued that, as the lack of development is a cause of conflict, the agenda's efforts to promote development will also have the effect of reducing conflict. Secondly, the fragile states agenda draws upon a meta-narrative of state failure, where a general condition of state failure is seen to explain the absence of both security and development.

The last decade has seen a convergence of development and security concerns among Western policymakers both in an operational and conceptual sense- often referred to as the security - development nexus. At an operational level, a driving force behind this convergence has been the changing international context, which since the early 1990s made possible increased international involvement in internal conflict. This new activism fostered a shift within the UN system from an emphasis on negotiation /enforcement and monitoring of peace agreements to efforts towards wholesale reconstruction of war-affected societies. Agencies from different fields now found themselves working within the same space, and increasingly utilising each others policy tools. For instance policymakers working with security and military affairs came to recognise that consolidating security depended on developing institutions, such as police and the judiciary, and strengthening overall institutional structures in the country concerned. In turn, development aid agencies, having started to work more directly in conflict-prone or conflict-affected areas began acknowledge that their work was dependent on security conditions, and in turn impacted on matters of security.[58]

At times the development-security convergence has also entailed a more problematic conceptual shift, suggesting that security and development strategies are essentially addressing the same underlying issue. The UN has promoted such a conceptual unification of development and security when stating that there can be no development without security, and no security without

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[54] Khan (2005) Brett (2006).

[55] See for instance Unsworth (2005).

[56] Brett (2006).

[57] USAID (2005): *"Although conflict is not limited to fragile states, the propensity for a fragile state to experience violent conflict is high .When development and governance fail in a country, the consequences engulf entire regions and leap around the world."* DFID (2005b): *"Poverty, underdevelopment and fragile states create fertile conditions for conflict and the emergence of new security threats, including international crime and terrorism".* DFID (2005a) *Fragile states are more likely to become unstable and fall prey to criminal and terrorist networks, which aggravate their instability.* LICUS (2002) : *Yet neglect of such countries [fragile states] perpetuates poverty in some of the world's poorest countries and may contribute to the collapse of the state, with adverse regional and even global consequences* OECD (2005a) : *"Fragile states are countries affected by weak governance and institutions where delivering aid is difficult but critical to support peace and stability, and to improve the lives of the millions of their citizens who are mired in a vicious circle of conflict, poor governance and poverty".*

[58] Uvin (2002) This has led to a proliferation of 'Do No Harm' and conflict sensitivity approaches amongst aid agencies, particularly NGOs.

development.[59]Yet despite the interface between the security and development fields, notions about common objectives are deceptive, and largely due to a shift in presentation.[60] Recent years have seen frequent contentions by development actors that poverty and underdevelopment cause conflict, [61] and that development can be 'a structural form of conflict prevention.'[62] This has allowed all development-assistance 'whatever its focus -health, gender, economic growth, education'[63] to be defined as 'peacebuilding' as long as it claims to address the "root causes" of conflict,[64] amounting to what Peter Uvin calls 'rhetorical repacking'-the assertion that that development axiomatically reduces conflict.[65] In the same fashion, the fragile state agenda argues that as fragile states are considered the root causes of underdevelopment, addressing state fragility is tantamount to peacebuilding.

Nonetheless, the underlying idea- that development is inherently peace-promoting, should not be accepted at face value. Some see the particular economic policies of neoliberalism (such as privatisation and liberalisation) as sharpening inequalities and fostering competitive behaviour, thus potentially resulting in the re-emergence of conflict.[66] In theory, aid agencies have started to acknowledge the effects of development policies on the short -term consolidation of security and are increasingly referring to the need for 'sequencing' and integration of various policy fields in such cases,[67] although it remains too early to assess the extent to which such references and 'integrated planning frameworks' have led to substantive practical changes. On a more fundamental level, scholars have questioned the peace promoting effects of development by pointing to how the development process itself can be inherently violent, not only as the challenges to existing power structures, rapid distributional changes and erosion of livelihoods can create tensions, but also in an endogenous sense as emerging classes use violence to appropriate assets, land and labour, – so-called 'primitive accumulation'. [68] Such perspectives turn the assumption that security is a precondition for development on its head by suggesting that development has historically been a very insecure experience for many people.

The logic of the security –development nexus has also become an integral part of *a meta-narrative of state failure*. Over the last decade or so, a pervasive view has developed amongst researchers and, particularly, policymakers to the effect that certain states are failing to perform the minimum functions expected of them. This failure is widely perceived as a prime issue of concern, a point of explanation and a target for reform. Yet the preoccupation with such state failure has taken place in separate disciplinary and policy fields, and it follows that the focus for identifying failure has differed. In particular, there are two different dimensions of *state failure* that policymakers and academics have been preoccupied with: (i) failure of states to promote development, and (ii) failure to uphold security or internal sovereignty. The latter has been the focus of agencies and experts

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59 See for instance the UN's High Level Report (UN, 2004) and the Secretary General's In Larger Freedom (UN, 2005)

60 This applies particularly to the OECD principles and the OECD/DAC documents on 'difficult partnerships', DFID and the World Bank's LICUS initiative, which have been at the forefront of the fragile state discourse. (An exception is the USAID strategy, which adopts a perspective more related to US security interests rather than general development issues (USAID, 2005).

61 In its influential report *Breaking the Conflict Trap* (2003) the World Bank States: 'the key root cause of conflict is the failure of economic development' p. 53.

62 Duffield (2001)p. 121.

63 Sending (2005).

64 Sending (2005).

65Uvin (2002) Interesting in this regard is the World Bank's LICUS group, who started in 2001 as a initiative to address aid effectiveness concerns (see p. 6) More recently and particularly since the Fragile State Initiative in 2005, LICUS have increasingly defined its work in terms of conflict. However a recent evaluation of The World Bank's LICUS work found that the definition of peacebuilding (and statebuilding) within LICUS is not clear, and that LICUS's post-conflict work overlaps considerably with the Bank's Postconflict Reconstruction Unit. (World Bank 2006b).

66 Paris (2004).

67 See for instance UNDP/ World Bank 2005.

68 Keen (2001) p. 8. See also Cramer (2006).

primarily concerned with security, international relations and conflict prevention. Often, state failure in security terms is seen as the end point in a process of reduced state *capacity*, where progressive disintegration of state structures eventually results in the outbreak of violence, at which point the state may or may not survive as an institution.[69] However, following the debate in the UN system over the 'responsibility to protect', the object of security has shifted somewhat from the state to the individual. Thus, state failure in security terms refers increasingly to the state's failure to discharge its responsibility to protect individuals from physical violence. In recent time, the genocide in Rwanda where a strong state apparatus failed spectacularly to ensure the security of the population starkly illustrates the difference between the state security and individual security.

The development discourse on state failure, of which the fragile state agenda is a part, has focused on development outcomes and initially evolved largely separate from the security –oriented preoccupation with state failure. However the recent emphasis in development circles on strengthening public administration fitted nicely with the corresponding focus among security and political analysts on effective security institutions and state consolidation. Thus, underpinned by the security –development nexus, a meta-narrative of state failure' has emerged, portraying state failure as a singular phenomenon, where failure in one area ineluctably leads to failure in the other. According to one report:

"As violent conflict is often associated with weak and failing states, the rationale of international assistance should focus on creating (...) "capable states," able to provide security, well-being, and justice. States unable to provide all three of these functions are prone to instability and violence. Thus, international efforts have to help revamp all these functions simultaneously, with the aim to strike a sustainable security, political, and socio-economic balance beyond the short-run."[70]

Included in this meta-narrative is also a projection of state failure as a key threat to the security of Western states,[71] perhaps most prominently in the US where the CIA in 2000 commissioned an extensive research programme to uncover the causes and characteristics of state failure.[72] The 11th September attacks and the subsequent focus on 'weak states' as providing enabling conditions for terrorist activity, have amplified such concerns.

The fragile state agenda draws upon this meta-narrative of state failure. Although the CPIA indicators do not include aspects of 'state failure' more closely associated with conflict, such as political repression or the condition of the security apparatus, the fragile states agenda often presents what is sees as state fragility in developmental terms as indistinguishable from a general state of state failure across the board. Both the state failure meta-narrative and the security development nexus more generally has often translated into a 'missing link approach' where the emphasis is on comprehensiveness and making sure no fields are left out. The underlying idea is that all elements of what is commonly associated with (Western) modernity are mutually constitutive. Particularly in the context of postconflict transitions, it is held that only with all elements of a set list on board, can success be achieved. For example, Ghani et al. put forward what they see to be ten core functions of the modern state, arguing that:

...failure to perform one or many of these functions leads to the creation and acceleration of a vicious cycle. This results in the creation of contending centres of power, the multiplication of

[69] This is sometimes described as a taxonomy of weak, failing, failed and collapsed states.
[70] IPA (2004) p. 6.
[71] See for instance Fearon and Laitin (2004).
[72] The authors initially defined state failure as 'when central state authority collapses for several years' However, when this definition did not allow for a number of cases large enough to produce statistically significant results, the definition was broadened as to include revolutionary wars, ethnic wars, adverse regime changes, and genocides and politicides. This, in many peoples' view, empties the concept of state failure of much of its meaning. (van Einsiedel, 2005).

increasingly contradictory and ineffective decisions-making processes, the lost of trust between citizens and the state, the delegitimzation of institutions, the disenfranchisement of the citizenry, and ultimately, the resort to violence.' [73]

In contrast;

…when these[core state] functions are performed in an integrated fashion, a virtuous circle is created in which state decisions in the different domains bolster overall enfranchisement and opportunity for the citizenry[74]…

Yet even cursory observation does not support processes of 'vicious /virtuous circles' as a general rule. Numerous states are experiencing widespread corruption, stagnated economic growth or non-delivery of state services without succumbing to civil war. In fact, addressing various aspects of 'state failure' can be in conflict which each other, at least in the short term. Policies that may be technically sound or are seen to be promoting development objectives, such as army or civil service reform, could create political instability and undermine security dimensions of statebuilding.[75] Similarly, transitions towards greater transparency or political accountability involve substantive reallocation of power and as such, are often associated with increased levels of violence.

The underlying problem with such missing link approaches to statebuilding is that they are inherently devoid of historical content. It is assumed that if the state could only adhere to a certain universal standard and deliver abstract public goods such as security, development and 'the rule of law', support for the state's subsistence will automatically materialise. Yet there is no analysis of the state as a social and historical construct. Implicitly or explicitly, the fragile states agenda and much of the policy and academic literature on state failure draws upon a particular version of liberal/ social contract model of state formation. The social contract model sees state authority as premised on the state meeting certain expectations such as providing welfare, security or representation. However, the social contract model gives a stylised account of state formation, and tends to be ahistorical. The model' s view on state formation/ authority neglects the fact that many rulers have in fact been illegitimate, at least to large parts of the population, [76] and that historically few states have been formed into existence through the provision of the set of functions currently associated with modern statehood. The social contract perspective on state formation therefore fails to differentiate between the various groups in society that challenge or support different forms of statebuilding and their basis and channels of power, both of which often vary significantly.[77] What is commonly associated with modern statehood; an effective bureaucracy, internal pacification, revenue collection and allocation, etc, did not come about simply as a popular demand from the general population, but were largely driven by specific political and economic interests.

In a discussion on perspectives on statebuilding, Milliken and Krause[78] argue that the social contract model can be seen as one of three main academic narratives of state formation. A second model is a Tillyian perspective that contends that state elites originally operated as protection rackets, offering security in return for payments. Thirdly, a political economy perspective regards the emergence of the modern state as intimately tied to modern capitalism and as an institution

[73] Ghani et. al 2006.
[74] Ibid.
[75] For instance, the cutting of rice subsidies to the army is held to be a triggering factor to the 1997 military coup in Sierra Leone. Similarly, the dismissal of 600 military personnel in East Timor served as the catalyst for an outbreak of violence in the country during spring 2006.
[76] Milliken and Krause (2003).
[77] Doorndos (2003), Khan (2005).
[78] Milliken and Krause (2003).

particularly well fitted to it.[79] The Tillyian and the political economy perspectives offer a corrective to overly liberal accounts of state formation processes; rather than an eventual triumph of the public good over particular and selfish agendas, state formation is seen to be driven by specific social groups and interests. It would seem that external support to 'statebuilding' would have much to gain from incorporating such historical analysis. Rather than attempting to identify a set of universal attributes seen necessary for the materialisation of statehood, more focus should be on identifying the key social and political groups that challenge or support developmental transitions and how this relates to other, and potentially conflicting objectives of stability or legitimacy.

Conclusion

The fragile states agenda centres around important issues: the politics of development, the evident corruption of many Southern governments and the inability of many states to monopolise violence and provide security for their citizens. In some ways the agenda represents an advancement of donor thinking and practice. The emphasis on contextual analysis and the need to improve, rather than circumvent, state structures is a significant step in the right direction, as is greater commitment to field presence,[80] differentiated responses to different situations and improved donor coordination.

However the fragile states agenda makes several problematic assumptions that need to be revisited: Its use of the CPIA indicators as a proxy for the state's role in development offers obvious advantages in terms of operational guidance. Nonetheless, using the CPIA indicators to determine developmental state failure is not widely accepted within the development field. At one level, this concerns the policy content of the indicators, which the historical experience of East Asian developers does not support. However there are also problems related to the very idea that change can be achieved through the promotion of a set policy and institutional model, without taking into account structural factors at the intersection of politics and economics. Ultimately, the promotion of a fixed reform programme seriously negates the fragile states agenda's claim to apply 'political economy' analysis and leads the agenda to adopt a simplistic framing of good and bad leaders.

Secondly the agenda's tendency to equate strategies designed to address its distinct concept of 'state failure', rooted in development discourse, as an overall solution to all aspects of 'state failure' must be seen as part of a problematic meta-narrative of state failure, where different concerns rooted in development and security discourses are conflated as a singular issue. Representing their efforts to address developmental state failure as inherently supporting of the state's ability to contain violence will be conducive to the institutional interests of development agencies, but it is not supported by empirical experience. By framing all issues as mutually reinforcing, the security – development nexus has impeded more nuanced thinking on the interrelationship between violence and development. The immediate challenge for the fragile state agenda will be to move beyond such weaknesses and to assess the causes of 'state failure(s)' through historically grounded analysis of country specific dynamics. Such an approach will be operationally more challenging but is likely to be more 'aid effective' in the long run.

[79] Giddens in Milliken and Krause (2003) p. 8.
[80] For instance a recent LICUS paper states the Bank's intention to increase field staff considerably (World Bank 2006a).

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