

The Brookings Institution
Foreign Policy Studies and the Wolfensohn Center for Development

EVENT SUMMARY

Development in Fragile States: The Toughest Cases

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1. A Problem-Solving Approach for a Key Development Priority

Where states are weak and have little commitment to development, there is no simple formula for how to invest. Nonetheless, development of fragile states should be a key priority for the international community in general, and for the U.S. in particular.

- Success requires understanding the local environment and tailoring strategies to local realities. This strategy calls for on-the-ground presence and sophistication.
- Diplomats and development professionals need resources to effectively analyze the unique problems particular to the complex environments of each fragile state.
- International actors should invest in local people and decentralize their operations.
- As these strategies develop, targeted capacity building can be more effective.
- Fiscal responsibility is one particular cross-cutting area that needs development.

2. Local and Decentralized Actors

When national-level programs are ineffective, it is often possible to achieve sustainable progress locally, especially when there are plans to build private capacity and create jobs.

- As success builds at the local level, the challenge becomes how to link the private sector to sustainable municipal strategies and use the media to strengthen local capacity.
- The goal should be both to improve local conditions and to create pressure for a better national development policy.

3. Security Services

Weak states are hampered by continuing instability and the risk of lapsing into conflict. Development strategies should create confidence that weak states can sort through their political problems.

- Working with police and security services should be seen as an essential part of this strategy and should not get walled off from traditional development thinking.

4. Power Analysis

The development community should analyze the distribution of power among the actors within the state and identify how the various players connect to the political and economic environment. Donor engagement inevitably is affected by and affects the dynamics of economic and political power in a country and needs to take account of this.

- To determine how to build a sustainable coalition in support of effective policies, practitioners should understand not only who the power players are, but also who is disenfranchised, who is oppressed, and who will protest.
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5. The Power of Data

Investing in data collection in corrupt environments may help measure which mechanisms successfully promote development and where resources make a difference.

- More data is needed to formulate an effective theory of development in fragile states in transition and in those dominated by authoritarian regimes.
- A system of peer review is an important mechanism to ensure the development of effective and context-appropriate tools, and to prevent the developed North from dictating to the developing South. Data is a tool that makes that possible.

6. Incentives: Regional and Global Prospects

National events must be seen in a global and regional context for states to succeed and be prosperous.

- The lure of the European Union provided a strong incentive for Bosnia to reform. Policymakers should examine regional prospects to help fragile states improve performance.
- Practitioners should also explore the global prospects of linking weak states into the global economy and private sector, connecting them to networks of trade, services, and capital. Policymakers must support these efforts by countering protectionist policies.

7. Authoritarian Regimes

In Zimbabwe and North Korea, ending all humanitarian aid cut off the ability to form any ties to local populations.

- As a result of severed ties, policymakers missed opportunities to engage leaders and promote development.
- Even such minimal ties are needed to help understand how to deal with repressive authoritarian societies. The development community should maintain contact with authoritarian regimes.
- Though this is not the only answer to the authoritarian problem, it is a necessary beginning.

8. Donor Issues

To be effective, development must become a mainstream part of foreign policy and engage the full apparatus of U.S. policy. Policymakers should not wall off development from other policy imperatives. The gaps between humanitarian, reconstruction, and development assistance must be better bridged. Donor engagement in fragile states must be pitched for the long term, not for short crisis response only.

- A mix of diplomacy, development, business development, and security need to be woven into a comprehensive and reasonable donor strategy.
- Donor relations must include a diplomatic strategy that highlights the centrality of poverty alleviation to development and security.
- To elevate poverty alleviation in U.S. policy and secure long-term commitments on development, practitioners need to speak to Congress with more specificity and transparency about the appropriate length of commitment and the challenges and risks of development in fragile states.