Learning brief

Financing fragility: Effective partnerships for implementation in fragile contexts

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About this publication

This publication emerged from the roundtable event ('Financing Fragility: Effective Partnerships for Implementation in FCV') co-organised by ODI and IGC (International Growth Centre) held on 29th February on the margins of the World Bank Fragility Forum (2024).

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Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AfDB	African Development Bank
CRFA	Country Resilience and Fragility Assessment
DFI	Development Finance Institutions
FCS	Fragile and Conflict-Affected States
FCV	Fragile, Conflict and Violence
HDP	Humanitarian-development Nexus
IDA	International Development Association
INGO	International Non-governmental Organisation
IFC	International Finance Corporation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LMIC	Lower-Middle Income Country
MDB	Multilateral Development Bank
MIC	Middle Income Country
PBA	Performance-based Allocation
PFM	Public Financial Management
WBG	World Bank Group

Introduction

Fragility[1] presents a formidable obstacle to global development, jeopardising efforts to alleviate poverty worldwide. Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) and Development Finance Institutions (DFIs) are pivotal to addressing these challenges, yet questions persist regarding policies and partnerships and how to manage the complexities and practical challenges (including high security costs) of staffing operations in fragile settings.

On Thursday 29th February, ODI in partnership with the International Growth Centre (IGC) and ICRC, convened a closed-door roundtable entitled 'Financing Fragility: Effective Partnerships for implementation in FCV contexts', in Washington D.C. on the margins of the World Bank Fragility Forum. The event brought together MDB staff from the WBG, AfDB, ADB, G7 WBG shareholders, senior officials in IMF, DFIs and senior policy makers from bilateral development agencies and other government departments to discuss how to mobilise the right kind of financing, what kinds of updates of existing instruments and tools and what sorts of partnerships might be needed for effective implementation and delivery by MDBs in FCV situations including in de-facto (Tindall, 2023) or politically estranged regime situations (Cliffe et al., 2023).

On the eve of the IDA 21 replenishment round, when the WBG is looking forward to a solid IDA replenishment to preserve this critical lifeline to FCV and at a time when many International Development Association (IDA) borrowing countries affected by fragility are fiscally hamstrung by the need to repay the interests on their external debt, the round table provided the opportunity to rethink the purpose of MDB and DFI engagement in fragile contexts and what better financing for fragile settings would need to look like.

This learning brief summarises and reflects on the round table discussions, which focused on three themes: sustaining the focus on fragility in the MDB reform processes; alignment of MDB policies and financial instruments for increased relevance in fragile contexts; and fit for purpose partnerships. Participants were asked to focus their attention on three sets of questions:

1 How to ensure a sustained focus on fragility in the MDB reform process – including what kinds of authorising environments are conducive to more and better financing and the recruitment and

[1] We use the term fragility – as synonymous with the WBG's use of Fragility, Conflict and Violence (FCV) but in acknowledgment of the fact that FCV is not used by all MDBs and DFIs

retention of staff that could be rewarded and incentivised for working in fragile contexts

2 How to ensure MDB policies and financial instruments are fit for purpose for managing and mitigating risks, contributing to prevention and remaining engaged in politically constrained or estranged fragile contexts.

3 Whether we have the right sorts of partnerships for remaining engaged and what needs to change and how in order to manage the trade-offs between working through third parties to remain engaged and working with state institutions to address the underlying causes of state fragility.

Ensuring a sustained focus on fragility in the MDB reform process

Participants agreed that sustaining the focus on reform processes within MDBs is crucial for effectively tackling FCV and advancing global development agendas. Some insisted that fragility was not just a list of countries, but a set of factors where extreme poverty is concentrated.[2] It was noted that 49 per cent of people (or about 450 million) are living in situations of fragility or in contexts with estranged external donor relations, and roughly 195 million people live in areas without state control. Together, these factors increase the risk of humanitarian development deserts (ICRC, 2024). By 2030, two thirds of the world's extreme poor will be living in fragile and conflict-affected situations. Although MICs were not the focus of the discussion, it was acknowledged that they are also affected by fragility, in particular by high levels of interpersonal violence and exposure to spillover effects.

It was also widely acknowledged that as well as other MDBs, the World Bank has made considerable progress with 'staying engaged' in FCV or fragile situations. This was welcomed because it was noted that continued involvement in crisis contexts can contribute to institutional resilience by reducing the costs of reconstruction associated with stopping and starting engagements.

Given the concentration of extreme poverty in geographies where fragility is prevalent, sustaining the focus on fragility within the MDB reform discussions and as the WGB's core business, was deemed critical. Within the WBG, one potential avenue that was discussed for sustaining high-level focus on fragility within MDB reform discussions, was the establishment of a Global Challenge Programme dedicated to addressing FCV. Such a programme, which still requires further elaboration and consultation, might provide the coordination and political muscle necessary to sustain concerted action and attention on fragility. Despite its potential benefits, the idea

[2] 'Fragility' is not a uniform condition. It can encompass a wide range of different vulnerabilities. When, how and to what degree a country might be considered fragile is often unclear. Even in apparently 'fragile' states there can be pockets of stability, effective governance and a functioning private sector, as is the case, for example, in Haiti and across much of the Sahel. States that appear to be on a development trajectory may contain marginalised regions prone to violence and insurrection, and repression amidst institutional functionality, may conceal underlying fragilities (Nwajiaku-Dahou et al., 2024).

of a Global Challenge Programme for FCV currently lacks support, including within WBG management, possibly partly since FCV is defined by geography rather than sector. Instead FCV is considered a cross cutting issue in the strategy that was adopted by the WBG in 2020 and likely to be cross cutting under each Global Challenge Programme area. How the Global Challenge Programme areas are implemented in fragile contexts, will require systematic monitoring. That said, several G7 governments have expressed interest in clear demonstration of the WBG's prioritisation of fragility. Some shareholders have also expressed interest in finding ways of more systematically harnessing the Bank's public and private sector capabilities for FCV contexts, signalling a growing recognition of the importance of addressing fragility. Fostering joint on-the-ground representation across the WBG, notably between the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation (IFC), a process already underway in several countries, could facilitate more integrated and effective approaches to addressing fragility.

Representatives of regional MDBs also insisted on the potential to learn from the experiences of other MDBs and DFIs who can offer valuable insights into effectively addressing fragility, and the need for MDBs to work as a system (in line with the recommendations of the G20).

The AfDB noted that it was the first MDB to integrate the concept of fragility in its operations, processes and instruments from 2001 onwards and in 2004 established its first facility to support post-conflict countries with clearing arrears and performance-based allocation (PBA) formula to allocate more resources to conflict affected countries. In 2008, it established the Fragile States Facility (now Transition Support Facility) through which more than US$4.8 billion has been mobilised. The same year, it created a dedicated Fragile States Unit with the mandate to oversee the administration of the FSF, ensure program coherence, rapid response capacity, and facilitate the coordination, harmonisation and alignment of the Bank's work with that of other international organisations and agencies working in fragile contexts (AfDB, 2022). Their 23-year commitment has been underpinned by three successive strategic frameworks, which have substantially enhanced the Bank's knowledge and capacity to engage in fragile contexts by introducing new practices, tools, and fit-for-purpose instruments.

Similarly, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has taken recent initiatives such as a new operating model emphasising decentralisation and field presence, highlighting potential avenues for enhancing attention to fragility.

Participants also insisted that MDB reforms must include a focus on HR issues, aligning incentives and career paths to attract relevant talent and expertise for addressing fragility. Incentives for MDB staff should be tailored to reflect the unique challenges and contexts of fragility. Rethinking performance criteria and career progression to prioritise fragility-related initiatives is essential for attracting and retaining the right people. Competencies such as political energy, dynamism, and pragmatism and a willingness to partner with others should be rewarded and prioritised in recruitments and posting of staff working on FCV.

The roundtable concluded that MDB system wide reform is an important opportunity for addressing FCV. By prioritising reform efforts and leveraging collective expertise, MDBs can play a pivotal role in addressing the complex challenges of FCV and promoting sustainable development. Establishing dedicated programs, learning from the experiences of other MDBs, and aligning incentives and career paths are essential strategies for ensuring sustained prioritisation of fragility within MDBs.

Fit-for-purpose MDB policies and financial instruments in fragile contexts

The inherent risks associated with FCV, including political instability and security concerns, demand robust risk management mechanisms embedded within MDB policies and financial instruments. The presence of estranged or de facto governments complicates traditional FCV interventions. FCV financing requires innovative strategies to ensure that financing reaches the contexts that need it most and does not do more harm. Speakers flagged the lack of funding to grow offices and the high cost and difficulty of retaining staff in countries such as Haiti (where armed non-state actors control roughly 80% of Port-au-Prince).[3]

Ensuring MDB policies and financial instruments are fit for purpose in FCV contexts requires a holistic, adaptive approach. This means investing in learning and evaluating existing policies, leveraging innovative financing instruments, prioritising prevention and resilience, and context-specific approaches. In addition, procedures and policies may need to be updated to enhance MDB's ability to work together as a system.

New and well-targeted concessional and blended financing instruments offer opportunities to mobilise resources and mitigate risks in FCV contexts. IDA21, which is aiming for a USD 93 billion package later this year, was flagged as a positive example of a financing solution, as 28% are to be allocated to FCV. Innovative financing mechanisms, such as the Italian Development Agency's support for the ICRC through Humanitarian Impact Bonds, demonstrate how financial incentives can align with humanitarian but also prevention or even peacebuilding goals. Co-financing arrangements among multiple MDBs and DFIs can enhance the impact of interventions.

The WBG's creation of a dedicated FCV strategy and FCV envelope within IDA to provide financial avenues to respond to specific needs

[3] Since the Roundtable event, the World Bank and all multilateral and bilateral partners have been forced to close their offices in Haiti and evacuate staff (Tuesday 19th March).

of FCV was welcomed. This financial envelope includes dedicated ‘top up’ allocation windows for Prevention and Resilience, Remaining Engaged, Turn Around Allocation, and for Host Communities and Refugee Spillovers. But participants questioned whether the criteria for accessing these windows were not overly prohibitive and whether they enabled the financing of the plethora of interventions required for prevention (beyond prevention for resilience i.e. social protection). This could include prevention of institutional fragility in domains critical for re-establishing legitimacy. Whether the World Bank and other MDBs could consider or stepped up financing for policing and the justice sector was discussed, even if financing the security sector would be beyond mandates and respective charters. There was some discussion about whether Operating Policies such as OP 7.30 enabled the flexibility required for operating in de facto government contexts, or whether the problem was less one of policy and more one of politics, i.e. divergences between shareholders about when to remain engaged or not.

Participants agreed on the need for politically robust joint country analysis (among MDBs but also with other existing or potential multilateral or INGO partners) to inform country diagnostics and for the latter to shape disbursement decisions insulated from political pressures. Joint analysis of challenges and sharing of best practices can inform evidence-based approaches and promote learning across institutions. Greater sharing of the political economy analyses conducted by regional development banks (and other actors) could be one way forward. The fragility assessments at national and regional levels, introduced by the AfDB since 2014, were cited as a rich source of data and analysis on risks across the political, economic, social, and environmental spheres. AfDB cited the introduction of the data-driven Country Resilience and Fragility Assessment (CRFA) tool in 2018, which has since become the basis for a conceptual framework to understanding fragility and resilience dynamics across Africa.

It was widely acknowledged that the WBG has come a long way in stepping up efforts to simplify processes for approvals of disbursements to FCV. Yet the need for timely approvals, remains a concern, particularly in ‘de facto’ situations. In the context of the Yemeni crisis, the IFC took two years to construct a trade finance facility, and it eventually fell through. There has only been one reported DFI investment transaction in Yemen since 2013, which despite the complex environment has a functioning private sector; that illustrates the need for a new approach in a country the UN has cited as having the worst humanitarian crisis globally. Given that there are few investments (in Yemen, Haiti or Sudan) that look profitable on paper, after pricing in risk, the IFC (which is profitable overall) could consider taking on much riskier or lower return investments in fragile states. There was some discussion about the need to facilitate the kind of flexibility and concessional finance support that the IFC might require to step up investments in these kinds of situations. The added complexity in cases like Yemen are sanctions; which MDBs and other institutions must learn to successfully navigate (and there are a number of examples of the World Bank doing this, notably in the Sahel where a presence is maintained).

Prioritising prevention and resilience-building efforts as the World Bank has done in recent years was deemed essential to effective on-the-ground responses in FCV. The significance of spillovers as a result of instability in neighbouring territories was also noted, which explains why countries not on the FCS list, are using the prevention window (e.g. Ghana and Côte D'Ivoire). While these countries were perhaps better able to design prevention plans and document incidents of violent conflict, there was some concern that the criteria for accessing prevention windows are too narrow (as was acknowledged during the IDA20 Mid Term Review in Zanzibar, Tanzania in December 2023, during which progress made on policy and financial commitments and IDA's response to various crises were discussed and evaluated (IDA, 2023)). Participants insisted on the need for more financing being made available for conflict prevention and for the analysis of political economy drivers of conflict and their communication to and discussion by shareholders and borrowers at MDBs' board level.

Investing in building a culture of critical learning and knowledge sharing around the MDB footprint in FCV, on what has worked well and less well, was noted as important in helping MDBs to continuously adapt and innovate their approaches to address evolving needs and challenges. There was much support for MDBs investing more in innovation and learning from others, and for MDBs to avoid simply repurposing existing measures and approaches (e.g. classic governance strengthening like PFM reform for FCV contexts).

Strategies that have sought to go beyond Do No Harm and intentionally build resilience in ways that might contribute to peace, were noted. The New Deal for International Engagement in Fragile States was referenced as important guidance about what MDBs might seek to prioritise, that continued to be relevant (OECD, 2012).

Learning from approaches by the regional development banks was reflected on in discussions. The AfDB's 2008 strategy for enhanced engagement in fragile states (AfDB, 2008) was noted. Collaboration among MDBs, DFIs and other stakeholders is critical for enhancing the effectiveness of interventions in FCV contexts.

There was some discussion about roles and mandates and whether the WBG and other MDBs, primarily development institutions with a mandate to address poverty, were well suited to the humanitarian response space into which they were increasingly being drawn. On prevention, there was also much discussion about whether the WGB's role was to prevent conflicts from occurring, to 'cushion the blow' and prevent the extent of human suffering that might result from conflict once it breaks out, to respond to crises by supporting states in crisis and/or supporting people affected by crises where the state was incapable of doing so. Whilst some participants questioned for how long MDBs could envisage a role in crisis response, other insisted on the need for MDBs to remain agile and context driven, whilst building strategic partnerships. As development institutions, MDBs are engaged in the prevention of conflicts often by implementing interventions aimed at addressing or mitigating some of the risks that have the potential to lead to conflicts. Just as with crisis response, it was acknowledged that prevention of conflicts can also be done through strategic partnerships building and strengthening the HDP nexus.

Participants generally agreed that MDBs must go beyond the current allocation window approaches to integrate prevention measures upstream in their operations. Investing in prevention may not only mitigate the risk of violent conflict but may also promote resilience in the long run. However, concerns were raised about possible trade-offs, e.g. police and justice funding coming at the expense of health or education funding, even as security is vital for the basic functioning of any state.

As part of its ambition to play a leadership role on prevention financing in Africa, the AfDB flagged its introduction of a prevention envelope within its much in demand African Development Fund (concessional window) financing architecture aiming to consolidate peace and prevent crises and to anticipate spillover effects of the Sahelian crisis in west African coastal countries, which it hoped could serve as a basis for intra-MDB collaboration to increase impact at the regional level.

The right kinds of partnerships

Staying engaged, particularly in de facto or politically estranged situations, has meant MDBs increasingly working in partnership, i.e. with 'third parties' and through grants, rather than concessional loans. Whilst there was strong endorsement of the implementation partnership models with eventual phase out, detailed in the ICRC accompanying report, the need for upstream planning, partnership agreements and decentralised decision making to facilitate timely operations in situations of crisis, was also noted (ICRC, 2024).

The focus of much of the discussion was on how to diversify partnerships in ways that Do No Harm, how to help to de-risk sustained engagement and how not to further erode state capacity.

Participants noted the need to tailor provisions for partnerships according to purpose and the need and to differentiate between partners required for conducting analytical work – (e.g. political economy analysis) necessary for programme design and assessments needed for financial disbursements, and partnerships required for implementation, in situations where MDBs are unable to operate. In all cases, the choice of partnerships has to be tailored to the unique dynamics of each context.

Some participants questioned some of the traditional partnership arrangements with UN agencies and the evolving relationship with INGOs, noting that partnerships often emerge post-crisis, frequently dominated by UN agencies and INGOs. They insisted on the need to diversify partnerships with organisations with a large local footprint and to ensure partnership choices do not erode local capacity of local NGOs and state institutions. There was some discussion about the need for new partnerships with local NGOs, local banking institutions and municipal or sub-national governments, to enable MDBs to stay engaged.

Establishing new partnerships with local NGOs, local banking institutions and municipal or sub-national governments was proposed. Partnering with local banks was identified as particularly important in contexts where the expansion of public debt (a phenomenon in many FCV contexts, in particular LICs), was squeezing out private capital. Local banks prefer to hold public debt (bonds), with little bandwidth left for lending to local businesses. The importance of working with the private sector to encourage investment was also noted.

Participants insisted that MDB reform discussions need to include reference to diversification of partnerships as a strategy and approach to enabling MDBs to stay engaged in FCV. MDBs must proactively facilitate this process, rather than responding to crises and selecting partners ad hoc. Trust and risk play critical roles in shaping partnerships, with effective risk management mechanisms and framework agreements in place upstream to enable potential partners and MDBs to overcome impediments to successful collaboration.

The role of the state in defining the scope and facilitating partnership relations, where possible, is critical. Where the institutional and political environment permits, nationally owned and nationally led Country Platforms can serve as vehicles for generating effective partnerships for in FCV situations.

MDB funding has traditionally flowed through governments. But in FCV situations, the humanitarian footprint may be essential to sustaining service delivery, at least temporarily. MDBs prefer to get around complex issues arising in de facto situations, like sanctions and associated problems by increasingly channelling finance through Trust Funds or through third parties. This however can increase fragmentation and potentially undermine the capacity of FCV institutions to bounce back.

In countries where MDBs and other international actors have a longstanding presence, borrowers insist on the need to challenge the ‘lack of capacity’ justification that is often used to bypass government systems. They insist on the need to continue to prioritise working with and through national governments in ways that enable them to identify and determine how to address their own capacity needs. There is some frustration about the amount of increased humanitarian funding going to INGOs (on the part of borrowers) particularly in contexts of protracted crises, whilst project sizes and grants are decreasing leading to fragmentation.

Participants also expressed a desire for MDBs to ‘utilise’ the private sector more. The Africa Resilience Investment Accelerator (ARIA) was mentioned by speakers as an organisation that is helping to coordinate DFI engagements in the private sector of several FCV countries.

Effective partnerships in FCV response efforts requires a multifaceted approach to address policy reforms, diverse stakeholder engagement, risk management and strategic planning for transition and sustainability. Fostering collaborative partnerships that prioritise local ownership and sustainability can enhance MDB and DFI impact and contribute to long-term stability and development in fragile contexts.

Conclusions and takeaways

This learning brief highlights critical reflections on the three discussion points that participants grappled with during the roundtable: how to maintain a focus on fragility within the MDB reform process and create a conducive operating environment; what kinds of adaptations of financing tools, instruments, policies and operational focus are needed to stem the drivers of fragility and effectively respond to its consequences; and what sorts of partnerships are needed to enable MDBs to stay engaged in FCV contexts in ways that do no harm and further undermine fragile institutions. Five main takeaways are listed below and will set the stage for further reflection and convening.

Key takeaways

1 By 2030, some two thirds of extremely poor will be living in FCV contexts. FCV needs to be core business for all MDBs with a mandate to tackle poverty. The WBG and regional MDBs (like AfDB) have come a long way in demonstrating their commitment to FCV and to ‘staying engaged’. The increased number of FCV situations and in the number of de-facto governments within them, means the need for stepped up efforts across the WBG and MDB system to ensure FCV remains a political priority and that and an integral part of the MDB reform discussions and process.

2 Whilst FCV has been identified as a cross cutting priority across the six Global Challenge Programmes rather than a Global Challenge Programme in its own right, the plan must be to ensure that all Global Challenge Programmes are implemented in FCV. Participants considered whether this would be enough to incentivise collective action across the WBG rather than siloed approaches, or whether organisational solutions could be found that helped to harness and focus the Bank’s energies on FCV. Participants urged moving from talk to action. One way of doing this could be to identify indicators and a system of monitoring the implementation of Global Challenge Programmes in FCV countries and regions.

3 Tools and instruments for risk mitigation and operational flexibility already exist and should be used. Some participants insisted that a plethora of tools and instruments already exist, that potentially equip the WBG to operate effectively in FCV contexts. This

includes innovative financing mechanisms and co-financing arrangements to mitigate and manage risk. There was some debate about whether these tools were sufficiently known, flexible and systematically deployed, ensuring the quality of the WBG offer in FCV. Operating Policies e.g.OP7.30 (the trigger to suspend disbursement in the event of an unconstitutional access to power) were discussed, with participants split over whether they should be updated, or were sufficient, and did not necessarily prohibit the WBG's continued presence in de facto contexts (e.g. the Sahel).

4 More systematic monitoring, learning and dissemination internally about the application of these tools and instruments; and about the WBG footprint in FCV to distil what has worked or not, and greater investment in and incentives for country level staff to feed country level political economy analysis into decision making on disbursements could reduce the scope for ad hoc, politically driven decision-making about whether and when to withdraw operationally from a given situation.

5 Greater out-of-the box thinking on how to finance prevention (which could require criteria for accessing the Prevention and Resilience window of the FCV window and the need to define more precisely what the scope of financing prevention should look like (and whether to include financing for justice and policing) was also discussed.

6 Diverse partnerships with a range of actors, with different roles, will be key to enabling MDBs to stay engaged in ways that do not harm, can contribute to effective prevention and stem the drivers on conflict and fragility. Whilst UN institutions and INGOs will continue to be partners of choice, the country platform led by national governments was identified as critical to a partner centred approach to staying engaged that managed the tensions between third party implementers and the need to reinforce the leadership and institutional capacities of governments as partners of choice, where possible. Diverse partnerships should also include the MDB system as a whole, in particular, regional development banks whose regional presence, makes them well placed to play an important role in addressing spillover effects.

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