



**Responses some questions raised by the EU Issues paper
“EU response to situations of fragility in developing countries – engaging in difficult
environment for long-term development**

Summary

1. What are the “triggers” that identify in practice a situation of fragility or that such a situation has been positively resolved?

- Fragility is caused a set of factors and circumstances that develop over a longer period and usually in a gradual way. Hence, analysing “causes” and their impact may be more appropriate than identifying the “triggers” as the term “trigger” has the connotation of something happening almost instantaneously
- The lack of social inclusiveness is frequently an underlying cause of fragility and should be addressed more forcefully
- Sustainable institutional capacity (e.g. the capacity of electoral management bodies to successfully organise regular elections) and progress in the field of social inclusiveness are good indicators of the overcoming of situations of fragility
- In post-conflict countries, it may be pertinent to consider to what extent situations of social exclusion combine with former or residual conflict fault lines since the latter may point to failures or inadequacies of reintegration programmes or other problems in the transition from armed conflict to peace.
- Effective political participation of all major ethnic/religious/linguistic groups should be focused in particular, including the accessibility of public office to all such groups

2. What are, according to your experience, the differences between situations of crisis and situations of fragility?

- A situation of crisis is not necessarily negative. Situations of crisis are turning points. They reflect an accumulation of social tensions that demand some re-definition of the governance order or even the establishment of a new “social contract”. Outcomes may be positive or negative

3. To what extent capacity development aims and “human security” concerns are your main guiding objectives when engaging in situations of fragility? According to your experience, does the “responsibility to protect” doctrine help guide engagement in situations of fragility?

- International IDEA does not operate specifically with the notion of “**fragility**”. Yet, capacity development is seen as an important pillar in promoting and supporting **national ownership** of processes of democratic change – a crucial dimension of IDEA’s overall strategy. Capacity building is therefore seen as the objective of some of the most important and best known programmes of International IDEA – such as BRIDGE¹

¹ Building Resources in Democracy, Governance and Elections, see <http://www.bridge-project.org/>

- IDEA's recent publication "**Democracy, Conflict and Human Security – Pursuing Peace in the 21st Century**" analyses the linkage between the three domains mentioned in its title. The underlying premise is that our increasingly interdependent world requires a deeper understanding of the linkages between democracy, conflict and human security
- Conflict management (hence, the promotion of human security) is widely mainstreamed in IDEA's programmes and activities with a double objective in mind: **a)** to minimise the potentially violent side-effects that often accompany processes of democratic change, particularly in their early stages and **b)** to maximise the conflict management capacity of democratic institutions and processes.

4. What analytical tools does your organisation use to assess and monitor fragility? What factor do you look for?

- Strengthening of democratic institutions and processes represents one of the most important safeguards against situations leading to or perpetuating fragility.
- IDEA's State of Democracy Assessment Methodology (SoD) is a tool for internal actors to assess the quality of their democracy, and on the basis of the findings, define priorities for debate, dialogue and eventually, for a democratic reform agenda

5. In which way have support to democratic governance and institutional development worked to prevent fragility and to address it in its early stages

- By supporting the strengthening of democratic institutions and processes. This overall objective is to be achieved through a) the provision of knowledge resources; b) influencing policy development and supporting democratic reforms. To the extent such reforms help consolidating democratic governance they also contribute preventing and reducing/alleviating situations of fragility.

6. Should "fragility" be part of the aid allocation criteria, with a view to increasing or stabilising country allocations in situations of fragility?

- IDEA supports the EU advocacy of "remaining engaged even in the most difficult situations to prevent the emergence of failed states". The ways in which fragility is taken as a criterion for aid allocation should be context-sensitive and always based on an analysis of the sources and causes of fragility.
- As a rule, situations of fragility are addressed more effectively through holistic and long term engagement.

7. Which specific aspects of both the programming process and the procedural requirements to mobilize funds should be adapted to better respond to fragility? What is the approach of your organisation regarding this question?

- IDEA uses the concept of "conflict management" rather than "prevention of fragility". The two are very similar. IDEA has elaborated specific conflict management check-lists that cover all phases of the project cycle. Emphasis is placed on integrated and holistic approaches, more consistent with conflict prevention objectives.

8. What should be expected from EU partnerships (global/multilateral, regional/continental), including, in particular the joint EU-Africa strategy, when it comes to addressing fragility?

- In particular, the EU should listen to what its counterparts are saying and base any partnering exercise on sound assessment and analysis. There is a need to shift from a crisis-prevention to a conflict management perspective. Partners should be included in these exercises and whenever possible, drive them; political parties and

parliaments should be included as vehicles of vertical accountability. Regional organisations should be among the privileged partners.

Full text:

- **What are the “triggers” that identify in practice a situation of fragility, a situation of failure or that such a situation has been positively resolved?**

Situations of fragility may have different root causes such as mass poverty, extreme inequalities in income distribution, mass youth unemployment, lack of inclusiveness of key governance institutions, high levels of corruption etc. As a rule, the symptoms of fragility do not appear, nor do they disappear overnight. They usually evolve gradually and influence one another. In that sense, indeed, it may be more appropriate to speak of “**causes**” than of “**triggers**” of fragility as the term “**triggers**” has a connotation of something happening in the short term, almost instantaneously. Speaking of “causes” rather than “triggers” is also more likely to lead the debate on addressing such situations towards **more long term, preventive, pro-active** and **holistic** approaches and policies rather than ad-hoc reactive measures.

What “**causes**” a situation of fragility and enhances its adverse effects is often a combination of two or more of the above mentioned circumstances. Thus, the effects of poverty and extreme social inequality will be more likely to produce situations of fragility and instability if coupled with a lack of political inclusiveness, real or perceived. Such combined causes often tend to engender vicious circles whereby one of the components aggravates the effects of the other. If, for example, the lack of employment opportunities affects (or is perceived to affect) particularly one clearly identified segment of society (an ethnic, religious or linguistic group), the ensuing ethnic and political divide may hamper the search for sound solutions to improve governance and institutional delivery. Governance problems will tend to be read through “group identity lenses”, deepening communalism and ethnic divides and further increasing levels of fragility and propensity to violence.

In the identification of potential causes of fragility strong emphasis should be placed on social and political inclusiveness, “unbundling” this term and considering its concrete manifestations: inclusiveness of citizenship and political institutions (of the three branches of power), inclusiveness of education, effective minority protection, language policies, religious freedoms etc. The analysis should go beyond constitutional and legal provisions and focus also on current governance practices. A failure to manage social and ethnic diversity through an inclusive and democratic dialogue has triggered situations of fragility in a number of developing countries (from Côte d’Ivoire to Sri Lanka). Even in some “established democracies”, in spite of the incomparably higher response capacity of their institutions, the combined effects of social and ethnic exclusion have posed serious challenges and occasionally, caused outbursts of violence (as, according to many analysts, in the case of the French suburbia riots in the fall of 2005).

In post-conflict countries, it may be pertinent to consider to what extent situations of social exclusion tend to combine with former or residual conflict fault lines since the latter may point to failures or inadequacies of reintegration programmes or other problems in the transition from armed conflict to peace: e.g. too early a disengagement of the international community or inadequate efforts to switch from a “peace-keeping” to a longer-term and more diversified “peace-building” approach. In view of the latter it might be useful to include in the debate on the causes of “fragility” experts and advisors involved in the work of the UN Peace building Commission and the Peacebuilding Fund. The latter is particularly mandated to: “establish a crucial bridge between conflict and recovery at a time when other funding mechanisms may not yet be available (...) with the aim of minimizing the risk of a relapse into conflict”. Although both the Commission and the Fund are still in their early stages, significant work appears to have been done in supporting the countries of Burundi and Sierra Leone by building on lessons learned from early disengagement in the past in order to ensure they do not fall off the radar of external assistance while simultaneously ensuring that key priorities linked to the root causes of the conflict are dealt with from the early phases of planning and support.

In a number of post-conflict countries, the so called “structural” (poverty and inequality induced) violence has replaced the politically motivated one. Thus, continuous gang-wars have succeeded to the internal armed conflict in Guatemala while the dividing line between organised crime and guerrilla warfare has become totally blurred Colombia. In such situations, the analysis of the causes of fragility should be closely related to the assessment of the implementation of peace accords and to longer term peace-building efforts.

In line with the same considerations, indicators of a successful gradual overcoming of situations of fragility are also multiple and complex. They encompass both the consolidation of institutional capacity and effective progress on social inclusiveness.

In the area of institutional capacity it may be useful to consider the country’s capacity to organise and manage successfully the electoral cycle (existence of a credible and independent Electoral Management Body – EMB, experience of the latter), the extent to which the electoral system is responsive to the country’s specific context and the need for inclusiveness and participation etc. If the country is heading towards an important electoral event, the readiness of the key contenders to accept the result of the elections may definitely be taken as an important indicator of progress in the overcoming of a fragility situation. Likewise, if recent elections have failed to pave the road for a new government and serious suspicions and doubts remain about their fairness and transparency, this circumstance will definitely add up to the existing economic and social sources of fragility. Successfully held second and subsequent (third, fourth etc.) elections are generally considered to be a better indicator of the resolution of a situation of fragility than first elections as they reflect better both the capacity of local EMBs and the level of acceptance of political alternation.

Effective political participation of all major ethnic/religious/linguistic groups should be focused in particular, including the accessibility of public office to all such groups. In post conflict countries, successful integration of former combatants into the social tissue and, as appropriate, successful transformation of insurgent groups into mainstream – legal political parties or movements should be considered.

- **What are, according to your experience, the differences between situations of crisis and situations of fragility**

A situation of crisis should be understood as a set of circumstances or relationships that most or key social actors perceive as untenable and demanding urgent and radical change. In that sense, situations of crisis are turning points and their outcomes can be positive or negative, controlled or spontaneous, revolutionary or incremental. In any case, a situation of crisis will demand some re-definition of the basic settings of the social and governance order or even the establishment of a new “social contract”.

The term “crisis prevention” is often used in the language of the international community to define policies aiming at preventing violent conflict and destruction. This understanding of the term is quite widespread, though its semantic correctness is debatable. Under this understanding, situations of crisis would come close to situations of fragility. If the broader and original meaning of the term “crisis” is accepted, “crisis prevention” would not make much sense as a crisis may well be a necessary and desirable phase in the process of social change, a phase that raises levels of political awareness, mobilises national actors and catalyses “drivers of change”. In that sense, the crisis is also what “triggers” democracy (e.g. it is the crisis of the state command economy and the immobility of governance structures that triggered the “implosion” of communist regimes and the wave of democratisation in Central and Eastern Europe). From the perspective of international support to democracy-building the original meaning and use of the term “crisis” may be more appropriate and useful, particularly for the understanding of the dynamics of social change and the key role of national actors.

- **To what extent capacity development aims and “human security” concerns are your main guiding objectives when engaging in situations of fragility? According to your experience, does the “responsibility to protect” doctrine help guide engagement in situations of fragility?**

The strategy of International IDEA does not operate specifically with the notion of “**fragility**”. Yet, capacity development is seen as an important pillar in promoting and supporting **national ownership** of processes of democratic change – a crucial dimension of IDEA’s overall strategy. Capacity building is therefore seen as the objective of some of the most important and best known programmes developed and implemented by International IDEA: this is the

case, for example, with BRIDGE² – a comprehensive course and training curriculum on electoral processes, widely employed in a number of regions, including the Pacific Islands, Southern Africa, the South Caucasus and Francophone Africa. A new expanded version of BRIDGE is currently being developed and will be launched in 2007. Training courses and curricula are also being developed in the field of constitution-building and local democracy.

As to **human security concerns**, they have been and continue to be among the guiding objectives our organisation in two ways: as a specific object of analysis and as a cross-cutting criterion to be mainstreamed in IDEA's work on electoral processes, constitution building, political party regulation and gender.

IDEA's recent publication "**Democracy, Conflict and Human Security – Pursuing Peace in the 21st Century**" analyses the linkage between the three domains mentioned in its title. The underlying premise is that our increasingly interdependent world requires a deeper understanding of the linkages between democracy, conflict and human security. The book emphasises the role of democratic governance and democratic practice in protecting people from grave threats to their lives, safety from harm and violent conflict and empowerment against such social threats as disease or crime.

Furthermore the dimension of **conflict and conflict management (hence, the promotion of human security) is widely mainstreamed in IDEA's programmes** and activities with a double objective in mind: **a)** to minimise the potentially violent side-effects that often accompany processes of democratic change, particularly in their early stages and **b)** to maximise the conflict management capacity of democratic institutions and processes.

- **What analytical tools does your organisation use to assess and monitor fragility? What factor do you look for?**

The assumption of IDEA's Strategy is that the strengthening of democratic institutions and processes represents one of the most important safeguards against situations leading to or perpetuating fragility. Weak or dysfunctional institutions and major lacunae in democratic practice obviously constitute potential sources of instability and "fragility". Consequently monitoring and assessing the state and the quality of democratic governance can also be seen as a tool to assess potential sources of fragility.

IDEA's **State of Democracy Assessment Methodology (SoD)** is a tool for internal actors to assess the quality of their democracy, and on the basis of the findings, define priorities for debate, dialogue and eventually, for a democratic reform agenda. SoD assessments are particularly intended to raise awareness about how democracy works in practice as well as feed into evidence-based advocacy for policy reform. Essentially, democracy assessments based on the SoD methodology are intended to contribute to

² Building Resources in Democracy, Governance and Elections – for more information, please refer to International IDEA's website: www.idea.int

democratisation processes of countries being assessed-rather than pass a judgement on where a country stands in some externally defined democracy scale. The core element of the SoD methodology is a comprehensive questionnaire comprising four main sets of questions focusing respectively on the areas of a) Citizenship, Law and Rights; b) Representative and Accountable Government; c) Civil Society and Popular Participation and d) Democracy Beyond the State (international dimensions of democracy). The SoD methodology has been implemented to date in more than 20 countries from all continents – developed and developing alike. The methodology is currently being updated and will soon be published in the form of a new IDEA handbook.³

- **In which way have support to democratic governance and institutional development worked to prevent fragility and to address it in its early stages?**

The strengthening of democratic institutions and processes has been set as the main overall objective of International IDEA. This overall objective is to be achieved by aiming at three expected result: the provision of **knowledge resources, policy development** and **democratic reforms**. To the extent such reforms help consolidating democratic governance they also contribute preventing and reducing/alleviating “**situations of fragility**”.

Strong, effective and accountable democratic institutions are considered to be the ultimate tool for the peaceful long-term management of conflicting interests and claims of different social groups – hence, also for the **prevention of situations of fragility**. However, as amply evidenced, particularly in countries where democratic culture and institutions are weak or barely existent, pressure for reform, particularly if resisted by the authoritarian rulers in place, can also increase the propensity to violent conflict and, hence at least temporarily, contribute to situations of fragility. This is why, fragility prevention (in IDEA’s terminology “conflict management”) concerns remain important in the design and implementation of the organisation’s programmes and activities.

IDEA is supporting processes of democratic reform in three priority regions: **Africa and the Arab World, Latin America** and the **Asia-Pacific** region. Within these broad regions, three countries – **Nepal, Bolivia** and **Sudan** - are specifically focused by major field democracy support programmes. They are all expected to have an impact on the **reduction/alleviation of fragility situations in the countries concerned**.

In **Nepal**, IDEA has been active in assessing democracy through a participatory process which included expert assessments, surveys and

³ Detailed information available on IDEA’s website, SoD page:
<http://www.idea.int/democracy/index.cfm>

dialogues⁴. It has facilitated a broad public debate among key political actors (traditional political parties, Maoists and their proxies, civil society organisations and NGOs) on the main challenges facing the country. Thus, it has contributed, in a very early stage, to the linking of the peace process with a renewed constitutional process. IDEA-led surveys and the public debates it organised and catalysed, helped national actors to articulate their claims in terms of governance options, enabled the emergence of clearly expressed preferences and commitments of the majority of Nepali citizens in favour of democratic solutions and a negotiated end of the armed conflict, and also encouraged the initiation of the process of a constitutional reform in which IDEA remains fully engaged. The main objective of this engagement is to build the capacity of key political players in Nepal in order to foster an inclusive, participatory and peaceful constitutional process. The dialogue tool is used as a means of promoting consensus on constitutional issues such as electoral reforms, federalism and the devolution of power, affirmative action and systems of governance. Experiences from other countries, particularly from the global South, are being provided on the ways of political bargaining achieving agreement on constitutional options when differences threaten to upset the process.

Fragility continues to characterise the peace-building and democracy-building process in Nepal. However, the levels of fragility are expected to gradually diminish in parallel with: **a)** the strengthening of the capacity of political actors to grasp and discuss complex governance issues; **b)** the strengthening of the levels of confidence as the former guerrilla movement evolves towards becoming part of the country's mainstream political spectrum and **c)** the recovery of the delivery capacity of institutions in terms of providing basic services to the population.

In **Bolivia**, the 2005 elections and the referendum on autonomy followed by the establishment of a Constituent Assembly led, to a new political scenario. The constitutional process underway has underscored social and political fault lines between the resource-rich lowland departments and the largely poor highland regions of the country, as well as between the traditional political classes and parties and social movements. Those differences are threatening to undermine the Constituent Assembly process, making activities aimed at strengthening democracy in the Andean country all the more urgent.

International IDEA began working in Bolivia in 2004, supporting the sharing of experiences, first on the "gas referendum" and later on issues aimed at fostering broader dialogue and consensus building. Through these activities, alliances have also been established with the National Electoral Court, the Andean Community of Nations, the National Democratic Institute, the Club de Madrid and the UN Development Programme (UNDP).

With the Constitutional Assembly so crucial to the development of democracy in Bolivia, International IDEA teamed up with the UNDP beginning in 2005 for

⁴ An important part of these activities have been carried out within a project sponsored by the EU Rapid Reaction Mechanism

the “Strengthening Democracy” Project to support political parties and other groups in developing proposals for constitutional reform.

IDEA’s current engagement in Bolivia aims at providing technical assistance in the work of the Assembly, sharing international experiences on constitutional reform (particularly in a South-South framework) and, strengthening political organizations (support for political party self-assessment and planning processes, training for political party leaders and members, technical assistance in developing political plans and programmes, especially those related to development etc.).

The underlying assumption is that a higher level of consensus on constitutional drafts will lead to stronger popular support to the constitution and consequently, reduce the current deep social polarization that threatens to hamper both democratic practice and the country’s unity. Such higher levels of political consensus on key constitutional issues should also be seen as **reduced levels of “fragility”**.

In **Sudan**, the peace process set a stage for a comprehensive peace-building action. The comprehensive peace agreement is paving the way for a transition to multi-party democratic elections in 2009. The current period is crucial for creating the conditions to sustainable peace and democratic development. IDEA’s engagement in Sudan aims primarily at strengthening the political parties’ ability to participate in the elections as well as to perform their duties in the democratic arena and to articulate collective interests so as to address the challenges of post-war reconstruction and development. The underlying assumption is that responsible and well organised political parties, able to formulate political programmes and assume their role either in government or as opposition in the parliament represent key safeguards against the return to authoritarian rule and arbitrary decision-making which, as already elaborated, constitute important sources of social conflict and hence may lead to situations of fragility.

- **Should “fragility” be part of the aid allocation criteria, with a view to increasing or stabilising country allocations in situations of fragility?**

IDEA fully agrees with and strongly supports the EU position expressed in the Issues Paper that advocates “**remaining engaged even in the most difficult situations to prevent the emergence of failed states**”. The ways in which fragility is taken as a criterion for aid allocation should be context-sensitive and always based on an analysis of the sources and causes of fragility. Fragility may be caused by external and internal factors, natural or man made disasters, a legacy of violent conflict, a gross mismanagement of the economy etc. In-depth contextual analysis should reveal these causes and serve as a basis for aid allocation decisions.

As a rule, situations of fragility should advise that aid resources be allocated with an emphasis on programmes aiming at a **sustainable and long-term reduction of the levels of fragility**, e.g. through the strengthening of democratic governance institutions, capacity building of national policy actors

such as parliaments, political parties and civil society organisations, improving their conflict-management skills etc.

A typical example of a policy development that may contribute to preventing situations of fragility is the current switch of emphasis from external electoral observation towards the building of sustainable national election-management capacities.

IDEA's experience suggest that a long-term sustainable prevention and /or alleviation of situations of fragility is likely to be achieved through aid allocations that are part of a **long-term engagement and** that support **holistic and context specific programmes owned and driven by national actors**.

- **Which specific aspects of both the programming process and the procedural requirements to mobilize funds should be adapted to better respond to fragility? What is the approach of your organisation regarding this question?**

As already mentioned, IDEA uses the concept of “**conflict management**” rather than “**prevention of fragility**”. However, the two concepts seem to be overlapping to a considerable extent. **The need to continue incorporating the dimension of conflict management in IDEA's work has been emphasized by several IDEA member states.** With the aim of responding to that expectation, IDEA has elaborated specific check-lists that cover all phases of the project cycle from design to evaluation. In addition, it places a strong emphasis on integrated and holistic approaches considered to be more consistent with conflict prevention/fragility reduction objectives.

What should be expected from EU partnerships (global/multilateral, regional/continental), including, in particular the joint EU-Africa strategy, when it comes to addressing fragility?

In particular, the EU should listen to what its counterparts are saying and base any partnering exercise on sound assessment and analysis. There is a need to shift from a crisis-prevention to a conflict management perspective. Partners should be included in these exercises and whenever possible, drive them; political parties and parliaments should be included as vehicles of vertical accountability. Regional organisations should be among the privileged partners.