

Good Governance in Conflict-Affected LDCs: A Regional Perspective Towards a New Paradigm

I. Introduction

This study has been written with the express intention to support the growing realization among international and national peacebuilding and development practitioners of the centrality of good governance as a conduit for reconciliation and lasting stability. It also aims to strengthen the argument that good governance is a catalyst for sustainable development from a regional perspective.

Governance is a slippery concept that is often-times defined within a contextualized setting. Hence, it does not have a universally accepted definition that can be utilized across studies.¹ Various studies in the field of governance have distinguished between concepts such as security, administrative, political, social and economic forms of governance.² While such distinctions are useful at the micro level, in particular for the design of specific and suitable analytical or developmental interventions, this study examines governance from a macro perspective. Such a perspective suggests that a series of mutually reinforcing interacting variables form the driving force of a given governance deficit (or surplus)³ and that each one of them cannot be tackled in isolation, since they are bound to affect governance in every sector.⁴

This study produces preliminary evidence which suggests that the quality of governance matters in initiating and maintaining conflict (and its corollary, peace) as well as causing a relapse into violent confrontation in the Arab region. Recommendations are posited in order to tackle the issues causing conflict within the prism of governance, and the paper concludes with suggestions of a new governance paradigm for the Region's LDCs that also happen to be conflict-affected countries.

II. Revisiting governance and peacebuilding

The report of the United Nation's Secretary-General on peacebuilding (1992) on the immediate aftermath of conflict ascertains that a post-conflict period is subject to significant insecurity and political uncertainties.⁵ Yet, the end of hostilities generates high expectations for the provision of tangible political, social and economic gains. In post-conflict settings, the report lists the most frequently requested assistance support for the provision of basic services (among which include water, sanitation, health and primary education),⁶ economic revitalization and the restoration of core government functions, in particular basic public administration and public finance.⁷ Such provisions and functions cannot be met without sound governance practices or mechanisms.

In a background discussion document for the Seventh Global Forum on Reinventing Government entitled *The Challenges of Restoring Governance in Crisis and Post-Conflict Countries*, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA) and the United Nations Development

¹ For an encompassing review of definitions within various contexts, see ESCWA (2011a).

² See for example GTZ (2005).

³ In essence, this study argues that endogeneity should be strongly considered when discussing governance. To be more specific, for endogeneity to exist, it must be the case that a governance deficit is not only caused by an influencing variable (e.g. conflict), but equally that a governance deficit also, in turn influences the aforementioned variable.

⁴ Which is not to say that solutions to erasing governance deficit must tackle all the variables of interests simultaneously. Indeed, given their (admittedly perceived) endogenous relationships, steps to ameliorate governance deficits could be concentrated at any part of the 'chain'. See ESCWA (2011a) for further information.

⁵ Currently, there is no consensus on the definition of peacebuilding though former UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali defined peacebuilding expansively as "action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict" (UN, 1992, paragraph 21).

⁶ For a further discussion on what is defined as a basic public services see: UNDP (2009).

⁷ UN (2009, pp. 4 and 6).

Programme (UNDP) concluded that “Without effective governance institutions – an effective government, a strong private sector, and a vital civil society – little can be done to bring about peace, reconstruct war-torn countries, and stabilize political, economic, and social conditions.”⁸ Effective governance is therefore a necessary, albeit not the only, precursor to peace building.

But what is governance? The apparent principles factored into most definitions of governance are the exercise of authority, the selection and the management of government or a nation’s affairs, rule of law, provision of publicly supported goals and services including citizen’s safety, accountable public institutions, public participation and the rights and obligations of citizens. These are just to name a few key concepts for the emergence and conduct of capable, productive and efficient state institutions. Obviously these concepts are also necessary peacebuilding ingredients, and usually listed in the literature as part of the *modus operandi* catering to the post-conflict phase.

From a regional perspective, while many in the Arab region subscribe to notions of governance, a number of critical views have been noted. The most prominent of which is the criticism that “the notion [of normative governance] itself is ethnocentric and the political categories it mobilizes are weak. It is rooted in the specifically European idea of the political good, and is based on the liberal political model used in Western countries.”⁹ Furthermore, some believe that one of the shortcomings of a globalized notion of governance neglects the fact that the “advent of globalization, ushered in by the end of totalitarianism, and the advent of democracy should not be taken for granted,” while citing that “there is no proof that in “good governance” there is an inherent link between democracy and development. Some countries have managed their development despite their authoritarian political systems; inversely, liberal democracies in the West have often been accompanied by a phenomenon of exclusion.”¹⁰ Another view in the Arab region looks towards Islam for notion of good governance in the hope of finding a more relevant and applicable definition to the characteristics of the region. Various Islamic schools developed different notions about governance; most of these views converge on the four pillars in the Islamic perspective on socio-political organization, namely Shura (consultative, participatory process), justice, equality, and human dignity, as the basis of good governance.¹¹

Overall, the literature suggests that peacebuilding and governance should not be viewed in isolation when attempts are made to end or ameliorate conflict situations.¹² This is especially so given that such endeavours are rightly viewed as being gargantuan tasks, especially given the fact that policymakers and practitioners in conflict zones face severe resource constraints. This situation is further compounded by the lack of a universally agreed definition of governance that may pit policymakers and practitioners in debates on acceptable spheres of interests whilst the conditions on the ground deteriorate further.

Attempting to define good governance in conflict settings: Towards a new paradigm?

The literature does caution about the special circumstances and needs of conflict-affected countries. The utilization of governance models that have been successful in other parts of the world, without proper background research and understanding of local realities, should be discouraged. The OECD, in its *Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations*, cautions against

⁸ UN-DESA and UNDP (2007, pp. 1-2).

⁹ Ben Nefissa (2001).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Hashem (2007, p. 63).

¹² See ESCWA (2011a) for a brief exposition.

“International interventions [that] can inadvertently create societal divisions and worsen corruption and abuse, if they are not based on strong conflict and governance analysis, and designed with appropriate safeguards.”¹³ This is further highlighted in the following statement from the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex: “development practitioners need to close off their existing assumptions and mental models about governance and development. They mostly come from or live in OECD states; they are driven by normative values (rights, democracy, and poverty reduction) ... knowledge – about the law, or private investment, or public expenditure management, or delivery of water, health and education services – is entirely valid and indeed essential in certain contexts. But it can get in the way of attempts to understand what is really driving behavior and development outcomes in poor countries and fragile states.”¹⁴

Indeed, in conflict-afflicted countries, where the entirety of the population is seldom represented by the acting government or where governmental tax collection is interrupted and public funds often diverted, a government’s responsibility for its citizen is more difficult to demand and the moral obligation of public officials towards society gets diluted in a myriad of loyalties, rivalries, dysfunctional entities and personal interests. Furthermore, economic marginalization, high mortality rates and lack of employment are common realities of conflict afflicted countries, which only contribute to growing discontent in marginalized communities, delegitimizing governments, weakening state institutions and perpetuating the conflict cycle.

Blattman and Miguel (2010) suggest that civil war is more likely to happen in countries that are subject to negative income shocks and have weak state institutions. As a matter of fact, 40 per cent of post-conflict states slide back into conflict within 10 years.¹⁵ The effects of war seldom stay confined to the borders of conflict affected countries. The spillover effects range from waves of refugees, disease, lawlessness, illicit trades in drugs and arms,¹⁶ to the need of investing in military supplies and training. Consequently, the resources, political stability and social cohesion of countries that neighbor war-torn nations are often jeopardized by conflicts in their region.

The risk of renewed conflict in countries with good governance drops rapidly after the conflict has ended (see Fig. 1). In countries characterized by poor governance, this process takes much longer.¹⁷ Hence, improving governance is an important part in reducing conflict, including in the Arab region, and good governance will in turn decrease the likelihood of conflict.

Fig. 1. Estimated risk of conflict recurrence based on governance characteristics.

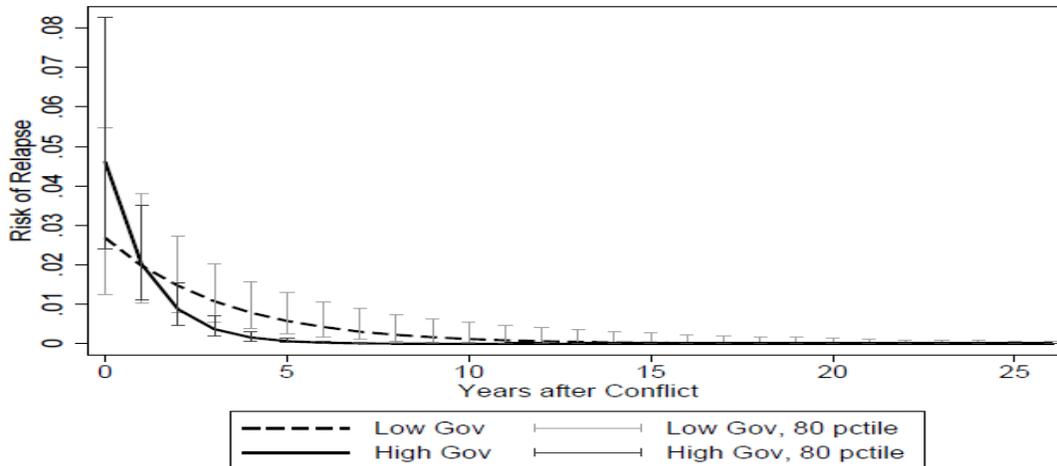
¹³ OECD (2007, p. 1).

¹⁴ IDS (2010, p. 2).

¹⁵ Elbadawi *et al.*, (2007, p. 179).

¹⁶ Blattman and Miguel (2010, p. 4).

¹⁷ ESCWA (2011a).



Source: ESCWA (2011a)

At the same time, **conflicts lead to steady erosion of the quality of governance.**¹⁸ Regimes become much more repressive during times of conflict and when faced with international threats, and this effect lingers long after the conflict has ended. This in turn increases the risk of conflict relapse. In the Arab region, armed conflict and political tension have devastating effects due to the region's poor governance records. It is often argued that Arab countries' governance quality is lower than expected for the countries' income levels.¹⁹ In conflict-affected Arab countries, occupation, armed conflict or continued political polarizations have significantly undermined state institutions' ability to deliver basic services. Such circumstances have forced citizens to provide for their own needs through patronage networks or other private means. Those that are able to meet them do so, increasing the gap between those who can afford private services and those who depend on inefficient governments for essential services, leaving poor populations even more vulnerable than they were prior to the conflict. This message is reinforced in ESCWA (2011a, p. 6), which notes that ESCWA member conflict-affected countries score relatively poorly compared to other member countries with respect to a myriad of government indicators utilized in their study.

Governance, Conflict and ESCWA LDCs: Sudan²⁰ and Yemen

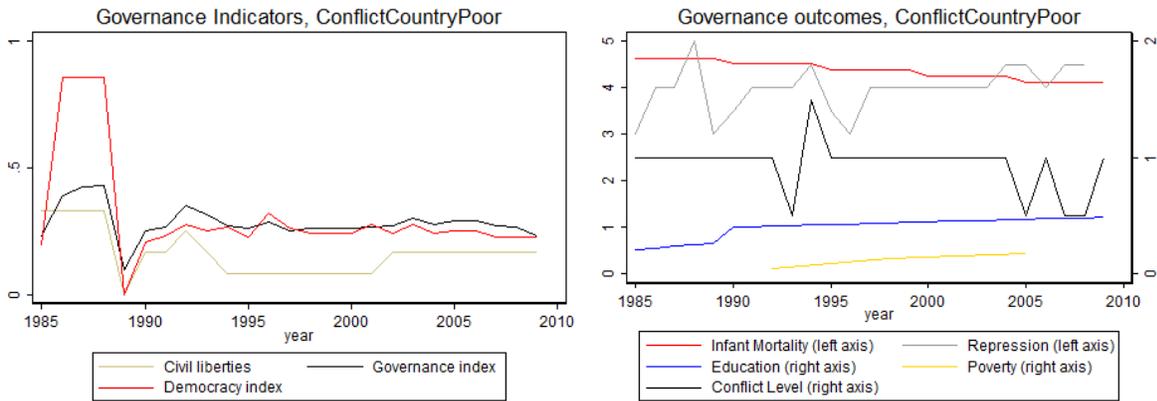
Given that most conflict countries are also lower income countries, this sub-section takes a brief look at the ESCWA region's two LDCs, Sudan and Yemen. According to ESCWA (2011a, pp. 24-5), Sudan stands out as one of the most war-ravaged countries in the region and the world. Since 1960, it has been almost continuously in conflict, most of the time in high-intensity wars, and recently witnessed, as a partial outcome of conflict the secession of South Sudan. Yemen is also witness to intermitted conflicts, and is at present suffering from internal conflicts that show signs of deteriorating further.

¹⁸ Ibid. Note that as this paper argues for the consideration of endogenous relationships, the steady decline of governance quality can also lead to conflict.

¹⁹ The Arab region in this specific situation encompasses Both ESCWA Arab and non-ESCWA Arab countries. See the World Bank (2003, p. 58) for more information. ESCWA (2011a, p. 20) makes a similar argument when comparing governance in the ESCWA region relative to comparable developing countries.

²⁰ Sudan here refers to the pre-secession state since data were collected until 2010.

Figure 2: Governance and conflict indicators – Sudan and Yemen



Source: ESCWA 2011a, p. 24.

Figure 2 above suggests that governance in Sudan and Yemen is far from levels exhibited by the bulk of countries worldwide, with high levels of conflict. Nevertheless, their performance relative to each other is somewhat different. Indicators show that Sudan ranks among the poorest in the region in terms of governance. It has been ruled in an autocratic manner since 1989. Corruption is widespread and the rule of law is weakly applied. In spite of decades of conflict and bad governance, Sudan has seen some improvement in secondary education and infant mortality rates (as is the case for most developing countries).

In unreported results, Yemen, on the other hand, possess governance indicators that are superior to Iraq, the oPt and Sudan.²¹ The country conducts both parliamentary and presidential elections, although the current political situation is in significant flux. In contrast to many other states in the region, the military has been little involved in politics. Significant divisions within the armed forces have rendered their support to the uprising. Regardless of how the uprising will affect Yemen, the country has a history where overall rule of law, bureaucratic quality and corruption levels are worse than the region’s average.

Turning to the broad development indicators, there has been progress, despite Yemen remaining the poorest country in the region. The proportion of the population with secondary education still is only around 60 per cent, but this is up from around 30 per cent in 1970. Infant mortality rates are similarly still high, but have declined consistently throughout the period under investigation.

Overall, the situation of ESCWA’s two LDCs with regard to governance and conflict remain bleak, though improvements are evident. Nevertheless, their fragility to conflict (as witnessed currently in Yemen) leaves their governance and developmental growth unstable and significantly affected by external and internal shocks.

Fragile peace: The nexus between governance deficit and conflict relapse

As previously mentioned, the common patterns of local conflict and political tensions in the Arab region are thought to play a significant role in widening the governance deficit.²² Most conflicts in this part of the world are interlinked and protracted.²³ Significantly, most of these conflicts are discontinuous. Battles

²¹ The first two being conflict countries like Yemen but which are categorized as being middle income countries.

²² ESCWA (2011a).

²³ Ibid and ESCWA (2011).

and violent confrontations take place intermittently, while times of apparent stability are plagued by constant political tensions and occasional violence, which are interrupted by sporadic periods of heightened clashes. Characteristic of such a predominant pattern are the short-lived political accommodations or peace deals that are enacted. However, short lived political accommodations are widening the governance deficit in conflict affected countries, in particular during the immediate post-conflict phase, and strengthening the very destructive ramifications of conflict.²⁴

The above-mentioned dynamics are confirmed in a study on MDG achievements in the ESCWA region,²⁵ according to which econometric estimates indicate that (i) in an ESCWA country, on average, one additional year of civil war causes a greater decline in per-capita GDP than in non-ESCWA countries over a five year period, (ii) most of the adverse effect of civil and interstate wars on income is transmitted through weaker institutions, international trade disruption, and decline in investment and physical capital accumulation (across regions, not just the ESCWA region), and (iii) the effect of wars on non-income dimensions of development is also significant. For the average ESCWA country, one additional year of civil war today would cause development indicators to return to the levels of 5 to 10 years ago, and one additional year of civil war reduces the quality of institutions by 0.7 points on a scale from 1 to 10. To get a sense of the size of this impact, 0.7 points correspond to the difference in institutional quality that exists between India and Ivory Coast.²⁶

Undoubtedly, the primary and immediate objective of any peacemaking initiative is to put an end to conflict and bloodshed and prevent the immediate relapse into violent confrontations. Mediators go through great pains to ensure the holding of ceasefires and securing the participation of all combatants in peace negotiations that would ideally result in a political settlement and subsequently durable peace. However, political solutions or peace processes that end wars, particularly civil wars, in the ESCWA region have not been able to tackle the root causes of conflict or create a durable reconciliation process. Nor have they been able to conduct effective peacebuilding initiatives, in terms of building solid, capable, credible, legitimate and efficient state institutions. While peace brokers succeed in putting an end to the bloodshed, even for long months and years, due to temporary political accommodations, a sense of false peace and stability is always beleaguered by political tensions and weak state institutions incapable of resolving resounding national differences.²⁷ The fragility of the institutions is exacerbated by the marginalization of certain groups during the political accommodations phase. Excluded leaders will use the unmet needs of their groups to mobilize them and hence destabilize the institutions that excluded them in the first place.²⁸ Peace and stability are thus hostage to domestic forces and the geopolitics or power politics. Should these factors combine, as they tend to, they do so at the expense of stability, peace and development.

Over the last few decades, these aforementioned elements have combined to form a vicious cycle of conflict and governance deficit. Specifically, the trend has been that conflict is often resolved through the attainment of some sort of elite-led political accommodations or temporary political settlements. Under such circumstances, what usually transpires is the emergence of a temporary national political system dictated one way or the other by all actors, national, regional or international, that were initially parties to a conflict. Significantly, these temporary political systems have a direct bearing on the institutional set up

²⁴ ESCWA (2011a).

²⁵ Excluding the oPt.

²⁶ ESCWA (2011).

²⁷ ESCWA (2011a).

²⁸ Anten (2009).

of state institutions, which are primarily designed to accommodate power sharing arrangements and facilitate the division of state resources among the leadership of all former combatants. Access to power and revenue is utilized by the post-conflict emerging ruling elite to sustain their power bases and popular support. Obviously, such a setting prevents the emergence of a capable, legitimate and efficient state, able to deliver core government functions, accountable to citizens or representative of all groups. The dynamics put in place only results in the emergence of a weak, police state that lacks transparency and accountability and is hostage to geopolitical pressures, namely regional and international struggles that often result in proxy and civil wars. The ultimate result is often a relapse into conflict.²⁹

Additionally, countries in the ESCWA region suffer from conflict in different ways: some are directly affected by conflict (destruction of infrastructure, refugees, etc.), while their neighbors suffer from immediate spillover effects (such as hosting conflict driven displaced persons, brain drain, focus on security, etc.). It could also be argued that those countries that are not in the proximity of conflict-affected areas are also indirectly affected by the spillover effects of conflict (soaring budgets for defense spending, long periods of declared state of emergency, brain drain, etc.). Furthermore, the effects of conflict have various socio-economic and political ramifications. As such, a 'one size fits all' regional approach to governance cannot be effective. Since each country suffers from a different combination of conflict related consequences, individualized governance strategies and priorities have thus far failed to effectively tackle said issues at the national level.

History and current trends in conflict-affected countries in the region have shown that governance practices resulting from political accommodations, peace deals or temporary political settlement have never led to sustainable peace, reconciliation and development; this in spite of the fact that ample lip service is paid to the adoption and mainstreaming of good governance practices within national institutions and civil society. These are usually articulated in cabinet declarations, constitutions or bylaws of various public administrations and institutions. Nevertheless, what is articulated and proclaimed are at times, completely different in reality.

Indeed, conflict-affected countries in the Arab region suffer from a deficit between *de jure* governance practices (i.e. on the books) and *de facto* governance practices (i.e. their implementation).³⁰ These deficits are characterized by numerous interacting variables. These variables are mutually reinforcing and interacting because they all affect the quality of governance; they negatively contribute towards sustaining one another and the limits between them are blurry. Also their relationship to governance is not only one of causality, since they can also be the consequence of sustained governance malpractice. ESCWA's (2011a) study on *Governance and Conflict Relapse* identifies four major variables worthy of investigation. First, lack of political will by the ruling elites to strengthen state institutions often under the justification of security related concerns, or due to the lack of incentives among ruling elites including vested economic interests, or the need to maintain patronage networks for retaining political influence; second, weak state structure that marginalizes segments of the population (be them rural communities, ethnic/confessional groups, women, or youth) and is unable to address socio-economic grievances of its citizens or resolve internal disputes (this includes the lack of capacity within the public sector to deliver essential services or perform the core functions of government); third, a public discourse or a general culture that does not prioritize good governance and civic values such as accountability, transparency, integrity or participation in the public domain has detrimental consequences on governance; and fourth,

²⁹ ESCWA (2011a).

³⁰ Global Integrity (2009, p. 1).

external factors, whether regional or international that greatly influence national political, security and socio-economic dynamics in conflict affected countries of the Arab region. This ranges from fermenting proxy wars to full-fledged occupation.

III. Towards a new good governance paradigm in conflict settings

The principles factored into most definitions of governance, such as the rule of law or accountable public institutions are almost certainly neither realizable in conflict affected countries nor do they serve to break the vicious cycle of conflict relapse. This is simply due to the realities dictated by the multitude of dynamics unleashed by interacting variables, which have rendered state institutions ineffective and too weak to change the status quo or the pattern of conflict relapse. Thus, the principles of good governance solely and strictly focussed on the state and its institutions cannot apply in conflict settings. What is required is for a governance paradigm for countries vulnerable to conflict (as opposed to an emphasis on the post-conflict phase exclusively) that would serve to support strategies for the attainment of governance models pronounced in the literature.

The starting point for such a paradigm is the argument that sustainable peace, reconciliation and development are unrealizable without sound governance practices within the public sector, whose role in a conflict, post-conflict or pre-conflict phase must be an embedded resilience and ability to provide and maintain the infrastructure, essential services, and security of citizens and offer programs and policies necessary for the achievement of national development goals. At the same time, the public sector must also be positioned to mitigate if not resolve the structural root causes of conflict. In other words, enabling the public sector charged with essential service provision should be the primary focus of local, national and international stakeholders. Their leading objective should be the mainstreaming of good governance practices, enhancing technical capacity, establishing the necessary supporting infrastructure and administrative legislation and establishing mechanisms to shield institutions from geopolitical fluctuations.

Effective governance mechanisms within public service providers, coupled with the discharge of their respective mandates, will enhance peacebuilding efforts, such as “establishing or re-establishing the network of social relations that facilitate the peaceful resolution of a conflict.”³¹ It will significantly contribute to the “fermentation” of reconciliation processes that must be set to encompass the whole nation, with its different ethno-religious communities or groups of conflicting political ideologies and loyalties. It is also important to consider that working on recovery, through essential service provision, and reconciliation in a parallel fashion serves to assist in the attainment of some common political ground and national purpose among the diverging ruling elite, bridge the differences among divided communities, enhance popular trust in state institutions, ferment national identity and legitimacy to the emerging political system since all groups benefit from them. Such a process would also strengthen national institutions’ ability to address political fractures that could otherwise translate into conflict.

This begets the question of how to strengthen essential service delivery institutions amidst conflict. As noted above, the argument made here calls for a new paradigm, namely mainstreaming good governance practices within the essential service sector as a catalyst for peacebuilding. Within this context, this paper proposes that good governance in conflict settings denotes the optimal utilization of resources by all

³¹ Mehler and Ribaux (2000, p. 33).

stakeholders for the delivery of essential services to all the civilian population, thereby mitigating the impact of conflict on development and strengthening peacebuilding efforts.

However, this approach can be criticized for being too technocratic because of an over emphasis on technical and economic questions, and the failure to address that part of the state which is meant to mediate between political interests, or “the struggle over ideas”.³² By ignoring the political aspects of governance, the so called “technical” programs are never really applicable and therefore do not produce the expected results. Therefore, any governance initiative needs to include a political process not only to ensure solid institutions, but also to generate the political will to build the necessary institutions that sustain peace or at least cater to the basic needs of the population.

Conflict and Governance through a Regional Lens

As research over the last two decades along with the World Development Report (WDR) 2011 have shown, security, governance, and development discourses are closely inter-linked. However, actions and policies taken by the whole spectrum of relevant stakeholders are not integrated accordingly. Economic shocks, unemployment, volatile food prices, horizontal inequalities, external pressures contribute to increase the risks of violence and protracted fragility. The current international governance mechanisms do not seem to grasp the potential and complex correlations between all these variables.

Compared to the past, conflicts have shifted increasingly toward being intra-state (i.e. civil war) with strong regional spillover effects, many of which are usually characterized by different forms of low intensity violence, but which are ready to erupt and suddenly scale up. Global governance mechanisms have difficulty in addressing the latter due to the inherent difficulty in dealing with protracted crises that require constant preventive and coordinated efforts to manage and gradually weaken their instigating factors. Different political interests, approaches, and parallel diplomatic, security, and development-sponsored activities, reflected in fragmented institutional mechanisms currently in place at the global scale, compound the problem.

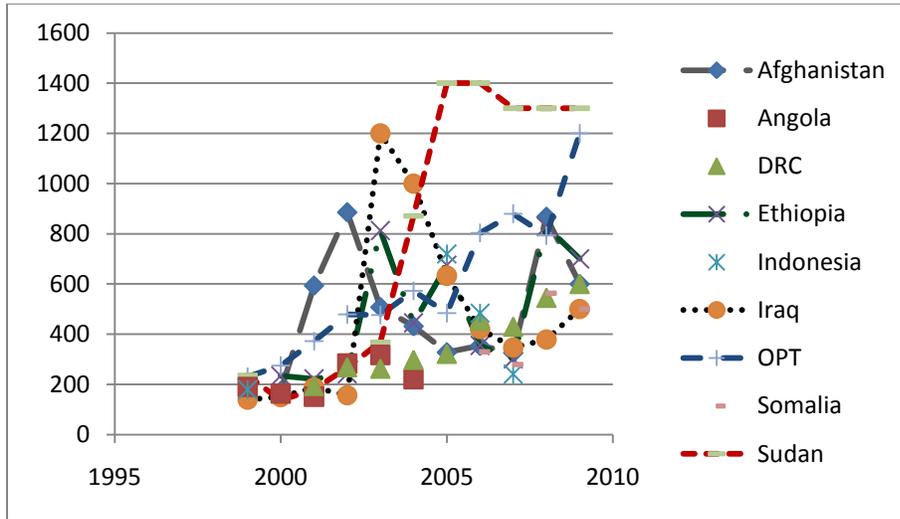
External assistance that can ameliorate or end intra-state conflict tend to be presented and/or utilized inefficiently. This is especially so with regard to the allocation and distribution of aid. Aid remains highly fragmented, volatile, and short-term focused in the very same countries that need it most and at length (i.e. conflict-affected LDCs). Aid still does not show suitable timing, sequencing, and prioritization of reforms in many conflict-related contexts which inhibit the development of partnership and trust between donors and recipients and hinder flexibility and continuous adaptation.³³ Figures 3 and 4 below show how worldwide aid but also aid originating from the region is volatile and that, despite aid volatility, international humanitarian aid has particularly focused on the conflict-affected Arab countries with four³⁴ of them consistently ranking in the top 10 aid recipients in the last decade.

³² Santiso (2001).

³³ Heller et al. (2006).

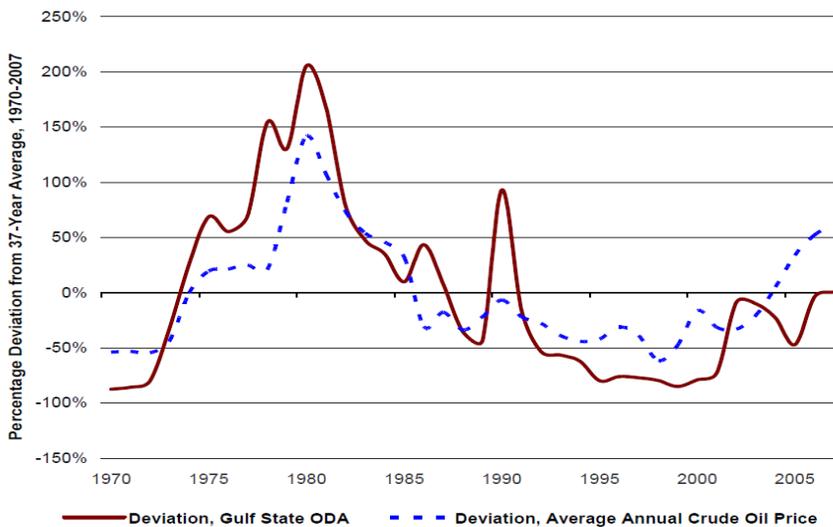
³⁴ Three being ESCWA countries (Iraq, oPt and Sudan) with the fourth being Somalia.

Fig. 3. Top ten recipients of humanitarian assistance from DAC donors.



Source: OECD-DAC database accessed on May 9, 2011.

Fig. 4. Deviation of Gulf state ODA and crude oil price from 1970–2007 average.



Sources: OECD 'Stats', Query Wizard on International Development Statistics, <http://stats.oecd.org/qwids/>; oil prices were calculated from monthly data from the International Monetary Fund, <http://www.imf.org>.

Significantly, international assistance needs to be a concerted-coordinated effort with a long term commitment by donors and development practitioners. Building effective and efficient state institutions that are in line with a national development vision and aspirations is a long-term process. Moreover,

technical support needs to ensure the development of indigenous good governance practices that are tailored to local needs and aspirations.³⁵

A middle way that combines the needed elements of the big-scale or standardized approach with the small-scale or contextual one is increasingly sought in the emergency and development aid arena.³⁶ A regional approach to addressing the vicious circle of conflict and governance deficit can help strike such a balance. For long time, the governance discourse has been seen as an instrument for the application of international or Western values and principles to the developing world resulting too often in façade reforms in the national legal frameworks. But governance is multi-faceted and although its principles of transparency, inclusivity, and accountability are universal, each country or region may apply them differently without jeopardizing these very same principles. Regional institutions can bridge the perceived distance between universal concepts and their practical implementation.

A holistic regional approach can also benefit a more integrated approach to development policies and programs where these are not fragmented at project levels and compartmentalized by donor, implementing agency, or ministry, with their respective bureaucratic, procurement, and financial procedures. A regional approach may first help establish regional development priorities which are harmonized with the national ones and, secondly, create a programmatic platform for state-building and institution-building in critical areas such as criminal investigations, security sector reform, police and justice reform, infrastructure, finance, food security, land policy, climate change adaptation, migration, trade and cross-border cooperation, institutionalized early warning systems to prevent emerging stresses, where countries sharing similar cultures, history, geography, can support each other more consistently, proactively, and effectively.

Regional support initiatives could be considered in order to strengthen governance mechanisms particularly addressed to natural-resource-based economies. Initiatives such as Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) and Publish What You Pay (PWYP) could help the regional public opinion and policy makers advocate greater revenue and expenditure transparency.

Examples of regional capacity-building and mediation activities are slowly increasing and include experiences from ASEAN and the African Union-ECOWAS. In the Caribbean, there are experiences of shared court systems among its countries, while, in West Africa, central banks have provided capacity buildings to their neighboring homologous.

Any institutional change in a fragile context creates winners and losers. This simple fact is reflected in complex webs of push and pull factors affecting security as well as economic policy of a country or a region. A reinvigorated regional approach may help institutional reforms in such contexts. Neighbouring countries have high stakes in favor of stability and gradual institutional reforms since they are the first to pay the consequences of conflict spillovers. The uprisings spreading throughout the Arab region are a testimony of that.

As seen in recent civil uprisings in the wider Arab world, despite of the threat of violence, citizens will voice their opposition when their needs are not met, the corruption is too flagrant and the economic gains

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Pritchett and de Weijer (2010).

of development are not distributed.³⁷ These events have arisen out of necessity, despair and a desire to topple the exiting government without a strategic vision for the future.³⁸ For instance, the fact that the movement in Egypt lacked a specific, identifiable leader brought together people from a diverse religious, ideological, generational and economic background, as well as the traditional opposition.³⁹ However, the challenge for civil society in the Arab region will be to translate popular demands for freedom, equality and democracy into a viable governance reform and a national development plan.

³⁷ Back in 2008, the unavailability of basic food products such as bread, rice, sugar and cooking oil, coupled with high food prices were already leading many to protest against the Egyptian government and resort to violent tactics (Al Jazeera, 2008).

³⁸ A form of formidable pressure and agent of public mobilization in these events was the (regional) media. Access to information through satellite networks and the internet have gradually and significantly curtailed governments' ability to monopolize information. External and internal influences through the media will undoubtedly continue, reaching an increasing proportion of the population, altering expectations and, most significantly, holding their leaders accountable, which in turn will have momentous bearing on the popular base, credibility and legitimacy of any leader or decision maker for no one is immune to social media and the satellite networks. These tools provide tremendous means to work towards rewarding or exposing the party, the leader or the group's role in facilitating or hampering the delivery of essential services to all segments of the population. In other words, decision makers will increasingly look at essential service delivery as either a source of political capital or bankruptcy.

³⁹ ICG (2011, p. ii).

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