

## Issues Paper

### “EU response to situations of fragility in developing countries”

#### Inputs by the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD)

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#### Background

1. The Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) supports joint initiatives of political parties in young democracies to improve the political system in their country. The NIMD also supports the institutional development of political parties at a strictly impartial basis, helps them develop party programmes and assists them in efforts to enhance relations with civil society organization and the media. In this work political parties learn *‘to disagree with each other without becoming disagreeable’*. By facilitating dialogues among the stakeholders across the political spectrum at a peer basis, the NIMD contributes to increasing levels of trust as well as to the mobilization of political will to implement needed reforms to institutionalize democratic practices.
2. In the last two years NIMD has received numerous requests from political parties, governments and international organisations to assist the strengthening of democratic processes and political party development in countries recently resurrected from violent internal or regional conflicts, among them Afghanistan, Burundi, Uganda, Togo and Ivory Coast. In view of the tense security situation, the entrenched political instability, and the low level of trust between political stakeholders, the NIMD has reflected on a strategy to support the strengthening of the multiparty system and the development of democratic political parties in this type of countries.
3. On the basis of 1) a thorough desk-study 2) several missions to Burundi and Afghanistan 3) a number of expert meetings and 4) the lessons learned in regular NIMD programme countries since the start of its work in 2000, the NIMD has developed a Political Party Assistance in Post-conflict Societies Strategy.<sup>1</sup> The “Ten Principles for good donor engagement in fragile states and situations” of the OECD/DAC Fragile States Group are reflected in this NIMD Strategy. The main findings of this analysis and policy development process are included in this contribution. Please refer to Annexes I and II for more detailed information on the NIMD strategy.

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<sup>1</sup> The NIMD Working Paper “Democracy and Political Party Assistance in Post-Conflict Societies” is due in September 2007 and will be published on the NIMD website: [www.nimd.org](http://www.nimd.org). A draft version of this paper as well as further information on specific NIMD country programmes can be provided on request.

## Issues for discussion

### I. Identifying fragility

#### 4. *The notion of fragile states*

The notion of fragile states is related to the degree in which nation and state building in a specific country and defined population have progressed. A state can be considered fragile when it lacks the essential capacity, resources, legitimacy and/or political will to provide basic services to the population, and faces difficulties in imposing order and in monopolising the use of legitimate violence.

#### 5. *Difference between crisis and fragility*

A situation of crisis differs from a situation of fragility in the sense that a *crisis* results in a breakdown of essential state capacity, and the threat of imminent violent conflict that this involves. A situation of crisis requires an urgent, comprehensive and multifaceted response from partners. A situation of *fragility* is one that exists either before a crisis, when specific targeted actions could and should be initiated to redress and heal the fragility, or after a crisis when there is a strong need for sustained attention to the “default lines”, for accompanying measures of reconstruction, and protecting devices to avoid any temptation or risk of a fall back in to past problems.

#### 6. *Pre- and post-conflict fragility*

A distinction should be made between situations of pre-conflict and post-conflict fragility. For analytical purposes conflict could be described as a cyclical process in which phases of (relative) peace and stability, unstable peace or fragility, crisis and war succeed each other. Conflict resolution measures can therefore at the same time be considered as (renewed) conflict prevention measures. This implies first of all that long-term donor commitments are needed in order to help fragile states to break the conflict cycle. In addition, the NIMD considers it to be important for political party support that the peace agreement lays sufficiently solid foundations for democratic transition and state building processes.

#### 7. *Symptoms of state fragility*

Symptoms or ‘triggers’ of state fragility are present at an early stage, before a crisis or open conflict has become manifest, when most actors do not sufficiently pay attention to the consequences of some - at that time - seemingly not crucial alterations in the political, social, military or economic fabric of a society and a state. These symptoms relate to declining levels of effective statehood, manifesting itself in an erosion of the rule of law, violations of human rights, flawed electoral processes, declining societal cohesion and increased tensions between groups in society, declining levels of governance and service delivery to the population, declining confidence and trust of the citizenry in state institutions, increasing vulnerability to external political and economic forces and disruptions of the economic fabric.

## II. Remaining engaged: reasons and objectives

8. ***Stability and democracy are mutually reinforcing long-term objectives***

It has been established by experience that the best way out of fragility into a normal, stable, functioning state and society is directly linked to the promotion of accountable and democratic governance and restored, functioning open institutions. Democratization is always a politically-contentious process and this is particularly true in volatile post-conflict settings. Without strong political and state institutions, some of its components (such as elections and political party competition) can raise tensions or, in extreme cases, lead to renewed conflict. However, this does not alter the fact that the institutionalization of a multiparty system is a necessary step towards the creation of a stable democratic political system, which is widely considered to be conducive to development, the protection of human rights and peaceful conflict prevention.
9. ***The missing link in democracy promotion in fragile states***

Political party development and multiparty dialogue play a key role in the stabilization and democratization of post-conflict societies. Despite their major shortcomings, political parties need to fulfil their crucial role in managing conflict, representing the interests of the population, and promoting stable and predictable politics as quickly as possible. This was underlined by the former president of Tanzania, Benjamin Mkapa, who recently stated: “*the single most important cause of the conflicts on the African continent is the lack of trust between political parties*”. Whereas international donor agencies provide substantial support to elections, civil society development, state-building and other aspects of post-conflict democratization, political party assistance has often remained limited. International donors seeking to support the democratic transition of fragile (post-conflict) states cannot but engage with political parties (either directly or through intermediary institutions like NIMD); political parties are often part of the problem, but in any case part of the solution as well.
10. ***A gradual approach instead of democratic sequentialism***

A gradual approach for introducing democratization and political party competition is needed in fragile, post-conflict societies. However, gradualism does not imply deferral; prescribing the deferral of democracy – and consequently the prolongation of authoritarian rule and/or ineffective statehood– makes little sense. Authoritarian rule is in itself often an impediment in building a well-functioning state and the establishment of the rule of law needed for a conducive environment for sustainable development. Often the emphasis lies on stability and reconstruction first, democracy later. This approach frequently entrenches the very political-economic interests which are the causes of conflict in the first place. Rather than sequencing approaches, successful international cooperation ought to be comprehensive by balancing the three interlinked objectives of democracy, security and development in an overall peace building agenda.
11. ***Long-term engagements required***

Democratic state and nation building are long-term processes and long-term engagements are therefore needed. Long-term strategic planning needs to be

reconciled with flexibility and adaptability in the implementation of programmes on the ground.

12. ***Accepting risks***

Any actor engaged in situation of state fragility should be willing to accept a relatively high level of risk. A risk assessment should not only take account of physical risks for an organization's personnel, but also of the costs for the aid organization and its local partners if the process derails completely. For the NIMD, its willingness to accept risks implies a responsibility for its staff on the ground to actively and continuously manage, monitor and evaluate the process and to have adequate contingency plans in case things do go wrong.

**III. Reducing the risk of fragility: preventive approaches**

13. ***Donor coordination***

Given the complexity of democratization processes in fragile, post-conflict countries and the variety of actors and agendas involved in, an effective coordination between donors is the key to successful engagement. Exchange of information on a structural basis is the bottom line. To start with, a mapping of international actors and the type of work they did or actually are doing is a pre-condition in order to prevent duplications and so-called catering by local partners and to make optimal use of each own tools and resources. The NIMD always seeks to integrate its assistance in a broader reconstruction and democratization agenda in which other international and local organizations have a share. Trust funds can contribute to donor coordination and policy coherence (see also point 25).

15. ***Ownership of the national stakeholders***

Stakeholders addressing fragility have been most successful when national state actors as well as non state actors have been associated with the efforts and the analysis of the situation. For the NIMD the principle of ownership is crucial and nonnegotiable with regard to the analysis of the existing situation and the identification of issues and priorities for action. To this end the NIMD has developed a methodology – the so-called “interactive assessment” - in order to enable political parties to jointly draw the picture of the state of affairs in their country and to develop a strategy and priority framework for improvement.<sup>2</sup>

The genuine willingness of the respective actors to play a constructive role in the redress of the situation is to be measured in the level of commitment and delivery on a “national agenda” to which they all should be required to subscribe. As most of the time, the internal (national) stakeholders are still in a difficult mental state to fully accept and endorse the commitments brokered in conjunction with the foreign partners, these partners need to remain committed and involved too in the post agreement phase and be prepared to act as co-guarantors for those arrangements.

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<sup>2</sup> The NIMD brochure “Political Institutions Interactive Assessment” can be downloaded from the NIMD website: [www.nimd.org](http://www.nimd.org)

14. ***Analysis and understanding***

When articulating responses to address fragility, a good understanding of the context in which the process of democratization must take place and the phase in which the country finds itself is critical. In order to minimise the risk of generating counterproductive outcomes, there is always a need to focus on the historical, social and cultural structures of a specific country. In situations of fragility this is even more urgent. One cannot effectively support political parties and the democratic process in fragile, conflict-prone states, without understanding the structures of power, authority, interests, loyalties, traditions and legitimacy, which possibly obstruct or limit the chances for democratic political party and hitherto state building. Furthermore, if one wants to grasp the role that political parties play in the post-conflict democratization process, one needs to assess the nature of the actors involved, the peace settlement negotiations and its deficiencies, and the implications of the institutional choices made. The NIMD is currently developing an assessment framework that will serve as a guideline for the country-specific study to be undertaken before engaging in a post-conflict country.

15. ***The political dimension and “doing no harm”***

One should keep in mind that any operation in a fragile environment holds a political dimension. Even humanitarian aid cannot be considered apolitical or neutral, even if it is genuinely intended as purely humanitarian. In many cases, the segments holding power, or the government exerts a certain control on the aid flows, either through its visible role alongside the delivering agents (securing convoys, participating in the distribution, intervening in the appointment of local partners) or through imposing official channels for aid money transactions (thereby benefiting tremendously from the mark-up in the often unrealistic exchange rate).

All other aspects of international support to fragile states, including efforts to ensure security and justice and to promote economic performance, also hold a political dimension. This implies that, even if one tries to act impartially, and to remain perceived as neutral, it is extremely difficult to effectively remain neutral. Since international donors are inevitably intervening in a political process, this reinforces the need to always respect the principle of “doing no harm”.

16. ***Focus on the relevant political actors***

In order to be effective the NIMD will always have to focus on the relevant political actors and parties. However, in a highly fragmented political party landscape it is extremely difficult to identify the relevant players. In Afghanistan, for example, working directly with political parties is considered to be premature at this stage because of the fluidity of the party landscape. Instead, the NIMD will concentrate efforts on a long-term political education programme, aimed at the Afghan younger generation and with a focus on political party formation and consolidation. In addition, the NIMD wants to facilitate a consultative platform, representative of all affiliations in society, which could advocate democratic reform.

The need to focus on the relevant actors becomes also problematic when the most powerful and relevant political actors (that is, the ruling parties) do not respect the fundamental principles of the rule of law and structurally obstruct the democratic peace building process. In this case, supporting them is not justifiable. When further

direct engagement with the partner government is no longer possible or justifiable, positive effects can be obtained in working more with credible civil society organizations, including by strengthening them, with democratic forces inside the political segments of society, with partner countries and partner governments in the region. However, when such an alternative approach is adopted, continuous efforts should be made to keep an open dialogue with all the other parties that are not being supported.

17. ***Analytical tools to address and monitor fragility***

Analytical tools to address and monitor fragility do not yet exist as an overall set, and that constitutes in itself part of the fact that situation of fragility keep emerging. It would be most useful to try and develop a set of indicators, capable of monitoring the early stages of potential fragility.

#### **IV. Articulating responses to situations of fragility**

18. ***Humanitarian aid is not neutral***

One of the lessons learned from the implementation of the “Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development” (LRRD) strategic framework is, as indicated above, that humanitarian aid is not neutral, even if it is genuinely intended to be neutral.

19. ***The need to remain engaged***

The most frequent policy shortcoming in situations of fragility is the fact that after a crisis, the foreign partners, including the EU, tend to view the ensuing phase as one where “normalcy” should be privileged as soon as possible, while in fact that is the time when a strong, accompanying partnership needs to be built with all the actors in the fragile environment. The examples are numerous where an early departure or early relaxation of measures and accompanying structures are responsible for a backslide, sometimes even a return to a crisis situation.

As was mentioned above (point 11), long-term engagements are crucial in fragile states. International donors should have a joint, long-term strategy focused on building effective and accountable state capacity. This strategy should constantly be reassessed and adapted to the changing circumstances on the ground.

20. ***Continued dialogue after the peace settlement is essential***

Since outright military victories ending intra-state wars are rare, post-conflict political systems are often based on the outcome of a negotiated peace settlement and new constitution achieved through a process of dialogue. Following the first elections often the winner takes all syndrome settles in and the spirit of dialogue in finding peaceful resolutions for conflicts of interest is quickly forgotten. The process of state and nation building, however, is not finished after the first elections and it is essential that the main political stakeholders continue a process of dialogue about the issues that emerge in the implementation of the new constitutional provisions and other national matters that remain contentious. The need for continued dialogue is often overlooked in the rush to ‘normalcy’ following a peace agreement or settlement. But

the social capital to make political systems work peacefully can only be developed over time and requires sustained dialogue.

21. ***Outsiders can facilitate an inclusive inter-party dialogue***  
An inclusive inter-party dialogue is an important instrument to help parties to overcome mistrust, to moderate positions, and to build consensus on issues that have not been dealt with in the peace agreement. When needed such a multiparty dialogue process can be facilitated by impartial outsiders. In Guatemala, for example, the NIMD has supported an ongoing multiparty dialogue on contentious issues and the development of a national agenda. In nine of NIMD's programme countries, Centres for Multiparty Democracy in which all political parties in the country in question participate, have been established, serving not only to promote dialogue and the development of national reform agendas, but also to provide a platform for other international actors and to coordinate activities. In some cases, peer engagement and regional cooperation can allow parties to learn from the best practices of other parties in neighboring countries.
22. ***Use local expertise and help building local capacity***  
The tendency to work only with foreign experts and to bypass local expertise needs specific attention. Using local human resources and investing in local social capital are essential ingredients in the process of nation and state building that will assist societies and countries to stabilize.
23. ***Help broaden the political debate***  
Special efforts should be made to help broaden the political debate that too often remains one-dimensional (exclusive focus on ethnicity for example). It is important to assist parties to get organized around tangible policy issues that can have a direct positive impact on people's lives, and to build coalitions on the basis of political goals and ideas.

## **V. Dealing with concrete situations of fragility: challenges to be faced**

23. ***'Fragility' as part of the aid allocation criteria***  
Fragility should indeed be part of the aid allocation criteria. However, this should be done in a credible and sustainable way, with measurable, controllable, accountable indicators and genuinely endorsed legal and institutional reforms.
24. ***A too low level of accountability and a too lax set of benchmarks***  
A specific lesson to be drawn from current implementing modalities and approaches concerns the too low level of accountability and the too lax set of benchmarks for implementing sustainable and credible reforms that often prevails. This slow pace, and low requirements, are in itself often the triggers of renewed tensions and fragility.
25. ***Trust funds***  
Trust funds, or their equivalents, constitute an effective implementing modality. This type of financial instrument guarantees (long-term) multi-donor commitment and shared responsibility. At the same time a trust fund provides an incentive for donors to coordinate their activities and set clear priorities. Moreover, a trust fund allows for

the flexibility in the implementation of projects, needed to respond to the often fluid political situation.

## **VI. Next steps: EU engagement in specific situations**

### **26. *Democratic Republic of Congo***

In the DRC, the EU has gradually moved from being a critical partner in the positive solution of the crisis, to a partner that deals with the new government as an already “post fragility” actor, mostly because of its democratic legitimacy after the successful electoral process there, while in fact a number of the fundamental ingredients of the fragility remain fully present (lack of openness and transparency in the government finances, violation of human rights, poor delivery of services, armed militias, etc,...) and need to be seriously addressed in order to avoid a real possibility of slide back.

### **27. *Zimbabwe***

In Zimbabwe, the EU humanitarian aid represents the largest inflow of donor funds into the Central Bank and as such contributes significantly to help the regime obtaining the scarce hard currency it needs to perpetuate itself. The agencies providing food aid are required to proceed via the government circuits, which in turn (ab)use this food aid for political patronage and to punish opposition areas in the country by denying it the equal distribution.

### **28. *Joint EU – Africa Strategy***

The joint EU-Africa Strategy offers a good potential for more open exchanges and more responsibility sharing with our African partners on the issue of fragility. The greater awareness and the gradual larger own African involvement in situations of fragility provide for a better sense of sound burden sharing. In the recent years, particularly through the initiatives of the AU, ECOWAS and SADC (and especially South Africa), a welcome new level of African commitment has emerged, to share with the EU the efforts in addressing situations of crises and fragility.

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