

Policy Brief

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Friendships with fragile states: Lessons from Haiti

“The central dilemma in providing aid is that it is needed most in precisely those contexts where the prospects for its [effective] use are the lowest.”

(Riddell, R. 2007)

Recognised as “fragile” long before the 2010 earthquake, Haiti is still ranked among the worst 10 on Fund for Peace’s 2014 Fragile States Index. Norway responded generously and rapidly to meet needs after the disaster. The evaluation of this support found that **Norway is risk-willing**, making it especially well positioned to engage in fragile states. In fact, *“in recent years, Norwegian development policy has focused increasingly on fragile states – countries affected by crisis and war. Statebuilding in these countries involves particularly difficult challenges”* (MFA, 2009). However, the evaluation also finds that Norway needs to strengthen its approach **to become a critical and needed “friend of fragile states”**. This policy brief applies lessons learned in Haiti to explore the characteristics of Norwegian aid that have the most potential, and the foundation required to meet that potential in and with fragile states.



Haiti: a fragility we can learn from

HAITI is SIMILAR to other Fragile States

- Deterioration of public services, uneven development
- Risk of violent conflict
- Intervention of external actors and aid dependency
- Accompanied by environmental fragility

HAITI is DIFFERENT from other Fragile States

- Island state
- Acute-on-chronic dynamic: earthquake on top of deep-rooted fragility
- Magnitude of disaster in densely-populated capital city

Haiti regularly confronts natural hazards and is characterised by a long history of social and political instability and fragile state and governance institutions. Out of 178 countries, Haiti still ranks in the worst 10 countries on the Fund for Peace's 2014 fragility indicators, situated between Yemen and Pakistan. The highest-ranking indicators for Haiti are:

- **intervention of external actors:** 9.8 (out of maximum 10, fourth worst);
- **progressive deterioration of public services:** 9.5, second only to Chad;
- **poverty or economic decline:** 9.4, the worst of all countries;
- **uneven development:** 9.3, second only to the Central African Republic;
- **human flight:** 9.1, the highest of the worst 10 countries.

Between 2013 and 2014, Haiti improved on six of the ten indicators, now ranking 9th instead of 8th worst in this index.

A factor that closely aligns to political instability, the

misuse of power and corruption, is Haiti's **aid dependency**. The country ranks 6th highest in the OECD list of fragile states' official development assistance (ODA) per capita, after Micronesia, Solomon Islands, West Bank & Gaza, Liberia, and DR Congo, and right before Timor Leste.

The political and socio-economic situation in Haiti is complicated by the added **fragility of the physical environment**. An index developed by Carleton University more systematically accounts for environmental fragility. In their 2012 index, Haiti was ranked in 32nd place overall (one being the worst). Among the 32 most fragile countries, Haiti registered one of the six worst scores in environment (following Iraq, Liberia, Equatorial Guinea, Afghanistan and Pakistan).

There are, however, some political and socio-economic indicators that clearly distinguish Haiti from other fragile contexts (see Text Box).



Norway has potential as a critical “friend of fragile states”

Norwegian aid is characterized by many qualities that are suited for fragile states. Those that were found in Haiti are highlighted below:

Commitment to dialogue and coordination: Norway actively participated in international platforms such as the Interim Haiti Reconstruction Commission (a national platform for co-operation and political dialogue between the government, civil society and the international community), the Haiti Reconstruction Fund (a mechanism to coordinate resources consistent with the priorities of the Haiti Action Plan) and the Group of Friends of Haiti. “Norway’s priorities to combat poverty and focus on fragile states are reflected in its policies and strategies, and aligned with DAC guidance” (OECD, 2013).

Political neutrality: In the OECD’s words, Norway is “a small northern country, with no direct interest in most fragile environments” (2013). This neutrality and proven honesty in political settlement allow for a genuine cooperation with partners. This was found to be the case in Haiti.

Experience: Norway has several fragile states as long-term

partners (Afghanistan, Liberia, Pakistan Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan). For its support to Haiti, Norway relied on experience gathered in the context of recent similar disasters, e.g. the Pakistan earthquake of 2005 and the Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004.

In the context of fragile states, Norway has supported financial mechanisms (e.g., trust funds) and has gained experience in key thematic areas, i.e., security, conflict resolution and peace building. “Norway’s approach to fragile states is (...) context specific with co-ordination structures, overall approaches and tools decided on a case-by-case basis” (OECD, 2013).

Willingness to take risks and flexibility: Even though a structured risk analysis was not conducted, there was evidence for a high degree of risk awareness within the Norwegian aid system and of a deliberate decision to accept these risks. Norway’s flexible decision-making enabled fast commitments. This led to Norway not only being one of the first donors to pledge humanitarian aid for Haiti, but also to deliver it and commit rapidly to longer-term support.

Norway’s potential:

- Commitment to inclusive dialogue and coordination
- Political neutrality, honesty in political settlements
- Experience in other fragile states, especially in security and justice
- Risk willingness, fast decisions
- Flexible, adaptive programming, innovation, agreement to stay longer

In regard to programming, when setting targets in fragile settings, Norway does not appear to assume linear processes and adjusts programming as needed based on visual monitoring.

Although these characteristics are a good starting point, a much stronger foundation is required for Norway to live up to its potential as a critical friend of fragile states.

Fruitful friendships require strong foundations

Although Norway has been an active member of the OECD's International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF) and is an endorsing member of the 2011 New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States, a specific policy to guide Norway in its work in fragile states is lacking. For Haiti, this resulted in ambitious programming with a lack of robust risk analysis and little tangible focus on statebuilding. Learning from the Haiti experience, a few elements form the requisite foundation for a solid and effective commitment to any fragile state.

Risk analysis: OECD (2011) stresses that “aid effectiveness in [fragile] contexts may demand a significant degree of risk taking”. While it is commendable that Norway takes risks, a documented risk analysis for the overall portfolio

Requisite foundations:

- Risk analysis: systematic and documented, based on a political economy analysis (PEA)
- Statebuilding: front and central, multilevel, long-term
- Vertical alignment (policy to praxis) and an integrated approach
- Plan to “hand over” to governments: do no harm

was absent and project designs only partially acknowledged the huge investment and other challenges required to address very complex issues. Indeed, Norway was not alone in foregoing such an analysis; comprehensive risk analyses on Haiti are very rare, and those found were conducted before the earthquake (for example see Fass, 1990 and James, 2010).

While Norway's approach to fragile states is context specific and “provides a great deal of flexibility, the approach could benefit from increased rigour, especially in determining clear whole-of-government priorities for working together in fragile contexts, setting realistic joint goals and taking into account the trade-offs between risk and opportunities, and long-term versus short-term gains” (OECD, 2013).

It is crucial to document a thorough systematic risk analysis, embedded in a political economy analysis (PEA). For examples of PEA for other countries, see Smits et al, 2013 and van Veen, 2014.

Multi-level and long-term statebuilding front and central:

Despite satisfaction with the Haiti portfolio expressed by some respondents, other members of the ‘Haiti team’ were adamantly more modest in their expectations and less congratulatory about achieved impacts in Haiti. This hesitation, shared by the evaluation team, stems from timing and lack of a focus on statebuilding. Impacts, especially in fragile states, require a long-term investment, realistically 20 years; basic governance transformations may take up to 40 years (IDPS, New Deal). It is essential to strive for modest impacts over longer timeframes in fragile states, with a prime focus on various dimensions of statebuilding, security and

Statebuilding is a deeply political process that requires simultaneous aligned support at central and local levels as well as an explicit recognition of state-society relations and legitimacy – these were not found in Haiti. This lack of statebuilding as a centerpiece of Haiti's development goes contrary to OECD guidance for work in Fragile States (2011). Because statebuilding is forged out of complex struggles over the balance of power, the rules of engagement and how resources should be distributed, it requires integrated parallel and simultaneous support at multiple levels that was not sufficiently found in the Haiti portfolio.

Vertical alignment (policy to praxis): Along the same lines, aid to central institutions was rare. Norway did not engage in any form of support to policy reform at central level. Division of labour between donors was not sufficiently explicit. Excellent localised efforts of many sectors (e.g. energy) gain strength from a dual focus on both praxis and policy (Farmer 2011). Although Norway preferred the more neutral and tangible actions of field-based programming in Haiti, ignoring the positive effect of pertinent policy in an aid portfolio may leave programmes stranded – even more so in fragile states. At the risk of becoming paternalistic, a very careful selection of policies/ sector strategies that promote pro-poor growth merit support at central levels, and may be required for some sectorial lower-level programmes to flourish in fragile states.

If Norway chooses to be a 'critical' friend of fragile states...

Plan to hand over to governments - do no harm:

While strong 'accompaniment' of recognised government entities can be assumed in a fragile state, a clear plan for a hand-over of any parallel effort created is crucial (OECD 2010). Parallel efforts, by definition, do not foster legitimacy. An example of parallel structures supported by Norway included the Cuban Medical Brigades (CMB) who provided skilled and accessible health services. While an excellent service to populations, the CMB set up parallel units inside Haitian institutions where the two sets of personnel would rarely interact.

At the heart of the interaction between social expectations, political settlement and the responsiveness of the state lies the matter of 'legitimacy', which provides the basis for rule by non-coercive means. States derive legitimacy from multiple sources that may coexist and/or compete. An explicit understanding (i.e., a political economy analysis) of these sources must precede all support.

Enabling, even unintentionally, entities to replace government services is not a testament to sustainable development. Even if often inevitable in fragile settings, it is urgent to recognise the efforts as parallel structures, and build in clear options to hand over in due course.

When Norway chooses to become a leading and critical "friend of fragile states", a few age-old rules of friendship still hold:

Friends are for keeps: aim for more modest impacts, but over longer periods. Consider tailoring Norwegian programming to longer timeframes, combined with funding cycles of five or more years to allow predictable commitments for fragile states (20 to 40 years).

Friends tell the truth – even when it hurts: consider the New Deal as a new form of genuine partnership that allows partners to be critical of each other face to face, in open dialogue (IDPS, 2011).

Be yourself - flexible and innovative: Use your natural assets to the advantage of both parties. Continue to take risks, accepting that working in fragile states is stepping beyond the 'safe' or 'neutral'. Sustain or systematize innovative transition financing.

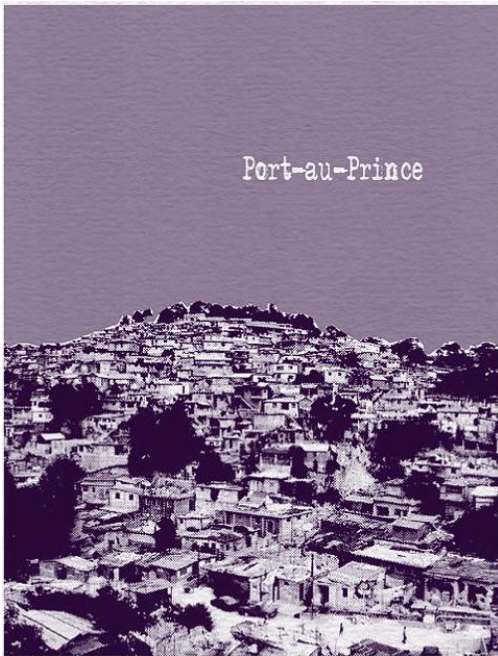
Embrace selective doses of structure: Document, at the start of each fragile state effort, a risk analysis developed on the

basis of a political economy analysis providing insights into the sources and structures of power/legitimacy in a society. This will establish and help monitor contextual, programmatic and institutional risks. Prepare also a White Paper to guide Norway on how to work in fragile states.

A friend of yours is a friend of mine: Not the job for a single donor, statebuilding is an effort that requires integrated support from a wide range of partners. Establish an explicit division of labour with other donors to support its various and complex dimensions.

Help new friends to help themselves: promote a prime focus on statebuilding. It needs to occur at every level, and reaps the greatest benefits when done so simultaneously. Consider piloting the New Deal, if the government initiates it and do not ignore the powerful effect of pertinent policy on praxis.

Fragile states, more than others, need Norway's aid. Precisely because of the flexible model, Norway should even more explicitly cast itself as a critical "Friend of Fragile States", seizing every possible opportunity to partner and assist fragile governments to get the job done - rather than doing it for them.



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