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# Arrested Development
## a few thoughts on development aid in countries considered to be 'fragile'

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*(Note: these initial thoughts result from my experience in recent years in 'post-conflict' countries:  Haiti, Timor, Nepal, Guatemala.  They are based on the perspective of work on human rights and political affairs so are not from within the development sector but rather a somewhat outside perspective.  This is positive in that it is a disinterested perspective but negative in that the observations do not take into proper account the ongoing debates between development practitioners and theorists so risk being partial and to some degree anecdotal)*

There is an immediate issue with the terminology in this field.  'Post-conflict' is almost always an over-simplification.  It is often used by development practitioners as an excuse to return to 'business as usual' in situations which may require a more agile, flexible approach to a complex transitional phase.  This would normally require more risk taking than in normal practice, and in turn this requires more detailed management and higher 'transaction costs' to mitigate some of the risks, such as a closer relationship with partners or grantees, and a readiness to adjust programming at short notice and in radical ways which goes against the culture of the ponderous project document process.  My impression is that this issue is being addressed precisely at a time when major donors are looking to achieve 'more for less' – increasing spending without corresponding increases in their staffing.

There is a clear risk that the terms 'fragility' or 'weak', often a polite euphemism for 'failed', tend to put vastly differing states into the same category encouraging a common approach to situations which are essentially different.  While it may be possible to group certain countries, I suspect that the peculiarities of each situation require donor actions starting from the specificities of the weakness rather than the possible apparent common features shared with other countries.  With so much of donor energy, spending and thinking currently focused on Iraq and Afghanistan, I fear that there is a high risk that donor practice and theory in several dozen 'weak' states will be unduly influenced by thinking derived from the 'lessons learnt' from these two cases.  I would cite in support of this the example of thinking around elections and security (not strictly speaking a development example but nonetheless the process is I think indicative).  It is now commonly held that elections can be successfully held in almost any security context including many that previously would have been seen as not conducive to a credible process. The mantra has become 'if we could do it in Iraq…….'

In nearly all the processes I have observed, the pressure to spend has tended to take precedence over the time-consuming process of consultation and participation, basic to the rights-based approach that most donors would claim to practise. This raises the issue of the relationship between 'humanitarian' and 'development' assistance. The donor community in Haiti, for example, is constantly troubled by the question of whether the country should be approached as a humanitarian or development crisis, exemplified by the controversy over the role and presence of UN OCHA. I would see this politically as a false dichotomy.

In Haiti 2005-6 I witnessed close-up the patent failure of the donor community to come up with a peace dividend or better put, to even start to develop a plan of development interventions which would have a positive impact on the complex political situation characterized by general pessimism and demoralization, in particular a lack of confidence in the very concept of democracy following the events post the 1990 elections, the first free and fair in the history of Haiti.

(There is a need to problematise the concept of *peace dividend* which seems to be generally used as a synonym for economic, income-generating projects or significant humanitarian improvements. There is a need to match the thinking around peace dividend to the particular causes of the conflict which is no easy matter given the almost inevitability of multiple and complex conflict causes. I suspect, however, that there are many cases where discriminatory state based on exclusion is at the core of the conflict and in such cases –for example Nepal- the peace dividend should include the reform, preferably through an inclusive and participatory process, of the state itself rather than more traditional development 'outputs'. The current rush to 'strengthen' the Nepali state risks exacerbating the problems which caused the conflict, which is ongoing, so the key is the sequencing of reform and strengthening rather than a simple push to strengthen (which results at least in part from the problem being perceived to be the 'weakness' of the state rather than its exclusive and discriminatory nature).

This failure of the Interim Cooperation Framework in Haiti was all the more striking given the relatively high proportion of GoH budget provided by the donors and the much trumpeted donor conference of 19 July 2004 in Washington at which over 1billion U$ was pledged. It is also surprising given the length of time donors and UN have been engaged in Haiti and the fact that the UN mission specifically sought to promote a post-electoral stabilization programme. It is worth noting that UN Peace Keeping missions have little or no programme funding to independently develop programmes, and are generally limited to Quick Impact Projects, a concept that merits some close evaluation.

Perhaps the most striking failure in Haiti in the period after the departure of Aristide, was the refusal of the donors to harmonise their police funding with the UN mandated public security reform programme to the point that police and government authorities who wanted money or equipment approached the embassies directly. They approached MINUSTAH with less openness as the mission could provide only advice and was therefore inevitably seen as interfering and an annoyance- an inevitable situation given the reform mandate provided by the Security Council. The issue for the big donor embassies in Port-au-Prince was that their multi-million contribution to

the police could either buy influence or promote reform. Combining the two was not a realistic option. Diplomats generally saw this and continued to act bi-laterally, effectively undermining the ability of the UN to promote much needed, or rather essential, police reform. This raises a key issue at a time when UN special missions are frequently present in states dubbed fragile; how is it possible to harmonise donor practice with resolutions from the Security Council, by which most donors do not feel bound. Even if they would not wish to be seen to be openly going against the spirit of SC resolutions, they do not feel obliged to adjust their programmes to be more in line with their objectives.

I should point out here that I am in general concentrating on UN special missions, (whether DPKO, DPA or OHCHR) in part as this is where my experience lies, but also because these missions are commonly found in 'fragile' situations. In the examples I refer to, in general donors, even when supportive of these missions, have not developed methods of working to optimise their cooperation with them. In some cases this can actually have a negative impact when diplomatic missions and donors tend to reduce their activities, for example, on human rights when an OHCHR mission is fielded and wait for a green light from the UN, deferring to the mission as the lead part of the international community on the issue, before taking human rights initiatives. If the UN HR mission is unable to provide adequate leadership there is a net loss in international action in favour of rights promotion and protection.

Is 'fragility' a development-economic-technical issue as many donors seem to be articulating? Or would it be more productive to see it essentially as a political issue as Carlos Pascual seems to argue at the Brookings meeting on 'Weak and Failed States" in February this year; "the perception of weak and failed states perhaps changed most dramatically after September 11, 2001 when the second-poorest country in the world became the foundation for the most significant strike that we have ever had on US territory….In the US, our national security strategy of 2002 said that America is threatened less by conquering states that we are by failing ones". The least that can be said about this is that it is a US-centric security perspective on what others are seeing as a technical donor/development issue. Even a cursory glance at the index of 141 countries which accompanies the statement by Pascual provides some interesting contradictions. The one which caught my eye particularly is that Haiti, ranked 12th in fragility, represents I would argue, no threat to the security of its neighbours, not even the Dominican Republic with which it shares Hispaniola. On the other hand, the transshipment of cocaine from the country ranked 47, Colombia, is I believe the single most important factor in the destabilisation of Haiti and the corruption it brings makes institution strengthening almost impossible.

 The case of the World Bank Community Empowerment Programme in East Timor deserves more study. It was their flagship in ET from 2000-2003 and the international community's leading programme on local governance, a programme which de facto imposed a model of local governance in the vacuum left by the Indonesians. However, it often created 'endebtedness' in local loan-holders unable to repay the loans often due to poor technical planning of the use of the loans, potentially pitting neighbours against each other as any defaulter blocked the supposed rotating micro credit facilities). Many of the problems of this programme could have been avoided with greater consultation at all levels of Timorese society. This did not happen and by the middle of 2003 the programme collapsed under its own weight. There are often

cases where donors convince themselves that their own development and spending imperatives can trump political reality.

While in Nepal donors often salute the macro-economic figures and recognize that there is relatively high level human capital, they fail to draw the obvious conclusion that what is holding back development is neither Nepali human capacity, money nor development plans but their lack of grounding in political reality and political consensus. In this context, it is worth examining the "Principles For Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations". This stresses the need for alignment with host government priorities and the harmonisation of donor initiatives but underlines the need for assistance to be politically grounded: "Sound political analysis is needed to adapt international responses to country and regional context…" Without dwelling too long on the unscientific voluntarism implicit in the phrase 'sound political analysis', it does seem to implicitly suggest that there is an international donor community which has a common set of interests in a wide range of assistance issues and countries. While it is quite feasible to construct a set of 'do no harm' development assistance guidelines which generally favour good things and oppose bad ones, building a consensus around the worldview put forward by Carlos Pascual would run into a set of seriously diverse analytical and political positions around fragility and security/politics.

At the same time, it would be a high-risk strategy to assume that donors will be able to make a useful contribution to a political process, in Nepal for instance, unless the tendency towards business as usual is disturbed. This could only be achieved by significant and explicit strategic political guidance.

Since the peace accord in November 2006, there has been a clearly self-interested creation of a consensus that Nepal has moved into a 'post-conflict' phase, which is taken as a green light for large-scale business as usual donor programming.

Donors are confronted with the fact that the governments for the foreseeable future risk being unstable, dysfunctional and ineffectual, unable to take coherent decisions which could create the perception of a peace dividend. Spending must be explicitly linked to inclusion of excluded groups both in the proposed constituent assembly and the state structures; this issue will make or break the legitimacy of the constitution-making process in Nepal.

Providing a 'development dividend' without a prior agreement on Security Sector Reform, SSR, risks dangerous unintended consequences. The restoration of 'normal, business as usual' donor practice could actually encourage governments to put off essential security sector reform. In the case of Nepal, the absolute impunity of the belligerent parties could well lead to an elite capture agreement for mutual amnesty which will undermine any genuine effort at Truth and Reconciliation as promised in the Comprehensive Peace Accord of 2006. There is no mechanism, or desire apparently, to examine the link between donor practice, return to normal (business as usual), and the persistence of impunity.

This compounds the problem that despite the endless round of donor-funded 'independent' evaluations, the impact of their work is largely unmeasured and to some

extent unmeasurable, certainly in political terms.  The obsession with workshops and other trainings, is to some extent a perverse effort to quantify at least something; formal, set piece activities.  The political impact, meanwhile, largely goes unexamined. This in turn is linked to the essentially unaccountable nature of donor practice.  At best, country programmes are monitored by capitals but the real accountability to the host country and the supposed beneficiaries of programmes is in fact very limited despite the increasing tendency to pay lip service towards alignment with government policies, etc, not to mention the obvious perils of alignment with governments whose bad governance is at least a factor in conflict generation/fragility. And how is it possible to achieve methods of evaluation which genuinely audit the impact of donor action?  Even the relatively enlightened approach of allowing beneficiaries to participate in evaluations often, it seems to me, falls foul of the 'pleasing teacher syndrome' with grant recipients often parroting back to the donors buzz words from their own mission statements etc.

The emergence of the conflicts based on identity in recent months in Nepal represents a serious challenge to the international community- another problematic term which implies a common purpose and vision which rarely exist- though the OECD principles rest on an assumption that such common analysis and purpose do exist, almost spontaneously.  New potential "partners" for development are emerging and they need thorough assessment to ensure that large inputs of finance at this stage do not exacerbate regional, caste, class, religious and geographical fault lines.  The donors should be encouraged to take a critical look at the effects of their activities/interference in the mid and far west in the 1980s including the famous RAPTI project in what is now the Maoist 'heartland'.  The emergence of these identity conflicts, grievances and demands exemplify the fact that the Maoist decade long war brought to the fore more historic grievances than the peace process has even been able to start to address.  The temptation for the donors in the Madhes area of the south of Nepal, will be to rush in with large funding to compensate for a history of donor neglect of this highly populated area.  There is a risk that this will be done with undue haste, without sufficient preparation in terms of understanding of the issues or creating partnerships which specifically avoid conflict exacerbating programming.

Local governance structures in Nepal are at an all-time weak point.  The confusion that the redeployment of Village Development Committee (VDC- the basic local state structure) secretaries and police means a return to normality is a key error;  the 70% no-go areas for government and political parties which were generally agreed to pertain in December 2006 has not, I would argue, significantly changed, as VDCs are still unable to carry out development tasks or raise local taxes and police presence in the redeployed posts is at best symbolic and at worst represents a deterioration of the situation of public security.   The reestablishment of the state in areas it has vacated in recent years has not been subject to scientific measurement, particularly at the qualitative level.  The least that can be said is that there is no data available on these issues given the lack of a national monitoring mechanism and the weakness of international monitoring of these aspects which are key to peace consolidation.  Any development actions undertaken without the simultaneous empowering and democratization of local governance will be futile at best, and conflict exacerbating at worst.  The signal failure over recent decades to benefit the most poor amongst the rural poor has helped fuel the conflict.

In many situations where societies are emerging from conflict, the political situation requires targeted actions which create confidence and optimism. Confidence can be achieved by 'participation' and transparency and optimism by rapid impact, high-profile interventions which may or may not fit the longer-term development aims or ethos. There needs to be some convergence of thinking and practice on the political priorities for development efforts which reinforce the positive in the political process but which may not fit the established donor 'common sense' on programming- and it is, by the way, worth noting the speed with which the development discourse and its key words change, often leaving 'partners' dizzy in their attempt to keep up .

In the case of Haiti for example, in the two years following the July 2004 pledging conference, there were few, if any, visible signs of any 'post-conflict dividend'. The reasons for this are hard to discern, particularly given the ironic position of the donors participating in the 'common framework' – a refusal to set up a tracking mechanism for the pledged aid!

The lack of impact can most obviously be explained, however, by the almost total exclusion of Haitians from the process with May and June 2004 seeing dozens of 'experts' from multi and bi-lateral donors writing projects in the elegant Montana hotel, way above the slums of Cite Soleil. Eloquent protests on this flawed process by western NGOs failed to have any impact on the process which then, surprisingly, went on to have little impact. It is unfortunate that although it had been formally set up by the Security Council by this time, MINUSTAH was barely on the ground by the time that this process was sealed in DC in July 2004, so it effectively did not participate. Much energy over the following two years was spent by the UN mission trying to harmonise its priorities with the UN Country Team and donors which would have been unnecessary had the donor pledging been synchronised with the mission; MINUSTAH was a DPKO mission of nearly 10,000 staff and the embodiment in Haiti of the will of the 'international community' as articulated by the Security Council so it would seem unthinkable that its analysis and priorities not be fully incorporated into any overarching donor framework.


A few initial conclusions:

1 Donors should not be allowed to retreat to their comfort zone of business as usual and this can only be achieved by confronting them with a realistic assessment of the security risks in any given transition which will inevitably have a negative impact on development programmes.

2 The frequent refusal of donors and diplomats to take up the challenges of breaking impunity as an essential first step towards SSR is unacceptable and conflict exacerbating. Even a superficial return to 'business as usual' will often simply risk aggravating this situation

3 Donor assistance, particularly to the security sector, should be made conditional on reform, real and radical.

4 It is worth looking closely at the cases of Timor, El Salvador, Guatemala and Haiti where social disintegration is linked to the failure of sensible and effective public security reform, the continuing link between public security bodies and organized crime and the political disintegration due to this. Donor strategies should reflect these realities rather than be driven by capitals' targets for expenditure.

And a few dangling questions:

How to achieve an objective audit of the impact of donor activity on pre-, ongoing or post-conflict situations? When I was the sole representative of OHCHR in Nepal in 2003-4, towards the end of the year I was asked by HQ how many 'beneficiaries' there had been from my activities. This seemed like a bizarre transfer of 'development' measurements to the world of human rights and suggested that maybe we could include all those Nepalis who during that period had not suffered extra-judicial killing, arbitrary detention or some other form of serious human rights violation.

What can the role of donors be to support UN peacekeeping efforts given that DPKO missions have no programme funding beyond relatively small sums for Quick Impact Projects? Are DPKO missions the best vehicle for such expenditures? Are QIPs sufficiently conflict sensitive and do they create practices that make things difficult for development agencies who will remain much beyond the time-limited DPKO missions?