

Relating Fragile States to Social and Human Fragilities

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ABSTRACT

Fragile States is a way of naming this particular category of states that have weak performance, insufficient service delivery, weak administrative and government power, and lack of legal rules. Little consideration is usually made to the fact that their own societies may also be fragile and easily jeopardised by inappropriate economic measures or external events. Poverty traps and social exclusion, unjust inequalities with lack of equity, feelings of insecurity and vulnerability, usually undermine the social fabric. Moreover, the people bear their own internal fragilities, which are based on the lack of capabilities and recognition, and interfere in the relationships between the groups that constitute the society. Therefore, dealing with the issue of fragility requires to consider various decision levels, from the personal one to the State level. Such an approach could allow fragile states to conceive preventive policies that would avoid the surge of a political crisis resulting from the combination of social conflict and individual failure.

Key words: Capability Approach, Fragile States, Poverty, Public Policy, Vulnerability

RÉSUMÉ

La notion d'Etats fragiles permet de caractériser des pays dont le pouvoir de gouvernement est faible, le cadre juridique et légal insuffisant, l'administration peu efficace et, en conséquence, la délivrance de services publics insuffisante. Mais elle prend peu en compte le fait que leurs propres sociétés peuvent aussi être fragiles et facilement détruites par des mesures économiques inappropriées ou par des événements extérieurs. Ainsi, les trappes à pauvreté, les structures d'inégalité pérennes, l'absence d'équité, de même que l'exclusion sociale, le sentiment d'insécurité et de vulnérabilité, ont tous pour effet de miner la cohésion sociale. De plus, les gens eux-mêmes, au sein d'une société donnée, portent aussi leur propres fragilités internes, basées sur un manque de capacité et de reconnaissance, et ceci interfère dans les relations sociales. Si bien



que si l'on veut aborder le problème de la fragilité dans toute sa dimension, il faut alors prendre en compte l'articulation des différents niveaux d'analyse où cette fragilité se déploie, du niveau personnel au niveau propre à l'Etat. L'intérêt d'une telle démarche est qu'elle permet aux Etats fragiles de concevoir des mesures de politique préventives qui leur permettraient d'éviter l'apparition de crises politiques graves, comme conséquence de la combinaison de situations sociales conflictuelles et d'échecs individualisés.

Mots clés : Approche par les capacités, Etats fragiles, Pauvreté, Politiques publiques, Vulnérabilité

JEL Classification : A13, H11, 015, P46

INTRODUCTION

The debate on the role of the State came back in the mid-80s with the implementation of structural adjustment policies under the leadership of the IMF and the World Bank. The idea was to have the State focus on his major regalia activities – such as money and finance, justice, security, foreign affairs, management of public goods - and leave the productive activities into the hands of the private sector which is said to be more efficient when following the markets rules. Making, through appropriate reforms, the State more efficient in the management of national resources would promote economic growth, poverty reduction and global development. At the beginning of the 90s, the international development institutions operated a focus towards the implementation of strategies aiming at poverty reduction (World Bank 1990) or human development (UNDP 2005). But the tendency was still to reduce the role and intervention of the State in the economic sphere, through policy measures such as those that constitute the basis of the Washington consensus.

Other tendencies influenced the debate: changes in the form of traditional conflicts, the context of the civil wars in Africa and, to a certain extent, the '9/11' terrorist attack on New York followed by similar events in Tunisia, Morocco, Spain, the United Kingdom; but also, the raise of the civil society and the role given to international NGOs, the regular UN meetings of thematic issues, etc..

While the World Bank published a specific World Development Report on the issue of the role of the State and the corresponding criteria to assess good governance (World Bank 1996), a few policy analysts generated, simultaneously, a set of concepts to describe various countries experience. They spoke of 'quasi-states' (Jackson 1990), 'collapsed states' (Zartman in 1995 considering Somalia) and, more generally, 'failed states' (like Liberia or Haiti). An index of failed states is regularly published by the magazine *Foreign Policy*. Fukuyama (2004) brought back to the debate the idea of a necessary 'strength' for the state and a related 'scope' for its activities, by insisting on the need to reinforce the capacity of its institutions. In 2005, a *Forum on Fragile States* was hold in London and a series of key reports were issued on this topic by the main development institutions, like DFID (2005), USAID (2005), The World Bank (2005) and OECD (2005).

However, even if several criteria were suggested to identify Fragile States in order to propose appropriate development strategies, no agreement on a clear-cut definition of fragility was reached by all the development institutions and agencies. In fact, two different views prevail and oppose DFID, OECD and World Bank on one side, USAID on the other (Daviron and Giordano 2007).

DFID considers that the status of fragile state can be assessed objectively by referring to two major criteria: first, the weakness of economic performances, especially when trying to satisfy the MDGs (Millenium Development Goals), and second, the government lack of leadership. This provides about 46 fragile states which can be characterised by their state of law, the control of their territory, the respect of minorities, the delivery of basic services. Both OECD, through the Development Assistance Committee, and the World

Bank join this view, and also require objective technical criteria to identify the fragile states.

On the other hand, USAID insists on the fact that security issues and geostrategic dimensions have also to be taken into account in the classification of Fragile States. This allows to give a greater weight to the countries which are in conflict or in post-conflict situations and to take into consideration the terrorism risk.

As Collier and *al.* (2003) showed, fragile states, due to their low level of administrative power and control, have a greater risk to see conflict between different social groups degenerate into civil war. Moreover, 45% of the states, having already known an internal armed conflict, have a risk of relapse in the five following years. For the same reasons, terrorist organisations could choose some particular fragile states (in terms of strategic location, political relevance and cultural background) to implement their operational centres. Until now, no study has yet proved such hypothesis to be empirically true (Leboeuf and Antil 2007). However, recent events at the Sahel border, in Mauritania and Mali, bring back this assumption on the front scene.

But, the fact still remains that nearly one third of the world's poor are presently living in fragile states. Therefore, increasing aid and reinforcing the capacity of fragile states to make them able to managed correctly their own development, even if this takes time, should be considered as an objective in itself – i.e. as a peculiar way of development aiming at reducing vulnerability and addressing inequality – but also as an indirect way of avoiding both internal armed conflicts and external terrorist action.

In this paper, we are not interested in looking at all the reasons that could make a state fragile whether they came as external events, as consequences of it own policy or from within the society. Effectively, numerous reasons explain this fragility and can be found in the various criteria of internal governance, international commitment, human rights protection and external relationships and constraints. We will focus on two main ideas that are frequently addressed by French development institutions. First, solid states and efficient administration are necessary conditions for both development and security. This provides a criterion of 'strength of the leadership'. Second, too little consideration is given to the fact that even if states can be considered as fragile, their own societies may also be fragile, and their social links or entitlements jeopardised by inappropriate economic measures or external events. This provides a criterion of 'openness to social dimensions'. Fragile states can then be identified and classified according to these criteria (Chataignier and Gaulme 2005, Chataigner and Magro 2007).

Going deeper within this societal analysis, one can also examines to what extend the people's fragilities expressed in terms of personal capability and recognition, would also play a key role. In France, for instance, the young people who organised the November 2005 riots in urban suburbs denounced a lack of recognition from the others and a lack of personal capabilities for themselves.

For us, this means that the issue of fragility requires a three levels analysis. First, at the personal level, a clear-cut definition of fragility is needed by relating to the other notions of vulnerability and fallibility. For this, the capability approach brings interesting insights. Second, at the societal level, the analysis will bear on social entitlements, and the interaction with people's fragilities. In that context, the notions of agency and equity are quite useful to refer to. Finally, at the level of the state itself, the analysis will

examine how fragility can be addressed, in a global sense, for the design of specific preventive policies that will ensure social sustainability (Dubois 2009).

The first step requires addressing the issue of fragility at the level of the people's lives.

I. FRAGILITY AT THE PERSONAL LEVEL

Referring to fragility at the personal level implies to agree on an appropriate definition of fragility. Definition, which cannot ignore that other proxies are already commonly used to qualify such phenomenon, like the concepts of fallibility in philosophy and vulnerability in economics. In this context, the reference to the capability approach is quite useful to add new interesting insights in an analysis that links philosophical dimensions to economic ones.

1. Interrelating Definitions: Fallibility, Vulnerability and Fragility

At the personal level, fragility is mostly defined in philosophical terms. Ricoeur, as a philosopher on the hermeneutics of action, relates fragility to the idea of fallibility. In his preface to Arendt's major work entitled *The Human Condition* (1958), he considers that personal fragility is the result of weaknesses in the human decision process that leads to unexpected and irreversible situations. While Arendt describes in her book the fundamental and a-temporal features of the human condition expressed through labour, creative work and action, Ricoeur (1960) explains that it is the 'fallibility' of the human being, through his way of acting or reacting, that makes him in a first step vulnerable, then in a second step fragile.

Fallibility means that a person may make mistake or 'miss the point', even if he or she acts in an autonomous and rational way using his/her freedom to choose. There are many reasons for that, such as a lack of appropriate information, taking care of social constraints in a context of negative freedom, living in a situation of adaptive preferences, etc. The result is a failure in terms of personal achievement, which means also failure in the person's effective capability. It may also be also a person's agency failure when relationships with the others become spoiled. On the reverse, unfallibility will mean no risk of mistaking or missing the expected objective. Moreover, all psychological experiments show how fallibility is the main cause for a lot of human misachievements, in all the technical, social and political fields.

This fallibility generates the person's 'vulnerability', i.e. the risk of being affected negatively by external shocks (e.g. loss of employment) or internal perturbations (e.g. disability) in the functionalities and capacity to reach expected objectives, such as well-being (Naudé *et al.* 2009). But the person may be able to adjust her behaviour in order to overcome the situation. This is the case, for instance, with adaptive preferences. Therefore, vulnerability leaves the person with a more or less great risk of failure. However, this vulnerability can be reduced by acting accordingly, either by catching up with the mistakes already made, or by alleviating the negative consequences of such mistakes. This expresses the capacity of resilience, i.e. the capacity to use appropriate coping mechanisms to overcome the related difficulties.

Vulnerability may lead to 'fragility' but not necessarily, for a person may be vulnerable but not fragile and vice versa. Vulnerability and fragility are two different concepts. This difference can be understood by referring to the metaphor of the 'reed' ('roseau') and the 'glass stick' ('baguette de verre'). The reed is vulnerable but not fragile, any change in the wind strength will affect it, but its capacity of bending accordingly makes it adjust permanently at the expense of its standing. On the other end, the glass stick is not vulnerable; it continues to stand in the same way when facing external events. It cannot adjust for small changes and be broken easily, once certain limits are exceeded.

Consequently, while fragility expresses the inability of the person to adjust to external circumstances leading to a final break down, vulnerability opens the way, on the contrary, to the ability of adjusting when confronted to the same circumstances. This expresses the person's 'capacity of resilience'. Unfortunately, even in this case, there are limits that should not be exceeded because they restrict this capacity of resilience. Going over these limits may make the person totally unable to adjust, therefore becoming fragile, with the risk of collapse.

In economic terms, the two issues of vulnerability and fragility can be addressed by referring to the capability approach as developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum. People are more or less vulnerable according to their 'capability set' and more or less fragile according to the constraints that limit the combination of their capabilities within this capability set.

2. Linking with the Capability Approach

For Sen (1999) the individuals, through their own personal characteristics, and within a set of economic and social opportunities and constraints, mobilise their resources and endowments (commodities, assets, capital, primary goods, formal rights, etc.) into appropriate 'functionings' in order to reach the objectives they value. These functionings express what the individuals are effectively able to do (like being able to read and write, being able to ride a bicycle, being able to participate in the community life, being able to become a doctor, etc.), or would be able to do once they got the opportunity to use these abilities. Sen calls capability the combination of these abilities which result from a series of attainable functionings, effectively achieved or still remaining potential. In a way, such 'capability set' expresses the degree of freedom that a person enjoys (or may enjoy once opportunities are there), and, more precisely, her power of choice between various options of life. Capability therefore transforms a formal freedom, which is usually given by the law and the corresponding set of rights, into a real freedom expressed by what the people are effectively doing and being, and are able to do and be.

What is interesting with the capability approach, is that the economic reasoning is not based on the management of goods, assets, or services delivery, but on the effective functionings of the people themselves (Sen 1985). Naturally, opportunities are still playing a key role for they allow the people's access to the goods, services, markets and rights that are required to build the capability set. But opportunities do not express the core issue of this approach. The core issue is the focus on the person's capability as a combination of effective and potential functionings.

This is extremely important, for instance, when dealing with disability or people's participation in the framework of poverty reduction policies. These two issues focus naturally on the persons' ability to function in a way or another, and not on the level of goods and services that they may use or consume. It is the same when dealing with vulnerability and fragility, because these two issues directly concern the person's ability to function in risky situation.

Nussbaum goes a little further in this framework by itemising the generic capability set of a person and providing a detailed list of potential functionings. She suggests ten 'central human capabilities' that people have reason to choose and value. These include the capabilities of bodily health, of exercising practical reason, of controlling politically and materially one's environment, etc.. For instance, the 'capability of affiliation' includes among other items the ability "to live with and towards others, to recognize and show concerns for the others, to engage in social interaction, to imagine the situation of another, etc." (p. 77). This list is conceptually enough opened to any socio-cultural context, to be fully adjusted if required, confirming its multiple realisability (Nussbaum 2006).

Consequently, each person can be viewed as having her own portfolio of various capabilities that she can manage and use according to the wants, needs, and constraints encountered. For economic analysis, we prefer using the notion of 'capabilities structure' which expresses that all these distinct capabilities are interconnected, even statistically, through specific functions and distributed according to appropriate proportions within the capability set (Ballet and *al.*, 2005).

This is useful to analyse vulnerability and fragility issues. Vulnerability is related to the person's capability set. It is the way in which the person combines her capabilities, within her personal structure, in order to become able to face any event or shock, therefore overcoming the related consequences (Dubois and Rousseau 2008). It is through this combination that she expresses her capability of resilience. Usually poor people have a smaller set of capabilities, some are missing and the range of choice is therefore limited. They focus more on capabilities such as work, education, and social bonds, since they lack potentialities like financial assets, power relationships, policy information.... Their capabilities structure is therefore concentrated on certain assets, and this limits the substitution possibilities between the various capabilities, reducing by the way the capability of resilience. The lack of some specific capabilities and the weakening of others, make poor people more vulnerable.

To absorb the consequences of exogenous events, whether internal policy measures or external shocks, readjustments are required within the structure of capabilities by substituting some capabilities for others. But such substitutions are not always feasible, because of threshold and ratchet effects that happen over certain limits of adjustment. The capabilities structure then may have difficulty to cope beyond a given level of pressure on the capabilities. Thus, the destruction of some capabilities may become unavoidable and even irreversible in some cases; especially when the changes that generate the pressure are occurring in the technology, knowledge and legal spheres. This fragile situation may become unsustainable and degenerate into violent conflicts. Fortunately, in a majority of cases, reversibility can be achieved, by leaving the time to rebuild these capabilities over a longer term (Ballet, Mahieu and Radja 2007).

All this explains the fragility of the person. It results from the fragility of her capabilities structure and the fact that some capabilities are more fragile in a given context and may break like a 'glass stick' under particular circumstances. For instance, a specialized technology requiring lengthy training is more fragile, when confronted by unexpected situations, than a generic technology, easy to acquire, which will still remain fully usable in all circumstances. Assessing this fragility of the capabilities structure vis-à-vis a shock is therefore as important as analyzing the vulnerability of a person. There is a direct link between the two. The destruction of a particular capability increases the person's vulnerability and implies a readjustment within the structure of capabilities, which will inevitably have an impact on the person's fragility. If the person is able to readjust, confirming her capability of resilience, she will overcome the situation, if not she may reach a collapse situation.

II. FRAGILITY AT THE SOCIETAL LEVEL

Addressing fragility at the societal level raises two questions. First, in what ways factors such as poverty and social exclusion, vulnerability and insecurity, inequalities and lack of equity, by loosening the social entitlements, may be the causes of fragility at the societal level. Second, to what extent appropriate social structures and formal institutions, despite their fallibility, could intervene on this fragility.

1. Inequalities as a Source of Fragility

We have seen that, at the micro level, all people bear fragilities, which depend upon the robustness of their capability structures. Poverty, according to Sen, can be considered as a lack of capability. Vulnerability requires to readjust, within the capability structure, the combination of existing capabilities. Fragility results from the inability of the capability structure to adjust over a given limit when some capabilities have been destroyed.

This shows that the capability structure, i.e. this functional combination of capabilities within a capability set, is a useful tool for analysing both the phenomena of poverty (and therefore social exclusion), vulnerability (and therefore security), and fragility through a unique analytical framework. This framework implies that all issues can be solved through the reinforcement of specific capabilities. This naturally raises the issue of how these capabilities are distributed among the people and the forms of inequality that may result. An issue which was initially addressed by Sen (1982) in his famous paper entitled "Inequality of what?" which initiated the capability approach. Development should then aim at ensuring an equitable distribution of capabilities among the people. This shows that capability reinforcement remains the main focus of development and should be done by taking into account the inequalities in the capabilities that the people have and have reason to value (Sen 1999).

The societal dimension of fragility is therefore mainly related to the existing range of inequalities within a society. The inequality of capability, as well as the inequality of recognition of what a person is and is able to do (Ricoeur 2004), are both at the end of the chain of inequalities. They result from various other inequalities that appear in the people's endowments, opportunities and personal characteristics, but also in the various fields of economics (goods and assets, access to employment and services), social categories (gender, groups and classes), culture (identity, ethnical tradition, religion) or

geography (regional, urban vs. rural). All these inequalities may be, at their own levels, a source of frustrations and tensions, but those who are at the end of the inequality chain also become a source of humiliation, leading to the risk of riots and violent conflicts. This is the case for the inequalities of capability and of recognition, which jeopardise the traditional entitlements that maintain the social cohesion and keep the society as a whole.

Indeed, these inequalities, according to the way they are distributed in the society, may generate ‘pockets of fragility’, where groups of similar individuals, easily described by a few social, cultural and geographical criteria, suffer (or feel suffering) from a particular lack of capabilities. This increases the risk of their marginalisation compared to other social groups that benefit from a larger set of capabilities and recognition. The issue is that, according to the socio-cultural context, some inequalities are seen unacceptable and have to be addressed to avoid discontent, while others may be too easily accepted (IMPACT Network 2006).

The fact of focussing on the people at the micro level, on their freedoms of choice, allows to consider them as agent, social actors or citizens, having the capacity to act and interact with those who are in the same situation. This may lead to the constitution of groups and organisations which are more or less institutionalised around common objectives and interests. However, one should not deny that those inequalities of capability and recognition, which exist within the society according to the various people’s background, also influence the person’s capability to act, thus generating inequality of agency. Some social structures will therefore benefit better than others from this situation and become more easily powerful.

2. Social Structures and Institutions

At the micro level, all people have, as agents, their individual capability to act and a set of social capabilities of affiliation like, for instance, to engage in various forms of action with others, to have the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation... (Nussbaum 2006). This allows them to gather with other persons and act together in order to generate a collective capability and a collective power of action, i.e. a ‘collective agency’. Such ‘collective capability’ expresses itself through specialised social structures, such as self-help groups, associations, cooperatives, trade unions, etc. (Ibrahim 2006, Dubois *et al.* 2008). It is through them, and through the direct use of their freedoms of choice, that individuals and groups of persons can contribute either to the reinforcement of social links, or to their destruction, therefore impacting on social cohesion. To empower these social structures and, therefore, reinforce their collective agency through a more formal institutionalisation is also an objective of development that has a direct impact on the societal fragility.

However, in economic terms, the key question is to understand how a collective capability can emerge from the combination of several individual capabilities. It implies to precisely describe how a functional collective capabilities structure can be constituted from the aggregation of individual structures of capabilities. Such an aggregative problem is not yet solved presently for capabilities for it follows a complex mechanism. Aggregation may lead to a lower level of capability if people do not match together (therefore increasing the fragility of the society) or to a higher level, than the mere sum of individual capability, if people fit together and feel in harmony (leading then to a

reduction of vulnerability and fragility). Experimental work has brought some solution to this issue by analyzing the content of this aggregative mechanism according to various contexts (Sandler and Arce 2007, Anand 2007).

Another issue of inequality emerges when the collective agency of the various social structures are too different. Some associations, some lobbies are more open or have more power than others. This brings inequality of agency at the collective level. For instance, women heads of households have often more constraints, and therefore more difficulties, to gather in social structure like microcredit organisation. Disabled people are more easily excluded as a group and this increases their vulnerability and fragility.

All these inequalities, especially those considered unacceptable are likely to stir up tensions and conflicts, but this will largely depends upon the efficiency of the socioeconomic mechanisms implemented to master these inequalities and upon their capacity to anticipate the risk of explosion (Huchon and Réseau IMPACT 2007). The setting up of appropriate social institutions should be of a great help. However, one may be aware that social institutions and specialised structures are not always the panacea to solve all vulnerability and fragility issues.

As explains Ricoeur (1990) following Arendt (1958), human action is a mode of ensuring sociality. This is because one cannot act alone in isolation from the others and all societies emerge from the power of such cooperative action. In this context, searching for equity is less a matter of promoting individual capabilities than a matter of reinforcing the collective agency of equitable institutions that will ensure the living together. Social structures are one expression of this sociality and it is within them that a 'collective capability of resilience' can be forged. But they are also marked by human fallibility and can be perverted, therefore not acting necessarily towards a common good life (Deneulin and *al.* 2006). This increases the risk of generating new forms of collective inequality that may jeopardise the society, once they are not accepted.

III. FRAGILE STATES AND SOCIETAL FRAGILITY

Numerous reasons explain fragility at the level of the State. They can be identified by looking at the internal governance and its public policy measures, and at international relationships, with the State commitments and its external constraints. However, analysing the corresponding impact requires considering the interaction between the various levels of fragility. This is done by proposing a unique and integrated framework, which relates all levels of fragility. Such framework can be a useful tool for the design of appropriate public policies aiming at reducing the overall fragility.

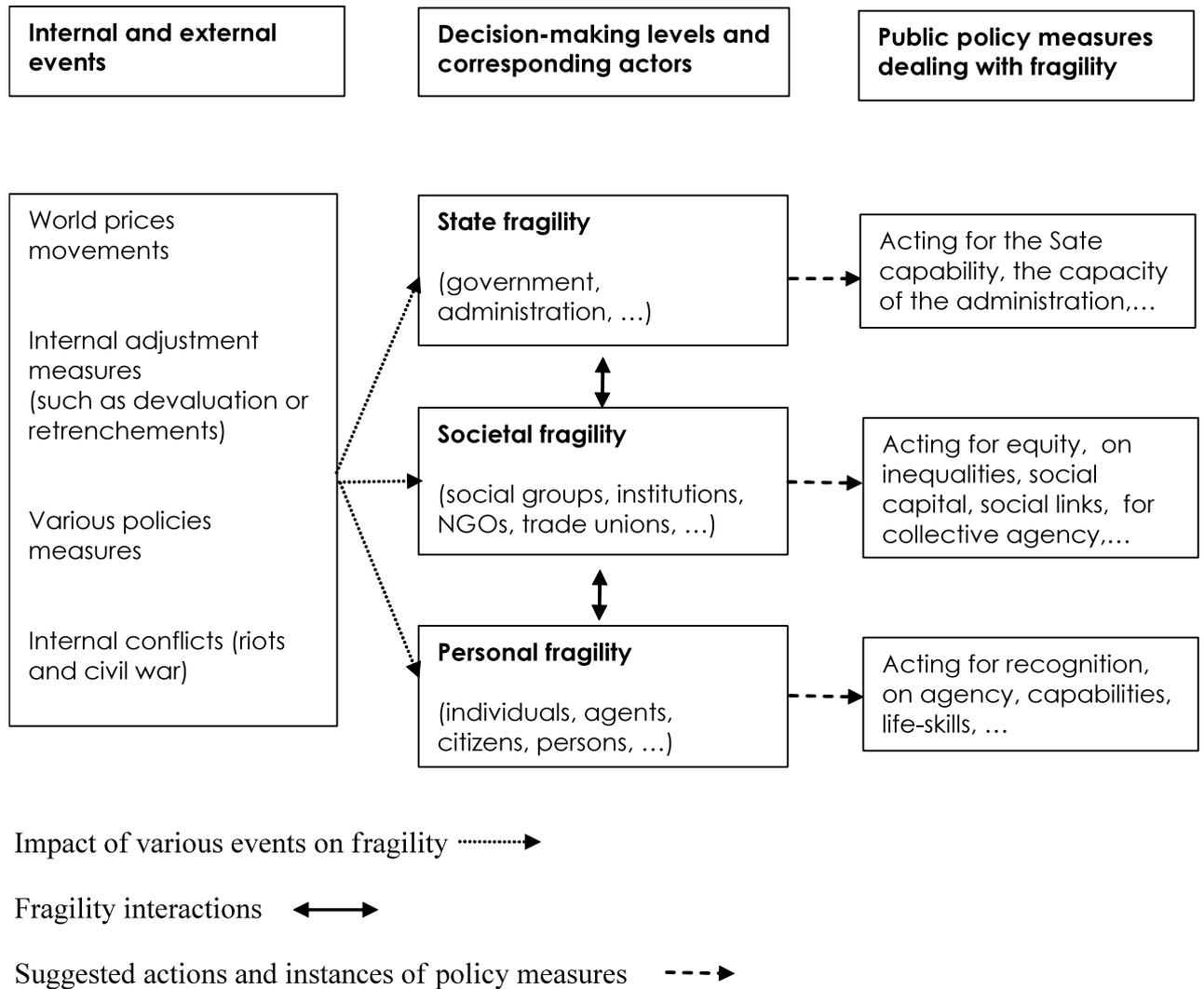
1. Proposal for a Global Fragilities Interaction Framework

At the level of the state, fragility can also be related to vulnerability. This is why USAID policy paper makes a distinction among the fragile states between those which are only vulnerable, i.e. which try to overcome the difficulties encountered by adapting their policies, and those which have already entered into serious crises, because they are unable to adjust anymore, even if they have not yet fell into armed conflict (USAID 2005).

Therefore, analysing the situation of fragile states requires to have a global view of fragility by understanding how works the interaction between fragilities at the three levels of State, society (which includes institutions, social groups, professional networks, NGOs, etc.) and people. On the one hand, at each decision level, fragility can be analysed by considering the appropriate agents and their probability of being able to adapt. Fragility is affected in different ways and at the various levels, by external events such as a change in the world commodities prices, and by internal events like adjustment measures such as devaluation, or even a conflict situation that degenerates between ethnic groups, etc... On the other hand, specific policy measures can be envisaged at each of the levels in order to contribute at the reduction of the overall fragility. They deal with the empowerment or the reinforcement of the capabilities of the various actors, the improvement of specific social links and a special focus on equity issues.

The graph 1 below suggests a framework that can be used to analyse global fragility by addressing the impact of internal and external events on the various levels of fragility, the interactions that exist between them and some instances of public policies that could alleviate fragility.

Graph 1. A Global Fragilities Interaction Framework



On the basis of such framework, several important issues still remain to be addressed: first, a better knowledge of what are the interactive linkages between the various actors that may affect fragility. This requires understanding better the bottom-up aggregative mechanism of the capabilities structure and the top-down impact of specific events on fragility. A second issue concerns the observation instruments and the way of measuring fragility. This requires a series of particular indicators at each of the levels. Some indicators have already been proposed to identify fragile states (Lavoix 2007), but the measurement of vulnerability, inequity and fragility at the personal and at the societal levels still remain a complex issue, especially when it is done through the capability approach.

2. Directions for Action through Public Policies Design

This framework gives indication for the design of public policies by addressing the three levels of fragility, i.e. the people (through micro analysis), the society (through meso and institutional analysis) and the State (macro analysis). Therefore, different lines of preventive action may be envisaged to alleviate global fragility. A first one would focus on the need to reinforce capability and agency at the individual and collective levels. The second one would consider the issues of inequality reduction and equity. The third one would deal with human security, including the issue of social cohesion.

(i) Strengthening Personal and Collective Capabilities and Agency

This is the first line of action because functioning and capability provide the foundations to analyse fragility. It includes all measures ensuring the reinforcement of individual and collective capabilities, the empowerment of the people and their social structures, the improvement of institutions capacity.

A particular focus have to be put on those particular capabilities that aims at reinforcing social interactions, actions towards the others, cooperative work, self-esteem and respect, etc., all contributing to the setting up of a capability of resilience. Improving agency at both the individual and societal level contributes to the reinforcement of social linkages and leads to the setting up of collective action towards common innovative objectives (Ballet *et al.* 2007).

This is included in the general vision of development as recommended by Sen (1999) for whom reinforcing the persons' capabilities and agencies will be a source of growth and of sustainability.

(ii) Reducing Inequality and Ensuring Equity

The second line of action deals with the issue of inequality which is one of the main causes of fragility at all levels of action. Various forms of inequalities are interrelated in an inequality chain where the inequalities of capabilities and of recognition have the greatest weight.

They will have to be addressed in different ways, either through specific redistributive measures by the State, or by participative action involving specialised actors (Winter 2001). The latter contribute to the design of 'public centred policies' which could be extremely efficient to tackle inequality since they mobilise and enhance local community-based organizations (Levy 2001).

All policies aiming at reducing inequality will have to deal with the issue of equity. First, they have to ensure that these measures do not contribute to the emergence of new forms of unacceptable inequalities, thus worsening the societal fragility. Second, they have to give priority to those inequalities considered as unfair like, for instance, inequality of capability, of agency and power, and of recognition of some categories of population.

(iii) Ensuring Social Cohesion and Human Security

The issue of social cohesion is directly related to equity within the society. Unacceptable inequalities may jeopardise the society or lead to conflict situation which, without appropriate mechanism to reduce them, may shift into violence.

Acting with appropriate social structures in order to ensure, through their collective agency, a reinforcement of social cohesion is a solution. It concerns the agency role of the people and their capacity to act as social actors to build up peace by concrete actions with the others. This is important in fragile states in the case of reconstruction after a conflict. Reinforcing through education those psycho-social capabilities, called life-skills, i.e. living in harmony with other and being able to master correctly their own lives at the levels of individuals or groups, may be a complementary solution (Dubois and Trabelsi 2007).

USAID when dealing with the concern of fragile states suggested focusing more on security. It is true that by considering the global framework of 'human security', it is possible to address in a unique way all the particular dimensions of security, such as food security, health pandemics, military defence, political issues, environment, etc., and to deal with their consequences on vulnerability and fragility (Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy 2007).

State institutions, along with civil society organizations, have a key role to play in regulating possible tensions with the objective of lessening societal fragilities. Once negotiated among concerned stakeholders through participatory governance, these regulations help to give credit to social sustainability by ensuring social cohesion and stabilization.

CONCLUSION

Since vulnerability is nowadays frequently addressed by considering the links between the various levels of the individual, the society and the State (Naudé *et al.* 2009), the fact of introducing fragility brings a complementary view for the design of preventive people-centred policies.

However, a few conceptual and analytical weaknesses remain which reduce the efficiency of this approach. First, there is not a clear-cut definition of what is fragility in a generic sense, i.e. a unique conceptual definition that can be used at the micro, meso and macro levels. A relevant definition would be "the inability of any further adjustment or adaptation when confronted to specific events and shocks". It makes the difference with vulnerability for which the capacity of resilience allows overcoming negative consequences by an appropriate adjustment of the capability sets, either at the individual or at the collective level.

Second, we need to know how the fragility of the State may be related to the social fragility of the society and the human fragilities of the people that compose it. Personal fragilities interact to ensure society resilience. And issues of inequality and equity also play a key role on the strength of social cohesion. Therefore a better understanding of the interactions between the fragilities of the various actors at all decision levels is required. We suggest using an integrated analytical framework to relate the three levels of the people, the society and the State, and by this way describe how fragility at any level

interacts with fragilities at other levels. This opens the way to further research aiming at understanding the interaction between various decisions levels, and the aggregative and distributive processes which contribute to the reduction or the extension of global fragility.

Third, with the help of such a framework, appropriate public policy measures, aiming at reducing vulnerability, ensuring equity and social cohesion, and improving capability and agency of social actors, will have to be specified through democratic debate between the various groups and community-based structures involved.

With such improvements, this approach may contribute to a new step ahead in the understanding of the conditions that may be required to ensure social sustainability under State mediation (Ballet *et al.* 2005).

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