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Fostering a Stable Framework in Helping Destabilising and Destabilised Nations to Rebuild Infrastructure

GA4 (Special Political and Decolonisation)



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Introduction

The issue of unsuitable infrastructure often reigns in destabilised, fragile nations. This often happens due to multiple factors such as economic insecurity, regional and local conflict, and government corruptions^[5]. Through this, infrastructure is not sufficiently managed, maintained, upgraded, rebuilt or even built in the first place. In fragile areas, infrastructure can be the pillar to major development to stability as through infrastructure the population gains access to many human rights facilities. This includes education, sanitation and housing^[8]. In areas where aid is present, short-term improvement is observed, but the proposed solutions are unsustainable for the long-term. Without the sufficient resources to become autonomous, civilians become vulnerable to human rights violations^[14] and standards of living which no human should be subject to. Tensions begin to rise, grow, and develop into larger scale conflicts which further destabilise a nation.

Rebuilding infrastructure is a catalyst for positive development. If designed to serve a fragile nation involving relevant parties¹ infrastructure becomes one of the most important actors for development^[8]. Inequalities are reduced as hospitals and schools run efficiently and normally, government institutions, work places, safe housing, and more.

Oftentimes, human rights are constantly violated in fragile, destabilised, and destabilising nations^[9], and it is also oftentimes that only short-term solutions are provided. These short-term solutions are unsustainable as the nations they are implemented in usually do not have the resources to keep providing these solutions after the period of aid-provisions is over. Populations become dependant on the aid and cannot fend for themselves if they do not receive aid, governments may take loans resulting in debts to funding agencies². This makes it of importance to implement long-term solutions which are sustainable.

This report explores the importance and relevance of infrastructure in peacebuilding and development contexts after conflict, and in fragile, destabilised, and destabilising nations. Keeping in consideration different factors such as economics, health, civil society, natural phenomena, and institutions, infrastructure and its role in peacebuilding will be illustrated. While keeping in mind all of the aspects of instability and fragility, this report will look at different solutions which have the potential to facilitate positive development in nations where it is needed.

¹ Any parties which might be involved in local, regional, and national conflict, and the providers of aid.

² (International) Funding organisations such as the World Bank, aid foundations, and others.

Definition of key terms

Assets

Infrastructure systems parts which are oftentimes essential for the needs of the general public, facilities that provide services such as economic productivity, and utilities such as power, water, and gas.

Civil Society

The third sector: non-profit, non-state affiliated, volunteer organisations, community groups, and unions formed by citizens for the purpose of advocating for the beliefs and needs of the citizens that are part of or support the said certain civil society organisation.

Civil Unrest

Situations where law enforcement struggles to keep public order at times of disturbances, violent and non-violent protests.

Military Expenditure

Money spent by institutions to support the military during times of conflict. The amount of money used to fund the military.

Fragile nation

A nation which is at risk, or susceptible to various crises and events due to multiple factors such as weak governance, and other fragility factors.

Fragility Factors

The different indicators which contribute to the fragility or instability of a nation. These indicators include: cohesion indicators, economic indicators, political indicators, and social indicators³. Fragility factors are those defined by the Fragile States Index (FSI) in this report.

Free Market

Where the economy is mostly unregulated, and the market is based on a supply and demand concept with little to no government intervention.

Infrastructure Systems

The different assets together make an infrastructure system: the foundations of physical society and how they interact, including operational structures such as roads and other facilities, and organisational structures such as school and housing.

International Funding

Money loaned or granted to nations and regions by international funding organisations such as the World Bank.

³ See [10] for more detailed definitions of each fragility factor.

International Humanitarian Law

The laws and rules for conflict and war, made to protect civilians and those who are not part of armed conflict.

Monopoly

When a singular party has exclusive access to commodities or private goods and is able to control trade and supply for it.

Political Unwillingness

The non-cooperation of political actors in cases where their cooperation is needed to proceed with projects.

General Overview

The problem with unsafe and unsuitable infrastructure is that it can do more harm than good. Infrastructure is supposed to empower citizens, to be an agent of change and be one of the most significant steps to positive change in fragile, unstable nations. Oftentimes however, infrastructure is considered an asset alone. Truly, infrastructure is a combination of systems that forms a large, *unified* system comprised of assets which provides the essential needs of the people. These systems can vary depending on different fragility factors. These are all factors which must be considered when designing infrastructure systems ^[5] in order to have them function efficiently, safely, and sustainably in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and also continue to do so for the future.

The concern of infrastructure inefficiency and the question of infrastructure investment has become increasingly relevant since 2012, being acknowledged by UKaid, multilateral development banks^{[34][35]}, and several news outlets^[34] despite having organisations working in the sector as early as the 20th century.

Fragile areas and infrastructure

Fragile areas are often affected heavily by armed conflict and economic instability. Through this, rebuilding infrastructure that was affected by the violence is too expensive, or more often, there are issues with political unwillingness. This demonstrates the importance of partner governments and organisations to aid development, such as the relationship between Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and multiple other organisations using their fragility framework established in 2015 as a basis of aid provision.

Countries which face environmental issues are also markedly affected in terms of infrastructure. These nations become fragile states due to unpreparedness, infrastructure and institutional plans which are unsuitable for the natural phenomena they face. By being prepared, states can avoid many fatalities like in the case of Cyclone Yasi in Australia (see appendix A).

In internal and cross-border conflict alike, schools, hospitals and other essential infrastructures are often attacked to satisfy an agenda of, for example, gaining better access to certain facilities or otherwise, despite these acts being against International Humanitarian Law (IHL) ^[13]. If not attacked, infrastructure may be inaccessible due to sickness or damaged foundations and structures. These infrastructures are means to basic human rights, the right to education⁴, healthcare, and housing⁵, raising major concerns of human rights violations, especially in post-conflict zones.

Housing issues

In unstable nations, housing crises are one of the most pressing issues. Without safe housing, the likelihood of spreading sickness and injury increases due to multiple issues. A common issue in shelters, overcrowding, can cause the rapid contamination of the area and the spreading of illnesses ^[20].

⁴ In the 26th article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

⁵ The right to adequate housing has been defined [1] by the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR).

Sickness related deaths in fragile states are often caused by HIV/AIDS, cholera due to poor sanitation, tuberculosis, malaria and more⁶ [21].

Housing is usually damaged due to poor maintenance, improper use of certain resources such as kerosene (see appendix B), or damage during conflict. This would mean risks of collapsing buildings, fires, uneven surfaces, burns, and poisoning [22].

Attempts at stabilisation through infrastructure

When attempts to begin stabilising and developing a nation begin, sufficient, long-term infrastructure solutions are often missing. Humanitarian aid organisations often prioritise short-term solutions. Quick, but long-term and sustainable solutions are the most favorable, a leading role model of this being Germany and the work done in Yemen's water and sanitation systems.

When long-term solutions are implemented, they are oftentimes unsustainable for the nation they are implemented in. Multiple factors must be considered when introducing solutions. This namely includes the fragility indicators of the state, geographical characteristics, historical contexts of the conflict. When these factors are not acknowledged, infrastructure can do more harm than good [5]. Afterall, if the solution itself is unsustainable for the area it was implemented in, the beginning of sustainable peace cannot be expected out of it [8].

Strategy and prioritization of infrastructure projects is also a notable issue. By implementing short-term solutions to substitute for long-term solutions, it is disregarded that the solutions are *short-term*. They cannot be expected to be a permanent solution. Oftentimes, tents are put up for temporary schooling, health institutions, and housing, but external aid does not usually consider the dependency of the people on these implementations. These immediate response mechanisms are essential, but made to be replaced. To prevent this, and to prevent dependency on short-term, unsustainable aid, encouraging long-term aid projects such as building hospitals, schools, and housing could make a big difference. Promoting long-term aid projects would be most beneficial for those affected by fragile and unstable settings, and it also may encourage aid providers to actually take on larger, longer projects.

Institutional frameworks

Frameworks to rebuild infrastructure introduced by institutions are often weak, underfunded, and not trusted. This is because, especially in cases of civil war, there are other parties which do not trust the government and institutions, vice versa.

For example, in the Central African Republic (CAR), as institutions take on large scale post-conflict rebuilding projects, rebel forces such as the Seleka rebels⁷ pose significant threat to humanitarian and rebuilding projects [18].

This is but one example of threats from oppositional parties to institutions in regard to post-conflict recovery and development of fragile nations. This can only be mitigated by encouraging participation of all groups, however political unwillingness, bias, and hostility

⁶ The mentioned illnesses are but a few examples. Illnesses and their effect vary depending on regions.

⁷A sectarian rebel group in CAR.

can raise concerns to neutral parties. By building infrastructure without consulting all parties, some demographics may experience feelings of injustice, only leading to worsened tensions and conflict.

Hazards to civil society and intergovernmental organisations (IGOs)

It is often the case that rebuilding in post-conflict zones is avoided by many civil societies due to hazards and unstable conditions. Many non-profit organisations avoid working in areas where staff and volunteers may face significant danger. Preparation measures must be taken to ensure the safety of workers, an example of this would be the SAF (see appendix C).

Some of the largest deterrents are unexploded landmines^[6]. If accidentally detonated, landmines can have fatal effects on the surroundings and exacerbate tensions between previously conflicting groups. Detonated landmines can destroy infrastructure in the making, signaling the importance of risk assessment before building and extreme care that must be taken in areas that might have a higher likelihood of having landmines,

Health and security are also major factors which might dishearten rebuilding projects. Oftentimes in fragile societies, armed groups⁸ present major danger to civil society. Volunteers and staff are threatened with sexual violence, murder, extortion, and torture.

In cases of epidemics, various counter-measures need to be taken to protect the staff from being infected as well, this is not a problem for IGOs working to solve healthcare concerns such as the World Health Organisation (WHO). Civil society volunteers and staff also face the danger of injury or death to the phenomena that the particular region faces.

The lack of civil society can be beneficial but also detrimental. Without the help of civil society, the reconstruction process could take longer due to a lack of workers, planners, or a neutral party. However, civil society can come with its own agenda of spreading religious or political values, which can only cause further polarisation between conflicting groups, or even conflict with other civil society organisations^{[7][24]}.

Economic strain

Many nations experience severe economic strain if they are unstable^[7]. Post-conflict societies and institutions that struggle with corruption are extremely vulnerable to economic decline and instability as a fragility factor. If the economy becomes unregulated, it could become a free market (see appendix D). This might allow for monopolies to form and limit the access to private goods, especially in fragile economies. Particular infrastructure assets would become more expensive or monopolised^[6].

Economic decline is caused primarily due to military funding and spending, especially in conflict, with the increased military expenditure, there usually isn't income to make up for losses.

Economic strain could significantly affect a nation that is institutional corruption. In cases where government officials embezzle funds from the government or accept bribes, or profiteer, new institutions can struggle with sourcing income in a sustainable method.

Preexisting debts can also cause significant drawbacks when it comes to rebuilding infrastructure. Institutions may be reluctant to take out loans from development banks and international funding agencies.

⁸ Most commonly non-state groups, but can also be groups which are supported by the government.

All of these economic factors can make institutions more reluctant to accept aid, take out loans, and fund infrastructure projects as they are often quite costly, costing up to billions of dollars ^{9[2]}.

Loans from multilateral development banks (MDBs)

A solution that economically unstable institutions often reach for is taking out loans from regional MDBs. This is usually an immediate emergency response for natural disasters, immediate humanitarian aid, or essential infrastructure building. This is one of the most common actions taken in times of need as it instantly provides a state with the financial means to take significant action in order to solve a problem. Taking out loans is often risky, however, for large scale, costly projects as it can leave fragile states with even more fragile economies if the debt accumulates.

⁹ Rebuilding heavily damaged regions can cost up to billions depending on the state of the nation.

Major parties involved

International Committee of the Red Cross

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) provides immediate response in areas in desperate situations needing support, especially in regards to the healthcare sector. The ICRC does not only aid in situations where healthcare aid is needed, but also aids in facilitating the restoration of essential life and wellbeing services such as water, housing, and sanitation. They work mostly in conflict and poverty affected nations such as Palestine, Ethiopia, Ukraine, Syria, Yemen, and more, but also nations affected by natural disasters such as Myanmar. Because human health is interconnected with all aspects of life, the ICRC uses a holistic approach for aid provision and restoration projects to improve multiple areas of civilian life in destabilised settings.

Multilateral Development Banks

Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) include regional and international banks which provide financial aid to nations in the form of loans and grants, helping institutions fund the initiation of rebuilding and restoration projects. Major MDBs include the World Bank, African Development Bank, Asian Development Bank, European Investment Bank, and many more. These MDBs can be fundamental to the recovery of fragile nations in the infrastructural context as many unstable nations struggle with financial issues and through financial aid, said nations can continue to focus on the needs of affected populations and infrastructure. Debts to MDBs can be later paid off once the economy has improved to an extent of considerable stability.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

By guiding the building of everyday infrastructure to aid in the lives of citizens and the essential transportation of goods, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) aims to improve the economies of fragile nations through restoring vital services such as power while also aiding sustainable development in line with the SDGs. The OECD offers insights to financial, environmental, and political systems and infrastructures with the main goal of assisting in economic development.

United Nations Development Program

Focusing on recovery, but also prevention, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) brings long-term solutions for crisis aversion and solutions from local to international levels. Through working on social and economic level, the UNDP aims to mitigate the effects of fragility on civilian populations, and to strengthen institutions to be able to function more effectively to benefit the people. By using the OECD-classified fragile states as a basis as to where help is most needed, the UNDP can effectively distribute funds and aid.

United Nations Office for Project Services

UNOPS enables the rebuilding of essential infrastructures in fragile and unstable nations. With a focus on responding to local community requirements, UNOPS restores, builds, and supports infrastructure projects in accordance with the SDGs and the Paris Agreement for climate change. UNOPS provides energy, health and education infrastructure, plans and designs in partnership with the nations where they are present while advising institutions on how to keep infrastructure effective. UNOPS has been present in fragile and conflict affected states since 1995.

Timeline of events

- 1947 May 8th** World Bank approves its first loan for post-conflict infrastructure rebuilding to France as immediate aid, jumpstarting the aid provisions to other European countries.
- 1948 March** The Marshall Plan launches, meaning that United States aid is being sent to Europe, allowing the World Bank to shift its attention to the rest of the world affected. The World Bank becomes one of the largest international actors in infrastructure rebuilding and financial aid provision.
- 1997 March** UNDP begins its first major infrastructure project in Azerbaijan to help in the restoration of civilian life and human rights alongside partner governments and organisations..
- 2012 December** The Asian Development Bank (ADB) publishes a guide indicating the importance of infrastructure to the development of developing nations for economic and institutional advancement.
- 2015 March 26th** The OECD publishes the first “States of Fragility” report, clearly establishing the multi-dimensional OECD fragility framework which many organisations utilise to distribute aid.
- 2016 January 1st** The SDGs become fully effective to all member states, establishing clear goals for the implementation of much of the infrastructure to be built in unstable and fragile nations for sustainability.
- 2016 April 27th** General Assembly (GA) and Security council (SC) adopt the twin resolutions GA RES/70/262, and SC resolution 2282 (2016) with the agenda of encouraging sustainable peacebuilding measures regarding architecture, infrastructure, and stronger institutions.
- 2023 October 30th** The International Monetary Fund (IMF) releases an article stating that the economic impact of COVID-19 would be the worst in fragile and conflict affected states, causing extreme poverty. Extreme poverty and weak economies in fragile contexts often means insufficient infrastructure.
- 2025 February 18th** OECD describes the majorly increased risks in fragile and unstable nations to human rights and extreme poverty in the annual report.

Relevant UN treaties and events

A/RES/70/1; Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: General Assembly resolutions announcing the SDGs, resolving to end all injustices and inequalities in the world by 2030. Adopted September 25th 2015.

A/RES/70/262; Review of the United Nations peacebuilding architecture: General Assembly resolution recognising and affirming the importance of architecture to development and human rights protection in fragile settings. Adopted April 27th 2016.

S/RES/2282; Resolution 2282 (2016): Security Council resolution which is the twin resolution of A/RES/70/262, affirming the same—that architecture is essential to development and human rights protection. Adopted April 27th 2016.

S/RES/2573; Resolution 2573 (2021): Security Council resolution strongly condemning violence against civilians, civilian infrastructures, and any violence which goes against the IHL. Adopted on April 27th 2021.

A/RES/77/282; Building global resilience and promoting sustainable development through regional and interregional infrastructure connectivity: General Assembly resolution acknowledging the need for specific infrastructures depending on each nation to make it more accessible for those in need, and reaffirming the importance of infrastructure to stabilisation as well as sustainable development. Adopted April 26th 2023.

Previous attempts to solve the issue

Governmental partnerships for aid provisions

Many governments choose to establish foreign aid and affairs institutions to have a managing branch for aid provisions in other countries. Oftentimes, governments will choose to partner with other newly emerged governments in post-conflict situations, or another government which experiences note-worthy fragility or instability to provide aid to. An example of this would be the German and Yemeni collaboration to implement a water and sanitation system within Yemen, or the Swedish and Kenyan partnership for aiding development. This oftentimes works, but can also pose a few problems. Firstly, these governmental collaborations and partnerships often only work with states which have allies that are capable of providing aid. The creation of allyships may cause polarisation or further conflict within, and outside of the state where fragility is present.

OECD fragility framework

The fragility framework published by the OECD, establishing which nations and states are unstable, destabilising, and which are fragile has been a helpful tool for many aid providers including branches of the United Nations, the European Union, multiple civil societies and individual countries. It has been largely recognised as an effective framework, however, the lack of an internationally applicable framework recognised by *all* could be seen as a concern.

“UNDP Crisis Offer” framework

The UNDP developed a framework in 2022 which addresses the ever growing need for a new, strengthened system for development aid. The Crisis Offer deals with fragility in three sections, anticipation and prevention, economic development and sustainability, and breaking the ‘fragility cycle’. These are the three pillars of the framework, dealing with resilience, socio-economic, and institutional development respectively. This framework, however effective it seems, is severely underfunded, and as global conflicts evolve, tensions rise, and disasters continue to occur, it becomes increasingly difficult for the UNDP to operate in so many areas, in so many different fragile regions.

Possible solutions

Establish an international framework

By establishing an international framework for defining fragility and instability, getting started with providing aid will become a faster and more efficient process, which is especially essential in cases of immediate risk. The framework could consider fragility factors, sectors, risks, and already existing frameworks such as the OECD fragility framework as it is already recognised globally. Also, time frame can be considered, instead of making an annual report it could be every half year, or every two years, or anything really, which could be suitable to the ever changing situations of states in unstable conditions. Making an international framework, however, might also become counter productive as shifting from using one system to another might be daunting to organisations with critical projects in progress, or conflict with already existing frameworks.

Establish a UN body for regulation and mediation

In cases of conflict, oftentimes there are feelings of injustice if one particular side of a strife has better access to aid and different facilities, especially with the involvement of civil society. Also, in regards to maintenance, it is important that it is overseen that infrastructure remains functional. This could be effectively done by establishing a UN body to regulate the impartiality of aid providers, to ensure that all parties despite any strife receive appropriate and equal access to aid, and to oversee the future maintenance of infrastructure in case of the institution still being unable to do so themselves. Having a regulatory or an intermediary body present in situations of heightened tensions could be beneficial for maintaining safety, but could also spark conflict if not done correctly, so it is important that when considering this as a solution, that all factors such as civil societies, institutions, armed groups, and many more are considered. This solution also might not be effective on UN organs such as the UNDP and UNOPS as they are already regulated.

Inclusion of conflicting parties

When in the initial stages of rebuilding infrastructure, it could be of considerable importance to include any conflicting parties to discuss what will be done. This can prevent any provocation of either party and create a mutual and inclusive environment from early on, discouraging any future conflict arising as a result of said infrastructures. This could consist of leaders or representatives of each group present at meetings, engineers from either party, civilians, civil society, any major actors which could encourage a positive environment to proceed from in building as a measure of conflict prevention, and not just recovery.

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<https://www.lse.ac.uk/international-development/Assets/Documents/PDFs/csdc-background-papers/Definition-of-a-Failed-State.pdf>

Appendices

Appendix A

- Cyclone Yasi was a category 5 cyclone which made landfall in Australia in 2011. The Australian government was able to avoid fatalities, with only one death, through previous drills and campaigns held to prepare the people for any cyclone which might affect certain areas in the future. The cyclone was still extremely costly, however, but death and injury was greatly avoided thanks to disaster management and preparedness.

Appendix B

- World Health Organization, *Injury hazards*. World Health Organization, 2018. Available: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK535287/>

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines hazards in homes, a primary one being kerosene. In lower income countries and households, kerosene is often used unsafely. The primary uses are for lamps, cooking fires, and heating, which are often lacking in fragile nations due to insufficient infrastructure to provide electricity or gas.

Appendix C

- ICRC and Safer Access Safer Lives, “Overview – Safer Access,” *Safer Access Safer Lives*, 2015. Available: <https://saferaccess.icrc.org/overview/>

The ICRC SAF is an acronym for the Safer Access Framework. This framework was made to ensure the efficiency in the ability of having aid and staff reach people in need, but also maximise the safety of the staff in volatile situations. To do so, this framework looks at 8 factors: identification, how people can identify their staff; external communication and coordination, communicating and coordinating with any external actors to develop efficient strategies; acceptance of the organisation, having key actors accept the provision of aid; acceptance of the individual, having key actors accept the staff of the organisation; context and risk assessment, the understanding of the social, economic, political, and cultural indicators which might pose risks to establish a basis for management; internal communication and coordination, communicating and coordinating action between the movement components¹⁰; operational security risk management, the organisation takes accountability for the safety of the workers by developing systems; legal and policy base, developing valid laws and policies that are in line with the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, IHL, and local legislation. Through this framework, the ICRC can work safely.

Appendix D

Free markets may be beneficial as they offer increased opportunities, efficiency, and growth. They encourage innovation, and encourage investments. It can also, however, cause economic instability if misused by monopolies, cause environmental damage, and drainage of natural resources. Minimal governmental regulation might cause the selling of dangerous

¹⁰ The three components of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the ICRC, the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).

products, merit goods will be expensive and underprovided, while demerit goods will be cheap and overprovided. It is quite easy to take advantage of a free market, but it can also be the reason for economic advancement. It can be viewed as a positive or negative step towards economic advancement.