

GENDER & FRAGILITY, CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE



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Gender equality is crucial for transforming societies from fragility to resiliency.

Fragility, conflict, and violence (FCV) serves as an analytical framework for understanding the connections between fragility, conflict, and violence, and the effects of each. FCV impacts people differently, and to have a more holistic understanding of the issue, practitioners must use a gender lens to comprehend how FCV impacts women differently from men.

The peacebuilding and international development fields do not share a universal definition of fragility, which feeds into a lack of cohesion in programming. The [United States Institute of Peace](#) understands fragility as the “absence or breakdown of the social contract between people and government”¹ while the [OECD fragility framework](#) defines fragility as “the combination of exposure to risk and insufficient coping capacity of the state, system and/or communities to manage, absorb or mitigate those risks.”² Other organizations do not explicitly define fragility, opting instead to represent fragility as a spectrum ranging from crisis to resilience. This brief will rely upon the OECD multidimensional fragility framework, which aims to “design the best policies to advance development in fragile contexts,” and outlines five core dimensions of fragility: economic, environmental, political, security, and societal. Each of these dimensions highlights specific risk factors and challenges that lead to fragility, all of which must be considered individually and collectively for effective programming, advocacy, and policy implementation.

In many countries women are more heavily impacted by the shocks and risks of fragility. For example, in post-disaster relief, women are less likely to benefit from entitlement programs because those programs favor “tenants of record, bank account holders, and perceived heads of households,” all of which are usually men. In addition, women provide the majority of care to children, the elderly, and disabled. The intensity of this function increases in the face of economic or environmental shocks, because completing basic tasks becomes more challenging.³ Finally, shocks that impact households have a disproportionate impact on women because the costs of household goods, e.g. water, increase, leading to reduced expenditures elsewhere. Women are also heavily impacted by shocks that damage the home. since they are more likely to be working in the informal sector, in which their home may serve as a workspace. If that workspace no longer exists or budget restraints prevent a woman from buying necessary materials for her work she cannot participate in the informal sector and generate income.⁴

The challenge of FCV is substantial, but by focusing on the gendered impacts of fragility it is possible to narrow the scope of the field and develop specific recommendations around improving responses to fragility. Two primary questions emerge: 1) how do we address the distinct needs of women in fragile or conflict-impacted states, and 2) how do we mobilize women to be change agents in their communities, and to break down the barriers that prevent them from enacting change? This brief answers these questions by exploring case studies across the OECD’s five dimensions of fragility.

¹ Nancy Lindborg, USIP, “Handle with Care: The Challenge of Fragility”, 2017.

² OECD, “States of Fragility 2016: Understanding Violence”, November 2016.

³ GFDRR, “Building Social Resilience: Protecting and Empowering Those Most at Risk”, 2015.

⁴ Virginie Le Masson, Andrew Norton, and Emily Wilkinson, BRACED, “Gender and Resilience”, 2015.

Case Studies

Economic: Managing Risks through Economic Development in Nepal (Mercy Corps)

Economic fragility: “vulnerability to risks stemming from weaknesses in economic foundations and human capital including macroeconomic shocks, unequal growth and high youth unemployment.”⁵

In Nepal, the introduction of the [Managing Risks through Economic Development \(M-RED\) program](#) provided new perspectives on how to address challenges posed by economic fragility. After the initial phase of the program, which did not address women’s inclusion, Mercy Corps determined that, to effectively promote resilience, they must address “structural social barriers related to women’s inclusion” and “increase the availability of and access to risk-reducing financial inclusion measures.” The research done on the topic in Nepal led to the inclusion of the Women’s Initiative fund for banana nexus crops, a program that supported women’s involvement in banana planting and cultivation. This program provided women with an outlet for sharing their knowledge, something they were excluded from doing in the prominent sugarcane nexus intervention. While this program was important and provided women with new opportunities, Mercy Corps recognized in their program review that, in the future, women must be better incorporated into decision making processes more broadly.

Environmental: Climate Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments in Indonesia (World Vision)

Environmental fragility: “vulnerability to environmental, climatic and health risks that affect citizens’ lives and livelihoods.”⁶

In the West Kalimantan region of Indonesia, “more than 50% of the population lives below the poverty line and the poorest communities, who depend on agriculture and forests for their livelihoods, are among the most vulnerable.”⁷ In West Kalimantan, communities are already being affected by the impacts of climate change, including dry spells that cause fires and destroy crops; flooding and soil erosion; reduced fresh water resources and an increase in disease.

[World Vision identified a need for more sustainable responses to shocks and stresses in the region](#), and as a first step to reaching this capacity they began the “Climate and Environmental Degradation Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (CEVCA).” This tool was used to assess community vulnerabilities, understand how communities are impacted by climate change, and incorporate scientific data in response to climate change. Engaging a range of stakeholders, including women, allowed World Vision to better understand the factors underlying vulnerability. Women were key to designing effective approaches both because they experience the impacts of climate change in ways distinct from men and because they hold unique insight on the impacts of climate change on their families and communities. In one specific instance it identified the root cause of children’s health problems as illegal logging practices happening far from the community being impacted. By identifying the root cause of the issue World Vision was better able to provide a response, instead of simply treating the symptoms of individuals facing health challenges they began to address the source, leading to a more sustainable solution.

Political: Natural Resource Management and Peacebuilding Program in the Mander Triangle (Mercy Corps)

Political fragility: “vulnerability to risks inherent in political processes, events or decisions; political inclusiveness (including elites); and transparency, corruption and society’s ability to accommodate change and avoid repression.”⁸

[Mercy Corps’ programming in the Mander triangle](#), the geographic region where Kenya, Ethiopia, and Somalia meet, seeks to improve natural resource management by improving social cohesion and enabling the institutional environment to facilitate conflict management. Mercy Corps’ programming theorized that more positive interactions among community groups and better working relationships between conflict management actors would improve conflict resolution mechanisms, drive down levels of conflict, and ultimately lead to greater resilience outcomes. Mercy

⁵ OECD, “States of Fragility 2016: Understanding Violence”, November 2016.

⁶ OECD, “States of Fragility 2016: Understanding Violence”, November 2016.

⁷ Josh Folkema, Maggie Ibrahim, and Emily Wilkinson, World Vision, “World Vision’s resilience programming: adding value to development”, 2013.

⁸ OECD, “States of Fragility 2016: Understanding Violence”, November 2016.

Corps defined resilience as a “greater ability to manage/cope with shocks and stresses while meeting household food needs.” Mercy Corps found that many people deemed the program successful; their faith in the ability of government actors and community leaders to prevent and resolve conflict had increased. Women and women’s groups played a central role in resolving community conflicts. In Northern Karamoja, the relationship between increased resolution of disagreements and the ability of women and women’s groups to prevent and mitigate conflict was among the strongest, statistically.

Security: Incorporation of Gender-Based Protection Programming in Nigeria (Mercy Corps)

Security fragility: “the vulnerability of overall security to violence and crime, including both political and social violence.”⁹

Nigeria faces security-based fragility arising from continued conflict in the Northeast, attributable to Boko Haram and various insurgencies, as well as military operations attempting to curtail Boko Haram. This conflict has led to a lack of security, limited mobility, and diminished employment options that have placed Nigeria in a food crisis. In addition, the conflict has threatened poverty alleviation and development efforts by destroying infrastructure and markets.

In 2017, Mercy Corps developed and published a pair of reports that considered the impact of these factors on the security situation in Nigeria. These reports are entitled [Resilience and Conflict in Nigeria: Analysis of dynamics and programming leverage points](#) and [Mercy Corps Nigeria’s Integrated Protection Approach](#). The first focuses on conducting research to better understand “what household and community characteristics are important sources of resilience when households deal with conflict and related shocks in fragile contexts.” It categorized resilience capacities as either adaptive or transformative and then considered three major capacities in each of these categories. The adaptive capacities included 1) access to/use of insurance, 2) risk aversion of household head, and 3) remittances. The transformative capacities included 1) the presence of community groups, 2) the presence of basic community services and infrastructure, and 3) access to electricity (household and community). The analysis found that programs that build transformative capacities have the greatest potential to improve resilience in the context of Nigeria, “specifically in the form of child nutritional outcomes in the face of conflict and bolstering household food security and consumption in times of other (primarily economic) shocks.”

The second report took crucial next steps by identifying areas for improved protection such as 1) the changing structure of households, and 2) the different impact of FCV on specific individuals within households. Continuous violent conflict has resulted in the separation of families, with many household now single-headed and run by a nontraditional breadwinner (women or young men). Taking this information into account, it is crucial that the two studies be combined, such that resilience capacities are built into transforming societies and communities in ways accessible to new heads of households. This means that the introduction of community groups, basic community services and infrastructure, and access to electricity must not be limited to those families led by a traditional male head of household.

Societal: Recognizing Women’s Leadership in India (Swayan Shikshan Prayog)

Societal fragility: “vulnerability to risks affecting societal cohesion that stem from both vertical and horizontal inequalities, including inequality among culturally defined or constructed groups and social cleavages.”¹⁰

In an attempt to develop greater resilience, Swayan Shikshan Prayog (SSP), a nongovernmental development organization, [helped mobilize 3,000 women farmers in Maharashtra to form women’s agricultural groups](#). These groups helped to combat inequalities women farmers were facing. The agricultural groups achieved recognition as farmers, which gave them access to government training and sustainable agricultural advice. In addition, the groups partnered with the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural development to access agricultural loans, equipment, and other services. Working as a group allowed women to be more efficient and combat the challenges they faced that their male counterparts did not face. Their efforts increased farm productivity and improved incomes and food security in the area.

⁹ OECD, “States of Fragility 2016: Understanding Violence”, November 2016.

¹⁰ OECD, “States of Fragility 2016: Understanding Violence”, November 2016.

Recommendations

These cases provide examples of how FCV programming can be effective, but also the many challenges that FCV programs face. Although each dimension of fragility is considered here individually, it is important to note the implications they have collectively. Together they allow for the identification of various recommendations to improve FCV programming with regard to women:

- FCV programming should focus on community-level transformative changes that provide services in a manner accessible to all members of the community regardless of age or gender;
- FCV programming should work to challenge existing social norms that prevent women from accessing the goods and services crucial to their active involvement in the community;
- Resilience-based programs should seek to address the root causes of fragility in communities, and when developing solutions should be inclusive of all members of society.

