

**Comments from The Asia Foundation on World Bank Group Concept Note:
Strategy for Fragility, Conflict and Violence**

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We welcome and support The World Bank Group's continued efforts to ensure that its approaches respond effectively to the demands and needs of regions affected by conflict and violence. The following comments offer ideas for taking forward the concept note. Further information can be provided if useful, now or at a later stage of strategy development.

1. Framing the approach

- **Unpacking FCV.** This acronym conflates three interrelated and yet distinct concepts which often require specific technical approaches and solutions (likely implemented by different sets of actors). The concept note could reflect this, including in the way it is structured: one approach would be to consider F, C and V as linked yet separate "areas of engagement". Related to this, the document could do a better job at articulating how various types of intervention (listed in Chapter 4) contribute to addressing F, C or V.
- **Avoid a misleading and false linear scale from fragility to stability.** Where use of the term fragility leads people to think of normative sequences and distracts from better understanding of context, then it will be better to avoid using it at all. In many cases, the term has little predictive value and limited descriptive value, and so it should be used sparingly.
- **Recognizing F,C and V as commonplace and varied, not as exceptional.** Encouragingly, the conflict note recognizes the increasing proportion of the poorest people who live in conflict affected places. The challenge then is to follow this approach through. How about openly discarding the implicit prior assumption: that most places are peaceful and stable? This is simple to do: rather than asking what anomalies lead to fragility and conflict, analysis can instead ask what conditions enable some places to move beyond forms of violence. This approach, well established in the wider literature, would also help to ensure that FCV is not treated falsely as a specific category or set of attributes, while enabling conflict assessment to feed directly into operational approaches.

2. Understanding context and building tailored solutions

- **Following through on commitments to tailored solutions.** The concept note identifies the need to balance common frameworks with tailored solutions. As it stands, there is more emphasis on establishing the common frameworks than on tailored solutions. There is a particular need to recognize differences between and within nations, across many variables.
- **Poverty, and development, are only one aspect of conflict.** Making a link with poverty can help to ensure that conflict is mainstreamed or adequately considered across operations, given the

WBG's mandate. But conflict still needs to be understood first and foremost as a political problem that needs political solutions. The thematic challenges on pages 8-9 appear to be shaped by existing WBG categories and policies rather than a broad understanding of conflict and its drivers.

- **How will the proposed approach generate space to understand subnational and cross-border conflicts?** Subnational conflicts require concerted local and national level attention. Conflicts that straddle borders between countries are also surprisingly common and many of the drivers behind them can be overlooked through focusing overwhelmingly at the national level. These and many other conflict contexts are also poorly explained through the concept of fragile states.
- **Continually engaging with partners and specialists in order to build contextual knowledge** is important, and not only as a one-off consultative process for a report. Understanding conflict and violence requires good political, social and economic analysis, and wider stakeholder engagement. If this does not happen, or if these inputs are squeezed into narrow categories and frameworks, then tailored solutions will not be found.
- **Lessons from past evaluations.** The concept note could articulate how past evaluations (IEG and others) inform the new strategy. This would highlight what changes are proposed this time around, when a lot of what is suggested here sounds often right but rarely new ("strengthening institutions and macro-stability", "delivering services to foster social inclusion", "promoting livelihoods, markets and sustainable private sector development").

3. *Specific fields to address*

- **Existing work on inequalities should be better integrated into the approach.** Inequalities – which are about political rights and social status as well as poverty levels or service provision – provide an obvious link between the causes of conflict and development interventions. The word "inequality" is mentioned just twice in the note. This is surprising given the prominent treatment of inequality and exclusion in the Bank's own Pathways for Peace. The note does mention exclusion/inclusion, but only for specific groups – refugees, women, youth. How about addressing inequality, exclusion and injustice more broadly through governance reform, economic policies etc., as a core element of conflict prevention?
- **Climate change.** The first part of the note emphasizes climate change as a "*threat multiplier*". When it comes to solutions and interventions (p. 9), concrete steps could be proposed. The Bank could address knowledge gaps over the anticipated effects of climate change on conflict and violence dynamics in the most vulnerable countries. This is a field where assumptions reign and evidence remains scarce.
- **Promoting private sector engagement.** The report states: "*FCV settings require a development approach that catalyzes private sector development to complement public efforts.*" In many cases, private sector funds will only flow after investment risks are reduced, from the risks facing a small-scale farmer up to those assessed by multinational companies. So the sequencing of interventions is important. In addition, fragile settings are often typified by 'elite capture' or 'limited access orders' rather than level playing fields, and so while investment is necessary it

can also end up furthering vested interests, funding warlords, or derailing peace processes. Care is therefore needed in forming recommendations.

- **Pivoting towards Prevention** (p.7). This is important to recognize but hard to take forward without considerable effort and investment. Good data on conflict trends is one important requirement. Global datasets rarely offer the granular detail and disaggregated data needed at the national or subnational level. Again, Pathways for Peace addresses this.
- **Avoiding internal jargon and categories.** The concepts, language, and approach presented in the concept note will make more sense to WB experts than to those outside the institution. If the aim of the document is to build wider change, and if the writing process hopes to gain genuine input from a range of stakeholders, then there is a need to adopt more widely used terms and approaches.
- **The 4 Ps for operational effectiveness:** This section follows on well from the Pathways to Peace report in directly addressing practical challenges, and it is well framed at this stage. Such measures will inevitably be very hard to implement, so realistic, tangible change may be most feasible.

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