

# SERVICE DELIVERY IN FRAGILE SETTINGS

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## INTRODUCTION

In countries experiencing fragility, the delivery of public services—such as security, social protection, education, healthcare, clean water, energy and waste management—is often inhibited by conflict, weak capacity within public institutions and insufficient infrastructure. In fragile contexts, service delivery gaps are often filled by non-state actors, including civil society organizations, armed groups and religious communities. This brief draws on recent research and best practices in service delivery from a range of fragile contexts, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Nepal, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Sri Lanka and Uganda. It also considers how SDG 16's goal of building effective institutions can best be pursued in fragile contexts with relation to service delivery.

## FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

There is a commonly held belief that providing services that meet citizen needs improves public perceptions of the state. As such, many peacebuilding and statebuilding interventions use support for state service delivery as a means to improve the perception of state legitimacy. In fragile and conflict-affected contexts, where the delivery of public services such as education, healthcare, water and sanitation tends to lag behind other countries, service delivery has become a central focus of many interventions. Moreover, the resumption of services can be viewed as an important peace dividend in post-conflict states like DRC and Afghanistan, where service delivery has been disrupted or cut off entirely during certain periods.<sup>1</sup>

However, recent evidence demonstrates that the way in which services are delivered matters more than whom they are delivered by and if they are delivered at all. In fact, effectiveness and the process through which effectiveness is achieved—often stakeholder consultation—has a greater effect on a citizen's perception of government legitimacy than does the service provider itself. The results of cross-cutting panel surveys, conducted by the Overseas Development Institute in five countries, illustrate that service delivery models with built-in grievance redress mechanisms are perceived more positively than those without.

In fragile and conflict-affected contexts, the political environment, the level of state capacity, the extent of public trust in government and conflict dynamics may determine the service provider, which may be the state or a non-state actor. In situations where non-state actors are providing services, the state's role is to facilitate the provision of services.<sup>2</sup>

Particularly in fragile contexts with multi-stakeholder service delivery models, the flexibility and depth of relationships between service delivery partners is critical. Collaboration between funders and service providers and among the various service providers themselves is important to ensure that limited resources are applied in the most effective and impactful way. For example, the Ministry of Women should work with the Ministries of Planning and the Interior to ensure that gender responsive services are available in a given province's districts. Some donors are reticent to work with non-state actors which, depending upon the service delivery model, could have an impact on the effectiveness of service delivery interventions.

1 Denney, L., Mallett, R. and Mazurana, D., 'Peacebuilding and service delivery', United Nations University (Feb 2015).

2 Denney, Mallett and Mazurana (note 1).



## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Move away from blanket approaches to service delivery in post-conflict settings

- While there is no clear evidence that service delivery directly results in statebuilding, investment in service delivery is still important to governance and stability. Donors must be conscious of context and select an intervention model that is well-suited to the given environment.
- Conflict analyses should be conducted before service delivery interventions and during regular intervals therein to enable a results-oriented approach.
- Blanket approaches are laden with assumptions that may or may not hold in complex environments and stand to undermine achievement of the desired outcomes.

### 2. Invest in approaches that build capacity and empower service providers.

- The training and maintenance of qualified personnel in government are important for improving the effectiveness of state service delivery and its facilitation of service delivery by other providers.
- Including service providers, such as local governments, in research on the perception of service delivery is one way to empower them to be more responsive. Such approaches should focus on assets rather than needs.

### 3. Service delivery as a peacebuilding tool should be inclusive.

- In order to achieve inclusive service delivery, programmes should be designed to target vulnerable and marginalized groups, namely women, the elderly, children, people with disabilities and minorities. In Sri Lanka, a service delivery programme that focused on women's grievance mechanisms has had very positive outcomes.
- Citizens should be consulted about the effectiveness of services delivered and means of improving service delivery. Relationships between those who benefit from services and the service providers have a strong impact on public perception.

### 4. Donors should provide flexible adaptive funding to service delivery partners.

- Partners on the ground are the most knowledgeable about evolving conflict dynamics and the political environment, and should have some room to use funding in different ways according to the circumstances on the ground.

