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Resilience: a Trojan horse for a new way of thinking?

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Acknowledgements

The topic for this paper was chosen in the light of the recent attention given to the term 'resilience' in the international development discourse, particularly in relation to fragile states. This coincided with the author's long-standing interest in complexity theory and systems thinking, which first came about during her time as a fellow at the Center for International Development at the Harvard Kennedy School.

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Any errors in this paper are the sole responsibility of the author. This paper should not be taken as representing the views of ECDPM. Any comments or corrections are most welcome and should be addressed to Frauke de Weijer at fdw@ecdpm.org.

Acronyms

DAC	Development Assistance Committee (of the OECD)
ECDPM	European Centre for Development Policy Management
EU	European Union
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NUPI	Norwegian Institute of International Affairs
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WDR	World Development Report

Executive summary

The term '*resilience'* has featured more prominently in the policy discourse on fragile states in recent years. Indeed, the OECD now defines the central objective of international engagement in fragile states as being that of 'moving towards effective, legitimate and *resilient* states'. But how should we view this term, and can it help to advance thinking on fragile states?

> "Resilience is the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and reorganise while undergoing change so as to still retain essentially the same function, structure, identity, and feedbacks."
>
> Source: Walker, 2004.

This concept of resilience is rooted in theories of complex adaptive systems, which view social (or socio-ecological) systems not as deterministic, predictable and mechanistic, but as organic and self-organised in structures that are intricately connected with each other. Change in complex adaptive systems is viewed as being unpredictable and non-linear, with positive and negative feedback loops causing change to be more rapid than expected when certain tipping points are reached, or slower due to issues of path dependency. In a social system (such as a household, a community or a country), behaviour emerges out of the complex interconnections between the prevailing norms, values, loyalties, culture, formal and informal institutions, political architecture, public policies and individual capacities. The interlocking nature of the different dimensions of the system generates a 'dynamic type of stability', which can cause a social system to be relatively resistant to change and can help explain the poverty or bad governance traps countries can seem to get stuck in. Yet in complex adaptive systems there is co-evolution, such that the overall system and the agents within it evolve together, or 'co-evolve', over time. A system with a greater adaptive capacity is better able to respond to changes in the environment and reinvent itself when necessary.

In a social system, resilience thus relates to the ***adaptive capacity to tolerate and deal with change without a loss of essential functions***. Resilience therefore needs to be viewed in relation to a particular social system, a particular shock and a particular function. But whose resilience is it? To cope with what? And in order to continue to do what? In the current discourse on fragile states, views on these issues differ widely. Are we talking about the resilience of state institutions, of state-society relations, or of society itself? In terms of types of risks and functions, some commentators focus on the ability of a social system to avert or mitigate violent conflict, whereas others adopt a perspective that also encompasses economic shocks and natural disasters. There is no right or wrong answer to these questions. However, in order to make effective use of the term, we need to be clear about what we mean.

Another concept stemming from thinking on complex adaptive systems, which could be helpful when thinking about states and societies moving out of fragility, is that of ***redundancy***. This relates to the presence of more than one system of coping and can be a key feature of resilience. When one system is impacted, the other systems help to ensure that society continues to function. Redundancy may therefore be related to the notion of ***institutional multiplicity***,[1] i.e. the presence of multiple institutional regimes and different 'rules of the game' all of which influence the institutions' behaviour. The way in which these institutional regimes 'rub against each other' can have both beneficial and detrimental effects, and is a major driver of institutional change. And yet it has not yet received proper attention in research, policy and practice.

[1] See Di John, 2008, for instance.

In the light of this discussion, the concept of resilience may be used in the discourse on fragile states in order to:

1. describe the objective of a transition out of fragility,
2. gain a better understanding of what keeps a social system stuck in fragility, and
3. think differently about how and whether external support can enhance resilience.

Enhancing resilience demands a twin-track approach. On the one hand, it is important to put in place policies that put resilience central; i.e. ***resilience-sensitive policies***. Such policies prioritise the ability of a system to cope with risks over a desire to maximise output or efficiency. On the other hand, we can think about whether a society's adaptive capacity can (perhaps?) be bolstered to strengthen its inherent ability to renew itself in the light of changes in its environment. Of course, these two types of approaches, of making policies more resilience-sensitive and of enhancing adaptive capacity, are closely connected and probably most effective when applied jointly.

Most importantly, however, the concept of resilience is like a Trojan horse: it brings with it a ***different way of thinking about change***. It regards transition out of fragility as a more evolutionary process of social and institutional change. It produces a mindset that places a stronger onus on creating conditions for positive change, rather than the interventionist and highly controlling strategies more traditionally employed in the development world. This way of thinking also focuses on the positive rather than on the negative, as it recognises the importance of existing sources of resilience. It also creates space for a more holistic and multidisciplinary mode of thinking about change, including a recognition of the interactions between sectors. It creates a demand for new ways of measuring progress, more iterative approaches and the right blend of planning and improvisation.

The current widespread usage of the term 'resilience' entails a risk that it may be co-opted by current ways of thinking about change, i.e. that it is not accompanied by the different mental models of thinking about social systems that the term embodies. If the term ends up being used in a very linear manner, where change is controllable from the outside and follows a linear path, the Trojan horse will have failed to achieve its mission.

Another risk is that too much emphasis is placed on the resilience of *state* institutions, thus ignoring sources of resilience outside the state. In fact, the state may at times destroy existing resilience rather than strengthen it. Finally, there is a risk that demands may be piled up on fragile states: apart from having to be effective, legitimate, transparent and accountable, fragile states will now also have to become resilient. This raises the bar, and risks placing them in an even more negative light.

In sum:

- thinking in terms of resilience,
- looking at countries in transition through a resilience lens, and
- operationalising resilience-sensitive or enhancing policies.

can greatly influence the way in which the international community engages with fragile states. By doing so, we can make a break from expert-led technocratic solutions and train the spotlight once again on human agency as the main vehicle for change. Resilience-based thinking underlines the importance of leadership and reinvents the task of the international community as supporting constructive leadership rather than designing expert solutions. For leaders, it opens up space for creative thinking and hybrid, localised solutions. Such a change would be both welcome and timely.

1. Introduction

The term '*resilience'* has started to feature more prominently in the policy discourse on topics such as food security,[2] drought resilience,[3] disaster preparedness and climate change adaptation. The term has also become fashionable in the discourse on fragile states in recent years. Resilience is increasingly viewed as the desired end-point of a transition out of fragility, and hence almost as the antonym to fragility. In its 'Principles For Good International Engagement In Fragile States & Situations', the OECD defined the central objective of international engagement in fragile states as being that of 'moving towards effective, legitimate and *resilient* states' (OECD, 2007). Similarly, the 2009 European Report on Development, entitled '*Overcoming Fragility in Africa*', regards the *resilience of socio-economic systems* is a fundamental facet of a country's development path, and claims that it should be the central objective of national development strategies and hence of development assistance (ERD, 2009; p.11). The reluctance of some countries to adopt the label 'fragile states', and their preference to stress the more positive dynamics of 'moving towards increased resilience' has placed the concept even more centre stage.

Yet, like the concept of '*fragility'* itself, the term '*resilience'* has also remained relatively ill-defined and open to differing interpretations. This discussion paper explores the concept of resilience in more detail and lays a basis for further work in this field. With its programme on Conflict, Security and Resilience, the ECDPM is seeking to deepen the collective (EU) response to issues surrounding conflict, security and resilience, and views enhancing 'societal resilience' as core to its mandate. This paper has been written as a contribution to the debate on what resilience exactly is, and whether and how it can play a useful role in the discourse on fragility, and how it can be operationalised – perhaps in different ways – in practice.

This paper first discusses the more theoretical aspects of the term 'resilience', a term that has its roots in complex adaptive systems thinking. It introduces various concepts, such as adaptive capacity, institutional multiplicity and redundancy, that could serve as useful additions to thinking on processes of change in social systems. It then explores the different ways in which resilience can be conceptualised in the context of fragile states, focusing specifically on the following questions:

- Whose resilience?
- To cope with what?
- In order to continue to do what?

The proposition in this paper is that the concept of resilience is currently used mostly to describe the end-state out of fragility, and that this can be helpful, However, it can also be used to advance understanding on what can keep a social system stuck and to support different ways of thinking about change. As such it may be able to help us work out how the resilience of a society can be enhanced. The paper closes with a discussion of whether it is wise to place resilience so central in the discourse on fragility and assesses some of the risks and opportunities involved. I argue that the concept of resilience may act as a 'Trojan horse' to bring a new way of thinking about change into the discourse on fragility.

[2] See for instance the recent Communication of the European Commission on *The EU Approach to Resilience: Learning from Food Security Crisis*. http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/what/food-security/documents/20121003-comm_en.pdf.

[3] The recent Intergovernmental Government Authority on Development (IGAD) initiative for Drought Resilience in the Horn of Africa is a prime example of a new approach to drought emergencies.

2. The concept of resilience: rooted in complex adaptive systems thinking

The resilience perspective emerged from the discipline of ecology in the 1960s and 1970s. The term has become central in the analysis of socio-ecological systems, in recognition of the complex interactions of response mechanisms in social and environmental systems. The concept has now spread over many fields and disciplines. For instance, in *psychology*, resilience refers to an individual's ability to cope with stress and adversity. In *disaster management*, it refers to the ability of businesses, communities and governments to improve their response to and rapid recovery from catastrophic events such as natural disasters and terrorist attacks[4]. In *food security*, it has come to refer to the ability of populations to feed themselves, even in the face of exogenous shocks such as droughts and food price fluctuations. A broadly accepted definition of resilience is that proposed by Walker (2004) and also adopted in this paper:

"Resilience is the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and reorganise while undergoing change so as to still retain essentially the same function, structure, identity, and feedbacks."

The term 'resilience' was initially interpreted as the ability of a material system to bounce back to its original state. This type of resilience is now called '*engineering resilience'*, the emphasis lying on the first part of the definition, namely a system's ability to return to its original steady-state,[5] i.e. to withstand shocks and to conserve what is there. However, this interpretation has gradually made way for more dynamic interpretations which emphasise the second part of the definition, i.e. the capacity of a system to reorganise while undergoing change. This is a reference to the opportunities created by a disturbance in terms of renewal and the emergence of new trajectories. The concept of resilience has started to encompass notions of adaptation, learning and self-organisation in addition to a general ability to absorb disturbance (Folke, 2006). The definition could therefore be adapted to read as follows:

"Resilience is about the adaptive capacity to tolerate and deal with change without a loss of essential functions." (Based on Folke, 2006)

This more dynamic concept of resilience is rooted in theories of complex adaptive systems, which view social (or socio-ecological) systems not as deterministic, predictable and mechanistic, but as organic, self-organised structures that are connected with each other. Complex adaptive systems contain many components that adapt or learn as they interact with each other and with the system as whole. Behaviour in complex adaptive systems is seen as an emergent property of these complex interactions and feedback systems. The social system is more than the sum of its parts and cannot be fully understood by looking merely at its parts.

In a social system (such as a household, a community, or a country), behaviour emerges from the complex interconnections among the prevailing norms, values, loyalties, culture, formal and informal institutions, political architecture, public policies and individual capacities. Each of these dimensions of society has its own rules, which influence the behaviour of the actors within it. Norms and values provide a motivating force for a particular type of behaviour, whereas family loyalty may at times overrule these norms. These

[4] See also Engel and Engel on the links between disaster management and the adaptive capacity of resilient communities (Engel and Engel 2012)

[5] In disaster management, social resilience is indeed measured by the time it takes for a community to rebound from a natural (or man-made) disaster (Sapirstein, undated).

different rules can act in unison or in competition with each other and may create multiple behavioural outcomes. The behaviour that emerges on aggregate is an outcome of the complex interactions between these different dimensions of society.

Change in complex adaptive systems is viewed as being unpredictable and non-linear, with positive and negative feedback loops causing changes to be more rapid than expected when certain tipping points are reached. This rapid type of change has received most attention in the discourse on change in complex systems (consider, for instance, the melting of Arctic ice or the permafrost). However, change can also be slower than expected. The interlocking nature of the different dimensions of a system generates a path dependency and an attraction to relative 'steady-states'. This creates what is called a '***dynamic type of stability***'[6] (Folke, 2006, Holling, etc). Dynamic stability may be viewed as a relatively steady-state, in which the behaviours of the actors within it are shaped by the rules prevailing in the social system. Yet social actors are not mere subjects to these rules: they have agency and can respond to these rules in numerous ways. In turn, their actions influence the rules that apply within the system. Thus, ***co-evolution*** occurs in complex adaptive systems, such that both the overall system and the agents within it evolve together, or 'co-evolve', over time.

When a social system faces internal or external shocks, dynamics of change are set in motion that cause it to change. An adaptive system is able to respond so that it enhances its ability to survive in the new conditions. This inherent ability of a social system to cope with changes and adapt its behaviour accordingly has been called its '***adaptive capacity***'.[7] This is a concept that can have important implications when applied to international development and to fragile states in particular.

> ***Adaptive capacity*** or adaptability may be defined as 'the property of a social system to adjust its characteristics of behaviour in order to expand its coping range in existing or future conditions'.
>
> Carpenter, 2008; adapted from Brooks and Adger, 2005

Another concept stemming from thinking on complex adaptive systems that may be helpful when thinking about states and societies moving out of fragility is the ***redundancy*** of social systems. Redundancy relates to the presence of more than one system of coping and is a key feature of resilience. When one system is impacted, the other systems can help society to continue to function. Redundancy therefore relates to the notion of ***institutional multiplicity***.[8] Social systems are not monolithic, but consist of different institutional environments in which different rules apply. In general, the greater the redundancy, the more resilient the system (Sapirstein, undated). However, redundancy can also reduce resilience, as will be discussed later.

As a final note, the above-mentioned terms, in particular resilience and adaptive capacity, are value-neutral. Thus, the mafia in southern Italy is highly resilient. Even an intricate system of corruption can adapt, learn and reorganise in order to remain corrupt. A system is resilient and has a high adaptive capacity if it manages to retain and expand its essential functions in spite of, or

> ***Institutional multiplicity*** is the presence of multiple institutional systems in which individuals and organisations operate simultaneously and which are governed by very different sets of incentives and rules of the game
>
> (DiJohn 2008).

[6] It must be said that research in this field is still relatively new and its applicability to socio-economic systems has not yet been proven.

[7] Walker refers to 'adaptability', i.e. the capacity of people in a social-ecological system to build resilience through collective action, whereas 'transformability' is people's capacity to create a fundamentally new social-ecological system when ecological, political, social, or economic conditions make the existing system untenable (Walker et al., 2004).

[8] See Di John (2008), for instance.

thanks to, changes in its environment. The terms in themselves do not imply any judgements as to whether these functions are desirable or not.

3. Applying these concepts to societies undergoing transition

3.1. Change and transformation in a complex adaptive system

So how does change occur, when viewed from the perspective of complex adaptive systems? Generally speaking, the answer is that change is relatively unpredictable, as positive feedback loops can lead to runaway change – the Arab Spring being a prime example – whereas negative feedback loops can lead to a reluctance to change – of which Somalia is an example. A social system tends to move towards a system of ***'dynamic stability***',[9] which may make it relatively resistant to change. This resistance stems from the interlocking aspects of different parts of a society. Its values, culture, institutional architecture and socio-political realities interact in ways that are mutually reinforcing, thus creating a lock-in. Change in a social system means that these dimensions have to reorganise.

The interlocked nature of these different dimensions can produce a resistance to change. As has already been pointed out, corruption is 'dynamically stable', i.e. very difficult to break out from. It involves many interlocking dimensions, such as norms (i.e. types of culturally acceptable behaviour), individual transactional behaviour by many actors, relationships and loyalty among actors, and the efficacy of enforcement mechanisms, which in turn influences other dimensions. Simply creating a new institution, such as an anti-corruption commission, often does not do the trick as it cannot directly affect norms and behaviours that are perpetuated by a multitude of minor interactions. The interlocking nature of dimensions in a social system means that adopting a particular political and organisational system (for instance, the architecture of the state) cannot by itself change society's behaviour unless these systems are sufficiently embedded in societal norms and values. Nor can changes in societal norms and values bring about changes in society unless the political and organisational system changes. In governance terms, this means that the deep structures of society and the institutional infrastructure need to evolve hand in hand.

Thus, *dynamic stability* may lead to poverty traps, governance traps and capability traps, where outcomes remain more or less unchanged in spite of changes in institutions, resources, capacity-building exercises and so forth. Norms, behaviours and individual value systems and institutions needs to co-evolve. Policies and strategies must therefore be sufficiently embedded in society and its values, modes of behaviour and informal norms and rules in order to actually change behaviour. A critical mass of actors must support a new policy or institutional change in order to create the momentum required to sustain the behavioural changes that the policy or institutions are intended to achieve. Enforcement alone is not sufficient. A credible degree of internal legitimacy is required for policies and institutional change to take hold and for transformational change to be achieved.

[9] Dynamic stability is not necessarily a good thing: the situation in Somalia is a good example of 'dynamic stability' of a less desirable type.

3.2. Adaptive capacity

A social system's capacity to respond constructively to contextual changes is referred to as its '**adaptive capacity**'. The concept of adaptive capacity thus refers to a system's ability to respond to slow or abrupt changes in its environment, to manage internal stresses in a non-destructive manner, to renew its rules, systems and institutions if they are no longer in tune with the demands of society or the world at large, and so forth. A social system with a high adaptive capacity is dynamic, makes optimum use of its resources and capabilities, and maximum use of the opportunities created by external changes, and copes effectively the with risks in the environment.

A society's adaptive capacity is closely related to its decision-making abilities, its capacity for collective action and its ability to resolve conflicts among its members. These characteristics of a social system are influenced by demography, ethnic composition, socio-economic stratification, history, social cohesion, institutional make-up, political systems and so forth. Research into and practice in operationalising and measuring resilience and adaptive capacity are still in their infancy, although a number of tools have already been developed.[10] Further research and experience are needed in order to understand the usefulness and implications of working with the concepts of 'adaptive capacity' and 'resilience' in relation to fragile states.

3.3. Redundancy and institutional multiplicity

Redundancy is related to the notion of ***institutional multiplicity***. Social systems consist of different institutional environments in which different rules apply. As a consequence, people have access to different coping strategies. In the absence of formal judiciary systems, there may be systems of community justice. Or, if a state cannot provide a social safety net, family ties or religious groups may be able to do so. In theory, access to multiple institutional environments – each of which comes with its own resources, capabilities and connections to other institutional environments – adds to a society's resilience. If one system collapses or loses its legitimacy, not all is lost.

However, 'institutional multiplicity' can also be a fragmentational force. In all social systems, different institutional regimes co-exist in parallel with each other, and the procedures of formal institutions are not always followed to the letter even in well-established institutional settings. However, in some social systems, the gaps between these institutional regimes may be very wide and may ultimately act as a polarising force. For instance, the new political systems in a young democracy are based on a confrontational juxtaposition between the legislature and the executive: decisions are taken by majority vote, and priority is given to the rights of individuals. Local decision-making, by contrast, may be based on consensus and unanimity, with the needs of the group being placed over those of the individual. This may lead to tensions or to one set of rules permeating into the other regime, for instance when, rather than individuals being allowed to cast their own votes, 'strongmen' harness all their dependents' votes. A wide gap between the different institutional regimes can also inhibit a more gradual transition from one main institutional regime to another, when individuals have to make extreme choices about which institutional world they would like to inhibit or – as is more often the case – if they do not have the full freedom to choose.

[10] See, for instance, the ODI background note for a brief overview (Mitchell and Harris, 2012).

4. Resilience in the current discourse on fragile states

If the central objective of international engagement in fragile states is to move towards effective, legitimate and *resilient* states, this begs the question of what we think a resilient state or a resilient society should look like. What exactly are we aiming for? Resilience, as the ability to cope with shocks and retain essential functions, needs to be viewed in relation to a particular social system, a particular shock and a particular function. So whose resilience is it about – and to cope with what, in order to continue to do what?

4.1. Whose resilience?

Whose resilience are we aiming for in the context of fragile states? The state's? Society's? Or both?

Different disciplines and communities of practice emphasise different elements of the social system, depending on their theories of change and preferred level of engagement. Although this paper does not seek to conduct a comprehensive mapping, some differences are relatively easy to spot. The OECD, the Crisis States Research Center[11] and the World Development Report (WDR) 2011 on conflict, security and development tend to focus on resilient state institutions, whereas the UNDP homes in on resilience at a broader societal level.

The Centre for Crisis States Research describes a resilient state as 'the opposite of a fragile state – one where dominant or statutory institutional arrangements appear to be able to withstand internal or external shocks and contestation remains within the boundaries of reigning institutional arrangements'. The WDR 2011 on conflict, security and development also uses the term 'resilience' mainly in a context of 'institutional resilience', i.e. the ability of institutions to cope with stresses.[12] In this way of thinking, resilience is about maintaining (or achieving) the resilience of state institutions. The OECD places resilience (and fragility) in the context of the social contract and state-society relations (OECD, 2008, p.7). Its most recent policy guidance defines resilient states as 'capable of absorbing shocks and transforming and channelling radical change or challenges while maintaining political stability and preventing violence. Resilient states exhibit the capacity and legitimacy of governing a population and its territory. They can manage and adapt to changing social needs and expectations, shifts in elite and other political agreements, and growing institutional complexity'.

Others think about resilience not so much in terms of state resilience, but in terms of a resilient society. The 2009 European Report on Development on Overcoming Fragility in Africa, for instance, speaks of '*the resilience of the socio-economic system*', encompassing all the different levels and the relations between them. Bond, a network for UK-based NGOs working in international development, views community governance – the way a community takes decisions, resolves conflicts and connects to formal government institutions – as central to resilience (Hafvenstein 2012). The UNDP also tries to strike a balance by asserting that '*a resilient society requires a state with the capacity to predict, manage and respond to crises in an equitable manner. But it also entails a society that can persevere and rebound from stresses with a modicum of self-sufficiency'*. Although the World Development Report 2011 uses the term 'resilience' mostly in the context of state institutions, it does take an overall approach that is more in line with a broader societal perspective. For instance, it places a great deal of emphasis on the importance of 'collaborative capacities' for prevention and recovery from violence.

[11] www.crisisstates.com
[12] World Development Report 2011, Conflict, Security and Development, World Bank 2010.

This broader conceptualisation makes a lot of sense. Typically, in policy discourse on risk management or disaster preparedness, there is an expectation and an assumption that governments (both central and local) take charge and respond to the people's needs following a natural or man-made hazard. However, this is not the case in many developing countries, where societies have withstood shocks in spite of failing governments (Sapirstein). Informal economic systems have continued to function in the absence of the state, as have conflict mitigation mechanisms and social safety nets. These informal mechanisms are often \important sources of resilience and should therefore not be overlooked, especially in fragile states.

This paper therefore proposes a sufficiently broad conceptualisation of the term 'resilience' in the discourse on fragility, encompassing societal sources of resilience that are not mediated by the state or viewed in relation to the state. This is especially important as efforts to strengthen state-society relations may in fact adversely affect these societal sources of resilience.

4.2. Resilience to which shocks?

As I have already mentioned, resilience needs to be operationalised in relation to the specific function it is intended to retain and the shocks that it should be able to absorb without collapse. Ideally, a resilient social system has systems and policies that enhance its ability to cope with the specific range of risks and vulnerabilities to which it is exposed. Fragile states are generally more susceptible than average to many of the same exogenous risks also affecting developed countries, i.e. climate change, price fluctuations, regional instability, terrorism, etc. Moreover, they are especially vulnerable to endogenous risks of state collapse, violent conflict and crime. Ideally, fragile states should be resilient to all kinds of shocks, as they are currently susceptible to a broad range of shocks, both exogenous and endogenous. Although a selection of the key shocks is presented below, the list can of course easily be expanded. Also, different actors will prioritise different risks.

Table 1: Key shocks facing fragile states

Exogenous shocks	Endogenous shocks
• external security threats • cross-border and domestic crime • fluctuations in commodity markets • loss of remittances • natural disasters	• loss of legitimacy of formal or informal institutions • criminalisation of political systems • violent internal conflict • ethnic tensions

Source: adapted from WDR 2011 (World Bank, 2011)

Again, key policy actors tend to vary widely in terms of the emphasis they place on the specific shocks that need to be maintained or absorbed. The UNDP states that 'public institutions and civil societies that are unable to effectively anticipate, cope with and recover from political, economic and environmental shocks are fragile' (UNDP, 2012). The OECD stresses the vulnerability of fragile states to internal conflict, their inability to cope with humanitarian disasters and the high risk of state collapse (OECD, 2008), as well as changes in social needs and expectations, shifts in elite and other political agreements, and growing institutional complexity (OECD, 2011). The World Development Report 2011 identifies the key stresses as being those surrounding security threats, cross-border and domestic crime, internal violence and ethnic tension (World Bank, 2011). The peace-building community tends to frame resilience as the ability of a society to manage stresses and shocks without resorting to violent conflict. This function of managing stresses and shocks without resorting to violent conflict seems to be the common thread in most definitions, although a broad range of other shocks can of course be added to the list, depending on the discipline or area of focus.

4.3. In relation to which functions?

What, then, are these essential functions? For each shock described above, one or more key functions may be identified as being under threat . Examples are given below.

Table 2: Key functions to be maintained by fragile states

Shock	Key function to be retained:
• external security threats	• maintain territorial control
• cross-border and domestic crime	• safeguard public security / maintain rule of law
• fluctuations in commodity markets	• maintain trade balance
• loss of remittances	• maintain household purchasing power
• internal violent conflict	• maintain capacity to resolve internal conflicts
• ethnic tension	• manage tensions in a non-violent manner

As one shock can adversely affect more than one function, the list of functions is really endless. One of the key characteristics of a complex adaptive system is the fact that the different functions are deeply interconnected. A society's ability to perform one function is closely related to its ability to perform another. Enhancing its performance in relation to one function may have unintended consequences (either positive or negative) for another. These characteristics call for a multi-disciplinary approach in which a number of functions are considered simultaneously, and adverse consequences are anticipated and monitored even more broadly.

For practical reasons, however, it may be necessary to prioritise the key risks for which a society needs to build up resilience and the functions it needs to maintain. One way of doing this would be to go through a process within a country to determine the key risks and functions. The next logical step would be to determine the existing sources of resilience and to build on these.

In view of ongoing policy processes, it may be worth exploring the resilience of the social system in relation to the key functions that fragile states themselves have identified as priorities. The Peace-building and State-building Goals of the New Deal could potentially serve as important guidance in identifying the most essential functions:[13]

- fostering inclusive political settlements and conflict resolution;
- establishing and strengthening public security;
- addressing injustices and enhancing public access to justice**;**
- generating employment and improving livelihoods;
- managing revenue and building capacity for accountable and fair service delivery.

Another challenge associated with the formulation of these functions is that there is an implicit understanding that it is already known what institutional models are needed to perform them, and that these institutions can be adopted. Yet as we have seen, institutions come about through a process of co-evolution and the simple adoption of new institutions does not necessarily lead to actual change.

[13] Of course, the key problem in fragile states is often that many of these functions are not yet performed very effectively. As much as states should ideally be able to withstand shocks while retaining their functionality, one of the more immediate problems is that of 'achieving functionality' rather than 'retaining' it. Yet even the process of achieving functionality can build on existing sources of resilience.

For instance, the underlying assumption is that addressing injustice in society requires a functional, capable, efficient and just court system based on an independent judiciary. Other institutional (or hybrid) means of improving access to justice tend to be overlooked, and existing capabilities for performing these functions dismissed. As a consequence, avenues for building on existing capabilities are missed and there is a risk that society will move away from achieving the desired functionality rather than achieve it. Complex adaptive systems thinking shows that there may be a more systemic way of thinking about functionality.

Box 1: Systemic way of thinking about functionality

Fragile states may have a number of different institutional systems, both formal and informal. The question of whether a function is currently being achieved thus relates to the way in which society as a whole currently performs this function. The state may or may not play an active role in performing a particular function. Society may itself have figured out ways of performing a particular function, in the absence – or in spite of – an active state. Formal institutions, or attempts to create these, may interact in numerous ways with these informal ways of doing things. For instance, conflict resolution mechanisms often function quite well at a local level, even if political settlements at a higher level do not seem to function effectively.

Taking this existing capability as a starting point thus leads to an assessment of functionality in a slightly different way. The key issue here is to identify:

1. the capabilities and functionalities that are already present, in terms of both formal and informal systems;
2. how capacity, internal legitimacy and effectiveness are affected by the presence of these parallel institutional systems;
3. how the performance of the whole can be uplifted.

Such a systemic view of functionality would also bear in mind the effects of new policies or institutions on existing sources of functionality, as they may very well undermine or strengthen these.

An example of a more systemic perception of functionality may be found in the attempts by UNDP and others to establish '*infrastructures for peace'* that aim to build 'dynamic networks of interdependent structures, mechanisms, resources, values and skills which, through dialogue and consultation, contribute to conflict prevention and peace-building in a society' (Kumar & De la Haye, 2011). This approach is based on the idea that a number of resources and capabilities exist in society that can foster peace-building. A society's ability to make or break peace lies in the interaction between these resources and capabilities. The 'infrastructures for peace' approach seeks to connect these resources so as to enhance the ability of the system as a whole to foster peace. This approach aims to build on existing capabilities and to strengthen the connections between them so as to make the whole more effective. A similar perception of systemic functionality could also be applied to other desired functions, such as domestic revenue generation and service delivery.

5. How can the concept of resilience best be used in relation to fragile states?

Based on the above discussion, I would suggest that the concept of resilience can be used in the discourse on fragile states to:

1. describe the objective of a transition out of fragility;
2. gain a better understanding of what keeps a social system stuck;
3. think differently about whether and how external support can enhance resilience.

All three facets of the term are highly relevant to the development debate on fragile states. They can help to:

1. define the objective;
2. support the diagnosis;
3. instigate new thinking on the process or theory of change.

5.1. An 'end-state out of fragility'

The current OECD discourse on fragile states tends to define resilience as 'a desired end-state out of fragility'. So what might the desired end-state of a resilient socio-economic system look like?

A highly resilient system has institutions and policies that increase its ability to cope with specific risks and manage vulnerabilities. Good resilience-enhancing policies are robust across multiple scenarios and are therefore prepared to cope with a range of foreseen and unforeseen changes in the environment. They anticipate a range of shocks and are designed to withstand these shocks without losing their functionality. This can lead to trade-offs between resilience and efficiency: the most efficient policy does not necessarily lead to increased resilience. A well-known example is the theoretical economic advantages of trade liberalisation weighed against the increased vulnerability of populations to price fluctuations on commodity markets. Another example is the potential trade-off between promoting agricultural productivity and increasing farmer's resilience to economic and climatic shocks. If resilience is emphasised, then some loss of efficiency needs to be accepted. Such policies could be seen as '*resilience-sensitive policies*'.

Yet a resilient social system is more than just one that has put resilience-enhancing polices in place. A resilient social system is aware of its vulnerabilities and has found ways to manage these, even in the event of unforeseen shocks. These functions could be (and indeed generally are) performed by the state, but they can also be performed autonomously in the way in which society is organised, even in the absence of the state, or in the interaction between society and the state. Many societies have proved highly resilient even when the state itself has been absent or dysfunctional.

Of course, these ideas of a resilient system are not entirely new to the field of development, as resilience is closely linked to notions of vulnerability, risks and coping strategies. These notions have been researched and applied quite extensively, particularly through the sustainable livelihoods approach. The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach[14] defines a livelihood as being sustainable if it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks, and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, while not undermining the natural resource base. The framework looks at the vulnerability context, and the livelihood assets,

[14] See www.fao.org/docrep/008/a0273e/a0273e00.htm#Contents), for instance.

institutions and livelihood strategies employed, and how they mutually interact and ultimately determine the livelihood outcome.

A resilient social system could thus be defined as one that has a high ***adaptive capacity***. It is dynamic, makes optimum use of its resources and capabilities and maximum use of the opportunities created by changes in the environment, and copes effectively with the risks in the environment. It has qualities such as self-organisation, networking and collaboration across groups, creativity, innovation and improvisation. Its formal structures and informal modes of behaviour are closely interlinked, thus enabling it to respond effectively to internal or external opportunities or challenges. It is able to create the enabling conditions in which the right type of behaviour and innovative drive can emerge, and which allow the social (economic, ecological and political) system to adapt to and cope with expected and unexpected shocks and risks. A resilient social system is one in which society and its institutions can respond to the environment and which can reinvent itself through innovation, purposeful collaborative action and the redesign of its institutions to secure a better and more robust outcome.

Existing approaches such as the Sustainable Livelihood approach can help to further operationalise the concept of resilience and resilience-sensitive policies in particular. Such approaches could well be accompanied by political economy and conflict analyses focusing even more on the political elements and on the structural, institutional and political drivers or inhibitors of change. Many of the tools and frameworks are already available and can be used with a resilience lens. However, more research needs to be performed into the concept of 'adaptive capacity' in order to gain a firmer handle and to assess whether and how it can (and should) be measured. Adaptive capacity is related to notions of trust, collaborative capacity and social cohesion, which are elements that could perhaps serve as proxies.

5.2. Understand what keeps a social system stuck

As we have seen, changing behaviour requires complex changes in the rules of the game. This doesn't come easily, however. The interconnections between values, norms, formal and informal institutions and political systems lead to path-dependency and resistance to change. As a result, many policies do not in fact change behaviour, due to the path dependency and interlocking nature of the different dimensions in the system. The resilience present in social systems also means that change can be difficult. Such interconnections explain the poverty traps, capability traps[15] and governance traps that make development in fragile states such a difficult task. A diagnosis that pays heed to these interconnections between individual, community, social group and government levels of society, as well as the relationships between norms, values and behaviours and the formal institutional structures can help us to understand the social system in more holistic ways and may help identify leverage points for more transformational change.

Institutional multiplicity, and the important role of informal governance institutions, has received more attention in the development discourse in recent years. A growing number of commentators now recognise that the emergence of good governance is a process of bargaining between social actors driven by a variety of interests and with varying sources of power and influence, as well as varying forms of legitimacy on which their negotiating strength rests. The socio-political realities on the ground in relation to decision-making, systems of accountability and legitimacy, and the ability for collective action, are often shaped as much by informal processes as by formal ones. Fragile states often have a wealth of informal institutions and these often operate on very different principles than the formal institutions that exist in parallel with them. These informal systems can serve as a source of redundancy and provide the necessary protection that the state may not always be willing to provide, and can as such contribute to a society's resilience.

[15] See Pritchett and de Weijer, 2011.

As we have seen, these systems may also be in competition with or stand in the way of a transition to other forms of governance that are more in line with modern standards. These overlapping governance regimes interact in ways that can undermine or strengthen each other. Outside forces, such as a changing global normative consensus on the value of democracy and human rights, influence different institutional regimes in multiple ways.

It is this 'rubbing of institutional regimes' that creates many of the dynamics of change, for better or for worse. The way in which different institutional regimes interact and are influenced by forces from outside the system is worthy of further research. Frameworks and tools will still need to be developed for this.

5.3. Think differently about whether and how external support can enhance resilience

As we have seen, changing behaviour requires complex changes in the rules of the game, but these changes don't always come easily. As a result, many policies do not in fact change behaviour, because of the system's inherent reluctance to change.

In order to strengthen the resilience of a social system, existing sources of resilience need to be taken as a starting point. A fragile society cannot afford not to utilise its sources of strength: it must capitalise on its existing resources and capabilities and use these to the full. This means strengthening its collaborative capacity, which is a prerequisite for the effective use of existing capacities. An adaptive governance framework relies critically on the collaboration of a diverse set of stakeholders operating on different social and ecological scales in multi-level institutions and organisations (Olsson et al., 2004).

Strengthening resilience thus demands a twin-track approach. On the one hand, it is important to create policies that place resilience centre stage, i.e. resilience-sensitive policies. Resilience-sensitive policies are crucial in any sector, any discipline and any field of action, and thinking in terms of resilience can lead to a genuine break from the past.

Box 2: Resilience-sensitive policies and institutions

1. are based on an assessment of the risks to which a community (or country) is exposed and its relative vulnerability;
2. are robust across different scenarios;
3. are designed to cope with both foreseen and unforeseen changes in the broader environment;
4. prioritise resilience over efficiency;
5. link (short-term) crisis response with crisis preparedness and (long-term) recovery;
6. promote cross-disciplinary approaches and governance structures;
7. are embedded in society and influence behaviour;
8. take account of the system's existing capabilities to manage inherent vulnerabilities.[16]

On the other hand, a society's adaptive capacity needs to be reinforced so as to strengthen its inherent ability to take decisions and renew itself in light of changes in its environment. As I have already mentioned, a particularly strong adaptive capacity may exist in pockets. Such pockets of adaptive capacity

[16] For instance, a highly capable, efficient and transparent system of government may be able to manage price fluctuations through social safety nets or other mechanisms, whereas these capabilities may not exist in other states. This would lead to different policy choices in different settings and suggests the use of 'best fit' approaches.

at sub-national level do not always have an upward impact, either on national governance or on surrounding regions. However, they may serve as entry points for improving governance more broadly and can act as crucial models for sharing, and possibly emulating, experience in a broader context (Carpenter, 2008).

Box 3: Strategies for enhancing adaptive capacity

- strategies that strengthen cross-cutting social capital;
- strategies that support self-organisation at different levels of society;
- strategies that integrate sub-national patterns of resilience into wider governance structures and support high levels of interaction between the public, private and voluntary sectors;
- strategies that promote redundancy and increase the diversity of potential societal responses (including enhancing access to different types of resources, capabilities and networks);
- strategies that support learning and the storage of knowledge and experience.

These two approaches, i.e. making policies more resilience-sensitive and enhancing adaptive capacity, are of course closely connected and probably most effective when applied jointly. For instance, a strategy for enhancing drought resilience would consider the vulnerability of populations to drought episodes and long-term climate change, faster population growth and fiercer competition for resources, the likelihood of conflict across borders and ethnic populations, the changing terms of trade, epidemic diseases, etc. It might respond to these specific risks by strengthening market infrastructure and information, creating disease prevention and control mechanisms, establishing conflict early-warning and mitigation systems, developing social protection systems, supporting alternative livelihoods, etc. From an adaptive capacity perspective, we would look at these strategies through the lens of society's ability to self-organise, to act collectively in the face of risks, to respond with collective decision-making, to draw upon existing resources and capabilities, at a sub-national, national or global level, and to adapt its response mechanisms to the new situation. Risk-specific strategies as described above should in any event not reduce this adaptive capacity. Ideally, they should strengthen it.

We know from complex adaptive systems thinking that processes of change in social systems are difficult to predict and manage from the outside. Consequently, we need a healthy understanding of the limits of external intervention. All external action has some effect, although it is often hard to predict. At the same time, the control exerted by external actors (or any actor for that matter) over the dynamics of a social system should not be overestimated. The best external actors can do is to try and 'nurture processes to enhance resilience' rather than 'build' resilience (or any more active verb that could be used).

6. Resilience as a Trojan horse for a new way of thinking?

In conclusion, framing the issue of 'fragility' in terms of 'enhancing resilience' creates a number of opportunities. Most of these opportunities derive from the different way of thinking presented by the concept – and its theoretical roots. As such, it may serve as a catalyst for new thinking.

The use of the word 'resilience' brings with it a particular way of thinking, derived from complex adaptive systems theory. This way of thinking (see box 4) regards the transition out of fragility as a process of social change. It produces a mindset that places a stronger onus on creating the conditions for positive change rather than the interventionist and highly controlling strategies more traditionally employed in the development world.

This way of thinking also focuses on the positive rather than on the negative aspects, as it recognises the importance of existing sources of resilience. Just as fragility differs from one country to another, the forces that create resilience also differ in each context. Thus, resilience-based thinking creates opportunities to think more creatively about hybrid solutions, to build on what is already there, to nudge a system from one state to another and, perhaps most importantly, to preserve a system that functions before a new way of doing things is realistically able to manifest itself.

Box 4: Thinking in terms of resilience

Thinking in terms of resilience has a number of distinct features, regardless of the discipline in which it is employed. First and foremost, it views social systems as dynamically stable, rather than static. There is therefore a sharp focus on change and change dynamics, with a firm acknowledgement that change is inherently unpredictable and non-linear. It is conscious of the systemic nature of change, which requires a holistic – rather than a reductionist – way of thinking about change. It acknowledges that change in one aspect of society may cause unexpected changes in other aspects, while resistance to change may be deeply engrained and difficult to overcome. Change cannot be easily controlled and planned, although planning and human agency still have important roles to play.

Thinking in terms of resilience shifts the emphasis to the creation of conditions that foster greater adaptability and innovation, and seeks to enhance self-organisation and the emergence of adaptive behaviour rather than the design of tightly managed programmes. It leaves more space for careful manoeuvre in a system that is inherently difficult to gauge and takes a more iterative approach to change.

While the term 'resilience' has inherently positive connotations, it also comes with a recognition that change is very difficult to achieve and that breaking out of the status quo is the exception rather than the rule where systems are concerned. Resilience can be strengthened only if society as a whole is factored into the equation, and if its values, behaviours, systems and political and organisational structures co-evolve in tandem into a new state. Resilience-based thinking acknowledges the need for resilience-enhancing strategies to be deeply rooted in the functioning of the social system and to some degree matches the 'best fit' approach promoted in the WDR 2011.

Thinking in terms of resilience creates space for a more holistic approach to change. The fact that the term 'resilience' is used in many different disciplines – albeit with slight differences in how it is operationalised – opens up opportunities for collaboration and increased awareness of how changes in one dimension can affect another. This can already be seen in innovative approaches to emergencies in the Horn of Africa, where the linkages between food security, disaster risk reduction, environmental issues and human mobility are increasingly viewed in conjunction with each other. Comprehensive approaches that seek to strengthen links between development, humanitarian action and security are another example. Resilience-based thinking helps to break open disciplinary silos and facilitates more integrated programming, including

programmes linking relief, development, security and governance. Of course, it also poses new questions about how much integration between fields is realistically possible, and what kind of collaborative approach this would require.

Resilience-based thinking also opens up a different way of thinking about governance structures. It means thinking more in terms of distributed and networked forms of governance that create new connections within the reality of institutional multiplicity, as exemplified by the 'infrastructures for peace' approach. This is also in line with new approaches to the linkages between formal and informal institutions.

Resilience-based thinking also creates opportunities to bridge the gap between ostensibly conflicting paradigms, such as between top-down and bottom-up approaches or between peace-building and state-building paradigms. When viewed from a resilience perspective, these become mutually interacting and reinforcing.

If this way of thinking was to really take hold, it would create a demand for new ways of measuring progress, more iterative approaches and the right blend of planning and improvisation. It would force a break from expert-led technocratic solutions and would train the spotlight once again on human agency as the main vehicle for change. It would place the focus back on leadership and reinvent the task of the international community as supporting constructive leadership rather than designing expert solutions. For leaders, it would open up space for creative thinking and for devising hybrid, localised solutions.

But beware of the pitfalls

These opportunities will not materialise automatically, however. The use of the term comes with a number of pitfalls. The first risk is that it will simply be co-opted by current modes of thinking about change, i.e. that it will not be accompanied by the different mental models of thinking about social systems embodied by the term. If the term ends up being used in a very linear manner, where change is controllable from the outside and follows a linear path, the Trojan horse will have failed to achieve its mission.

The second risk relates to the use of the term for narrow state-building purposes. The risk is that too much emphasis will be placed on the resilience of *state* institutions and that sources of resilience outside the state will be ignored. In fact, the state may eventually destroy existing resilience rather than strengthen it.

The third risk, also related to this narrow conception of state-building, is that the desired objective of a resilient state - one that is able to cope with shocks of all kinds and which has policies that are robust across multiple scenarios - is a rather aspirational ideal. In a way, it reflects the new thinking on public policies that the West is only just beginning to embrace (and is failing quite miserably at, in view of the string of crises it seems unable to overcome). In other words, there is a real risk of this becoming an even higher and unattainable goal for already weak institutions. The danger is that yet more demands will be placed on nascent institutional structures in fragile states, thus raising the risk of *premature load-bearing*, which may lead to a collapse of real capacity.[17] On top of having to be effective, legitimate, transparent and accountable, fragile states will now also have to become resilient. This raises the bar, and places them in an even more negative light.

[17] See World Bank, 2011, p. 101, on premature load-bearing.

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