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PREVENTIVE ACTION IN FRAGILE CONTEXTS

Fragility, as we all know, is not just a signature concept for academics, but it is the unequivocal expression of a constant threat to human beings. Threatening is not just the number of violent conflicts on the rise and the fact that an average of 80,000 people each day attempt to flee their poverty and violence-stricken homes and communities. The menace to peace and stability is represented by the multiple crises that gravitate upon the most vulnerable people and exacerbate already intractable situations with global spill over and consequences.

What requires particular care and special handling are the possible chain reactions among fragility factors, causes and effects: For instance an epidemic outburst, migratory patterns, local corruption, infrastructure deficits, extreme violence, and so on. All patterns that could be found in many societies, even the ones considered most stable and secure.

In fragile settings we are often confronted with extreme destitution and people are not just interested in growth and development. Poverty is due to the lack of income and resources, exploitation, mismanagement and the absence of adequate planning to support sustainable livelihoods. Its manifestations include hunger and malnutrition, limited access to education and other basic services, social discrimination and exclusion as well as the lack of participation in decision-making. Economic growth should be inclusive to provide sustainable interventions and promote equality. However, impacts of multiple calamities in the global socioeconomic crisis are compounding the threats faced by people living in poverty around the world.

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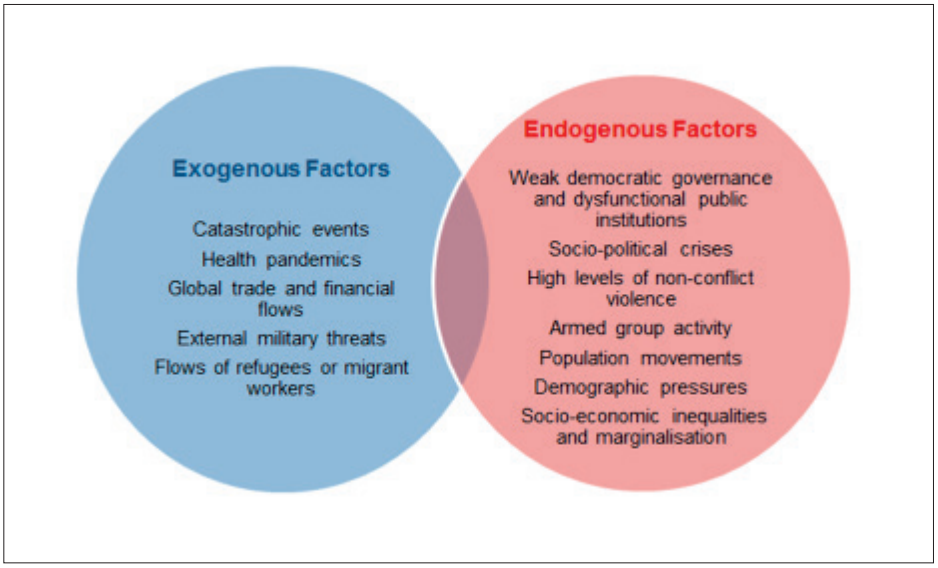

Fig. 1. Fragility Factors

1. PEOPLE OWNERSHIP AND THE LOCAL DIMENSION

Countering fragility means primarily providing people with tools and means for a dignifying life. However, two fundamental mistakes often contribute to mislead the reading of the evolution of many political, economic, societal, environmental and security related crises: One being the oversimplification of the analysis itself that sometimes relies only on predetermined theories of change (causes and effects) with variables hardly accounted for; the second being the underestimation of the human element and its complex nature that cannot be explored and explained only in terms of values such as wealth, economic growth or ideological affiliation.

In terms of the diagnostics, we should look at context specific entry points and the long-term evolution of crises. *No one-size fits all* is the general principle to be applied. No matter how much research has been conducted into the origin and underlying causes of conflict, we cannot expect to import and export experiences and lessons learned from completely different contexts.

A problem-focused and context specific approach is required at all times. Who is credible on the ground? Who has capacities? These are among the questions we should ask ourselves to overcome the silos approach in overcrowded and dangerously drifting situations.? A fragility compass can indicate how the variables interact and potentially amplify the contours and dimension of any given crisis.

How to overcome the gap between the analysis and congruent actions is the next step. If we don't know how to move forward and design the right theory of change, we should not superimpose a ready-made solution. In many cases, a peace and resilience mapping might be require to flesh out what is the potential contribution of different actors, what works and what doesn't work. For sure, to appreciate changes in the making, a global and locally shared contextual analysis is required in addition to polycentric action.

Ultimately, solutions that are not truly shared by the local communities are not likely to be taken up and therefore succeed.

A people-centred approach is based on enhanced awareness of the impact of potential risks and benefits for the beneficiaries and individuals of a given community, from a cultural, gender and socio-economic standpoint. An understanding of needs and aspirations that provides a clear pathway to empower those who are at risk of being left behind.

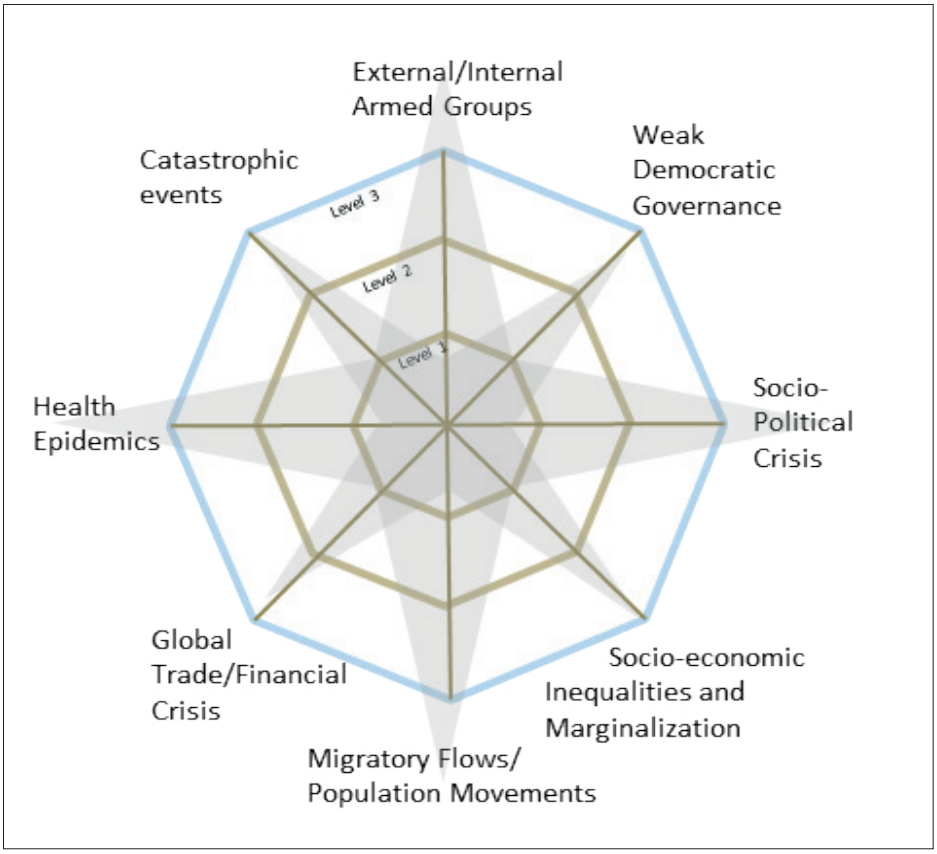

Fig. 2. Fragility Compass

2. ANTICIPATION AND PREVENTION

While confronted by global challenges, more efforts are required to manage risks and to anticipate change. The world is in turmoil. Human consequences are overwhelming. Norms are cast aside with rampant impunity. State and non-state actors do not comply with international obligations. There are many new threats on the horizon: climate change, genetically engineering, artificial intelligence, etc. all of them have implications for human societies. We are entering uncharted waters and the international system is very fragmented and reactive.

Futurologists and social scientists ask themselves where we are heading to and if it is possible to act pre-emptively and correct the trajectory of dangerous spirals that would inevitably trap populations at risk. "The Future has no History" is the title of a book by Momir Djurovic depicting uncertain scenarios with foresight. Accordingly, we could say that that answers to our quests are unwritten as the future is. We know that there is a future but — paraphrasing a successful marketing campaign of a luxury brand: — *Do we know what we're going to do with all that future?* The transformation in the making requires us to put emphasis on and imagine a future that should not be delinked from individual aspirations and freedom of choice: — *And now, what are you going to do?* This is a question for a cab-driver to the passenger that has just missed his appointment due to traffic jam. It is also the question for political leaders and scientists that wish to define a pragmatic course of action through a maze of non-linear events. We are supposed to find a solution but we are incapable of addressing the real causes of the malaise.

In front of constantly transforming political and social landscapes, we need to spare non efforts to anticipate change and minimize risks.

Early and later prevention is needed at all stages. Working with people, local communities and governments allows to facilitate compromise and to exert peer pressure against violence and conflict, deconstructing the enemy picture, defusing the creation of new enemies and demystifying who is the enemy and who is not. Often perceptions become reality and working on those perceptions, without dispensing judgements, is a key factor to gain mutual confidence and trust.

A culture of prevention and resilience, through inter-communal dialogue, could bring about the necessary change for mutual learning, understanding and peace.