

WORKING IN FRAGILE CONTEXTS

Why

The world is experiencing prolonged conflicts and natural disasters, creating a large number of fragile contexts. These undermine the ability of individuals to live decent lives and of communities to reduce poverty.

Fragility is posing a challenge for civil society organizations operating in these contexts, as it affects their capacity to provide support, mobilize resources, and advocate for vulnerable populations.

An increasing share of CISUs grant holders engage in fragile contexts. This calls for guidance on how to address the drivers of fragility. Developing resilience is one of the approaches for this.

Who

Civil society organisations aiming to work in a context characterized by high fragility.

What

This tool paper includes the following three key foci:



Understanding and analysing the drivers of fragility:

The fragility of a particular context has high influence on how you can plan and prepare an intervention. It also influences the content and approaches you choose for your intervention. Therefore, an thorough analysis of the context is needed to understand the drivers of fragility.



Resilience as an approach to work in a fragile context:

Interventions in a fragile context need to have a strong focus on resilience. Therefore, this tool paper provides information about how to strengthen resilience and how to work with it in practice.



Ensuring contextual interlinkages between humanitarian, development, and peace actions:

Another aspect when working in a fragile context is synergies and coherency between actors and their respective approaches.



Understanding the drivers of fragility

Fragility is highly complex and needs to be understood as a multidimensional context. It is important to capture the diversity of those contexts affected by fragility.

Each context has its own particular combination of drivers which make them more or less fragile.

A fragile context can be analysed by looking at six dimensions, namely economic fragility, environmental fragility, human fragility, political fragility, security fragility, and societal fragility. When analysing fragility, one needs to get a deeper understanding of the scope and the severity of each dimension.

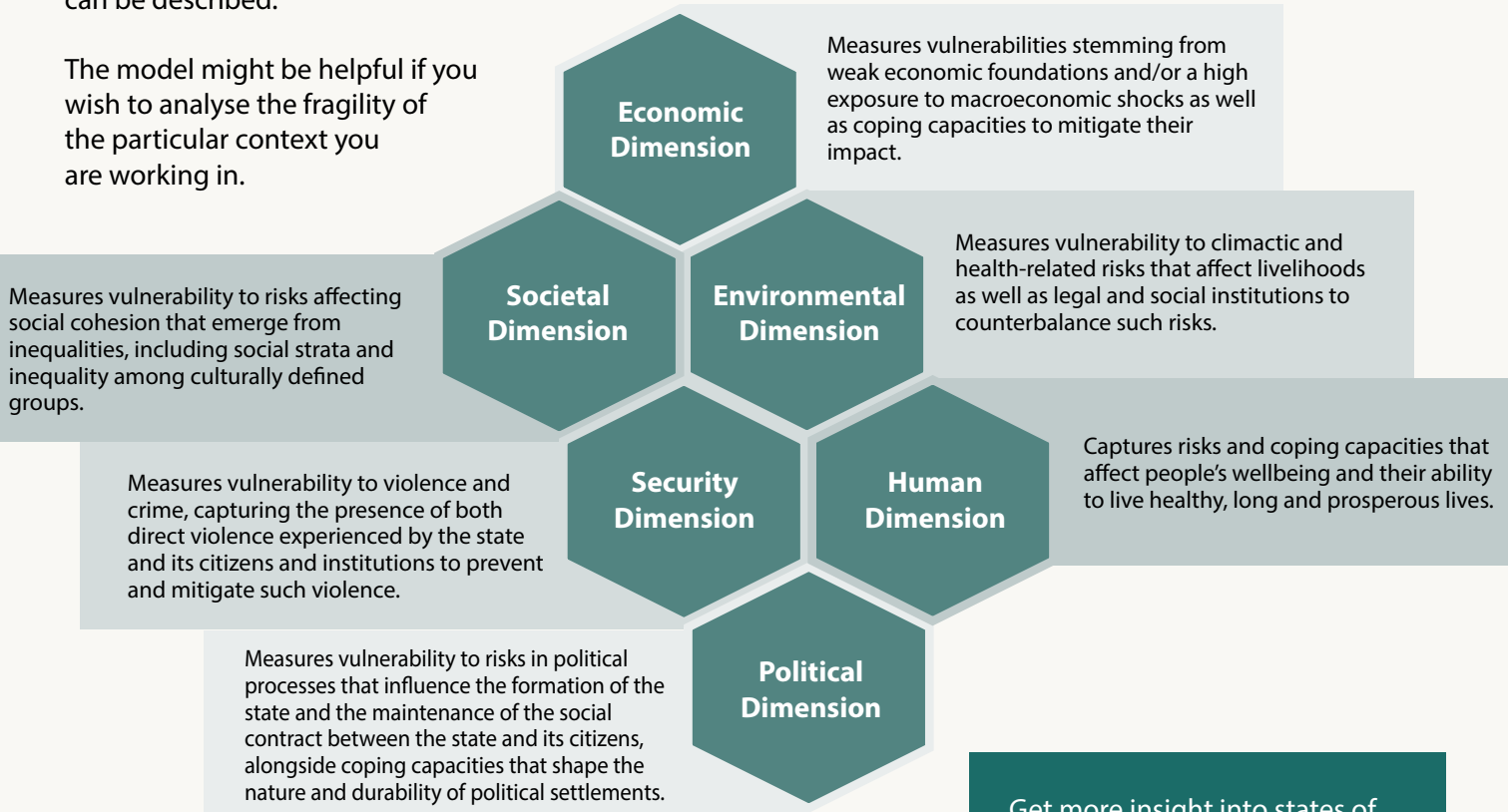
The illustrated model is based on OECDs Fragility Framework, which assesses each dimension of fragility. This way, the fragility of a country or context can be described.

The model might be helpful if you wish to analyse the fragility of the particular context you are working in.

DEFINITION OF FRAGILITY

Fragility is the combination of exposure to risk and insufficient coping capacity of the state systems, and/or communities to manage, absorb or mitigate those risks.

[OECD fragility framework, 2022]



Get more insight into states of fragility at OECDs website about [the fragility frameworks](#).

Working through partnerships

Addressing the drivers of fragility takes time and require long-term partnerships to create lasting stability. Working in partnerships with local civil society actors can have a strong impact on changing the drivers of

fragility. Through collaboration, long-term partnerships can secure a sustainable approach to improving the lives of people in fragile contexts while simultaneously addressing their immediate needs.



Resilience as an approach to work in a fragile context

Working with people affected by a fragile context requires knowledge about how to strengthen resilience. The expression **resilience** describes the ability of a person or a system to resist, absorb and recover from a crisis. Resilience also recognises how people and communities stick together in times of hazards.

DEFINITION OF RESILIENCE

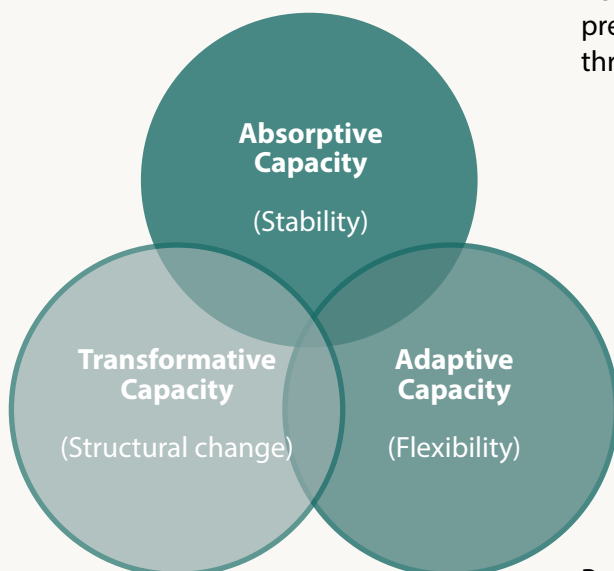
Resilience is the ability of a system, community or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate to and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner.

[UNDRR 2024]

Social Coherence

Resilience encompasses not just the ability to endure individual crises but also the importance of fostering social coherence within communities. This involves building trust and collaboration, addressing inequalities, and promoting inclusivity to ensure all voices are heard.

By encouraging collective action and providing emotional support, communities can strengthen their bonds and enhance their overall resilience. Ultimately, a cohesive community is better equipped to navigate challenges together, creating a united front in times of adversity.



Resilience also describes the resources and capacities available to prevent, respond and adapt to a changed situation. In this context, three types of capacities are important to understand:

- » **Absorptive capacity:** the capacity to take intentional protective action to cope with known shocks and stresses. It happens in a situation of stability. This is necessary because shocks and stresses will continue to happen.
- » **Adaptive capacity:** the capacity to make intentional adjustments in anticipation of or in response to change, in ways that create more flexibility in future. This is necessary because change is ongoing and because intentional change takes time.
- » **Transformative capacity:** the capacity to make structural change in order to stop or reduce the drivers of risk, vulnerability and inequality. This is necessary because resilience also is about justice and inclusive development.

Resilience is strengthened when all three capacities work together. Absorptive capacity is required to address ongoing shocks. It creates enough stability for planned adaptive and transformative change. Adaptive capacity is required to adjust to ongoing change.



Resilience as an approach to work in a fragile context

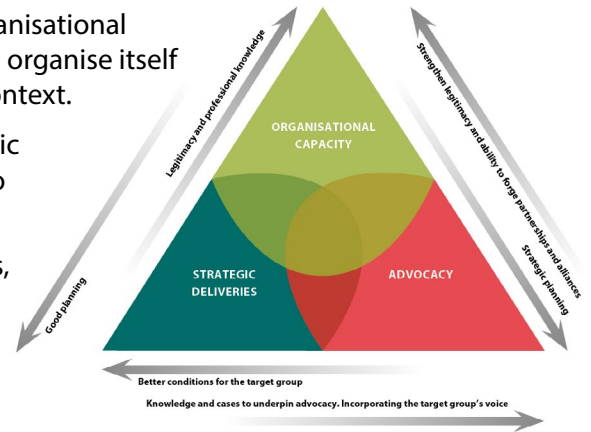
Resilience and the development triangle

Working with strengthening resilience will require considerations within all three corners of [the development triangle](#).

Organisational Capacity: Building resilience is most often about organisational capacity, for instance when improving the capacity of a community to organise itself to e.g. assess risks and adjust their strategies to navigate in a fragile context.

Strategic Deliveries: Resilience can, to some extent, be about strategic deliveries, such as infrastructure, e.g. when organising communities to construct dams that protect them against flooding.

Advocacy: Resilience is also about advocacy towards decision-makers, e.g. when engaging in dialogue with local authorities on rights and early alert systems, or when advocating for protection of vulnerable groups in a severely fragile context.



Focusing on people or systems

The aim of working with resilience can vary, depending on whether the focus is on people or on systems and actors:

- Focusing on people, that is, at the individual level, within a community or with particularly vulnerable/exposed groups or households.
- Focusing on systems and actors, including local systems (an institution, local authorities, community committees), national systems (a ministry, an NGO) and international systems (partnerships, programmes, multilateral organisations)

Some **examples** of resilience interventions targeted at people are:

- Information and knowledge: e.g. about prevention and risk reduction, disaster preparedness and leadership.
- Skills: enabling people to provide counselling or psycho-social support for people heavily affected by the fragile context.
- Mastery of tools that enable action, e.g. risk mapping and analysis.
- Social security: e.g. a person participating in loan- and saving groups.

Some **examples** of resilience interventions aimed at building and strengthening systems are:

- Setting up structures: early alert systems, risk monitoring, appointment of focal persons and/or disaster management committees in communities.
- Strategies: e.g. policies and guidelines to manage risk or crises, a resilience strategy at the organisational level for a particular intervention or programme.
- Networks: using local networking or established coordination mechanisms and security networks.
- Working on empowerment in order to champion the rights of vulnerable groups.



Ensuring contextual interlinkages between humanitarian, development and peace actions

An intervention in a fragile context typically occurs in the cross field between humanitarian, development, and/or peace actions (also called the triple nexus). The following must be considered when civil society organisations work in such context.

1. When working nexus in a fragile context, civil society organisations are recommended to engage in development approaches **whenever possible**, while at the same time engage in humanitarian action **whenever necessary**.
2. Each civil society actor is to choose its intervention focus in view of its experience, knowledge, and position in civil society.
In other words: Do what you are best at.
3. Coordinate and creating synergies by letting other actors do what is not within your competence.

DEFINITION OF NEXUS

Nexus can be defined as interlinkages between humanitarian, development, and peace actions, that is, actions that connect and that create coherence and synergy.

[DAC Recommendations OECD, 2024]

How to improve coherency

If you wish to ensure coherency between humanitarian, development, and peace actions, you need to look at the following different levels:

- ✔ Coherency in financing: You should develop financing strategies that allow flexibility to operate in the cross field between humanitarian, development, and peace actions.
- ✔ Coherency through coordination: You should undertake analysis of the drivers of crises and coordinate its plan and actions, working in complementarity to each other.
- ✔ Coherency within your projects and programmes: You should put people and their resilience at the centre of interventions. You should work conflict sensitive and align actions with risks

This way you can foster greater coherence among actors working to strengthen resilience in fragile contexts and addressing the root causes of fragility.

Read more:

Resources on fragile contexts:

- » Read more about the dimensions of a fragile context on the OECD webpages on [the Fragility Framework](#).

Resources on resilience:

- » [UN Common Guidance on Helping Build Resilient Societies](#).
- » [United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction](#).
- » [Oxfam Framework for Resilient Development](#).

Resources on coherency and nexus:

- » [DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus. OECD, 2024](#).
- » [Issue paper: Exploring peace within the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus](#).