Five ways to support state-building, service delivery and recovery in fragile and conflict-affected situations

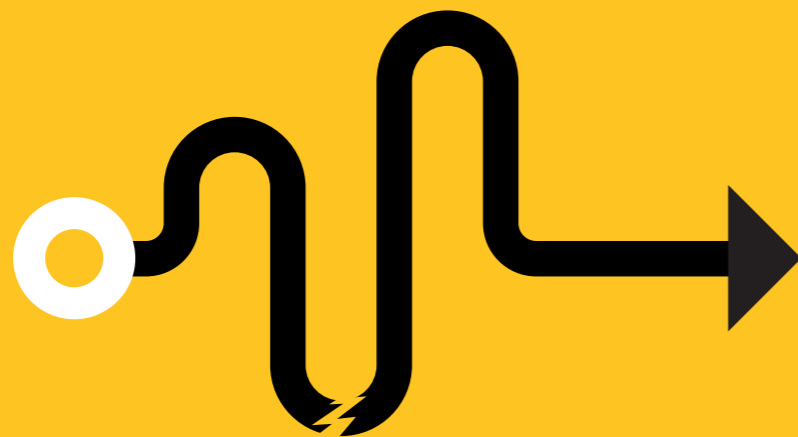securelivelihoods.org
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1. Livelihood recovery is neither automatic nor linear after conflict.

Vulnerability to shocks and stresses – including those not related to conflict – persists long after wars end, sometimes causing the rapid depletion of hard-won livelihood improvements.

Policy implications

- Assume a long and non-linear trajectory for the recovery of livelihoods and wellbeing.
- Turbulent livelihoods reinforce the need to avoid blueprint, 'best-practice' programming and pay closer attention to context.
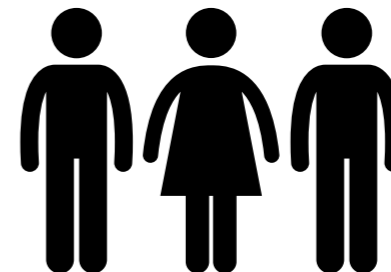- Think carefully about how – and whether – to target support.

2. It is the 'how' that matters when it comes to the question of whether service delivery can enhance state legitimacy.

Improvements in access and perceived quality matter far less than how people are treated, including whether they are engaged by providers and have access to channels of redress.

Policy implications

- Recognise that achieving state legitimacy is only a secondary objective of service delivery.
- Prioritise service delivery for its own sake.
- Do not assume that non-government provision undermines state legitimacy.
- Take a 'do no harm' approach to service-delivery programming.
- Pay more attention to the quality of services, including strong systems for ensuring accountability.

About SLRC

The Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC) is a global research programme exploring livelihoods, basic services and social protection in conflict-affected situations. SLRC was established in 2011 with the aim of strengthening the evidence base and informing policy and practice around livelihoods and services in conflict.

Over the past six years, we have learned that state-building and recovery are turbulent processes – and supporting them requires more than technical 'best-practice' fixes. Policy and programming need to become more adept at navigating politics, building relationships, and responding to ever-changing situations.

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3. Grievances, unfairness and exclusion - both within arenas of service delivery and the workplace - are enduring issues and must be taken seriously.

Experiencing problems with services can lead to negative perceptions of government. Exploitation in the labour market has far-reaching negative consequences for people's livelihoods and perceptions.
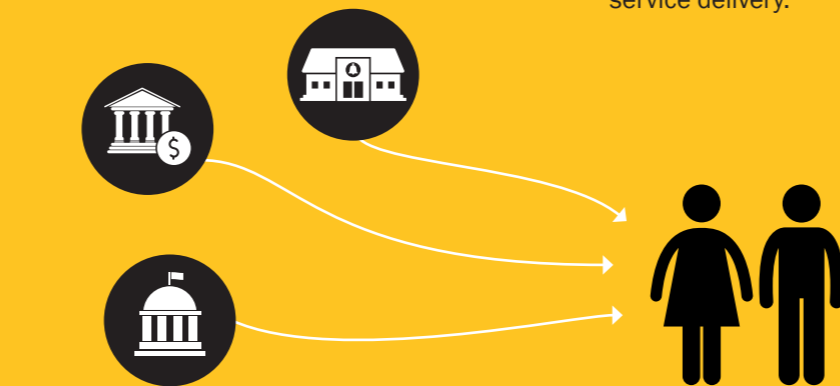
Policy implications

- Avoid the carelessly-applied notion of post-conflict settings as a relatively 'blank slate', in which old grievances have evaporated and any new service is bound to be viewed positively.
- Achieving fairness and addressing grievances associated with jobs and markets requires a response beyond the usual toolbox of skills training, access to credit and infrastructure investments.

4. State-building is fundamentally about how individuals and organisations relate to each other.

This is true in relation to both legitimacy (where the nature of interactions between state and society heavily shape prospects for legitimation) and capacity (where a state's performance is underpinned by the kinds of relationships it has with other stakeholders).
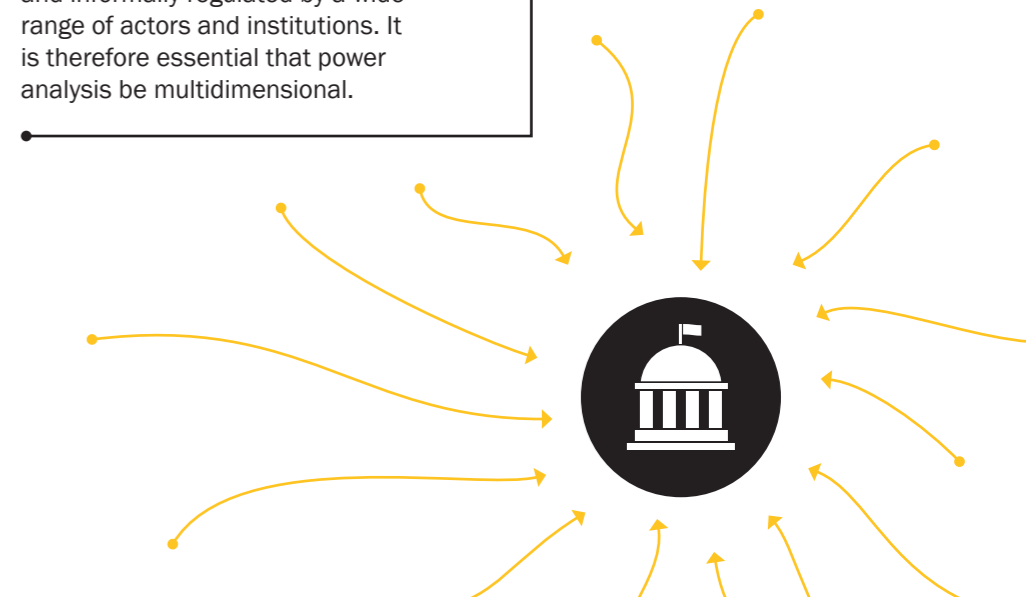
Policy implications

- Start from an understanding of how people use services in practice and what this means for how they experience the state.
- Focus on what would need to change for services to be more effectively delivered.
- Start thinking about service-delivery programming less in terms of tangible assets and structures and more in terms of the relationships and behaviours through which people experience service delivery.

5. Supporting state-building, service delivery and recovery means engaging with power and politics beyond government alone.

These processes are both formally and informally regulated by a wide range of actors and institutions. It is therefore essential that power analysis be multidimensional.

Policy implications

- Invest in better, more localised understandings of how power and politics shape state-building, service delivery and recovery.
- Adopt a multidimensional perspective on power and regulation.
- Focus on structural constraints, not just individual skills and capacities.