Doing research in fragile contexts

Literature Review
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About this report

This report is a literature review supporting the IDRC conference on ‘Research in Fragile Contexts’ held in Amman, Jordan, on 4-5 March 2019. The conference aims to develop guidance and support to research funders and councils for investing in fragile contexts, to enhance efficiency and impact.

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1. Summary

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defines fragility as ‘a combination of exposure to risk and insufficient coping capacity of the state, systems and/or communities to manage, absorb or mitigate those risks’ (Mueller, 2018: 13). Drawing on academic and grey literature, this review gives a summary of the available evidence in relation to the challenges faced in doing research, as well as monitoring and evaluation, in fragile contexts, and the approaches being taken to address these. There are shortcomings in the literature, in particular on the how of doing research in fragile contexts. This report should not be taken as a comprehensive account of all the different research methods, actors and issues involved in doing research in fragile contexts, but rather as a ‘big picture’ review highlighting key aspects.

It is important to stress at the outset that many of the findings are not unique to fragile contexts, but will often be applicable to developing countries in general. In distinguishing between fragile contexts and other developing countries, perhaps the key difference is one of degree: challenges such as lack of data seen in many developing countries, will be greater in fragile contexts; lack of capacity in many developing countries will be an even bigger problem in fragile contexts. A further distinction is multiplicity of issues and challenges: whereas research in developing countries could be difficult because of lack of data and local research capacity, in fragile contexts it could be harder because of lack of data, lack of capacity and ongoing conflict/violence and large-scale population displacement.

Key findings from the literature include:

Research is critical to understanding and addressing the problems seen in fragile and conflict affected states (FCAS). The scale and impact of these problems is staggering: in 2016 about 1.8 billion people were living in fragile contexts but this is predicted to grow to 2.3 billion (28% of total world population) by 2030; poverty is also increasingly concentrated in fragile contexts - upwards of 820 million, or 60% of the world’s poorest, could be living in these contexts by 2030 (OECD, 2018: 7). While the majority of fragile countries are found in Sub-Saharan Africa (35), there are many in the Middle East and North Africa (9), Asia and Oceania (10) and Latin America and the Caribbean (4) (OECD, 2018: 7). Research is needed for effective policy-making, programme design, and monitoring and evaluation. As well as ensuring the vast sums being invested in FCAS (USD 46.7 billion) (Mallett, nd) are used properly, research is needed to prevent interventions having harmful impacts.

A number of challenges are faced when trying to carry out research in such contexts, notably: lack of data; poor quality of data; insecurity, making it difficult to access regions/local populations and conduct on-ground research; lack of research capacity among local partners; lack of trust on the part of research participants; fast changing environments; tendency of researchers not to understand the context; and polarisation leading to higher risk of bias. Development agencies can also fail to give it priority and invest adequate resources.

Research Methods

These challenges necessitate the use of diverse research techniques in fragile contexts. Conduct of large-scale household surveys can be difficult, but the World Bank’s Survey of well-being via instant and frequent tracking (SWIFT) offers a rapid, cost-effective poverty assessment tool. Perception surveys are increasingly being used in FCAS. They measure what respondents believe, think or feel and can be a relatively quick, cost-effective and extensive data gathering method. However, they also have limitations, key among which are the reliability of the data and representativeness of the sample. These can be mitigated by triangulation of data gathered from perception surveys with other non-survey and non-perception data.
Digital data collection refers to a diverse set of tools and methodologies: a) conventional data collection using digital technology to facilitate collection, sharing and analysis of data; b) select stakeholders or representatives integrated into a networked reporting system; c) crowdsourcing which relies on larger numbers of individuals or groups reporting information without any filter or exclusion; d) analysis of passively produced ‘big data’ that is generated as a by-product of activities.

The spread of mobile telephones in developing countries offers potential for these to be used more frequently in research for data collection. Analysis of two pilot projects using mobile phones for high frequency data collection in Tanzania and South Sudan, found that overall the experience was largely a success: data was collected on a wide range of topics in a manner that was cost effective, flexible (i.e. questions could be changed over time) and rapid. However, mobile surveys should not be considered as substitutes for household surveys but additions to these, and they are not the right platform for lengthy interviews.

High resolution satellite imagery is increasingly available at the global scale and contains an abundance of information about landscape features that can be used for research. In one study, daytime satellite images and night-time light intensities were used in five African countries – Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda, Malawi and Rwanda – to extract information about cluster level economic well-being (consumption expenditure and asset wealth). In another study in rural western Kenya, remote satellite imagery was successfully used to predict household poverty levels. A third application of satellite imagery has been to assess disaster impact.

Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring of incidents of violence can be carried out by reviewing press reports. The Uppsala Conflict Data Programme (UCDP) collates global data on organized (fatal) violence, drawing on news reports from diverse agencies (international and local) as well as other sources (e.g. NGOs, international organizations). There are important limitations to press monitoring, however, especially on accuracy of content.

Monitoring and evaluation in fragile contexts faces similar challenges to doing research: in addition the impact of donor activities on fragility and conflict is complex and often difficult to measure. Recommendations include using ‘good enough’ data, relying on diverse sources (NGOs, local and international companies, the military...), and supporting beneficiaries to monitor outputs and impact. Remote programming and monitoring can be carried out in contexts where development actors cannot operate but project implementation continues through local staff or partner organizations. Approaches to remote monitoring include use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), big data, third party monitoring and iterative beneficiary monitoring. Each have benefits for M&E but can also be problematic: technology, for example, can allow rapid monitoring, large-scale data collection and analysis, and bring about cost savings, but also carries the risk of introducing selection bias (through unequal access).

Research actors and partnerships

International development organizations are increasingly prioritizing working with fragile states, and have taken a range of approaches to conducting research. These include DFID, the World Bank, Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC), and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affair’s Knowledge Platform Security and Rule of Law (KPSRL). DFID’s recommendations for research include liaising with other UK government agencies, other development partners, using local sources such as civil society organizations, triangulating information, and carrying out media monitoring. Numerous research institutes support research on fragile contexts, e.g. the Berghof Foundation, United States Institute of Peace (USIP), Carnegie Corporation and HF Guggenheim Foundation.

There is an increasing trend for international research collaboration, and specifically for North-South research partnerships. As well as building local research capacity and thus overcoming the challenges of
researching in fragile contexts, such collaboration is essential to address global impact issues such as climate change and migration. **North-South research partnerships have many potential benefits:** promoting mutual learning and knowledge exchange, capacity building, access to resources and expertise.

In practice these are often undermined by Northern dominance. Southern partners can end up merely collecting data for Northern research agendas; time and resource constraints in the North can mean there is little investment in Southern capacity building. Research outputs – international academic publications – are not necessarily the most relevant or useful for Southern research partners. In order to bring about equitable and effective partnerships measures such as joint research agendas, two-way capacity building and funding mechanisms which give Southern institutions more control are needed.

**There are many positive examples of North-South research partnerships.** These include the ReBUILD Consortium, Collaborative Adaptation Research in Africa and Asia (CARIAA) and USAID funded Partnerships for Enhanced Engagement in Research (PEER) programme.

**Recommendations**

The literature makes a number of recommendations for doing research in fragile contexts. It stresses the need to build local research capacity, including for monitoring and evaluation for programme results frameworks. Capacity building approaches include academic training for individuals, transnational partnerships between institutions, and setting up centres of excellence in the global South.

There is also stress on the need for innovative and customized approaches to research design and implementation, and for flexibility on the part of both funders and researchers. In researching conflicts, there is criticism of the search for objective facts and simplistic narratives which lend themselves to clear policy solutions. Researchers are urged to embrace ‘messy data’ because it more accurately reflects the complexity of the situation and needs to be acknowledged if peacebuilding programming is to be successful.

The literature stresses the importance of conducting ethical research. It highlights the potential (risks) in fragile contexts for international researchers to carry out practices/unethical behaviour that would be considered unacceptable in their home countries (the West) and that could cause harm. Examples include gaining easy access to victims or perpetrators of wartime violence, and making payments to access documents or secure other permissions. Data collection could be dominated by powerful groups, leading to bias and further marginalising vulnerable groups; such groups could also face a backlash when their views are shared. Digital data collection could be particularly affected by biases due to unequal access to technology. Increasingly, guidelines are being developed to promote ethical research in fragile contexts.

**Annex I** gives a selection of international development organizations and research institutes carrying out research in fragile contexts.

2. Challenges

**Challenges faced in doing research in FCAS**

The literature consistently highlights the problems caused by lack of data in FCAS. Data is key for decision-making; lack of baseline data makes it difficult to track progress and identify changes. The OECD’s *States of Fragility 2018* report notes that:

Gaps persist in our ability to capture subnational and regional dynamics and the pace of change within societies….While various forms of inequality can be measured, it is still very difficult to
quantitatively and fully capture the myriad, interwoven influences and systems that determine how well, or how poorly, societies function (OECD, 2018: 17).

Furthermore, ‘even when available, data are often unreliable, of poor quality, not sufficiently disaggregated by geographic area or population group, and not regularly collected. Moreover, some data and information can be controversial, politicized and unrepresentative of a group’ (Defontaine, 2018).

**A second key challenge is lack of local research capacity.** Typically in crisis-affected settings there will be a small number of trained researchers, often clustered in one or two institutions (ReBUILD, 2017: 2). Limited support for research may also lead to greater turnover of research staff in some institutions. Capacity to manage research projects and to share skills and knowledge beyond the individual level within organisations is typically weak (ReBUILD, 2017). General research orientation and skills, within academic centres but also in government ministries and other potential evidence users, are often limited (ReBUILD, 2017: 2-3). Opportunities to engage in research are few and not always meritocratic.

**Research in FCAS is often not grounded in adequate knowledge of the context.** An OECD report on international engagement in fragile states finds that international development organizations do acknowledge the importance of taking context as the starting point in programming. ‘However, the strength and depth of their contextual analysis is often limited by insufficient use of local knowledge, which in turn leads to limited understanding of the subnational context…. Sound contextual analysis is constrained by a lack of development partner capacity and, in some cases, lack of presence in the country ….. Where development partners have been on the ground longer, they are sometimes felt to have a better understanding of the local dynamics and political context but this is undermined by frequent staff turnover. When staff members go, knowledge often goes with them’ (OECD, 2011: 23).

**Obvious challenges are posed by conflict and insecurity.** These include higher risks to personal safety for those conducting research; problems with accessing some geographical areas; and rapidly changing social and political environments that complicate longitudinal work (ReBUILD, 2017: 2).

**Research, particularly in contexts of crisis and pressing humanitarian needs, can be seen as of secondary importance.** E.g. the ReBUILD Consortium found that governments and the international community typically focus on funding and facilitating projects to restore healthcare services rather than conducting research, as research has less tangible benefits in the short-term. A qualitative study of challenges faced in health systems research in FCAS identified lack of appropriate support: health systems research (HSR) in FCAS was seen as a low priority, making it difficult to secure appropriate funding (Woodward et al, 2017: 4-6). Sue Unsworth notes that, ‘The quality of studies varies considerably, reflecting inadequate investment of time and resources; and analysis is too often seen as a one-off exercise’ (cited in Bolling, 2015: 5).

**Topics being researched in fragile contexts will often be sensitive.** With reference to political economy analysis, Sue Unsworth points out that, especially in conflict affected contexts, as well as the practical difficulties of assembling evidence about very informal relationships and practices, many of the findings can be politically sensitive, raising awkward questions about whether or not to make them public (cited in Bolling, 2015: 5). Woodward et al (2017) note that local participants could perceive themselves at a disadvantage in the research process because researchers generally hold the power to interpret the data collected; those interpretations could assert considerable influence over policies and programmes that directly affect participants’ lives. Such mistrust could especially be present if the subject matter related to conflict or politics.

Research with staff and communities who have experienced trauma also poses **particular ethical challenges**, which require careful and sensitive approaches to the consent process, methods (for example
sensitive questioning in qualitative interviews or life histories) and building of trust (including the need for oral rather than written consent in some sensitive contexts) (ReBUILD, 2017). A brief by the ReBUILD Consortium on the challenges of conducting ethical and trustworthy qualitative research in health systems in post-conflict and fragile contexts, noted that participants might be more vulnerable and have reasons to be fearful of research encounters. Thus, for example, they could be afraid that a signature in the informed consent process could have repercussions; they might be anxious about discussing issues with strangers (researchers) and worried about being judged. A common finding was that people told a different story once the recorder had been switched off, while some were nervous about being recorded at all (ReBUILD, nd). [Ethical challenges are discussed more fully in Section 6.]

Mallett (nd) concedes that in FCAS, it might be tempting to argue that donors should reduce the burden of proof required to justify decisions, to ‘lower the bar’ for evidence-based policy-making in conflict-affected countries. But he contends that this would be the wrong approach: ‘it is possible to do high quality, methodologically rigorous research in difficult places’. Mallett (nd) cites examples where this has been done: the Households in Conflict Network (HICN) which undertakes collaborative research on the causes and effects of violent conflict at the household level, and MICROCON, a five-year research programme which promotes understanding of micro-level individual and group interactions leading to and resulting from violent mass conflicts. Bush and Duggan (eds., 2017) echo Mallet’s point. They note that, when looking at the needs of violently divided societies (VDS), effort to strengthen research might seem less pressing than other problems, but argue that: ‘Rebuilding VDS requires a nuanced understanding of very complex and deeply politicised processes within highly volatile environments. Research plays a critical role in understanding the structures and processes of violence, and in developing effective responses to the most pressing social, political, economic and security challenges within VDS’ (Bush & Duggan, eds., 2017: 16).

There is increasing focus on research on fragile contexts. Annex I gives a selection of international development organizations and research institutes engaged in such research. A forthcoming scoping review (Diaconu et al) describes the global literature on fragility in relation to health and identifies where and how the term has been applied. 377 documents met the inclusion criteria for the review, reflecting the ‘exponential increase in applications of the concept in published literature over the last ten years’ (Diaconu et al, forthcoming: 3). The review notes that ‘fragility’ has traditionally been used in relation to fragile states, those lacking legitimacy or capacity for delivery of services. It finds that the concept is actually used with respect to a much broader range of contexts, including stable and prosperous settings, and circumstances at sub-state level.

Challenges faced in doing M&E

Despite the significant funds being invested in interventions in FCAS, evidence on their impact is limited. DFID (2017) note that ‘the evidence base on conflict prevention and mitigation has advanced only moderately since 2010’. Woodward et al (2017) echo this in the health sector, writing that little is known about how to effectively strengthen health systems in FCAS – one reason being the challenges associated with health systems research (HSR). A review of evidence on growth and livelihoods found that – despite the range of programmes from public works to seed and tool distribution – there was very little impact data (Mallett & Slater, 2012). ‘Much of the time, it seems, we simply don’t know whether programmes are working for beneficiaries, having no effect at all or, worst case scenario, making things worse’ (Mallett, nd).

1 http://www.hicn.org/
2 http://www.microconflict.eu/
Mallett (nd) gives a number of possible reasons for the lack of evidence of impact of interventions in FCAS, including the fact that doing impact evaluation well is not easy or cheap, and that faced with often urgent humanitarian and recovery needs in FCAS, funding research may not be on the top of donors’ list of priorities. DFID (2010b: 1) identify a number of challenges specific to M&E in situations of fragility and conflict:

- Where the context is insecure and volatile, programme objectives and activities are often fluid, making it difficult to maintain a coherent approach to monitoring;
- Data can be hard to come by, making it difficult to prepare baselines and identify changes;
- In insecure environments, implementing agencies may lack the staff resources or expertise for effective monitoring.

Nonetheless, DFID stress that the case for a well-structured approach to M&E in situations of fragility and conflict is just as pressing, if not more so, as in other development contexts (DFID, 2010b: 1).

3. Current approaches to research in fragile contexts

Diverse research methods can be used in fragile contexts, depending on the type of information needed and the particular constraints or challenges faced. It is not possible here to provide an exhaustive review of all the research designs and techniques used in FCAS, but some of the common methods and key innovations are discussed below:

**Surveys**

*Household surveys*

The challenges faced in doing research in FCAS are particularly applicable to large-scale surveys. Security issues can make it difficult to access large numbers of respondents, with often some areas completely inaccessible (introducing potential for skewed results); lack of data can make sampling difficult; there can be high levels of attrition making follow-up surveys a challenge – or requiring larger sample sizes; surveys in FCAS are generally very expensive, requiring high levels of human and financial resources (Mohmand et al, 2017: 18).

**One approach to overcome some of the difficulties in conducting household surveys in FCAS is SWIFT (Survey of well-being via instant and frequent tracking).** Pioneered by the World Bank, SWIFT is a rapid poverty assessment tool that can produce accurate household data in a timely, cost-effective and user-friendly manner (World Bank, nd: 2). The SWIFT process involves the following steps (World Bank, nd: 3):

i. **Statistical model development** – Data analysis and modelling is used to identify 10-15 questions that can predict household income, e.g. education of the household head, ownership of consumer durables, household head’s employment status;

ii. **Survey design and data collection** – Enumerators interview household members either face-to-face or over the phone. This usually takes 7-10 minutes, meaning significantly less data collection time and cost than in traditional methods;

iii. **Data recording and formatting** – Enumerators record responses on tablets and data are sent to a cloud server. This reduces risk of data loss and human error in interview process, and increases efficiency by removing data processing and most cleaning tasks;

iv. **Analysis and reporting on results** – Data are downloaded and analysed;

v. **Use of analyses.**
It should also be noted that SWIFT estimations are only as good as the underlying models (referred to in point i above) which require access to recent large-scale data sets collected by governments and multilateral agencies.

Mohmand et al (2017) note that existing socioeconomic datasets from FCAS can be used as proxies for other measures, e.g. on conflict and violence. Bruck et al (2016) give details of how various household surveys, e.g. Living Standard Measurement Surveys (LSMS), as well as census data have been used in this way. They argue that purpose-built surveys are far better for assessing the causes and impact of conflict and identify five types: a) ex-combatant surveys; b) genocide and atrocities surveys; c) surveys of displaced populations; d) post-conflict reconstruction surveys; and e) conflict surveys conducted among civilian populations (Bruck et al, 2016: 6-11).

**Perception surveys**

Perception surveys are increasingly being used in FCAS. They measure what respondents believe, think or feel and can produce information about: a) knowledge (e.g. levels of awareness and understanding of particular issues); b) experiences (e.g. with regard to service provision); c) beliefs and values; d) attitudes and opinions; and e) expectations (Herbert, 2013: 2). In the context of FCAS, perhaps the key strength of perception surveys is that they can be a relatively quick, cost-effective and extensive data gathering method compared, for example, to focus groups. Short questionnaires with standardised questions and answers can provide a large data set involving large sample groups in a short amount of time, and can be carried out remotely (Herbert, 2013: 3). Other advantages of using perception surveys in FCAS include: they offer a means of collecting data about issues which are intangible and difficult to measure, e.g. citizen views on state legitimacy; they facilitate communication between citizens and government/international development organizations; they can provide data where this is limited, and can triangulate other data sources; and they can be useful to test policy assumptions and challenge un-evidenced stereotypes.

The use of perception survey data in Sudan shows that it can provide evidence for policy-making and shaping programmes (Hamilton & Hammer, 2017). A DFID household survey focused on governance issues in Sudan was used to gain insights into what ordinary Sudanese think about everything from female genital mutilation to the link between poor service provision and trust in government. ‘The work shows that while producing and using data in fragile contexts is difficult, it is eminently possible’ (Hamilton & Hammer, 2017: xi). However, perception surveys in FCAS also have several limitations key among which are the reliability of the data and representativeness of the sample. Examples of types of bias are: selection bias (when the sample is not representative of the target population, e.g. too small, non-random sampling); response bias (when respondents are more likely to agree with the interviewer than disagree, or respond with answers thought to be more socially acceptable); and survivorship bias (when the number of participants is reduced to those that have ‘survived’ following conflict, etc.) (Herbert, 2013: 5; Blanchett et al, 2018: 9-10). The accessibility challenges faced when doing research in FCAS apply to perception surveys too: the Asia Foundation, conducting their annual perception survey in Afghanistan for 2012, had to replace an average of 16% (in one region as many as 35%) of sampling points (identified through the random sampling process) because of access issues (due to security, logistical challenges, transportation problems, villages not located, remoteness, weather, surveyors not being allowed, natural disasters) (Herbert, 2013: 4).

While perception surveys can be used to measure opinions over time, e.g. to explore how changes in service delivery affect public perceptions, FCAS populations often change rapidly and unpredictably leading to potentially high levels of attrition (and survivor bias) (Herbert, 2013: 8). In countries and regions with high levels of gender inequality, women are less likely to be captured in data sources and will be less able to articulate views both publicly and privately. Perception surveys measure perceptions, and hence the
data generated cannot be used in place of facts – but there is *a danger that the findings will be treated as facts*. ‘A key question for researchers is how to interpret and understand the data generated through perception surveys’ (Herbert, 2013: 6).

The literature identifies steps that can be taken to ensure a rigorous and high quality approach to perception surveys. A key step is **triangulation of data gathered from perception surveys with other non-survey and non-perception data** (e.g. institutional data, focus group data). Sensitive or ambiguous questions should also be triangulated within the survey, e.g. by asking a number of similar questions to test for reliability (Herbert, 2013: 7). Other measures relate to the timing of surveys, the sequencing and phrasing of questions, pilot testing of survey instruments, and quality checks to ensure that individual interviewers are meeting the required standards and there is no interviewer bias (Herbert, 2013).

The Afghan Centre for Socio-Economic and Opinion Research (ACSOR) is an example of good practice. All 200 staff are from Afghanistan; 50% of the workforce are women, and there is a mix of ethnicities – this ensures gender and ethnic matching of interviewer and respondent (Herbert, 2013: 8). However, due to gender relations, women conducting surveys must be accompanied by a male family member – this has various implications for budgeting. ACSOR runs a continuous recruitment and training scheme to ensure high quality standards of surveys, and to build national research capacity – a key objective of perception surveys for the organization.

**Digital data collection**

Digital data collection refers to a *very diverse set of tools and methodologies*. ‘The centrality of digital technologies to the methodology itself varies, from those in which digital technologies simply facilitate and expedite conventional data collection strategies, to those in which digital technology provides the central architecture of collection, reporting, and analysis, transforming the means and scale of data collection’ (Mohmand et al, 2017: 22). Mohmand et al (2017: 22-23) identify four types of digital data collection:

- **a)** Digital collection methods can include systems in which researchers rely on conventional data collection professionals, including survey enumerators, sectoral experts or trained staff, who **make use of digital technology to facilitate the collection, sharing, distribution and analysis of data**. Examples include using digital survey platforms on smartphones or tablets to input responses directly to a central database;

- **b)** In a second type, **select stakeholders or representatives – for example, CSO or community leaders – are integrated into a networked reporting system** in which they represent wider communities, groups or constituencies. Examples include the use of mobile phones among targeted, representative community members reporting on instances of violence and insecurity in their region;

- **c)** A third type of digital data collection, **crowd-sourcing**, departs from the strategy of using known sources and representative samples, and instead relies on larger numbers of individuals or groups reporting information without any filter or exclusion, except access to digital technologies. This approach can in turn be disaggregated between two forms of data collection: (i) those in which participants directly and voluntarily contribute information to monitoring or data collection systems; and (ii) those in which otherwise public statements (such as via social media) are analysed for content, details or information, without participants necessarily directly or intentionally feeding information into monitoring systems;

- **d)** Finally, digital data collection methodologies can involve **analysis of passively produced ‘big data’** that is generated as a by-product of activities: this form of data does not involve the active reporting or documenting of events or information, but instead involves researchers reviewing large quantities of data logged in mobile, or digital systems, such as information about users
generated from mobile phones or from internet browsing activity. Related methodologies may involve remote sensing, image analysis and satellite-based assessments of geographic or locational data.

**Use of mobile phones for rapid, cost-effective data collection**

The spread of mobile telephones in developing countries offers potential for these to be used more frequently in research for data collection. Timely, high quality information about socioeconomic outcomes related to well-being, service delivery, income, security, health and many other topics is not readily available in fragile contexts. Such data is typically collected by nationally representative, face-to-face household surveys, which are expensive and time-consuming and are, for this reason as well as security/access constraints, not implemented very frequently (Croke et al, 2012).

Croke et al (2012) describe two pilot projects using mobile phones for high frequency data collection in Tanzania and South Sudan. In both, a standard baseline survey was combined with the distribution of mobile phones to respondents at the time of baseline, who were then called regularly (weekly or every two weeks) with follow up questions. These questions could be comparable to questions asked before to track changes over time, or could be new and collect data on emerging issues. In this way a high frequency panel was created. Answers from respondents could be collected in various ways as mobile phones offered a multitude of opportunities to obtain feedback, including through SMS, WAP, IVR and USSD. Questions were posed by a call centre. These offered flexibility to vary questions from one round to the next, the ability to ask complex questions (which might require explanation), the possibility to accommodate illiterate respondents and respondents owning basic phones without internet connectivity. Call centres were also able to deal with respondents with different mother tongues; good enumerators could build rapport between respondents and phone operators.

Overall, the experience was a largely a success: data was collected on a wide range of topics in a manner that was cost effective, flexible (i.e. questions could be changed over time) and rapid (Croke et al, 2017). Moreover, once households were included in the survey, they tended to stick with it: respondent fatigue was not an issue. The paper notes that attrition and non-response were an issue in the Tanzania survey, but in ways that were related to the way the survey was originally set up and that were fixable. Croke et al (2017) concluded that mobile surveys have great potential to provide rapid feedback and address existing data gaps at limited expense. However, they added that mobile surveys should not be considered substitutes for household surveys but complements: mobile surveys could, for example, rely on an existing household survey to serve as baseline. They found that mobile surveys were not the right platform for lengthy interviews; moreover, when interviews are lengthy, face-to-face interviews would probably be more cost effective.

**Use of satellite imagery to measure poverty and disaster impact**

Mapping areas manually is extremely time and resource intensive, and faces obvious challenges in fragile contexts. Satellite images can be a rapid, cost-efficient and safe way of getting vital information about an area, notably socioeconomic data, as well as, in the case of disasters, disaster impact. High resolution satellite imagery is increasingly available at the global scale and contains an abundance of information about landscape features that can be used for research (Jean et al, 2016).

Jean et al (2016) describe how daytime satellite images were used in five African countries – Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda, Malawi and Rwanda – to extract information about economic well-being (consumption expenditure and asset wealth). A convolutional neural network (CNN), pretrained on ImageNet (a large image classification data set consisting of labelled images from many different countries) was trained to
predict night-time light intensities corresponding to daytime satellite images. Night-lights are a globally consistent and globally prevalent proxy for economic activity. Both daytime imagery and night-lights are available at relatively high resolutions for the entire global land surface (Jean et al, 2016). The technique also makes use of survey data (mean cluster-level values) to estimate cluster-level expenditures and assets. The technique was found to be more accurate than sources of passively collected data (e.g. images of night-lights alone) in estimating economic well-being at cluster level – though it was unable to distinguish between households within clusters. It was also found to be scalable, more so within the same country, but even when applied to a different country the model had high levels of accuracy. Jean et al (2016: 794) conclude:

Our approach could have broad application across many scientific domains and may be immediately useful for inexpensively producing granular data on other socioeconomic outcomes of interest to the international community, such as the large set of indicators proposed for the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

A recent paper (Watmough et al, 2019) describes how remote satellite imagery was successfully (with 62% accuracy) used to predict household poverty levels in a rural area of western Kenya. A multi-level approach was taken, with the size of buildings within a family compound (homestead), the amount of bare agricultural land surrounding a homestead, the amount of bare ground inside the homestead, and the length of the growing season being important predictor variables. The study found a 10% increase in accuracy using the multi-level approach as compared to using single-level methods which do not consider details of spatial landscape use (Watmough et al, 2019: 1213). Of the four variables considered, the most important in explaining variance in household wealth were the size of the household’s buildings and proportion of agricultural and bare land. Watmough et al (2019: 1216) highlight the implications of their study for future research:

The increasing availability of high-resolution satellite data means that methods, such as those developed in this study, could support the SDG “data revolution” and provide a more cost-effective way of monitoring development than annual household surveys.....If the sampled households are a panel, satellite data covering these households could be acquired every year to provide continual monitoring of some socioecological conditions and potentially provide $100,000s worth of savings compared with household survey costs.

A third application of satellite imagery has been using convolutional neural networks (CNNs) on satellite images to assess disaster impact (Doshi et al, 2018). Models on CNNs are trained to detect high-level human-made features, e.g. roads. The models then generate prediction masks in regions experiencing a disaster. By computing the relative change between features extracted from snapshots of data captured both before and after a disaster, it’s possible to identify the areas of maximum change – i.e. maximum disaster impact (and hence most in need of support). This method has the potential to produce more accurate information in far less time than current manual methods. It relies on readily available data and can be scalable to other, similar natural disasters (Doshi et al, 2018).

Use of technology in health systems research

In the health sector, the increased availability of information and communication technology (ICT), known as eHealth, is being exploited for research purposes, e.g. through online surveys (Woodward et al, 2017: 8). However, Woodward et al (2017: 8) caution that the use of technology in research may introduce bias because of the differing levels of access to it: ‘Marked differences in access to technology exist in FCAS, where most people lack access to even the most basic utilities’. Hence, they recommend that future innovations in research be designed to include communities and vulnerable people within them, and in such a way that prevailing health inequities are not exacerbated (Woodward et al, 2017: 8).
Violence monitoring

Monitoring of incidents of violence can be carried out by reviewing press reports. In Indonesia and the Philippines, national violence monitoring systems have been developed (with World Bank support). These use multiple provincial and local-level newspapers to ensure accuracy. Incidents of violence reported in the local press are clipped and a number of variables are coded including: where the incident took place; when; what the incident’s impacts were (deaths, injuries, buildings destroyed); what the incident was about the form violence took; weapons used; who was involved; and who tried to stop the violence and how successful this was (AusAID, 2011: 72). The incidents are entered into a database that allows for analysis of trends in violence over time and across areas.

The database is supplemented by ongoing qualitative research to help explain the causal processes behind trends (AusAID, 2011). In other countries where the press is less free or has limited reach, other data sources can be used, notably non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In Timor-Leste, for example, NGOs collate data on violence collected by locally-stationed facilitators. As well as facilitating a better understanding of conditions in different areas, the data can be used to inform short-term responses by government as well as the development of longer-term planning, and to track the impacts of development projects on violence (AusAID, 2011: 72).

The Uppsala Conflict Data Programme (UCDP) collates global data on organized (fatal) violence. It too relies on news reports, with the precise media sources varying, depending on how extensively they cover a specific conflict and/or region. ‘As a minimum, UCDP uses at least one of the global newswires (AFP, Reuters, Xinhua, or Agencia EFE) in addition to BBC Monitoring. BBC Monitoring was specifically chosen because it supplies text of local news reports, thus providing UCDP with a mixture of reports from international news bureaus and from local sources, including non-English ones. Other local and specialized news-sources are also added to further improve coverage (e.g. Radio Okapi for the DRC).’ UCDP considers media reports to be an indispensable resource for identifying and documenting conflict. In addition, UCDP draws on reports and data from NGOs and international organizations (e.g. the UN), case studies, truth commission reports, historical archives and other sources of information, many of them local. Approximately 20% of events in the UCDP database for 2013-2016 were from non-media sources.

However, it is important to note that there can be serious limitations to relying on analysis of media reports. A major issue is that the media (particularly where this is state-dominated) can often be quite biased – reflecting the power dynamics in a country. Analysis based on biased reports can thus end up presenting a misleading picture, under the guise of being ‘neutral data’. Herbert (2017: 25) cautions that external actors ‘should be cautious of what information they select and how they use/reproduce it, as it can have legitimising and de-legitimising impacts on certain actors or issues’.

Case study 1: Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC) panel survey

SLRC carried out a multi-year longitudinal panel survey in five fragile states. The aim was to understand how processes of post-conflict recovery and state-building play out in some of the world’s most challenging contexts – and to equip policy-makers and practitioners with better information about how to support those processes. ‘The SLRC panel survey is an attempt to help ensure that decision-making about recovery and state-building is aligned more closely with the experiences, perceptions, interests and needs of those who have lived through – and often continue to live in – conflict’ (SLRC, 2017: 2).

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3 [http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/methodology/](http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/methodology/)

4 [http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/methodology/](http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/methodology/)
In 2012 SLRC researchers surveyed almost 10,000 people across five countries: the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Uganda (SLRC, 2017: 2). They gathered information about three broad themes: a) people’s livelihoods; b) their access to and experience of basic services and transfers (e.g. social protection); and c) their relationships with government processes and practices (SLRC, 2017: 3). Three years later, in 2015, research teams went back to the same towns, villages and communities to track down and interview the very same people once more. They were successful in 86% of cases: more than 8,400 of the original respondents were found and re-interviewed, thus enabling SLRC to directly observe individual and household change over this three-year period (SLRC, 2017: 2).

Key features of the methodology are (SLRC, 2017: 3):

a) Allowing for attrition - the round-one sample sizes were inflated to allow for attrition of up to 20%. This meant that the sample remained representative at a specific administrative or geographical level in each country, even when some respondents dropped out of the sample because they could not be re-interviewed for whatever reason. Overall, 8,404 of the original 9,767 respondents were re-interviewed in round two, meaning that the survey teams managed to find six out of every seven individuals they sought to re-interview. Furthermore, sampling weights were incorporated into the analysis in order to deal with those individuals who did drop out by round two.

b) Panel survey - The ‘panel’ aspect of the surveys – whereby SLRC defined their panel as including exactly the same respondents in both rounds, as opposed to a cross-sectional approach where a new sample of respondents would be generated each time – gave the SLRC survey additional analytical value and scope. It allowed them to: i) directly track changes in people’s lives over the two- or three-year study period; and ii) identify factors that shared an underlying association with those changes. Compared to the more standard cross-sectional approach, this enabled SLRC to better explore and understand potential causal relationships, and build a multidimensional picture of development and change over time.

Nonetheless, SLRC concede: ‘We faced our fair share of challenges along the way. In addition to the regular technical challenges – such as how to interview around religious festivals in Nepal, or how to ensure that the observance of Ramadan by respondents in Pakistan and Sri Lanka did not bias our data on food consumption – we also lost a planned sixth survey country after the baseline was completed when our work in South Sudan was curtailed by violence from late 2013 onwards. In other countries our research teams experienced thefts, threats and the bugging of phone calls to respondents by national security services, and had to navigate curfews, protests and blockades’ (SLRC, 2017: 10).

Case study 2: Gender and artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) in Central and East Africa

A GrOW working paper details the findings of a three-year study in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Uganda exploring the gendered dynamics of ASM and constraints and possibilities facing women’s ASM livelihoods (Buss et al, 2017). The paper highlights the challenges faced in conducting the research, including: challenges in accessing ASM zones, often located in remote, difficult to reach terrain; the fact that mine communities functioned largely in languages local to the area; complex social and economic ordering of mine zones, which required time and repeated visits to discern; and suspicion of outsiders in ASM zones, connected to the often uncertain legality of this economic activity (Buss et al, 2017: 7-8).

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5 Growth and Economic Opportunities for Women (GrOW) programme funded by DFID, The William and Flora Hewlitt Foundation and IDRC.
To overcome these a mixed method research study was conducted, including participant observation, focus group interviews, a survey and life histories (Buss et al, 2017: 8). The mixed methods were complementary and cumulative. The study was conducted in the following steps (Buss et al, 2017: 8-10):

- **Site selection** - six artisanal mining sites were selected, two in each country;
- **First research trip** - starting with a week of participant observation in each mining zone, examining the broad contours of the social organization of mining and introducing the research study to the communities in the mine zone;
- **Training** - Researchers and gender focal points from the three countries met with the whole research team in Kampala, Uganda, to share their results, and receive training on gender analysis and other aspects of the research.
- **Focus group discussions** were conducted with different stakeholders identified in the participant observation phase, and with the questions guided by the findings of this first phase of research.
- **Survey** - Analysis of the two phases of qualitative research informed the design of a survey. The survey was translated from English into French and Kinyarwanda, and delivered to communities speaking Kiswahili, Congolese-Kiswahili, Luganda, Kinyarwanda, and Runyankore. Answers were largely recorded in English and French (with the latter then translated into English);
- **Sampling** - For the sample size, the target was at least 120 respondents per mine, half of which were women. The survey was administered to 878 people at seven ASM zones. Researchers who administered the survey were instructed to over-sample women as they tend to be a smaller proportion of people working at the mine.
- **Life history interviews** were also conducted with four to five women and men in each research site whose lives typify or defy the gendered patterns of economic opportunity. These provided more social texture to understanding the authority relations shaping the gendering of economic practices.

The data collection and analysis provides the research team with a good understanding of various features of the gendered dynamics shaping women’s livelihoods in the mining zones.

### 4. Monitoring and evaluation of programmes in fragile contexts

Just as many of the challenges faced in conducting M&E in fragile contexts are similar to those involved in doing research in such contexts, so there are considerable overlaps on the approaches to conducting research and carrying out M&E in FCAS. Nonetheless, it is useful to summarise what the literature has to say about doing M&E in fragile contexts:

**Data collection**

DFID (2010a) recommend that **conducting sound M&E means locating ‘good enough’ data** so that it is possible to draw useful conclusions about programme impact. Where travel is constrained, other options may be available for data collection (DFID, 2010a: 10):

- drawing on secondary sources;
- changing the geographical sample for monitoring purposes;
- identifying proxies (e.g. representatives able to speak for minority groups in conflict-affected areas, parents of child soldiers);
- bringing representatives of key groups out of the conflict zone, in order to conduct focus groups.

In a 2012 ‘How to Note’ on results in FCAS, DFID suggest **working with local partners (companies and NGOs)** especially (but not only) where it is hard for donors and others to operate in the target areas. ‘Even
in a collapsed state like Somalia, there are tertiary institutions offering relevant qualifications in monitoring methods and a range of companies competing for business’ (DFID, 2012: 27). Large international companies, which often invest considerable resources in risk monitoring and management, might be able to provide data that is not available elsewhere. In stabilization contexts, DFID note that there are many sources of data collected routinely by the military which could be useful for country office staff to draw on, e.g. in Afghanistan, daily patrolling information and minutes from shuras (meetings) with local farmers and tribal leaders (DFID, 2012: 27). ‘Triangulation of different types of data, e.g. surveys, administrative data and focus groups, is a useful strategy to make results measurement more robust’ (DFID, 2012: 25).

However, DFID caution that data can be very powerful and must be collected and used with political sensitivity: ‘we must take care not to exacerbate or create tensions or conflict or put particular groups at risk through insensitive handling of data’ (DFID, 2012: 26). DFID (2012) also stress the need to invest heavily in data generation in FCAS. ‘This may include reviewing the robustness of existing data, commissioning new data, and supporting national or other bodies in generating good data, while building their capacity’ (DFID, 2012: 25).

DFID (2010a) also suggest monitoring of programme outputs and impact by beneficiaries, including public or social audits. This would entail increasing the transparency of assistance – publicising exactly what should be delivered, where and to what standard – and assisting local communities to monitor delivery. One way to do this could be through committees to monitor outputs and outcomes: ‘providing committees with digital cameras and mobile phones can be a low cost way of obtaining additional data to verify the reports of implementing partners’ (DFID, 2012: 28). Using beneficiaries in this way would not only provide an additional source of data to triangulate with official sources, but would help strengthen the accountability of local service providers and implementing agencies to their own communities (DFID, 2010a: 12). DFID (2010a) note that such an approach could be particularly helpful in high-corruption environments. However, DFID acknowledge that engaging beneficiaries presents real practical challenges, especially in FCAS where people may be unable or unwilling to engage with external actors (DFID, 2012: 28).

When considering indicators the literature recommends starting by looking at the data sources available, and including both positive and negative indicators (to allow for potentially negative impacts of interventions). The literature suggests a mixture of qualitative indicators, which measure perceptions, and quantitative indicators, aimed at capturing objective changes. In fragile situations, both types of indicators have limitations, but cross-referencing perceptions with quantitative data may provide the most robust results (DFID, 2010a: 9). Finally, the literature stresses the need for disaggregated data (e.g. by region, age, gender, disability, religion or ethnic origin) as local circumstances can differ considerably within the same country, or even same district, province or town (DFID, 2010a).

Opinion polls can be a useful means of gauging public perceptions of progress towards complex goals (e.g. state legitimacy), and are likely to be especially important as milestones where it may take a long time to see tangible change but where some way is needed to be able to monitor the direction of travel (DFID, 2012: 27). DFID note that conducting good quality surveys in FCAS is notoriously difficult, and suggest combining surveys with other approaches to counter methodological shortcomings. These could include focus groups, which offer an opportunity to explore results with the target population in a more open-ended way and provide qualitative data that can be useful in interpreting survey results and other analysis (DFID, 2012: 27). DFID also suggest considering non-perception data that can be generated from surveys, including information on specific events (e.g. frequency of violent incidents in a particular area), and behavioural information (e.g. data on mobility along major transport highways which can act as a useful proxy for the level of security in an area) (DFID, 2012: 27).
Remote monitoring

Remote programming refers to when development actors withdraw from insecure areas but continue to implement projects in those areas through local staff or partner organizations: remote monitoring is part of this broader definition (Price, 2018: 1). Approaches to remote monitoring include use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), big data, third party monitoring and iterative beneficiary monitoring.

*Information, communication and technology (ICTs)*

ICTs cover a diverse set of tools to create, disseminate and manage information. The literature describes how the integration of ICTs can help overcome some of the structural challenges of remote M&E in FCAS, but cautions that technology must be approached as an enabler and not as the sole solution (Price, 2018).

Potential contributions of ICTs include (Corlazzoli, 2014, cited in Price, 2018: 3-4):

- **Rapid and near real-time monitoring:** New technology can be used to collect, analyse, and publish information more rapidly than with traditional methods. Incorporating new technologies, such as mobile and internet networks and digitisation of the collection process, can reduce time-delays, inefficiencies, and improve data quality by reducing data entry and human errors.

- **Different types of data to assess programming:** New technologies provide the opportunity to collect a wide range of data points, including sounds, pictures, and videos. The different data points can help practitioners analyse the complexity of a conflict through different lenses and ultimately uncover new patterns of information.

- **A chance to track indicators more systematically:** Tracking culturally appropriate and context-specific indicators over time, systematically, may be done more effectively with new technologies. To be able to aggregate indicators, organisations and donors need to openly share data and standardise methodologies and indicators.

- **Cost savings:** New technologies are seen as cost saving M&E strategies, with the potential to decrease costs associated with transportation, printing, data entry and cleaning, coding, and staff hours. Some new technologies, such as the use of tablets and mobile phones, have an initial operational and infrastructure cost, but thereafter costs can be kept relatively stable.

- **Opportunity to increase capacities and collaboration:** New technologies are also enabling the increase in capacity of all staff related to M&E systems. The Internet has provided a platform to enable the easy sharing of a wide range of documents, interactive trainings, and manuals on M&E, and encourage discussions on key questions related to overcoming M&E challenges in FCAS.

**General challenges associated with use of ICTs for remote monitoring in FCAS** include: systematic bias or errors; selection bias; safety and security; training and logistics (Price, 2018: 8). These could be addressed through mitigation measures such as: taking time to study the context before choosing tools; involving all users actively to ensure technologies are usable and appropriate; and providing back-ups and having analogue alternatives in place to turn to if the new tool does not work (Price, 2018: 9).

A 2016 toolkit (Dette & Steets, 2016, cited in Price, 2018) provides an overview of **different technological options for M&E**, summarising the lessons learned from various pilot projects in countries like Afghanistan, South Sudan, Somalia and Syria. The research identified the challenges faced in such countries, including access restrictions, high costs, poor infrastructure, and high levels of uncertainty. Based on these it identified the following criteria for appropriate M&E tools: able to function without electricity, across large
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Distances and without advanced computing skills (Price, 2018: 4). Four technology applications that meet these criteria are:

- Handheld devices for digital data collection;
- Mobile phone-based feedback mechanisms;
- Remote sensing with satellites or delivery tracking;
- Broadcasting with radio and other forms of media.

Price (2018: 5-7) gives a useful summary table of the benefits and challenges associated with each.

**Big data**

‘Big data’ is defined as referring to “the massive quantities of data that are now generated daily as part of the increasing computerisation of systems and records by governments and companies” (Corlazzoli, 2014: 18, cited in Price, 2018: 4). There are three areas where it is thought that big data analysis could have an impact on M&E in FCAS: through early warning, real-time awareness of events and providing real-time feedback on a situation (Corlazzoli, 2014, cited in Price, 2018: 3). For example, real-time awareness through social media content, photo, and mobile phone use, could provide continued snapshots of a community at different points in time, helpful for monitoring the impact during the progress of a project.

Challenges associated with use of big data for M&E relate to: privacy and security (for example, dealing with sensitive or personally identifiable information about those living in or affected by conflict); complexities of data and interoperability (e.g. with datasets collected using incompatible definitions and timeframes); and interpretation (over-reliance on remotely gathered data can reinforce simplistic narratives of drivers of conflict); and verification (e.g. with crowdsourced data it is hard to verify if respondents are who they say they are, and where they say they are) (Price, 2018: 8-9). A further challenge with big data is the risk of finding patterns and correlations which don’t really exist (spurious correlation). For example, data miners have found correlations between Twitter words or Google search queries and heart attacks (Smith, 2019). This can be particularly significant in fragile contexts if big data findings cannot be verified in another way.

Challenges in using big data can be mitigated with measures such as: using security-conscious, free and open source software; minimising (collect only on a ‘need to know’ basis) and limiting (defining access levels clearly) data; and pooling funds and risk with other aid actors in the area (Price, 2018: 9). Overall, the literature shows that the application of big data is under debate and more concrete examples are needed to truly analyse its utility for remote M&E (Price, 2018).

**Third party monitoring**

Third party monitoring (TPM) describes the practice of contracting third parties to collect and verify monitoring data (Price, 2018: 9). One study of TPM (Sagmeister & Steets, 2016, cited in Price, 2018: 10) found that the main strengths and risks of TPM were as follows:

- **Strengths** - Provides independent ‘eyes and ears’ on the ground where own staff cannot go; allows the validation of monitoring data from implementing partners where confidence in partner reporting is lacking; can in some cases allow more cost-efficient field monitoring and thus more frequent missions; is most useful for verifying quantitative and physical outputs of aid projects.

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6 The ability of a (e.g. computer or software) system to work with or use the parts or equipment of another system (Price, 2018: 8).
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- **Risks** - Time and resources required to make TPM work are often underestimated by commissioning agencies; quality of reporting is frequently seen as sub-par by TPM users; reputational risks from field monitors’ actions need to be mitigated; there is significant risk transfer to field monitors, especially where TPM providers lack adequate security systems; TPM can negatively affect context understanding and acceptance where aid agencies use it as a substitute for regular internal monitoring.

The study concluded that by strengthening compliance in places where access is limited, TPM could meaningfully contribute to the broader M&E toolbox, with benefits for both donors and aid agencies (Sagmeister & Steets, 2016, cited in Price, 2018). However, this should ideally complement rather than entirely substitute for monitoring conducted by an agency’s own staff. It further concluded that the practice of TPM is far from fully established, and it needs to be regularly reassessed, and options for internalising monitoring should be regularly re-evaluated.

**Iterative beneficiary monitoring**

Security concerns in Mali have rendered field supervision of projects in many locations impossible. The World Bank has recently successfully pioneered a feedback mechanism, Iterative Beneficiary Monitoring (IBM), in Mali to inform on what is not working during project implementation phase. On a regular basis, this mechanism is used to identify and quantify biases and shortcomings that would put at risk the achievement of project objectives (Taptue & Hoogeveen, 2017, cited in Price, 2018). Those misrepresentations are brought to the attention of project leaders and project managers who use them to improve the project management.

The main advantage and innovation of the IBM system is its relatively simple, low cost, rapid and iterative (with high frequency) feedback loop that collects information directly from beneficiaries and produces brief reports on challenges that can be addressed by the project team. It repeats data collection regularly, creating positive and self-reinforcing cycles of improvement. Given that little information is collected on small samples, analysis is rapid and inexpensive. It is a mechanism that helps improve project results gradually and quickly without need of lengthy and expensive evaluations. Data can be collected using face-to-face interviews, but where feasible, mobile phone interviews are used as they are less expensive and avoid travel to insecure places. The programme has also relied on enumerators from beneficiary communities who, once trained and equipped with tablets, report back regularly.

In Mali, school feeding, fertiliser subsidies, and free medical care have all been monitored, and the results used to inform and improve operations. In all instances, the cost of data collection was less than USD 5,000 and the associated staff time just a couple of weeks (Taptue & Hoogeveen, 2017, cited in Price, 2018: 13). There are plans to scale IBM up to other World Bank projects.

**Case study 3: Helmand Monitoring and Evaluation Programme (HMEP)**

Many of the points discussed above feature in the Helmand Monitoring and Evaluation Programme (HMEP). HMEP was established to improve the delivery and effectiveness of stabilisation and development programmes in Helmand province, Afghanistan. It has been described as ‘an ambitious attempt to apply an integrated M&E framework to all development and stabilisation interventions in Helmand to assess whether the international community is successfully boosting the capacity and legitimacy of the Afghanistan Government and undermining insurgents’ (DFID, 2012: 28).

Institutional, political, logistical, cultural and financial challenges were associated with data collection and setting up comprehensive, cross-cutting M&E systems. HMEP’s approach to overcome these challenges

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7 This write-up on IBM is adapted from Price, 2018: 13.
took into account lessons from other existing primary research, and was characterised by (Ahmar & Kolbe, 2011):

a) **Carefully designed sampling strategy** – HMEP used the 2004 census data and the Central Statistics Organization’s (CSO) raw data as its sampling universe. There were issues with this data which HMEP addressed: updating assignment of settlements to districts; correcting spatial coordination errors by mapping coordinates to village locations taken from spatial imagery; using spatial imagery analysis to adjust population figures for settlements so they reflected what could be seen on ground. For both statistical (views of people in the same house are likely to be similar) and cultural (barriers to engagement with women) reasons only male heads of household were targeted. A multi-staged random probability sampling process was used with a random route for selecting households in each sampling point.

b) **The survey was implemented by an Afghan research partner**, which allowed extensive reach within Helmand. Enumerators relied on local networks and facilitators to establish access to remote areas in Helmand and to provide insights into population groups inaccessible to the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT). Whilst security constraints did impact the sample and the feasibility of implementing standard variation techniques, use of local research partners provided reach into Taliban-controlled areas and ensured a more representative sample was surveyed.

c) **Robust sample sizes at provincial and district level** - over 4,000 heads of household were surveyed across 11 districts of Helmand province (nearly 4% of all household heads every quarter), giving high levels of confidence at both provincial and district levels of disaggregation. Together with the large number of profiling questions exploring household economy, access to facilities and demographics, this led to the HMEP survey being considered one of the primary statistical data sources in the Afghan international community.

d) **Longitudinal approach providing confidence in time-series analysis** – it was impossible to build a panel in Helmand because of the security issues associated with keeping interviewees’ contact details and physical addresses, and because of the potential respondent fatigue that a quarterly survey could create. The programme explored the use of repeated cross-sectional surveys to carry out time-series modelling.

e) **Combined quantitative and qualitative research** – qualitative research was designed and carried out to complement the quantitative research findings, and to help unpack the observed trends in perceptions. It was also used to reach those that a quantitative survey could not reach, notably women, and capture their perceptions. The qualitative research took the form of a combination of semi-structured, in-depth interviews and focus groups or kin group interviews with randomly selected household heads and women. While not statistically representative, the qualitative research proved a crucial complement to the larger survey. Other sources of data were also used by HMEP including: ISAF’s Theatre Integrated Nationwide Survey (TINS); PRT reporting; international community and Afghan ministerial reporting; secondary sources of public opinion data and atmospherics, e.g. ABC News Poll and Integrity Watch Afghanistan (DFID, 2012: 29).

One of the most important factors in the success of HMEP was that it took a holistic approach to M&E setting up a comprehensive, cross-thematic system. ‘As development and reconstruction efforts in conflict-affected states are mutually dependent, a holistic approach to M&E is crucial’ (Ahmer & Kolbe, 2011: 16). Such an approach also enabled it to report across interventions by different donors – recognising that these can be mutually dependent (e.g. a road built by one donor enables access to a school built by another); it also provided detail on the numerous factors influencing perceptions and how these causal factors were related to one another.

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8 International Security Assistance Force.
5. North-South partnerships

Issues

There is an increasing trend for international research collaboration, and specifically for North-South research partnerships (Dodson, 2017). These are seen as critical ‘in today’s world of common global agendas, including the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change’: effective North-South research partnerships are essential ‘to support action on mutual challenges that transcend national boundaries and disciplines’ (Dodson, 2017: 2). Research areas like climate change, migration, water, energy and food security are ‘global problems that have direct and dire impacts in low- and middle-income countries but also affect donor countries in the North’ (Carbonnier & Kontinen, 2015: 150). North-South research partnerships can help overcome the difficulties faced in doing research in FCAS. They are also an important means of building local research capacity in fragile states.

However, there can also be downsides. One of the main criticisms of activities to build research capacity in the Global South is that they are driven and funded by governments, international agencies and research institutes that are based in the Global North. ‘The result is that researchers, donors and governments from the global North act on their own priorities, interests and budgets. Due to pervasive inequalities, researchers from low-income countries do not have an equal voice in shaping research agendas’. Issues that could be relevant to Southern institutions, but do not fit with Northern research agendas, could get left out (Carbonnier & Kontinen, 2015). As well as unequal power relations driving Northern dominance, another factor is funding constraints and pressure on Northern research institutions to generate publications; this reduces ‘the incentive to invest time and resources in partnerships meant to advance capacity building and inclusion’ (Carbonnier & Kontinen, 2015: 151). ‘Particular criticism has been reserved for approaches in which researchers in the Global South are expected to benefit simply from taking part in research that is designed, managed and published by researchers in the Global North’ (ReBUILD, 2017: 2). For example, research contracts can limit the role of Global South researchers to the collection and translation of data, while allowing commissioning organisations to dictate outcomes (Carbonnier & Kontinen, 2015; ReBUILD, 2017).

Typical research outputs – publications in academic journals written by Northern researchers – reflect Northern priorities: as well as facing language and other access constraints to such academic journals, Southern institutions are more interested in policy-relevant outputs that can reach domestic audiences but their Northern peers rarely have the time to produce these (Carbonnier & Kontinen, 2015). One critic’s scathing description of North-South research collaboration is as follows (Perry, 2018):

> Collaboration between the global north and global south too often follows a tick-box approach. A named global south partner ticks a box to indicate that a project is complying with Official Development Assistance criteria. A local translator ticks a box to indicate that local people are being consulted. A meeting in the country of a Southern partner indicates that the work must be collaborative in nature. Typically the results will confirm the (Northern) “expert’s” hypothesis and support monocultures of the mind.

Dodson (2017: 2) claims that equitability of research partnerships is now valued by both North and South: ‘Fairer research partnerships are thought to be important for ownership, strengthening capacity, long-term sustainability, efficiency and improving development and scientific outcomes, as well as seen as a good in their own right’. But she notes that moving beyond the concept of equitability to embedding it in

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research partnerships is harder. Table 1 outlines the benefits and challenges of North-South research partnerships:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Better access to scientific resources (laboratories, equipment, expertise) and talent, expertise and ideas, including access to increasingly complex (and often large-scale) instrumentation.</td>
<td>More complex management and decision-making processes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutual learning and knowledge exchange between partners that may lead to broadened perspectives and new solutions to key challenges.</td>
<td>Additional workload required to maintain the partnership over and above existing responsibilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater access to financial resources</td>
<td>Higher financial costs and difficulty in overhead recovery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced research impact</td>
<td>Power imbalance and research agenda dominated by the Northern institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity building for individuals, institutions and national research systems.</td>
<td>Side-lining of local and long-term research agendas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved quality, cost efficiency and productivity of research programmes.</td>
<td>Diversion of staff and resources away from parts of the Southern institution not involved in the partnership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved institutional and individual profile and esteem.</td>
<td>Logistical challenges (visas, international travel, difficulty transporting samples between countries).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term relationship and continuity that is not dependent on individuals.</td>
<td>Tensions due to cultural differences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The wider political and social context</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Dodson, 2017: 3-4.

In response to the criticisms, there is now an emphasis on ‘locally led’ research capacity building. Such approaches aim to meaningfully involve researchers from the Global South at all stages of the research cycle. While commendable, ‘there remains a risk that such research may reflect the priorities of individual researchers and institutions rather than being initiated as part of a harmonised national plan’ (ReBUILD, 2017: 2). Further, there are fears that a focus on supporting a small number of individuals in the Global South to lead research projects will facilitate a ‘brain drain’ process in which those researchers subsequently migrate to consultancy projects, or to countries in the Global North (ReBUILD, 2017).

Carbonnier and Kontinen (2015: 160) call for new institutional designs and innovations to address critical challenges: jointly negotiated and agreed research agendas; approaching capacity-building as a two-way street especially when it comes to localized knowledge; recognizing the variety of vehicles to disseminate research outcomes toward diverse target audiences; development of new forms of research funding where the southern organizations are in the driving seat; and co-funding from southern bodies (e.g. science bodies in emerging economies) to promote shared agendas. They note that explicit guidelines and principles for effective and equitable partnerships have started to be provided by specialized agencies in northern countries, e.g. the Swiss Commission for North-South Research Partnership (Carbonnier & Kontinen, 2015: 160).

A recent study by Rethinking Research Collaborative identified eight principles for different stakeholders to apply when engaging with research partnerships (RRC, 2018: 2):

1. **Put poverty first.** Constantly question how research is addressing the end goal of reducing poverty through better design/evaluation of responsive pathways to development impact.
2. **Critically engage with context(s).** Consider the global representativeness of partnerships and governance systems and commit to strengthening research ecosystems in the global South.

3. **Redress evidence hierarchies.** Incentivise intellectual leadership by Southern-based academics and civil society practitioners and engage communities throughout.

4. **Adapt and respond.** Take an adaptive approach that is responsive to context.

5. **Respect diversity of knowledge and skills.** Take time to explore the knowledge, skills and experience that each partner brings and consider different ways of representing research.

6. **Commit to transparency.** Put in place a code of conduct or memorandum of understanding that commits to transparency in all aspects of the project administration and budgeting.

7. **Invest in relationships.** Create spaces and commit funded time to establish, nurture and sustain relationships at the individual and institutional level.

8. **Keep learning.** Reflect critically within and beyond the partnership.

**Examples of North-South research partnerships**

**ReBUILD Consortium**

The ReBUILD Consortium is an international research partnership funded by DFID which has been working since 2011 to support improved access of poor people to effective health care and reduced health costs burdens, through the production and uptake of a coherent body of high quality, policy-relevant new research on health systems financing, human resources for health, and aid-architecture in post-conflict countries. Working primarily in Cambodia, Sierra Leone, Uganda and Zimbabwe, the consortium explores how policy and practice related to health financing and staffing in post-conflict settings can be strengthened. ReBUILD is also working with affiliate research partners in other settings, to broaden the range of evidence.

The ReBUILD Consortium provides support to build research capacity in the countries in which it is working. These efforts are detailed in a brief (ReBUILD, 2017):

- Methods training provided to support collaborators in Cambodia, Sierra Leone, Uganda and Zimbabwe;
- Small grants offered to researchers in those countries to further their research training; they were subsequently supported in submitting proposals for research grants that could sustain and extend health systems research capacity in the countries;
- Staff mentored at each stage of the research process, including research uptake and policy influencing – a new domain for many researchers;
- Some partners supported in winning independent grants for research centres to further develop their capacity and reputation.

ReBUILD reported from feedback from partners that they found elements supporting ‘learning by doing’ to be most valuable; they also emphasised the importance of being supported to build networks and ‘relational capital’ with policy-makers at national and district level, as well as with other researchers (ReBUILD, 2017). ReBUILD’s experience suggests that supporting even a few key individuals, or one organization or network, could make a difference (ReBUILD, 2017).

**Collaborative Adaptation Research Initiative in Africa and Asia (CARIAA)**

The Collaborative Adaptation Research Initiative in Africa and Asia (CARIAA) supports collaborative research on climate change adaptation in order to:

10 https://rebuildconsortium.com/
11 https://cariaa.net/home-0
1) Generate and share new knowledge on vulnerability and adaptation in hotspots;
2) Inform better policy and practice through engagement; and
3) Build new capacities by strengthening expertise among researchers, policymakers and practitioners.

Jointly funded by DFID and IDRC, CARIAA supports collaborative research by four consortia, each addressing a particular climate change hotspot. Each consortium has selected study areas spread across different countries and continents, but with geographic and social similarities in the way they experience climate change. This approach provides opportunities for institutions with varying expertise and geographic scope to come together to share knowledge and experience across disciplines, sectors and geographic areas. The four consortia are:

- ASSAR (Adaptation at Scale in Semi-Arid Regions) – in Botswana, India, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mali and Namibia;
- DECCMA (Deltas, Vulnerability and Climate Change: Migration and Adaptation) – Ghana, India, Bangladesh;
- HI-AWARE (Himalayan Adaptation, Water and Resilience Research on Glacier and Snowpack Dependent River Basins for Improving Livelihoods) – India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh;

A technical report on ASSAR identified the following lessons for collaborative research:12

1. Large-scale collaborations of people and partners who have not worked together before require significant investments in relationship-building activities in the early phases, to enable expectations to be cleared and trust to be developed, before (or at least alongside) the hard discussions on deliverables and budgets. Early meetings should also be aimed at developing a joint vision and framing of what is desired, and discuss how work will be undertaken and challenges (including conflict and risk) dealt with.

2. Collaborative research can be enabled through a combination of training activities (more effective when early in the project), face to face time to enable progress (maximising the opportunities when colleagues are already together) and strong leadership and commitment by the different colleagues involved.

3. The provision of small seed funds at opportune times (e.g. once relationships have been built and the focus of work is clear) can play a catalytic role in enabling the production of collaborative, comparative outputs, strengthening capacities and increasing impact.

4. The dispersed nature of a consortium partnership requires dedicating additional, specialised attention to ensuring transparency, keeping communication channels open and maintaining the flow of information to keep partners engaged and motivated. This could be done through weekly newsletters (e.g. a digest was adopted in ASSAR) to keep everyone updated about important documents, meetings, deadlines and opportunities, as well as to celebrate achievements across the team. This is particularly important for those involved more peripherally and who have fewer opportunities for face-to-face interactions.

5. Face-to-face time is critical to maintain momentum and ensure progress is made. Though expensive, this is probably the most worthwhile investment, particularly to secure commitment and attention to the project when colleagues are only involved in it part time.

Partnerships for Enhanced Engagement in Research (PEER)\textsuperscript{13}

PEER provides funding for developing country scientists to conduct development-oriented research in partnership with US government-supported researchers. Funded by USAID and US government agencies, the initiative gives awards for between one and three years for single or multiple institution projects. Calls open annually for proposals from PEER applicants who must be from eligible low and middle-income countries. Funding from USAID goes directly to the PEER principle investigator (PI) institution. The PEER PI institution leads the project. They work with a US-based researcher who must be a PI or co-PI on an active research award at one of seven US government agencies (these include NASA and the Smithsonian Institution). The US partner does not automatically receive any funding and is not expected to contribute any funds to the partnership. Their role varies from being a full collaborator to providing mentorship as and when required. As well as US government agencies, the programme also has two private sector partners – National Instruments and General Electric – who contribute resources and technical expertise to the awardees.

Sustainable Futures in Africa Network

The Sustainable Futures in Africa Network strives to break out of the ‘traditional’ pattern of North-South partnerships and take a completely different approach to research. They describe the differences as follows (Perry, 2018):

- We begin by acknowledging our own implications in the issues we address: we ask how our own practices, assumptions and behaviours contribute to the very inequities and issues we seek to improve.

- We prioritise creating a safe and honest common ground where new knowledge can be shared and new solutions can be co-designed. For example, in Uganda we engaged in fieldwork to study water and food security issues using a “no method” approach with no predetermined research design. This meant no questionnaire or sampling technique. Instead the team spent time with families in their homes, listened to them and allowed the communities to direct the research enquiry. Our ideas and expectations were confounded. The extreme problems these communities faced were largely due to the misplaced aid and intervention of previous projects. By listening, and bringing our own knowledge to the table, we were able to understand these communities as complex spaces of social, cultural and ecological needs.

- We’re pioneering ways of engaging with communities that allow them to contribute their traditional knowledge and co-design the research agenda. For example, in Nigeria soil scientists are engaging with spiritual beliefs that inform communities of the meaning of gold found in their soil. These ideas conflict with what is known in terms of Western science, and yet they serve a real purpose, have real impacts, and are “true” and “factful” to the communities that live according to such beliefs.

- Another difference lies in the way the network shares insights with its stakeholders. There are no shiny reports crammed with tables and graphs, sent to external offices so that a box is ticked. Rather, policy makers, researchers, and community members are brought together in common spaces – such as a community hall constructed entirely from recycled plastic water bottles and a timber frame in an urban slum in Kampala – so they can engage differently with the factors, people and places at play in a given issue.

The Network conclude that, ‘Our practices allow us to genuinely and ethically communicate and collaborate with communities, colleagues, and stakeholders’ (Perry, 2018).

\textsuperscript{13} Write-up drawn from Dodson, 2017: 16.
Somali-Swedish health sector research cooperation

Somali-Swedish Research Cooperation was started in 1981 but was cut short by the civil war in Somalia. It has recently been revived. A programme focusing on research capacity building in the health sector is currently underway through the work of an alliance of three partner groups: six new Somali universities, five Swedish universities and Somali diaspora professionals. ‘Somali ownership is key to the sustainability of the programme, as is close collaboration with Somali health ministries’ (Dalmar et al, 2017: 1). The programme aims to develop a model for working collaboratively across regions and cultural barriers within fragile states. The overall mission is to strengthen research capacities and functions of Somali universities in response to priority health needs and to carry out research linked to policy and practice (Dalmar et al, 2017: 4). There is acknowledgement that long-term cooperation over the next 5-10 years will be needed to secure a tangible outcome. The initiative and its three-partner approach – involving domestic and external universities as well as diaspora academics – could have relevance for other fragile, post-conflict states and prove to be a constructive model for international cooperation (Dalmar et al, 2017: 7).

6. Recommendations

Build local research capacity

The literature stresses the need to build local research capacity. This can help overcome some of the access constraints – particularly for international researchers – faced in fragile contexts. ‘Capacity building addresses this challenge by enabling researchers based in less stable areas to conduct their research’ (Woodward et al, 2017: 7). During the Ebola epidemic, UK-based ReBUILD Consortium researchers were unable to travel to Sierra Leone, but capacity building efforts undertaken since the programme’s inception meant the UK team were able to remotely support the local (Sierra Leone) team to successfully carry out research (Woodward et al, 2017: 7). Another advantage of capacity building is that it enables researchers in FCAS to carry out research in the midst of fragility, offering ‘potential for timely research that truly captures the context in fragile environments’ (Woodward et al, 2017: 7-8).

DFID stress the need to build local capacity for data generation in the context of providing evidence for results frameworks: ‘We should use local data sources as much as possible, invest in their development, and supplement these with other sources. Building national ownership of data generation and indicators enables the instrumental use of the data by national institutions to improve their performance and hold authorities to account’ (DFID, 2012: 26).

Building local research capacity can be done through academic training for individuals, developmental grants and mentorship, transnational partnerships between institutions, and the creation of centres of excellence in countries in the Global South (see Section 5) (ReBUILD, 2017: 1-2). These different components are complementary. Alongside capacity building, it is important to build relationships and trust between local and international researchers, and between researchers and research participants (Woodward et al, 2017: 8). It is also important to communicate research results in a timely fashion both to policymakers and to communities (Woodward et al, 2017: 8). [North-South research partnerships are explored more fully in Section 5.]

Need for innovation and flexibility

The literature stresses the need for innovative and customized approaches to research design and implementation (Woodward et al, 2017: 8). Innovation does not necessarily mean inventing something new: it could simply mean applying something commonly used in one context (e.g. non-fragile contexts) to another where it is not so common (e.g. fragile contexts). Moreover, a range of research methods should
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be used in FCAS. In the case of health systems research, for example, it might not be feasible to carry out longitudinal analysis because of the difficulties in large-scale, longitudinal data collection. A mixture of other methods, e.g. qualitative research and quantitative cross-sectional data collection, could be more feasible and provide well-rounded insight (Woodward et al, 2017: 8).

The need for innovation requires flexibility on the part of research stakeholders, including funders and researchers themselves. As one comment in a discussion paper on research on war circumstances put it, ‘Where information is hard to come by, one must do everything possible to encourage chance learning’ (Barakat & Ellis, cited in Woodward et al, 2017: 9). One example given was researchers benefitting from ad-hoc conversations, even though such chance learning opportunities ‘met with little enthusiasm within the realms of rigid research protocol’ (Barakat & Ellis, cited in Woodward et al, 2017: 9). Making room for flexibility in terms of funding, design and implementation of research allows researchers to respond to changing environments and needs (Woodward et al, 2017: 9).

Embrace the ‘messiness of researching in conflict’

Perera (2017) acknowledges the difficulties faced in conducting research in conflict affected states, adding that the pressure on academics to be methodologically rigorous and produce policy-relevant research ‘means that the problematic nature of the data we use is often obscured and ignored in research outputs’ (Perera, 2017: 1). It is often ‘a messy mixture of competing and often contradictory narratives emphasizing different issues and explanations……(and) are often ignored or obscured as hearsay and rumour, with little analytical value’ (Perera, 2017: 3). She argues that such information can itself be a valuable source of conflict knowledge. She refers to the process of ‘Bermuda triangulation’ whereby the verification of one piece of information leads to the uncovering of multiple views, which may themselves tell much about the drivers of conflict (Perera, 2017).

Perera also highlights the problems caused by demand for verifiable, objective facts and the pervasiveness of simplistic narratives. In the context of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), she argues that the media-aid narrative of armed groups ‘situates them in a depoliticized state of anarchy…. Their motivation for fighting is often reduced to simple control and exploitation of resources’ (Perera, 2017: 4). Furthermore, Perera contends that the pervasiveness of this media-aid narrative of African warfare has a profound effect on the mindset of the researcher, predisposing them ‘to seek out what is barbaric and exceptional in conflict settings’ (Perera, 2017: 4). Even where researchers see beyond dominant media-aid narratives, the alternatives they tend to offer are different but nonetheless relatively simplistic (Perera, 2017: 5).

Simplistic narratives to explain complex situations are popular because they lend themselves easily to policy solutions: ‘Simple narratives are critical to helping deal with such complexity: they identify salient issues, dictate urgent action, and help determine who is worth supporting and who should be challenged’ (Auteserre, 2012, cited in Perera, 2017: 7). Perera (2017: 8) notes that complex information with ill-defined findings are often poorly received by both academic and policy audiences: ‘knowledge which does not point to clear solutions is not deemed “useful” knowledge’.

The result is misguided policies which overlook dynamics such as ‘land conflict, poverty, corruption, local political and social antagonisms, and hostile relationships between states officials, including security forces, and the general population’ (Auteserre, 2012, cited in Perera, 2017: 5). The prioritization of solution-oriented research obscures such difficult-to-articulate and hard-to-measure drivers of conflict. ‘Despite the fact that these drivers continue to fuel conflict, their invisibility in conflict research means that they are rarely addressed in peace-building measures’ (Perera, 2017: 8). Perera calls for such ‘messy data’ to be
embraced because it more accurately reflects the complexity of the situation and needs to be acknowledged if peacebuilding programming is to be successful.

**Conducting ethical research**

Ethical guidelines are centred on three principles – cultural sensitivity and empathy; privacy and informed consent; and the ‘do no harm’ principle (Mohmand et al, 2017). The literature highlights the potential (risks) in fragile contexts for international researchers to carry out practices/unethical behaviour that would be considered unacceptable in their home countries (the West) and that could cause harm (Cronin-Furman & Lake, 2018). Examples include: qualitative researchers gaining easy access to victims or perpetrators of wartime violence, including (underage) victims of sexual violence; experimenters coercing under-resourced NGOs to pursue interventions at odds with their organizational mandates; researchers hiring local research assistants at very low remuneration rates (exploiting cheap labour); researchers making payments to access records, territory or secure other permissions (Cronin-Furman & Lake, 2018). The weak regulatory environment in fragile states offers foreign academics opportunities that are not available when states have greater reach or capacity.

Different research methods carry different risks. In surveys and interviews, sensitive questions may evoke traumatic memories about suffering, remorse, victimisation or guilt, and some questions may also lead to the revival of old conflicts and tensions, or bring respondents to the attention of political actors (Mohmand et al, 2017: 27). There is also the risk of the data collection and generation process being dominated by more powerful groups within the context – sometimes simply because they may be more easily accessible within a difficult context – which can further disadvantage marginalised perspectives. Digital data collection may be particularly affected by biases created by uneven access to technology. Another risk that is particularly pertinent to research with the most vulnerable people in fragile and conflict-affected settings is that of inappropriate exposure and backlash when views of minority groups are shared externally (Mohmand et al, 2017: 27). In the context of violently divided societies, Bush and Duggan (eds. 2017) note that research (even methodologically sound and scientifically valid) could exacerbate tensions, for example, if its implications or conclusions are perceived to be threatening to the interests of one or more groups.

Cronin-Furman and Lake (2018) call for more ethical and responsible research practices in fragile contexts. They have produced a checklist for individual researchers to consider before heading to the field, in the field and at home. Questions include: Would all of the practices you are employing be considered ethical in your home country? Would you comfortable with someone treating you or your loved ones in the way you are interacting with your research subjects and partners? (Cronin-Furman & Lake, 2018: 618). They also call on the wider research community to be more reflective about the ethical implications of work in fragile and violent contexts. ‘As a research community, we also can do more to ensure that researchers who travel to work in these settings are appropriately trained and prepared, that ethically problematic research is not rewarded, and that the contributions of local partners are adequately credited’ (Cronin-Furman & Lake, 2018: 617).
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Annex I: International development organizations and others

Research on fragility is being carried out by a range of international development organizations. Given the time constraints in carrying out this literature review, and the fact that – even for a single donor - research on fragility will often be spread across different regional and country-level programmes, it is impossible to give a comprehensive summary here. This annex outlines what a selection of development organizations and others are doing including, where readily available, specific areas of focus and approaches.

**UK Department for International Development (DFID)**

In recent years, DFID has increasingly prioritised support for fragile states: it is committed to spending at least half of its budget on fragile states (DFID, 2017). Many of the countries DFID works in are fragile. DFID's focus on fragile states is reflected in the mainstreaming of fragility and conflict related research across its research portfolio (DFID, 2017). DFID's research and fragility agenda includes:

- Investing in research to address critical evidence gaps: security and justice, migration, taxation and accountability, and political constraints to growth, peace and development;
- Tackling cross-border drivers of conflict/suffering (crime, human trafficking, etc.);
- Increasing research on resilience to disasters, protracted crisis, reducing vulnerability to shocks, and delivering education in emergencies.

DFID stress that it is particularly important in situations of fragility and conflict, where conditions can change very quickly, to keep analysis fresh and updated: outdated analysis is of little practical use (DFID, 2010a). Recommendations to ensure this include liaising with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and other UK government departments, and combining in-depth analysis (often commissioned from independent consultants or within government) with regular political reporting and media monitoring. DFID also recommend conducting joint analysis with other development partners to bring about a wider collective understanding of the context; this can also be of significant practical value in fragile contexts (DFID, 2010a: 5). DFID (2010a: 6) highlight the role that civil society organizations (CSOs) can play as sources of information:

> They can contribute during consultations or fieldwork, or be commissioned to gather data and conduct analysis. They add particular value in helping to “ground” or validate analysis at local level, using qualitative and other methods to reflect the perceptions of different groups in society. In insecure environments, CSOs may be able to reach areas and groups that are inaccessible to DFID and other donors, so may be the most suitable partners to commission.

However, DFID caution that, in such contexts, CSOs' analysis should be triangulated with other sources where possible. Joint analysis with national governments or institutions can support consensus-building, ownership and harmonization, and can enable greater access to local information and a wider range of areas and stakeholders (DFID, 2010a). But their capacity to engage in lengthy, complex analysis could be limited, and they could hold different assumptions and views on politically sensitive issues such as conflict and fragility (DFID, 2010a).

**Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC)**

In recent years Switzerland has significantly increased its support for fragile and conflict-affected regions. Funds are earmarked for the alleviation of the causes of conflict, the strengthening of civil society, increasing respect for human rights and promoting responsible governance at national and local levels. SDC
is active in a number of FCAS including in North Africa, Afghanistan, Nepal, Mali and Haiti.\textsuperscript{14} Under SDC’s programme for Research on Global Issues for Development, one focus area is social conflicts. Research in this area looks at: political reconstruction and democratisation processes in fragile and conflict-prone states; conflicts over scarce natural resources, with a focus on water issues; and chronic causes and consequences of state fragility and weakness of public institutions.

**Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA)**

JICA carries out research through the JICA Research Institute (JICA-RI). Its ‘Peace and Development’ theme is perhaps the most relevant to fragile contexts. From the perspective of realizing human security in the face of imminent threats and ever-increasing humanitarian needs, JICA-RI attempts to analyse the factors behind these crises in a more systematic way and explores more effective approaches to address them through comparative analyses of initiatives taken by a diverse range of actors.\textsuperscript{15} Ongoing research projects include: Obtaining a second chance: Education during and after conflict; Conflict and gender-based violence: the role of aid in help-seeking and recovery process for victims; and Comparative study of humanitarian crisis management from the perspective of bilateral cooperation agencies.\textsuperscript{16}

**World Bank**

For the World Bank, addressing fragility, conflict and violence (FCV) is a strategic priority to achieve the twin goals of ending extreme poverty and promoting shared prosperity. Responding to an increasingly complex fragility landscape, the World Bank is taking a broader approach to FCV that aims to address sources of instability and build resilience: the new approach emphasises prevention and acting early. Resources for countries affected by FCV have been increased to USD 14 billion.\textsuperscript{17} In order to deliver, the World Bank is deepening its knowledge of FCV. This includes risk and resilience assessments, and recovery and peacebuilding assessments. The former serve as the basis for country engagement and inform preparation of the Systematic Country Diagnostics and Country Partnership Frameworks. The latter provide a platform to help governments and their international partners identify, prioritize and sequence recovery and peacebuilding activities and coordinate support for planning and implementation.

The World Bank uses its Country Opinion Survey programme to assess the views of influential stakeholders in its client countries affected by fragility, conflict and violence annually (over 40 countries surveyed per year in three-year cycles). ‘By keeping “ears to the ground” it can understand what the institution’s key stakeholders think about their own development situations, the Bank’s work within this context, and how the Bank can increase its value in these increasingly difficult and complicated situations’ (Felzer, 2017). Survey respondents typically come from national and local governments, multilateral/bilateral agencies, media, academia, the private sector and civil society.\textsuperscript{18}

**Australian AID**

Australian AID’s 2011 *Framework for working in fragile and conflict-affected states* stresses the importance of increasing understanding: ‘understanding the context in which we are working. This includes building knowledge of whom to engage with and how, and assessing how best to balance risks with opportunities’ (Australian AID, 2011: 6). This can ‘help avert counterproductive or harmful interventions based on

\textsuperscript{15} https://www.jica.go.jp/jica-ri/research/peace/index.html
\textsuperscript{16} https://www.jica.go.jp/jica-ri/research/peace/index.html
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simplistic formulas and faulty analysis’ (Australian AID, 2011: 70). However, while the framework lays out the kinds of information needed – actors, interests, institutions, history, culture, drivers of conflict and violence – it says very little about how that information is to be obtained. Similarly, while it calls for heavy investment in monitoring and evaluation work to track changes at country, sectoral, programme and project levels over multiple time periods, there is nothing about how such intensive M&E is to be carried out in fragile contexts.

Knowledge Platform Security and Rule of Law (KPSRL)\(^{19}\)

Established by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2012 as part of the Ministry’s knowledge policy, KPSRL is a network of experts working on generating, sharing, interrogating and applying evidence in the field of security and rule of law. The Platform’s main objective is to improve the learning capacity and knowledge base of its members, specifically decision-makers for Security and Rule of Law (SRoL) programmes. The Platform carries out diverse activities:

- It serves as a knowledge broker and plays a key role in convening actors, initiating relationships and linking (unexpected) sources of evidence to relevant audiences;
- It hosts a repository of knowledge in the fields of security and rule of law, garnered from projects and programmes undertaken by researchers and practitioners around the globe;
- It works to ensure greater uptake of generated evidence among policymakers, practitioners and researchers, through innovative dissemination strategies, the design and organization of thematic events and workshops, and the coordination of learning agendas among its members.

Research institutes

A large number of research institutes and think-tanks are carrying out research on fragile contexts. These include:

a) Berghof Foundation  - The Berghof Foundation is an independent, non-governmental and non-profit organisation that supports efforts to prevent political and social violence, and to achieve sustainable peace through conflict transformation. Its Conflict Transformation Research programme\(^{20}\) aims to support the active participation of conflict stakeholders, both armed and unarmed, in inclusive processes of non-violent resistance and conflict transformation. It does so by conducting collaborative research, offering capacity-building assistance and providing policy advice regarding the roles of formal and informal actors as peace- and state-building agents in asymmetric state-society conflicts.

b) Swisspeace\(^{21}\) – Swisspeace is a practice-oriented peace research institute, whose mission is to contribute to the improvement of conflict prevention and conflict transformation. The institute analyses the causes of violent conflicts and develops strategies for their peaceful transformation. Among other activities, it produces innovative research, shapes discourses on international peace policy, and provides and facilitates spaces for analysis, discussion, critical reflection and learning.

c) United States Institute of Peace (USIP) – USIP sees “state fragility” as a complex issue that needs urgent attention.\(^{22}\) USIP strives to address the challenge of fragility through new approaches to conflict prevention and by strengthening resilience that promotes a sound social compact between the state and society. USIP has joined in convening the Fragility Study Group, a non-partisan initiative aimed at improving the U.S. government’s approach to reducing global fragility.

\(^{19}\) https://www.kpsrl.org/
\(^{21}\) https://www.swisspeace.ch/activities/research/about
\(^{22}\) https://www.usip.org/issue-areas/fragility-resilience
d) **Carnegie Corporation**\(^23\) – The Carnegie Corporation supports four key programme areas, one of which is international peace and security. The programme's goal is to build a more secure, peaceful, and prosperous world through independent analysis and action addressing critical global challenges. It supports research through targeted grants. Recent grantees include the Arab Council for the Social Sciences and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

e) **Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation**\(^24\) – The HF Guggenheim Foundation was set up to support research on violence, aggression and dominance. Topics of interest include genocide, nationalism, political violence, religion, terrorism, totalitarianism, and war. The Foundation provides grants to promote research on these topics.

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\(^{23}\) https://www.carnegie.org/programs/international-peace-and-security/

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