Preface

The issue of states in fragile and post-conflict situations has increasingly been on the radar of the international community for the past 15 years, both on the research and policy sides. Research has made huge progress in analysing the causes and impacts of fragility, and in recommending responses. On the side of practitioners, the international community has strived to adapt and expand policies, instruments and mechanisms in order to respond more effectively to this challenge.

These effective responses are desperately needed, because efforts to strengthen state capacities in fragile situations are often faced with a series of dilemmas. This includes the overarching concerns of reinforcing state legitimacy, responding quickly to people’s needs and – all the while – keeping in mind the long-term priorities of national capacity development.

In fragile situations, state capacity gaps have been bridged through a variety of arrangements. Non-state actors often perform – to various extents – the functions that we would expect to be performed by the state. This can range from standard technical assistance to so-called contracting-out arrangements, which are understood to mean the transfer of competencies or authority for a given period of time based on a contractual arrangement between the delegating authority (the government) and a third party (a contractor).

We are aware of the argument that contracting out bypasses the state, inhibits the strengthening of state capacities and, ultimately, threatens state legitimacy. Contracting out also poses serious challenges in terms of the responsibility of – and accountability to – the government regarding capacity development and exit strategies.

We cannot ignore these concerns.

We have no intention to promote contracting-out. We have no intention to favour the contracting out of government functions as the best response to the challenges of fragile situations. Our objective is, rather, to investigate the experiences and practices of contracting out in fragile and conflict-affected environments, and to debate these questions in a co-ordinated, systematic and evidence-based manner to eventually answer the question: When and under what circumstances can external contractors be effectively used to help bridge state capacity gaps?

This publication is a first step in this direction.

Margaret KILO
Fragile States Unit
African Development Bank

Jerzy POMIANOWSKI
Partnership for Democratic Governance
OECD