

## **The objective of this paper**

This document is meant as a think-piece, to bring out some of the ideas inside of NIS and hopefully generate discussion and feedback. For NIS, the key objective is to continue to test and refine these types of ideas in the field and through experience find the most effective means of working in politically unstable environments. To date NIS has been able to find partners and supporters that are keen to take risks and experiment with different policy initiatives and we continue to look for others.

## **Introduction**

The NIS foundation was started by individuals with experience working on the Horn of Africa in response to what was seen as a lack of donor policy and operational success, specifically in Somalia. From the beginning, the creation of NIS was driven by two primary objectives: to support the emergence of the state and to be pragmatic. In addition to the practical security constraints faced by many donors in Somalia, there was also a lack of organisations that were willing to address the political dimensions of stabilisation and recovery work. The first principle for any NIS project is that it will support political stabilisation through increased legitimacy for the authorities and ongoing state-building and reconciliation processes in the country. As a result, NIS carries out a wide range of work from political and security analysis, to the design and management of financing mechanisms and funds, to the physical construction of roads, markets, street lighting, water systems and government buildings. The exact nature of the project becomes secondary as long as it meets a genuine need of the population and is implemented in a way that strengthens the relationship between communities and the state, rather than robs the state of an opportunity to boost public confidence.

The need for a more practical approach in Somalia was highlighted with the arrival of a new president and new government at the end of 2012; despite considerable political backing from key countries including the UK and US, the international community was unable to deliver the technical and financial support necessary for the government to succeed. Despite all their pledges, donors had no tools with which to engage directly and quickly with the government. As with previous less promising regimes, large sums of money continued to be channelled through international NGOs, UN agencies and others with little or no requirement that they operate with and complement the government. As a result, few projects were carried out in ways that sought to boost support for the authorities among the population, and thereby to begin the long, painful journey of rebuilding state institutions. Much of the population's original goodwill and optimism was wasted, and the prospect that the new government could bring rapid change faded.

The political significance of aid being delivered through the national government (be it real or perceived) cannot be underestimated. What NIS has witnessed in Somalia is similar to what we are seeing in Mali, the Central African Republic, South Sudan and Myanmar. In all cases we have countries struggling to emerge from complex conflict; donors and donor funding are lining up to support a peaceful transition, but are inhibited by institutional protocols from engaging in imperfect and challenging political environments – and in most cases default to funding NGO and humanitarian interventions that exclude government participation. As a result, populations harbouring very high expectations of their new governments are almost always left disappointed.

These problems are systemic and far bigger than NIS or any single organisation can tackle alone. A useful way to understand what NIS is trying to achieve is to read the World Bank's 2011 World

Development Report, “Conflict, Security and Development”. Through trial and error and experience on the ground, NIS finds itself working to operationalise much of what the 2011 WDR recommends, and we see this important report as a natural intellectual anchor for the organisation.

### **Appropriate phasing and prioritisation**

Unfortunately many of our interactions with donors suggest that many of the operational lessons contained in the 2011 WDR have either been ignored or largely forgotten (even if policies on paper claim the contrary). **In the countries where we are working: Somalia, Myanmar and Mali, it feels as if only a small minority recognise that conventional longer-term development policies and objectives only work if short-term confidence is created and sustained. Time and again we witness the donors’ failure to acknowledge that new governments in unstable environments must demonstrate rapid results.** The need to build and sustain early momentum is essential to ultimate political stability and economic recovery. To help governments build this momentum, donors must be quick, flexible, creative and well-informed. In our experience these characteristics are in short supply, not least because of unwillingness to accept that one must operate in politically unstable environments using different rules and more explicitly political objectives. In Somalia, two years after the appointment of the new president, the biggest donors still confine themselves to the airport and control their country operations remotely from Nairobi. This degree of disconnection from the realities of a country robs donors of the intimate day-to-day knowledge needed to recognize urgency and opportunity, to adapt adequately and to be effective.

The field of psychology offers an interesting example for the field of development in an area aptly called, Stabilisation<sup>1</sup>. In psychology, the term stabilisation refers to a phase of treatment that precedes more standard and longer-term treatment for victims of trauma. Psychologists have discovered that if trauma victims are subjected to more standard treatment practices without first being properly stabilised, there is a significant risk of worsening the patient’s condition. The guidelines for stabilisation in psychology are different than the guidelines for standard treatment practices, in recognition of the specific needs of the patient during the critical early phase of their care. In psychological stabilisation literature emphasis is placed on establishing safety and trust. Without this foundation, a therapist will be unable to move the patient towards standard treatments.

The same logic can be applied to the context of state instability: if governments cannot create trust, they find themselves without the essential legitimacy needed to conduct ‘normal’ governmental functions. And this trust can only be earned by concrete demonstrations of good intent. Donors, likewise, need to recognise the importance of the psychological dimension of post-conflict recovery. If trust is not created, conventional development remedies will lack a stable platform for success.

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<sup>1</sup> In 2000, the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies adopted Judith Herman's Tri-Phasic Model as the Standard of Care for clinicians working with clients diagnosed with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. These three phases of treatment--(1) Safety and Stabilization; (2) Remembrance and Mourning (trauma memory processing) and (3) Reconnection.

## **NIS PROVE Principles**

Based on the above, NIS has developed the PROVE principles. PROVE stands for: **P**olitical, **R**elevant, **O**pportune, **V**erified and **E**xpedited. The principles are an attempt to address what we see as the greatest obstacles to effective policies and interventions in fragile states and areas of political instability. The need for urgent action in these fragile environments cannot be overstated: populations not only suffer from an absence of essential needs, but also from a lack of faith that their governments can provide them. A project conceived of under the PROVE principles would need to observe the following criteria:

- Political – the project must be implemented in close cooperation with the authorities in ways that boost their legitimacy and political reputation among the population;
- Relevant -- projects must provide benefits that cater to the most immediate needs of the people, including security, basic amenities/infrastructure, and livelihoods;
- Opportune -- in terms of timing, partners and location, projects should be implemented in ways that respond to and counter a loss of trust in the ability of the state to meet essential needs that provide maximum strategic stabilisation benefits;
- Verified – projects must meet a genuine need of the local population, and thus must be verified with the local community and authorities; and
- Expedited -- once identified and verified, projects must be implemented quickly and with minimal time lag between initial discussions and actual project implementation.

If we accept these criteria, it is easy to see why humanitarian and more traditional development policies often fail to address the challenge of political instability in fragile environments. When examining possibilities for interventions in fragile environments, conventional concerns about sustainability, equality, and representation need to be considered in the specific context of what the overall political objective should be, and with an understanding that the pursuit of design perfection is often the enemy of relevance and impact.

### **Applying PROVE principles during peace/reconciliation processes**

Peace talks and reconciliation processes are a key aspect of international diplomacy, especially today when conflicts are characterised by multiple parties and often non-state actors. In many cases reconciliation processes will be taking place in the context of extended conflict, spanning sometimes decades and affecting multiple generations.

During discussions with organisations specialising in reconciliation and conflict resolution, it has become clear that these processes are very much focused on the conversations taking place around the negotiating table. An essential part of any reconciliation process is that the general population has faith that the process will result in a change for the better. In order to combat this lack of faith in the given reconciliation process, parties involved and international supporters must recognise that conversations taking place around the negotiating table are an abstraction for the majority of average citizens.

In many conflict affected countries populations are often suffering from a kind of “faith fatigue” where it is difficult to believe that yet another process will actually achieve anything. The question arises: How do you sustain people’s faith in a peace process while it is ongoing, especially after extended conflicts and multiple failed earlier peace talks? One potential answer is the inclusion of a

“PROVE track” for any peace and reconciliation talks. This track would seek to ensure that what is happening at the negotiating table is translated into tangible, concrete evidence down to the village level that something substantive is happening. Process-linked projects would be intentionally simple, easily understood and must not have been possible without the consent and cooperation of the parties to the negotiations. Projects that could have taken place regardless of reconciliation efforts would fail to achieve the political objective of creating a PROVE track. Generating some kind of trust among the people in the peace process goes a long way to generating legitimacy in the institutions that will emerge from the process. In addition, providing some kind of tangible evidence that the peace process is achieving something will make it more difficult for spoilers to mobilise support to disrupt the process.

Projects should be identified by their political, geographic, economic or symbolic importance. In addition, the project must carry sufficient risks to be meaningful in terms of boosting faith during peace talks, but not so risky as to potentially derail the process if the project does not succeed.

#### **Stabilisation starts with the basics**

A useful conceptual tool for ensuring that interventions in fragile environments deal with some of the most pressing practical and political needs is *Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs*<sup>2</sup>. At the international level there is in many cases a policy drift towards concerns and issues that are not immediately relevant to the most pressing needs in developing countries. Maslow’s hierarchy rises from physiological needs to safety, social, esteem and self-actualisation. In the worst conflict-affected countries, clearly physiological and safety needs are generally the greatest, though physical and psychological needs do co-exist. Concrete confidence-building measures must address basic needs first as a way of working towards more psychological needs such as trust, legitimacy, expectations, identity, etc.. Meeting these basic needs is often left to NGOs and other international agencies to cater for with little or no involvement of the national government, thus denying the government an opportunity to boost legitimacy and provide evidence that *this* government is going to be different. Helping the authorities to assist in meeting these basic needs for the population is the most rational place to start building trust and legitimacy for a vulnerable regime.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.edpsycinteractive.org/topics/conation/maslow.html>