

FOREWORD

Policy-making requires accurate, deep and timely knowledge of any situation. And development is no exception. In Europe, many universities and research institutes think about development issues and produce enlightened analytical work. However, its full potential has yet to be unleashed for numerous reasons, including a fragmentation of efforts, a lack of resources and a disconnect from policy-making.

The “Mobilising European research for development policies” initiative is meant to remedy this situation. Currently supported by the European Commission and six Member States (Finland, Germany, Luxembourg, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom), it seeks to enhance the European perspective of some of the most pressing development issues of our time through the knowledge, innovation and building common ground between the European research community and policy-makers.

This *European Report on Development* (ERD), to be published yearly, is the main outcome of this initiative. It is an independent, knowledge-based and forward-looking review of development issues reflecting the European vision. It will help the European Union to refine its vision on development, enrich its policies and influence the international debate. It will also complement other flagship reports on development, in an attempt to reflect the diversity of views that may co-exist on various issues and – where relevant – the specific European approaches, based both on Europe’s political and social values and on its own history and experience. Indeed, we are convinced that there should not be any monopoly of thinking in a field as complex and rich as development policy.

This year’s edition, elaborated under the lead of the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence, deals with the complex and multidimensional issue of “fragility”, with a specific focus on Sub-Saharan Africa, where most fragile countries are located. This has been described as the “toughest development challenge of our era”. Dealing with situations of fragility is, rightly, a growing concern both for Europe and for the entire international community. It is an increasingly important priority in European development policies. It is also a key challenge for European security strategy.

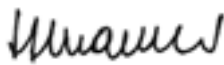
Overcoming fragility is above all a moral imperative. One-third of the world’s poor live in fragile states. Progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is lagging behind in these countries, and the cost of weak governance – especially when it leads to conflicts and wars – is enormous, in economic, human and social terms. This is all the more important considering the closely linked food, fuel and now financial and economic shocks that threaten to reverse recent development progress. The human costs of the crises are particularly worrying for fragile Sub-Saharan African countries, where the ability to cope with shocks is limited.

Situations of fragility are also a major cause of concern from the security perspective. In an interdependent world, tackling fragility is also in our own interest, to ensure global stability and prosperity. The revival of piracy in the Gulf of Aden, closely linked to the turbulence in Somalia, and the flows of economic, political and war refugees who, understandably and often reluctantly, flee the fragility at home to build better and more stable lives in Europe and other wealthy parts of the world, are just some examples of this growing interdependence.

These situations encompass an extremely diverse group of societies with very different socio-economic, cultural and political circumstances and compositions. They thus require specific, tailor-made approaches when it comes to external support. The classical development policy “mantra”, such as the aid effectiveness agenda (Paris Declaration and the “Triple A” Agenda), the European Consensus on development and the approach to support governance reforms, meets specific challenges in their application in fragile contexts. As mentioned in the 2008 EU research paper “Millennium Development Goals at midpoint”, led by Professor François Bourguignon and produced in the context of this initiative,¹ “fragility needs to be tackled if progress on the [Millennium Development Goals] is to be achieved. This will require sustained engagement and new, imaginative use of combined political, technical, financial and sometimes military resources, engaging with governments but also civil society and non-state actors”. In that regard, partner and donor countries are currently jointly engaged in an “international dialogue on state building and peace building”, with the aim of possibly arriving at a consensus on objectives and principles of intervention in these most difficult circumstances.

An intensive participatory process, bringing on board a wide range of top scholars, policy-makers and civil society representative from both Europe and Africa, has been undertaken to conduct this ambitious policy research initiative. Through building common analytical ground on how to better grasp those difficult situations, this first edition of the ERD will help Europe fine tune its strategic approach to fragility and define more coherent policies in the future. It is a major step forward for the European research initiative, which seeks to clarify how best to reconcile development goals with new global challenges.

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¹ Bourguignon et al., 2008.