

Facing fragilities: the socially embedded nature of socio-economic recovery

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An estimated 1.2 billion people live in countries affected by conflict or fragility. Poverty in these settings is usually extreme, and people face major challenges as they try to secure their lives and livelihoods. When war is formally over, people still experience manifold insecurities related to loss of assets, political instability and institutional flux. Governments and international actors seek ways to enable socio-economic recovery, partly out of concern that stagnating development may reignite conflict; but they are faced with daunting complexities.

This volume addresses the question about the ways in which people face post-conflict fragility and how policies and aid interventions can enable their socio-economic recovery – or how fail to do so.

We focus our analysis of socio-economic recovery on the relations between the social and the economic. We view recovery as an arena where a variety of actors (political actors, aid actors, local citizens) actively engage with processes of re-ordering and change. As we will elaborate below, we found the idea of social embeddedness a useful connecting frame in which to study the interfaces between economic life, governance institutions and aid interventions in recovery. In this introductory chapter, after a brief exploration of socio-economic recovery and the idea of social embeddedness, we describe five major findings that emerge from the case studies presented in the chapters of this book. We end the chapter with suggestions on how these findings from qualitative case studies can be used in policy and practice.

This volume originates from a research programme initiated by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs to explore these issues in post-conflict, and a number of post-disaster, settings. This programme, the ‘IS Academy Human Security in Fragile States’, funded seven PhD projects and several smaller pieces of research.¹ It was a varied programme in which research, policy and practice were connected in many ways. All the research was sponsored by different sets of stakeholders and addressed questions that they deemed to be priorities; much of the data gathering and analysis had elements of stakeholder involvement.²

The different case studies examine the interaction between economic life, governance and aid interventions in recovery settings. The research projects were connected in addressing similar kinds of questions and were grounded in similar theoretical perspectives. Regular seminars with the researchers and conferences with the involved stakeholders enabled us to identify relevant ways of developing theories about the meaning of socio-economic recovery. Intense supervision processes, often involving the joint drafting of chapters, further strengthened the linkages between the projects. In this way, we were able to build on the strength of single case studies to produce generalised insights and findings.

Socio-economic recovery

The term ‘socio-economic recovery’ was introduced to recognise the role of economic activity and actors in causing conflict, but also in building peace. In the 2000s, attention to economic aspects of recovery increased, arguing that socio-economic recovery was the ‘key to success’ in a post-war

economy (Obidegwu 2004: 50), and that ‘socio-economic recovery must be integrated into existing post-conflict recovery strategy and policy’ (Specker 2008: 1), because existing strategies tended to focus first on social assistance, security and state-building. Tangible economic recovery, manifested in improved livelihoods, would enhance stability (peace dividend), and have a role in creating a secure environment enabling business and establishing ‘the conditions for self-sustaining equitable growth and human development’ (Haider 2014: 108).

Socio-economic recovery has since become a standard phrase in post-conflict and post-disaster reconstruction, but the real meaning is rarely questioned. Is it more than shorthand for restoring livelihoods and markets and rehabilitating social services? What is ‘social’ and what is ‘economic’ about it?

In its first straightforward usage, the hyphen connecting ‘socio’ and ‘economic’ denotes an add-up sign, making the concept a reference to everything relating to the recovery of livelihoods, markets, and social services as well as to a large range of social indicators pertaining to the health and well-being of the population. The Human Development Index for example uses ‘socio-economic indicators’ that range from GDP, to life expectancy, to literacy and gender. In this vein, socio-economic development has become part of regular recovery language that covers a wide range of actions, spanning ‘reconstruction of physical infrastructure, livelihoods and employment generation, rehabilitation of public health and educational systems, development of social safety nets, legal and regulatory reforms, private sector development, the creation of markets and transparent banking and financial institutions’ (Haider 2014: 108). Socio-economic recovery can thus be seen as a container comprising the non-political, that is, it covers those domains that fall outside state-building policies aimed at enhancing democracy and the rule of law.

In a second usage, the hyphen between socio and economic is a qualifier to indicate the interaction of social and economic factors. Apthorpe (2015: 113-114), reviewing economists’ usage of the qualifier, finds that the social in socio-economic is often viewed as the subjective, qualitative, micro non-economic, and is used as a ‘catch-all reason for the failures of economic development policy’. In this view, the social is meant as a dissonance, a distraction or distortion of the economic.

In this volume, we are interested in how the social and the economic interact. However, in our approach, the ‘social’ is not a distortion of the ‘economic’ but in fact a key property of it, however dissonant. In the tradition of the sociology of economic life, every economic institution is considered a social institution, and economic processes are socially embedded (Granovetter 1985, Granovetter and Swedberg 2011: xix). The socio and the economic of socio-economic interact because economic action (recovery) is embedded in and works through non-economic institutions such as sense making, social networks, cultural routines and political institutions.

Fragility, recovery and the negotiation of change

It has become common to associate post-disaster and especially post-conflict settings with fragile states, where ‘fragility’ means that the state cannot or will not shoulder responsibility to protect the lives and well-being of the population within its borders (DFID 2005). There have been relevant critiques in the fragile states literature about how fragility has been defined and approached, and we do not need to repeat these critiques here (Boege et al 2009; Debiel and Lambach 2009; Hagmann and Hoehne 2009, Menkhaus 2007). More recently, the notion of fragility is being explored further, recognising that fragility is co-produced outside of the state by global and regional factors, and that

fragility is often uneven within states (Graevingholt et al 2012: 1). Currently, it is more common to speak of ‘fragile settings’ that have a combination of conditions that together can prevent a political, economic and social system (at regional, state or community level) from coping with external or internal stresses in a non-violent manner (Putzel and Di John 2012: ii). In this vein, the chapters of this book focus on how recovery efforts face (cope and engage with) conditions of fragility and how they attempt to overcome them.

Fragile settings are defined by high levels of uncertainty and unpredictability, both at the micro-level of people’s livelihoods and at the macro-level of political stability. Uncertainty derived from weakness or unresponsiveness of (state) institutions is one dimension of that and contributes to institutional flux. Fragility is characterised by flux, not only of state institutions but also of non-state forms of authority, elite formations, economic activity, patterns of migration, community organisation and social norms. The differential paces and multi-directional nature of these changes are affected by the high density of aid interventions that are often found in these fragile settings. This has important consequences both for the practical course of recovery as well as for how recovery is imagined. International aid actors often play a large role with regard to service provision, and more significantly by setting the agenda for the direction of development and the role of the state in it. Recovery comes with global discourses which embody assumptions about what is right and proper and what is risky and dangerous.

Recovery reflects a specific conjunction where a variety of actors (political actors, aid actors, local citizens) engage with processes of re-ordering and change. Recovery processes open windows of opportunity which actors may seize to address both old challenges that pre-date the conflict or disaster, and new challenges generated by the crisis episode. It is now widely acknowledged that war-to-peace transitions are inherently ambiguous, contradictory and non-linear, with uncertain outcomes (Richards 2005). Windows of opportunity do not derive in a linear fashion from formal declarations of ‘peace’ and may be experienced in very different ways and to varying degrees, or indeed not be experienced at all.

However, even though the ‘recovery’ label may be more wishful thinking than a description of realities on the ground, it is a label which holds significance. The immediate aftermath of crisis is experienced as a period of hardship but also as a moment of inflexion, where things are felt to take a different turn. The contributions to this volume give us insight into how these moments are constructed in different times and places, how they shape people’s options and strategies, and what happens with the ‘sense of recovery’ in the longer term.

Recovery is a moment at which change is both imagined and strived for. Building on what many others have suggested (Cramer 2006, Barakat 2010), recovery must be seen as clearly moving beyond restoring what was there before. It is about constructing new realities which embody ideas about the past, the present and the future. The praxis of recovery includes judgements about the causes and consequences of conflict and disaster, about current feasible avenues for change, and about desirable lives. Different actors may develop their own reading of the situation and what is required, and negotiate the directions, conditions, authorities and patterns of inclusion and exclusion in the recovery arena (Hilhorst and Jansen 2010).

The arenas opened by disaster and recovery attract powerful domestic actors and aid actors but are also the terrain of conflict and disaster-affected people that seek to re-create their lives and livelihoods. As the cases in this volume show, they have their own evaluations of what recovery may have to offer for them, their families, their identity groups, and they make estimations of risk factors and

uncertainty. Recovery trajectories emerge out of the manifold actions and interactions of populations, elites and authorities. This is what we will call later on the ‘micro-politics of recovery’.

The social embeddedness of recovery

The chapters of this book all depart from the idea that social and economic aspects of recovery interact. Economic institutions are socially embedded, operating through different melanges of economic logics, socio-cultural rationalities and social relations. This is manifest in individual actions as well as in the working of complex institutions. Human agency, the capability of people to reflect and act upon their surroundings, is shaped by (and unthinkable outside of) the normative frames and social relations in which people function. For institutions, social embeddedness refers to the ways and degrees in which institutions are shaped by the interaction with other institutions, including governance relations. Here, bureaucratic logic ties in with social constructions of authority.

Our approach draws on the body of work on the sociology of economic life (Granovetter 1985). This tradition has formed a consistent counter-current to the classic economic approach of perceiving people and institutions as rational and profit-maximising, and social aspects as basically a distorting influence on economics. An important branch of this tradition can now be found in studies of economic life in settings of weak governance institutions, conflict, or recovery. These studies bring out the interplay between economic transactions and governance showing the entanglements between economic actors and actions, and public authorities. Examples include the studies on cross-border trade networks of Titeca (2011) and Titeca and Flynn (2014), and a study of the differential levels and processes of cross-border traffic taxation by different elements of the South Sudanese authorities (Twijstra et al. 2014). Other studies focus on the role of illicit economies in reshaping political and armed mobilisation in northern Mali (Strazzari 2015), or links between the public transport sector and security provision in Uganda and Rwanda (Baker 2005, Goodfellow 2015).

While the concept of social embeddedness is mainly associated with economic institutions, we find the notion equally relevant for all institutions involved in socio-economic recovery. Governance institutions concern the interplay of government and non-government actors in bringing about ‘any organised method of delivering public or collective services and goods according to specific logics and norms, and to specific forms of authority’ (Olivier de Sardan 2011: 1). The social properties of governance institutions have been recognised in many different theoretical strands. These range from anthropology of the state, legal pluralism and more recently hybrid governance, twilight institutions and institutional multiplicity.³ A number of these works have been triggered by concerns of social embeddedness, where states were seen as being invaded by traditional, corporate or mafia-style value systems, or where ‘relationships of a broadly patrimonial type pervade a political and administrative system which is formally constructed on rational-legal lines’ (Clapham 1985: 48). This literature sharpens the debate and insists on the importance of empirical research around crucial issues such as the multi-faceted nature of the state, local embeddedness and legitimacy of non-state governance, the workings of power, and the relationships between different forms of authority (Meagher 2012). An important feature of this literature is that it takes issue with assumptions that embeddedness is only a feature of customary or non-state governance, and we aim to add to this debate by recalling that all forms of authority and governance relations are socially constructed.

The notion of social embeddedness is equally pertinent for the third pillar of our analysis: aid interventions. Drawing on the tradition of actor-oriented approaches, aid interventions can be productively portrayed as arenas where issues, resources, values and representations are contested

(Long 1992). Actors at all levels of formulation and implementation invest policies with their own meanings and the interlocking interests they want the intervention to serve. Aid interventions are not a chain of implementation of pre-defined plans but the negotiated product of a series of interfaces between different social fields (Long and van der Ploeg 1989). Aid actors cannot be seen as external to the realities of socio-economic recovery, they are part of these realities. International aid in fact adds a layer to the complexity of governance in these settings, creating an imprint on recovery as it unfolds while forming a playground for different actors to further their interest and mould interventions according to their interests.

Social embeddedness is thus a cross-cutting concept, as institutions of governance, the economy and international aid all have their own traditions, symbols and rules that are grounded in social histories and institutional entanglements. They are interdependent. They invade each other vertically through the exertion of power and horizontally through the movement of people, ideas and resources. They come about and evolve through their interrelation with other societal spheres.

Key findings that arise from this volume

As recovery gets shaped in practice, the evidence base for recovery programming should be grounded in empirical research. Almost all chapters of this book are based on rigorous, ethnographic work (with the exceptions of Chapters 2 and 3 which are based on systematic reviews of literature and policy documents). They constitute a series of case studies from different continents, social settings and sectors. The chapters stand alone in addressing specific questions and generating rich insights pertinent to the questions and setting of each research. There are also cross-cutting findings which we will outline here. All studies addressed issues of the interaction between economic life, governance and aid interventions. Taken together they signal a number of theoretical insights that can inform our understanding of similar social settings or cases.

- 1. People play the key role in reconstructing their lives and finding ways to access markets, authorities and aid*

The authors of Chapter 2 observe an increased recognition of ‘more proactive and strategic responses to conflict than has often been assumed’- and the same can be said about recovery. The chapters of this book are replete with illustrations of how people proactively meet out their livelihoods, moving back and forth, returning to old occupations or carving out new bases for existence, often in urban environments. Since the turn of this century, socio-economic programming in conflict-affected settings has turned to ‘reconstruction from below’ (Hilhorst et al 2010) where programming claims to be grounded in, and supportive of, people’s self-chosen and self-proven livelihood strategies.

Greater visibility of the coping mechanisms and recovery strategies of people in war-affected settings provides insights into recovery challenges as these people look ‘from the ground up’. When reading the year reports of socio-economic programmes, the numbers of people reached and the significant outcomes, it is easy to get an impression that people’s lives are being reconstructed. The view ‘from the ground up’, however, presents a sobering picture of the importance of services and resources provided by authorities or aid actors in people’s lives. In people’s livelihood strategies, socio-economic programmes often play a minor role compared to their own efforts.

Chapter 4 provides an apt narrative of these processes. The authors have followed post-war reconstruction in a Salvadoran village for over 20 years, with varying intensity. Focusing on the distribution, use and consequences of reconstruction funds and remittances in the post-war decades, they found that while the reconstruction of infrastructure was successful, none of the socio-economic recovery programmes had a lasting success. These programmes were ill-adapted to local needs, aimed at reviving a peasant economy that was already defunct on account of liberalisation and globalisation and became dominated by a local elite made up primarily of former insurgent cadres. The village population overwhelmingly opted for a different recovery strategy based on illegal labour migration to the US. The village's economic survival could mainly be put down to remittances and investments of returned migrants.

On the basis of this finding, it is suggested to direct the attention of recovery research to people's own strategies for recovery, and how these are affected by, and in turn affect, the logic and praxis of other economic, governance and aid institutions.

2. Aid actors are also socially embedded

Past decades have seen an abundance of literature de-masking aid interventions as socially embedded and showing the ritualised, myth-driven and power-related drivers behind the facade of rational-bureaucratic interventions. While we cannot do justice to the multiplicity of contributions to this literature⁴, we want to emphasise that this concerns all dimensions of aid: the genesis of policy, the inner working of aid and the implementation of programmes. Different strands of discourse analysis have unravelled the ways in which the genesis of policy is power-driven and just as cultural and subject to belief-systems as any other obviously cultural artefact. Chapter 3 illustrates the point by detailing how a single policy notion may derive from different institutional histories that continue to echo in different meanings and policy practices. Focusing more on the internal dynamics of aid, a trail of research inspired by the notion of 'Aidland' (Apthorpe 2005) focuses on the meaning-making processes among aid workers and the 'bubble' they create with its own rituals, symbolism and language. Dissecting the working of interventions in recipient settings, actor-oriented approaches (Long 1992) have highlighted the ways in which aid (or any other type of planned intervention) is 'invaded' or appropriated by actors who reinterpret, alter and reallocate the ideas and resources generated by development, resulting in processes that fundamentally depart from the formal objectives and channels of aid.

Donors are of course not unaware of the 'social life' of development (Arce 1993), and development history is marked by attempts to make policy and practice more rational and evidence-based. Nonetheless, chapters in this book find that interventions often continue to hinge on untested assumptions, while implementation processes are subject to all kinds of everyday politics. Chapter 7 reveals how attempts to make aid interventions more evidence-based and rational, are undermined by the persuasive and situational logic that interventions need to serve different goals for different audiences. The chapter follows in much detail how the policy-turn to work with the grain and encourage private sector contributions to development (see also Chapter 3) did not lead to results in a programme for middle-sized entrepreneurs in South Sudan. Despite the evidence that the programme officers were familiar with a number of these entrepreneurs, they sustained the narrative of the 'missing middle', claiming a lack of entrepreneurial capacity in the country. Underneath this myth was the realisation that following the policy as it was meant to be, would probably lead to political backlash in the Netherlands, as this would entail supporting the 'messiness' of business in the country,

where transactions are inevitably entangled with informal politics. Caught in the contradictory pulls on the programme, the programme officers preferred to think these entrepreneurs out of the picture.

Two chapters in this volume provide detail on the problematic assumptions on labour that are shared in many socio-economic recovery programmes. Promoting food security in combination with public works is a standard formula in post-conflict scenarios. Other socio-economic interventions, such as community-driven programmes for infrastructural projects, also require a labour contribution from the communities that will benefit from the projects. The assumption underlying these programmes is that interventions aimed to include the poor ‘should utilise the assets typically owned by the poor’, because ‘in all cases, the poor own their own labour, and in some cases this is all they own’ (FAO et al 2012: 29). Another incentive to build programmes on a labour counterpart is found in the persistence of the idea that the exemption of such a counterpart could lead to dependency attitudes among populations.

Chapter 9 describes how people in northern Uganda increasingly lost their motivation to join labour-based projects. The overwhelming reason was that families needed all their labour to open land (especially because draught animals were not replaced after the conflict) and to meet social labour-exchange obligations. Chapter 10 also found the labour component in a community-driven reconstruction programme in eastern DRC highly contested by villagers. The labour contribution was reminiscent of forced labour under colonial and post-colonial days. In addition, villagers objected to the notion that they were contributing to public goods, when they knew in advance that these goods were going to be more private than public. They objected, for example, to providing free labour for the construction of a school when they would not be given a discount on the school fees. In both these cases, assumptions on the availability of labour among the poor were not valid, which is a worrying finding in view of the fact that such a contribution is almost a standard feature of recovery programming.

This finding, then, reaffirms the need for symmetrical analysis that studies both sides of the interface between aid interventions and their targeted populations in a similar way. Instead of viewing aid interventions as rational, and people’s actions as social distortions of interventions and therefore irrational, both aid interventions and people’s actions appear to equally be mixes of rational logic, and social motivations and routines. Recovery programmes are often underpinned by (partly) wrong assumptions about what people need and want in recovery settings, meaning that programmes are ill-targeted or even undermine people’s own efforts at recovery. Reducing the ‘mismatch’ between assumptions and the complexities of recovery continues to be a key challenge.

3. Recovery involves overt and covert contests over the prospect of development

Post-conflict recovery programmes tend to centre on conflict as the cause of post-conflict vulnerabilities. This may lead to biased or short-sighted forms of socio-economic recovery programming. There is a broad recognition that uneven development and inappropriate governance systems may be among the root causes of conflict. As a result, key processes generating inequality and grievances may be left unattended or unrecognised and risk being perpetuated in the vital window of post-conflict recovery (World Bank 2011). Another issue is that post-conflict vulnerability may be emanating from sources other than conflict-related shocks including natural hazards, droughts, criminality and other adverse factors that are only partially re-ordered by the dynamics of conflict (Hilhorst and Serrano 2010, SLRC forthcoming).

The relevance of these issues and the complex consequences they have for aid and governance becomes clear in Chapter 12. Although the argument that people's lives in poor urban areas are affected by multiple and multiplying risks is not difficult to prove, the chapter shows how this poses major challenges for the Red Cross/Red Crescent (RC/RC) movement that is used to framing its mandate on more single-caused vulnerabilities such as either a conflict or a disaster. Understanding the contextual nature of vulnerability as intertwined with, but not capable of reduction to, causes of conflict or disaster may be easy. But the ramifications for the RC/RC movement are vast, posing questions about how the movement translates its fundamental principles into action, what style of working and what profiles of staff are appropriate, and how the movement can position itself in the landscape of service provision in these areas.

There is currently broad recognition that reconstruction is far from straightforward post-conflict or post-disaster reparation. However, this rarely leads to open discussion about the ways in which development pathways have brought about conflict and what alternatives exist for imaging the future. As a result, recovery may be packaged in technocratic languages of 'promoting rule of law' or 'restoring state control' that hide the underlying political implications for (in)equality, inclusion and exclusion. Chapter 2 asserts that much of recovery programming continues to rest on neo-liberal, standardised development notions, and we find this echoed in a number of the cases in this book. Chapter 4 critically analyses the impact of neo-liberal reform in post-conflict El Salvador. Chapter 5 shows how the reforms in artisanal mining in DRC that are meant to restore order in this sector and break the connection between minerals and conflict, in practice work to marginalise small-scale miners more and yield more space to international firms, thus spurring renewed grievances and disputes. Chapter 9 shows some of the implications for poor farmers in northern Uganda of the government's policy to modernise agriculture.

At times, the models of development that underpin recovery are openly contested. Chapter 11, which analyses social mobilisation in the aftermath of hurricane Mitch, shows how the post-Mitch moment in Central America was seized by social movements to voice concern about neoliberal development models that had undermined livelihoods and contributed to making Mitch so devastating. In the aftermath of Mitch social movements reconstituted themselves and formulated alternative futures to the dominant neoliberal development models embraced by governments. In this case, social movements in the region have appropriated and politicised disaster management.

Most of the time, however, discussion on where recovery must lead is tacit. We find that people like the villagers in El Salvador, Uganda and eastern DRC referred to above, maintain their own ideas on the development trajectory of their community and strategise on how they can bring about a better future within the parameters of this context.

This finding points to the importance of listening to people and the ways they view the contours of development because these views alter the course of recovery and may explain some of the responses to recovery opportunities. Where people resent recovery programmes, this may be because they do not like the vision of the future that these programmes present for their communities.

4. Micro-politics of recovery matter

We found that variations in post-conflict recovery trajectories defy general patterns that categorise areas according to their history with armed conflict, whether they were under government control, or continued to be rebel-held. Many of the chapters hint at local actions and negotiations among power

holders at different levels. We can capture these power dynamics and differential outcomes with the term ‘micro-politics of recovery’.

The term ‘micro-politics of recovery’ is aligned with the notion of ‘micro-politics of conflict’, as developed by Kalyvas (2003, 2006), and brings this term into the realm of recovery. Kalyvas highlights how conflicts are simultaneously driven by local as well as more overarching agendas and how these connect through alliances between local and higher level leaders. From this perspective, a conflict is never dominated by one cleavage, though there might be an overarching narrative, but by multiple cleavages relevant to, and expressed in, the local setting. What is relevant in the recovery process, is to realise that we need to understand what the local stakes are and how local power holders will try to direct processes of change to serve their goals and stake their claims.

We find that, just as the meaning of conflict is shaped locally, so is the meaning of reconstruction. Chapter 6 brings out most forcefully how this may lead to variegated outcomes of socio-economic recovery programmes. The author compares different groups of women entrepreneurs and finds that the space women can claim, within the social norms of *pardah* that define women’s room for manoeuvre, strongly depends on negotiation and locally-specific trajectories of this social norm. The chapter emphasises that these micro-dynamics in the social sphere can have major implications for macro-level socio-economic recovery and bottom-up democratic development.

Aid organisations struggle with the varied contextual scopes of reconstruction and are aware of local power politics that may underlie or steer them. Chapter 3 elaborates how there has come to be more space in formal policies to engage with these different power holders, such as in the suggestion by the World Bank to work with ‘inclusive-enough coalitions’. However, as described above, Chapter 7 on entrepreneurs in South Sudan illustrates how agencies display considerable unease in dealing with these micro-politics.

Chapter 8 on South Sudan shows the complexity of an aid arena where agencies with different mandates and working routines have to engage with a variety of governance actors and other power holders in a situation where the micro-politics of recovery blend into the politics of renewed conflict. The chapter focuses on how aid agencies navigate these complexities in negotiating security and access for their operation. While agencies develop different strategies for this, the outcome essentially hinges on the social relations between the agencies and the authorities which can determine whether security is fostered or jeopardised.

This finding poses considerable challenges both to research on recovery and to policy. The extent of variations in social outcomes of recovery seems infinite, and it is important to continue to seek ways in which to work with generalised notions - without losing sight of the localised specifics.

5. Institutions in fragile settings may acquire properties of rational institutions

A final finding provides a cautionary tale against ‘exoticising’ and ‘othering’ institutions in fragile settings. The chapters predominantly illustrate how institutions are socially embedded, pervaded by the influence of other institutions and subject to capture by strategising elites and other actors. Nonetheless, there is also a strand of findings in this volume that warns against a view of institutions as completely ‘socialised’ and reveals that social embeddedness can, to a certain degree, co-exist with predictable, rational and routine institutional behaviour.

Granovetter (1985) cautioned that assumptions around economic behaviour can be ‘over-socialised’ as well as ‘under-socialised’. A key proposition of the sociology of economic life is that social embeddedness, which is obvious in the case of pre-industrial societies, continues to be an important determinant of economic behaviour in highly modern or post-modern markets and societies. We find that this argument can be reflected in the case of fragile settings. While in non-fragile settings, we may indeed underestimate the power of the social, in fragile settings there is the reverse risk; we may expect that in fragile institutions everything is personalised and fail to see the manner in which institutions sometimes enact their standards and develop predictable procedures. In the chapters of this book, we also find evidence that policies, to some extent, may work as envisioned and that institutions in fragile settings, to some extent, work according to their formal meaning and can be less personal than we have come to expect.

Chapter 5, for example, while exploring the messiness around local cooperatives in artisanal mining, nonetheless shows that there is a level of predictable negotiation happening. Miners know what deals to expect, and the government system of fines and fees does have an impact on the working of the cooperatives. While actors appropriate and use regulations to a large extent to suit their purposes, these regulations nonetheless acquire a life of their own and become accustomed rules.

One of the exciting propositions of working with the concept of social embeddedness is that it allows us to analyse the ways in which institutions are embedded, to what extent and under what conditions they become less socialised, how this changes through time, and to what degree these processes can be influenced through planned interventions.

And then...

In conversations with policy makers and practitioners, we were often questioned about the practical implications of our understanding of the socially embedded nature of institutions and processes in recovery. Where can possibilities for action be found in the intricate webs of multi-layered social realities, especially when needs are considered great and urgent?

This volume was written because we are convinced that detailed case studies are not only necessary to understand recovery but that they are also useful for policy and practice. We have sought to apply our emerging insights during the research process in all the studies brought together in this volume. Although the interactive nature of the studies is not made explicit in the chapters, most case studies had built-in interaction with intended end-users throughout the research process with a view to gaining relevance as well as better quality of analysis (Haar et al 2013). A prime example is the research underpinning Chapter 9, where the outcomes of this single case study were so convincing to the concerned NGO, that the case was immediately used to redirect the organisation’s general policy. While such instances of interaction are extremely valuable, we hope that the cases presented are also useful for readers of this book who were not immediately involved in the research.

The power of case studies lies in the contextualised nature of the findings. As Flyvbjerg (2006) convincingly argues, context-dependent knowledge and experience are at the very heart of expert activity and case knowledge is central to human learning. Even though this seems to work against generalisation, cases invite readers to pro-actively process their implications and reflect on the possibility that insights generated in one case apply to another similar situation.

Case studies provided here can be helpful in delineating the working and boundaries of social embeddedness. We see three levels of application for such insights (and often these can be mixed in practice).

- First, findings may compel actors in policy and practice to redefine their objectives or claim a more modest scope of intervention. In these cases, intervening actors may find that their assumptions do not pass the research reality-check and therefore they need to revise their theory of change, or adapt their programmes.
- Secondly, findings may guide intervening actors to ground their programmes more in social realities and make them resonate with development, even when this leads to less-preferred trajectories of development. The call by DFID and other donors to ‘go with the grain’ or to work with the existing authorities rather than with the pre-defined state institutions, can be seen as an inclination in this direction. However, when we organised a round-table about the ways in which agencies translate the directive of ‘going with the grain’ in practice, many participants admitted that they were groping in the dark most of the time.⁵ Case studies may inspire these actors to come up with more creative solutions to these challenges.
- Thirdly, findings can be used by agencies seeking, to some extent, to socially *disembed* institutions. A negative connotation has come to be attached to practices of social engineering of development institutions. Ambitions to turn these institutions into rationally operating deliverers of services tend to be portrayed as unrealistic or patronising. Nonetheless, we find the practice of recovery replete with attempts at social engineering, for example through the wide adoption of all kinds of capacity building programmes. When recovery actors are more explicit about the ways in which they want to reform institutions, the case study findings presented in this volume contain rich lessons about the do’s and don’ts of such enterprises.

These three different strategies may all be appropriate for certain times, places and challenges. Picking the best strategy for a specific time and place will be enhanced by better understanding of the contexts and dynamics of recovery.

Overview of the book

To position the case studies, this volume starts with two chapters based on literature review. In **Chapter 2**, Rachel Slater and Richard Mallet critically review the evidence on the effect of violent conflict on people’s livelihoods and economic activity and the variety of ways in which actors cope and respond. They review the evidence on the ways in which external actors attempt to create an enabling environment for economic growth based on standardised neoliberal-oriented economic models. **Chapter 3** by Anette Hoffmann combines a literature review on international policies oriented towards socio-economic development and fragility, with detailed case studies of three policies which frame and act on livelihoods and institutions, demonstrating the ways in which the social history of policy matters.

The first case study, **Chapter 4** by Ralph Sprenkels and Chris van der Borgh, looks at recovery in a village in a war-torn region of El Salvador. It shows that recovery aid did not provide the economic opportunities hoped for because of the particular historical and political circumstances that shaped the community and the limited opportunities common people found in a liberalised economy. Continuing with the theme of recovery trajectories as part of development processes of ‘longer durée’, **Chapter 5**

by Claude Iguma and Dorothea Hilhorst is a study of the creation of mining cooperatives in northern Katanga (DRC), and the influence of 'big men'. They highlight the importance of basing such new initiatives on knowledge of historically-grown institutions and power relations.

This is followed by two case studies focusing on entrepreneurial activity in recovery. **Chapter 6** by Holly Ritchie explores how poor women in Afghanistan strive to overcome cultural barriers to engage in business and markets. Drawing on in-depth empirical research, the chapter generates a nuanced understanding of the role of actors and context in the transformation of women's *purdah* norms which then permitted the start of women's enterprises. **Chapter 7** by Rens Twijnstra and Dorothea Hilhorst is about Dutch programming in South Sudan and examines what happens in practice with the policy aimed at supporting domestic entrepreneurship in recovery. For different reasons, and partly because the policy representative had to navigate between policies and politics in the Netherlands, interventions ended up side-lining, instead of supporting, domestic entrepreneurship.

The next two chapters focus on labour relations in recovery projects. **Chapter 8** by Patrick Milabyo, Jeroen Cuvelier and Dorothea Hilhorst examines the effectiveness of the mobilisation of voluntary manual labour for public works in a community-driven reconstruction programme in eastern DRC. It finds that people's participation was lower than expected due to a history of forced manual labour and contestation over the notion of 'public' goods. In **Chapter 9**, Winnie Wairimu, Dorothea Hilhorst and Maja Slingerland investigate everyday practice and farmer responses in community-based food security interventions in northern Uganda. Their findings underscore the need to examine labour conditions before making public works part of food security programming, and question untimely policy shifts to agricultural modernisation.

Recovery aid involves interfaces between NGO staff, (would be) beneficiaries, local authorities and power holders. **Chapter 10** by Bram Jansen zooms in on these aid relations and how they shape the recovery process for the case of South Sudan. It shows how humanitarian agencies engaging in socio-economic recovery need to deal with security issues, engaging with those who wield power locally. Aid access, recovery and security turn out to be intimately intertwined as part of the same post-conflict dynamics.

The final two case studies direct attention to recovery after natural disasters. **Chapter 11** by Carlos Morales and Gemma van der Haar illustrates how effective political agency can be built within the context of recovery. It details how strong social movements developed in the process of recovery after hurricane Mitch in Central America and how these contributed to developing disaster risk management and connecting it to broader societal claims. **Chapter 12** by Raimond Duijsens returns to the theme of socially-situated policy development and outlines the challenges for the Red Cross/Red Crescent in assuming a resilience-building role. While the 'resilience' paradigm presents opportunities to expand the focus of its humanitarian work to prevention and mitigation of disaster risk, the approach also presents challenges that lead back to the fundamental principles of the Red Cross movement.

The **Final Chapter** by Ian Christoplos and Paul Harvey reflects on the contributions to this volume and draws lessons for recovery programming.

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¹ Outputs of the Academy can be found at: <http://www.wageningenur.nl/en/Expertise-Services/Chair-groups/Social-Sciences/Humanitarian-Aid-and-Reconstruction/Research-1/IS-Academy-Human-Security-in-Fragile-States.htm>

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³ These theoretical strands have grown and fanned out over the years. Some key references are, for anthropology of the state: Clapham 1985, Frödin 2012, Gupta 1995, Hansen and Stepputat 2001; for legal pluralism: Griffiths 1986; for hybrid governance: Kraushaar and Lambach 2009, Meagher 2012; for twilight institutions Lund 2006; and for institutional multiplicity: Haar and Heijke 2013.

⁴ For a thorough review of different strands of these literatures, see Harrison (2013).

⁵ Round table session 'Engaging with 'non-state' governance: NGOs/donors working with non-state actors in fragile settings', held at the 3rd World Conference on Humanitarian Studies, Istanbul, October 24-27, 2013.