



## Training, communication, and more women's involvement can strengthen fragile states. Patrick Safran, former Asian Development Bank official

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Patrick Safran, who spearheaded ADB's Approach to Engaging with Weakly Performing Countries, says ADB project officers in fragile and conflict-affected countries examine the local context from all possible angles to come up with an effective strategy of aid and relief:

And everybody can also understand that within some countries we do have regional recipes, so basically we have the same raw materials, but different ingredients, and then we adapt our recipes to the local context. This is exactly what we can understand in daily life. When we are talking about our country, we also need to do the same. We need to look at the local context first. The work in the Philippines may not be the same work as in Afghanistan and certainly not in the Pacific.

Speaking at a recent ADB seminar on fragile and conflict-affected countries, Patrick Safran shared his experience in disaster and emergency relief, and coastal and aquatic resources management.

He says the situation in conflict-prone Afghanistan and the climate-change threat to the low-lying Pacific islands, such as Kiribati, are quite different, but there are also similarities in terms of public service weaknesses. In Asia and the Pacific, many fragile states are nations of small islands.

Since 2007, ADB has published a yearly list of fragile states, combining data from the Asian Development Fund and the World Bank. Conflict-affected states include Afghanistan and Myanmar, but also specific areas such as Mindanao in the southern Philippines.

To strengthen these fragile states, ADB project officers first assess them based on a string of broad social and economic indicators.

Fixing the fragile states or fixing the failed states, depending on how you present it, was to look at the public service delivery, or what the core functions of the government are, and then looking at what the government is supposed to bring to its citizens.

Then ADB takes measures that will strengthen the challenged states, in the same way that steel reinforcing is built into a fragile building to allow it to survive adverse conditions, explained Mr. Safran.

We also found that mainstreaming gender issues is quite important. We have several examples of women playing a very big role, especially in difficult situations—I do not want to say conflict situations. There are a couple of anecdotes or so in the Philippines in Mindanao, where the women forced the men to stop fighting at some point.

Training is a key tool in strengthening fragile and conflict-affected states. Examples show that women are playing a particularly important role in helping improve the conditions in these countries.

There is in Asia and the Pacific a kind of continuum between those different situations, and we have between the fragile and conflict-affected situations a kind of vicious circle if we don't work on it. We have something like a transitional situation and we go after a long period which could be 2 or 3 decades, according to the World Bank's World Development Report in 2011, to more resilient and stable states.

Mr. Safran said it is also important to involve central and local governments, as well as civil society organizations, to help progress toward a sustainable recovery. To this end, information campaigns are crucial for stimulating community participation and sense of ownership.