



AGI's Fridays: The Concept of Fragile State

The inaugural session of 'AGI's Fridays' took place on 25 June 2010 at the Institute Headquarters. This session was chaired and moderated by **Professor Penda Mbow** from Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar (Senegal). Bringing together around fifteen (15) participants (university lecturers and experienced researchers, civil society members, experts from different think-tanks based in Dakar, and representatives from international organisations), this session, devoted to the 'notion of the fragile State', took place in a particular context:

- a. During the High Level seminar organised by AGI in March 2010, participants agreed that the concept of 'Developmental Governance' is a uniting factor in new dynamics **by Africans and for Africans** in governance. There could not be development without transformation/appropriation/endogenization of ways of regulating public space and State/society relations in African countries; nor would it be possible to speak about governance without **hearing the voice of those concerned and a clear commitment with a view to sustainable development**. Three issues linked with developmental governance were identified: respect for democracy and human rights; the imperative of effective and proactive economic and social transformations; and the prevention of conflicts and preserving peace and security.
- b. The participants at the seminar in March 2010 also agreed that 'Developmental Governance' should bring **appropriate responses (i.e. specific, legitimate and shared)** to the challenges of governance that arise in the different contexts and political configurations in Africa.

It is precisely one of these contexts that was examined during the first session of 'AGI's Fridays': known as the 'fragile State'; **not in the polemic sense, but rather from the point of view of its political economy and its relevance in describing situations in which it wants to explain and on which it has concrete effects using a framework of action and strategies of a number of bilateral and multilateral partners in development.**

The exercise in which the participants engaged at this session seemed to them at first sight all the more important and topical as partners in development very recently increased operational discussion on this notion. Three examples were given to illustrate this state of affairs:

- a. The Dili Declaration adopted by the G7/G8 on 10 April 2010 established a new vision for constructing peace-building and state-building in 'fragile States'.
- b. The Oslo Conference on Climate and Forest questioned the notion of the fragile State on 27 May this year, as part of the worldwide partnership for the protection of tropical forests;
- c. The European Union and OECD/INCAF organised on 15 June this year in Brussels a workshop on 'risk management in Fragile States'.



The window of opportunity for African discussion, by African stakeholders in governance in Africa, should be seized.

- a. The participants started off with the paradox presented by **the notion of the 'fragile State' that is covered by a 'blanket phrase' and using the same term for all countries and situations in various states of crisis (political, societal, economic, environmental) for reasons also as varied (political, societal, economic, security, environmental and climatic, institutional etc.)**. Deliberately pushing aside the debate related to its taxonomic dimension, they asked themselves if this notion could be revived *ex-nihilo* or not as a potential referential in implementing Developmental Governance or if Africans should not put forward and share with partners in development another way of describing these contexts, **prospective and proactive, consequently encouraging the implementation of issues structuring Developmental Governance?**
- b. Reinvesting the African Union's position in the matter, participants chose the second option by underlining the necessity of **deconstructing the notion 'of the fragile State' to take into account the diversity of situations and factors of fragility which it reflects and which are not specific to Africa**. The participants in the meeting also emphasized the necessity of returning to the social and political uses of the notion, in particular its functions of legitimization/stigmatization, to envisage a conceptual, dynamic and operational perspective of these contexts **whose reality of the difficulty should not be burdened**. The participants also agreed that **more global thinking on the State in Africa was necessary in order to take complete stock of its nature, dynamics and sources of its legitimacy**: they emphasized the fact **there would not be economic and social development, in an environment of peace and security for the people without restructuring the State in Africa, restoring trust among the people and taking control again by African States and societies of their destiny**. The objective of discussion was to lead to practical African approached for application in terms of establishing development and management of internal crises in African States and societies, strengthening intervention capacity of institutions and individuals from a base adapted to reality. **A proposal was made that this discussion could be led under the auspices of the African Union African Platform on Governance (AGA)**.