Fragile States: Beyond International Borders and into U.S. Communities

Debra J. Bolton PhD
Kansas State University, dbolton@ksu.edu

Francisco M. Hernandez Major
Civil Affairs U.S. Army, francisco.hernandez@soc.mil

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Civil Affairs U.S. Army

Abstract: "Fragile States Indicators", used worldwide, were applied to U.S. communities with high poverty. Theories, literature and data gave rise to a model that could be applied to families and institutions with implications for adult education.

Keywords: fragile states, poverty, social justice, culturally relevant practice

Introduction

The greatest impacts stemming from ongoing global conflicts are *forced migrations* of affected human populations. Forced migrations include displacements because of persecution, armed conflict, generalized violence, human rights violations, natural or environmental disasters, famine, ineffectual governments, and lack of financial opportunities (Baker, 2014; Goetz, & Rupasingha, 2007). Human displacement caused by conflict is the highest on record since World War II. According to World Bank (2014), "forced displacement" is typically viewed as a humanitarian issue, but also has economic, social, political, and environmental impacts on places of origin and receiving communities (Dozi and Valdivia, 2005). Research on the impact of forced migration on those families and communities affected by conflict, violence, and poverty needs further refinement (Bolton & Dick, 2013), and policies need to be enacted that will mitigate, reduce and prevent outbreaks of violence, conflict, and/or poverty (Hernandez & Wright, 2015).

Of the many indicators driving violence and conflict, those most notable in the context of this paper include loss of state legitimacy, extreme poverty and gender inequality. A states' inability to provide the essential needs of its citizens, such as protection, the ability to earn/maintain an acceptable standard of living /quality of life, significantly damages the credibility of government institutions with local populations. Projections for 2015 estimate that 50% of "Fragile States" populations live on/under $1.25USD a day, which data suggest, significantly increases the likelihood of violence, poor health, low educational attainment, and armed conflict as a result of extreme poverty (Baker, 2014; Flora & Flora, 2015; Hernandez & Wright, 2015). While this level of extreme poverty sounds like a global issue tied only to failed or failing states, millions of families and households in the United States are feeling the effects of fragility as well; living in impoverished conditions (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). In communities with high poverty, loss of employment, assets, and/or income can effectively put families into "fragile states" conditions, making them vulnerable and more at risk of negative behavioral responses (Hernandez & Wright, 2015, Bolton & Dick, 2013, and Dozi & Valdivia, 2005). Fragile States Index (Fund for Peace, 2015) looks at social, economic, and political/ military indicators to measure human well-being. This paper explores "fragile states indicators", used by government and non-government organizations worldwide and applies those concepts to U.S. communities with high poverty. From this, the authors propose a framework for Adaptive and Culturally-Relevant Practices targeted at individuals, communities, and institutions as a guide for what could work to help

move families out of a state of fragility and toward a quality of life that reflects self-actualization.

Lierature Review

A *fragile state*, as described by Dr. Pauline Baker (2015), fails to carry out basic governing functions, manage pressures/shocks to the system, and fails to be responsive to changing social dynamics of its citizens. Today, we see government failures (from local to national levels) to provide adequately (perceived) legitimate policing and justice functions, economic opportunities and inclusive social programing/policies, all of which drive *fragility*. A majority of data in the Fragile State Index, analyzed by the International Development Community working in underdeveloped/fragile countries, show that these same indicators can be applicable within rural and/or underdeveloped U.S. communities. Baker also notes a 2015 Mercy Corps study, stating that though poverty, specifically, does not necessarily correlate to violence. However, poverty, coupled with injustice, tends to lead to discrimination, disenfranchisement, corruption and economic deprivation; drivers of fragility and indicators of fragile states (Baker, 2015). In looking at programing to target those most at-risk populations, we must consider programs to improve economic growth and inequality, which encompass the subset – injustice. Economic growth programs to improve quality of life within homes and communities tend to increase stability, and programs to reduce inequalities improve resiliency. (Baker, 2015).

The United States continues its grown in ethnic and cultural diversity, which poises it to become minority-majority by 2043 (Hernandez & Bolton, 2015 and Silva, 2015). We must identify a means to reach those fragile states within U.S. borders or risk further disenfranchisement. While education, formal and informal, continue to be strong partners to develop fragile communities (King, 2000), another approach gaining wide acceptance, in international development circles, is increased collaboration with the private sector, particularly companies/organizations practicing corporate social responsibility, or CSR (Wright & Hernandez, 2015 and Hernandez, 2016). As private industry leaders and organizations look to new programs/markets in which to expand, shared-value ("win-win") approaches, it presents tangible benefits to all stakeholders and shows an ability to provide sustainable growth and vitality across various development sectors. Internationally, U.S. government organizations are increasingly reliant upon the private sector to help meet developmental objectives; such as reducing violence, poverty and security threats. By looking inside U.S. borders, the application of similar approaches by local governments for the benefit of its populace could provide those shared-value approaches and returns of investments between government, community and business (Hernandez, 2016). The creation of these partnerships and value-chains build (the necessary) trust for successful implementation, while also increasing opportunities for other programing, such as those targeting other at-risk areas, i.e. education, health, security and justice, to be successful. As we look to new ways to promote community resilience and combat fragility, we must *not* discount or look away from what has demonstrated to be successful in the international community.

Methods

In a mixed-methods approach, we examined literature and analyzed multi-lingual research to determine fragility in rural and urban communities with high immigrant populations, high poverty, and challenged social integration. Data came from international development research, families in communities' research, localized multi- lingual/quantitative research, and

analyses on international data sets. Literature review content analyses was qualitative as we looked for items related to *fragile states*, emigrating families to the U.S. coming from those *fragile states*, and immigrants' ability to adapt to new environments according to localized studies in rural areas. We also reviewed the approaches that non-governmental entities are taking to bridge research with application/practice.

Preliminary Results

While *fragile states* are associated mostly at a country level application, looking at how family dynamics are impacted within fragile settings is also reasonable. Limited or lack of employment/income generating opportunities, social isolation, poor health, and barriers to educational opportunities put families at risk, cause stressors, and contribute to environmental shocks for families. These experiences, at the family and/or community level, creates a *fragile state*. "Shocks" can be a sudden loss of a job (micro) or implementation/change of a national policy (macro). Based on preliminary analyses, we see limitations in the current research and practice, which can be judgmental or fault- finding in the at-risk communities (Hero, 2007). The Fragile States Index has a great foundation for identifying the factors that make fragile societies (Baker, 2014; World Bank, 2011). From a family scientist's point of view, however, the indices do not take into consideration all the spheres of influence (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) down to the individual. There is more consideration of the state or community as a whole. We found that Philanthropic organizations utilize approaches, as do businesses practicing CSR, to benefit those populations challenged by the environment of living within a fragile state, offering opportunities to better health, education and economic conditions of those in greatest need.

Implications and Future Directions for Adult Education

National security strategies, international development agendas, and educational outcomes are designed to mitigate and prevent the socio-economic challenges faced by millions of families who continue to face poverty because of conflict or violence, government corruption (or inability to govern effectively), displacement and poverty that have marked the beginning of the 21st century. In an effort to combat fragility with targeted programming, we not only have opportunities, but have obligations to support those families as they attempt to maintain or re-establish their wellbeing; fit into community dynamics; and increase their resiliency to outside stressors and shocks. Educators can help to shape environments to mitigate fragility in the future by targeting external and internal environmental factors and conditions that confront/mitigate risk factors. Adult education programs and policies could address those interventions that decrease fragility and further support social justice.

In effort to overcome the factors influencing conflict leading to community-level "fragile states", policy makers and program developers/deliverers have thus far utilized various approaches based on the desired outcomes and objectives of varying stakeholders. Efforts can be strengthened with human domain-centric, long-term programs targeting those families and communities most at risk of being negatively affected by shocks and stressors to their environments. Concentrated attempts would also help to build resiliency while providing economic opportunities.

Though the desired end-states vary, the global objective remains the same: Promote well-being and peace, and engage citizens by giving them tools to overcome those factors influencing conflict, violence, poor health, low education, and lost opportunities.
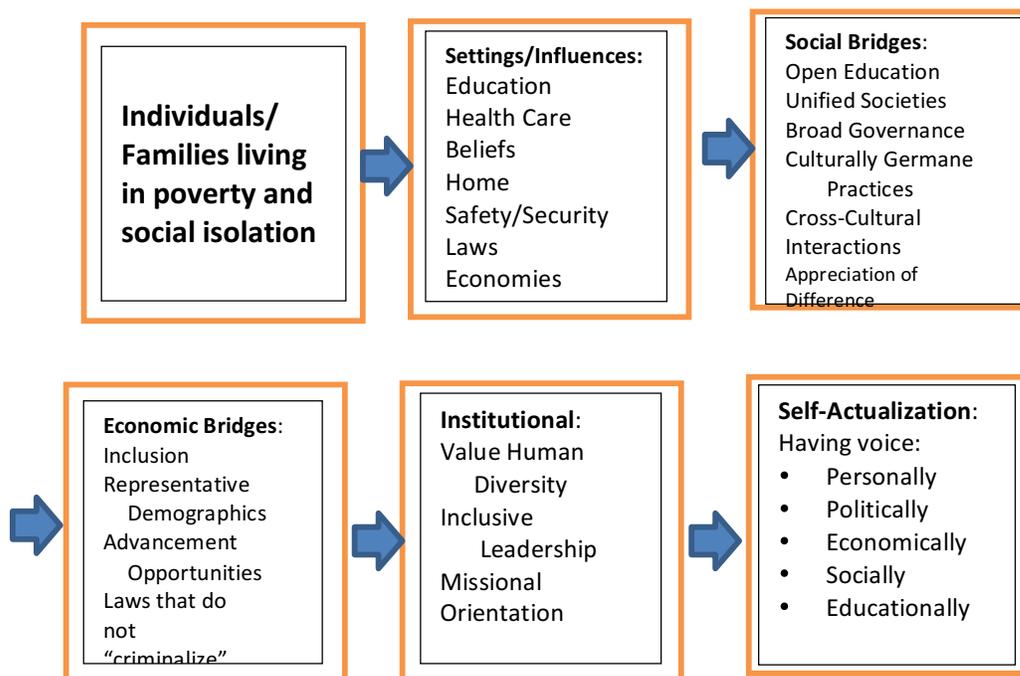
Recommendations: 1) More collaboration must happen between families and other social researchers, governmental and non-governmental entities to get the true picture of well-being; 2) We suggest more multi-lingual research be done at the local level so that families can play a role in telling the researcher how migration, forced or political, has affected them on a family level, and 3) Consider the development of new frameworks or theory that address adaptive and culturally relevant practices by practitioners with a social mobility outline for families and communities.

Impacts on Adult Education: In the interest of social justice, we look at the recommended model and movement toward adaptive and relevant practices as a form of Transformational Learning (Freire, 2000; Mezirow, 2000; & Corely, 2003) as it applies to supportive living and learning environments, engaged civic life, empowerment, resilience, and self-awareness. If the model of adaptive and culturally relevant practices and the concept that illustrates families and individuals living in a "fragile state" are used as frameworks, we may better understand barriers that impede learning in an adult education setting. Thusly, we become better equipped to increase learning outcomes for adult learners.

Proposed Framework for Adaptive and Culturally-Relevant Practices

Principles of Approach

- Relevance to need for self-actualization and upward mobility to prevent or mitigate social injustice, poverty, and poor health and educational outcomes
- Partnerships between individuals, communities, institutions (government sponsored and private sector)
- Acceptable levels of acculturation and/or integration by "minority" populations
- Continuity through Adaptive and Culturally-Relevant Practices

Individuals/ Families living in poverty and social isolation

→ **Settings/Influences:**
Education
Health Care
Beliefs
Home
Safety/Security
Laws
Economies

→ **Social Bridges:**
Open Education
Unified Societies
Broad Governance
Culturally Germane
    Practices
Cross-Cultural
Interactions
Appreciation of
Difference

Economic Bridges:
Inclusion
Representative
    Demographics
Advancement
    Opportunities
Laws that do
not
"criminalize"

→ **Institutional:**
Value Human
    Diversity
Inclusive
    Leadership
Missional
Orientation

→ **Self-Actualization:**
Having voice:
- Personally
- Politically
- Economically
- Socially
- Educationally

<u>Outcomes</u>
- Risk factors for social, political, academic, and economic failures decrease
- Individuals integrate with value-chains and provide skilled labor relevant to market demands
- Laws and policies do not "minoritize" or criminalize citizens, rather they promote and provide security and justice
- Individuals and families integrate fully into their communities as active participatory me

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