



Operationalizing the World Bank's FCV Strategy

Reaching Communities Caught in Crisis

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A dangerous divergence has emerged for people in countries affected by fragility, conflict and violence (FCV) - surging levels of crises and shrinking efforts to address them. Communities in countries characterized by FCV are the ones who bear the brunt of ongoing global disorder, as described in the IRC's 2026 Emergency [Watchlist](#).

In particular, extreme poverty is becoming increasingly concentrated in these areas. As of 2025, more than [half](#) of all people living in extreme poverty globally are in countries classified by the World Bank Group (WBG) as [Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations \(FCS\)](#). This figure is expected to rise to nearly [60%](#) by 2030.

This makes the World Bank's refreshed [strategy](#) for operating in countries affected by FCV critical. These are the places where most of the world's extreme poor live, and where old recipes for development do not work. By sustaining long-term investments in inclusive services in places where extreme poverty is most pervasive and intertwined with crises and conflicts, the Bank can cut through the impacts of disorder and establish a sense of hope and prosperity for people living in FCV settings.

Civil Society Organization (CSO) partnerships play a vital role in supporting the Bank's efforts to help FCV-affected countries build a pathway to long-term development. Not only can CSOs reach marginalized and hard to reach communities in crisis settings, they also offer expertise and evidence-based programs, even in areas without government support or capacity. To operationalize its FCV strategy, the Bank must leverage CSO partnerships in order to reach people where needs are greatest.

How can the World Bank best leverage CSO partnerships to achieve maximum impact for FCV communities?

[Build preparedness and resilience by focusing on early action and engagement.](#)

The Bank should ensure early and proactive CSO engagement during the development of Country Partnership Frameworks (CPFs) and Bank-financed projects, so that CSOs' ground-level knowledge shapes the Bank's programs and policy reforms. This knowledge will take into account the nuances of operating in FCV contexts and the challenges facing marginalized groups.

CSO-informed risk mapping, particularly to assess political risks, such as intent and capability of the established authorities to partner effectively with WBG, is another critical piece of engaging in FCV settings. De Facto Authorities (DFAs) taking control of countries or areas can disrupt the Bank's financing and programs. Political risk assessments informed by CSOs with experience operating in DFA-controlled areas enable the WBG to identify these situations early and prepare delivery adaptations.

[Leverage CSO expertise to bolster essential services and strengthen systems.](#)

Across FCV contexts, CSOs play a vital role in reaching inaccessible, marginalized communities, neglected due to government absence, discrimination or limited capacity. The WBG needs to leverage CSO partnerships to maintain service delivery in the most complex settings. In countries in active conflict or acute crises, where the WBG cannot work through the government, or communities under DFA control cannot be reached, CSOs are the viable - and sometimes the only - route to remain engaged, reach communities, and achieve results at scale through operational delivery.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the government, WBG, IRC, and partners supported over 7,000 gender-based violence (GBV) survivors in 2025 via the [STAR-EST](#) project. The project creates community-level capacity enabling health, economic empowerment, and social cohesion services. STAR-EST has now reached 29,000 people through progressively institutionalized GBV prevention and response across the country's investment portfolio, especially in the infrastructure, education, and health sectors. These are the institutions that stand the test of time, even when governments change.

CSOs can strengthen national and sub-national systems, and enhance impact and sustainability through advisory roles, technical assistance, and partnerships that improve project design and community inclusion.

Foster economic development and prioritize inclusion of marginalized populations.

There are examples of successful CSO engagement with governments and financial service providers that boost overall economic empowerment in FCV settings. The Bank can leverage CSO expertise and experience in FCV settings to promote an enabling environment that supports the economic inclusion and empowerment of FCV communities and marginalized groups, which will further the Bank's agenda on job creation.

In South Sudan, the \$10 million Women's Entrepreneurial Opportunity Facility, delivered by IRC under World Bank financing and implemented by the government through the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare with UN Women as a partner, has enrolled more than 1,200 women-owned businesses in intensive training, disbursed nearly \$556,000 in business grants, and linked more than 500 entrepreneurs to public and private sector actors who can help their businesses grow.

CSO partnerships can enhance project design and implementation including when using blended finance approaches and partnering with the private sector or Development Finance Institutions (DFIs), to ensure projects' deeper contextualization, improved risk mitigation, enhanced community engagement and inclusion of displaced communities.

Securing a Better Future Amidst Global Disorder

Through proven solutions implemented in a wide range of FCV settings, including some of the hardest-to-reach areas in the world, CSOs have proven their value-add to global development.

The Bank has made promising commitments in its Refreshed FCV Strategy, and now is the time to put those into practice. This means broadening the interpretation of country ownership beyond governments only and better leveraging CSOs comparative advantages, embracing a more flexible, pragmatic approach—one that allows financing to reach people, not just governments. CSOs are not a substitute for the state, but in many contexts they are a key and sometimes the only viable bridge between international institutions and communities in need. Ignoring that reality risks leaving millions behind. The challenge is no longer simply about how much the Bank invests, but how and through whom it delivers.

Recommendations for the World Bank

In order to achieve the goals of the refreshed FCV Strategy, the World Bank should:

Normalize CSO partnerships in World Bank programming, rather than making them an exception.

CSOs have extensive experience successfully partnering with governments, but also have the experience and networks to negotiate access where governments are unable to tread. For example, over the last four years, in six fragile countries, the IRC has delivered 28.5 million doses of vaccine to children, many of whom have never gotten a single dose of vaccine, for about \$2 a shot, consistent with UNICEF's benchmark.

Invest in small businesses and require that financing operations in FCV contexts include a defined role for marginalized groups in project design and delivery.

The Bank should set a clear expectation that projects targeting FCV populations actively engage refugee-led and women-led organizations, not just as beneficiaries but as implementing partners and advisors. CSOs, with established relationships with these organizations, can serve as a bridge to ensure private investments, support for micro-, small-, and medium-enterprises, and social protection programming are designed to reach those most at risk of being left behind.

Embed CSO-informed risk assessment at early stages of project design.

Country teams should conduct political and operational risk assessments, including assessments of whether authorities have the intent and capability to partner effectively, before financing operations are approved. CSOs with on-the-ground presence are best placed to inform these assessments and identify risks that headquarters-level analysis will miss.

Prioritize innovative approaches in hard-to-reach settings.

CSOs like the IRC have been stress-testing, adapting, and deploying proven tools to ensure they are suitable to fragile and conflict settings. For instance, in Somalia and Mali, the IRC uses a simplified, evidence-based approach to diagnosing and treating acute child malnutrition that delivers a 92 percent recovery rate while cutting costs by 20 percent. This is practical, proven innovation that can be scaled.

Advance solutions to enable direct financing to CSOs.

The Bank has signaled it is open to developing financing pathways that allow resources to flow directly to CSOs where they are best placed to deliver. IRC urges the Bank to move from openness to operationalization, and stands ready to pilot these approaches in contexts where it has proven presence.