



AID AND CONFLICT

SAFERWORLD POLICY BRIEFING

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the links between development and security and aid and conflict have risen on the development agenda. Donors have, increasingly, become concerned about the limitations and failures of development aid in regions of violent conflict in terms of how conflict impacts on development, but also in terms of how development assistance can fuel conflict. The 11th September attacks, in turn, have put the needs for greater security on top of the international agenda, but often focusing on narrow, military security without making the links to deeper social causes of instability.

Development and peace and security issues are currently very high on the agenda of European and African relations. Two chapters of the future joint EU – Africa strategy (and two of the eight partnerships of the first action plan) are devoted, respectively, to peace and security and development considerations. Yet, the link between the two issues is not clearly made and would certainly benefit from greater emphasis. In this respect, we would like elaborate on these links between aid and conflict and to propose a method to ensure that development aid / projects contribute to addressing the root causes of conflict.

What are the links between conflict, poverty and underdevelopment?

Underdevelopment can lead to conflict.

- It is linked to weak state capacity, causing countries to be less able to manage conflicts peacefully.
- It undermines the state's ability for sound and equitable economic and environmental management.
- It is linked to scarcity of resources (e.g. pasture, water)
- It affects demography and social structures leading to high child to adult ratios which are associated with greater conflict risks.

Underdevelopment is also linked to an increase in armed violence, even where major conflict is not present. Pressure on resources can undermine livelihoods and push groups and individuals into armed crime, such as cattle rustling, banditry and theft.

Conflict and armed violence increase poverty and undermine development. Violent conflicts lead to poverty, particularly where protracted and associated with the collapse of state institutions. Beyond their direct consequences (e.g. military and civilian deaths, displacement and injury or death of populations), conflicts have long-term political, economic, environmental and social costs. They include:

- erosion of political institutions
- reduced state capacity to provide basic social services
- destruction of production base
- capital flight
- loss of food production ¹
- destruction or depletion of natural resources

At the same time, conflict encourages high levels of military expenditure, diverting essential resources away from development and poverty alleviation. High levels of gun violence also obstruct poverty alleviation, deter investment, restrict food production and distribution and undermine livelihoods in both rural and urban areas. There is also a growing recognition – reflected in the views and experiences of those living in poverty - that freedom from fear is central to well-being and that enhancing human security is important in improving the lives of the poor.

¹ conflict-related annual agricultural production losses are estimated at 12% across Africa throughout the 1990s

How can development projects impact on conflict?

The relationship between conflict and development is a highly complex one. Experience over the last decade has shown that misplaced humanitarian and development assistance can sometimes inadvertently fuel existing and potential conflicts. Alternatively, effective assistance can help address the causes and drivers of violent conflict.

Humanitarian aid gone wrong

The classic example of development, humanitarian and peacebuilding work gone wrong is the case of the Rwanda genocide in 1994. “By and large, relief agencies had only a very limited understanding of the structures of Rwandese society and very little account had been taken of the views of the beneficiaries in the design and implementation of programmes... During the first weeks of the refugee crisis, traditional structures of authority have been used to organize food distribution and very high levels of diversion had occurred and vulnerable groups often received very little. Attempts to rectify these failings were met with sometimes violent resistance.”²

Development assistance can contribute to stability when for example states use it to address human security needs, inequality, discrimination, the political economy of conflict and paying the state bureaucracy. These priorities need to emerge from the local context.

However, development assistance can also exacerbate conflict, for example through supporting corruption or helping to perpetuate an unjust status quo. Additionally, conditionalities attached to development assistance (e.g. structural adjustment policies) can increase tensions, particularly where they require lay-offs in the public sector without compensatory measures and cuts in state subsidies for basic consumer goods.

The necessity of a conflict-sensitive approach

The first principle for aid policymakers to be conflict-sensitive is “to do no harm and to guard against unwittingly aggravating existing or potential conflicts” as well as effectively addressing the underlying causes of poverty and conflict. Development practitioners need to have a thorough understanding of the causes and dynamics of conflict so that they can design their programmes and projects in a way that addresses these and contributes to peace. This requires basing development interventions on a constantly updated conflict analysis and applies to all types of funding mechanisms, from macro-level instruments, such as direct budget support through national poverty reduction strategies, through to supporting more localised or focused projects and programmes.

Conflict sensitivity means the ability to

- understand the context or situation in which you operate
- understand the interaction between your intervention and the context
- and act upon the understanding of this interaction, in order to avoid negative impacts and maximise positive impacts³

Conflict sensitivity in development assistance can serve not only to decrease levels of violent conflict or the potential for violent conflict but also to increase the effectiveness of the assistance. Development assistance without conflict sensitivity can inadvertently encourage conflict and end up doing more harm than good.

² Joint evaluation of emergency assistance to Rwanda, *the international response to conflict and genocide, lessons from the Rwanda Experience, study 3, Humanitarian Aid and effects*

³ Further reading : *conflict sensitive approach to development, humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding- a resource pack*, Africa Peace Forum, CECORE, Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies, FEWER (Forum on Early Warning and Early Responses), International Alert, Saferworld