

On the Links between Violent
Conflict and Chronic Poverty:
How Much Do We Really Know?

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Abstract

This paper assesses the usefulness of emerging evidence-based studies in advancing the current understanding of the relationship between violent conflict and chronic poverty. Following a discussion of some key concepts, recent empirical research is reviewed. Both the transmission mechanisms from violent conflict through to chronic poverty and the impact of chronic poverty on conflict are considered. The paper concludes by identifying gaps in the current state of knowledge on this subject and proposes an ambitious future research agenda.

This paper focuses on violent mass conflict, taking a dynamic view of both violent conflict and chronic poverty. A micro-level perspective is adopted, whereby impacts on individual and household poverty, exclusion and deprivation are considered. The approach is considered well-suited to uncover the links and dependencies of chronic poverty as both a cause and a consequence of conflict. It is felt that understanding how conflict develops at the micro-level will impact on how policies are designed and how incentives to prevent conflicts and maintain peace are structured.

Three key questions are addressed:

1. Who are the chronically poor affected by/affecting violent conflict?
2. How are the chronically poor affected by violent conflict?
3. Do persistent levels of poverty impact on the likelihood of an individual, household or group participating in violent conflict?

The review reveals that hard micro-level evidence on the relationship between violent conflict and (chronic) poverty is scarce and at times contradictory. However, this field of research is growing and some conclusions can be drawn.

Violent conflict can cause chronic poverty and contribute to the creation of poverty traps, the chronically poor are likely to suffer disproportionately from violent conflict, and violent conflict can bring benefits to some groups (including the chronically poor) which may counterbalance the negative impacts.

In turn persistent poverty can create the grounds for increased social discontent which can lead to violent conflict and chronic poverty may lead individuals to become fighters as a form of coping with poverty itself.

In conclusion three main research gaps are identified:

1. Further research is needed on transmission mechanisms – for both violent conflict to chronic poverty and *vice versa*;
2. There is an absence of sufficient and adequate datasets for the analysis of both violent conflict and chronic poverty;
3. There is a large gap in knowledge between dominant macro-level policy interventions and the new emerging field of micro-level analysis of violent conflict.

Each of these is considered and a research agenda thus proposed.

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1. Introduction

A large proportion of the World's population is affected by widespread violence and instability. Most of these people live in poor countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America (Fearon and Laitin, 2003; Stewart *et al.*, 2001a, 2001b), under circumstances of extreme destitution, poverty and misery. Furthermore, conflict, once initiated, helps to perpetuate poverty, low growth rates and the underdeveloped status of low income countries: violence kills, injures and displaces people and increases poverty, hunger and deprivation. Regardless of these facts, there is remarkably little empirical evidence on the direct impact of conflict on poverty or on the consequences of conflict on people's own agency to escape poverty. Much less is available on the conceptualisation, measurement and analysis of the possible links between chronic levels of poverty and violent conflict. In an earlier paper published by the Chronic Poverty Research Centre, Jonathan Goodhand (2001) writes: "To date [...], there has been limited empirical research, which examines the nature of the relationship between poverty and conflict (and virtually no research, which focuses on chronic poverty and conflict" (p. 4). This is still very much the current state-of-the-art, though significant, even if infrequent, evidence-based studies have slowly started to surface.¹

The objective of this paper is to assess the usefulness of this emerging body of work in advancing the current understanding of the relationship between violent conflict and chronic poverty. The state-of-the-art of recent empirical research on transmission mechanisms from violent conflict through to chronic poverty, as well as the impact of chronic poverty on conflict, is discussed and an ambitious research agenda still left to be addressed by researchers in this field is outlined. The paper is organised as follows: Section 2 discusses some key concepts and defines the overall scope of the paper; the two subsequent sections provide detailed evidence-based discussion of important transmission mechanisms from violent conflict to chronic poverty (section 3) and from chronic poverty to violent conflict (section 4); Section 5 summarises the state-of-the-art, identifies gaps in the existing literature on violent conflict and chronic poverty and proposes ways forward.

2. Concepts and scope of the paper

Violent conflict is a multidimensional phenomenon, covering a range of intensities of violence from riots to wars. Each of these involves a broad spectrum of actors including victims, perpetrators, bystanders, and free-riders, amongst others. Conflict results from, and leads to, a variety of cultural, political, social, economic, religious and psychological processes and dynamics. Different forms of conflict are therefore bound to impact and/or be affected differently by chronic poverty. This paper focuses on forms of "mass violence instigated through collective action" (Brück *et al.*, 2006), such as violent protests, riots, revolutions, civil wars and genocide. It excludes conflicts derived from labour relations that do not result in mass violence, such as strikes and lockouts and other forms of labour action; conflicts instigated by individuals for self-gain that do not involve mass violence, such as crime; and intra-household forms of conflict that do not necessarily degenerate into group violence, including domestic violence and bargaining processes within the household (Brück *et al.*, 2006). The focus of this paper on violent mass conflicts is intended to contain the analysis within manageable boundaries. Other forms of conflict listed above are certainly likely to affect and be affected by the actions and behaviour of the chronically poor, albeit through different transmission mechanisms.²

¹ See, for instance, recent research programmes at HiCN (www.hicn.org) and CRISE (<http://www.crise.ox.ac.uk>).

² Justino (2006) provides a comparative analysis on industrial disputes in South India. On the relationship between crime and poverty see Becker (1967), Fajnzylber, Lederman and Loayza (1998) and Bourguignon (1999). For analyses of potential links between domestic violence and poverty see

The paper takes a dynamic outlook on both violent conflict and chronic poverty. Violent conflicts are rarely a one-off shock and often result from slower, structural processes of social disintegration. In addition, violent conflicts do not typically occur in a linear cycle, where conflict and peace represent opposite ends of a continuum, but rather coexist in different degrees of intensity in different time periods. Poor individuals and households living in conflict-areas often find themselves responding, acting and being affected by stages in-between and must therefore adapt their livelihoods and build forms of social capital accordingly. In addition, the paper assumes a multidimensional, dynamic perspective on chronic poverty in the spirit of Hulme *et al.* (2001) and Hulme and McKay (2005). With this perspective, the concept of chronic poverty touches upon multifaceted notions of social, economic, political or cultural forms of inequality, exclusion and deprivation. This goes beyond static notions of income poverty, by focusing on processes rather than outcomes.

Finally, the paper adopts a micro-level perspective on the relationship between violent conflict and chronic poverty. The paper focuses on individual, household and group interactions leading to and resulting from violent conflict that will impact on individual and household forms of poverty, exclusion and deprivation. This focus does not intend to dismiss the relevance of macro-level, cross-sectional studies of violent conflicts, which have dominated modern research on conflict, and have included important inter-country comparisons, with natural implications for national and international policies aimed at mediating, resolving or preventing conflicts (see, amongst others, Appadurai, 1999; Brown, 2001; Collier and Hoeffler, 2001; Collier and Hoeffler, 2004; Gurr and Moore, 1997; Kalyvas, 2004; Luckham, 2003; Luckham, 2004; Singer and Small, 1994).³

Micro-level analyses of conflict are uncommon although, at a fundamental level, violent forms of conflict originate from individual behaviour and their interactions with their immediate surroundings, their social groups and institutional norms (Brück *et al.*, 2006). However, existing literature on violent conflict, as well as existing programmes of conflict resolution, prevention and mediation, are typically driven by regional, national and international perspectives. These make inadequate concession to the role of individual and group interactions leading to or resulting from violent conflicts, and their links with social norms that encourage some groups to be violent, while discouraging others from engaging in violent acts (Brück *et al.*, 2006). A micro-level analytical perspective is fundamental to the understanding of the relationship between violent conflict and chronic poverty. Knowing how conflict develops at the micro-level will impact on how policies are designed and how incentives to prevent conflicts and maintain peace are structured. Within this perspective, the paper addresses three key questions:

1. Who are the chronically poor that are affected by and/or affect violent conflicts?
2. How are the chronically poor affected by violent conflict?
3. Do persistent levels of poverty impact on the likelihood of an individual, household or group participating in violent conflicts (i.e. is chronic poverty a trigger for conflict)?

The first question is concerned with identifying the actors of conflict. Addressing this question entails significant challenges given the absence of information on the lives of individuals and households in conflict-ridden societies. The current state-of-the art of conflict analysis,

Tolman and Raphael (2000) and Bell (2003). Dasgupta (1993), chapters 11 and 12, provide a detailed analysis of intra-household bargaining processes.

³ There is also a small number of studies that focus on national-level analyses (Tambiah, 1996; Varshney, 2002; Valentino, 2004; Justino, 2004, 2006; de Vletter, 1999; Westley and Mikhalev; 2002; Woodward, 1995; Young *et al.*, 2005). These studies have largely used secondary or gathered information from newspapers and media (Justino, 2004, 2006; Varshney, 2002; Valentino, 2004), or relied on highly contextualised anthropological field study from which generally applicable conclusions are difficult to draw (Tambiah, 1996; Comaroff and Comaroff, 1999; Berman, 2000). This set of literature has explicitly detailed the need for and lack of workable micro-level data on violence.

dominated by a top-down approach (driven by international and national perspectives in conflict processes), is particularly ineffectual in understanding the real actors of conflict and why different individuals and groups participate in upheavals.

In addition, there is a further difficulty in defining who the chronically poor are. The chronically poor do not belong to a homogenous group as both the causes and consequences of chronic poverty are extremely complex. A growing body of literature on chronic poverty has identified several characteristics associated with the probability of an individual or household being, or becoming, chronically poor. These include extremely low levels of monetary assets (e.g. land, salary, livestock, housing, and so forth), lack of education and inability to read or write, low levels of nutrition and generally poor health and lack of established sources of social capital, networks and political voice (see Chronic Poverty Report 2004-5). In addition, a disproportionate number of the chronically poor is often found amongst (i) socially marginalised ethnic, religious, indigenous, nomadic and caste groups; (ii) migrants and bonded labourers; (iii) refugees and internally displaced populations; (iv) disabled people or those with ill-health (especially HIV/AIDS); and, in some contexts, (v) poor women and girls, children and older people (especially widows) (Chronic Poverty Report 2004-5). It is not clear, however, whether these groups would coincide with any of the categories of conflict actors (e.g. perpetrator, victim or any other category in-between).⁴

Existing literature assumes that the poor (particularly those in extreme, persistent poverty) would mostly be victims of violent conflict as they are generally politically and socially unorganised, and are typically unable to diversify activities, or move to safer areas (e.g. Goodhand, 2001; Cramer, 2005). On the other hand, emerging studies have suggested that persistent levels of poverty may make soldiering (or violence) a more attractive means of earning a living when other (non-violent) means of earning livelihoods offer limited opportunities (e.g. Humphreys and Weinstein, 2004). There is, however, very little empirical evidence on socio-economic profiles of conflict victims or perpetrators,⁵ and certainly no known systematic evidence on the involvement of the chronically poor in the onset and/or the upholding of violent conflicts.

The second and third questions refer, respectively, to the effects and the triggers of conflict. These mechanisms often cannot be separated and may take place simultaneously. This is particularly true in the case of poverty, which can be seen as both a cause and a consequence of violent conflicts. Chronic poverty is also likely to fit into both categories. The costs and causes of conflict have played a central role in many recent studies of violent conflict (e.g. Azam *et al.*, 1996; Barron *et al.*, 2004; Blomberg and Hess, 2002; Brück, 1997; Hess, 2003). However, existing literature fails to recognise that the two are not necessarily separable and what ends conflicts in one setting may cause conflict to ignite in different contexts. A micro-level perspective on conflict processes is particularly suited to uncover the links and dependences of chronic poverty as both a cause and consequence of conflict.

Providing evidence-based answers to the above questions entails significant difficulties. The first difficulty is the absence of a conceptual and theoretical framework on individual/collective motivation for conflict participation (see recent work by Brück *et al.*, 2006). The second difficulty concerns the absence of adequate datasets to analyse (quantitative or qualitatively) the impact of economic and social shocks resulting from violent conflicts on households living in chronic poverty. Data collection in conflict contexts (even after conflict has ceased) entails significant obstacles. However, answers obtained from

⁴ Gupta (1990) suggests a typology of conflict which includes three participant types (ideologues, mercenaries and captive participants) and three non-participant types (regime supporter, free-rider, renegade collaborator).

⁵ Exception is Verwimp (2005).

empirical evidence provide valuable information for better informed policy on aspects of conflict resolution, mediation and prevention. The remaining sections of this paper will analyse and discuss new emerging evidence. Section 3 focuses on the transmission mechanisms from violent conflict to chronic poverty, while section 4 examines possible causal links from chronic poverty to violent conflict. In both sections, attempts are made to match categories of the chronically poor to categories of conflict actors.

3. From violent conflict to chronic poverty

It is widely accepted that violent conflict will affect the levels of poverty in any given economy, as well as the dynamics of poverty throughout the lifetime of the conflict and in post-conflict contexts. Knight *et al.*, (1996) have estimated that civil wars lead, on average, to a permanent income loss of around two percent of GDP. In addition, Collier (1999) has calculated, using cross-sectional evidence for 92 countries between 1960 and 1989, that national incomes following a seven-year civil war will be roughly 15 percent lower than if the war had not happened (see also Hoeffler and Reynal-Querol, 2003). In one of the very first analyses of the impact of conflict on household poverty dynamics, Justino and Verwimp (2006) show, using household panel data, that around 20% of the Rwandan population moved into poverty following the Rwandan genocide in 1994. Around 26% of the sample moved into extreme poverty.⁶ The impact of violent conflict on the poor and the chronically poor may take place through several mechanisms. Below we summarise existing evidence-based studies on the poverty impact of violent conflicts. Most studies refer to overall poverty and not chronic poverty *per se*. We will use this body of work to interpret, whenever possible, the relationship between violent conflict and chronic poverty. We have compiled the evidence under several headings, which overlap with the multidimensional, dynamic understandings of what characterises the chronically poor. These include monetary effects, education effects, nutrition and health effects, and migration and displacement effects. The choice of headings does not intend to be exhaustive and was determined by the availability of evidence-based studies.

3.1 The impact of violent conflict on monetary aspects of (chronic) poverty

Individuals and households in developing countries face severe risks even in the absence of violent conflict. These have a variety of causes ranging from weather shocks, illness, unfavourable economic changes, loss of assets and so forth (see Dercon, 2004). Insecure socio-economic environments force vulnerable people into deprivation and distress. Episodes of violent conflict tend to increase insecurity further. In particular, violent conflicts are distinguished from other shocks by their deliberately destructive nature, including the intentional destruction of survival strategies such as social networks and family ties, agricultural assets, land and so forth (see de Waal, 1997). Violence is also typically associated with the destruction of essential infrastructure and social services, the breakdown of the rule of law, as well as with significant reductions in private and public investment. Violent conflicts are therefore likely to have considerable impact on the economic position of both individuals and households due to the loss of assets, limited access to essential commodities and services and disruption or loss of livelihoods.

Violent conflicts kill and displace populations, often limiting the access of households to employment and earnings (due, for instance, to the death or recruitment of young adult males). This situation can be aggravated once displaced and refugee populations return to their communities in post-conflict situations and food aid and medical help (at least for those in refugee camps) may no longer be available. Violent conflicts often result in the destruction of houses, land, labour, utensils, cattle and other livestock. This is made worse by the

⁶ This study cannot infer on whether extreme poverty persisted across time as panel data information is only available for two years, one before (1990) and another after the 1994 genocide (2002).

destruction of social networks and traditional social protection mechanisms, due to fighting, migration, deaths and loss of trust between individuals. The very poor are likely to be the worst affected. This impact can be long-lasting depending on the difficulties faced by communities in post-conflict integration processes of displaced populations and ex-fighters, in particular those that had been abducted to be part of fighting units (see Humphreys and Weinstein, 2004). Several studies have also observed breakdowns of customary rights and rules of usage once violent conflicts start, with predatory behaviour leading to resource depletion and environmental degradation (Moser and McIlwaine, 1999).

During violent conflicts assets get lost or destroyed. For instance, Verpoorten (2003) reports that 12% of all households lost their house during the 1994 Rwandan genocide, while cattle stock on average decreased by 50%. Shemyakina (2006) finds that the homes and livelihoods of around 7% of households were damaged during the civil war in Tajikistan between 1992 to 1998. The Burundi conflict in the 1990s, in turn, was associated with sharp increases in prices of key staple commodities, as well as severe asset depletion (Bundervoet and Verwimp, 2005). The number of deaths and injuries in these conflicts were extremely high (see Verwimp, 2005; Bundervoet and Verwimp, 2005; Shemyakina, 2006), with unaccountable impacts on individual livelihoods.

Conflict, and subsequent times of insecurity and fear, may impact also on the ability of individuals and households to fall back on known survival strategies. For instance, Verpoorten (2005) reports that, in Rwanda, households did not in general sell cattle in response to conflict, as they would do as a response to other shocks (see Fafchamps *et al.*, 1998). This is because lack of safety on the roads prevented those households most targeted by violence from accessing markets where cattle could be sold, at the same time that cattle were seen as an insecure asset, likely to be targeted by violence. Households less affected by violence sold their cattle but suffered from overall lower prices (Verpoorten, 2005).

In times of violence, households tend to return to subsistence farming (see Brück, 2004a; Deininger, 2003; McKay and Loveridge, 2005). Private investment is also likely to decrease due to increased levels of instability and loss of trust. Deininger (2003) shows that civil strife in Uganda during the 1990s reduced the propensity of individuals to start up new enterprises and for those that had, made it more likely that they had gone out of business, possibly moving back into subsistence forms of agriculture. Violence significantly reduces the potential for investment by individuals and communities, and individuals and households who have been affected by conflict will tend to reduce their exposure to the non-farm economy (Deininger, 2003; Brück, 2004a, 2004b).⁷

In poorer, more vulnerable areas, or amongst the poorest, more vulnerable households, the consequences of conflict will add to already difficult circumstances. Those that were not chronically poor may well become so due to reductions in food security, following market disruption, and increased difficulties in getting to markets. Brück (2004a) shows that very poor households affected by the civil war in Mozambique were often forced to adopt very risky coping strategies that tended to reinforce their initially high vulnerability. However, war-time activity choices (such as subsistence farming) may enhance the welfare status of vulnerable households living in extreme poverty when market and social exchange may limit any welfare gains (Brück, 2004b): “Farm households in the post-war period operate in an environment characterised by extreme uncertainty, weak markets and few public goods. Consequently, their choice of activities has strong implications for their welfare. Farmers do better when focusing on known and low risk activities. New and higher risk activities (such as the adoption of cash crops) are not rewarded.” (p. 18). In addition, McKay and Loveridge (2005) report that, in Rwanda, during the genocide in 1994 and subsequent insecure years,

⁷ For macro-level, cross-sectional evidence see Alesina and Perotti (1996) and Alesina *et al.* (1996).

“the majority of households retreated into a more autarkic mode of production focused on key subsistence crops. The change in crop mix seems to be associated with the improved nutritional status of children” (abstract). Evidence on the potentially positive effects of autarkic modes of production in conflict and post-conflict situations must of course be balanced against the extent of income/asset loss due to the destruction of markets and market access. This area of research is still in its infancy.

We must not forget that conflicts may forge new opportunities for the very poor. In many instances, becoming a fighter may be seen as a rural livelihood coping strategy. Humphreys and Weinstein (2004) report how RUF fighters during the recent Sierra Leone conflict were promised jobs and money as a means of attracting candidates. Another militia group, the CDF, helped to meet the basic needs of their members and provided increased security for their families. Material benefits were generally sufficient to satisfy basic needs but not much else, which may have attracted those individuals with few other livelihood options.

In addition, although violent conflicts are frequently perceived as a form of state and governance failure (e.g. Zartman, 1995; King and Zheng, 2001), they nonetheless offer important opportunities for new classes to challenge previously existing political powers (e.g. Reno, 2002). A number of actors have used conflict and violence as a means of trying to improve their position and to take advantage of potential opportunities offered by conflict. The resulting situation is often the reshaping of relations between populations and political, military and socio-economic elites. Existing literature provides some evidence of such patterns at a national, state level (see Ottaway, 2002). However, little is known about changing power relations at grassroots level and its impact on local governance structures (see Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers, 2004 for summary of existing evidence). Much less is known about the impact of these political changes on the lives of those affected by extreme poverty and destitution.

3.2 The impact of violent conflict on education and literacy

Violent conflict is likely to affect important determinants of chronic poverty, namely education and literacy. The disruption and destruction of infrastructure caused by violence often results in severe cutbacks in a state's capacity to provide services such as health care and education (Stewart *et al.*, 2001a, 2001b). Significant reductions in social services reinforce further the inability of households to fall back on state support in times of crisis (e.g. safety nets). Reduction in schooling often has severe long-lasting negative impacts on the household's stock of human capital. For instance, Deininger (2003) calculates that an increase of 10% in the proportion of households affected by civil strife in a given community in Uganda decreased investment in schooling by about one year of schooling.

Access to school may be further restricted by security fears of families who may be worried about exposing their children to violence. In addition, during conflicts, children may be needed for other activities. In particular, older children may be required to replace adult males that have become fighters, died or been injured. Furthermore, winners in conflicts may restrict access to education for the losers by limiting enrolments at some levels of education and/or by segregating schools along racial (South Africa), ethnic (pre-1994 Rwanda) and religious lines (Northern Ireland) (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000; Shemyakina, 2006). These mechanisms are likely to have severe negative long-term impacts on the accumulation of human capital in households and communities affected by violence.

In one of the very first papers to examine the direct impact of conflict on household and individual education levels, Shemyakina (2006) calculates the impact of the 1992-1998 civil war in Tajikistan on household investments in human capital, where human capital is measured by school enrolments and attendance of children. The paper uses the 1999 and the 2003 Tajik Living Standards Surveys. The paper finds a drop in enrolment rates following

the onset of the conflict. This reduction continues as the conflict develops further. At the end of the conflict, in 1999, school enrolments were lower for girls aged 12-16 living in high conflict intensity areas. This effect results from a combination of security fears (girls in that age group were at risk of being harassed by military men) and household risk diversification (returns on education of girls became very low in high conflict zones thus households showed a preference for educating boys rather than girls). The decrease in school enrolment for girls was particularly pronounced amongst girls living in households whose house was destroyed by the conflict (by 17%). On the other hand, the conflict did not have any significant impact on the education of boys or the education of younger children. According to the author: "under uncertainty, households placed a priority on the short-term goals and shifted the distribution of resources towards safer investment such as education of boys, and protection of minimum education for younger children" (p. 26). Interestingly, school enrolments were higher in rural areas where access to subsistence agriculture implied less reliance on outside income. This result seems to reinforce the discussion in the previous section on the potentially beneficial effects of subsistence modes of production for very poor households in conflict contexts.

These findings contradict previous international-level analyses of school enrolments (summarised in Stewart *et al.*, 2001a), which postulated that boys were more likely to do worse in terms of education than girls as they were more likely to become fighters. In addition, de Walque (2006) shows that individuals with an urban, educated background were more likely to have died during the Cambodian genocide period of 1975-1978. As a result, males of school age during that period have a lower educational level than previous or subsequent cohorts. Shemyakina's study reaches a contradictory result. Although these new micro-level findings may be specific to the situation in Tajikistan, they strongly imply a need for further similar analyses based on household and individual-level information. This could have important implications for research on chronic poverty and conflict, since women (sometimes widows) are in many circumstances over-represented amongst the chronically poor. Replication of the Tajik results across other conflict areas would indicate that violence would tend to reinforce the position of women amongst chronically poor groups by denying further access to social opportunities. Final conclusions are likely to be highly dependent on specific contexts.

3.3 The impact of violent conflict on health and nutrition

Violent conflicts have a large and visible impact on health outcomes. More violent, armed conflicts often lead to military and civilian deaths, whilst most forms of violent conflict will cause injuries, ill-health and severe psychological damage to those involved in fighting, to those living in war-torn communities and to displaced populations. In addition, violent conflicts are often highly correlated with increases in infant and maternal mortality rates, a larger proportion of untreated illnesses, reduction in nutritional levels, and so forth, even when these are not directly caused by the initial conflict (e.g. WHO, 2002).

These effects are repeatedly aggravated by a variety of factors, such as the breakdown of health and social services, which increase the risk of disease transmission (such as HIV/AIDS), particularly in refugee camps (Grein *et al.*, 2003), decrease food security (possibly resulting in famines), and increase insecurity in living conditions. For instance, refugee women have higher fertility but their children have a lower probability of surviving (Verwimp and van Bavel, 2004). Also newborn girls tend to suffer more than boys (possibly because more resources are spent on the survival of boys rather than girls given the extreme economic stress on households). There is some knowledge on the health consequences of violent conflict on individuals and households obtained through localised field surveys (conducted for instance by the Médecines Sans Frontières), despite difficulties associated with research on health issues in conflict areas, partially due to the destruction of registration

systems and possible misrepresentation of politicised information on the true levels of mortality and morbidity (see Grein *et al.*, 2003).

Violent conflict is associated with the destruction of human lives. These are often young men of prime working age, though a large number of more violent conflicts have been accompanied by violence against civilians, often children, women and the elderly (e.g. Dewhurst, 1998; Woodward, 1995). The death of household members of working age means that the household will be left with a severely depleted earning capacity. This is often enough to push previously vulnerable households into extreme forms of poverty (particularly households with widows, orphans and disabled individuals), which may well become persistent if the household is unable to replace labour (see Justino and Verwimp, 2006).

Injuries caused by violence and conflict may lead to similar outcomes. In addition, households may have to draw on existing savings to pay for medical bills. In many circumstances, the household may choose to replace dead or injured males with children. Children are then removed from school, which will in turn further deplete the household's potential stock of human capital for future generations. Deaths and injuries (as well as other effects of conflict) will therefore lead to reductions in households' economic and human capital, which may be long-lasting even after the end of the initial conflict (for evidence see Ghobarah *et al.*, 2003; Alderman *et al.*, 2004; de Walque, 2006). In many circumstances, these effects may result in forms of poverty trap and contribute towards the reinforcement of structural forms of chronic poverty.

The effects of civil conflicts on health are long lasting and severe (Ghobarah *et al.*, 2003). Hoeffler and Reynal-Querol (2003) estimate that adult and infant mortality increase by 13% during conflict and remain 11% higher for at least 5 years. De Walque (2006) shows how the severe impact of mortality during the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia in 1975-78 can be observed almost 30 years later. Bundervoet and Verwimp (2005) show that the Burundi civil war in 1993, and subsequent embargo, has had significant negative impacts on the nutritional status of rural populations due to direct destruction caused by the conflict, as well as increases in food prices. Children affected by both shocks had a height-for-age of one-standard deviation lower than children not affected by the shocks. Alderman *et al.* (2004) use panel household survey data collected in 1983-84, 1987 and yearly from 1992 to 2001 to show the impact of the Zimbabwe civil war in the 1970s, which was followed by severe droughts in 1982-83 and 1983-84. The authors find that in 2001, on average, children in the sample affected by the shocks would have been 3.4 cm taller, had completed an additional 0.85 grades of schooling and would have started school six months earlier had s/he not been affected by the shocks. Although a lot of work still remains to be done, these first studies suggest that health effects may be a powerful mechanism whereby violent conflicts may force individuals and households into long-lasting chronic poverty.

3.4 The impact of violent conflict on migration and displacement

A large proportion of violent conflicts, typically revolutions, insurrections and civil wars, lead to the migration and/or displacement of large numbers of individuals and their families. By cutting off vast numbers of people from economic opportunities, internal conflict can lead to a vicious cycle of displacement and poverty from which it is difficult to escape. Refugees from conflict areas and displaced populations are found amongst those living under the most difficult forms of socio-economic exclusion and deprivation (see Chronic Poverty Report 2004-05).

Violent conflicts are often associated with large population movements following attacks on civilians: by the end of 1990, 90 percent of victims from armed conflicts were civilians (Cairns, 1997). In 2002, almost 34.8 million people across the world were forced to seek asylum in another country or elsewhere within national borders due to violent conflicts

(USCR, 2004). This has an important long-term impact as it creates a group of people who may have little to gain from a return to peace. Successful integration of displaced populations into society is a key precondition in avoiding the economic decline that makes it more difficult to bring civil unrest to an end (Walter, 2004) and that may provide the basis for rebels to recruit fighters to export terrorism elsewhere (Sandler and Enders, 2004). In addition, the demobilisation of troops and returned refugees and displaced populations may create competition for scarce available resources (such as jobs, land, assets, available services like health care and so forth). It may also create new forms of exclusion and sources of further instability.

Despite this evidence, very little is known about the effects of violent conflict on the experience of displaced households and individuals. Most research so far has focused on collecting event data based on counting numbers of refugees (but not necessarily internally displaced populations), or numbers of deaths amongst these groups (e.g. USCR, 2004). It is widely accepted that refugee status is often associated with experiences of chronic poverty (Chronic Poverty Report 2004-5). However, little is known about what happens to these people after the end of the conflict. This is because most individual- and household-based datasets tend not to follow migrants, and even less internally displaced populations (see Deaton (1997) for a detailed discussion of these problems in Living Standards Monitoring Surveys).

Slowly emerging evidence has shown that productivity levels of returnees tend to be lower than those that stayed, which may cause difficulties in terms of reintegration of these individuals into their original communities (Kondylis, 2005). In contrast, Clark (2006) argues that it is not always the case that refugees do badly out of conflict. Normally it is assumed that refugee young people without parents in refugee camps are very badly off. That is not necessarily the case in situations where they have access to different structures of decision-making often not available in their own household/kinship contexts. Clark (2006) shows this in the context of 350 Congolese men interviewed in Ugandan refugee camps in 2005.

In a pioneering study using a unique dataset, Deininger *et al.* (2004) analyse return patterns of displaced populations during the Colombian conflict. Their results show that the desire to return is very much influenced by particular characteristics of the household and the displacement process. In general, agricultural employers, in the origin and reception site, families with access to land or households with a dense social network in the origin will be more willing to return to their village. On the other hand, vulnerable families, such as households with one parent, with female heads or large dependency ratios (often found overrepresented amongst the chronically poor), showed a strong preference for settling in the reception site. In addition, households tend to be less willing to return to their place of origin when displacement was caused by distressing events. The authors conclude that “return programs should be particularly targeted to households with access to land, agricultural employers or families with strong links to collective action organizations. Such households are less equipped to face the conditions of urban areas. Return programs should also focus on recently displaced households. As the displacement period increases, households adapt to the reception site and, therefore, may rather settle in the new place of residence than face an uncertain situation in their villages of origin. On the other hand, vulnerable households or families that flee after being the victim of a violent event reveal a lower disposition to return. Policies for this group of the displaced population should concentrate on supporting the settlement process in the reception place” (p. 26).

4. From chronic poverty to violent conflict

Over the last decade a significant body of work on the potential impact of poverty and inequality on violent conflict has emerged. Macroeconomic analyses of civil war point to low-per capita income as the most robust explanatory factor in cross-country studies to explain

the risk of violent internal conflict breaking out (Collier and Hoeffler, 1998; Elbadawi, 1992; Stewart, 2002). In addition, conflict is more likely to occur in poor countries, and conflict-affected countries generally have higher levels of poverty and lower growth rates (Collier, 1999; Collier *et al.*, 2003). No consensus has, however, been established on whether poverty is effectively a cause of violent conflict, nor whether chronic poverty is in any way associated with the onset or escalation of violent conflicts. Much more empirical evidence is needed before this debate can move further.

Existing literature has mostly concentrated on two explanations for the origin of conflict. They are, respectively, greed and grievance. Although in practice both motivations may co-exist simultaneously (see Murshed, 2005), the greed explanation emphasises the role of lootable rents in producing inter-group rivalry for their control (Collier and Hoeffler, 1998, 2001), while the grievance concept refers to historical injustices, poverty and inter-group inequalities. Collier and Hoeffler (1998 and 2001) have found no statistical evidence for a relationship between 'grievances' and violent conflict across samples from over 100 countries. Using district level evidence for Indonesia, Barron *et al.* (2004) also do not find any statistical association between poverty and the onset of communal violence. Sanchez and Chacon (2006) partially confirm these results. Using district level data for Colombia from the mid-1980s, these authors show that guerrilla activity is linked to the process of decentralisation, which created incentives for irregular groups to consolidate local power bases via the use of violence. However, they found that poverty was greatly influential in the onset of the guerrilla conflict in Colombia in the earlier years between 1974 and 1982.

Other authors provide stronger support for the 'grievance' hypothesis. Deininger (2003) using community-level panel data for Uganda between 1992 and 2000 shows that lack of economic development was a key factor in increasing the incidence of civil strife. This study further demonstrates that increased perceptions of poverty by communities increase the propensity of conflict escalation between the two survey years by almost 22%. Malapit *et al.* (2003) show empirically that provinces with lower Human Development Index outcomes in the Mindanao region of the Philippines experienced higher levels of conflict. However, while illuminating, existing studies do not inform us on whether chronic poverty may be a cause of conflict and whether the chronically poor can be found amongst the perpetrators of violent conflicts.

Why would the chronically poor engage in violence? The first motive is lack of choice. Many individuals are forced into becoming soldiers either through peer-pressure (see Verwimp, 2005 for Rwanda),⁸ or through force (see Humphreys and Weinstein, 2004 for evidence in Sierra Leone).⁹ This latter mechanism will be easier to impose amongst those with the least voice. However, very little evidence exists on choice sets faced by household members in face of the possibility of participating in violent collective actions. Most existing work has focused on two additional mechanisms that can potentially lead to the involvement of the chronically poor in violent conflicts. These are social discontent and the search for better socio-economic opportunities.

⁸ Verwimp (2005) reports that evidence for Rwanda shows that "households decided to supply the labour of one person per household to the genocidal effort" (p.15), having interpreted their participation in the 1994 genocide as a state-directed obligation. Alison Des Forges, cited in Verwimp (2005), adds that "during this period when the guy with the gun was the one who gave the orders, the poor and the weak – who had no way to get a gun – had precious little means of defence except to join the strong" (pp. 319-320).

⁹ New surveys on fighters and their motives for engaging in militia groups are currently being undertaken across Africa. See www.sway-uganda.org.

4.1 Social discontent as a motive for involvement in violent conflict

Social discontent and frustration with living conditions can act as triggers of conflict. In Ted Gurr's words: the "primary causal sequence in political violence is first the development of discontent, second the politicization of the discontent, and finally its actualization in violent action against political objects and actors. Discontent arising from the perception of relative deprivation is the basic, instigating condition for participants in collective violence" (Gurr, 1970, p. 13). This can be a powerful mechanism when forms of discontent coincide with ethnic, religious or regional divides measured by the degree of ethnic fragmentation (Easterly and Levine, 1997; Wilkinson, 2004), horizontal inequality (Stewart, 2000; Langer, 2004; Mancini, 2005), categorical inequalities (Tilly, 1998) or increased levels of social polarisation (Esteban and Ray, 1991, 1994, 1999; Boix, 2004).

Participation of groups and communities in collective violence by and large requires a level of organisation and capacity of mobilisation which is not typically associated with the chronically poor. There are exceptions, such as uprisings led by Dalits in India or civil strife (usually land-related) caused by indigenous populations in Latin America (e.g. Caumartin, 2005). While not necessarily a direct cause of conflict, chronic poverty may contribute to sustain it through its association with perceived injustices and forms of exclusion. In many instances, extreme poverty has provided the motivation for effective recruitment and mobilisation of the masses. Humphreys and Weinstein (2004) provide evidence of combatants' profiles based on survey information from a representative sample of 1043 combatants involved in Sierra Leone's civil war. They find that the majority of fighters across the two factions were largely uneducated (more than 30% never attended school) and very poor (the majority lived in mud houses, indicative of very low standards of living in Sierra Leone). Many fighters had left school before the start of the conflict either because they could not afford school fees or because schools had closed down. There was a small faction of intellectuals that formed the core of the RUF at the start of the conflict. However, surveys show that the level of education of combatants declined continuously as conflict progressed.

If we take a broader definition of poverty to take into account its multidimensional nature, we may find other mechanisms that may account for the possible impact of poverty on conflict. Though not direct evidence for the impact of poverty on conflict, some literature has shown that improvements in variables often bundled within the 'grievance' heading may contribute towards decreasing the likelihood of violent conflicts taking place. For instance, Collier and Hoeffler (2001) argue that prioritising investment in education and health may signal a government's commitment to peace by keeping the population content. On the other hand, increases in equal opportunities in the access of excluded groups to education may decrease social tensions. This logic underlies the US's affirmative action policies in the education sector (see Bush and Saltarelli, 2000). In fact, some evidence seems to suggest that higher enrolment rates increase opportunity costs of recruiting militants by rebel groups (e.g. Thyne, 2005).

In addition, Justino (2004), using state-level empirical evidence for India shows that, in the medium-term (i.e. over a five-year period), public expenditure on social services and improvements in education enrolments are effective means of reducing civil unrest, as they directly affect important causes of social conflict, notably poverty. Deininger (2003), using household-level data for Uganda during the 1992-2000 period, shows that higher levels of education decrease an individual's propensity to engage in civil strife at a declining rate up to an absolute minimum between 8.1 and 5.9 years of schooling per household, depending on the specification. The impact is estimated to be greatest in communities with very low endowments of human capital. In contrast, some evidence has shown that suicide bombers in Israel and Palestine are characterised by high levels of education, which may be inconsistent with instances of chronic (income) poverty (e.g. Berrebi, 2003; Krueger and Malečková, 2003). These apparently contradictory findings strongly suggest that this

research agenda requires further empirical and conceptual analysis on what is meant by chronic poverty in conflict contexts and how to distinguish between different types of violent conflict at the micro-level.

4.2 Creation of new opportunities as a motive for involvement in violent conflict

Violent conflict may constitute a viable alternative to unemployment for many. When joining militias or military groups, young men may get access to food and clothing as well as recognition and a sense of becoming valuable which may not be available otherwise. Humphreys and Weinstein (2004), in the context of Sierra Leone, report that “RUF combatants were promised jobs, money, and women; during the war, they received women, drugs, and sometimes more valuable goods. The CDF helped to meet the basic needs of the members and provided increased security for their families. Material benefits however, both those promised and those received, were typically at best sufficient to satisfy basic needs. Most fighters were not directly engaged in the lucrative natural resource trade and when the groups encountered valuable resources, these were sent upwards through the organization. If leaders of the factions did in fact make large fortunes from these industries, these profits do not help to explain the motivations of the vast majority of combatants. Throughout the conflict, the interests of most fighters, particularly those in the RUF, remained focused on basic needs – access to security, food, and education” (pp. 2-3). Their analysis of fighters’ profiles shows that more than 60% of fighters belonging to both CDF and RUF reported ‘improve the situation in Sierra Leone’ as their main motivation for joining the militias, following by improved prospects of getting a job, more money and food in the case of RUF and protecting their families, jobs and money in the case of CDF.¹⁰

Conflict may also create opportunities for looting and creates new access to power mechanisms for the group which becomes the winner. In addition, in the context of young Congolese men in Ugandan refugee camps, Clark (2006) shows that conflict may also offer the opportunity of access to new forms of household dynamics, social decision-making and livelihood strategies as these young people were no longer bound by tradition and ways imposed by older generations. Cragin and Chalk (2003) provide evidence for potentially positive effects of job creation in decreasing potential recruits for the IRA and providing alternative economic opportunities for those willing to abandon terrorism.

In one of the only existing empirical analyses of profiles of conflict perpetrators, Verwimp (2005) shows that perpetrators of the 1994 Rwandan genocide are over-represented amongst the educated population of Rwanda, amongst those with a part-time or full-time off-farm activity and amongst those households with higher incomes and that eat more meat, milk and eggs. But they are also over-represented amongst the unemployed and quasi-landless households. In the words of the author: “the interests for members of both these groups to participate in the genocide is to be found in their respective relation to the land and labour markets. The landlords or employers had ‘something to defend’, meaning their job, their land, their farm or farm output and their overall privileged position in Rwandan society. The poor, landless group on the other hand, whose livelihood crucially depends on the availability of off-farm low skilled jobs (mostly working on someone else’s farm) and/or the chance to land rent from a landlord, were in a very vulnerable position. They *could expect to gain from participation* [author’s italics]: it has been widely documented that a large number of participants, mainly the rank and file among the perpetrators were very interested in the property of the murdered Tutsi. Among the property, land was a much desired asset” (p. 29).

The evidence presented in this section does not show either undeniable evidence for the participation of the chronically poor in conflict, or for conflict being a form of coping strategy

¹⁰ See also new work being developed by researchers at UC Berkeley at www.sway-uganda.org.

by the chronically poor. It does suggest, however, that these mechanisms should not be dismissed.

5. Reflections on the state-of-the-art and recommendations for future work

The body of research discussed in this paper shows that hard micro-level evidence on the relationship between violent conflict and (chronic) poverty is scarce and at times contradictory. This field of research has, however, grown significantly in recent years and evidence is slowly starting to accumulate. Existing micro-level evidence on the relationship between violent conflict and the (chronically) poor can be summarised as follows.

Possible transmission mechanisms from violent conflict through to chronic poverty:

- Conflict kills and injures people, destroys infrastructure, services, assets and livelihoods, displaces populations, breaks social cohesion, institutions and norms and creates fear and distrust. These effects are likely to be causes of chronic poverty, as well as contribute towards the creation of poverty traps (which in turn lead to and/or result from chronic poverty).
- The chronically poor are likely to suffer disproportionately from violent conflict due to the inability to cope with the negative effects of violence by, for instance, changing livelihoods, gathering new assets or moving to different areas.
- Conflicts bring destruction but may also benefit some groups, including the chronically poor. Conflict may provide alternative, steady employment. Successful rebellions and wars may also result in social and political gains for previously excluded groups. These benefits may counterbalance potentially negative impacts of violence on the chronically poor.

Possible transmission mechanisms from chronic poverty to violent conflict:

- Persistent levels of poverty, particularly when associated with profound deprivation, perceived injustices and forms of social exclusion, are likely to create the grounds for increased social discontent. This may create conditions for the onset of violent forms of conflict. However, materialisation requires some form of organised collective action. Although the chronically poor are not typically found to be involved in organised socio-political actions, chronic poverty may create triggers for mobilisation of masses as recruitment may be easier amongst those with lesser voices.
- Chronic poverty may lead individuals to become soldiers/fighters as a form of coping with poverty itself (e.g. Humphreys and Weinstein, 2004), as well as gain access to economic and social advantages (e.g. Verwimp, 2005). However, different forms of conflict may be triggered by different circumstances and different actors. This hypothesis requires much more rigorous testing.

Overall, the state-of-the-art literature reviewed in this paper, and summarised above, highlights three significant gaps. The first gap concerns the mechanisms of transmission between violent conflict and chronic poverty, and vice-versa. Although a significant body of empirical literature is starting to emerge, evidence is still often contradictory and scarce. The second gap relates to the absence of sufficient and adequate datasets for the analysis of both chronic poverty and violent conflict. Finally, there is currently a large gap between dominant macro-level policy interventions and the new emerging field on micro-level analysis of violent conflict. These three areas are discussed in more detail below.

5.1 Further research on transmission mechanisms

This paper emphasises the need for much more work on ways through which violent conflicts will affect household and individual livelihoods, how households cope with conflict-related

shocks and whether coping mechanisms will restrain violence or breed new conflicts. Despite important recent empirical findings, we still lack substantial understanding on (i) economic and market choices of war-affected farmers and other workers; (ii) the role of human and social capital and networks in coping with mass violence; (iii) the role of key assets (such as land) in initiating, but also coping with, violent conflicts (see Pons-Vignon and Solignac Lecompte, 2004); (iv) choices of conflict-induced refugees and displaced populations to reconstruct their economic livelihoods, as well as the links between migrants and social tensions in receptor countries; (v) the combined effect of violence-induced ill-health and death on coping strategies, welfare and survival; amongst others.

In addition to the gaps identified above, two key research areas remain thus far ignored in the literature on conflict. The first refers to the role of social protection in conflict contexts. Several questions remain unanswered:

- To what extent does social protection contribute towards keeping social cohesion before the onset of conflict (see Justino, 2004)?
- What is the role of social protection policies during conflict beyond humanitarian interventions?¹¹
- How can social protection policies help re-establish livelihoods in post-conflict situations? How do we best combine government interventions or the return of government's responsibilities with humanitarian interventions?

The second area relates to the role of labour markets and employment policies in conflict contexts. Again, several questions remain unaddressed:

- Is there a link between unemployment and structural problems in labour markets (e.g. discrimination and exclusion) and the onset of violent conflicts?
- What happens to labour markets during conflicts? What gets destroyed? What new opportunities get formed? What is the role of subsistence farming as a coping mechanism during conflict (as opposed to the post-conflict situation where some literature, though limited, does exist)?
- What happens to labour markets after conflicts? What is their role in establishing peace? Who gains and who loses?

Effective analysis of the mechanisms outlined above requires serious advances in existing knowledge on micro-level processes leading to and resulting from violent conflict. Currently, we have little understanding as to who the actors of conflict are and why they choose to join in violent activities. Further empirical research is needed to understand reasons for group mobilisation, both from the perspectives of leaders, or orchestrators of violence, and of those who are mobilised, as well as the determinants of individual participation in collective violence.

This requires great effort in linking existing evidence and literature on sociological, economic and political aspects underlying collective action, with the analysis of psychological categories of group identity and perception – which, under certain circumstances, may trigger violence – and key historical processes of religious and ethnic integration. Of key importance is also the distinction between different gender and age impacts of violent conflicts, in particular the differentiation between male and female needs in conflict contexts, between male and female perceptions of conflict and between different needs and different motivations across generations. The ability to map how different categories of chronically poor individuals, households and groups participate in and/or are affected by violent mass conflicts is a useful exercise in providing a reality check on normative conceptions of human

¹¹ A first attempt at designing a conceptual framework is provided in Darcy (2004).

security, as well as ensuring that conflict-related policies are adequately tailored to the needs and demands of different groups that constitute the chronically poor and vulnerable.

5.2. The need for more empirical work

Operationalising notions of conflict at the micro-level requires the development of new databases and new and more appropriate methodologies. One of the main challenges to understanding conflict from a micro-level perspective is the absence of adequate datasets. This partially results from the focus of traditional security studies on the state and state agency. There are also a number of difficulties associated with the collection of data in conflict areas, not least of which are the destruction associated with violence and potential ethical and security challenges to research in areas of conflict.

In addition, experience with micro-level data analyses of conflict contexts face a number of methodological challenges, such as selection effects, the fact that conflict events tend to be highly clustered geographically, the fact that many of the occurrences or types of actors that conflict surveys will want to focus on may be in very small numbers and difficulties in linking the objects of surveys with contextual information.¹²

5.3 Macro-micro linkages

The absence of detailed knowledge on micro-level processes of the type described in the previous section means that policies aimed at preventing, managing, transforming and resolving violent conflicts are being designed on the basis of very little hard evidence. There have been a few efforts to fill this gap but with little political impact thus far (see World Bank, 2005). Donors, humanitarian organisations and international NGOs are often responsible for picking up the pieces when fragile states fall into violent conflict, peace agreements fail and conflicts reignite. Some of their critics, however, see them as more part of the problem than part of the solution, arguing that humanitarian assistance can contribute towards the maintenance of conflicts and fail to address key aspects of poverty and injustice that may sustain violence (Anderson, 1999). There is therefore a good case for the development community to be more proactive in formulating adequate strategies to end and reverse vicious cycles of conflict and to build durable systems of local development and peace that incorporate real assessments of individual and group motivations and perceptions, particularly of those in greater need.

Shortcomings in current analyses of effectiveness of intervention in conflict contexts and their impact on the livelihoods of individuals and their families are of course largely due to the absence of systematic and comparable datasets and information on contexts of conflict. At the same time, existing programmes of conflict resolution, prevention and mediation tend to be driven by regional, national and international perspectives, which largely overlook the role of individual and group interactions that may lead to, or result from, violent conflicts. Further advances in the identification of factors leading to the success or failure of conflict prevention measures and their impact on structural poverty, deprivation and exclusion demand much more in-depth evidence of why individuals engage in collective acts of violence and how conflict affects their standing in society.

¹² There are already a number of useful surveys that can be adapted and new surveys will shortly be collected by HiCN and partners (for more details see www.hicn.org now, for existing surveys, and over the next couple of years, for new surveys).

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