



Conflict, Food Insecurity, and Globalization

Ellen Messer and Marc J. Cohen

For more than two centuries, proponents and critics of an open global economy have debated whether the free flows of goods, services, and capital make the world more peaceful and food secure or instead exacerbate inequalities and hardships, fanning interclass or interethnic violence motivated by grievance and greed. Food security and primary agricultural commodities have been largely left out of these discussions; the authors begin to fill these gaps.

How does globalization affect conflict-hunger links?

The first section adds a component of globalization to the authors' analyses of "food wars," conflicts where food is used as a weapon, food systems are destroyed in the course of conflict, and food insecurity persists as a legacy of conflict. For a single year of record (2002-2003) the presentation identifies, maps, and characterizes 24 active-conflict, 18 post-conflict, and two conflict-refugee recipient countries. Not surprisingly, these conflict and post-conflict countries, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), tend to be food-insecure, with greater than 20 percent of the population lacking access to adequate food, although not all highly food-insecure populations are in conflict countries. The percentage of the population judged to be food insecure usually far exceeds the numbers judged to be in need of humanitarian assistance by United Nations (U.N.) agencies and other humanitarian donors. Global openness-to-trade (imports and exports as a share of gross domestic product) at one point in time appears not to be a good indicator of conflict potential or food-security status. This one-year snapshot of food-globalization-conflict, in sum, refutes assertions made by peace-and-conflict analysts, that after ten-plus years of globalization the 2000s are becoming more peaceful than the previous decade, that openness to trade on balance is peace-promoting, or that taxonomies of conflict are productive ways to elucidate these linkages.

These assertions are further scrutinized in the second section, which reviews first, the authors' previous findings, and FAO evidence. Both show that conflict causes food insecurity: reducing availability, access, and utilization. The

developing world over 1970-1997 experienced conflict-induced losses of agricultural output of \$121 billion in real terms; and in Sub-Saharan Africa in the 1980s and 1990s, the losses accounted for over 50 percent of all aid received, and far-exceeded foreign investment inflows. Second, studies of the political economy of war, which consider (1) resource scarcity, (2) competition for land and high-value commodities, and (3) surrogate evidence for extreme poverty such as a high infant mortality rate, all indirectly suggest that food insecurity is a cause or correlate of conflict, either as an underlying or trigger cause. Third, political studies of the economic correlates of war—or of motives and opportunities of the combatants (by the Peace Research Institute at Oslo, the United Nations University, and the World Bank), also found conflict associated with factors closely related to food insecurity, for example, high infant mortality, extreme poverty, inequality, and declining per capita incomes, and intergroup competition over land and water. Fourth, trade, especially in illicit commodities, is often a cause or correlate of conflict.

Export crops as conflict commodities

Few of these studies, however, consider agricultural commodities directly. The third section reviews the positive and negative, contextualized evidence for war-versus-peace outcomes for the agricultural cash crops: sugarcane, coffee, cotton, and vegetables. These case studies show that export cropping can contribute to poverty reduction and food security where small farmers have access to land, capital, information, and transport, and education and health infrastructure.

Whether cases of market shifts and income reversals push farming populations toward conflict also depends on

what other crops and sources of incomes are possible substitutes, how farmers understand and respond to structural conditions of production and commerce, and what additional political forces drive them toward arms. In Afghanistan, contraband opium poppies proved to be a more lucrative and under-policed scenario than fruits, nuts, and cotton for

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international markets; opium sales helped fuel continuing armed violence in the country. In Colombia, a sharp decline in the price of coffee in 2002 pushed farmers into coca production, dominated by cartels, and linked to the country's political violence.

Probably the most important way in which trade in particular primary agricultural commodities has proved income destabilizing and contributed to food insecurity and conflict is through rapid changes in global markets and prices, for example, in coffee and cotton, overexpansion of production, leading to gluts in supply, with resulting price declines, exacerbated by selective barriers to trade. These jeopardize livelihoods and living standards of those who depend on income from the particular cash crops, and, in the absence of opportunities for rapid crop substitutions or possibilities for other livelihood diversification, can contribute to violence of various kinds, including genocide, as in Rwanda in 1994. But they may not be directly related to food security crises.

Peace-promoting aspects of globalization

Working against conflict and violence are global human-security efforts, including the SPHERE humanitarian project, more localized human rights and rights-based development programs that provide community-based alternatives to top-down development, international efforts to regulate trade in "blood" commodities and arms, and expanding transnational momentum for fair (alternative) trade arrangements that can improve farmers' livelihoods, food security, and access to justice.

Policy recommendations

In view of these crop-specific and conflict but also global justice scenarios, the paper recommends four agendas for further food policy consideration: first, more attention to equitable outcomes in food distribution and food production and trade programs, so that such food security programs do not further contribute to ethnic divisions favoring violence-prone grievance and greed. Second, more careful scrutiny of national marketing and financial policies that influence farmer and middlemen income, and who benefits from agricultural export crops. Third, the design of some type of compensation fund for sudden or certain "losers" in globalization, who face loss of livelihood and recruitment to violence when cash crops like coffee fail to deliver expected livelihoods. Fourth, and in sum, more systematic use of livelihood-security and rights-based frameworks that address local-level food security in the context of national food policy planning.

Keywords: hunger, conflict, war, globalization, export cropping, coffee, cotton, sugar, human rights, right to food, fair trade

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2033 K STREET NW
WASHINGTON, DC 20006-1002 USA