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A MICRO LEVEL ANALYSIS
OF VIOLENT CONFLICT

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

MICROCON Research Working Paper 1
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On the Links between Violent Conflict and Household Poverty: How Much Do We Really Know?¹

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Abstract: This paper assesses the usefulness of a new emerging body of work on the micro-level analysis of conflict and violence in advancing our current understanding of the relationship between violent conflict and household poverty. Micro-level empirical evidence on the relationship between violent conflict and poverty has been scarce and at times contradictory. This field of research has, however, grown significantly in recent years and evidence is slowly starting to accumulate. The paper makes use of new findings to propose a framework to understand fundamental transmission mechanisms from violent conflict through to household poverty, as well as the potential impact of household poverty on conflict. This framework suggests three key self-reinforcing mechanisms through which violent conflict may impact on the poor: through the impact on assets and livelihoods, through education and health effects, and through the displacement of populations and the breakdown of socio-economic networks. In addition, the paper conceptualises the extent to which poverty can act as a trigger for violent conflict owing to lack of choice of those involved, widespread social discontent amongst different population groups and the search for better socio-economic opportunities. We expect this framework to act as a benchmark for further work on the analysis of the relationship between poverty and violent conflict, including much-needed efforts at gathering further empirical evidence.

JEL codes: D74, I32, O01.

Keywords: Household poverty, violent conflict, micro analysis.

¹ An earlier draft of this paper was commissioned by the Chronic Poverty Research Centre at the University of Manchester and is available on (<http://www.chronicpoverty.org/pdfs/61Justino.pdf>) and (<http://www.hicn.org/papers/wp18.pdf>). I would like to thank Armando Barrientos for useful discussions and Tony Addison for extensive and thought-provoking comments on a previous draft of this paper. A number of ideas discussed in this paper draw on discussions with Tilman Brück and Philip Verwimp before and since the foundation of the Households in Conflict Network and MICROCON.

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1. Introduction

A large proportion of the world population is affected by widespread violence and instability. The majority lives 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 levels of poverty and violent conflict, though significant, even if infrequent, evidence-based studies have slowly started to surface.³

The objective of this paper is to assess the usefulness of this emerging body of work in advancing current understanding of the relationship between violent conflict and poverty. The paper makes use of state-of-the-art of recent empirical research to propose a framework on fundamental transmission mechanisms from violent conflict through to household poverty, as well as the potential impact of household poverty on conflict. Section 2 discusses some key concepts and defines the overall scope of the paper. The two subsequent sections outline empirical evidence on transmission mechanisms from violent conflict to poverty (section 3) and from poverty to violent conflict (section 4). Section 5 summarises the findings.

2. Concepts and scope of the paper

Violent conflict is a multidimensional phenomenon, crossing over a range of intensities of violence from riots to wars. Each of these involves a broad spectrum of actors including victims, perpetrators, bystanders, free-riders, amongst others. Conflict results from and leads to a variety of cultural, political, social, economic,

³ See, for instance, recent research programmes at HiCN (www.hicn.org) and CRISE (<http://www.crise.ox.ac.uk>).

religious and psychological processes and dynamics. Different forms of conflict are therefore bound to impact and/or be affected differently by poverty. This paper focuses on forms of “mass violence instigated through collective action” (Brück, Justino and Verwimp, 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. 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 poor, albeit through different transmission mechanisms.⁴

The paper focuses on processes of conflict and poverty rather than on outcomes. 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, economic and political capital (not just income) accordingly.

Finally, the paper adopts a micro-level perspective on the relationship between violent conflict and 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

⁴ 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 Tolman and Raphael (2000) and Bell (2003). Dasgupta (1993), chapters 11 and 12, provide a detailed analysis of intra-household bargaining processes.

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).⁵

Micro level analyses of conflict are uncommon in spite of the fact that, 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. 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. A micro-level analytical perspective is fundamental to the understanding of the relationship between violent conflict and poverty. Knowing how conflict develops at the micro level will impact on how policies are designed and how incentives to prevent conflicts, maintain peace and protect livelihoods are structured. Within this perspective, the paper addresses three key questions:

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

⁵ 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.

The first question is concerned with identifying the actors of conflict amongst the poor. 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, 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. 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 (see 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 (see Humphreys and Weinstein, 2004). There is, however, very little empirical evidence on socio-economic profiles of conflict victims or perpetrators,⁶ and certainly no known systematic evidence on the involvement of the poor in the onset and/or the upholding of violent conflicts. A growing body of literature has identified several characteristics associated with the probability of an individual or household being or becoming 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. In addition, a disproportionate number of the poor are often found amongst socially marginalised ethnic, religious, indigenous, nomadic and caste groups, migrants and bonded labourers, refugees and internally displaced populations, disabled people or those with ill-health (especially HIV/AIDS) and, in some contexts, women, children and older people (especially widows) (see, for instance, 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).⁷

⁶ An exception is Verwimp (2005).

⁷ 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).

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. 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, Kaiser, and Pradhan, 2004; Blomberg and Hess, 2002; Brück, 1997; Hess, 2003). However, existing literature fails to recognise the endogenous nature of the two or that factors that lead to the end of conflict 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 poverty as both a cause and consequence of conflict. The next two sections in this paper attempt to propose potential transmission mechanisms between poverty (and characteristics associated with being poor) and violent conflict.

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 along the lifetime of the conflict and in post-conflict contexts. Knight, Loayza and Villanueva (1996) have estimated that civil wars lead, on average, to a permanent income loss 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 had the war 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.⁸

⁸ This study cannot infer 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).

How are the poor affected by violent conflict? Based on recent empirical evidence, we suggest that the impact of violent conflict on the poor takes place through three central self-reinforcing mechanisms: economic, human capital and displacement.

3.1. Economic effects of violent conflict

Individuals and households in developing countries face severe economic 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. On the other hand, violent conflicts take place because there is something worth fighting for, thereby motivating some groups (poor and marginalised groups in some cases) to benefit from some forms of violence. Existing empirical evidence shows that violent conflicts are likely to have a considerable negative impact on individual and household's economic position due to loss of assets and disruption or loss of livelihoods. At the same time, some forms of violent conflict have created new opportunities for some poor populations.

Loss of assets

Violent conflicts often result in the destruction of houses, land, labour, utensils, cattle and livestock. The very poor are likely to be the worst affected. This impact can be long-lasting depending on difficulties faced by communities in post-conflict integration 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 environment 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.

Disruption or loss of livelihoods

Violent conflicts kill and displace populations, often limiting the access of households to employment and earnings (due, for instance, the death or recruitment of young adult males) and increasing levels of instability and loss of trust. 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. In addition, conflict, and subsequent times of insecurity and fear, may impact on the ability of individuals and households to fall back on known survival strategies. In poorer, more vulnerable areas, or amongst the poorest, more vulnerable households, these consequences of conflict will add to already difficult circumstances. Those that were not poor may well become so due to reductions in food security, following market disruption, and increased difficulties in getting to markets. 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, Udry and Czukas, 1998). This is because road unsafety prevented households most targeted by violence from accessing markets where cattle could be sold, at the same time that cattle was 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). Increased levels of socio-

economic instability and loss of trust between different individuals and groups accentuate these mechanisms. Deininger (2003) shows that civil strife in Uganda during the 1990s reduced the propensity of individuals to start up new enterprises and made it more likely that those which had already been established had gone out of business, possibly back into subsistence forms of agriculture.

In times of violence, households tend to return to subsistence farming (see Brück, 2004a; Deininger, 2003; McKay and Loveridge, 2005). 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). In addition, McKay and Loveridge (2005) report that, in Rwanda, during the genocide in 1994 and subsequent insecure years, “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.

‘Benefits’ of violent conflict

Conflicts may forge new opportunities for the 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 form of luring 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 little other livelihood options. Others are attracted by the possibility of looting and other material gains.

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 to try to improve their position and to take advantage of potential opportunities offered by conflict. The often resulting situation is the reshaping of relations between populations and political, military and socio- economic elites. Existing literature provides evidence of such patterns at a national, state level (see Ottaway, 2002). However, little is known about changing power relations at a grassroots level and their impact on local governance structures (see Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers, 2004 for summary of existing evidence). Much less is known on the impact of these political changes on the lives of those affected by extreme poverty and destitution.

3.2. Human capital effects of violent conflict

Violent conflict is likely to affect important human capital determinants of poverty, namely education and health. The disruption and destruction of infrastructure caused by violence often results in severe cutbacks in states' capacity to provide services such as education and health care (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 crises (e.g. safety-nets).

Households will tend to deplete their stock of human capital in times of crisis. 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. This effect is due to a complex set of reasons, amongst which are labour substitution effects, feelings of fear and insecurity and changes in household social preferences. During conflicts, children are often needed for other activities. In particular, older children may be required to replace adult males that have become fighters, died or have been injured. Or they may be required to become fighters themselves (see evidence summarised in Stewart et al., 2001a). In addition, access to school may be restricted by security fears of families

who may be worried about exposing their children to violence (e.g. Shemyakina, 2006). Finally, conflict may lead to changes in household preferences due to increases in economic and security risks. Shemyakina (2006) reports a drop in female enrolment rates following the onset of the 1992-1998 civil war in Tajikistan, and throughout the conflict. At the end of the war, in 1999, school enrolments were lower for girls aged 12-16 living in high conflict intensity areas. The main reason was a decrease in returns to education of girls in high conflict zones. Households showed therefore an increased preference for educating boys rather than girls. Interestingly, school enrolments were higher in rural areas where access to subsistence agriculture implied less reliance on outside income.

In addition to the effects described above, winners in conflicts may restrict access to education for the losers by limiting enrolments in 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). In some cases, educated population groups may be specifically targeted by the conflict. de Walque (2006) shows 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 the period have lower educational level than previous or subsequent cohorts. These mechanisms are likely to have severe negative long-term impacts on the accumulation of human capital in households and communities affected by violence. This could have important implications for research on the effects of violent conflict on poverty since education is amongst one of the most important mechanisms shown to aid households out of poverty traps.

Education effects can be accentuated by the large and visible impact of violent conflicts on health outcomes. More violent, armed conflicts often lead to military and civilian deaths, while most forms of violent conflict will cause injuries, ill-health and severe psychological damage to those involved in fights, 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, 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 lower probability of survival (Verwimp and van Bavel, 2004). Also newborn girls tend to suffer more than boys (possibly because more resources are spent in the survival of boys than girls given extreme economic stress of 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 Médecins Sans Frontières), despite difficulties associated with research on health issues in conflict areas and 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 severely depleted earning capacity. This is often enough to push previously vulnerable households into extreme forms of poverty (particularly amongst 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 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, Huth and Russett, 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, persistent forms of poverty.

The effects of civil conflicts on health can be long lasting and severe (Ghobarah, Huth and Russett, 2003). Hoeffler and Reynal-Querol (2003) estimate that adult and infant mortality increases by 13% during conflict and remains 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, Hoddinott and Kinsey (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 they 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 poverty.

3.3. Displacement effects of violent conflict

A large fraction of violent conflicts, typically revolutions, insurrections and civil wars, leads 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. This is made worse by the destruction of social networks and the consequent depleting of important elements of the social, economic and political capital of the poor. 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. In 2002, almost 34.8 million people across the world were forced to seek asylum in another country or within the 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 to avoid 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 resources (such as jobs, land, assets, available services like health care and so forth). This 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, the breakdown of societies and the destruction of social networks. Most research so far as 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 often is associated with experiences of poverty (Chronic Poverty Report 2004-5). Little is, however, known about what happens to these people during and after 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 detailed discussion of these and similar 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 in their original communities (Kondylis, 2005), if their original communities exist at all after the conflict. 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, Ibanez and Querubin (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 actions 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” (pp. 26). Similar empirical evidence in other conflict contexts would be invaluable for the success of post-conflict policies of reintegration, the re-building of destroyed societies and networks and the prevention of new conflicts.

4. From 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 et al., 1999; Collier et al., 2003). No consensus has, however, been established on whether poverty is effectively a trigger of violent conflict, nor whether 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 (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, 2001) have found no statistical evidence for a relationship between ‘grievances’ and violent conflict across samples of over 100 countries. Using district level evidence for Indonesia, Barron, Kaiser and Pradhan (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 an important influence 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, Clemente and Yunzal (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 whether poverty may be a trigger of conflict and whether the poor can be found amongst the perpetrators of violent conflicts.

Why would the poor engage in violence? One key motive identified by some emerging evidence is lack of choice. Many individuals before and during violent conflicts are forced into becoming soldiers either through peer-pressure (see Verwimp, 2005 for Rwanda),⁹ or through force (see Humphreys and Weinstein, 2004 for evidence in Sierra Leone).¹⁰ It is presumed that this latter mechanism will be easier to impose amongst those with the least voice, though information on choice sets faced by household members in conflict contexts is scarce. Most existing work has focused on two additional mechanisms that can potentially lead to the involvement of the poor on violent conflicts. These are social discontent and the search for better socio-economic opportunities.

4.1. Social discontent as a motive for involvement in violent conflict

Social discontent and frustration with living conditions can act as strong motivators for conflict and for the participation of individuals in organised forms of violent 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, pp. 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).

⁹ Verwimp (2005) reports that evidence for Rwanda shows that "households decided to supply the labour of one person per household to the genocidal effort" (pp.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 precarious little means of defence except to join the strong" (pp. 319-320).

¹⁰ New surveys on fighters and their motives for engaging in militia groups are currently being undertaken across Africa. See www.sway-uganda.org.

Violent conflict is never driven by individuals but by groups of individuals. Participation of individuals in collective violence by and large requires a level of organisation and capacity of mobilisation which is not typically associated with the 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, poverty itself may contribute to sustain it and may push individuals into violence 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 on 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 RUF at the start of conflict. However, the 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 on 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, even Collier and Hoeffler (2001) argue that prioritising investment in education and health may signal 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 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 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 (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 poverty in conflict contexts and how to distinguish between different types of violent conflict at the micro-level.

We can also infer indirectly the true degree of impact of social discontent driven by poverty and forms of socio-economic injustice on violent conflict. For instance, Justino (2005), using state-level empirical evidence for India shows that, in the medium-term (i.e. over a period of five years), public expenditure on social services and improvements in education enrolments are effective means to reduce civil unrest, as they affect directly the level of poverty across Indian states. Deininger (2003), using household-level data for Uganda during the 1992-2000 period, shows that higher levels of education decrease individuals' 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.

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 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 trades 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 belong to both CDF and RUF reported ‘improve the situation in Sierra Leone’ as their main motivation to join 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.¹¹

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 the impositions of 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 rent land 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" (pp. 29).

The evidence presented in this section does not show irrefutable evidence for the participation of the poor in forms of violent conflict, or for conflict being a form of coping strategy by the poor. It does suggest that these mechanisms should not be dismissed.

5. Final reflections and future research

This paper proposed a conceptual framework to understand important transmission mechanisms from violent conflict through to household poverty, as well as the potential role of household poverty as a trigger of violent conflict. The framework is based on three key self-reinforcing mechanisms through which violent conflicts may impact on the poor: economic effects, human capital effects and displacement effects. In addition, we conceptualise the extent to which poverty can act as a trigger for violent conflict owing to lack of choice of those involved, social discontent and the search for better socio-economic opportunities.

These mechanisms are based on and substantiated by recent empirical findings. However, despite this welcome surge in empirical evidence on micro-level processes of violent conflict, we still lack considerable evidence on fundamental processes linking household poverty (and welfare in general) and violent conflicts.

Effective analysis and refinement of the mechanisms outlined in this paper requires serious advances in existing knowledge on micro-level processes leading to and

¹¹ See also new work being developed by researchers at UC Berkeley in www.sway-uganda.org.

resulting from violent conflict. The review undertaken in this paper emphasised much more what we do not know than what we do know about the characteristics of actors of conflict, their reasons to join in violent activities and the impact of violent conflicts on their welfare and livelihoods. 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. The ability to map how different categories of poor individuals, households and groups participate and/or are affected by violent mass conflicts is a useful exercise in providing a reality check on normative conceptions of human security, as well as ensuring that conflict-related policies are adequately tailored to the needs and demands of different groups that constitute the poor and vulnerable.

Operationalising these notions of conflict processes 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

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, in particular of those in greater need.

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 a much more in-depth body of evidence of why individuals engage in collective acts of violence and how conflict affects their standing in society. We expect the framework proposed in this paper to act as a benchmark for further work on the analysis of the relationship between poverty and violent conflict, including much-needed efforts at gathering further empirical evidence.

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 check www.hicn.org now, for existing surveys, and over the next couple of years, for new surveys).

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