

## Non-conflict armed violence Rethinking models of conflict and conflict resolution

**Significant unrest that falls outside the scope of civil conflict or rebel insurgency is becoming more common. Such conflicts hamper development, along with other sources of tension, instability or unrest, and researchers are beginning to realise their importance. Predictive research not only illustrates how accepted and widely-evidenced drivers – such as inequality – affect conflict, but also how they are magnified in a world that is increasingly globalised. It directs us to rethink the scale and impact of what are currently considered ‘low-intensity’ patterns of conflict and the required policy responses.**

The changing nature of armed violence over the past several decades has blurred the distinction between armed conflict and crime<sup>1</sup>. Well over half the 740,000 plus people who die every year as a result of violence die in non-conflict settings<sup>2</sup>. Between 1978 and 2000, more people died from armed violence in Rio de Janeiro than in Colombia, which is experiencing civil conflict<sup>3</sup>. The global cost of non-conflict armed violence (NCAV) is estimated at US\$163 billion a year<sup>4</sup>.

Data on non-conflict armed violence, however, has been largely neglected in international policy until recently. While it shares many characteristics with large-scale armed conflict, the heavy costs associated with non-conflict violence demand a more nuanced understanding of its causes and the implications for policy.

### What is non-conflict armed violence?

It is defined as small- or large-scale criminally- or politically-motivated armed violence<sup>5</sup> including criminal violence (homicide, assault), gang

violence, self-directed violence (suicide), domestic violence and gender-based violence<sup>6</sup>. Men aged 15 to 29 are the main perpetrators and the main victims of these types of violence. Gender roles are changing, however, but women are still disproportionately affected by domestic and gender-based violence.

### Drivers of non-conflict armed violence

Some drivers are similar to the causes of large-scale conflict, including:

- *State fragility and lack of public security* – weak governance structures, corruption, excessive use of state force, lack of effective service delivery, limited public investment and limited police presence.
- *Social, political and economic inequalities and grievances*, persistent unemployment and underemployment, and systematic exclusion of certain groups.
- *Resource scarcity and competition* such as localised competition for

valuable renewable resources and struggles around access rights to resources.

- *Legacy of conflict* – some post-conflict settings experience high rates of criminal and armed violence, resulting from the widespread availability of guns, incomplete reintegration and reconciliation, or unresolved tensions<sup>7</sup>.

### Specific drivers

- *Criminality*, particularly the penetration of weakened societies by organised crime and illicit markets – the drugs trade, firearms or gangs, for example. In Guatemala gang warfare is largely responsible for 20,000 murders in the past five years<sup>8</sup>.
- *Unregulated and rapid urbanisation* exacerbates all of the above.

### Implications for development

Non-conflict armed violence destroys lives through death and injury. The increased numbers of urban child soldiers has particular implications:

#### About this series

*Horizon* is produced by IDS Knowledge Services. *Horizon* highlights emerging issues, synthesises the latest research on development trends and predictive ‘futures’, and summarises the policy implications. It draws on peer-reviewed research from multiple sources and highlights critical issues confronting development and practice. This issue of *Horizon* considers the growing impact of non-conflict armed violence on development from a ‘futures’ perspective.

Understanding our future and being able to plan strategically for it, has become a significant area of research. ‘Futures’ research and horizon scanning extrapolates from trends and historical data, makes probability-based assessments, evaluates alternative scenarios, and makes use of expert opinion, among other methods. The aim is to develop intelligent forecasts and help policymakers cope with uncertainty.



**Bishar Issack, a Somali shopkeeper, hurriedly packs up his shop in Diepsloot township, Johannesburg. Thousands of migrants were forced to flee due to brutal xenophobic attacks on foreign African migrants living in South Africa's impoverished townships. Panos Pictures James Oatway, 2008**

approximately 4,000 children are killed by small arms every year in Colombia<sup>9</sup>, for example.

Non-conflict armed violence affects development in significant ways.

- It *destroys livelihoods, infrastructure and property*. After the 2007 elections in Kenya, violence led to widespread destruction of infrastructure and property. The violence also affected thousands of tourism-based livelihoods, already threatened by crime in Nairobi and by ethnic conflict in other parts of Kenya<sup>10</sup>.
- It *hampers prospects for human development*, undermining investment in human, social and economic capital. Investment in security in Rio de Janeiro is twice that of education, five times that of health and fifty times that of housing<sup>11</sup>.
- It *drains government resources* by contributing to unproductive expenditures on security services. On average, 10 to 15 percent of developing country Gross Domestic Product is consumed by law enforcement activities<sup>12</sup>.

The Inter-American Development Bank estimates the cost of crime in Central America to be 14.2 percent of GDP<sup>13</sup>.

- Gender-based violence in particular *destroys social relations*. Urban gangs in Haiti, for example, see violence against women as a main means of terrorisation. And in Cambodia organised criminal groups use armed force to protect the sex trade.
- It *endangers political stability*: ungoverned spaces breed insecurity (such as pirate activity off the Somali coast) and provide havens for terrorist activity (the border areas between Afghanistan and Pakistan, for example).

### Do traditional approaches work?

There has been a concerted donor emphasis on Security Sector Reform (SSR) as a response to rebuilding and reconciling post-conflict societies. However, outside the traditional post-conflict environment can such approaches meet the needs of communities struggling to combat violence, in a sustainable way? Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration, a favoured

component of SSR, is a case in point. It is widely perceived that the international community focuses on the more pragmatic demobilisation and disarmament whilst paying little attention to reintegration, which is more time-consuming.

Reintegration is crucial in any attempt to achieve a sustainable post-conflict society and to protect communities from outbreaks of violence. There are elements of SSR that can help tackle insecurity and foster a more considered security environment – a responsive, responsible police service is, of course, a prerequisite to protecting communities from crime<sup>14</sup>. Researchers, however, are now making clear the general ‘ineffectiveness of top-down strategies that fail to address the security needs of communities and citizens’<sup>15</sup>.

Greater sophistication in the analysis and collection of data on armed violence is emerging. In particular, a growing global effort to collect disaggregated information – by age, ethnicity and sex – is helping to challenge over-generalisations that hinder a more refined understanding of the impacts of security issues, such as small arms misuse<sup>16</sup>.

This data shows the importance of revising traditional assumptions about the perpetrators and victims of armed violence. There is growing evidence that gender roles *vis-à-vis* armed violence are changing, for instance. In Brazil interviews with young women reveal how they assist in men's use of violence by hiding or transporting guns, drugs or money or by delivering messages to criminals in prison, or by acting as lookouts for police or rival gangs<sup>17</sup>.

### Devising more tailored approaches

Policymakers are recognising the need for more holistic and targeted approaches to armed violence. One example is to address the root causes and impacts of violence through targeted development assistance, human-centred security sector initiatives (community-based policing, for example, which has, however, received some criticism),

local peacebuilding and conflict management efforts and access to basic entitlements<sup>18</sup>.

Another approach stresses the need for international efforts to focus on conflict and violence prevention, in particular on four key principles:<sup>19</sup>

1. Appropriate scale of political attention and financial resources.
2. Sustaining action over longer time scales.
3. Developing systematic approaches to action across political, development, economic, security and other dimensions.
4. Achieving more sophisticated understanding of the long-term dynamics of instability.

This is a stark departure from the more formulaic donor responses frequently criticised for lack of sustainability.

The Armed Violence Reduction lens encourages development policymakers and practitioners to draw on multiple methods and data sources in order to plan such targeted

programming<sup>20</sup>. Possible methods and analyses include:<sup>21</sup>

- Conflict and stability or fragility assessments which analyse the underlying structural conditions of instability, institutional capacities and fragilities, socio-economic and political dynamics and key actors.
- A public health approach to map armed violence, hot spots, risk factors and protective factors.
- Governance and justice sector assessments, which can generate vital information on the role, capacities and challenges of the institutional environment with respect to enabling or protecting against armed violence.
- Victimisation surveys, security and safety audits, and small arms and multidimensional armed violence surveys. Surveys can help capture people's views of insecurity and data on the availability of, trade in and demand for weapons.

Different manifestations of armed violence – from armed conflict and post-conflict to criminal – often share common patterns of structural risk factors. Identifying and acting on

these can open up new opportunities for the cross-pollination of conflict, crime and public health approaches to diagnosing and responding to armed violence<sup>22</sup>.

The UN, through its multi-agency Armed Violence Prevention Programme, also stresses the cross-cutting impact of armed violence. It emphasises the need for a multi-sectoral frame of analysis and response spanning fundamental human development issues (education, livelihoods and social equity), democratic governance, peacebuilding and conflict prevention, public health, human rights, rule of law and access to justice, as well as security sector measures<sup>23</sup>.

In this respect, armed violence prevention programmes should be situated within a broader national security sector strategy and linked to social and economic development programming such as job creation, urban renewal, and training programmes<sup>24</sup>.

### Responses to non-conflict armed violence

**Jeremy Lind**, *Research Fellow in the IDS Vulnerability and Poverty Reduction Team*, argues for a deeper understanding of the nature of power and how it is exercised. [www.ids.ac.uk](http://www.ids.ac.uk)

Understanding of the relationship between violence and development has improved but there are still significant gaps. Recent progress includes multilateral efforts to formulate indicators and carry out rigorous analysis to develop understanding of the multi-faceted nature of armed violence, as well as preventing violence and building social resilience<sup>25</sup>.

#### Understand power

We need to move beyond a simplistic understanding of the interrelationships between underdevelopment and violent conflict and assess how

violence forms part of the economic, social and political change processes that accompany development. Development does not guarantee peaceful outcomes. Indeed, it may generate new violence and lead to new struggles between elites. It is problematic to assume that the state is a benign and willing agent in reducing violence.

A more complete understanding of governance systems and the nature of how power is claimed and exercised is thus essential for crafting actions necessary to reduce armed violence. Apart from strengthening law enforcement, this may include challenging vested interests that use violence with impunity, and their close associations with state institutions.

#### Adopt a social justice perspective

Development actors need to approach violence reduction from a social justice perspective – redressing issues of representation and partici-

pation of marginalised groups within governance systems, for example. It may also involve adopting a building block approach by learning from and strengthening effective local responses to armed violence. In urban areas, promising bottom-up approaches include citizen security, crime prevention through environmental design and the community-driven social capital approach<sup>26</sup>.

#### Prioritise violence reduction

No Millennium Development Goal deals specifically with violence or conflict, although several help reduce the causes of conflict by improving human security and wellbeing. Reducing violence should be a development priority once the MDGs have ended: there is scope to integrate the aim of reducing violence into poverty reduction strategy papers, UN development assistance frameworks and post-conflict needs assessments.

## Xenophobia in South Africa A civil society response

*The xenophobic violence against African refugees and migrants in South Africa in May 2008 is an example of how civil unrest can escalate into large-scale violence, with all the 'attributes' of formal conflict such as mass displacement, significant humanitarian response and post-conflict psycho-social trauma. Cyril Adonis, from the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVr) in South Africa articulates a 'civil society' response.*

The attacks in South Africa resulted in several casualties, hundreds of injured and thousands displaced. The government insisted on reintegrating displaced people back into their communities. However, experience in Kenya and Rwanda should have led South Africa to consider the complex-

ity of reintegration processes more carefully. Reintegration implies that integration had occurred in the first place. Yet, in reality migrants and foreigners tend not to interact, socially or otherwise, with local people.

In the absence of decisive and immediate government action, interventions were led by international relief and development agencies, local non-government organisations such as the CSVr and faith-based bodies. There was recognition that the victims may need psycho-social support. However, as thousands were left without shelter, protection, food or clothing, priority was given to humanitarian and basic needs. Without civil society, the crisis would have been worse.

### Lessons learnt include

- Local people need to learn about the rights of fellow Africans, and migrants and refugees need

to learn about the importance of more meaningful interaction with local people. This will help break down stereotypes and misconceptions that may have contributed towards the xenophobic attacks.

- A sustained campaign against xenophobia within communities, driven by the kind of activism that helped overcome Apartheid, will also help fight xenophobic feeling.
- In areas with strong community governance structures, violence was averted and integration processes were smoother.
- The government response was slow, uncoordinated and lacked consultation; it needs to be re-examined particularly in light of the positive role civil society played.

CSVr presentation to the South African Parliament <http://bit.ly/csvrpr>

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