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Some observations on *World Development Report 2011: conflict, security and development*

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Abstract

The World Development Report 2011 describes the relationship between conflict, security and development and makes a strong argument in favour of strengthening legitimate institutions to reduce the fragility of countries facing protracted cycles of violence, and moving from violence to resilience in order to realise development goals. While highlighting some of the lessons learned from the report (the nature of violence in the 21st century, the global reach of seemingly local conflicts, the universality of conflict as an impediment to development, the role of the international community, and the impact on health), this comment discusses the role of development on conflict and security -- particularly the role of imbalanced inequitable development on fuelling conflict and insecurity.

Introduction

Every year, since 1978, the World Bank has published a world development report, which highlights a specific aspect of economic development and discusses challenges and possible solutions. Over the years, themes have included agriculture, gender, climate change, and youth, and the linkages with economic development. The theme this year is the role of conflict, violence, fragility, and security on development. With uprisings in West Asia and Africa, and other ongoing conflicts around the world, it is evident that patterns of conflict and violence are changing, and that fragile states are vulnerable to conflict in the face of food insecurity, climate change, and global economic shocks.

The World Development Report 2011; conflict, security and development (WDR 2011) (1) states that peace is required for progress and conflict and violence hamper development.

This apparently obvious conclusion is supported with a very readable, methodical argument complete with well presented data, tables, visuals and reflections from advisory council members who share their experiences and thoughts from their respective countries.

Drawing from different disciplines and countries, the report first establishes the detrimental effect of protracted cycles of violence, weak institutions, and the vulnerability of communities on security and human development. It then discusses the role of legitimate institutions, inclusive coalitions and the restoration of confidence in people through the delivery of security, justice and jobs. Finally, it discusses the role of the international community in helping to develop stable and legitimate institutions to meet external and internal stresses and reduce the vulnerability of communities to cycles of violence.

New trends in the report

Patterns of conflict and violence have changed in the 21st century

Conflict and violence in the 21st century follow a different model from what was experienced in the 20th century. The pattern earlier was predominantly that of interstate conflict (wars between countries), and the international community was called upon for humanitarian aid and rebuilding efforts. Violence and insecurity in the 21st century result from intra-state conflicts between governments and rebel groups, organised crime, gang wars, smuggling and trafficking.

The impact of conflict and peace on development is measurable

The impact on development is measurable: countries facing repeated cycles of violence are yet to realise any of the Millennium Development Goals (2) and the cost of internal conflict can be as high as 30 years of GDP growth for a medium sized developing country. On the flip side, countries that re-establish peace and security show development gains, with examples like Ethiopia's increased access to water, Mozambique's increased enrolment in primary schools, and Bosnia's increased immunisation coverage.

Conflict is not restricted only to "developing" countries

This is illustrated with a number of examples from high, middle and low income countries, making conflict a global problem and not one affecting only some countries. So, while we read about conflicts in countries like The Republic of Congo, Mozambique, Chile, and Afghanistan, which are commonly cited when discussing conflict, we also find lessons being drawn from the violence inflicted by criminal gangs in Los Angeles in the US, and the protracted violence in Northern Ireland.

"Not in my backyard": irrelevant to the impact of conflict

The report also establishes the global reach of seemingly local or intra state conflicts. Violence spills across borders to neighbouring countries, and people displaced by violence disturb the equilibrium of host communities leading to a strain on local resources and possible conflict. Criminal activity used to finance conflict has international pathways of smuggling, trafficking, piracy; and areas of conflict offer criminal groups

and fanatical ideological groups the opportunity to recruit and indoctrinate unemployed, traumatised youth to carry out activities anywhere in the world. The mitigation of conflict is therefore every country's responsibility -- not as an act of altruism but one of need.

The role of the international community is more than financial assistance

The *WDR 2011* calls upon the international community to provide long-term engagement with fragile countries in the form of financial and technical assistance, as transitions can be slow and building legitimate institutions takes a lot of time and investment. However, the role of the international community extends beyond assistance and includes:

- the tracking of commodities used to fuel rebellions, violence and crime -- for example the Kimberley process, used to prevent the flow of "conflict diamonds" to finance the rebellion in the Democratic Republic of Congo;
- international cooperation in stopping transnational corruption and illicit financial flows of money between countries, and
- addressing food and water insecurity which could lead to conflict in fragile states.

The report makes a very compelling argument, and, with data and experience from a wide range of countries, offers a treasure trove of learning. However, the discussion on armed conflict and natural resources is limited to the role of extraction of resources in funding conflict, for example conflict diamonds, timber, precious metals, etc, controlled by rebel groups and used to fund rebellion.

Conflict and violence have a direct and adverse impact on health

Conflict and violence obstruct the realisation of all development goals, and have direct and indirect effects on the health of people. The report describes the ways in which people's health is adversely affected -- violent deaths, gender-based sexual violence (in the Rwanda genocide of 1994, there were 250,000 rapes -- mainly of women, but sexual violence perpetrated against men has also been recorded), displacement of people and breakdown of systems and services. The report, with the help of graphs and visuals, presents data showing that countries affected by conflict and violence have proportionately higher percentages of undernourished people, higher rates of infant and under-five child mortality, higher rates of unattended births, and higher percentages of people living with HIV/AIDS, and of people with no access to safe drinking water and sanitation.

There is a breakdown of public health services due to battle-related destruction of infrastructure and personnel casualties. Government spending on the military and armament has increased, reducing funds for healthcare, as in Burma (3). Malnutrition and measles claimed the lives of thousands of children in Somalia as a result of epidemics which spread during the conflict (4).

The report, however, is silent on the role of natural resource extraction in fuelling conflict -- between the state and dispossessed people.

Silence on the role of "development" in fuelling conflict and insecurity

After going through the report and reading the correlation between conflict-security-development, I would like to rearrange the order of the words and look at how development can fuel insecurity and thus create conflict.

The *WDR 2011* mentions the role of conflict and violence in displacing people referred to as internally displaced people (IDPs). However, the reasons for displacement are limited to civil war, organised crime and rebel movements.

People are also displaced as a result of a country's quest for economic growth and progress. This could be in the form of land acquisition and loss of customary fishing and forest rights in the wake of "development" projects such as hydroelectric power projects or dams. Or they could be to extract resources through mining. Or forest land could be cleared for plantations and factories. All these add to the GDP of the country, but dispossess entire communities of their land, livelihood and identity.

Displacement and dispossession of indigenous peoples are leading to armed conflict- whether it is mining in the southwest of Colombia, or the Pakitzapango Dam on the Ene River in Peru, or armed conflict in Chhattisgarh and Orissa, India, where state forces are being used to quell the resistance to displacement and loss of customary rights by indigenous communities.

Displacement of communities leads to mental trauma (post traumatic stress disorder, depression, intimate partner violence), disruption of food supplies, safe drinking water and medicines and vaccinations. The most important immediate causes of deaths in displacement due to conflict situations are acute respiratory infections, diarrhoeal diseases, maternal and neonatal morbidity, tuberculosis, and vector-borne diseases such as malaria. Disease risk is increased by several conditions common in displaced communities, including overcrowding and inadequate shelter; malnutrition; insufficient vaccination; poor water and sanitation conditions; exposure to "new" diseases, to which affected populations have not developed immunity; and lack of, or delay in, treatment. (5)

The report defines citizen security as both freedom from violence and freedom from fear of violence. While development is not directly defined, it is measured by attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). In the examples mentioned above, the projects which are supposed to feed the country's economic growth are in reality exposing citizens to both violence and the threat of violence (state action, and the formation of rebel groups) as well as draining financial resources -- the opportunity cost of quelling a rebellion with arms and force means fewer schools and reduced access to healthcare and safe drinking water.

If we define development as that process which enables "the promotion and expansion of valuable capabilities" of people, based on Amartya Sen's capabilities approach (6) then we need to look at the "development" megaprojects and understand whose valuable capabilities are being promoted and expanded. Certainly not those of the indigenous people who have lost their land and livelihood, who are recruited into rebel movements, quelled by the state and caught in the crossfire.

The report acknowledges that creation of jobs reduces conflict, as unemployed youth are a ready audience for recruitment and ideological indoctrination, but the creation of jobs should not pose new occupational risk hazards and be exploitative, as this goes against the spirit of development, and exploited workforces can be recruited into rebel groups. Often, displaced communities are offered employment in mining projects and factories, but these are completely alien to their customary livelihood and subject the workers to unfair labour practices. As a result, exploited workers are drawn into conflict.

In India, the under-development of remote and rural areas has been implicated in the growth of armed rebel groups. Ironically, "development" initiatives like natural resource extraction further stoke rebellion by displacing and dispossessing communities for whom the opportunity cost of joining a rebellion is very low. When there is nothing left to lose, armed violence becomes the only option. Reports from Chhattisgarh state that children are being recruited for combat in both state and non-state forces (7). One of the eight MDGs is universal primary education, an indicator being the enrolment of children in primary schools (8). Ironically, this conflict fuelled by imbalance in development, is actually pulling children out of school, further leading to a setback in human development.

The Uppsala Conflict Data Program(9), quoted as a source in the *WDR 2011*, has defined "war" as armed conflict with 1,000 battle deaths in the year. The Ministry of Home Affairs, India, has reported 1,003 left wing extremist-related deaths in 2010 (10). There is an urgent and serious need to look at the role of "development" on conflict; under-development in remote rural areas, coupled with displacement and dispossession due to development projects in the same areas, feeds the escalation of conflict.

As many megaprojects in developing countries have multinational players, the international community has yet another role -- not really stated in the report -- to ensure that governments ensure responsible partnerships with other countries, and do not participate in processes that violate the local people's rights and harm them.

Ultimately, the relationship between conflict, security and development is multi-directional. True development is more than the economic growth of a country. It should be the process by which the weakest sections of society also have the means to achieve the fullest potential of human life; and the opportunity cost of conflict makes peace an option worth trying.

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