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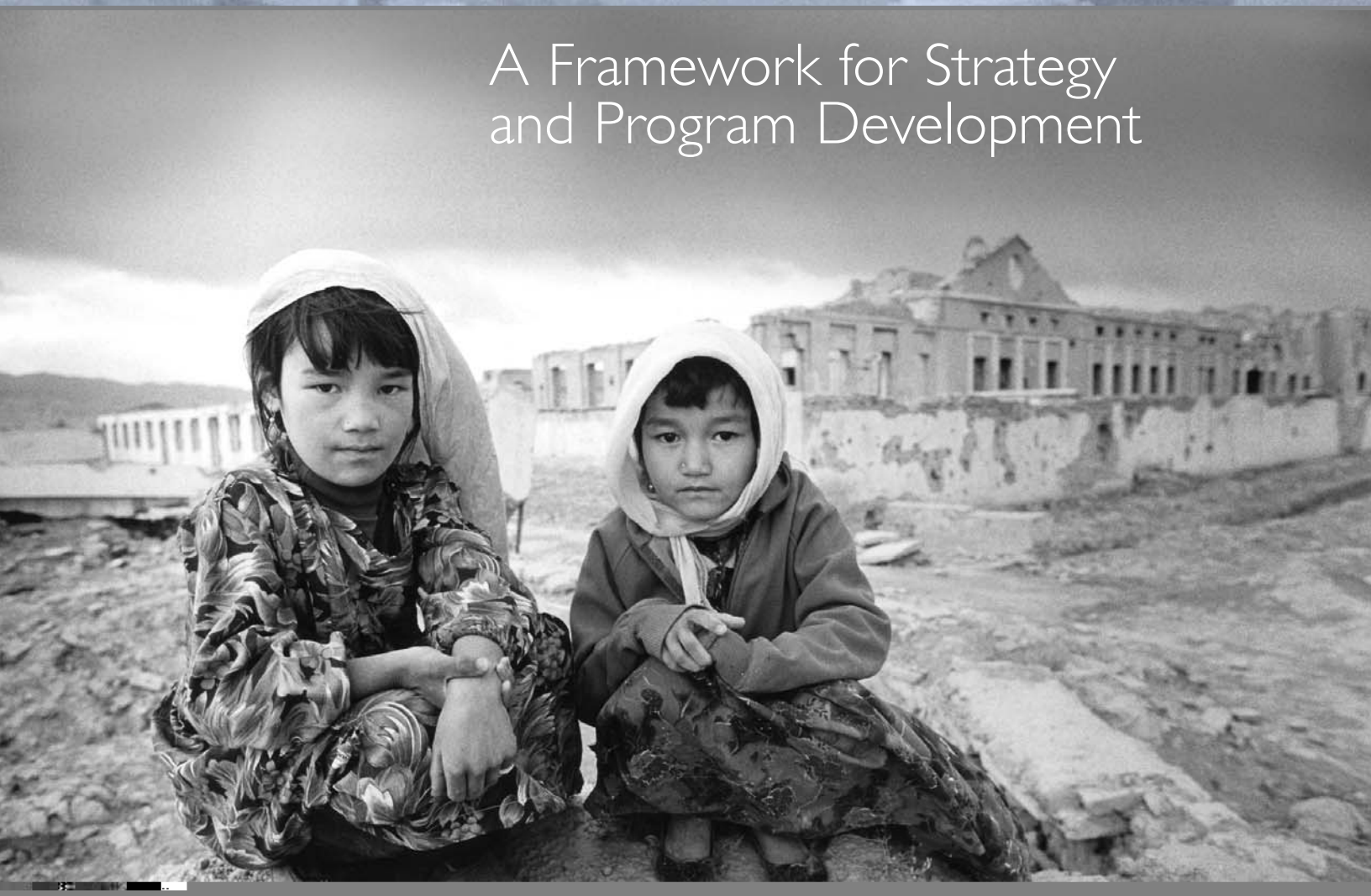
CONDUCTING A CONFLICT ASSESSMENT

A Framework for Strategy and Program Development



CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND MITIGATION

April 2005

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FOREWORD

Widespread, deadly violence, extremism and state failure affect approximately 60 percent of the countries in which the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) operates. In Africa alone, between 1990 and 2002 there were 19 major armed conflicts. Violence reached a peak between 1998 and 1999, when a fifth of the continent's population lived in states battered by war.

The pattern continues today. Violent conflicts have proven increasingly disruptive and lethal to local populations. They also seriously undermine countries' prospects for development. The USAID Conflict Policy Paper provides a number of examples of ways in which development assistance can be used to manage the causes of violence.

While USAID is committed to responding effectively to violence and its aftermath, I believe we can, and must, do a more effective job preventing and minimizing violence in USAID-assisted countries. USAID's interventions must stop addressing just the symptoms of conflict - refugee flows, famine, and ethnic riots - and instead focus interventions on the causes of violence.

USAID will seek to directly address the sources of conflict using development, transition and humanitarian assistance programming. One tool that will assist us is the Conflict Assessment Framework. This document provides a framework that will assist Missions to map out destabilizing patterns and trends, both long and short term, leading to recommendations about possible points of intervention using our assistance resources.

USAID officers must be acutely aware of the fact that stability no longer characterizes our operating environment, and that our development and other forms of assistance needs to adapt to that change. Otherwise, we will continue to see an increase in the number of fragile, failing or failed states.

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INTRODUCTION

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Attracted by the money and status of older fighters, many youth see the militia as an alternative family.

Understanding what, if anything, the international community can do to stop a nation's slide to self-destruction is critical. Internal or 'civil' conflicts have become the dominant mode of violence in the post-Cold War era.

THE DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGE

Understanding what, if anything, the international community can do to stop a nation's slide to self-destruction is critical. Internal or 'civil' conflicts have become the dominant mode of violence in the post-Cold War era.

Widespread, deadly violence now affects nearly 60 percent of the countries in which USAID operates. While conflict can be an inherent and legitimate part of social and political life, in many places the costs and consequences of violent conflict, extremism, and state failure have become unacceptably high.

Internal conflict causes tremendous human suffering with a disproportionate share of the costs falling on civilian victims. In today's wars, civilians are nine times more likely to be killed than combatants. By the year 2000, internal conflict and repression had generated 14.5 million asylum seekers worldwide and nearly 25 million persons were displaced within their own countries. Child soldiers, gender-specific atrocities, extremist ideologies, and the targeting of aid workers are all part of "new war" scenarios.

Violent conflict also dramatically disrupts development. It discourages investment, destroys human and physical capital, undermines the institutions needed for political and economic reform, redirects resources to non-productive uses, and causes a dramatic deterioration in the quality of life. In the past forty years the United States has spent billions of dollars on development programs, many of which will never come to fruition due to conflict.

The costs of violence are not limited to the country where it is fought, but spill over borders and reduce growth and prosperity across entire regions. It also has a damaging effect on global stability. Transnational criminal organizations and terrorist networks have found refuge and profit in war-torn societies and have used instability to directly target the interests and citizens of other countries, including the United States.

A peaceful, stable world order is a key foreign policy priority for the United States and foreign assistance has a critical role to play in achieving this goal. Many of the most important causes of conflict and state failure, such as a stagnant or deteriorating economy, weak or corrupt political institutions, and competition over natural resources, already lie squarely at the heart of traditional development assistance. However, although development and humanitarian assistance programs are increasingly implemented in situations of open or latent conflict, most still do not explicitly incorporate a sensitivity to conflict in their design or execution.

USAID is acutely aware of the fact that stability no longer characterizes our operating environment and that our assistance needs to adapt to that change. In recognition of this fact, conflict management and mitigation has been designated as an Agency priority and the Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation (CMM) was established to provide technical leadership to Missions, implementing partners, regional and pillar bureaus, and other USG agencies working in conflict-prone environments. A key part of CMM's mandate is to integrate or 'mainstream' best practices in conflict management into more traditional development sectors such as agriculture, natural resource management, economic growth, democracy, education, and health.

WHAT IS A CONFLICT ASSESSMENT?

Conflict assessments are diagnostic tools that are designed to help Missions: 1) identify and prioritize the causes and consequences of violence and instability that are most important in a given country context; 2) understand how existing development programs interact with these factors; and 3) determine where development and humanitarian assistance can most effectively support local efforts to manage conflict and build peace.

Conflict assessments are meant to provide a broad overview of destabilizing patterns and trends in a society. They sift through the many potential causes of conflict that exist and zero in on those that are most likely to lead to violence (or renewed violence) in a particular context. While they provide recommendations about how to make development and humanitarian assistance more responsive to destabilizing dynamics, they do not provide detailed guidance on how to design specific activities.

To move from a diagnosis of the problem to a more detailed discussion of potential interventions, CMM is developing a series of program 'toolkits' that are companion pieces to the conflict assessment framework (CAF). These toolkits explore key risk factors in greater detail, such as youth unemployment, competition over land, or a lack of transparency and accountability at the local level. They provide an in-depth analysis of why a particular issue, land for example, is so often linked to violence, lay out key lessons learned, program options, monitoring and evaluation tools, and relevant USAID mechanisms and implementing partners.

Together, the assessment framework and toolkits are designed to help Missions gain a deeper understanding of the forces driving violence and to develop more strategic and focused interventions. It is important to emphasize that the assessment framework and toolkits do not typically suggest a whole series of stand-alone conflict activities, although these types of interventions are sometimes necessary. Rather, they are designed to help Missions think about how to use regular development assistance more strategically to address many of the most important causes of violence.

WHO NEEDS TO CONDUCT A CONFLICT ASSESSMENT?

In general, it is recommended that most countries undertake a conflict assessment as they design or modify a country strategy. The emphasis that conflict assessments place on identifying causes and consequences of violence makes them equally relevant to pre-conflict, conflict, and post-conflict settings.

Even if a country has not experienced violent conflict in the past, conflict assessments can highlight potential areas of concern and can help development programs begin to address destabilizing trends before they reach a critical stage. Similarly, the factors that lead to the initial outbreak of violence do not disappear once a peace-agreement has been signed. Development and humanitarian assistance in post-conflict societies needs to be sensitive to both the initial causes that lead to the outbreak of conflict and to the destabilizing forces and vested interests that violence creates.

PHOTO: PANOS/ADLER

A 13 year old girl fighter in El Salvador poses with her rifle.

In addition to being relevant to widespread violence, conflict assessments can also shed light on the underlying conditions that support radical or extremist movements, or that fuel pervasive instability short of full-scale conflict.

While all Missions are encouraged to undertake conflict assessments, for some countries the risk of violence is sufficiently low that it may not be necessary. To help Missions determine whether or not they need to undertake a conflict assessment CMM is developing an early warning system — the Conflict and Fragility Alert, Consultation and Tracking System (C/FACTS) — that is a composite of several quantitative models that predict the risk of political instability and conflict. For countries that fall into high or moderate risk categories, it is strongly recommended that Missions conduct a conflict assessment. Countries that fall into the low risk category have the option of requesting a waiver from their regional bureau.

CONFLICT ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

PHOTO: PANOS/STORFINN

Women from the village of Kitoga have been forced to flee their homes to escape violence in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

The conflict assessment framework (CAF) presented below draws together the best current research on the causes of conflict and instability and develops a conceptual framework that can help Missions design more strategic and effective assistance programs in high risk environments

The conflict assessment framework (CAF) presented below draws together the best current research on the causes of conflict and instability and develops a conceptual framework that can help Missions design more strategic and effective assistance programs in high risk environments.

The CAF has three main parts. The first is a discussion of factors linked to violence. This is a synthesis of over a decade of recent research on the causes of internal violence. It presents the main causal arguments for why certain factors, such as ethnicity or natural resources, are linked to violence and explores interaction effects between variables. Appendix A is a check list of questions that complement the text. This section is intended to help the conflict assessment team diagnose the conflict 'problem' in particular country context.

The importance of the factors identified in this framework will vary across countries. An issue that has great relevance in one country, for example ethnic tension, may have little or no relevance in another. By presenting all of the possible factors, the framework attempts to be both comprehensive and flexible in its design and is intended to serve as a general guide for analysis in very different country situations. The team conducting the assessment should therefore adapt the generic variables presented here to the specific situation, and add or delete variables as necessary.

The assessment framework also places strong emphasis on identifying interaction effects among different factors linked to violence. Conflict is extremely complex. Even if many individual causes of conflict are present in a given country, the risk of violence will remain fairly low if they exist in relative isolation from each other. It is only when multiple causes come together and reinforce each other that conflict will emerge. Therefore a key challenge for the assessment team will be to identify places - regions, demographic groups, or moments in time - where this has occurred or is likely to occur.

The second section looks at how development assistance is linked to the causes of conflict identified in the first section. It provides an example of how to 'map' existing programs against identified causes and includes a discussion about possible interventions. Since assessments are primarily intended to be diagnostic, the second section of this framework should be complemented with information contained in the program toolkits if greater detail is needed on program options.

DEFINING CONFLICT

Since the term conflict lends itself to a wide range of definitions, it is important from the outset to draw a distinction between conflict that is a necessary, even critical, component of positive change, and conflict that ends in widespread, deadly violence.

Conflict is an inherent and legitimate part of social and political life. Democratic institutions, for example, are not meant to eliminate conflict, they are designed to manage it and channel it in productive directions. Also, conflict is often a precursor to positive change, and USAID is in the business of change. We certainly should not try to avoid all conflict if in so doing we eliminate protests that lead to democratic elections, or positive changes in the status of women, or increased economic growth, or more sound environmental practices.

The type of conflict that concerns us is the kind that kills thousands, leads to waves of

Greed, for lack of a better term, is another very powerful reason for turning to violence. Some groups and individuals, loosely termed 'conflict entrepreneurs', stand to gain a great deal of power and wealth from instability and conflict.

refugees, creates an enduring climate of hate and fear, and sets a country's development back by generations. It is easy to identify. It has torn apart countries such as Sudan, Sierra Leone, Bosnia, Cambodia, and Afghanistan, and it rarely leaves anything good in its wake. If more democratic institutions emerge, it is in spite of the conflict, not because of it. If economic growth picks up quickly, it is because all forms of economic activity were so completely and utterly devastated during the fighting.

No single definition can capture the almost infinite number of forms that deadly violence can take. It can be explosive and short — the genocide in Rwanda unfolded over a handful of months — or it can drag on for years as in Sudan and Afghanistan. It can follow a more 'traditional' path and pit distinct military factions against each other as in Tajikistan and Mozambique, or it can 'spill up' from local or regional violence in the context of eroding institutions as it did in Somalia and as it threatens to do in Nigeria.

Violence can take on an explicitly ethnic or religious coloration, as it has in the Balkans and Nigeria. It can be primarily political or ideological, as is the Maoist insurgency in Nepal. It can be nationalist or secessionist, as are the conflicts in Chechnya and Aceh. Or it can be criminal violence on a new and devastating scale, as in Colombia and Sierra Leone. Whatever the dominant theme, most conflicts take on elements of all of these trends and cannot be neatly slotted into one category.

To add to the complexity, conflict is constantly evolving. For example, diamonds as a cause of conflict are more important now than they were 15 or 20 years ago, largely because changes in the global economy have made moving illicit commodities and concealing the proceeds far easier. These changes will continue, and it is unlikely that we will be able to predict all of them. However, we need to always be alert to the possibility.

How then are we to sort through and make sense of the bewildering variety of conflicts that currently exist? And how should we go about designing conflict prevention programs? Rather than attempting to devise a detailed typology of conflicts with an associated strategy for each, a more promising approach is to develop a deeper understanding of the underlying causes of conflict and then see how programs might be brought to bear in addressing those causes.

CAUSES OF CONFLICT: AN OVERVIEW

While there are many different causes of conflict, there is an emerging consensus that certain broad clusters or categories of causes need to be in place for conflict to emerge. These are: 1) causes that fuel incentives or motives for participation in violence; 2) causes that facilitate the mobilization and expansion of violence; 3) causes found at the level of state and social capacity to manage and respond to violence; and 4) regional or international causes. If all of these are in place, there are also likely to be windows of vulnerability — moments when events such as highly contested elections, natural disasters, economic shocks, or riots — can trigger the outbreak of full-scale violence.

The schematic on the following page presents an overview of the different categories of causes. It is useful to think about the three boxes in the middle of the diagram in terms of *motive*, *means*, and *opportunity*. These are the essential building blocks of conflict. Each forms a single step in a causal chain that can ultimately lead to widespread violence. Remove any one and conflict becomes less likely. Put all of these categories into place in a region, country, or sub-region, and the risk of widespread violence increases dramatically.

Structural or root causes shape *motives* or *incentives* for participating in violence. Ethnic or religious tensions, population pressures, poverty, and competition over access to valuable natural resources all fit into this category. Many of these factors feed into a strong sense of grievance, and without a widespread sense of anger it will be difficult to move large numbers of people to fight. However greed, for lack of a better term, is another very powerful reason for turning to violence. Some groups and individuals, loosely termed

PHOTO: PANOS/CHAPMAN

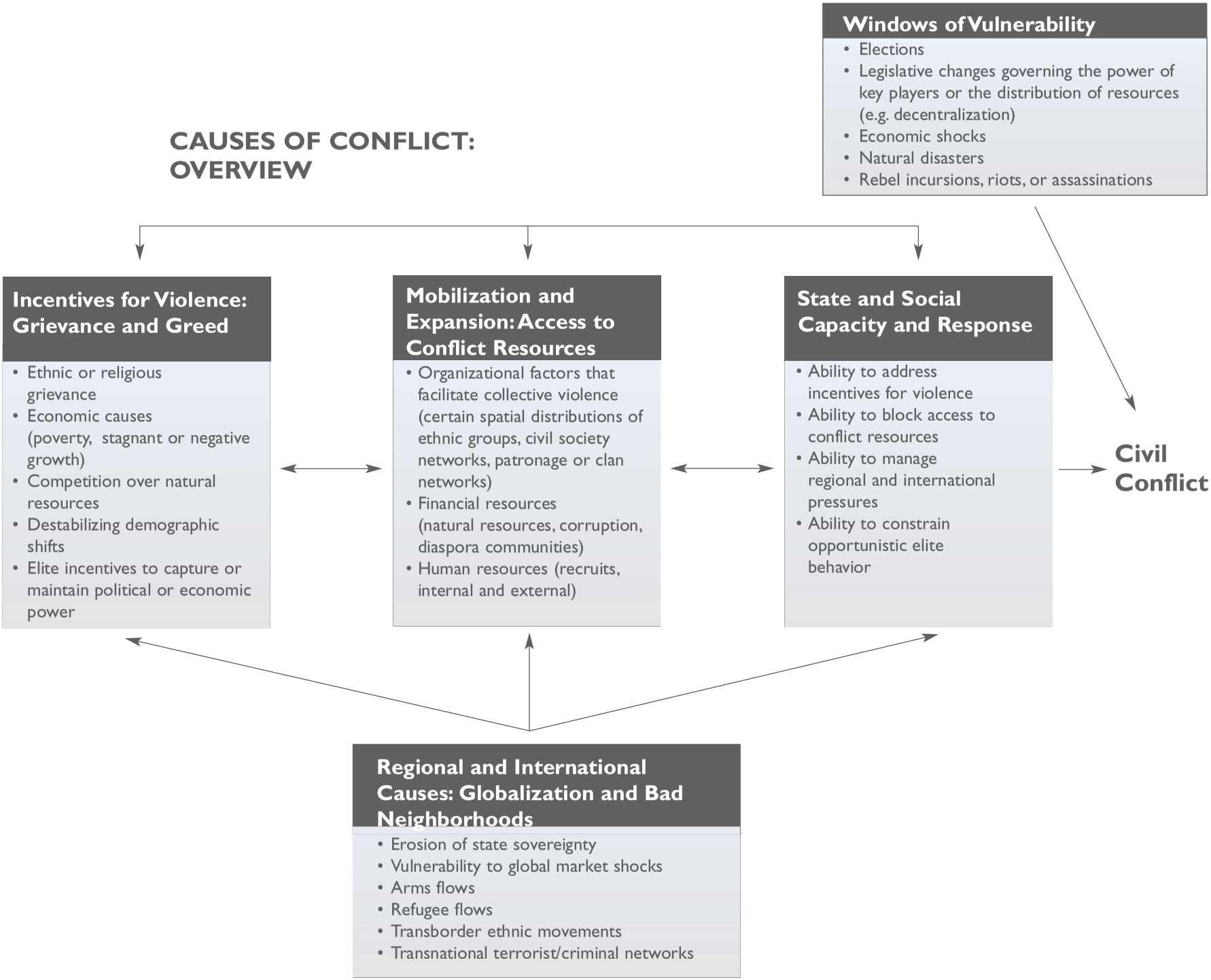
Victims of landmines.

'conflict entrepreneurs', stand to gain a great deal of power and wealth from instability and conflict. These are a particularly pernicious and difficult set of incentives to address, and they require a very different set of solutions than those that have traditionally focused on redressing grievance.

The second category looks at whether individuals or groups with an incentive for violence have the *means* at their disposal to organize and execute conflict on a wide scale. Do they have the organizational capacity necessary to sustain violence? Do they have access to money and weapons, and on what scale? Are there pools of recruits they can draw on? Without these resources, no matter how deeply felt a grievance or overwhelming the desire for economic or political gain, widespread violence cannot be sustained. Causes in this category are critical for determining whether violence will remain at a relatively low level or whether it will scale-up to more dangerous levels.

The third category looks at whether the *opportunity* exists in a given society for conflict dynamics to find expression. Essentially, political, economic, security and social institutions are the filter through which all other causes have to pass. They can either work to address grievances and be responsive to the needs of their citizens, or they can fuel discontent through repression, poor governance, corruption, and inefficiency. They can block access to conflict resources by crafting policies that limit the flow of arms or find economic alternatives for potential recruits, they can fail to do so, or they can actively contribute to conflict by providing these resources to different factions. Perhaps most important, institutions can either constrain the behavior of opportunistic elites who see violence as an effective strategy for gaining power and wealth, or they can create the conditions that foster their emergence, appeal, and room for maneuver.

CAUSES OF CONFLICT: OVERVIEW



While these categories are at the heart of internal conflict, forces at the regional and international level have become increasingly important. National borders in most parts of the world are porous and many of the networks that sustain conflict — economic, ethnic, religious, and criminal — are transnational in scope. The ease with which rebel groups can sell diamonds or timber on global markets, arms flows, refugee flows, and transnational extremist groups have all had a significant impact on violence occurring within a country. And if all of these causes are in place, there will be certain events, such as elections or natural disasters, where all of the forces that can lead to conflict crystallize and become concentrated in a relatively brief window. It is at these moments when simmering or latent conflict tends to erupt and take on explicit form.

Conflict becomes more likely when causes operate at all these levels. Clearly, the simple existence of poverty is not enough, nor are ethnic divisions, nor is competition over natural resources. These tensions are likely to remain dormant unless they are activated by opportunistic elites, and this is only likely to happen when institutional constraints on this type of behavior are weak. Similarly, without a serious base of grievance to tap into, and without human, material, and military resources to draw on, ambitious elites will not be able to mobilize and sustain a mass following. Regional or international causes often reinforce internal causes by fueling discontent, providing a ready source of money, weapons, and recruits, and eroding the authority and legitimacy of state institutions.

The following sections discuss the different categories in greater detail. As previously mentioned, program toolkits are intended to be used as companion pieces to the assessment framework and provide more in-depth analysis and program options. Appendix A contains a check-list of questions that complement the text and Appendix B provides key resources if greater detail is needed.

INCENTIVES FOR VIOLENCE: GRIEVANCE AND GREED

Structural or root causes shape incentives or motives for violence. These are the raw material of conflict: they operate at a very deep level, are highly resistant to change, and, although widespread in the developing world, are usually latent. Obviously, violence does not emerge everywhere people have a reason to fight. Nor do underlying incentives necessarily need to be deep or enduring in order to produce conflict. But they do need to exist. Understanding a society's fault lines and the pressures that drive people to consider violence as a means for advancing their interests is a necessary first step in assessing a country's level of risk.

ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS DIVISIONS

Ethnic or religious hatred is one of the most commonly offered explanations for violent conflict in the post-Cold War era. One view, the primordialist view, holds that conflict between ethnic or religious groups is inevitable because of deep-seated cultural practices and antipathies. It argues that the explosion of conflict after the Cold War occurred because the lid was taken off ancient hatreds when authoritarian regimes in the developing world lost the backing of their superpower patrons.

A more widely accepted approach, known as the constructivist or modernist view, argues that ethnic and religious identities are created: they are shaped by leaders and vary in response to social, economic and political change. According to this approach even categories that seem as permanent as "Islamic" or "Serb" have taken on different meanings in different times and have adopted different definitions of enemies and threats. This view suggests that there is nothing inherently conflictual about ethnicity or religion but rather, under certain conditions, identity can turn from a relatively neutral organizing principle into a powerful tool for mobilizing mass violence.

HOLDING ON TO POWER AT ANY PRICE

In 1983, President Nimeiri unilaterally abrogated the 1972 Addis Ababa Accords leading to a resumption of civil war in Sudan. However, conflict between Muslims in the north, rather than Christian-Muslim differences, appears to have been a main factor behind renewed violence. Because Nimeiri had decimated all forms of political opposition, by the early 1980s radical Muslim groups were the only viable form of protest and were fast becoming the principal threat to Nimeiri's rule. While interviews showed that most northerners supported Nimeiri's moderate policy toward the south, he abandoned this position as the power and strength of the radical Islamists grew. Under threat from his right flank and forced to negotiate, he began to stress his Islamic credentials by dressing in Arab garb and pressing for the imposition of *shari'a*. Moderate Muslims who protested were executed or expelled in order to appease the fundamentalist challenge. Therefore, fear of his own radicals appears to have pushed Nimeiri toward an aggressive posture toward the south.

Source: James Fearon and David Laitin, *Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity*, 2000.

If there is one dominant view about how ethnicity or religion becomes polarized and leads to widespread conflict, it is that elites foment ethnic or religious violence in an attempt to gain, maintain, or increase their hold on political or economic power.

Certain ethnic settlement patterns — where groups live and in what numbers — appear to be more conducive to violence than others. For example, one study has found that if the largest ethno-linguistic group in a multi-ethnic society forms an absolute majority, the risk of violence increases by approximately 50 percent. Similarly, if a distinct group is concentrated in one region of a country, and if it makes up the majority of the population living in that region, conflict is more likely than if a group is widely dispersed (Toft 2004). Conversely, a number of studies show that high levels of ethnic or religious fragmentation are negatively correlated with violent conflict.

The reasons are fairly straightforward. If politics are conducted along ethnic lines, as they are in many parts of the world, then the potential for one group to dominate the others implies permanent exclusion for minority groups. The opposite is true for highly fragmented societies where it will be difficult for any one group to achieve dominance. Also, the larger the number of groups, even with shared grievances, the more difficult it will be to coordinate across differences to sustain widespread violence.

In addition to certain settlement patterns being more conducive to violence, there also appears to be general consensus that the greater the competition, inequality, and discrimination among groups in a given society, the greater the salience of ethnic or religious identities and the greater the potential for conflict. For example, if ethnicity overlaps with other forms of grievance such as political exclusion or economic dissatisfaction, this is a more destabilizing and volatile mix than if it does not.

However, if there is one dominant view about how ethnicity or religion becomes polarized and leads to widespread conflict, it is that elites foment ethnic or religious violence in an attempt to gain, maintain, or increase their hold on political or economic power. While competition between groups can lead to this type of behavior, in many recent conflicts 'playing the ethnic card' has often been the result of political competition between members of same group.

For example, in Yugoslavia Slobodan Milosevic exploited anti-Albanian sentiment and Serbian nationalism in his efforts to topple his former mentor and leader of the Serbian League of Communists, Ivan Stambolic. Similarly, in Rwanda, the use of anti-Tutsi hate propaganda was a formidable weapon in the hands of Northern Hutu extremists who sought to discredit and eliminate more moderate Southern Hutu opposition leaders, many of whom were among the first victims of the genocide.

While the constructivist approach sees identity as flexible and looks for conditions, such as inequality, exclusion, or elite manipulation, under which it can turn violent, most do not suggest that it is an artificial construct or infinitely subject to manipulation. Rather, this approach questions the extent to which hatred is an enduring property of inter-group relations. This view also recognizes that once ethnicity is activated and people are targeted because they belong to a particular group, identity becomes more rigid and antagonistic, leaving little room for moderation or compromise.

ECONOMIC CAUSES OF CONFLICT

A growing number of researchers have started to explore how economic forces shape conflict, looking not only at how factors such as poverty, negative economic growth, unemployment, and corruption fuel societal discontent, but also at how violence and instability are used to gain access to scarce economic resources.

Poverty and stagnant or negative economic growth are highly correlated with the emergence of civil conflict. This is one of the strongest findings in recent research on conflict. Overwhelmingly, internal conflict is concentrated in low-income countries, particularly countries that have remained dependent of primary commodities and that have stagnant or negative economic growth. For example, one study shows that a society in which the economy is growing by 5 percent is roughly 40 percent less likely to

A Chechen woman salvages bricks from the rubble of destroyed buildings to support her family.

see conflict than one that is declining by 5 percent (Collier and Hoeffler, 2002).

There are a number of reasons why countries mired in poverty or suffering from stagnant or negative economic growth are more prone to conflict. First, it is likely to generate straightforward grievance effects; governments will be unable to provide access to critical services such as education and health care or access to economic opportunity and employment. Systemic poverty also implies limited state capacity to make economic concessions that can buy off potential opposition groups, and, on the coercive side, to exert military or police control over violent contenders to power.

The relationship between socio-economic inequality and conflict is more ambiguous. Quantitative studies have been unable to find a strong statistical relationship between various measures of inequality and conflict (Collier and Hoeffler, 2002). However, case study evidence clearly points to socio-economic disparities as a strong incentive for violence, particularly when the inequality is between distinct groups, for example if a particular ethnic group is systematically excluded from an equitable share of economic opportunity (Ballentine and Sherman 2003).

If corruption or patronage is added to the mix, particularly if corruption flows along ethnic or other group lines, deep poverty or economic decline also implies that competition over political and economic power will be seen in zero-sum terms. If access to state power is the only route to wealth, and exclusion from these institutions implies abject poverty, then competition for control of these institutions is likely to be intense, protracted, and deadly. An extreme form of corruption, as exemplified by the kleptocracies in Abacha's Nigeria or Mobutu's Zaire, has also clearly led to a strong sense of societal grievance, in addition to contributing to the erosion of state institutions.

Despite vast reserves of petroleum and diamonds, decades of fighting have impoverished generations of Angolans.

Finally, attention has recently begun to focus on 'greed' as an incentive for violence. There are many examples of leaders and their followers doing extremely well out of war. In Liberia, between 1992 and 1996, Charles Taylor is estimated to have made more than U.S. $400 million per year from the war. UNITA and its network of traders, middlemen, and regional commanders controlled roughly 70 percent of Angola's diamond trade, generating as much as an estimated U.S. $3.7 billion in revenue (Berdal and Malone, 2000).

Using a nation's endowment of primary commodity exports as a proxy measure for 'lootable' natural resources, such as diamonds or timber, scholars have found a strong, positive correlation between primary commodity exports and an increased risk of civil conflict. In fact, nations with a quarter of their national income deriving from this source had a risk of conflict roughly five times greater than nations without this level of dependence (Collier et al 2003).

Apart from the high stakes world associated with controlling valuable natural commodities, micro-level economic incentives also contribute to conflict. In separate studies of the Balkans, Susan Woodward (1995) and John Mueller (2000) point to a common theme in many conflicts; that is, the participation of young men who view the theft, smuggling, and banditry that accompany violence as a route to status and personal enrichment.

'War economies' or the cluster of economic activities that feed into and flow out of conflict, require an extremely high level of instability to function and have a corrosive effect on state institutions. In many countries where state control over territory or economic activity is weak, autonomous power centers have emerged and have challenged the authority of the state. The more informal the nature of pre-

existing local political and economic transactions, the easier it is for these actors to capture them and use them to pursue their own economic agendas, as has happened, for example, in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

While it is difficult to disentangle whether greed-based incentives cause conflict or merely sustain it once it is underway, many analysts recognize their importance, particularly in the context of weak or eroding state institutions.

NATURAL RESOURCES AND CONFLICT

The idea that natural resource degradation and competition is linked to deadly conflict has received a great deal of attention over the past decade. In addition to the inherent plausibility of the idea, a number of well-respected authors have painted a devastating picture of future conflict based on competition over a dwindling pool of natural resources.

There are three broad arguments that link natural resources to conflict. The first, advanced by Thomas Homer Dixon, argues that environmental scarcity leads to a host of political and social ills that fuel conflict, including population transfers, weakened state institutions, and a heightened sense of grievance. For example, under conditions of scarcity, he argues that elites will "capture" valuable resources, marginalizing powerless groups. Denied access to the resources they need, these groups are then forced to migrate to other ecologically sensitive areas.

In addition, scarcity can reduce a state's ability to respond to the needs of its population, by draining resources away from sectors such as education and creating situations where innovative responses to environmental crises are overwhelmed by the need to simply survive. Taken together, these effects of scarcity deepen poverty, lead to significant declines in agricultural production, generate destabilizing population transfers, and aggravate tensions along ethnic, racial, or religious lines.

After nearly a decade of research, systematic evidence for a direct connection between environment scarcity and widespread conflict is limited. There is support for a connection between environmental scarcity and *low* levels of violence (Hauge and Ellingson, 2001). However the bulk of the evidence shows that while resource degradation is sometimes linked to widespread conflict, state capacity to respond effectively to environmental crisis is an important intervening factor.

For example, in the early 1990s El Nino-driven droughts were projected for Brazil and Zimbabwe. Expected declines in agricultural production were estimated to roughly similar for both countries, however, Brazil suffered relatively insignificant losses while Zimbabwe lost 80 percent of its maize crop. The difference can be attributed to state response. Acting quickly on the knowledge, officials in Brazil implemented strategies designed to minimize the damage. Officials in Zimbabwe never acted on the information.

The second broad approach focuses on the political economy of natural resource control. It begins with the assumption that natural resources - renewable not, degraded or not, scarce or not - represent an important source of wealth and power in developing countries. It then examines patterns of competition over the control of critical resources such as land, water, timber, oil and valuable minerals.

For example, Jack Goldstone (2001) argues that political competition between elite factions lies at the heart of conflict over resources, rather than scarcity. In Kenya, Zimbabwe, and South Africa, for example, he contends that land simply represents one particularly lucrative prize in an elite competition that is driven by political factors. In these and other cases, land represented an important tool in the hands of elites, either as a reward for support (as in Zimbabwe) or as a powerful psychological weapon, as it was in the hands of Milosevic who gained strong support among the Serb population for his stance on 'sacred' Serbian spaces in Kosovo.

The third approach focuses on the negative political and economic effects of

WAR AND DRUGS IN AFGHANISTAN

Drug trafficking has proven to be a crucial source of revenue for rebel groups, terrorist networks, and rogue governments. In Afghanistan, for example, revenues from opium helped to finance the war against the Soviets in the 1980s. It also has been linked to terrorist financing. Despite the fact that the Taliban government banned opium growth and distribution, Afghanistan became home to an elaborate global system of trade and production, making it the largest source of opium in the world. Although the ban led to an increase in opium prices within Afghanistan, the distribution of opium from stockpiles controlled by independent drug traffickers along the borders ensured ready availability and low prices outside the country. Revenue from this trade enabled the Taliban to continue to finance their control of the country and support terrorist activities.

Source: Tim Golden, *A Nation Challenged: War and Drugs*, 2001.

A large pool of young people does not need to be destabilizing, however if young people — particularly young men — are uprooted, jobless, intolerant, alienated and with few opportunities for positive engagement, they represent a ready pool of recruits for ethnic, religious, and political extremists seeking to mobilize violence.

over-dependence on natural resources, what is know as the 'resource curse'. Numerous studies show that, paradoxically, most natural resource-rich countries consistently under-perform relative to countries with fewer natural resources. Abundant revenues from natural resources can destabilize exchange rates and weaken other sectors of the economy through currency appreciation. Similarly, these types of economic ventures rarely produce large scale employment.

Perhaps the most destabilizing effects, however, are political. Political leaders sitting on top of massive oil revenues have little incentive to share power. They are able to buy loyalty rather than having to earn it through transparent and accountable governance and competitive elections. The exclusion of distinct groups from sharing in the benefits, such as the Ogoni and Ijaw in the Niger Delta, or the Papuans and Achenese in Indonesia, often prompts violent resistance.

DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFTS

Population growth by itself is not a cause of widespread conflict. However, there are several specific demographic shifts that bear close monitoring. These are:

1. An expanding agrarian population where arable land is scarce or controlled by large landholders;

2. An expanding urban population in the context of economic stagnation or decline;

3. Rapid increases in young, educated professionals who have no opportunities for political or economic advancement;

4. The presence of a 'youth bulge', or a disproportionate share of 15 to 25 year-olds relative to the adult population; and

5. The migration of distinct groups into regions already settled by groups with a strong sense of identity, or demographic shifts between these groups.

What is common to all of these, and what makes them so destabilizing, is the fact that population growth or demographic change is not matched by an increase in the absorptive capacity of state or society.

There is a strong correlation between large youth cohorts and political violence. A large pool of young people does not need to be destabilizing, however if young people — particularly young men — are uprooted, jobless, intolerant, alienated and with few opportunities for positive engagement, they represent a ready pool of recruits for ethnic, religious, and political extremists seeking to mobilize violence. The Political Instability Task Force found that the presence of large youth cohorts (an unusually high proportion of youths age fifteen to twenty-five relative to the total population) was a major factor in ethnic conflict. (Esty et al 2002)

Another particularly salient demographic shift is the rapid transfer of rural populations to urban areas. The growth of urban centers over the last several decades has been unprecedented. The quality of life in many of the world's cities is becoming worse: polluted air, filthy water, and inadequate sanitation affect hundreds of millions of the world's urban inhabitants. Whether or not rapid rates of urbanization are linked to conflict depend on a state's ability or willingness to implement municipal policies that improve public welfare and rates of economic growth. Where urban growth is not matched by an increase in economic growth, the risk of conflict increases. For example, Sub-Saharan African countries with high rates of urbanization but below average GDP growth are at twice the risk of political conflict as African countries with above average per capita GDP growth.

Without economic opportunity, and in combination with appalling living conditions, the vast slums that grow up around major urban centers are a fertile recruiting ground for extremist ethnic or religious ideologues. One of the factors leading to the 1975-6 civil war in Lebanon, for example, was the presence of a large, young, unemployed Shiite population living in sprawling slums around Lebanon's major cities. These young people represented a pool of recruits for radical political parties including the Shiite Movement of the

Deprived and the Islamic Liberation Party. Similarly, in Haiti, rural farmers driven off their land by environmental degradation migrated to cities such as Port-au-Prince. During his first election campaign, Jean Bertrand Aristide reportedly encouraged slum dwellers to attack Haiti's elite, leading to a violent backlash by Haiti's military.

INCENTIVES FOR VIOLENCE: INTERACTION EFFECTS

All of the causes discussed in this section have the potential to interact and multiply up. Environmental degradation can deepen poverty and fuel ethnic tensions. Ethnic tensions can overlay economic and political marginalization. Rapid population growth can lead to large pools of young people, and slow or negative economic growth can leave this demographic group highly vulnerable to political elites who promise them financial gain for participation in violence.

Understanding the mix of incentives for violence can yield important information about the potential for conflict, and what conflict might look like if it emerges. Incentives for violence can tell us something about which types of groups might mobilize, along what lines of division, and in what numbers. It can also tell us something about the location, scope, and character of violence. Attempts to capture and control pockets of valuable natural resources will look very different from attempts to capture and control a state, which will in turn look quite different from attempts by an ethnic group to secede. Incentives for violence can therefore provide information about the goal of violence, which can also provide information about the level of resources that will be necessary to achieve that goal.

The assessment team should use the preceding section to identify actors and groups who might face an incentive to turn to violence. However, incentives for violence are not enough. As long as those who are motivated by either grievance or greed do not organize and mobilize along pertinent lines of division, incentives for conflict are likely to remain localized or dormant. To move to violence, groups and individuals must be able to organize and acquire the resources they need to sustain violence. The following section turns to the next step in the chain — the ability to mobilize and sustain violence over the long haul.

TRANSMIGRATION IN INDONESIA

In Indonesia, the transmigration program launched by the Suharto government is one of the root causes driving recent massacres of migrant Madurese by indigenous Dayaks. Traditionally the majority in Central and West Kalimantan, Dayaks have seen their political and economic position erode since the program was launched in the early 1980s. While the massacres have been painted as 'spontaneous' uprisings in many accounts, there is evidence to suggest that local Dayaks used anti-Madurese rhetoric as a means of garnering support for their political ambitions.

Source: International Crisis Group, *Asia Report No. 18*, 27 June 2001

PHOTO: PANOS/BONET

Up to two million people have fled their homes in Darfur following violent attacks by Janjaweed Arab militants.

2 MOBILIZATION AND EXPANSION: ACCESS TO CONFLICT RESOURCES

While certain groups may have an incentive for violence, the question remains as to whether they have the means to do so. Do these groups have the organizational capacity necessary to sustain violence? Do they have access to money and weapons, and on what scale? Do they have international backers? Are there pools of recruits they can draw on? Without these resources, no matter how deeply felt a grievance or overwhelming the desire for economic or political gain, incentives for violence cannot find expression. The second major category therefore focuses on whether people with incentives for violence have access to the resources they need to turn that incentive into sustained violence.

ORGANIZATIONS AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

Certain types of organizational structures are critical to sustaining widespread violence. Their importance turns not only on their ability to forge a sense of solidarity and articulate group goals, but also on their ability to monitor the behavior of individuals who are part of the group. Participation in violence carries heavy physical and emotional costs. No matter how strong the incentive, most people would rather see others do the dirty work and share in whatever rewards violence will bring. The difficulty from the perspective of those who are seeking to change the existing political or economic order is finding out how to overcome this problem, often referred to as a coordination or collective action problem.

One reason why ethnically or regionally based violence is so common is that these

types of groups are able to overcome barriers to collective action. People in the same ethnic, religious, or regional group know each other; they are embedded in dense social networks where behavior can be easily monitored, information quickly gathered and shared, and sanctions for not participating put into place. While ethnic communities may be ideally suited to performing this role, patronage networks, clan structures, and even civil society groups can fill the same role.

For example, one factor that appears to have facilitated the genocide in Rwanda was the dense, hierarchical network of associations that organized virtually every aspect of life from the highest government levels down to hillside villages. When Hutu extremists decided to launch the genocide, these groups made it easy to get the message out about what was to be done, who was to be killed, and most importantly, who was or was not participating in the 'work' of killing. When the price for not participating was the threat of punishment by roving bands of *Interahamwe*, many were left with little real choice. This is not to excuse what happened, merely to point out the importance of the ability to monitor and sanction behavior at the micro-level.

Another characteristic that appears to make these types of organizational structures particularly effective in mobilizing violence is that in places where the state is weak, they provide critical social services such as paying for weddings and funerals and helping to secure employment. They therefore engender strong loyalty.

This discussion points to the importance of determining whether groups in a society reinforce or bridge lines of division. In a study of urban violence in India, Ashutosh Varshney (2002) found that multi-ethnic associations, such as trade unions, professional organizations, and political parties, played an active role in countering damaging rumors, improving communication, and exerting pressure on violent elements at the local level. Communities that had these types of associations were more peaceful than communities in which Hindus and Muslims interacted together in daily life but where associations bridging ethnic divides were weak or absent. The most vulnerable communities were those where Hindus and Muslims had little interaction, either on a neighborhood or associational level.

FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Sustained violence also requires access to significant financial resources. The section on 'war economies' suggested that the desire to capture and control valuable natural resources or engage in other forms of illegal economic activity may provide an incentive to initiate violence, but the resources that derive from these activities may also sustain violence once underway.

In many recent conflicts, the income deriving from the capture and control of valuable primary commodities has played a critical role in purchasing weapons, paying recruits, and buying the compliance of corrupt government officials. International attention has recently focused on a number of high-value, low weight commodities such as diamonds, coltan and drugs. For example, the Armed Revolutionary Forces of Columbia (FARC) has been able to collect substantial revenues by imposing taxes on coca producers operating in areas under their control, revenues then used to prosecute the war effort. It is also apparent that diamonds not only helped finance the Revolutionary United Front's (RUF) bloody reign of terror in Sierra Leone, but have also been a major source of income for the al Qaeda network and other terrorist groups.

Another important source of financing appears to come from diaspora communities, particularly those located in the west who are relatively better off than their counterparts in the developing world. The Tamil separatists in Sri Lanka, for example, sustained nearly 20 years of civil war in a resource poor country by tapping into an extensive network of Tamil communities in North America, Europe, and Asia who

In many recent conflicts, the income deriving from the capture and control of valuable primary commodities has played a critical role in purchasing weapons, paying recruits, and buying the compliance of corrupt government officials.

provided funds to procure weapons, communications, and other equipment and supplies.

Straight-forward looting, smuggling, kidnapping and banditry have also made violence profitable. In Nepal, the Maoist insurgency has primarily been financed through bank-robberies and extortion. A disturbing new trend is the use of kidnapping - of both tourists and employees of major multinational corporations - to gain large ransom payments. Finally, the control of international borders can lead to lucrative smuggling opportunities.

It is important to keep in mind that motivated groups are likely to be extremely creative in their search for financing. If natural resources are not available or if resources from diaspora communities are blocked through international sanctions, for example, highly committed groups are likely to turn to other avenues. It is also important to keep in mind the role that state actors play in providing financing for violence.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Another important resource, touched on briefly in the preceding section, concerns the availability of recruits, particularly young people. Understanding why young people choose to participate in violence is a critical part of conducting a conflict assessment and suggesting appropriate interventions. Most analyses have focused on economic incentives. It is certainly true that a lack of economic opportunity is a strong motivation for this group to engage in violence. Young people often join extremist organizations because they provide immediate economic benefits, because violence itself offers opportunities for economic gain (through direct payment or looting), or because conflict promises to open up longer term economic options (for example, through patronage if 'their' ethnic or religious group captures power).

Another reason is that there are often very few opportunities for political engagement open to young people, particularly for those with little education or few personal connections. In the absence of constructive opportunities, young people are often used by political parties and other social movements to intimidate rivals and destabilize opponents. While sometimes these young people are paid, often they participate because doing so gives them some measure of voice in a system that offers no other opportunities. For example, some of the most ardent supporters of the Maoist insurgency in Nepal are young women who have been given a level of authority and respect that traditional political and social structures simply do not allow.

Many militant opposition groups have also reached out to young people by providing access to key services. The provision of education by Islamic militant groups has received a great deal of attention. Another example is in Sri Lanka, where the Tamil insurgents have been successful in recruiting young women who have no means of supporting themselves once their husbands have been killed or conscripted into the military. Another example is the Maoists in Nepal, who have been similarly successful in recruiting women through campaigns against domestic violence and alcoholism.

Finally, it is critical to remember that many young people who are part of militant movements are not there through choice, but have either been kidnapped or forced through other means. The Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda provides one of the most egregious cases, but virtually every conflict has some element of coerced participation.

3 INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY AND RESPONSE

The third major causal layer concerns the extent to which institutions - political, security, social, and economic - either address or exacerbate causes found at other levels. Institutions are a critical filter and the opportunity structure for violence is deeply influenced by the relative strength and health of state and social institutions.

PHOTO: PANOS/LOWE

A man runs to avoid sniper fire in Sarajevo.

They can work to address grievances or they can fuel discontent through repression, poor governance, corruption, and inefficiency. They can block access to conflict resources by crafting policies that limit the flow of arms or that constructively engage potential recruits, they can fail to do so, or they can actively contribute to the problem. Finally, institutions can either constrain the behavior of opportunistic elites or they can create the conditions that foster their emergence, appeal, and room for maneuver.

DEMOCRACY AND AUTOCRACY

A growing body of evidence shows that both well-established democracies and entrenched authoritarian regimes are relatively successful at managing the factors that lead to conflict, albeit through very different methods. In both democracies and autocracies, longevity implies a certain basic acceptance of the rules of the game or at least acquiescence to those rules. In entrenched authoritarian regimes, while there may be many grievances, there are a host of mechanisms in place — from patronage networks to the coercive apparatus of the state — that are able to contain, buy-off, or destroy incipient political challenges.

Similarly, in well-established democracies, institutions are able to engage with many causes of violence, whether or not they are always able to find solutions to these problems. A healthy civil society can articulate group goals, monitor abuses of power, and propose effective solutions to social problems. In a democracy, political inclusion and effective participation guarantee that groups with competing interests can engage in a political search for solutions.

Destroyed buildings in Mogadishu, Somalia.

Finally a strong and accountable security sector and an equitable and impartial rule of law can guarantee personal security and property rights, leaving little room for the opportunistic political and economic behavior discussed earlier.

In a statistical study of over 160 cases of internal conflict, Ibrahim Elbadawi and Nicholas Sambanis (2002) find a significant negative correlation between democracy and civil war. Similarly, Ted Gurr (1994) shows that in democracies, ethno-political groups are far more likely to express dissatisfaction through peaceful protest rather than through violence. Finally, using World Bank measures of good governance Hugh Miall (2001) finds that 70% of countries that score well experience no violence, whereas only 37% of countries with bad governance remain free from conflict.

PARTIAL DEMOCRACIES, POLITICAL TRANSITIONS, AND STATE FAILURE

Partial democracies, newly independent states, and transitional regimes, on the other hand, are highly vulnerable to conflict. For example, newly independent states are five times more prone to violence than comparable but older countries. Similarly, partial democracies (regimes sharing a mix of authoritarian and democratic features) were four times more prone to civil war than full democracies and their vulnerability was even greater in Sub-Saharan Africa where they were on average eleven times more likely to fail than autocracies (Esty et al, 1998).

Even if consolidated democratic institutions are the best, most just way to manage conflict, it is impossible to ignore the fact that the path between autocracy and democracy can be a dangerous one.

Fundamental political change is a highly contested process. Any change in the existing distribution of power opens up new channels for competition, draws in new actors, creates new threats, opens up new possibilities for resource allocation and patronage, and often leads, at least in the short term, to the erosion of institutional constraints governing the behavior of powerful actors. In this fluid environment, elites will often attempt to use violence to advance their own narrow political or economic agendas.

A special category of political change is the case of institutional erosion or collapse that manifests in 'shadow' states or state failure. The weakening of institutions that safeguard property rights, collect taxes, provide security, mobilize in response to natural disasters, and ensure economic growth not only feeds societal grievance, but also leaves room for the emergence of conflict entrepreneurs to operate unhindered.

In examining how institutions shape the potential for violence, the assessment team should start with incentives and conflict resources and then look at how institutional structures either reinforce or manage identified causes. For example, if competition over access to land is an important incentive for violence, the team should examine how institutions are addressing the issue (or fueling the problem). However, there are several key institutional features that deserve close attention.

INCLUSION/EXCLUSION

The deliberate and systematic exclusion of certain groups from participation in governmental and non-governmental arenas is one critical institutional pathology that feeds into the potential for violence, particularly in transitional regimes or regimes that share mixed political features. This also applies to the ability of groups to enjoy equal access to the benefits and services provided by the state.

THE PROVISION OF SECURITY

One critical factor is the state's ability to maintain a monopoly on the use of violence throughout the country or in certain regions. Security — at the individual, community, and national level — is widely viewed as a critical precondition for economic growth and democratic development. A weak or unaccountable security sector will often fail to prevent, and will sometimes directly cause, violent conflict. Excessive or inefficient spending on security also takes away resources that could be better used for other important development goals.

LOCAL GOVERNANCE

The decentralization of authority from national to local government authorities can bring a number of significant benefits. By devolving significant fiscal and political authority to regions, it can block domination of one ethnic or religious group by another at the national level. By providing a measure of autonomy over cultural, religious, political, and economic practices, it also can defuse a major source of tension. However, decentralization in the context of a weak or transitional state can also carry significant risks.

Instability and conflict bring a difficult set of issues to the fore, such as competition over access to land, ethnic and religious tensions, youth unemployment, the redrawing of political boundaries along ethnic lines, high levels of personal insecurity, or a history of mistrust between the police and local communities. Many of these sources of conflict are best addressed at the local level, yet often local governments lack the resources and skills needed to identify and address these issues, even where the political will and mandate for action exist.

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COWS AND GUNS

In 2001, it took five cows to buy an AK-47 in northwest Kenya, down from fifteen in 1986. This drop in price reflects a dramatic increase in the availability of small weapons worldwide, with massive surpluses in certain 'bad neighborhoods', such as the Horn of Africa, the Balkans, and Central Asia. These weapons are changing the social and political fabric of many small communities. For example, among the Pokot of northwest Kenya power used to be vested in village elders. It now belongs to young men with guns and traditional rules of engagement no longer apply. For example, when a neighboring village used their new found guns to capture Pokot cattle, the Pokot, also heavily armed, retaliated by killing women and children, breaking a long-standing taboo. The lethality of the response has made it very difficult, if not impossible, to return to traditional and more peaceful ways of conflict resolution.

Source: Karl Vick, "Small Arms' Global Reach Uproots Tribal Traditions," *The Washington Post,* July 8, 2001.

4 REGIONAL AND GLOBAL FORCES

Even when dealing with 'internal conflict' it is important to look at the regional and global context. National borders in most parts of the world are extremely porous, and many of the networks that sustain conflict - economic, ethnic, religious, and military - are transnational. The ease with which rebel leaders can now sell diamonds or timber on global markets, arms flows, refugee flows, ethnic brethren living across borders, and guerilla movements, and transnational extremist groups, all have had a significant impact on violence occurring within a country.

Financing for violence, for example, needs to be understood in a global context. Globalization did not cause conflicts in places like Sierra Leone, but it has made it easier for warring parties to establish the transborder economic networks they need to survive. While international attention has tended to focus on illegal trade in drugs or diamonds, the trade in legal commodities bears equal responsibility for sustaining conflict. In the early 1990s, for example, the Liberian warlord Charles Taylor was supplying a third of France's tropical hardwood requirements through French companies.

Another critical external factor fueling many internal conflicts is the easy availability of arms, particularly small arms and light weapons. The end of the Cold War freed up massive surplus arsenals in many states, and the black-market trade in weapons is thriving (Boutwell and Klare, 1999). There are no reliable estimates of how many weapons are circulating in any one region. However, it is clear that 'bad neighborhoods' such as the Balkans, the Great Lakes Region, Central Asia, and parts of West Africa are awash in weapons. The easy availability of arms not only makes ongoing conflict more deadly, it also has the potential to trigger conflict and undermine positive moves toward peace.

Finally, refugee or exile populations fleeing instability at home can also bring political, ethnic, or religious ideas with them that threaten the governments of their host nations. At a minimum, refugees pose heavy economic burdens on host countries. At the extreme, refugees can generate serious security problems, for example by radicalizing populations in the host country who share the same ethnicity or religion.

5 WINDOWS OF OPPORTUNITY AND VULNERABILITY

If all of these causes are in place, there will be windows of vulnerability or moments when particular types of events — elections, natural disasters, riots, or assassinations — can trigger the outbreak of full-scale violence.

Many of the more predictable windows of vulnerability or 'triggers' concern events, or anticipated events, that threaten to rapidly and fundamentally change the balance of political or economic power between key players. **Elections** are the most obvious example, but any type of change that threatens to alter established patterns of political or economic control in high-risk environments could lead elites to mobilize violence. The devolution of authority to **local government** is one such example, as are legislative changes that govern the power of key players such as the military, or anti-corruption programs that that threaten to strip incumbent elites of their main source of income.

Another class of events that are less predictable but equally destabilizing are those that point out, in a particularly dramatic fashion, the weakness, inefficiency, or corruption of an existing regime. For example, a number of studies have shown how political unrest often sharply increases following a large scale natural or man-made disaster, such as hurricanes, droughts, floods, or earthquakes (Goldstone, 2001). Economic shocks can serve much the same role, as the events leading to Suharto's overthrow in Indonesia make abundantly clear.

PHOTO: PANOS/MEYST

Kurdish children collect and sell copper and aluminium from unexploded ordnance.

SUMMARY OF KEY AREAS FOR A CONFLICT ASSESSMENT

The preceding section lays out five broad areas that the assessment team needs to consider:

1. Incentives for violence
2. Access to conflict resources
3. Institutional and social capacity for managing violence
4. Regional dynamics
5. Windows of opportunity and vulnerability

As mentioned previously, not all of the trends and variables listed above will be relevant to every country and the assessment team should use its best judgment about adding or deleting variables and adapting the generic arguments presented here to fit the specific context.

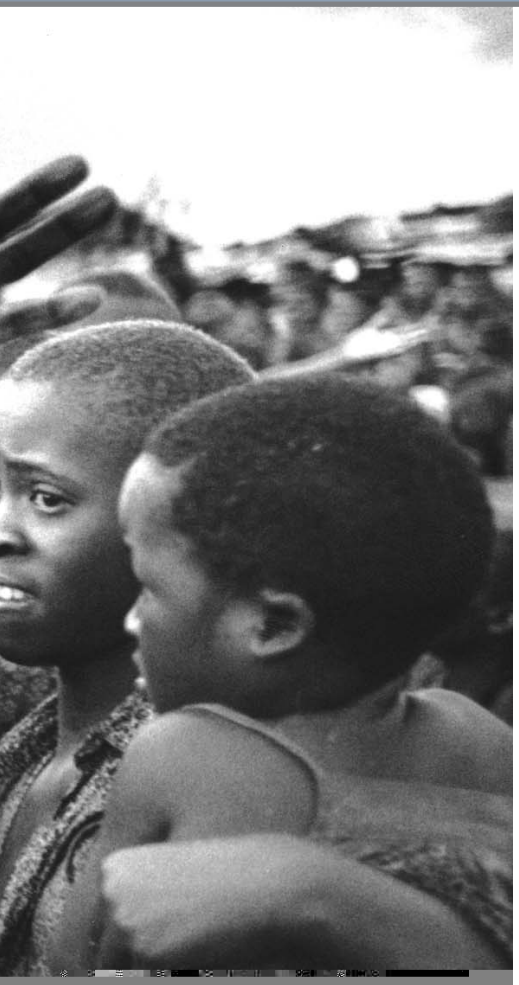
Since conflict only occurs when multiple factors come together and reinforce each other, the team also needs to pay careful attention to interaction effects between variables in each category and between categories. Essentially, the team should 'layer' the different categories on top of each other to see if actors with incentives for violence have the necessary resources and the institutional opportunity to mobilize violence on a broader scale.

STRATEGIES AND OPTIONS

PHOTO: PANOS/LOWE

Rwandan internally displaced persons in a camp plead for protection.

The next step in an assessment is to 'map' existing development programs against identified causes of conflict, particularly against causes that are converging, in order to identify gaps and potential areas of intervention.



MAPPING EXISTING PROGRAMS

The next step in an assessment is to 'map' existing development programs against identified causes of conflict, particularly against causes that are converging, in order to identify gaps and potential areas of intervention. The table presented below is an example of one such mapping for institutional risk factors.

This type of mapping can identify where USAID programs are already attempting to deal with the causes of violence and where new initiatives might be warranted. In conducting the mapping, it is also important to include a discussion of whether the programs are appropriately targeted. For example, a youth employment program in a region that is not at high risk for violence is a good development program, but unless it is geared toward youth who have an incentive to participate in violence it is not a conflict management program.

SUGGESTING NEW INTERVENTIONS

The final step is to suggest new areas of intervention or new configurations of development assistance. In making recommendations, it is important to keep in mind that conflict is extremely complex. It doesn't occur simply because people are unhappy or greedy or because a country happens to have the resources in place that might sustain violence. Nor does it happen everywhere state and social institutions are weak or perverse. It happens when causes found at multiple levels come together and reinforce each other. It is ultimately the product of deep grievance, political and economic competition, irresponsible political leadership, weak and unaccountable institutions, and global and regional forces.

Effective interventions cannot, therefore, be based on activities that focus on a single dimension of conflict, such as ethnic tension or political exclusion. Nor can they be

MAPPING DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Conflict Risk Factor (Institutional)	USAID Program
Executive branch domination • Compliant judiciary • Weak independent media • Divided, ineffective political parties	 • Judicial development • Media strengthening • Parliamentary strengthening
Limited minority representation	• None
Corruption and lack of accountability at local and national levels	• Fiscal Reform Project • Local Governance Initiative • Tax/fiscal reform and decentralization • Small and Medium Enterprise Regulatory Reform Project
Weak, ethnically segmented civil society	• Civil Society Support Centers
Corrupt, ineffective police force	• None

In working with civil society groups in deeply divided societies, donors need to be attentive to how civil society is either reinforcing or bridging lines of division. This will often entail looking beyond civil society actors who are "approved" by the state to those who represent voiceless sectors.

and national government officials to adopt constructive policies than traditional peace-building NGOs, and in areas where other civil society groups are divided along ethnic lines economic associations are often multi-ethnic.

For example, in Sri Lanka the local business community played a critical role in getting the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) back to the negotiating table after 20 years of fighting. After their interests took a direct hit because of an LTTE attack on the Colombo airport, the business community rallied and sponsored a pro-peace media campaign that spelled out in very concrete dollar terms what the country was losing in terms of growth and investment because of instability. Similarly, several chambers of commerce in Sri Lanka are working with local universities, schools and businesses to match at risk young people with job opportunities.

SECURITY SECTOR REFORM, CIVIL MILITARY RELATIONS, AND POLICE TRAINING:

To date, most explicit work in this area has focused on post-conflict issues such as demobilization, de-mining, child soldiers, and the reintegration of ex-combatants. In pre-conflict settings, the emphasis will need to shift and focus more directly on issues such as increasing civilian oversight, community policing, and civil-military relations. USAID already has a number of programs that provide assistance to help improve the capacity of relevant civilian bodies in government to manage the security forces more effectively. These programs stress the need to use the same principles of good public sector management in the security sector as in all other public sectors, principles such as transparency, accountability, respect for human rights, and informed debate and participation on military expenditures and threat assessment.

For example, in Indonesia, a USAID funded civil-military program helped reinforce legislative oversight of the military by raising awareness of issues such as military-owned businesses, corruption, territorial affairs, and control of natural resources. The program also addressed the military's involvement in inter-ethnic conflict. Another area where USAID might want to consider focusing its efforts is in strengthening the broader institutional and legal framework in which public spending and security decision-making occurs, ensuring due transparency and attention to corruption.

While working to encourage civilian oversight is a key part of security sector reform, it is also important to remember that civilian elites can be among the worst offenders in terms of using the military in dangerous ways. In these cases, a highly professional military can be an important bulwark against conflict. Clearly, important aspects of security sector reform such as enhancing the military's ability to deal effectively with internal or external threats are outside the scope of USAID's mandate. However any engagement in this area by USAID will require continued and close collaboration with other U.S. government agencies to ensure that those who have the authority and skill to implement programs are covering the most important aspects of security sector reform.

Working with governments and civil society groups to reducing excessive or inappropriate security sector expenditure is an important goal, particularly since it can free up resources for other development purposes. However in accepting the need for well-functioning security systems, a single-minded focus on down-sizing the security sector as a whole may not be consistent with the need to enhance security as a precondition for development. Redistributing spending away from the military and toward civilian police forces may be one important area to explore, particularly given the blurring of boundaries between conflict and organized crime in many developing countries. A disproportionate military response to what is essentially criminal activity may in fact account in large part for the escalation of conflict.

CIVIL SOCIETY INITIATIVES:

A central component of conflict management and peace building should be strengthening civil society's role in all of the areas discussed above. From many of the examples presented above it is clear

PHOTO: PANOS/PIROZZI

that civil society groups have an important role to play in monitoring abuses and working in partnership with other actors to devise appropriate and sustainable solutions.

However, it is important to recognize that civil society is a reflection of society rather than something entirely distinct, and while many groups can represent a positive force for change, many others can mirror the social ills and tensions that exist in a particular context. Before engaging with civil society, donors need to conduct a careful analysis of how civil society groups line up along a society's fault lines. For example, as mentioned before, prior to the genocide Rwandan associational life was extraordinarily vibrant and dense. Yet it did little to stop the killing, and in fact the organizational density may have facilitated it.

In working with civil society groups in deeply divided societies, donors need to be attentive to how civil society is either reinforcing or bridging lines of division. This will often entail looking beyond civil society actors who are "approved" by the state to those who represent voiceless sectors. Donors should give particular consideration to locating and supporting organizations that cross ethnic, economic, or political fault lines such as women's groups or community development associations that explicitly engage members of different communities in order to address common problems.

The discovery of huge oil reserves in Guinea could make the country one of the richest per capita in the world, leading to fears that the oil may fuel conflict and corruption.

CONCLUSION

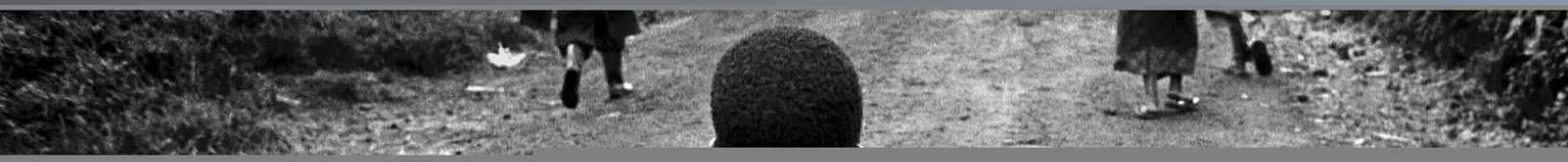
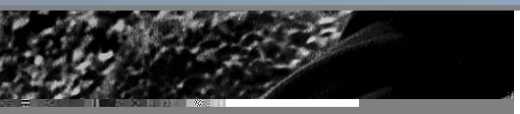


PHOTO: PANOS/KEULEN

Young refugees in North Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo.

The fact that conflict has been steadily declining since reaching a peak in the early 1990s gives room for cautious optimism. In many places the politics of violence appear to be giving way, slowly, to the politics of accommodation. This is not to suggest that conflict cannot flare up again or emerge along new lines. But this trend does point to the fact that conflict prevention and conflict management have been taking place in areas touched by violence.



The fact that conflict has been steadily declining since reaching a peak in the early 1990s gives room for cautious optimism. In many places the politics of violence appear to be giving way, slowly, to the politics of accommodation. This is not to suggest that conflict cannot flare up again or emerge along new lines. But this trend does point to the fact that conflict prevention and conflict management have been taking place in areas touched by violence.

The preceding analysis lays out some of the best current thinking on the causes of widespread, deadly violence. The level of detail presented above is intentional. We need more than a simple checklist of indicators. We know that certain variables, such as poverty are correlated to conflict. But in order to move from an estimation of risk to a conflict prevention strategy we need to know why they are correlated. The causal story is not always obvious, nor are the interaction effects between variables immediately clear.

To illustrate, while poverty can generate a widespread sense of grievance, its destabilizing potential appears to stem more from the fact that it erodes state and social capacity to respond to crises, and that it generates incentives, particularly among pools of young unemployed men, for participating in violence for financial gain. So while poverty reduction is one program implication that flows from an analysis of the causes of conflict, programs that don't pay attention to how they affect the micro-level economic incentives that underlie violence, or that mandate sweeping cuts in key state institutions in order to jump start the economy, may ultimately make things far worse.

Bringing this type of rigor and depth to the initial analysis will help Missions guard against proceeding on the basis of partial or incomplete understandings of what they are dealing with. This will not only allow us to view such visible and compelling factors as ethnicity and religion in proper perspective, it also makes sure that some less obvious but equally salient factors, such as sources of financing for conflict are not overlooked. This will ultimately provide a much more detailed and complete set of potential programmatic responses to choose from.

All of this said, we should not underestimate the difficulty of the task at hand. Conflict is extremely complex. It doesn't occur simply because people are unhappy or greedy or because a country happens to have the resources in place that might sustain violence. Nor does it happen everywhere state and social institutions are weak or perverse. It happens when causes found at multiple levels come together and reinforce each other. It is ultimately the product of deep grievance, political and economic competition, irresponsible political leadership, weak and unaccountable institutions, and global and regional forces.

Effective interventions cannot, therefore, be based on activities that focus on a single dimension of conflict, such as ethnic tension or political exclusion. Nor can they be based at a single level, for example at the community level or the national level, since gains in one area may be so easily undermined by setbacks in another. It is important to think about how problems manifest themselves at all of these levels, and how solutions to these problems can be strengthened or built at each.

CHECKLIST OF QUESTIONS

APPENDIX A

I. INCENTIVES FOR VIOLENCE: GRIEVANCE AND GREED

1. ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS DIVISIONS

- Is the relationship between ethnic/religious groups characterized by dominance, potential dominance, or high levels of fragmentation?
- Where do these groups live and in what numbers? Are they concentrated in regional pockets or dispersed? If they are concentrated, do they form a majority or a minority in the area?
- What is the history of relations between groups? Is there a pattern of systematic discrimination or have relations been relatively peaceful and inclusive?
- Do other divides, for example political exclusion or economic inequality, reinforce ethnic divisions?
- Are there elites who face an economic or political incentive to mobilize violence along ethnic lines?
- Is extremist ethnic or religious rhetoric increasing? Are elites beginning to create or promote ethnic 'myths'?

2. ECONOMIC CAUSES

- Is the economy (of the country/region) growing, stagnant, or declining? By what percent?
- Is the country (or region) low income?
- Are there large socio-economic disparities? Do these reinforce other lines of division, such as ethnicity?
- Is the economy heavily dependent on primary commodities? Are these commodities easily 'lootable'?
- Is economic power tied to political power?
- How pervasive is corruption or patronage? Does it flow along ethnic or other lines of division?
- If there is a large informal economy, is it legal or illegal (i.e. based on drugs, trafficking in humans)?

3. ENVIRONMENTAL CAUSES

- Are there major resource scarcities?
- What are the primary causes of scarcity?
- Has scarcity led to resource capture?
- Has scarcity led to population transfers?
- Do the effects of scarcity (resource capture, population transfers) reinforce other divides (ethnic, religious, economic) and/or generate competition between groups?
- Do elites compete over the control of valuable natural resources (both renewable and non-renewable), scarce or not?
- Are certain resources (such as land) used as a tool in political competition?

4. DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

- Do population growth rates differ across distinct, adjacent communities?
- Are there other factors (e.g. economic migration) that are tipping the demographic balance toward one group?
- Is the rural population expanding? If so, is there access to land or are there other safety valves for population pressures (e.g. migration to adjacent states/economic opportunity in urban centers)?

- What are rates of urbanization? Is the urban population expanding in a period of economic growth or decline?
- What is the size of the youth cohort relative to the adult population?
- Are there particular areas (urban centers, distinct regions) where the youth cohort is disproportionately large?
- Are young people radicalizing? If so, around what issues? If not, what is keeping this from happening?
- Are there rapid increases in young, educated professionals who have no opportunities for political or economic advancement?

5. INTERACTION EFFECTS

- Are there many incentives for violence (both greed and grievance) or only a few?
- Are they longstanding and chronic or of fairly recent origin?
- Do incentives for violence overlap and reinforce each other or cut across lines of division? For example, does access to economic opportunity overlap with ethnic difference or cut across ethnic difference?
- Is there an alignment between grievance and greed? Are elites with a political or economic incentive to mobilize violence well-positioned to tap into a strong grievance?

This section is intended to help the conflict assessment team diagnose the conflict 'problem' in particular country context.

II. MOBILIZATION: ACCESS TO CONFLICT RESOURCES

1. ORGANIZATIONAL RESOURCES

- Do organizational structures bridge or reinforce differences in a society? For example, are civil society groups mono-ethnic or multi-ethnic?
- Are there well-established ethnic or religious associations that could be used to mobilize violence?
- Have these structures stepped in to provide important services, such as access to employment or education, in the context of a weak state?
- How closely do organizational resources (e.g. ethnic groups or patronage networks) align with incentives for violence?
- If incentives and organizations are aligned, are these organizations capable of monitoring group behavior and punishing 'defectors' from group goals?

2. FINANCIAL RESOURCES

- Are groups with an incentive to mobilize violence affiliated with foreign support groups (e.g. diaspora, foreign governments, transnational religious or ethnic groups) that could provide funding?
- Can those motivated to engage in violence obtain control of "lootable" primary commodities?
- Are resources available through government corruption or patronage networks?
- Can sufficient resources be gained through smuggling, kidnapping, banditry or other activities on the black or gray market?

3. HUMAN RESOURCES

- Is there a population of ready recruits (e.g. unemployed young men in urban or semi-urban areas) available to actors motivated to engage in violence?

4. GENERAL QUESTIONS

- Do groups with incentives for violence have access to all conflict resources - organizational, financial, and human - or only a few?
- What level of resources do groups have and what level do they need to achieve their goals? Is there a match?

- Where do these resources come from (e.g. natural resources, corruption/patronage networks, diasporas, foreign recruits, local/international sources) and what does this imply about ease of access and sustainability?

III. INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY AND RESPONSE

1. REGIME TYPE AND LEGITIMACY

- Is the regime democratic, authoritarian, or mixed?
- How long has it existed in its current form?
- Is it in a period of transition or erosion?
- Are there generally accepted rules for political competition?
- What is the overall level of respect for national authorities?

2. INCLUSION/EXCLUSION

- Do government policies favor one group over another? For example, are government services provided equally across different ethnic or religious groups, are exclusive language policies in place?
- Has the collapse or erosion of state institutions led groups to turn to more immediate forms of identity for survival?
- Do civil society groups reinforce or bridge lines of division?
- How robust are multi-ethnic or multi-religious organizations? Do they have a mass base (e.g. trade unions, business associations) or are they limited to a narrow elite layer?
- How are issues of ethnicity/religion taught in schools?
- Does the press promote ethnic or religious intolerance?

3. RULE OF LAW/PROVISION OF SECURITY

- How strong is the judicial system?
- Are civil and political freedoms respected?
- Are other basic human rights respected?
- Does unlawful state violence exist?
- Does civilian power control the security sector?
- Is the government able to exercise effective control over its territory
- Does the security sector (police/ justice sector) effectively and impartially settle disputes between groups or is there a perception of bias?
- To what extent is the security sector involved in 'shadow' economic activity?
- Do government institutions effectively regulate legal arms trade and prevent illegal arms trades or do they participate in it?

4. ECONOMIC GOVERNANCE

- Does economic policy encourage economic growth or impose obstacles?
- Is policy conducive to macro-economic stability?
- How pervasive is corruption in state institutions?
- Do government institutions/civil society groups effectively monitor and enforce financial transparency and accountability?
- Is the government able to exert economic control over the territory of the state or are there large pockets of autonomous economic activity?
- Does government policy encourage a good match between available skills and the demands of the market?
- Do state economic policies favor one group at the expense of another?
- Are local governments able to encourage local economic growth and investment and respond to local economic problems?
- Do grassroots and/or national institutions constructively engage underrepresented and marginalized groups in economic development activities?

- Do government programs constructively engage potential recruits, such as unemployed youth?

5. NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

- Does government policy seek to improve the sustainable management of natural resources?
- Are there institutions in place that effectively mediate competing claims to natural resources such as land or water?
- Do local/national elites earn significant off-budget income from the exploitation of natural resources?
- Do government institutions effectively regulate trade in "lootable" commodities?
- Are natural resources viewed by state elites as a useful tool or prize in a larger political competition?
- Are state institutions able to respond to environmental shocks or natural disasters?

6. DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS

- Are government policies causing demographic shifts, for example through government-sponsored transmigration or agricultural programs?
- Are government institutions able to respond to new demands created by demographic change? For example, are voting rights tied to place of residence or birth (meaning will uprooted populations be able to voice demands through political channels)?

IV. REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL FACTORS

- Are ethnic and/or religious divisions reinforced by parallel relations in neighboring countries?
- Does environmental degradation have cross-border causes or effects?
- Is economic activity (both legal and illegal) closely tied to regional or global dynamics?
- Is the economy highly vulnerable to global economic shocks?
- Are demographic shifts tied to regional events?
- Is mobilization facilitated by support from other governments or ethnic and religious groups outside the country?

V. WINDOWS OF VULNERABILITY

1. PREDICTABLE

- Are major government reforms planned that could result in shifts in political or economic power (e.g. decentralization, anti-corruption, security sector reform)?
- Are contentious elections approaching?

2. UNPREDICTABLE

- Is the country vulnerable to natural disasters?
- Does the government effectively respond to mitigate the damage done by natural disasters?
- Is the economy highly vulnerable to global economic shocks?
- Do government institutions have a history of effectively responding to political and economic crises?
- Do local governments effectively and constructively respond to local instability?
- What is the capacity of the formal/informal economy to absorb new entrants?
- What is the unemployment rate, particularly for young men in urban areas?
- Is there a match between the skills of new entrants and the needs of the economy?
- Are these economies heavily dependent on access to global markets? How susceptible are they to economic shocks?

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