

Understanding and Tackling Violence Outside of Armed Conflict Settings

Understanding and tackling violence that occurs outside of armed conflict settings is essential to improving the wellbeing of some of the world's poorest communities. Whilst advances have been made in terms of designing policies that address violence in fragile or conflict-affected countries, progress has been slower in relation to dealing with violence happening outside of these settings. New forms of violence, such as organised crime and political instability, often arise in states which have undergone rapid economic growth and social transformation. These forms of violence are difficult to address because they are part of the very structures and processes that drive and shape development. Current responses have often been unsuccessful. Fresh approaches are required. They need to be driven by communities, civil society and young people, as well as the state and international donors. They must also be underpinned by a better understanding of how violence affects the poor and what works in terms of interventions.

What is the relationship between violence and development?

Violence is a widespread phenomenon that exists across a spectrum of political contexts, not just in situations of war and conflict. Violence by state and non-state actors encompasses a variety of actions leading to the destruction of life and property, and is motivated by a host of grievances and criminally motivated opportunities. An estimated 740,000 people die every year as a result of armed violence, but more than half of these deaths occur in countries that are not affected by armed conflict. In 2011, out of the five countries with the highest death rate attributed to violence, only one, Cote d'Ivoire, has recently experienced conflict. The others – Guatemala, El Salvador, Jamaica and Swaziland – exhibit a more complex set of problems including violent gang culture, organised crime, drug trafficking, and the prevalence of firearms.

The 2011 World Development Report (WDR) reports that for every three years a country is affected by major violence, poverty reduction lags behind by 2.7 percentage points. Yet, while violence and/or organised crime clearly impede efforts to reduce poverty and improve human well-being, they are also very difficult to address because they are embedded in political, governance and economic structures. In many places, new violence and organised crime have developed in parallel

to uneven economic growth and widening inequalities. In Nigeria and Kenya, in spite of economic growth, violence has mutated and become more complex to manage as inequalities, high levels of poverty and youth unemployment persist. Sectarian violence also continues to affect certain cities and states in India even with economic growth and improved coverage of social programmes.

Many countries move in and out of situations of violence even as they continue to grow and transform. A clear trajectory from conditions of fragility, conflict and underdevelopment to a situation of wider prosperity and peace is rare.

What role do state and non-state actors play in violent environments?

The capacity of states to provide public services and economic opportunities for the poor is constrained in violent environments. A host of non-state actors and citizen-led efforts often fill the void. These range from horizontal support networks, neighbour-hood watch, vigilante groups and other community policing bodies, to gangs, criminal organisations and militias. The Mungiki, a criminal organisation present in Nairobi, has provided connections to public utilities in poor neighbourhoods and wrestled control of some public transport routes from other cartels, even though it has carried out acts of violence. ➔

As well as providing access to basic services and employment opportunities, non-state actors often provide security (and instigate insecurity), particularly for the poor. Criminal violence and protection provided through non-state armed actors and groups have become a way of life in many places. In Nairobi, vigilante groups mushroomed from the late 1990s in response to worsening security in poor neighbourhoods and ineffectual, corrupt or altogether absent policing. Extra legal security and policing has become a norm for slum dwellers in urban areas of Mumbai, even in neighbourhoods where the poor have been relocated – ostensibly to improve their living conditions and the delivery of services including policing.

In these cases, violence is best seen not as an unintended consequence of failed development but rather as something inseparable from the underlying logic of how politics and economies operate in these places, making it very difficult to address.

What can we learn from existing interventions?

Existing responses have often failed to minimise the impacts of entrenched violence, particularly for the poor. Besides the fundamental problem that violence has become an acceptable attribute of the political settlement in many places, responses often focus on targeting suspected criminals and members of armed groups, and fail to tackle the deeper underlying causes of the problem.

Many states continue to rely on intensified policing and security responses. For instance, in 2009 the federal Nigerian government authorised a large-scale military offensive against the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), an umbrella for a number of armed organisations fighting for ‘resource control’, but which are also involved in oil infrastructure sabotage, large-scale oil theft and the kidnapping of oil workers. The federal government later initiated an amnesty as well as a Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programme for militia members. However, no foundations were laid for a lasting peace, to effectively address the grievances of the Delta communities or involve them meaningfully in the process.

At times the emphasis on ‘security’ has been misplaced by diverting attention from wider development problems that threaten renewed conflict if left unaddressed. The ‘security first’ policy backed by international actors in Sierra Leone is hailed for preventing a relapse into

wide-scale conflict. Yet, these efforts have not translated into significant development progress, with the country ranking near the bottom of the UN Human Development Index. Sierra Leone’s political settlement has marginalised young people, many of whom were born after the end of the country’s civil war. Youth unemployment is thought to approach 70 per cent. ‘New’ violence has flared, particularly in the capital Freetown, and more young people are joining gangs and ‘secret societies’ while wider problems of youth unemployment and marginalisation remain unaddressed.

Improving physical safety and security often rank as top concerns for the poor in Nairobi and Mumbai. Yet, even while it is widely recognised that violence in poor areas relates to wider political problems and policing failures in both cities, more detailed data is missing on patterns of crime, violence and victimisation. Ineffectual, corrupt or absent policing of slum areas creates an opening for illegal groups and criminal organisations to ‘provide’ security through various predatory practices. Some groups have established parallel local governance structures to organise street patrols, intervene in local disputes and regulate local business activity and trade. State responses to ban such groups such as the Mungiki in Kenya belie the covert alliances that exist between criminal organisations and politicians who hire armed thugs to target their opponents.

In Mumbai, government policy to relocate slum dwellers is meant to improve their security by providing them legal tenure or other forms of recognition and diminish their dependence on extra-legal arrangements. Yet, relocations have been marred by alleged police aggression in slum clearances as well as poor design and planning of new estates, which make it difficult for the police and other responders to easily access new residential blocks.

There have been efforts, such as the Safer Nairobi Initiative which was endorsed by the City Council, which aspire to a more coordinated effort to improve urban security by involving agencies and departments with mandates to deliver public services and create work opportunities. While these have had mixed outcomes, the spirit of such efforts to develop a joined-up approach is essential to improve security for the urban poor. Some public utility companies have moved to regulate services that have been captured by predatory gangs and cartels. Neighbourhood-level efforts to improve the slum environment have also had positive impacts.

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Nairobi

In recent years, Kenya has experienced ethnic, political and criminal forms of violence. During post-election violence that roiled the country in 2008, national political figures are alleged to have used vigilante groups and criminal organisations to incite violence against civilians. Over the past decade, these organisations and groups have gained increasing sway over the regulation of business activity and access to public utilities, as well as in the maintenance of security (and insecurity) in poor neighbourhoods of Nairobi.

Sectors of the state have actively cooperated with violent non-state actors even while their activities are officially condemned, and the police have carried out raids to arrest suspects. Given the involvement of some sectors of the state in violence and crime in poor neighbourhoods, there is little public confidence or trust in the police or justice system.

Despite these difficulties, community groups such as Ghetto Green in the Huruma neighbourhood of Mathare – the city's second largest slum – have sought to rehabilitate and provide income opportunities for young people who were involved in criminal organisations. Ghetto Green has funded its activities through income generated by its members. USAID has also provided small grant support to the group. The Ghetto Green youth are engaged in activities such as garbage collection, washing cars and vending. The group's chairman explained,

'We want to create peace. Without employment peace cannot be found. It is up to us to mobilise the resources available to us.'

A wider approach is required that also addresses people's limited access to basic services and economic opportunities in places like Huruma. Criminal organisations and vigilante groups have gained influence in part because the state – at least formally – does not provide these. Community efforts can provide some insights into practical measures that might make a difference.

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Sierra Leone

Efforts to combine development and security in Sierra Leone are widely seen as having helped it to avoid relapsing again into widespread conflict. However, there are hidden structural issues that threaten this success and the security of the poor. Reforms initiated by donors, especially decentralisation, have not managed to transform the country's politics. Instead, they have reinforced the pre-war political structures, particularly chieftancies, to the benefit of long-established political and societal elites. The emphasis of the international community on 'security first' after the country's civil war has come at the expense of broadening access to economic opportunities and basic services, leaving the poorest members of society in the same position as they were previously. Grievances that contributed to the outbreak of the country's civil war are mostly unaddressed.

There have been some effective local efforts to address these challenges which implicitly link development with security. Yet, so far these efforts are largely disconnected from larger peacebuilding operations in the country. In Bo County, in the central part of the country, young people (including ex-combatants) have not been included within DDR programmes and feel largely excluded from political processes and reforms. Many have become involved in informal networks and associations of their own making, within which they support each other in economic enterprises such as selling cassettes and running bicycle taxi services. Political-administrative and security officials have turned to these groups to help maintain security through a set of informal rules.

Policy recommendations

- **Strengthen the evidence base on what sustains and mitigates violence**

While the problem of violence is widely recognised, how it intersects with development is poorly understood. The lack of reliable and detailed evidence of violence in development processes and transitions, as well as how it affects the poor clearly compromises the formulation of more effective responses. Affected states and their partners should invest in methods of systematic data collection in order to better understand the constraints and enablers that will shape the outcomes of interventions in different places.

- **Learn from the successes and failures of existing and previous interventions**

New approaches to address violence need to be based on what already works. Many smaller, localised efforts to address violence exist but these are 'hidden' and unrecognised by central planners and decision-makers. Isolated success stories are often highlighted as best practice without the necessary investment in learning from a broader range of both successful and failed experiences. Affected states and development donors have also funded an assortment of experimental initiatives. More effort needs to be made to systematically learn from all of these interventions and about what does and does not work, while recognising that particular approaches must always be contextually appropriate wherever they are applied.

- **Build the competencies of civil society, communities and social organisations to meaningfully engage in policy processes**

Currently there is a tendency for donors to focus at the country level, working with and through Ministries and official security institutions where possible. However, citizens must have a role to play alongside the state. Their voices need greater recognition in policy processes to address violence as well as in external actors' attempts to understand it.

- **Make young people a central focus of state and donor efforts**

Existing policies to support political agreements as a way to address violence and prevent conflict do not go far enough to ensure the inclusion of young people. Many political agreements such as those in Sierra Leone or in the Niger Delta are fragile, precisely because they emphasise alliances and bargains amongst existing elites over the needs and interests of young people. A particular focus on job creation and vocational training for youth is required, not simply as a bolt-on to existing political agreements but as an overriding priority that guides how such agreements are negotiated and structured.

Further reading

The World Bank (2011) *World Development Report: Conflict, Security, and Development*, Washington DC: The World Bank.

The Geneva Declaration on Armed Conflict and Development www.genevadeclaration.org

OECD (2011) *Reducing the Involvement of Youth in Armed Violence: Programming Note, Conflict and Fragility*, OECD Publishing. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264107205-en>

Credits

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