

Violent conflict is the greatest challenge posed to human development. The costs of conflict for development are obvious, immediate and catastrophic: loss of life, wounding, disability, rape... But conflict has many other disastrous costs that are less easy to capture in figures: conflict often triggers the collapse of food systems, causes disintegration of health and education services and abruptly disrupts the economy. In Mozambique, during the civil war, half of the schools were destroyed. In Chechnya the tuberculosis infection rate is nearly twice as high as the national average in the Russian Federation. In Africa net losses in agricultural production due to armed violence are estimated at US \$25 billion between 1970 and 1997. Worldwide, 25 million people are displaced by conflict, while 250,000 children have been enrolled as soldiers. Overall conflict increases poverty, reduces growth, undermines investment and destroys the infrastructures on which progress in human welfare depends. Conflicts claim lives “not just through bullets” but also through the broad erosion of human security. In turn, there is a strong correlation between underdevelopment and violent conflict: countries with a per capita income of US \$600 are indeed half as likely to experience civil war as countries with a per capita income of US \$250: “For many countries, the conflict trap is part of the poverty trap”. Conflict is the very reversal of human development, and this reversal of human development often breeds further conflict.

Today, the challenge in such a context is to *prevent* violent conflict, which often erupts when states fail to prevent, contain and resolve internal conflicts. Collapsing and failing states are often also conflict-prone states, suffering from a security, capacity and legitimacy gap. They fail to provide *security*, including human security in its broadest sense, to their citizens. They lack the *capacity* to provide basic services and infrastructures, and they lack the *legitimacy* to uphold their role as arbiters in the peaceful resolution of conflicting interests and aspirations of different groups. However, in these conflict-prone states, mass poverty, or even high inequality are not automatic triggers for violence. The scale of inequalities itself may not be the decisive factor, but rather the way horizontal and vertical inequalities combine on the backdrop of complex political and economic tensions. The dynamics of conflict can also be further complicated by abundance of natural resources. The causality however is not automatic: Botswana has succeeded in converting its diamond wealth into high growth and rapid human development, but in other countries, with weak governance and corruption, riches have turned into a “resource curse”. Liberia’s civil war was fuelled by revenues from timber and diamonds. Copper, cobalt, gold and timber were at the center of conflict in DRC, while in Peru coca has triggered violence between various groups. However, not all conflicts are the product of state failure, inequalities or competition over resources. Insecurities also spread through borders, allowing for security problems of one state to be exported to others. Conflict in Darfur has prompted refugee flows towards Chad, where violence is spreading. The war that started in 1989 in Liberia migrated to Sierra Leone, returned to Liberia, then moved to Guinea, while in September 2002 combatants from Liberia and Sierra Leone were also involved in the conflict in Côte d’Ivoire.

Meanwhile, security objectives, including in developing states, are largely oriented towards addressing the threat posed by “terror”. Today, there is a danger that the war on terrorism could sideline the struggle against poverty, health epidemics and other challenges, drawing scarce financial resources away from the causes of insecurity. International aid must address this discrepancy, notably by breaking the “resource curse”, with initiatives such as the Kimberley Process on blood diamonds from Sierra Leone; by controlling small arms, through more effective and binding regulations; by building the capacity of regional organizations, such as the AU, ECOWAS and others, to engage troops in peace missions; and by giving clear objectives and the necessary resources for success to UN peace operations. Many pitfalls need also to be avoided, such as inducing aid dependency, failing to coordinate aid policies, delaying and slowing disbursement, or on the contrary sending an overflow of aid when absorption capacity remains low.

What the world needs therefore is a security framework that recognizes that poverty, social breakdown and civil conflict are the core components of the global security threat. If the MDGs “provide a focus for progress towards freedom from want, the world still lacks a coherent agenda for extending freedom from fear”. Redefining security as *human security* thus remains the key to preventing conflict and ensuring global security.