

## Strategies for countries affected by conflict

The UN Millennium Declaration rightly emphasizes the critical role of peace, security, and disarmament as fundamental for human well being and eradicating poverty in all its forms (UN 2000). Many of the poorest people in the world live in fragile states where ethnic or geopolitical tensions and vulnerability to conflict or regular natural disasters undermine efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. We define “fragile states” broadly as countries facing natural or manmade stress that threatens their ability to function effectively and, in extreme cases, their existence as viable states. Countries at regular risk of natural disasters are discussed in chapter 11. In this chapter we discuss conflict situations.

Conflict can take many forms. It can be latent or explicit; it can range from isolated violence to full-scale civil war; it can cross borders and result in large movement of populations. As chapter 3 discusses, outbreaks of conflict have a strong negative correlation with per capita incomes. On average, poor countries—even those not in conflict—risk conflict in the future. If a low-income country has a 3 percent risk of an outbreak in any given year, the cumulative effect is a more than one in four chance of a major conflict during a 10-year period.<sup>1</sup> It should thus not be altogether surprising that of the 34 poor countries farthest from reaching the Goals, 22 are in or emerging from conflict. Without effective strategies to forestall conflict, a significant number of national MDG-based strategies will likely be thrown off course by violent conflict in the course of implementation. We therefore recommend that any international or national strategy to achieve the Goals include a focus on conflict and conflict prevention.

For many fragile countries, if not most, the Millennium Development Goals can be powerful in promoting long-term stability by offering a coherent long-term development vision that is currently lacking. The Goals represent prospects for decent education, healthcare, access to basic infrastructure,

and freedom from hunger and want. Given the positive relationship between human capital growth and institution building (chapter 7), extreme risks of conflict are not a reason to abandon development initiatives. If anything, investing in development is a key step toward averting conflict.<sup>2</sup>

To ensure that development policy accounts for the risks of conflict and responds appropriately, several practical steps need to be undertaken, at both the national and international levels. The Report of the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change (UN 2004a) outlines the key elements of an international response to the threat of conflict, especially for international and internationalized conflicts. We endorse the Panel's recommendations and focus here on country-level actions that will respectively help prevent internal conflicts, end conflict, and support the transition to peace in countries emerging from conflict.

### **Investing in conflict prevention**

To prevent conflict, MDG-based scale-up programs need to narrow rather than widen existing ethnic, regional, or communal divides. In practice, countries must ensure the equitable provision of services and infrastructure to all groups in society, including people in disadvantaged regions, minorities, and those with special needs, such as refugees. Major projects in countries at risk should conduct regular peace and conflict impact assessments to ensure that they do not exacerbate existing tensions and increase the risk of conflict.

Specific actions can minimize the chances of an outbreak of violent conflict. First, conflict early warning systems are essential in regions vulnerable to increased violence. Elements of individual warning systems will differ by political context, but there are some guiding principles for their development and use. They should emphasize the continual collection of behavioral indicators (not just structural indicators) to reveal whether the implementation of MDG-based strategies is contributing to violent conflict.<sup>3</sup> They should also link with regional and international institutions watching out for early signs of conflict.

To be useful, conflict early warning systems need to be well integrated with response strategies. Within countries, their findings should be integrated with the work of governments, particularly ministries of finance and planning. At the international level, the systems need to be well coordinated through the UN secretariat.

Second, conflict prevention should be supported through the careful design of MDG-based poverty reduction strategies. This entails a particular focus on marginalized groups, migrants, and displaced persons. If growth-enhancing policies are likely to produce or worsen severe regional or ethnic inequalities, compensatory investments should be made in disadvantaged areas, with steps to facilitate migration to areas of faster growth, encouraging the return of remittances. We urge countries to undertake disaggregated reporting on how

different regions or groups within a country are progressing toward the Goals in order to shed light on patterns of inequality across groups and help mainstream conflict prevention.

Third, decentralized and participatory decisionmaking structures, with direct involvement of marginalized communities, can help reduce the risks of conflict by providing political space to address grievances and aspirations. Civil society organizations (CSOs), particularly human rights groups and leaders of indigenous people, can be pivotal in preventing conflict (chapter 8). They can present early warnings of crises, serve as conduits to understanding the root causes, and act as intermediaries, facilitating links and dialogues between contending groups and affected communities. In Brazil, for example, CSOs representing Afro-Brazilians have focused government attention on racial inequality and contributed to defusing potential conflict. In India, the efforts of civil society organizations have prevented riots from taking place in many cities (Varshney 2002).

Fourth, conflict prevention can be supported by increasing transparency in the flow of public funds, and accountability for how revenues are spent or distributed by government. This is particularly important in countries where volumes of aid need rapid scale-up. For countries dependent on extractive sectors, participation in the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative can help. Already such countries as Nigeria and Sierra Leone have agreed to take part in this noteworthy initiative.

Multinational firms have a special responsibility to promote transparency when engaged in low-income countries (chapter 9). Mechanisms such as the UN Global Compact and the UN “Norms on the Responsibilities of Transnational Corporations and Other Business Enterprises with Regard to Human Rights” need to be strengthened to this end. The Publish What You Pay campaign has advocated that all payments to overseas governments should be published as a precondition for such privileges as listing in major stock exchanges. Multilateral initiatives such as the Kimberley Process to regulate conflict commodities also need support and expansion. Any corporations receiving payments to deliver MDG-related goods or services in high-risk countries should receive them only on compliance with such basic norms. The criminal responsibility of corporate employees should be invoked where international corporations are complicit in conflicts and human rights violations (Alston 2004; Clapham 2001).

Fifth, MDG-based poverty reduction strategies should include specific investments aimed directly at enhancing peace and security. Measures are needed to strengthen state capacity, including investments in justice and security. Training the police and military to provide effective, accountable, and rights-based public services is itself a priority for development planning (UNDP 2002). Proper regulation of weapons is also important. Integrating these programs typically requires better coordination between development

ministries and defense departments both domestically and in donor countries (OECD/DAC 2004c).

### **Investing in countries in conflict**

For countries in conflict, large-scale government budget support is often inappropriate, and assistance strategies need to be targeted to the local situation. Conflicts can affect societies in different ways, based on their scope (for example, local in northern Uganda, national in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, or regional in Sierra Leone and Guinea), their nature (genocides, secessionist wars, insurgencies aimed at altering government policies, bids to capture the state, or quasi-criminal conflicts aimed at securing control over lucrative commodities), and their duration (short-term, intermittent, or long-term). In each case, the strategies for humanitarian and development work will differ significantly. The UN Millennium Project has not attempted to outline the specific needs and strategies in all these diverse situations. Instead, we highlight some shared implications for national governments and the international community.

The first priority for countries in conflict is to bring the conflict to a close. Efforts to achieve the Goals cannot be separated from conflict management. Humanitarian assistance is essential for survival—to enable people to meet the basic needs of food, clothing, healthcare, reproductive health services and care, and security from sexual violence.

The immediate implication of an outbreak of violent conflict is generally a diversion of government finances to military efforts and, at a minimum, a disruption of basic services and infrastructure. In these circumstances, cutting external assistance to governments can have devastating consequences for human development—so any such decisions should be taken with extreme care. Where possible, donor agencies should aim to provide ongoing MDG-based financial and technical assistance to maintain or restore basic infrastructure and the provision of social services, delivered in a way that reaches refugees and people in conflict zones without worsening the conflict. Since the Goals address many of the same needs as humanitarian relief—security from want, hunger, illiteracy, and disease—wherever possible they should guide humanitarian activities over the medium term, as described in the principles of the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative established in 2003.

In some cases of civil war, rebellion, and insurgency, the state is no longer a credible actor, lacking the authority to implement either humanitarian programs or development strategies. In such cases, external support for governments can worsen the conflict. Some long-term development assistance may still be feasible, but will then need to be channeled through multilateral agencies or NGOs, trusted and seen as impartial by all sides at war, but not providing new targets for warring groups. This would include financing for schools and teachers and providing primary healthcare and access to water and basic sanitation facilities.

Another typical first consequence of an outbreak of violence is the movement of people—internal migration or cross-border movement. Of the 175 million international migrants in 2000 nearly 16 million (9 percent) were refugees. In addition, conflict-related internal displacements are estimated to have affected 25 million people in more than 47 countries in 2002 alone (Commission on Human Security 2003). Associated development and humanitarian challenges include organizing the settlement of these people, providing security for migrant groups, ensuring access to basic services of education and health, and creating opportunities for long-term productive activities and income generation. In many cases, national governments simply do not have the capacity to provide for large numbers of refugees and internally displaced people—but this does not mean that the needs of these groups can be ignored. International support is essential to help governments identify ways of addressing the economic and political needs of such groups.

A major additional issue in most conflicts is the need to support women and girls, who are often at the epicenter of conflict's harmful effects. Sexual violence as a strategic weapon of war is widespread, as seen in recent conflict situations in Bosnia, East Timor, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Sudan. The consequences include higher HIV/AIDS prevalence, the spread of other sexually transmitted infections, increased trafficking of women and girls, and long-term psychological damage. While male relatives are in combat, women are often the sole providers for their families. They are also active combatants in many armies and rebel groups. Humanitarian and relief work needs to provide basic health services for women and girls, especially reproductive health services and care, and ensure security from sexual violence.

### **Investing in countries emerging from conflict**

Statistically, countries emerging from conflict show a 44 percent tendency to relapse into conflict within the first five years (World Bank 2003b). Such post-conflict countries require policy and investment measures, by both national governments and the international system, to avoid sliding back into violence. Some countries have adequate institutional structures to manage large-scale budget support. Others that do not have the same institutional strengths will require support to build public administration capacity and project support for key investments.

Large investments are needed to rehabilitate wartorn areas, refugee populations, internally displaced people and former combat troops and to rebuild basic infrastructure such as roads, electricity, schools, and hospitals. Health systems especially need rapid investments. Multiple studies now show that the health impacts of conflict continue long after fighting stops. In Sierra Leone, for example, infant mortality rates in the Kenema district were reported as high as 303 deaths per 1,000 live births, even after fighting had abated (International Rescue Committee and Ministry of Health and Sanitation, Sierra Leone 2001).<sup>4</sup>

Countries emerging from conflict also need much larger investments in rebuilding the general administrative capacity of the government. Several countries emerging from conflict, including Mozambique, highlight the critical role of investments in sectors that lay the foundation for rapid recovery and much faster economic growth. What is needed in the early stages of peacebuilding is the development of long-term MDG-based frameworks that focus on income-generating opportunities, healthcare services, primary and higher education, and access to basic infrastructure such as housing and electricity. Humanitarian and development assistance should be seen as complementary and sometimes sequential investments, which together can help populations during and after conflicts.

Since health needs loom especially large in conflict and postconflict situations, the WHO has taken the lead in proposing a sound health-based strategy for fragile countries, especially those emerging from crisis (box 12.1). Postconflict health services should include HIV/AIDS treatment and care, treatment of sexually transmitted infections, and social and psychological support services for victims of trauma (UN 2002d). In the immediate aftermath of conflict, early and sustained support of this nature is a priority for successful peacebuilding.

A postconflict society needs to focus on ways of building peace and security to prevent a relapse into conflict. Here again we support the recommendations

**Box 12.1**  
**Responding to**  
**health needs in**  
**fragile settings**

Source: Nabarro, Colombo, and Griekspoor 2004.

Although some reversals and declines are inevitable when dealing with the complex problems of fragile states, a coordinated and concrete approach focused on sustaining health will lay the groundwork for eventual recovery—and ultimately the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

A realistic strategy should be built on the following principles:

- *Focus on essentials.* Interventions must focus primarily on providing the essentials for life, including access to water, sanitation, hygiene, food and nutrition, shelter, security, public health and disease control, and sexual and reproductive health information and services.
- *Integrate health into stabilization efforts.* Health concerns need to be priorities in the overall process of stabilizing fragile states to guarantee that health service delivery continues securely and reliably even in the face of political and economic changes.
- *Deliver predictable and coordinated support.* In practice, maintaining health services delivery requires stable and predictable financing. Financing should be channeled through a single comprehensive and results-based planning instrument that uses concrete milestones and an inclusive system for managing and coordinating implementation.
- *Repair now, reform later.* In periods of instability or rapid flux, maintaining and repairing existing health systems is more important than initiating major reforms, which may disrupt service delivery systems precisely when they are most urgently needed.
- *Develop managerial capacity.* Substantial assistance will be needed to develop capacity for effective resource management and stewardship.

of the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change, which offer a range of international responses for peacebuilding, such as greater coordination through the United Nations, a standing fund for peacebuilding with at least \$250 million to finance the recurrent expenditures of nascent governments, and critical agency programs in the areas of rehabilitation and reintegration.<sup>5</sup>

At the country level, an important element of peacebuilding is a successful strategy for demobilizing, disarming, and reintegrating combat troops. The United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations is developing such a strategy to register people, monitor and control decommissioned weapons, and disarm soldiers and train them for alternative careers. Such efforts need more systematic inclusion of women ex-combatants (UN 2002d) and better coordination with development planning in postconflict contexts.

Much greater international commitment is needed to collect and destroy weapons in the aftermath of conflict. Too often, collected weapons later come back into circulation. Individual countries need to tighten up the civilian regulations governing military-style arms. Exporting countries should adopt broad and internationally consistent mandatory codes of conduct to better regulate the sale of arms, reduce the likelihood of resale, and allow more transparent arms sales monitoring.

Finally, to prevent countries from relapsing into conflict governments must also of course address the legitimate grievances of their people. Many grievances, though not all, are tied to social or economic development outcomes. But addressing them requires political structures that engage different groups, allowing them to voice their concerns while also meeting their needs. The civil society function of voicing the public interest is often a critical starting point for social transformation and should be supported where necessary. This leadership role of CSOs—representing women, indigenous people, ethnic and racial minorities, and ex-combatants—has been exemplary in resolving conflict and bringing about reconciliation in many parts of the world, for example, in Ecuador, the Mano River countries, and the Philippines. But CSOs cannot succeed in isolation. A sustainable conflict prevention strategy requires the combined commitment of national and local governments, the international community, and civil society to resolve long-standing conflicts and prevent their resurgence.