

The Importance of Development in Societies Emerging From Conflict

Written by Tom McCarthy

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TOM MCCARTHY, AUG 29 2011

In post-conflict environments, the peace achieved is often relatively unstable, facing a wide range of risks which have the potential to force a return to violence. The work of Paul Collier emphasises the importance of economic development in reducing these risks. Whilst I agree that this is important, I argue that Collier's approach ignores the political and social dimensions of post-conflict recovery. Furthermore, more should be done to ensure that economic development in countries emerging from violence is conflict sensitive. By this I mean that the development strategy used must take account of the causes of war, and the reasons for the continuation of fighting. By making poverty reduction and pro-poor growth a more integral part of the development strategy employed in post-conflict states, a more positive peace is likely to occur which both reduces the risks of future conflict as well as tackling the grievances that caused and were manifested through the previous conflict. I will begin this essay by looking critically at the causes of war and the reasons for the continuation of war, exploring how poverty and inequality can interact with these processes. I will then move on to consider the importance of pro-poor growth, and how this can help in producing a more positive peace. Finally, I will consider El Salvador where the post-conflict development strategy largely ignored the causes of the conflict, and consequently further entrenched poverty and inequality through structural adjustment policies. These reforms failed to address the causes of the conflict, leading to a negative peace in El Salvador characterised by violence and high levels of crime.

The immediate post-conflict stage can be seen as a negative peace, which means that whilst 'overt physical violence may have ended, other political, social, economic and cultural factors that adversely affect human opportunities and quality of life may persist' (Mac Ginty, 2010: 34). The major challenge in post-conflict states is to transform this environment into one of a positive peace, which begins to ensure long-term development and removes the structural causes of violent conflict, stretching "the concept of peace beyond the limits of its elasticity, going far beyond a reaction to the immediate aftermath of violent conflict" (ibid.). In trying to bring about a positive peace it must be acknowledged that peace cannot be achieved through temporary solutions, but must be matured through a long-lasting transition which helps people move on with their lives by providing opportunities for survival outside of conflict (Barakat & Chard, 2004: 18; Darby & Mac Ginty, 2003).

Miall *et al* (2000) identify three areas that must be considered in post-conflict reconstruction. These are political/constitutional incapacity, economic/social debilitation and psycho/social trauma. It is the second one that I focus upon in this essay. One way of reducing the risk of future conflict is through economic growth, something emphasised in the research undertaken by Paul Collier (Collier & Hoeffler, 2002; Collier *et al*, 2003; Collier *et al*, 2006). However whilst these works have been important in addressing the factors likely to make peace more sustainable, what has been largely ignored is the political process that surrounds this transition (Mac Ginty, 2010: 32). In this essay I argue that whilst economic development is important in reducing the risk of future conflict, it should be done in a way that does not exacerbate previous grievances, and instead, attempts to rectify them (Barakat, 2010: 11). In order to promote a sustainable reconstruction process "consideration has to be given to the root causes of the conflict ... which involves understanding the manifestations of poverty and seeking to increase a country's general development through various approaches to poverty reduction" (Jones, 2010: 115). Poverty and inequality are major causes of conflict (Stewart, 2010: 287 - 290), both economically, as Collier suggests, as well as politically, in the form of grievances. Therefore attempts at reducing them should form an integral part of a country's

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post-conflict development strategy.

I begin my essay by looking critically at the causes of conflict, and consider what role poverty and inequality play in this process as both causes and consequences of conflict. I then move on to explore the beneficial impacts that post-war development centred round poverty reduction and pro-poor development[1] can have. I end by considering the case of El Salvador where poverty and inequality (which were important in initiating and sustaining the conflict) were ignored in the post-war development strategy resulting in a negative peace characterised by violence and crime. Whilst poverty and inequality are widely recognised as both a cause and consequence of conflict, “the contemporary neoliberal guided peace-building approach is not well suited to tackling socio-economic grievances” (Ahearne, 2009: 2 – 3).

Poverty as a Cause and Consequence of Conflict

Econometric analysis has highlighted factors that are likely to increase the risk of conflict. These consist of conditions that favour insurgency such as the type of terrain; the presence of foreign, cross border sanctuaries; and most importantly, “the government’s police and military capabilities and the reach of government institutions into rural areas” (Fearon & Laitin, 2003: 80). Also important is the availability of finance; the cost of rebellion; where military advantage lies; and the population size (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004: 588). It is when organisation, resources, and opportunities become available that people will mobilise for collective action, including rebellion (Tilly, 1978: 59 – 87).

Similar analysis has been applied to determine what factors are important in deciding whether a peace-settlement lasts, or relapses into violent conflict. Many of the findings are similar to those that cause conflict, with the opportunity for rebellion still an important factor. However a number of other factors are also important. A falling level of military expenditure by the government demonstrates that the government is committed to the peace, which is likely to result in rebel groups also giving up their arms (Collier *et al*, 2003: 156). The level of economic development also has a significant impact upon the risk of future conflict. If the post-war “economy remains stagnant through the [first post-conflict] decade the decade-risk is 42.1%. If, instead, it grows at 10% per year, which is fast but not without precedent, the decade-risk falls to 26.9%” (Collier *et al*, 2006: 9). Finally, if more time and money is spent on external peacekeeping forces, then a more durable peace is expected (*ibid*: 13).

These analyses, whilst important in demonstrating the factors that may or may not increase the likelihood of conflict, fail to take proper account of the grievances associated with conflict, and as a result, ignore the social and political factors that are important in explaining why people fight and why peace processes may fail. Economic conditions are not the primary drivers of war, instead it is “political and identity factors [that are] the key initiation agents ... and economic factors [that] often subsequently [come] ... into play to change the nature and aim of the conflict” (Mac Ginty & Williams, 2009: 32). Grievances may be an important mobilising factor in initiating conflict (Brown, 1997); they often are a core reason for the continuation of conflict; and, in the post-conflict environment, they will be of great importance as citizens begin to come to terms with the damage that has been inflicted on different groups.

Poverty, and in particular inequalities related to poverty, can serve as both a cause and consequence of violent conflict (Goodhand, 2001: 4; Junne & Verkoren, 2005: 1). It is this relationship that makes it so important to post-conflict development. Groups that are in poverty may feel that “that they do not have the treatment in society that they are entitled to... [and so will] resort to violence to achieve their aims” (Barakat, 2010: 256). It is when this exclusion overlaps with ethnic, regional, linguistic, or religious boundaries that these inequalities become mobilising grievances, able to be manipulated by ethnic entrepreneurs (Goodhand, 2001: 24; Sen, 2008: 15). Whilst Collier & Hoeffler (2004) recognise that poverty can be a cause of war, they only consider it from an economic perspective. In this respect I argue that they only consider poverty[2] in an isolated manner, in terms of the economic effects of poverty and what ramifications and opportunities this poses for people in low-income countries. By considering poverty and inequality together a more holistic view can be taken that considers the perceptions of poverty and wealth between groups, giving poverty social and political importance. This different analysis shows how poverty may become a mobilising factor, just like many other grievances, as it becomes a source of tension between groups.

However, poverty does not only serve as a grievance, it is also a consequence of conflict. Collier *et al* (2003: 17)

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show how “after a typical civil war of seven years duration, incomes would be around 15 percent lower than had the war had not happened, implying approximately 30 percent increases in the incidence of absolute poverty”. Conflict will also negatively impact upon government expenditure on social safety nets causing survival strategies to collapse (Goodhand, 2001: 15), with funding instead being diverted towards military expenditure and the war effort (Jones, 2010: 107). Moreover, “as conflict is prolonged, violent acts based on economic motivation become more commonplace as resources diminish” (ibid: 104). As a result, people are more likely to turn to criminal activity, increasing the viability of a war-economy, and forcing the continuation of violence. Conflict results in the creation of a new type of political economy focused around fighting, not simply a destruction of the old one (Keen, 1998:7). Where this is the cause, it makes reverting back to peace more difficult, as I will explore later on.

The complementary relationship between poverty as both a cause and consequence of conflict demonstrates its importance in both initiating and sustaining violent conflict. I now go on to demonstrate the beneficial effects of focusing upon pro-poor growth.

Pro-Poor Development

In post-conflict societies, states will have a number of priorities that they feel they need to address. Often this will create tensions between long-term goals and short-term security needs. I argue here, that as early as possible states should begin to mould their economies towards one that emphasises pro-poor growth. This should be targeted for a number of reasons. Firstly, it can begin to readdress some of the grievances created through unequal distribution of resources that may have been a cause of fighting, or a reason for the continuation of fighting. Secondly, it is important for improving perceptions of the government’s commitment to peace, and increasing the benefits that people receive through peace. Finally, it is also important in shifting people’s livelihoods away from a war economy to one that is orientated around peaceful activities. I shall now explore each of these in turn.

Post-war development should be focused upon pro-poor growth in order to reverse the poverty / conflict trap and address the grievances created through inequalities. This can be achieved through a fairer allocation of “public spending (and taxation) across regions and ethnic groups [in order] ... to redress some of the deep social inequalities that often characterise the pre-war pattern of public infrastructure and services” (Addison, 2003: 10), and remove some of “the primary catalyst[s] and ‘justification[s] for violence” (Jones, 2010: 122). Unless pro-poor growth is targeted, then a post-conflict peace settlement is only more likely to be rejected as it will not meet rebel demands, forcing a relapse into conflict. This should be built upon the “implementation of social safety nets to protect the vulnerable and the need to ensure that all people of differing ethnic groups mutually benefit” (ibid: 113). Post-war reconstruction should therefore seek to not only re-build the previous economy, but to correct its faults in terms of re-distribution and fairness (Obwona & Guloba, 2009: i93).

Secondly, in order to change people’s perceptions, “explicit connections need to be made between public political peace processes and improvements in the people’s everyday experiences” (Mac Ginty, 2010: 48). A major danger in post-conflict situations is that “even if governments are willing to concede to rebels’ demands, they might have no credible means of committing to the agreement, and thus the rebel group might fear that once it loses its fighting capability the government will renege, a problem known as time inconsistency” (Collier *et al*, 2003: 80). By focusing on pro-poor growth the government sends out a range of positive signals, both social and economic, that the peace is likely to be long-term. By switching spending from military expenditure to social development policies, governments demonstrate their intent to start investing in the country and move into a development stage; “this may be interpreted, not just by the rebel organisation but by the wider population, as the government actively honouring the spirit of the settlement” (Collier *et al*, 2003: 155). In countries where entire generations have grown up in war, “lack of education and respect for human rights has made them contemptuous towards authority structures and non-violent mechanisms for addressing differences” (Obwona & Guloba, 2009: i87). By starting to invest in the country, and in particular, in those worse affected by the conflict, the government can begin to change these attitudes.

In addition, focusing on pro-poor growth demonstrates a commitment by the government to the peace, which is likely to enhance stability and therefore, lead to a return of capital. This is often a major problem for countries coming out of civil war: “By the end of the first decade of postconflict peace capital flight has risen further to 26.1 percent. Far from

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realising a peace dividend here, the country experiences a war overhang effect” (Collier *et al*, 2003: 21). However, if governments are investing in their people’s social development then companies are more likely to believe in the peace settlement, and therefore return. In this respect not only does investing in the poor benefit those living in poverty, but it will also enhance economic development more generally through the return of capital to be used for investment.

Finally, as demonstrated in the previous section, when people lives are persistently interrupted by conflict, they are more likely to turn to fighting as a means of survival. Post conflict situations are often marred by “a crime surge, the failure to fulfil public expectations and slow economic growth (Mac Ginty, 2010: 47). During persistent fighting, “conflict changes the balance of assets in the society, reducing the value of those that are useful during peacetime and increasing the value of those that are useful only for violence” (Collier *et al*, 2003: 84). In this regard, the economy becomes one directed and shaped by war, something which is very difficult to change. However, by emphasising pro-poor growth, the local economy can be transformed into one which favours peaceful activities.

This may be achieved through emphasising the importance of rural and agricultural development. Those African countries which have achieved both growth and equity have done so by investing in agriculture in the form of “rural infrastructure, inputs, research and credit combined with appropriate institutions to increase this sector’s productivity and potential capacity for contributing an even larger reverse flow to the rest of the economy” (Ali, 2009: i44). By changing the local economy through pro-poor policies, especially in those areas particularly affected by poverty and violence, national governments and donors can begin to change the opportunities that local people have. Through public programs to improve access to markets and to social services, including security of property and persons, a pro-poor development strategy can be implemented (Ali, 2009: i45).

Pursuing Conflict-Sensitive Development

I have argued so far that poverty is both a cause, and consequence of violent conflict. As a result, it forms an integral part of violence, and deserves close attention in post-conflict states. Development, by its very nature, is likely to create winners and losers (Mac Ginty & Williams, 2009: 5) and this is something which makes post-conflict development more difficult, when so many people are already facing the negative after-effects of violence. For this reason, I argue for trying to pursue a development strategy that is conflict sensitive. By this I mean one that takes into account the causes and consequences of war, and fits a national development strategy around these issues. Where grievances centre round the inequality and poverty of certain groups within a society, the aim of post-war development should be to seek economic growth, but to do so in a manner that limits “the conflict-inducing effects of political and economic liberalization” (Paris, 1997: 58). The durability of peace will depend upon whether post-conflict economic reforms “integrate people into a society and give them a stake in the strengthening of peace” (Kamphuis, 2005). This strategy does not aim to achieve “equal outcomes regardless of the efforts... Instead, inclusiveness means levelling the playing field, getting rid of special enticement for lopsided development, and making the effort to engage every segment of the population” (Thomas, 2011). If is this done properly, then a more inclusive development strategy is likely to be pursued, preventing the creation of new grievances in post-conflict states, and addressing the ones that may have initiated and / or sustained conflict.

The case of El Salvador exemplifies many of the problems associated with post-conflict development. It is a prime example of donors, and in particular the International Financial Institutions (IFIs), not fully taking into account the causes of the conflict and entrenching these problems through the post-conflict development strategy. The twelve year long civil war in El Salvador between 1980 and 1992 was largely a result of pervasive inequalities and poverty (Paris, 2004: 122). It cost an estimated 75,000 lives and displaced roughly one-quarter of El Salvador’s population. Under the guidance of the IMF, the World Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank, El Salvador liberalised its economy upon reaching a peace settlement implementing economic stabilisation and structural adjustment policies in return for financial assistance (ibid: 123). Furthermore, the conditions on entering into negotiations were that the government would only pursue democratisation and demilitarisation if the opposition forces (the FMLN) “acquiesced not to discuss the economic policies during the peace talks. This resulted in peace accords that focused on reforms in both the security sector and the political system, while largely leaving out socioeconomic issues” (van der Borgh, 2005: 252), which had been the main drivers of the conflict.

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Following the conflict, between 1992 and 1996 El Salvador achieved relatively successful growth, expanding its GDP at a yearly average of 6.0% (EIU, 1997: 76). However, a closer inspection demonstrates that despite this the economic liberalisation policies applied in El Salvador have “exacerbated the very socio-economic conditions that precipitated war in the first place” (Paris, 2004: 124). Large sections of the population are still denied basic services such as health care and water whilst “post-war economic growth has primarily enriched a very narrow segment of the population” (ibid: 125). Distributional inequalities have widened, whilst HDI levels dropped by over 10 per cent in the first six years of economic adjustment (ibid.). The limited role of the state has resulted in a largely negative peace, characterised by dramatic increases in both violent and non-violent crime, and high unemployment in rural areas (Vilas, 1995; van der Borgh, 2005: 253). Many of the poverty alleviation programmes were largely uncoordinated, and have taken place without adequate consideration of local concerns (van der Borgh, 2005: 253), meaning that they have not properly addressed the real problems.

The peace process pursued in El Salvador demonstrates many of the arguments I have been outlining throughout this essay. A post-conflict development strategy was employed that took little consideration of the causes of conflict, and furthermore, created new grievances by increasing inequalities and poverty through economic liberalisation reforms. An unstable peace has resulted, in which both crime and homicide rates have increased. The tensions that initiated the conflict are still present, and little is being done by the government to change this. By promoting an approach which is not conflict-sensitive, El Salvador has only achieved an “illusion of peace” (Fishel, 1998).

Conclusion

In this essay I have sought to demonstrate the importance of poverty as both a cause and consequence of conflict. I have attempted to demonstrate the need to move beyond just seeing poverty as an economic condition that increases the likelihood of war (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004). Whilst this is valid, poverty is multi-dimensional and also has the potential to act as a grievance, especially when it overlaps with ethnic, regional, linguistic, or religious differences. Furthermore, it is also a major consequence of conflict and for this reason has the potential to create a negative cycle of poverty and violence (Ahearne, 2009: 5). In order to address this I have argued that countries emerging from civil wars (especially those which have been based around inter-group inequalities) should promote conflict sensitive development. By this I mean policies that seek to minimise the conflict-inducing effects of political liberalisation by implementing social safety nets, whilst also recognising the grievances that helped to cause and sustain violent conflict.

An emphasis on poverty reduction will have a number of beneficial effects. Firstly, the primary catalysts for conflict can begin to be removed as grievances are addressed; secondly, both those affected by conflict, and businesses who moved financial capital away, will regain their faith in both the government and the peace process as they see more resources being invested in peaceful as opposed to violent activities; and finally, by increasing people's employment opportunities and changing their livelihoods, there is likely to be a shift towards a peace-time economy as opposed to one directed and financed by conflict. By promoting longer term investment and ensuring the sustainability of a peace time economy, people will begin to increase those assets useful for peace, whilst disregarding those only useful for violence.

I have demonstrated the failure of neo-liberalism in El Salvador in promoting a positive peace. Structural Adjustment Programs applied there were done so with only limited social safety nets increasing inequalities between groups. Economic liberalisation was favoured above all other types of economic reform creating only an ‘illusion of peace’ where crime rates and violence are still high, despite impressive levels of economic growth.

The over-arching aim of my argument has been to show that whilst development is important in reducing the risk of future conflict. It must be pursued in a manner that does not pose the risk of creating new grievances, and causing harm (Anderson, 1999). Development should not be pursued for its own sake, but in order to restructure the economy and facilitate a positive peace that addresses the causes and consequences of conflict.

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- [1] Pro-poor development is that which "can reduce the degree of inequality in the distribution of income while a growth process is being ignited...such policies could include social transfers, state employment and investment in infrastructure in addition to the usual public expenditure on health and education" (Ajakaiye & Ali, 2009; Son, 2004: 308).

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[2] Absolute poverty “refers to a set standard which is the same in all countries and which does not change over time. An income-related example would be living on less than \$X per day” (Poverty.org.uk, 2011).

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*Written by: Tom McCarthy
Written at: University of York
Written for: Dr David Connolly
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