CONFLICT IN AFRICA:
A REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON
SELECTED TOPICS

WORKING DRAFT

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I. INTRODUCTION

The end of the Cold War has had contradictory influences on the nature and incidence of violent conflict across the globe; warfare has subsided in Asia and Latin America but surged in Africa and the former Eastern Bloc. Intrastate conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa has reversed years, even decades of development progress and brought about environmental devastation, tremendous population movements, political destabilization of neighbors, public health emergencies, economic collapse, and extraordinary human suffering. The escalation and ferocity of violence in many African countries has become so severe that USAID is seeking to integrate conflict perspectives into its development programs across the continent. This literature review is intended to serve as a resource to USAID personnel and introduce them to major issues and debates regarding the characteristics of conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The subject of violent conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa is immense; this literature review does not attempt to serve as a comprehensive survey of this subject, nor of any of its innumerable aspects. Instead, the authors have sought to sample a variety of materials on several important subtopics in order to give readers an overview of some of the major issues that are being discussed. The sources cited vary greatly; they include materials by some of the most prominent scholars in this field as well as lesser-known works. Many of the articles are available over the Internet, placing them within the reach of USAID personnel in the field. This review is also a work in progress; while some of the topics have been explored in depth, others have not yet been addressed or only discuss a few materials.

II. CAUSES OF VIOLENT CONFLICT

The causes of violent conflict are complex, and frequently so thoroughly intertwined with a range of social, economic, and political factors that isolating individual variables can be extremely difficult. In the past, economic issues were often held to be at the root of violent conflict, and it was these issues that seemingly propelled communist-inspired
insurgencies during the Cold War. Similarly, the “hierarchy of needs” approach which was particularly fashionable in the 1970s pointed to economic issues as being the paramount factors in achieving development and preventing conflict. Today, however, it is generally understood that the causes of violent conflict are more complex. In general, there is some agreement that the root causes of conflict include poverty, economic dependence, weak states, ethnic discrimination, international rivalries, and foreign military interventions (Schmeidl and Jenkins, 1998). “Environmental security,” including competition over diminishing resources, is also being pointed to more and more.

Sub-Saharan Africa is widely regarded as a “development failure,” and large parts are embroiled in deadly conflict. However, the question of causes and effects is being reconsidered, and many contemporary researchers are now pointing to issues of governance as lying at the root of conflict in Africa (e.g. Zartman, Reno, Ake, Baker, and Weller). A recent study by Douma et al. (1999) on the causes of conflict in the developing world corroborated that socioeconomic factors in and of themselves do not cause conflict. Instead, they interact with other issues to intensify or prolong it. This conclusion is not “news” to today’s researchers, but this careful analysis of case studies from West Africa, South Asia, and Central America adds important evidence to back up the prevailing conventional wisdom.

At the same time, given the focus which so many researchers place on governance, one must be cautious to not overlook other important socioeconomic factors. The Carnegie Commission (1997) emphasizes that economic growth which is unevenly distributed may contribute to conflict, especially when poverty is concentrated among certain ethnic groups; Baker and Weller (1998) identify uneven economic development along group lines and sharp or severe economic decline as two of the top twelve indicators of internal conflict and state collapse. Relative economic decline between groups may also be key; as the Carnegie Commission states, “peace is most commonly found where economic growth and opportunities to share in that growth are broadly distributed across the population.” Not surprisingly, the State Failure Task Force (1995, 1998) found that poor
economic and quality of life indicators were sensitive in forecasting state collapse, particularly in more democratic countries.

Conteh-Morgan (1994) demonstrates that in countries where the interests of particular groups (namely the military) are threatened, violent response often follows. He argues that if improved civil and political rights are not accompanied by social and economic improvements, the military will tend to intervene. He shows that externally-imposed structural adjustment policies are likely to run counter to the democratic impulses of society, because they are seen as a source of economic hardship. Therefore, he argues, the West is “tacitly creating conditions for military intervention in African democracies by insisting on economic conditionalities without providing resources to prop up the democratization process.”

A second question is whether violent conflict is caused by or itself causes state collapse. Zartman (1995) and Baker and Weller (1998) hold, perhaps counter-intuitively, that violence is the result of collapse. Zartman explains this more fully, positing that “poor performances of the state’s functions are broad causes of state collapse.” He makes the point that state tyranny and state incapacity are two sides of the same coin, for both ultimately destroy the legitimacy and infrastructure of the state. As the inevitable power vacuum transpires, violence ensues.

Like Zartman, Khadiagala (1995) focuses on state institutions as the central element in state collapse. In an examination of reconstruction in Uganda, he focuses upon the return of the state to the center of the political and social stage. Although many point to the overextension of the state as the root of the collapse of the Amin regime, he argues that it was the militarization of politics which resulted in the erosion of the state’s purpose and caused its ultimate disintegration.

* It should be emphasized that the terms “weak” and “strong” states are references to the state’s capacities to perform the functions of governance, including internal and external security, provision of public goods (e.g. health, education, rule of law), control over state agents, etc., and do not necessarily reflect issues such as degree of centralization or economic control. Strong/weak states should not be confused with strong/weak rulers; indeed, “strongmen” almost invariably govern weak states. For further clarification of

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In contrast to these institution-centered analyses, Reno (1998) seeks to determine the incentives of leadership in weak African states, and the reasons why they descend into “warlord politics.” He argues that warlordism is a logical consequence of weak state rulers’ attempts to manage external challenges and reconfigure patron-client politics. In particular, he argues that liberal economic and political reform, such as that demanded by the IMF and World Bank, undermines the incentives of leaders to maintain their positions through development. Sudden opportunities for political entrepreneurs emerge from the dismantling of previous patronage systems, resulting in violence and state collapse. Leaders seek to maintain their positions by relying on repression, force and a narrow political base of trusted allies. Furthermore, Reno argues that privatization under these circumstances has only served to concentrate resources within the hands of cronies, while opponents are rooted out under the guise of “anti-fraud” efforts. He asserts that the dilemma facing African rulers is not simply a choice between reform and collapse. Rather, he argues that externally dictated reforms are bringing about unintended results in that they cause leaders to use their authority to control markets independently of state institutions or governance. Privatization is thus being used as a smokescreen to transfer control over state institutions and industries into the hands of mafia-style enterprises.

Adam’s (1995) study of Somalia under Siyad delineates eight factors behind the complete collapse of that state: personal rule; military rule; “clan-katura,” i.e. appointing clan members to office; clan rule; poisoning clan relations; urban state terror; neofascist campaigns against the north; and external military, technical, and financial foreign assistance. While some of these are unique to the case of Somalia, many are not. Personal rule, military rule, and external support are pointed to as key factors in state collapse by many observers, and if “ethnicity” is substituted for “clan” in Adam’s list, it could describe any number of conflicts in Africa. Somalia is an extremely important example to turn to when comparing the ethnic conflicts that are so dishearteningly prevalent in contemporary Africa. It is one of the most homogenous states on the terminology, please consult the USAID/AFR/CMR – Tulane University glossary of terms and concepts related to violent conflict at http://www.info.usaid.gov/regions/afr/conflictweb/reports/terms.htm.
continent in terms of ethnicity, culture, language, and religion, yet it too has been devastated by intergroup warfare – this time revolving around competing clans. This case strongly supports the thesis that ethnic conflict is a symptom, rather than a cause, of a deeper malaise, such as state failure, lack of political legitimacy, or economic crisis.

An interesting question, particularly cogent in the context of developing an early warning model, is whether violent conflict occurs suddenly or is the end result of a long-term process that can perhaps be reversed. Anderson (1999) argues that proximate causes are more important than root ones, and notes that many contemporary wars have broken out quickly. Mirroring Reno, she posits that this is because war has been rushed into by those seeking to fill a power vacuum. Furthermore, she notes that these wars are frequently not preceded by intervening diplomatic or formal mediation efforts. Those who stand to benefit may even intentionally provoke a crisis as a pretext for pursuing war.

Anderson’s position contrasts markedly with those of scholars seeking to identify underlying structural causes. Although it is important to recognize that Anderson’s analysis is of war and Zartman’s (1995) is of state collapse, Zartman’s position contrasts in several points. He argues that state collapse is simply the end point of a long process of the disintegration of state institutions. The good news, from his perspective, is that this process can be recognized ahead of time and therefore reversed. He describes five discernible stages: devolution of power to the periphery as the center is mired in infighting; government loss of its power base as it withers at the center; avoidance by political leaders of necessary but difficult choices, resulting in a crisis of governance; incumbents’ practicing only defensive measures and the absence of a policy agenda; and the center’s loss of control over its agents. He further argues that one of the most notable features of this process is the absence of clear turning points or thresholds. However, Zartman’s analysis is not necessarily incompatible with Anderson’s, as she is describing the outbreak of violence itself, not the conditions that make it likely.
The State Failure Task Force (1995, 1998) undertook an immense study to identify correlates of four kinds of state failure (revolutionary wars, ethnic wars, geno/politicide, and disruptive regime changes) through a retrospective statistical study of over six hundred variables. Its conclusion was that a combination of three of these variables – openness to international trade (measured as the value of imports plus exports divided by GDP), infant mortality, and level of democracy (unconventionally defined by the ethnic composition of the ruling elite and executive dependence on the legislature) – correctly discriminated between failure and nonfailure two years in advance for about two-thirds of the cases. However, the study has been criticized on methodological grounds, and in interpreting the results it must be emphasized that correlation and causation are two entirely different matters.

III. LINKAGES BETWEEN CONFLICT AND DEVELOPMENT

Almost without exception, writers on the subject of violent conflict in Africa discuss the continent’s development dilemmas, which include lack of economic progress, environmental degradation, poor soils and climates, abysmal health and education indicators, massive levels of population movements (both voluntary and involuntary), exploding urban growth, disintegration of state services, and so forth. Rock (1993) gives a gloomy historical account of Africa’s development performance as compared to Asia and Latin America. Without question, Sub-Saharan Africa, with its crises in agriculture, environment, economics, and governance, poses by far the greatest development challenge the world now faces. Violent conflict is very much a part of this development dilemma. Traditionally, the development community lacked integrated perspectives on warfare, and characterized assistance in complex emergencies as “humanitarian” rather than developmental. It is now generally recognized that complex emergencies and sustainable development lie at opposite ends of a continuum and that both “development” and “relief” professionals must have a clear understanding of this connection.

Rock (1993) outlines two primary schools of thought which seek to explain Africa’s development crisis. One emphasizes the destructive combination of fragile economies at
the time of independence and an unfavorable international system. This interpretation holds that drought, a poor natural resource base, and dependence on primary exports interacted with an increasingly hostile international environment with disastrous consequences. Rock argues, however, that this hypothesis is problematic on several fronts. In recent years, the more compelling explanation for lack of development in Africa has been its weak states, the very item that many political scientists are pointing to as an explanation for violent conflict. This evidence suggests that Africa’s development failures and its violent struggles are twin outcomes of the same malady.

The impact of structural adjustment and the harsh conditionalities it imposes is a topic that appears throughout the literature, with many authors concluding that it has contributed to political instability and violence. Martin and O’Meara (1995) note that austerity measures have required abrupt, drastic changes in monetary and fiscal policies that have led directly to political instability, and Conteh-Morgan (1994) discusses how economic hardship and imposed austerity measures may undermine the legitimacy of a government. Rothchild’s (1995) examination of the state collapse in Ghana is yet another example. After the democratically elected Limann administration became mired in ineffectiveness, Rawlings seized power in a 1981 coup. Initially seeking to achieve legitimacy through populism, he abandoned this in favor of imposing an unpopular reform package. Although Ghana’s economic decline was halted, this did not translate into legitimacy for the Rawlings government; some sectors of the public were hard-hit, and the government’s reliance on external recommendations and funds heightened popular mistrust.

Some may argue that conflict and crises in development may result from a poor environmental base that is being rapidly depleted. In general, Sub-Saharan Africa has not entered the demographic transition or adopted Green Revolution technology. Drought, poor soils, inhospitable climates, and disease are pointed to as factors behind famine and natural disasters, and, indeed, the environmental catastrophes facing Africa should not be underestimated. The Carnegie Commission (1997) explicitly discusses the relationship between natural resources and conflict, focusing on conflicts over the control of these resources.
resources, and discussing how environmental degradation and resource depletion aggravate tension. However, it is now generally recognized that even “natural” disasters have strong socioeconomic and political components, and cannot be explained simply in terms of the environment. McNulty (1995) points to the example of the Sahel. This region includes some of the poorest and most peripheral countries in Africa and has been wracked by drought. However, this same area was the center of kingdoms and urban centers that dominated West Africa for centuries. This “complete and dramatic reversal of the spatial structure of West Africa” demonstrates that the political and economic institutions that determine the distribution and use of natural resources must be critically examined.

Ake (1996) argues that Africa’s development has not been a failure – he posits that development has simply never truly been on the agenda of African leaders or the international community in the first place. Asserting that political conditions have been the greatest impediments to development in Africa, he constructs a sophisticated explanation of how African politics have been constituted in such a way as to prevent development. He argues that arbitrary and absolute power were two major features of the colonial era which carry over to the present day. Ake explores how intense, zero-sum competition arose over the capture of state power and how its use as the sole avenue for material accumulation came to dominate politics. In this context, cleavages were reinforced as leaders manipulated communal loyalties, transforming ethnicity into a menacing political force. In efforts to consolidate power and cut off opponents, the state became an agent for the appropriation of wealth and a tool to punish adversaries’ pocketbooks. The character of politics thus led to an economic crisis and violent competition.

Ake further argues that political elites in essence passed on the responsibility of development to Cold War patrons, expecting development budgets to be financed externally. He forcefully asserts that “[t]he ideology of development was exploited as a means for reproducing political hegemony; it got limited attention and served hardly any purpose as a framework for economic transformation.” His critique of the development
paradigm, behaviors, and agendas of the West is similarly scathing; he points to structural adjustment policies as an example of “development against the people – not of them or for them” and states that “[f]oreign development agents do not see the people as agents of development or as the essential energy that must fuel it, as a source of ideas of how to proceed, or even as a constituency to which the agents are accountable. With few exceptions, they do not even take seriously the idea of the people developing themselves.” The policies of the Bretton Woods institutions are cited as examples. While Ake’s book is largely grounded in theory and the interpretation of overall trends, he also offers concrete examples to support his arguments.

Ake further discusses how when African leaders have made efforts to assert and carry out policy goals, they found themselves too politically weak and dependent do so. As a result, they were “trapped in the dilemma of choosing between an endogenous agenda that they cannot find the means to implement and an exogenous agenda that they [could] bring themselves to accept, between what they want[ed] to do and what they [had to] do.” As a result, African leaders became alienated from development. True development in Africa, Ake contends, will not be able to begin until the struggle over programs and policies is resolved and the character of politics transformed. As long as African leaders are preoccupied with their own survival, and as long as that survival is inimical to development due to the dynamics and configurations of politics, development cannot occur and violent conflict will persist. Asserting that “[t]here is no development in alienation,” Ake argues that the only solution to economic as well as political woes lies in meaningful democratization.

IV. CHARACTERISTICS OF VIOLENT CONFLICT

Lederach (1997) identifies several dynamics of armed conflicts in the world today. These include:

− Cohesion and identity tend to form within increasingly narrower lines than those that encompass national citizenship.
Factionalization, along with diffusion of power among a multiplicity of groups rather than a statist hierarchy.

Long-standing, protracted relationships that are driven by the groups’ animosity and fear. As a result, psychological and even cultural issues may propel the conflict, rather than substantive ones.

V. IMPACT OF VIOLENT CONFLICT

According to a German proverb, war leaves three armies: an army of cripples, an army of mourners, and an army of thieves. The costs of war may seem obvious, yet there has been remarkably little scholarly research into this subject, especially as to its long-term consequences. Anderson (1999) offers one of the most original examinations of the consequences of violent conflict. Rather than simply focussing on the tragedy of war, she looks at winners and losers. “Warlords,” for example, enjoy economic gains from control of resources which are the basis of their patronage networks, and will thus seek to prolong the war. Reno (1998) shares this analysis, but also strongly argues that collapsed states are an important component of the global economic system, as warlords, freed from the constraints of statehood, run their territories like a very bloody business. Influenced by world systems theory, he argues that these collapsed states are in symbiotic relationships with powerful global interests that benefit from uncontrolled and monopolistic access to natural resources such as oil and gems.

Francis (1995) too demonstrates that the impacts of war are not evenly spread throughout a society. Her study of the costs of war is as original as it is startling. In 1979, Tanzania fought a six-month war with Uganda, winning a quick and decisive victory. As the war was fought almost entirely on Ugandan soil, it represents an excellent case study of the costs of war to a victor that in large part escaped horrific suffering. She analyzes the direct and indirect costs to Tanzania, including corruption, an inflated military, a disgruntled public, an undermined economy, and cuts to education and health services. Although any methodology for arriving at a “price tag” for direct and opportunity costs of such a complex subject should be considered with a grain of salt, her final estimate for a
brief and “successful” war is a sobering $5.12 billion. If this number is even close to accurate, it should clear any doubt that the developmental costs of conflict, even to the “victor,” are staggering.

Two studies by Gersony (1988, 1989) commissioned by the US State Department document the nature, pattern, and extent of the violence that compelled widespread refugee flows in Mozambique and Somalia in the late 1980s. While out of date, these papers are excellent examples of field research into the causes and patterns of flight. The accounts of atrocities committed by Renamo are particularly disturbing; the parallels between its tactics and those of the Khmer Rouge are a startling reminder that patterns of extreme violence are not unique aberrations, but often bear striking similarities to each other. Another aspect that particularly stands out from these reports is how loathe people are to leave their homes; one of the most shocking disclosures was how much people endured before their escapes. This should be highlighted to counter perceptions that refugees seek handouts even when they are not truly in danger. It is clear that these refugees and IDPs took to flight only as an extreme and desperate last measure. Those seeking more contemporary accounts of patterns of human rights abuses may wish to consult the web sites of Amnesty International (www.amnesty.org) or Human Rights Watch (www.hrw.org); both organizations produce excellent, timely reports on human rights issues around the world.

Nordstrom (1995) explores not only how violence deconstructs societies, but also how those caught in its grip employ tremendous creativity to survive against all odds. She writes,

“For the vast majority of Mozambicans, war is about existing in a world suddenly divested of lights. It is about a type of violence that spills out across the country and into the daily lives of people to undermine the world as they know it. A violence that, in severing people from their traditions and their futures, severs them from their lives. It hits at the heart of perception and existence. And that is, of course, the goal of terror warfare: to cripple political will by attempting to cripple all will, all sense.”
Nordstrom perceives that to understand the process of dehumanization, one must see what it means to be human within a particular cultural context. In Mozambique, this is grounded in family and community life, parameters that disintegrated as the war progressed. She recognizes that African cultures – and many anthropologists – do not make sharp distinctions between the self and the society; in this context, the destruction of the community is accompanied by psychological chaos. This is countered by tremendous creativity in survival strategies. She documents several examples of Mozambicans re-ordering the world through the creation of new symbols, society, and culture. Those interested in psychosocial assistance in post-conflict societies may wish to consult this article for its discussion of the ways in which traditional healers developed rituals to “take the violence out of people” and reintegrate them into society.

VI. IMPACT OF VIOLENT CONFLICT ON WOMEN AND CHILDREN

“The war in Somalia…is a war on the woman. Any woman between the ages of 18 and 40 is not safe from being forcibly removed to the army camps to be raped and violated. If her husband finds out, he kills her for the shame of it all; if they know that he has found out, they kill him too; if he goes into hiding instead and she won’t tell where he is, they kill her.”


This harrowing account illuminates all too clearly the trauma of women in conflict. Though many still assume that the primary victims of conflict are combatants, in Africa this is not at all the case. Women and children account for up to 80% of Africa’s displaced people (Dirasse 1999) and represent the most vulnerable populations in times of crisis. Stresses placed on women are immense and encompass not only war-related physical and sexual violence, but also increasing levels of domestic abuse which result from the breakdown of traditional community and family life and the ensuing erosion of cultural mechanisms that protect and support women. Their weak status also makes them particularly vulnerable to shortages of food and medicine; meanwhile, the burdens on women increase as they shoulder the responsibility of safeguarding the well-being of
children while being forced to cope with the new demands of daily life in a crisis situation. Many are forced to resort to dire sexual survival strategies to obtain passage or food, for example. There is a large body of literature on this subject; Dirasse’s 1999 article represents an excellent, concise overview on women and conflict in Africa. She also touches upon numerous programs of interest to the international development community, ranging from mechanisms to empower women in crisis situations to small but important gestures to relieve the stresses and indignity endured by refugee women, such as providing menstrual sanitation supplies, which are generally unavailable in camps.

The Carnegie Commission (1997) argues that the plight of women is of crucial importance not only because of their victimization in war, but also because in so many societies and post-conflict countries they are truly the backbone of community resilience. The Commission also discusses the effects of war upon children, showing how they suffer not only from the direct trauma of war, but also from tremendous opportunity costs stemming from interrupted education and so forth. Francis (1995) reinforces this latter point, arguing that among the economic consequences of Tanzania’s 1979 war with Uganda was “the beginning of the decline of this education miracle.”

Perhaps the most chilling aspects of many of Africa’s civil conflicts are not only the horrors that are committed, but the age of those who commit them. As Rubin (1998) comments, “Perhaps one of the most terrifying sights in the dozens of post-Cold War insurgencies around the world is that of a thirteen-year-old with a loaded Kalashnikov.” It is all too common for armed groups to abduct or force children into their armies, where they are terrorized, brainwashed, and forced to commit unspeakable crimes. As Rubin notes, it is estimated that as many as 80% of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) terrorizing northern Uganda is made up of abducted children. Under such circumstances, the lines between victims and victimizers become blurred; the ferocity displayed by half-grown killers lay bare the intense traumatization of society and the immense psychological wounding that takes place. A videotape directed by Abramson (1998) provides a portrait of northern Uganda that is both hopeful and intensely disturbing.
Aimed at a broad, popular audience, this one-hour documentary sheds little light on the conflict itself. However, its interviews with former child soldiers and healers at a rehabilitation center reveals the suffering of children abducted into the LRA and forced into sexual slavery and/or appalling acts of violence, and shows the center’s efforts to rescue and reintegrate them into a society that has come to fear them.

VII. US POLICY ON VIOLENT INTRASTATE CONFLICT

VIII. US FOREIGN POLICY ON AFRICA

IX. IMPACT OF FOREIGN ASSISTANCE ON VIOLENT CONFLICT

Anderson (1999) explicitly addresses the question of how foreign assistance harms or helps countries in crisis. Her short, highly readable volume on this subject should be required reading for any development professional. One important point that she makes is that agencies’ approaches to conflict too often focus only on the “dividers” that led to or aggravate the conflict; she also explores the impact of “connectors” within society and how they can be strengthened. She examines both how resource transfers (e.g. market price fluctuations, distributional impacts, etc.) and “implicit ethical assumptions” (unintended messages sent by competition among agencies, lifestyles of aid workers, etc.) can exacerbate the conflicts that aid is intended to mitigate. Her goal is to articulate these matters and provide a conceptual framework for analyzing the unintended harmful consequences of some aid programs that unwittingly feed intergroup tensions or weaken intergroup connections, and then to identify points of intervention. The first half of her book lays out a conceptual framework, while the second half discusses extremely interesting case studies that further illustrate the points.

There are all too many examples of weak, violent leaders being supported by external countries. This practice was notoriously rampant during the Cold War, when the United States, the Soviet Union, and their respective allies supported one regime or armed opposition over another almost regardless of its internal legitimacy or behavior. However, some point out that abruptly halting aid to oppressive regimes is not always the
best option. Adam (1995) notes that in Somalia when the US cut all aid where it had previously given too much, outright collapse ensued. He argues that the international community missed an opportunity to facilitate a transition in Somalia along the lines of the successful examples of Malawi and Kenya. He also concludes that it is of the utmost importance that international intervention activities do not overtly favor particular sides or factions.

X. CONFLICT EARLY WARNING

There are numerous efforts underway to create early warning models; however, those concerning violent conflict are not fully matured. Schmeidl and Jenkins (1998) assert that current capabilities “are not sufficient to develop strong humanitarian [early warning models] and associated information systems…[but] sustained dialogue between academics and policy analysts could make up for this.” They conclude that humanitarian early warning is likely to be as much art as science, but state that it can play an invaluable role by informing policymakers of political tremors. However, if “success” is to be measured by disasters averted, it may be difficult to sustain political will in such mechanisms.

These early warning models vary by approach, whether they look at structural or dynamic factors or a combination of the two. Lund’s 1996 book, *Preventing Violent Conflict*, was highly influential, although it tended to focus on the sphere of international relations, not development, and served as more of a conceptual framework than a model per se. Baker and Weller (1998) have a more development-oriented framework, but it is not fully operationalized. They suggest twelve top indicators for state collapse, but some of these are conceptual (e.g. “rise of factionalized elites”) and lack concrete variables. Their volume, too, is more of a conceptual framework than a full-fledged model.

Another issue in the use of early warning efforts is methodological. A number of academic models are impressive in their scope and efforts, but are not readily applicable to the needs of the practitioner in the field in that they require major efforts to gather and
process comparative data. Some of these models, such as the Protocol for Assessment of Nonviolent Direct Action (PANDA), use the Kansas Event Data System (KEDS), which machine-codes news wire articles for data analysis. The limitations of this method for use in the field are clear: the practitioner needs on-the-spot, practical tools and lacks the time and access to information that academics and policy analysts enjoy. Readers seeking a fuller examination of early warning models may also wish to consult Davies and Gurr (1998), Verstegen (1999), or Schmeidl and Jenkins (1998), as well as the document on this subject prepared for USAID by Samarasinghe et al (1999).

The Forum on Early Warning and Early Response (FEWER) takes the important position that there is no shortage of early warnings; the real issue is implementing early response. It has two interesting pilot programs as well as a manual and list of suggested indicators (e.g. human rights abuses, capital flight, military build-ups), but to date its efforts, while important, are in the early stages. However, it does make a strong, proactive effort to bridge the divide between early warning and early response. Lund (1996) explores similar issues in the realm of preventive diplomacy; his subsequent materials with Creative Associates (1998) seek to further develop an operational framework for implementation. Schmeidl and Jenkins (1998) point out that early warning systems, when implemented, are likely to encounter stiff opposition from political actors or international agencies whose interests run counter to them. For example, they note that any effective early warning model will inevitably have a very strong human rights component, and attention to such sensitive material has a long history of being muffled in international and domestic arenas alike.

Most of these models are not easily translated into field-based projects, because the needs and tools of policymakers and academics are so different from those of practitioners in the field. In contrast, Benini et al (1998) describe an extremely intriguing grassroots example that should be of keen interest to the practitioner. During 1990-1994, a functioning early warning system existed for KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, a province characterized by a rate of political violence more than ten times that of the country as a whole. A national NGO, the Human Rights Committee (HRC), collected and processed
information on conflict from a variety of sources and prepared reports. Although the quality of sources and information was open to question and the committee’s monitoring “had more the character of a social movement than a research enterprise,” the authors conclude that HRC’s publicized violence profiles provided critical information to the public and political actors during a potentially explosive transition. Benini et al conclude that although the quality of reporting was questionable, this kind of grassroots networking may have more impact than refined academic models because of its immediacy and the proactive responses it generated.

XI. PREVENTING THE RECURRENCE OF VIOLENT CONFLICT

Several authors express grave concern that transitions are not being properly managed. The State Failure Task Force (1998) data indicates that emerging democracies are much more unstable than either fully democratic or authoritarian regimes; Zartman (1999) has similarly argued that “good things” such as democracy and economic restructuring may be destabilizing in the short term, although necessary in the long run. The challenge is thus how to manage transitions in such a way that they do not contribute to further conflict. There is broad agreement in the literature that the challenges of post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation are immense, far greater than stopping conflicts before they pass the point of no return. It is widely recognized that transitional countries are among the most fragile, and so post-conflict efforts must be undertaken with the greatest care to prevent large-scale violence from recurring.

Scheper-Hughes (1998) writes, “Democratic transitions are best understood as a ‘dangerous hour.’” With the collapse of authoritarian regimes, there emerge new nations full of needs…and full of rage.” During the 1990s, there has been a resurgence of interest in transitional justice, i.e. how emerging governments address massive human rights violations committed under previous regimes. New democracies must negotiate a treacherous path encompassing difficult and sometimes contradictory ethical, moral, and legal considerations while somehow attempting to achieve some measure of reconciliation and justice within the country. This process is easily derailed by those
responsible for the atrocities on the one hand or those seeking “revenge justice” on the other. There are five broad categories of transitional justice: prosecuting crimes against the state (i.e. treason); prosecuting crimes against individuals (i.e. particular acts); non-criminal sanctions (e.g. banning former elites from holding office); truth commissions; and ignoring the whole mess altogether. Which path a country chooses generally depends on the nature of the peace process; negotiated agreements are usually accompanied by some sort of amnesty arrangement. However, for a country emerging from violence, it is imperative to mark a break with the past and establish new standards for justice and the rule of law. Other objectives may include acknowledgement of atrocities; establishing accountability; achieving some measure of justice; and deterrence. As Benomar (1995) neatly summarizes, the challenge is finding a solution that is acceptable to the population but does not turn into either a witch-hunt or a whitewash.

The Carnegie Commission (1997) emphasizes that a publicly-acceptable vehicle for reconciliation is absolutely paramount. It also discusses the importance of addressing the legacy of violence through “aggressive and visible use of the existing judicial system,” a truth commission, or an international tribunal. Stanton (1998) agrees that “impunity…is the weakest link in the chains that restrain genocide” and that achieving some measure of justice is therefore imperative. His paper specifically addresses genocide, but much of it is applicable to conflict scenarios in general. He argues that “social order abhors a vacuum,” so that when no system of effective justice is in place, revenge-taking becomes the norm, immeasurably feeding the cycle of violence.

The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has gained a great deal of international attention. It is true that the TRC achieved remarkable successes under very challenging circumstances. However, it must also be recognized that internationally, truth commissions rarely produce satisfactory results. McGinn (forthcoming) cites several factors that characterized the TRC and perhaps contributed to its success:

- Strong commitment by major parties in supporting the process.
− Generous resources in terms of personnel, funding, translators (into eleven languages), and time.
− Extensive media coverage and transparency of process.
− Participation of prominent private individuals (“track two” leaders), not simply politicians and political appointees.
− Inclusive process that reached out to survivors and families of victims and gave them a forum to speak freely not only about what occurred, but how it affected their lives.
− Making amnesty contingent on cooperation with the commission, which succeeded in breaking the wall of silence on the part of those who committed abuses.
− Face-to-face encounters between those who committed abuses and those who suffered from them.
− Making amnesty applications an individual, rather than group, process.

The last factors, she emphasizes, were important in humanizing the process and making the TRC a forum for actors on all sides to recognize each other as individuals rather than simply enemies. Schepers-Hughes’ (1998) anthropological reflection on remorse, forgiveness, and the politics of reconciliation in South Africa is a highly original and thought-provoking inquiry into the TRC. One avenue that she explores is comparisons between traditional mechanisms of popular justice in South Africa and around the world and the TRC processes. Indeed, she argues that some elements of its success stemmed from its lack of preoccupation with legalistic fact-finding and checking, while instead emphasizing public enactments of suffering, confession, remorse and forgiveness. Those wishing for an in-depth investigation into the TRC would be advised to read the work of Krog (1998), a poet and journalist who elegantly blends both crafts in her intimate and critical account of the TRC and its participants. She arrives at more questions than answers, but this thoughtful and detailed exploration is highly recommended to those seeking to implement similar inquiries in other countries.

Multiple cases exist of the reformation of collapsed states. Foltz (1995) outlines five stages for the reformation of a collapsed state: establishment of central political authority; control over national boundaries; control over national territory; the capacity to extract
resources so that the state can support itself; and control over actions of state agents. Several authors describe difficulties in navigating the post-conflict process; these situations are immensely complex and also of extreme importance in laying the foundation for a new social, economic, and political order. Khadiagala (1995) makes the important point that peasants may enjoy great autonomy under collapsed states, and may react with deep suspicion and mistrust if the only state institutions with which they have had experience have been violent or coercive. Nevertheless, he asserts that the Ugandan example shows “that policymakers can strike a compromise between building strong state institutions and the demands of external forces intervening directly to promote their own grassroots initiatives,” as illustrated by the progressively influential role of NGOs under the Museveni government. Meanwhile, Lowenkopf (1995), reflecting on Liberia, laments that the international community rushes to hold elections despite severe doubts about their feasibility and legitimizing quality – particularly if the elections are used as a pretext for freeing the international community from further responsibility in meeting a traumatized public’s paramount concern, security.

In addition to general overviews, there is a plethora of materials advocating particular policies for particular crises. While many of these have limited application outside of a specific time and place, important lessons can nevertheless be gleaned. Prendergast and Smock’s (1999) policy brief on postgenocidal reconstruction in Rwanda and Burundi is a case in point. While its recommendations are focused and specific, it does shed light on wider issues. Among them is how multifaceted the approaches to these complex conflicts must be; while this piece seriously addresses international negotiations and issues concerning “the elite-driven nature of the conflict,” it acknowledges that peace and reconciliation will not be possible without grassroots efforts, meaningful democratization, and economic and educational opportunities. Its assessment of the counterinsurgency measures in northwest Rwanda is an excellent example. The government’s initial efforts were violent – often brutal – and largely ineffective. When it began to address the problem more holistically through political and social strategies such as public education, providing relief to refugees and returnees, creating and training local defense forces, and discouraging reprisals, it broke the back of the insurgency on
Rwandan soil. However, there are no easy answers, – the genocidal militants have taken advantage of the collapse of Congo and shifted their base of operations there. Warfare in Congo, Rwanda, and Burundi is now intensely intertwined, rendering national-level efforts entirely inadequate.

XII. PREVENTING CONFLICT AT THE GLOBAL LEVEL

The Carnegie Commission (1997) divides measures for preventing conflict at the global level into two broad categories. The first is operational prevention, or “measures applicable in the face of immediate crisis. It relies on early engagement to help create conditions in which responsible leaders can resolve the problem giving rise to the crisis.” In contrast, structural prevention is defined as “measures to ensure that crises do not arise in the first place, or, if they do, that they do not recur…. [they include] strategies such as putting in place international legal systems, dispute resolution mechanisms, and cooperative arrangements; meeting people’s basic economic, social, cultural, and humanitarian needs; and rebuilding societies that have been shattered by war or other major crises.”

Lund (1996) takes a similar approach, making a strong case for why preventive action is so imperative and developing a conceptual framework for preventive diplomacy. His book has been highly influential and has contributed immensely toward contemporary awareness of conflict prevention. Although much of Lund’s focus is on international relations, he delineates the importance of “track two” diplomacy and multipronged approaches from the global to local levels in order to achieve crisis prevention and mitigation.

XIII. PREVENTING CONFLICT AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL

XIV. PREVENTING CONFLICT AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL
During the 1990s, a major focus of development assistance has been “good governance,” i.e. a state’s possessing the technical competence and expertise; organizational effectiveness; accountability; rule of law; and transparency and open information systems needed to foster an enabling environment for sustainable human development. This is seen as an antidote to state collapse and conflict. The Carnegie Commission (1997) outlines the role that the development community can play in reducing the risk of conflict through such “good governance” efforts as training, capacity building, and promoting rule of law.

Lederach (1997), like the Carnegie Commission (1997) and Lund (1996), makes a strong case for going beyond the traditional statist approach to diplomacy. While this view is hardly revolutionary for the international development community, his outstanding book draws from a wide variety of disciplines ranging from international relations to individual psychology and presents a multipronged, human-centered approach to building an infrastructure to support peace in deeply divided societies. He describes peace-building as “more than postaccord reconstruction…. [It] is a comprehensive concept that encompasses, generates and sustains the full array of processes, approaches, and stages needed to transform conflict toward more sustainable, peaceful relationships…. [P]eace is seen not merely as a state in time or a condition. It is a dynamic social construct.” He asserts that reconciliation frameworks must thus explicitly seek to heal relationships between groups and individuals to overcome feelings of fear, mistrust, and animosity.

To support these frameworks, Lederach (1997) offers a typology for identifying resources within the country which can be utilized to build a constituency for peace. He discusses the importance of middle-level actors in particular, pointing to their connections with both elite and grassroots elements. Noting that the international community is unfortunately oriented almost exclusively towards top-level leadership to the detriment of the overall peace-building process, he argues that recognizing the importance of and supporting the efforts of “unofficial” individuals and groups to act as peacemakers is critically needed. Options to facilitate this include intentionally broadening channels between mid-level and upper-level leaders, linking internal and external peacemakers,
and so forth. He illustrates this issue with an example from Somalia. Those who are engaged in the development of peace-building programs may also wish to consult the final chapters of his book, which are focused on appropriate approaches for education/training and monitoring/evaluation.

XV. PREVENTING CONFLICT AT THE SUBNATIONAL LEVEL

Anderson (1999) recognizes that aid neither causes nor ends wars; that “[p]eople and societies must make their own peace; outsiders cannot make or guarantee peace for anyone else.” Few in the international community would disagree. She does strongly believe, however, that aid can make a positive difference. One focus of her book is the poorly-understood “connectors,” i.e. links that bring people together across battle lines, and discusses five case studies of how aid can support “local capacities for peace.” She acknowledges that much work remains to be done, however, to bridge the gap between successful local projects and change at the macro level.

One case study in Anderson’s book discusses a children’s program in war-torn Lebanon. UNICEF, as part of its efforts to provide educational materials to children after schools were closed, began an informal magazine that soon became a major initiative. In addition to scholastic exercises, the magazine emphasized commonalities among all children in Lebanon and stressed their mutual heritage. It also included space for children to express their desires for peace and friendship. Building upon the enormous demand that the magazine tapped into, UNICEF later began a series of summer “peace camps” that emphasized similar themes. This case study is interesting from several standpoints. On the one hand it is a lovely example of psychosocial and educational programs that reach out to children across enemy lines in times of war, the significance and logistical challenges of which should not be underestimated. At the same time, it illustrates possibilities and limitations of peace-building programs during times of hostility. These kinds of activities had little impact on the broader dynamics of the conflict itself and as such the project’s influence in one sense was limited. But it did provide space for
children and their families to express their yearning for peace and cooperation in spite of intense fighting and rigid isolation of different groups in a “balkanized” country.

In the context of violent conflict and state collapse, the question of whether to take on community-level or social peace-building programs such as the one outlined above in the absence of opportunities for more systematic transformations is a difficult one indeed. On the one hand are positive results from micro-level projects such as this one; on the other hand, their impact on overall peace processes can be negligible, particularly when the conflicts are elite-driven. Some authors of current writings in the field make a compelling case for the importance of community-level approaches. Lederach (1997) cites Garcia (1993) in asserting that “virtually all of the recent transitions toward peace…were driven largely by the pressure for change that was bubbling up from the grassroots.” Among the evidence he points to are examples from El Salvador, the Philippines, and Somalia. From the donor standpoint, he reviews grassroots peace-building programs, including those that can be undertaken in the absence of formal peace efforts.

For a community-level program that must measure short-term positive results, however, the feasibility may be limited if it is not incorporated into a larger humanitarian relief effort. While there is strong merit to the grassroots approach to peace, the international development community has become increasingly reluctant to undertake projects in the absence of an enabling policy environment. For example, there has been debate within USAID concerning the continuation community-level activities in Angola in the absence of a promising overall peace process.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


