

# NETWORK HPN paper

## Politically informed humanitarian programming: using a political economy approach

by Sarah Collinson

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### ABSTRACT

A widening recognition of the ethical, political and practical complexities of providing relief in situations of conflict has led to increasing debate among humanitarian agencies on the meaning, implications and delivery of humanitarian assistance amid chronic conflict and political crisis. Humanitarian agencies have come to recognise that, while they are mainly concerned with delivering neutral or impartial emergency assistance to populations in need, they are also important political and economic actors. By providing public welfare services and relief goods like food, or more directly through protection, rehabilitation or peace-building activities, agencies unavoidably form part of the local political economy.

This paper describes a recent ODI project exploring how political economy analysis could contribute to improved humanitarian programming in situations of conflict and political instability. The project was based on case studies in four countries: Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Senegal and Sierra Leone. The case studies had two principal objectives. The first was to identify key themes arising from political economy analysis that could have direct or indirect implications for humanitarian aid interventions. The second was to develop practical

guidelines to help agencies integrate political economy analysis into their programming. Through this work, the paper provides appropriate analytical tools that humanitarian agencies can use to help them understand the often complex and difficult environments in which they work.

A political economy approach takes context analysis beyond a 'snap-shot' approach to assessing the status and needs of particular groups or communities. It incorporates a wide historical and geographical perspective, seeking to explain why the relative power and vulnerability of different groups changes over time, and how the fortunes and activities of one group in society can affect others. It therefore encourages an understanding that is dynamic (by focusing on change), broad (by connecting changes in one place or group to those in another), longitudinal (by incorporating a historical perspective), and explanatory (by asking why certain people are affected by conflict and crisis in the ways that they are). If, by using this approach, agencies assess, anticipate and monitor vulnerable people's assistance and protection needs more effectively, it follows that they will be better equipped to plan and refine appropriate responses.

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# 1

## What is a political economy approach and why does it matter?

Political economy analysis is essentially concerned with the interaction of political and economic processes in a society. It focuses on the distribution of power and wealth between different groups and individuals, and on the processes that create, sustain and transform these relationships over time. When applied to situations of conflict and crisis, political economy analysis seeks to understand both the political and the economic aspects of conflict, and how these combine to affect patterns of power and vulnerability.

There is an extensive and growing literature on the political economy of conflict (see Box 1). While there are important differences between these various analyses, a number of important implications emerge. The first is that we cannot fully explain the kind of conflict taking place in countries of concern to humanitarian agencies without understanding the economics underpinning it. In a situation of entrenched political instability and conflict, individuals and groups may use violence as an instrument to gain or assert power or wealth, such that the perpetuation of the conflict becomes an end in itself. Prolonged conflict leads in turn to new political structures and processes; the state may no longer seek or need to establish territorial or bureaucratic control, and political authority in the conventional sense may become superfluous (Cliffe and Luckham, 2000; Keen, 1998; Chabal and Daloz, 1999). Often, there is neither total war nor total peace, but a more-or-less chronic state of instability and vulnerability, with widespread violence and human rights violations, recurrent political crises and humanitarian emergencies (Le Billon, 2000: 4).

Political economy analysis should not be understood simply as a form of conflict analysis. Although the ODI project described in this paper focuses on situations of chronic conflict and instability, it has, in fact,

been largely concerned with the political economy of poor societies and local livelihoods as much as it has with conflict. In the Casamance, for instance, many phenomena that might easily be attributed to conflict, such as inadequate public services, the unequal distribution of resource revenues or widespread poverty, are endemic in the region, at war or at peace. Likewise, it is difficult to be sure whether activities like cannabis and timber trafficking are part of people's responses to the stresses of war, or whether they would be happening anyway (Evans, 2002). Many of the key themes from the case studies – relating, for instance, to the significance of unregulated resource extraction, or the importance of rumour and innuendo in generating local political grievances – are applicable to many societies suffering extreme poverty, political instability and weak governance institutions, whether violent conflict is present or not. All the case studies highlight in different ways how difficult it can be to disentangle the causes and effects of violence and conflict from wider processes at work in poor societies. Nor should a political economy approach be seen as primarily or exclusively concerned with war economies and the political economy of what the literature has dubbed 'greed'. While three of the ODI studies looked closely at war economies, all of them point to the intimate and complex relationship between 'greed' and 'grievance', and between war economies, parallel economies and coping and survival economies.

That said, questions about changing power and wealth relations are especially pertinent to societies affected by conflict, since conflict is usually associated with particularly acute political and economic change, with potentially catastrophic consequences for large sections of the population. Conflict is capable of destroying markets, and also creating markets where none existed; it may ruin some

### Box 1: 'Greed' and 'grievance': the economic and political analysis of conflict

There is a large and growing literature on the economic causes, costs and consequences of conflict (see, for instance, Nafziger, Stewart and Vayrinen, 2000; Stewart, Fitzgerald and associates, 2001; Keen 1998; Berdal and Malone, 2000). These effects include sometimes dramatic declines in economic growth, investment, exports and imports, a switch to subsistence and informal activities, falling consumption and increased aid dependence. Overall human costs are usually considerable, related to increased food insecurity, raised infant mortality rates and deteriorating nutritional, health and educational standards. Development costs are typically heavy.

One important conclusion of work in this area is that these costs are not borne equally across a society. A study of the economic and social implications of conflict in poor countries undertaken by Frances Stewart and Valpy Fitzgerald, for example, shows that some groups gain and others lose as a consequence of conflict (Stewart, Fitzgerald and associates, 2001): women and men, different generations and different livelihood groups are usually affected differently. People who rely on exchange for their food, for instance, may be more vulnerable to trade disruptions than those who produce their own. Farmers may find it harder than traders to recover from disruption, and people growing labour-intensive annual food crops may be more vulnerable than farmers growing perennial cash crops.

As well as looking at the costs of war, recent conflict analysis has also focused on the role of economic agendas and motivations in causing and sustaining violent conflicts (Duffield, 1994; Keen, 1998; Collier and Hoeffler, 1998; Berdal and Malone, 2000; Le Billon, 2000). David Keen argues that the violence in civil wars cannot be understood without understanding the economics underpinning it: conflicts create war economies, armed gangs benefit from looting, and regimes use violence to deflect opposition, reward supporters or maintain access to resources. Violence may be initiated by powerful groups trying to defend their economic interests, and ordinary people may turn to violence out of fear, need or greed. Civil wars that appear at the outset to be political often mutate into conflicts primarily driven by short-term economic interests (Keen, 1998: 11–12).

Other analysts have focused on the political processes associated with conflict. Lionel Cliffe and Robin Luckham, for example, argue that conflicts cannot be understood without appreciating the crisis in political authority and governance that lie at their root (Cliffe and Luckham, 2000). In turn, conflict challenges the state, and transforms the power relations within it, enhancing the power of groups that control the means of violence or enjoy access to aid and other resources, while diminishing the power of groups that do not.

The relative weight of the political and the economic in creating and sustaining conflict is a matter of some debate. Paul Collier, for instance, argues that conflicts are far more likely to be caused by economic opportunities than by political grievance. Others emphasise the interaction of economics and politics. Mats Berdal and David Malone, for example, note how organised violence may serve a range of different purposes, particularly within politically fragmented and economically weak states (Berdal and Malone, 1998: 4). Mark Duffield highlights sustained processes of 'asset transfer' by which economic assets flow from the weak to the politically strong (Duffield, 1994). Cliffe and Luckham also acknowledge the close relationship between the economic and political causes and consequences of conflict.

people, while empowering and enriching others (Chingono, 1996). Local political economies are transformed by conflict and associated war economies and political crises, and communities must constantly adapt to the opportunities and constraints that these transformations bring. Frequently, the issue is not 'a conflict' but a complex and multi-layered 'conflict system', in which a number of different conflicts interact with one another. In Afghanistan, for instance, micro-level conflicts around land and water have become entwined with the wider national

and regional conflict (Bhatia and Goodhand, forthcoming).

### Why a political economy perspective matters

A great deal of humanitarian programming is concerned primarily with the 'what': what groups are facing food insecurity, what commodities are being exchanged at what price? Political economy analysis centres much more explicitly on asking why and how:

how have patterns of relative vulnerability and power come about? If a particular group is facing acute food insecurity, for instance, why is this? How have political, economic and other processes contributed to that group's predicament? If food insecurity has increased because the price of food has gone up, why has the market changed in this way?

Conflicts and political crises will affect people's lives and livelihoods in a variety of ways, creating new forms and patterns of economic, political and social vulnerability. According to a political economy approach, vulnerability should be understood in terms of powerlessness rather than simply material need or the failure of basic 'entitlements' (Sen, 1981). Vulnerability and power are therefore analysed as a political and economic *process*, in terms, for instance, of neglect, exclusion or exploitation, in which a variety of groups and actors play a part (Le Billon, 2000). People are most vulnerable when their livelihoods and coping strategies are deliberately blocked or undermined, or if their group identity, political position and/or material circumstances (in some cases their wealth) make them particularly exposed to violence (Le Billon, 2000; Keen, 1994).

Power and powerlessness determine the distribution of access to food and other key commodities and assets among and within different groups. Because those who lack power cannot safeguard their basic political, economic and social rights and may not be able to protect themselves from violence, action to help vulnerable populations requires protection efforts as well as the immediate provision of material assistance. But in order to design effective protection strategies, it is essential to understand why particular groups are powerless and vulnerable in the first place.

Humanitarian programmes typically operate under time pressures and short project cycles that impede detailed analysis, particularly of the historical and political context of relief operations. To the extent that they are considered at all, political economy issues tend to be treated largely as background to the essentially technical business of delivering aid, rather than as a central and



People search for diamonds, Kono district, Sierra Leone

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immediate aspect of humanitarian need and humanitarian response in which agencies are directly involved. However, as Mark Duffield has argued, realistic policies can only emerge from an adequate understanding of the situation that one wishes to ameliorate. Thus, if predatory local political structures are the determining factor in a complex emergency, humanitarian policy must be premised upon the centrality of indigenous political relations. Agencies cannot afford to depoliticise policy by reducing it to a technical matter of organisation or good practice (Duffield, 1994: 65). Because it seeks to explain (rather than simply describe) patterns of need and vulner-

ability in poor and conflict-affected societies, political economy analysis potentially matters to every level of humanitarian programming, including needs assessment, vulnerability mapping and the design and implementation of local relief and rehabilitation projects, through to monitoring and evaluation.

An improved understanding of the complex political and economic contexts of relief operations, and of the role and impact of relief within these contexts, could make a significant difference to aid programming in a number of ways. This kind of analysis could help agencies to:

- *Apply an ethical framework to their work*  
Without a clear understanding of the political, economic and social environment in which they are working, agencies cannot apply an ethical framework reliably. Humanitarian actors not only need to be sure of their own principles, but also need to ensure that they live by them and must be able to provide a reliable account of how these principles were applied in practice (Van Brabant, 2000: 19–20).
- *Strengthen and refine early-warning systems, contingency planning and preparedness measures, and inform and improve the design and impact of prevention efforts*
- *Capitalise on political developments that might create or expand humanitarian space or provide openings for improved respect for human rights (Leader, 2000)*

- *Monitor and evaluate the impacts of humanitarian activities more comprehensively*

This could allow more accurate assessments of the relative good and/or harm done by humanitarian activities in the short, medium and long term and at different levels – including their economic and political impact. Evaluations of humanitarian activities typically include some discussion of context, but there is usually a failure to make the necessary linkages between the history of events and actors narrated and the humanitarian intervention in question (ALNAP, 2001: 128).

- *Identify, analyse and monitor vulnerable people's assistance and protection needs more effectively, and target and coordinate assistance and protection responses accordingly*

This includes informing decisions about appropriate action in the face of potentially contradictory humanitarian imperatives, for instance securing access for the delivery of relief goods versus speaking out about human-rights abuse. Without an adequate appreciation of context, it is difficult to pay adequate attention to coping strategies and to design appropriate programmes (ALNAP, 2001: 51, 93, 119).

- *Provide assistance and protection in ways that should avoid undermining or distorting positive social, political and economic institutions (Anderson, 1999)*

- *Manage their security more effectively in situations of conflict and political instability*

Keeping abreast of complex changes in the local, national and international political economy, including military developments, should enable agencies to anticipate the effects on humanitarian programmes, agency security and beneficiary groups or individuals (Van Brabant, 2000).

- *Fine-tune agencies' relationship between their own and others' relief, protection, advocacy, rehabilitation, development, human-rights and peace-building activities*

Humanitarian and development agencies are under increasing pressure to clarify and improve coordina-

tion and connectivity between these different types of activity, particularly in situations of conflict and political crisis.

- *Manage relations and contacts with international, national and local political, military and civilian actors*

This could include in the selection and monitoring of, and cooperation with, local partners; and in negotiations over humanitarian access, for instance to ascertain whether negotiations are likely to be conducted in good faith; and in dealings with military and political actors involved in peace-keeping and/or providing security and protection for humanitarian actors and beneficiaries (Van Brabant, 2000).

- *Distinguish between 'civilians' and 'combatants', to understand better the relationships between violence and war economies and particular individuals, groups, communities, institutions, livelihoods and/or humanitarian interventions*

This would reduce the likelihood of assistance being manipulated by factions in the conflict, and improve the targeting of assistance (including capacity-building activities when there is a danger of civilian institutions being co-opted by malign political and economic forces) (Le Billon, 2000).

- *Identify and distinguish between war economies, economic violence and the economic impact of conflict, and assess the implications for specific communities, groups and/or humanitarian programmes (Le Billon, 2000)*

- *Calculate more systematically the likely impact of humanitarian action on the realisation of rights by beneficiaries*

The following chapter presents some of the key themes from the ODI case studies. These illustrate how political economy analysis can help shed light on the relationships between power and wealth and local communities' lives, livelihoods and vulnerability in conflict-affected societies, and so inform humanitarian programming at different levels.



## What does a political economy approach tell us?

This chapter draws on recent ODI research to illustrate how political economy analysis can inform humanitarian programming in conflict-affected societies. The research, which was conducted in 2001 and 2002, looked at four case studies: Afghanistan prior to the fall of the *Taliban* in late 2001; eastern DRC; Sierra Leone; and the Casamance in Senegal. Each of these studies describes a different type and level of conflict and humanitarian crisis. Eastern DRC, for instance, has seen high-intensity regionalised conflict and massive casualties, whereas the separatist conflict in the Casamance has generated low-level but prolonged violence and insecurity, and the conflict in Sierra Leone has, officially at least, come to an end. In Afghanistan, chronic conflict up to September 2001 combined with drought to create high levels of vulnerability, displacement and destitution.

Despite these differences, key common themes emerged. First, war economies, shadow economies and formal, coping and survival economies are closely intertwined, and there are no clear boundaries between them. Second, while it is difficult to separate out war economies from other economic activities, an understanding of warring groups and what drives them to violence is important in understanding how the vulnerability of various groups is affected. Third, a historical and regional perspective is essential; conflicts and their associated political and humanitarian crises cannot be understood adequately without understanding the history of the conflict and the broader regional and international processes involved. Finally, in prolonged conflict and political crisis, economic imperatives and commercial agendas become increasingly intertwined with social and political crises; endemic insecurity, uncertainty and vulnerability can itself generate extreme political sensitivities at the local level.

Understanding the political economy of a society in crisis will not, of course, help humanitarian programming unless it is related to the lives of the people that agencies are trying to help, and to agencies' own activities. An important aim of the case studies was therefore to look at the links between different levels of political economy, to relate political and economic processes at the macro level to vulnerability and need at the local level. To do this, the studies adopted a 'bottom-up' approach, linking local conditions to the wider political and economic environment at the national and regional level.

### War economies, 'shadow' economies and survival economies

An important innovation of a political economy approach is to demonstrate that conflict transforms society, rather than simply destroying it, causing people to adapt their behaviour and their livelihoods in order to survive or to minimise risk, or to capitalise on the opportunities that conflict presents. In any conflict situation, relief is only one of a range of survival and coping mechanisms for people affected by crisis. In most conflicts, some people profit, while the majority of the population see their assets decline and their vulnerability increase.

Three broad types of economy usually operate in a conflict zone: the war economy, the parallel or 'shadow' economy, and the coping/survival economy. Table 1 (page 8) presents the main economies in play in Afghanistan before September 2001.

All the case studies demonstrate that, in practice, there are usually no clear boundaries between 'war economies' and other parts of the economy, including

*Continued on page 9*

**Box 2: The case studies***Afghanistan: from buffer-state to bazaar economy*

Afghanistan's recent history is complex and violent (see Rubin, 2000; Hyman, 1992; Maley, 1998). In the nineteenth century, the country acted a 'buffer state' between the Russian and British empires, dependent on external support. This pattern changed little, and in the 1960s nearly half of Afghanistan's budget relied on foreign aid, primarily from the Soviet Union. Following the Soviet invasion in 1979 and the start of the *mujahideen* war, US and Soviet financial and military support flooded into the country. By 1992, *mujahideen* forces had seized Kabul, and the conflict had mutated from a Cold War proxy confrontation into a regionalised civil war. With the reduction in US and Soviet interest, neighbouring countries, particularly Pakistan and Iran, became increasingly important sources of revenue and support to the various factions. Central power fragmented and the war economy expanded rapidly, based largely on cross-border smuggling and narcotics. Afghanistan became a 'transmission zone' or marketing corridor for a growing illicit economy, and violence became a means of controlling markets.

In 1994, a new group, the Pakistan-backed *Taliban*, emerged, and by 1996 nine-tenths of the country were under its control. Afghanistan became the world's largest opium producer, and the country had become a regionalised 'bazaar economy', with the *Taliban* and the drugs and trading mafia increasingly intertwined. While a minority of profiteers have benefited from deregulated and illicit commerce, the absence of a functioning state has made poor communities all the more vulnerable by exposing them to the turbulence of regional and international markets and to successive external shocks, including drought.

The establishment of a new government in Kabul and significant new international aid commitments will further transform the country's political economy. With sensitive international support for reconstruction and institution-building, the war economy may be transformed into a peace economy. On the other hand, aid for reconstruction risks exacerbating underlying tensions, particularly between Kabul and the regions (Bhatia and Goodhand, forthcoming).

*The Casamance: low-level, chronic violence*

The Casamance is the southern limb of Senegal, largely separated from the rest of the country by The Gambia. For 20 years, the Casamance has witnessed a separatist rebellion, which makes it West Africa's longest-running, albeit largely unknown, civil conflict (Evans, 2002). The origins of the conflict lie in the 1970s and early 1980s, when protests began against the Senegalese state's administration of the Casamance. This led to the formation of the Mouvement des forces démocratiques de la Casamance (MFDC). In the late 1980s, increased repression by the Senegalese authorities led the MFDC to form an armed wing, the *maquis*. Violence has since escalated, and government efforts to resolve the conflict have failed.

Several armed groups are involved. The MFDC is divided between the Front Nord and the Front Sud. In 1992, the Front Nord largely retired from active combat, but remains in *de facto* control of large areas north of the Casamance River. The Front Sud remains militarily active, with bases along both sides of the Casamance's southern border with Guinea-Bissau. Guinea-Bissau has been home to Front Sud rear bases, and active or retired Guinea-Bissauan soldiers have supported and sometimes taken part in *maquis* operations. The Gambia is also believed to have harboured and supplied elements of the MFDC. Meanwhile, some 4,500 Senegalese troops are stationed in the Casamance, together with paramilitary police forces. The army's equipment is inadequate for its role in the Casamance, and soldiers' living conditions are poor.

While the humanitarian and developmental impacts of the conflict are relatively small, they are locally serious nonetheless. Estimates are difficult to make, but the total death toll is probably around 1,000, with some 60,000 people displaced and 10,000 refugees in Guinea-Bissau and The Gambia, out of a total population in the Casamance of just over a million. The attendant war economy is based mainly on high-volume, low-value natural resources, including timber, cannabis and tree crops (Evans, forthcoming).

*Sierra Leone: from conflict to reconstruction*

Sierra Leone's most recent bout of conflict broke out in 1991, though its roots lie in long-standing practices of patronage and the exploitation of the country's mineral resources by the élite. Mining licences were

distributed as political favours and foreign exchange generated from diamond mining funded imports of cheap rice to feed the mining labour force and other patrimonial clients. Popular anger at the levels of tribute and labour service demanded by the chiefs, and their perceived abuse of power, prompted violence in northern Sierra Leone in the mid-1950s.

By independence in 1961, elected councils and elected authorities had been created in some districts, yet chiefs continued to play a primary role in local government (Kilson, 1966; Barrows, 1976; Tangri, 1978). The suspension of district councils in 1972 and the subsequent transfer of local authority from councils to non-elected 'committees of management' ensured that everyday governance in rural areas remained with the chiefs. The underlying rationale of this strategy was that chiefs were ideally placed both to deliver votes to the governing party, and to suppress rural protest.

In 1991, civil war broke out between the government and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). Tens of thousands of people were killed and maimed, and as many as two million – a third of the population – displaced. After a decade, the conflict appeared to be drawing to a close with the conclusion of a peace agreement and the arrival of UN forces. Former combatants were disarmed and demobilised, and the resettlement of refugees and displaced people began. By March 2002, the UN reported that all but the remoter districts of northern and eastern Sierra Leone had passed from 'emergency' to 'recovery' status. National elections were held in the following May.

Assistance to Sierra Leone is delivered through a complex network of government ministries, commissions and committees, multilateral and bilateral funding, coordination and monitoring agencies, international and local NGOs, community-based organisations and private businesses. UN agencies feature prominently alongside national institutions in the coordination of assistance (Fanthorpe, forthcoming).

#### *Eastern DRC: Africa's regional war*

Conflict has afflicted the DRC since 1996, and the Kivus since 1993. The present, so-called 'second war of liberation' broke out in August 1998, when Rwandan- and Ugandan-backed rebels of the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD) launched a campaign to replace their former ally President Laurent Kabila, backed by Angola, Chad, Namibia and Zimbabwe. The conflict reached a stalemate, with the rebels being pushed back into the eastern part of the country. Peace talks followed in the Zambian capital Lusaka, and in 1999 the six governments involved, along with the rebel Congolese Liberation Movement (MLC) and Rally for Congolese Democracy (RCD), signed a peace accord. Fighting continued, and in early 2000 the UN authorised a 5,000-strong monitoring force. Tensions persisted, and in January 2001 Kabila was killed. His son Joseph took his place. In 2002, a power-sharing agreement was agreed between the Kinshasa government and rebels backed by Uganda, and a peace agreement concluded with Rwanda. Troops from neighbouring countries began to pull out, but there was little sign of a settlement between the various Congolese factions. Towards the end of 2002, relief and human rights organisations warned of potential massacres in eastern DRC, with militia groups taking advantage of the power vacuum left by the departure of foreign troops.

Successive UN reports show the systematic and intimate relationship between economic and military activity in the conflict (see UN Panel of Inquiry 2001a; 2001b; 2002). Rwandan forces, for instance, have provided protection and security for the mining of tantalum ('coltan', which is used in making mobile phones and armaments technology). For Uganda, the principal commodities have been gold, coltan, diamonds and oil. Zimbabwe has enjoyed access to diamond and copper reserves in the south and south-east (Willame, 1999), while the long-standing connections between Congolese and Angolan diamond smugglers have been well documented (De Boeck, 1996). Meanwhile, Namibia is part of a joint venture with a US mining company and the DRC government.

The humanitarian consequences of the conflict have been extremely grave. Over four years, it has been estimated that the war has claimed more than two and a half million lives; of these, 350,000 died from acts of direct violence, with the remainder dying from the impacts of economic collapse, displacement, loss of livelihood, malnutrition and disease (IRC, 2001:19; Jackson, forthcoming).

Table 1: War economies, ‘shadow’ economies and coping economies in Afghanistan

	The war economy	The shadow economy	The coping economy
<b>Key actors</b>	Commanders, ‘conflict entrepreneurs’, fighters	Profiteers, transport mafia, businessmen; ‘down-stream’ actors (truck drivers, poppy farmers)	Poor families and communities (the majority of the population)
<b>Motivations and incentives</b>	<p>To fund the war effort or achieve military objectives</p> <p>Peace may not be in their interest as it may lead to decreased power, status and wealth</p> <p>Fighters may have an interest in peace if there are alternative sources of livelihood</p>	<p>To make a profit on the margins of the conflict</p> <p>Entrepreneurs profit from the lack of a strong state and a highly liberal economy</p> <p>Peace could be in their interest if it encourages long-term investment and licit entrepreneurial activity</p>	<p>To cope and maintain asset bases through low-risk activities, or to survive through asset erosion</p> <p>Peace could enable families to move beyond subsistence</p>
<b>Key activities and commodities</b>	<p>Taxation of licit and illicit economic activities (opium, smuggled consumer goods, lapis and emeralds, wheat, land tax)</p> <p>Money, arms, equipment and fuel from external state and non-state actors</p> <p>Economic blockades of dissenting areas</p> <p>Destruction of means of economic support</p> <p>Asset-stripping and looting</p>	<p>Opium economy</p> <p>Cross-border smuggling</p> <p>Mass extraction of natural resources (timber, marble)</p> <p>Smuggling of high-value commodities (emeralds, lapis, antiquities, rare fauna)</p> <p><i>Hawala</i> (currency order and exchange system)</p> <p>Aid manipulation</p>	<p>Diverse livelihood strategies to spread risk</p> <p>Subsistence agriculture</p> <p>Petty trade and small businesses</p> <p>Agricultural wage labour</p> <p>Labour migration and remittances</p> <p>Redistribution through family networks</p> <p>Humanitarian assistance</p>
<b>Impacts</b>	<p>Disruption to markets and destruction of asset bases</p> <p>Violent redistribution of resources and entitlements</p> <p>Impoverishment of politically-vulnerable groups</p> <p>Out-migration of educated people</p>	<p>Concentrates power and wealth</p> <p>Undermines patron–client relationships, increasing vulnerability</p> <p>Smuggling circumvents Pakistan’s customs duty and sales tax, affecting revenue collection and undercutting local producers.</p> <p>Increased drug use</p>	<p>Coping may reinforce social networks, but survival may lead to negative or regressive coping strategies</p> <p>Lack of long-term investment</p> <p>Long-term effects on human capital – lowering levels of health, education, etc.</p>

local coping and survival economies. Each has distinctive features, but all are interconnected, with many actors engaged in more than one type. Terms such as 'licit' and 'illicit' economy start to look inadequate in these situations (as they do in many peacetime environments – see Chabal and Daloz, 1999). For instance, a particular community may be primarily engaged in subsistence agriculture within the 'coping economy'. At the same time, people may also have diversified their livelihood strategies to spread risk, including participating in the shadow and 'war' economies, for example through unregulated mining, smuggling or poppy cultivation. In one village in Afghanistan's Jaji District, for instance, the number of families engaged in growing cannabis increased from five to over 20 between 2000 and 2001. Likewise, different commodities – some essential to poor people's livelihoods and survival, others a key part of the war economy – may travel along the same commercial routes. In Afghanistan, for instance, warlords, conflict profiteers, traders and aid agencies all use the same informal money-changers (*sarafis*) and money-



*Rotting mangoes, Djinaki, Casamance: 'conflict mangoes' form an important part of the war economy in Casamance*

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transfer systems (*hawala*). In Casamance, armed groups have become involved in the existing civilian trade in nuts and fruit; 'conflict' cashews, mangoes and citrus are traded and marketed in the same way as the civilian harvest and benefit the same dealers. Cashews leave Dakar or Bissau on the same Indian ships. Timber, traded by Senegalese army servicemen through an illicit parallel market, benefits some local people by providing jobs and trade.

### The implications for aid agencies

Understanding the relationship between war economies, shadow economies and coping and survival economies will

help agencies to better evaluate the impact of relief goods in local conflict-affected environments, and the implications of their own dealings with local commercial and other actors. In Afghanistan, for example, the use of *sarafis* and the *hawala* system can only be properly weighed up if agencies first have a good understanding of the relationship between the *hawala* system and the wider conflict. By using this mechanism, are NGOs directly contributing to a

### Box 3: War economies, coping economies and survival economies: coltan mining in eastern DRC

Coltan mining in eastern DRC offers a good example of the dynamic and shifting relationship between war economies, coping economies and survival economies. Initially, coltan mining appears to have functioned primarily as a coping and survival mechanism, both a cause of, and a reaction to, the contraction of other livelihood possibilities at the local level. Over the last two years, however, this appears to have changed. When the global price of coltan collapsed in 2001, many independent miners and traders were driven out, allowing military actors to extend and consolidate their control over the lower ends of coltan extraction and trade. Labour-intensive mines in the Kivus are increasingly worked by diggers under the direct control of Rwandan or Rwandan-backed RCD officials or the military, and military actors have increasingly employed force to acquire and control mines. As a consequence, the political and economic significance of coltan has shifted considerably: it is now less directly important to ordinary people's coping and survival, and more important for the war economy. Localised combat to control resources has all but replaced direct confrontation between the principal adversaries, labour is sometimes coerced – including press-ganging of local villages – and population displacement is frequently engineered. Most of the profits from mineral extraction are siphoned off to external military, political and commercial interests, and so contribute little to local livelihoods and development in the Kivus. Meanwhile, local economies in the Kivus have been distorted by the 'dollarisation' that has accompanied the expansion in mineral exploitation, further exacerbating the vulnerability of both the rural and urban poor.

system that underpins the war economy and undermines state-building in Afghanistan? Perhaps, but the *hawala* system is also central to many people's coping and survival, playing a particularly key role in the transfer of remittances from Pakistan and elsewhere. Attempting to ring-fence and criminalise it because of its links with the war economy might compromise its role in the coping and survival economy, and so deepen the vulnerability of many Afghans.

This kind of analysis can also help agencies to recognise the links between local vulnerability and the wider economic and political forces driving conflict. This should help them to identify vulnerable groups' coping strategies, and their need for assistance, protection or livelihoods support. In the case of eastern DRC, for instance, the move to one form of coping strategy – coltan mining – took young men off the land, damaging local agricultural productivity and increasing food insecurity for many communities in areas where 'coltan fever' took a hold. In Casamance, an initiative to supply food through Caritas, the Red Cross and other humanitarian agencies direct to MFDC fighters was based on an assessment that *maquis* predation on the civilian population was a coping or survival strategy, rather than an organised tactic of warfare. Thus, it was hoped that feeding the *maquisards* would not only facilitate dialogue, but also reduce the likelihood of them turning to banditry because of hunger.

Recognising the interaction of war economies with people's coping strategies may also help agencies – particularly multi-mandate agencies – to achieve more effective links between advocacy and their operations at field level. In eastern DRC, for instance, the emergence of coltan and other minerals as a key component of livelihoods in the Kivus suggests that international advocacy to improve the governance structure around mining is likely to have better results for local people than calls for an outright boycott. In this way, international advocacy concerned with

resource exploitation from zones of conflict – for instance, calling for 'smart' sanctions – dovetails with action on the ground to assist and support communities trying to adapt their livelihoods to cope with war.

## The diversification of livelihoods and coping strategies

People cope with and survive conflict and humanitarian crisis first and foremost by adapting and diversifying their livelihoods. The transformations that conflict brings about in the wider political economy are thus mirrored in varied, profound and often irreversible changes in people's lives at the local level.



*A child soldier in barracks, Kisangani, DRC: in some conflict societies, children may join armed militia*

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In all four of the case studies, the general picture is one of growing vulnerability across most of the population, with a gradual erosion of asset bases, compounded by the weakening or collapse of governance institutions and a range of external shocks to poor communities' coping strategies. A 'top-down' political economy analysis may stop at this general level of observation. However, the 'bottom-up' approach adopted by the ODI study – exploring power, wealth and vulnerability principally through an examination of local livelihoods – suggests that generalisations about the impact and implications of conflict for people and their livelihoods should be treated with caution.

People's livelihood strategies depend upon a complex range of factors, including location, security regimes, the strength of local governance structures and social networks, and access to roads, markets and water. There is consequently a great deal of variability among areas, groups and even villages and households within the same locale. In Faryab in Afghanistan, for instance, villages relatively close together had markedly different economies, with considerable household differences in their main sources of income and access to food. In certain villages in the Almar area, the economy was entirely agrarian-based with a high degree of mutual livelihood interdependence, while for others the degree of involvement

with agriculture was extremely variable. One Qaramqol village settled by one-time Turkmen nomads had no arable land, and had been dependent on livestock and labouring opportunities in other villages.

Coping strategies too can vary enormously. In Afghanistan, for instance, people responded to the various threats to their livelihood posed by conflict and drought by reducing food consumption, seasonal migration, selling non-essential assets, carpet-weaving, reducing expenditure, seeking food relief, trading, moving to Iran, Pakistan, Europe and Australia, cutting and selling timber, embroidery, gileem production and vehicle mechanics. Other responses can include the disposal of core assets (oxen, land, house beams), taking children out of school and setting them to work collecting fuel or as servants, or marrying daughters off early for their bride price – depleting physical, social and human assets. As stated by one informant, ‘everything is an asset in an Afghan family ... the drought has meant that people have had to squeeze the economic potential of their children even more’.

The significance of particular livelihood strategies for different households and communities is therefore also highly variable. In Afghanistan, for instance, labour export and remittances have become a primary source of income and a central part of the Afghan economy. But while people relying on family members working in the Gulf or Europe are often able to profit and increase their asset base through remittances, those dependent on workers in Pakistan and Iran are more likely to be using the remittances simply to cope or survive. In the Kivus, meanwhile, coltan mining may have represented a coping or survival strategy for some households or communities, but for others it threatened their ability to cope because young men quit agriculture to make a profit from mining, without sending anything back to their families or communities.

The case studies also highlight considerable local variation in the role that mutual support mechanisms play in people’s coping and survival strategies. For many communities, mutual support based on local reciprocity and sharing is a key buffer between extreme vulnerability and the total collapse of livelihoods. These solidarity networks are particularly important for the extremely poor, who lack other assets. In some communities, social capital is destroyed by conflict, in others it is strengthened. In some villages in Qaramqol, extended ties of economic interdependence and a strong sense of origin and mutual support mechanisms have been maintained; in others, particularly where there have been periods of

settlement by different ethnic groups and patterns of ownership have been more highly differentiated, fault lines between social groups have emerged. In some communities, prolonged crisis has even exhausted kinship systems, causing a further collapse in coping strategies.

### **The implications for aid agencies**

Recognising and understanding the adaptations and transformations in people’s livelihoods at the local level is vital in identifying the most vulnerable and needy groups requiring assistance or protection, and in anticipating how particular groups might be affected by external shocks, such as drought or collapsed markets. Exposure to a threat does not necessarily mean a household or group will be susceptible to that threat – much will depend on the assets that the group or household can draw upon, including political and social assets. Different groups’ assets, and therefore their vulnerability, will depend crucially on local and wider power relations.

In essence, the adaptations and diversification in people’s livelihoods and coping strategies need to be matched by diversification and adaptations in the humanitarian response. A key challenge for humanitarian action, therefore, is to move beyond formulaic delivery to allow for greater flexibility and differentiated responses over space and time. A wide range of aid interventions might be suitable in different places and different times, and these will need to be sequenced according to particular groups’ changing needs and recovery processes. Food transfers may be the initial focus, and food inputs might themselves be deployed in a variety of ways to support or maintain community and household assets. But a variety of non-food interventions could also help to sustain livelihoods and reduce vulnerability if fine-tuned appropriately at the local level, including cash and capital inputs (for example, farm inputs, livestock, tools, equipment and raw materials for petty production).

### **Understanding warring groups and the wider role of violence**

Understanding war economies and their significance for the vulnerability of different groups depends on understanding warring groups and their motivations – their incentive systems, strategies, motivations and resources – and the broader role of violence in society (Richards, 1996).

The political economy of armed groups is usually a highly sensitive subject, and potentially dangerous to investigate. For this reason, agencies and researchers need to tread extremely carefully when seeking any information that relates directly to the interests and

activities of actors and groups involved in fighting (see chapter 3). Nonetheless, it is important for agencies to understand as much as they can of how they and local and beneficiary populations and potential partners might be affected by or implicated in the activities of armed groups, directly or indirectly, and what the implications might be for programming. The greater agencies' knowledge and understanding of the actors involved in violence and political upheaval, the better able they will be to manage their own operational security (for example minimising the risks of manipulation or direct attack) and to protect vulnerable populations (Van Brabant, 2000). Key aspects to address include:

- The structure and organisation of command and control within armed groups active in the region where agencies are operating. This encompasses issues such as the degree of hierarchy and centralised decision-making and the nature of the leadership within the group (is it factionalised or contested, for instance?), and the relationship between political and military actors within the group and with government or regional interests and commercial actors at different levels. It is also important to know as much as possible about who the fighters are and how they are recruited, resourced and trained: are they part-time or opportunistic fighters or professional soldiers?; did they volunteer or were they forcibly recruited? This information will help agencies to understand the nature and motivations of their violence.
- The mission and ideology of armed groups and political movements – such as whether they have clear objectives focused on the state, or whether political motives have mutated or expanded to include economic objectives – so as to understand the course of the conflict and prospects for an end to violence.
- The relationships that different armed groups have with civilian populations, and whether and how they are supported by local communities or particular social groups. This, in turn, will help agencies to better appreciate the relationship between their own assistance to civilians and the wider political economy of violence.
- The way that different groups in the conflict are resourced. This includes issues such as whether their fighters are reliant on central command to maintain their living, or informal economic activity, or predation on local communities, and what the implications of these groups' economic activities are for particular communities and populations, and for aid agencies themselves.

#### Box 4: Motives and incentives: the *Taliban* in Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, disagreement over the nature of the *Taliban* was a fundamental point of difference in the West's approach to the regime. Western governments viewed Afghanistan under the *Taliban* as a 'rogue state' that needed to be isolated. The humanitarian community, by contrast, saw the country as a 'collapsed state' that needed support, including support to strengthen public institutions – albeit not necessarily *Taliban* institutions (Duffield et al., 2001). Without fully understanding the structures and incentives of the *Taliban*, one can only speculate as to whether it sought to command, control or merely exploit opportunities presented by the illicit economy, and what influence the outside world – Western governments as well as aid agencies – might have had over its policies. For instance, how the *Taliban*'s involvement in illicit commerce was viewed depended partly on whether the regime was understood as a warlord faction, or as a proto-statebuilder: was the *Taliban* simply managing existing economic opportunities, or creating new ones? And how important was external funding, from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and radical Islamic groups, for example, compared to internal revenues from drugs, smuggling and taxation?

We also need to ask questions about the political and economic role of violence at different levels in society. What forms of violence predominate at particular levels and/or in particular areas? How are particular communities or populations affected by this violence in the short, medium and long term? Are communities made vulnerable by this violence principally because of neglect (by the state, international community, or aid system), because of exclusion (by the state and/or other powerful actors) or because of exploitation? Are terror tactics being used, and if so, what is their nature and who is being targeted? (See Le Billon, 2000; Van Brabant, 2000; and Moser and McIlwaine, 2000; 2001). When asking these questions, it is important to bring in local perceptions of violence and vulnerability, since people's own concerns may not focus on the most obvious forms of violence in society. People may, for instance, be more concerned about local violence and insecurity linked with crime than about violence associated with war (Moser and McIlwaine, 2000; 2001).

In any given conflict, there is usually a continuum of different forms of violence, from organised warfare



and systematic economic violence prosecuted or perpetrated by the state or other organised military actors, through to more individualised forms linked to crime and opportunism, and violent and destructive survival strategies. Violence within households and communities is probably less likely to be connected directly with conflict, except where conflict has ruptured kinship and other social structures; in Sierra Leone, DRC and the Casamance, for instance, children and young people joined militia groups, and then subsequently preyed on their home communities.

### The implications for aid agencies

Despite the difficulty of separating out war economies from other economic activities in conflict situations, humanitarian agencies need to be able to distinguish as far as possible those actors, processes and institutions that drive violence and deepen people's vulnerability and suffering.

It is important for agencies to try to understand warring groups and their motivations so as to manage their own security and inform their relationships with local military actors (Van Brabant, 2000); to assess the relative significance of external aid resources for different groups; and to monitor the potential abuse or manipulation of aid by warring parties (Le Billon, 2000). This could help humanitarian actors to reach principled and accountable decisions about the appropriate actions to take in direct dealings with warring parties (such as in access

negotiations) or in response to their activities. In turn, this should help to link assistance with other activities, such as protection and advocacy – including reporting human rights abuses. Stephen Jackson addresses this point in relation to the forced evacuation of mining areas in the Kivus:

*All agencies reported their disquiet at this practice, but some also questioned their own role: to what extent does providing aid to such displaced people condone and perpetuate their displacement, thus playing into the hands of the profiteers? No analysis would, or should, suggest not providing necessary aid to displaced people. But it is pertinent to ask what else must be done, in addition to providing such aid, so as not to reward the deliberate engineering of displacement for political or economic purposes (Jackson, forthcoming).*

Humanitarian actors also need to try to understand the nature and motivations of warring groups so as to recognise the links between local violence and broader national or regional conflict, designing and adapting their local protection, assistance and advocacy policies accordingly. In Afghanistan, for instance, changing national and international security conditions have affected local governance structures, local patterns of violence and local livelihoods in different ways at different times. The effects of the *Taliban* regime varied considerably from place to place. In Pashtun areas, the benefits of security under the *Taliban* were most marked. For Kabul and other non-Pashtun regions, the effects were more mixed as non-Pashtun communities were subject to greater levels of violence and predation. The nature of the local *Taliban* administration and the level of violence that it perpetrated against communities appear to have differed according to the movement's calculation of the locality's orientation, composition and independent power.

#### Box 5: The functions of violence in the Casamance and eastern DRC

In both the Casamance and DRC, rural communities have been displaced and their access to land and other resources has been restricted by warring parties seeking to extend or maintain control of key commodities. But the *nature* of these warring parties and the extent and nature of the violence they employ is radically different. In eastern DRC, the exploitation of local resources has become progressively and violently militarised, with military actors increasingly using force to acquire and maintain control of mines. By contrast, in the Casamance Senegalese servicemen maintain access to resources mainly by forbidding or restricting civilian 'for their own safety', or to prevent them from sheltering or supplying *maquisards*. The threat or use of violence is not necessarily deployed, and some civilians may benefit from the military's involvement in exploiting and trading in local commodities.

### The historical and regional perspective

A further theme emerging from these studies is that an understanding of conflict and associated political and humanitarian crises requires an understanding of the history, and of the broader regional and international processes involved. Mary Anderson suggests that immediate causes are more important than 'root causes' (Anderson, 1999: 9). However, these case studies demonstrate that the more proximate causes and implications of conflict and crisis – and the implications for aid programming – cannot themselves be understood in isolation from the historical and international context. At the most general level, a broader historical and international perspective is important if agencies are to be in a position to answer

the ‘why?’ questions that should underpin a comprehensive analysis of the context – for instance, to explain why the state has collapsed, why a particular ethnic group is being persecuted, why trust has broken down between local communities and government institutions, or why particular markets have expanded, been transformed or disappeared. The case studies point to the particular importance of this broader perspective for informing the protection, rehabilitation, human rights and peace-building activities that run alongside relief operations in many conflict situations, and in which many humanitarian actors are often directly involved.

In Afghanistan, the case study research included an examination of carpet production and trading in Faryab Province and Peshawar. The findings highlight the importance of transnational linkages in local coping and survival activities. Carpet-weaving has become the primary source of income for many families in Andkhoi in Faryab, and for some the only activity preventing a complete collapse of livelihoods. But Andkhoi producers’ previous control of the production and marketing of carpets has been lost to Pashtun traders and international markets operating

through Peshawar; as a consequence, local and regional terms of trade are deteriorating. An initiative to provide micro-credit to a Guaranteed Group Lending Scheme established by Save the Children-US in 1995 was designed to assist disadvantaged women with no access to micro-credit. Despite its considerable operational achievements, the scheme’s impacts on beneficiaries’ vulnerability was undermined by the almost exclusive focus on expanding carpet production. If the scheme had considered the changes occurring in the wider market and explored ways of potentially strengthening the overall economic position of producers, such as establishing alternative marketing channels, the project may have been more effective and sustainable.

### The implications for aid agencies

A historical and international perspective is important to inform agencies’ early-warning systems and contingency and preparedness measures and, potentially, their local and international advocacy. In all the countries included in the ODI study, weakened, absent or collapsed state institutions have exposed vulnerable communities to regional and global market forces. As Stephen Jackson notes with respect to eastern DRC:

#### Box 6: The importance of history: chiefdoms in Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone’s most recent conflict cannot be fully appreciated without understanding the historical role that chiefs and the grievances against them have played (Fanthorpe, 2001; Richards, 2001; Richards and Archibald, 2002). Many chiefs served as the willing instruments of an oppressive patrimonial regime before the latest war, and local politics – then and now – is often a desperate struggle among families to get a foot on the patrimonial ladder. In a series of consultations conducted in late 1999 to gauge local opinion on the return of exiled chiefs, people complained about alleged abuses of power at all levels in the chiefdom hierarchy, including accusations that chiefs had reserved aid agency benefits for themselves or their clients. Yet the national government continues to show strong support for chiefs and sees them as the key institution through which to rebuild local governance structures. Moreover, many rural people still respect the office, if not the incumbents. This places aid agencies in a difficult position. On the one hand, chiefs represent legitimate local authorities with a right to oversee agency activity in their purlieus. On the other, many agencies and many beneficiaries do not trust chiefs to distribute aid inputs fairly.

*Most international and local agencies ... see themselves as engaged in relief, and thus not directly concerned by structural issues of war economics. But coltan teaches us that global economic shocks can be as much ‘disasters’ in humanitarian terms as a failure of the rains or a new military offensive. While the London Metal Market might seem like the other side of the moon to humanitarians on the ground in the Kivus, its mood swings feel all too intimate to Kivutiens who come to rely on coltan. Humanitarians require ‘early warning systems’ and early response for these less-studied forms of ‘disaster’ too (Jackson, forthcoming).*

### The interaction of ‘greed’ and ‘grievance’

Some analysts have argued that economic agendas (‘greed’) have become more important than political agendas (‘grievance’) in causing and sustaining many contemporary conflicts (see, for instance, Collier and Hoeffler, 1998). However, the research for this paper highlights that economic imperatives and commercial agendas are in fact intimately intertwined with social and political crises in these circumstances. In eastern DRC, for instance, coltan has transformed local power relations: traditional authority has given way to military might; elders have ceded power to young people emboldened and enriched by coltan; and community relations have become ‘ethnicised’, with existing anti-Rwandan sentiment exacerbated by

**Box 7: Fact, fiction and fear**

In a traumatised or conflict-ridden society, real or imagined threats, grievances or violations may be as significant as any objective differences in wealth or political or military power. Since markets and profits are regulated by access to political power and the means of violence, fear is easily reinforced and manipulated by those in power, and can prove as efficient a means of control as overt violence. Rumour, innuendo and propaganda circulate in every conflict situation. The degree to which Rwandans/*rwandophones* actually control the mining and export of minerals from eastern DRC, for instance, is probably less significant than the *perception* that they control it. In Sierra Leone, resentment and grievance at the local level tend to trace back to charges of patrimonialism and personal favouritism. Gaps in the coverage of NGO assistance, for whatever reason, generate considerable local resentment. A rural trader interviewed for this study complained that his chiefdom had seen very little NGO activity, compared with chiefdoms and towns with better political connections. It was also claimed by a number of people interviewed that the first schools to benefit from school feeding programmes were always those attended by the girlfriends of local NGO field staff, and that any school left off the list would most likely be attended by a girl who had once spurned the sexual advances of a fieldworker. The NGOs concerned would almost certainly reject these accusations out of hand. But the rumours themselves are significant for local political relations and the position of NGOs *regardless* of whether there is any truth in them. By the same token, complaints of exclusion from aid disbursements and other charges against aid agencies may be a political weapon of the weak. This, in turn, has implications for agencies' accountability to their beneficiaries.

In circumstances such as these, prudent programming needs to take into account the possible knock-on effects of local targeting decisions. If a particular ethnic group already has a reputation as being economically dominant, providing that group with aid could damage its longer-term interests by increasing resentment towards it. This is not an argument against providing aid, but it does suggest the need for an understanding of the historical political and economic context in which aid is delivered, the importance of transparency and local accountability in targeting decisions, and the desirability of balancing benefits across communities.

local resentment over Rwanda's domination of mineral exports from the Kivus. This in turn has adversely affected the position of Congolese *rwandophones*.

In these conditions, patterns of vulnerability – a function of political powerlessness – may change rapidly and radically in line with the shifting fortunes of different religious or ethnic communities, classes and regions, or different livelihood or social groups. In Afghanistan, for example, some areas have been better able to exploit the 'bazaar economy' than others. This has transformed the relative power of different groups, particularly Pashtuns with commercial links to markets in Pakistan, relative to non-Pashtun populations.

Ethnic and religious identities often become increasingly important in these contexts. As Rubin has noted in Afghanistan, 'the origin of the war is not ethnic, but the conduct of war is ethnic, which has had corrosive effects on the potential for national reconstruction'. Worsening poverty and inequality, and the gains made by conflict entrepreneurs and war profiteers, feed grievances that may centre on ethnic

or religious identities. Early in the Kivus' coltan 'boom', violence around coltan was linked with mounting ethnic tension:

*At the moment [coltan] is a high-risk job especially if you are not a Hutu or a Tutsi. Our young Hunde miners are shot at point-blank range. In the mines, when people talk of armed groups they are mainly Interahamwe who systematically kill the Hunde but leave out the Hutu after they have robbed them. The young Hunde who manage to escape from the Interahamwe are then victims of the Tutsi army on the road. We hope that the authorities will protect our brothers. If not, many more problems will arise because there is already tension here and there. (President of the Bushenge/Hunde mutualité, Bernard Luanda, interviewed by the POLE Institute, December 2000: Pole, 2002).*

Conflict also transforms social relations. In Sierra Leone, for instance, divisions between young people and traditional sources of patrimonial authority were a key cause of the conflict; as in the DRC, conflict has further transformed relations between youths and older generations, posing a significant challenge for

post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts. In Afghanistan, the *Taliban's* policies on gender affected men as well as women by taking authority out of the hands of male family and community members.

### **The implications for aid agencies**

Humanitarian actors' protection efforts need to be attuned to these changes. For instance, the vulnerability of communities in Hazarajat, Afghanistan in 2001 was due partly to their political standing, reflected in an economic blockade and restrictions on their mobility. In Kabul, a family with a male wage earner working as a government servant was considered by the WFP to be as vulnerable to food insecurity as a family with a male casual labourer or a family with no male wage earner (World Food Programme, 1999: 3). Wealth may itself become a source of political vulnerability (Keen, 1994), as illustrated by the precarious political position of *rwandophones* in eastern DRC.

Endemic insecurity, uncertainty and vulnerability often generate extreme political sensitivities at the local level among conflict-affected populations. These sensitivities may sustain grievances that are difficult to unravel, but in which agencies may become directly embroiled. There is a fine line between getting caught up in local politics and engaging with local political structures that may have a crucial role in governance during and after conflict. In delivering important food and other resources, humanitarian agencies need to know which political and commercial actors to work with, and how. The return of Western donors to the Casamance, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan and, potentially, to eastern DRC after years of absence may create new problems, as local and international operational agencies jostle for funding and local political interests engage in a potentially divisive scramble for aid resources.

# 3

## Methods, frameworks, challenges and constraints

There are a number of significant methodological challenges and constraints associated with researching complex social, political and economic processes in any society. These challenges are all the more acute in situations of conflict and complex political crisis, where the sheer complexity and pace of political, economic and social transformation, high levels of insecurity and uncertainty and rapidly-changing patterns of vulnerability combine with an overall lack of reliable information, fragmented or collapsed state institutions and polarised perceptions of the causes and nature of the conflict. Intense pressure for immediate humanitarian action also tends to leave little space or time for detailed analysis and reflection on the crisis and the complex implications for particular livelihoods.

Agencies therefore vary considerably in terms of the level and nature of political economy assessment and analysis that they are likely to undertake. The relative need and capacities for this kind of work will depend on the size of the agency and the resources that it can call upon, the particular characteristics of the conflicts and humanitarian emergencies that it is working in, and the nature of its engagement (rapid-onset versus chronic humanitarian crisis or long-term versus short-term presence and assistance strategies, for instance).

The intention here is not to provide a set of rigid frameworks to support the analysis of conflict for its own sake or as a stand-alone exercise. Because conflicts, political crises and associated humanitarian crises are so varied and dynamic, and because agencies' own time and research resources are usually scarce and staff over-stretched, it is important that humanitarian actors integrate strategic analysis into their operations on an ongoing basis, and in a way that is specifically intended to inform both policy and practice.

### Practical and methodological constraints

In conducting research for the four case studies, the research team encountered a number of practical and methodological constraints that highlight the kind of 'real world' problems that aid agencies face in collecting and analysing complex and sensitive information in situations of humanitarian crisis, conflict and political instability.

In Afghanistan, DRC and Sierra Leone, the duration of the field studies was very short – between five and eight weeks. In Sierra Leone, this was largely due to the limited time and resources available within the confines of the project. In Afghanistan and DRC, time constraints were also due to crises occurring in the countries concerned. In Afghanistan at the time of the study (summer 2001), relations between the *Taliban* and the international community had deteriorated, and it was extremely difficult to obtain visas for foreign researchers. As a consequence, the two non-Afghan researchers were unable to conduct the community-level studies that they had originally planned. If the fieldwork had been organised for a month or two later, it would not have been possible at all. In Goma, plans to extend the study with a local research team were dashed by logistical problems, serious harassment of civilians by rebel authorities, and the loss of field materials in the January 2002 volcanic eruptions in Goma.

The short duration of the field studies made it difficult to investigate how war economies and livelihoods had adapted and mutated over time – longitudinal surveys would have been better able to show this. It also limited the range of the research – it was beyond the scope of the Afghanistan study, for instance, to examine external resource flows, including the financial and military support coming from neighbouring countries.

Analysis was also hindered by a lack of reliable data and useful background research material. As Jonathan Goodhand notes, war zones often ‘drop off the research map’, and so analysis is consequently stuck at pre-war levels (Goodhand, 2001). Until September 2001, Afghanistan was probably one of the least researched countries in the world – the last census was in 1979, and no serious long-term anthropological studies had been conducted for at least a decade. The Human Development Index has not included Afghanistan since 1996, and the data used then was highly questionable anyway. Information and analysis remain extremely fragmented within Afghanistan, often mandate-driven and rarely value-free, with different actors drawing diverse conclusions from the same data. The British Foreign Office’s security analysis, while differing substantially from the aid community’s, led the Department for International Development (DFID) to ban international/expatriate aid personnel it funded from travelling to Afghanistan.

The Casamance conflict is also very poorly researched: while the broader geopolitical dimensions have been explored in some depth, the meso- and micro-level dynamics have been neglected. While there is a rich literature on the ‘second economy’ in Zaire, relatively little has been published about coping and survival strategies and the nature of local conflict in the Kivus since the late 1990s, despite a burgeoning literature on the nature of the DRC’s war economies at the macro level. Even this level of analysis is hindered by a lack of reliable data.

In all four case-study countries, the presence of humanitarian and development agencies has been erratic, and so there is a lack of continuity of data and knowledge. The focus of agencies’ own analysis and data collection has also changed over time as a consequence of the changing pressures of professionalisation. In Afghanistan, for instance, relief agencies maintained a relatively good understanding of *mujahideen* groups and commanders during the 1980s, but by the late 1990s few organisations invested substantially in this kind of analysis, focusing their attention instead on technical standards of aid delivery and the monitoring and assessment of relief activities against project log-frames. This resulted in an absence of the kind of systematic analysis of the *Taliban* that could be used to inform aid responses.

Inquiring into political and economic issues, such as war economies, is not only difficult, but also sensitive and potentially dangerous. How sensitive will vary greatly from place to place and over time, but in any situation of prolonged or recent conflict and political

#### Box 8: Data problems in the DRC

In 2000, the UN Security Council mandated an expert panel to investigate the illegal exploitation of natural resources and other forms of wealth in the DRC. One of the most serious problems the panel faced was the lack of detailed and reliable information on the nature, extent, location, yield and value of the country’s natural resources. Mines and other sources of natural wealth were remote, heavily-guarded and often located in insecure areas, their activities ‘cloaked by an atmosphere of lawlessness, violence and fear’. The panel reported that the complexity of the situation, the vast territories and many actors involved, the difficulties of travel and communications and insecurity all posed ‘formidable problems’ for the investigation (IRIN, 25 January 2001).

instability, the dangers and opportunity costs of research are considerable. Inquiry therefore needs to be undertaken *extremely* carefully, and a convincing argument needs to be made for its practical benefits. Tackling sensitive issues will often be best – and most safely – done indirectly, through ‘bottom-up’ community-level research focused on people’s livelihoods and how they have changed with, and been changed by, conflict and crisis (see below). This, plus the need for reliable local advice about the safety and advisability of particular lines of inquiry, again underlines the importance of linking analysis as closely as possible to agencies’ policy and programming on the ground.

Ethical concerns are important for all social research, but particularly so in situations of conflict and humanitarian crisis, where people are losing their lives and livelihoods are threatened. It may be ethically difficult to justify the acquisition of knowledge for its own sake, particularly given the hazards associated with conducting research. The personal safety of researchers or respondents might be put at risk, for instance if they pursue potentially dangerous lines of inquiry in an insensitive way. There is also the possibility that research and/or reported findings may exacerbate tensions in societies that are polarised or traumatised by violence, for instance by selecting certain regions or working with certain groups, legitimising certain actors or reinforcing particular views of the situation. In some situations, violent conflict will have led to suspicion of all intervention, or to an assumption that all interaction with foreigners and agencies will be

**Box 9: Local governance and its implications for research**

Not every situation will be as difficult to research as the next. For example, in the Kivus it proved a lot easier to ask questions about coltan than was first feared. However, the consolidation of military control over coltan is likely to make the whole subject a lot more sensitive than in the past.

In Casamance, security and local sensitivities did not hamper the research considerably. Partly because Senegal is generally stable, with no particular tradition of state suppression, there is a vigorous and largely free press and some independent radio stations operate; large numbers of foreign visitors are present, and there is a strong academic culture with many links to the West.

In Afghanistan before the overthrow of the *Taliban*, the extent and nature of *Taliban* control and the effects of the regime varied enormously from place to place. Certain communities and regions with relatively homogeneous and strong tribal ties directly resisted or simply ignored *Taliban* edicts, thus maintaining a degree of local governing autonomy. Jaji and other districts of Paktia, for instance, retained a privileged status in relation to the central government and enjoyed a degree of internal autonomy. This inter-relationship was characterised by a significant degree of political accommodation and non-confrontation. The inclusion of girls and women in community-level surveys would therefore have been easier in Jaji than in many other areas of Afghanistan, where the *Taliban's* edicts on women were enforced more stringently.

associated with direct assistance. As a result, the presence of researchers among poor or vulnerable communities may raise expectations, or reinforce suspicions. Respondents may be vulnerable to breaches of confidentiality, or they may not understand the research process sufficiently to be able to give their informed consent. Discussing traumatic events may reopen old wounds, while emotional involvement with victims or anger at the behaviour of belligerents may influence a researcher's judgement and affect the type of information gathered (Smyth and Robinson, 2001; and Goodhand, 2001).

Some of these hazards can be minimised or mitigated. Agencies could ensure high-quality contextual and situational analysis, before and during field investigations, and give careful consideration to when and where to conduct research. Researchers should seek to work with credible and trusted local partners, and consult closely with community members on security matters. Members of the research team should be carefully selected, and given detailed briefings and training. High-profile research activities might be avoided.

Given the risks and difficulties associated with research in conflict zones, agencies have a responsibility to ensure that any research conducted to support their programming is undertaken seriously, and that every possible effort is made to draw upon the results of that research in informing future policy and programming.

**Institutional challenges**

All of these problems and constraints point to the need for contextual research and analysis to be conducted in close association with ongoing operational activities, in an action research model that integrates research and practice dynamically. Those conducting the research must be adequately trained in appropriate approaches and methodologies, and the research team should include local and/or international staff and researchers with a good knowledge of the local context and with the trust of respondents.

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*Despite the presence of landmines, security considerations did not greatly hinder research in Casamance. This landmine-awareness poster across the border in Guinea-Bissau warns people against approaching the area*

This, of course, has resource implications for agencies. Some larger agencies might be in a position to create dedicated, specialist posts, to provide relevant training

for incumbents, and/or to commission external consultants to work alongside staff and partners on the ground. Smaller agencies might be more reliant on the analysis provided by their larger counterparts, with further implications for the coordination and sharing of information and analysis among different agencies in the field.

Whatever their immediate staffing and other resource constraints, agencies also face important institutional and cultural challenges in integrating political economy analysis into the mainstream of their programming. This is particularly so when their staff are working to short time-frames in fast-changing contexts; a great deal of limited staff time is taken up with detailed monitoring and assessment of project inputs and impacts and ensuring that they and their partners are achieving acceptable technical standards in the delivery of relief.

Although individual project cycles may be short, and some rapid-onset emergencies are relatively brief in duration, agencies are often *de facto* engaged on a relatively long-term basis because the crisis itself is chronic or recurring and/or because agencies' programming extends beyond immediate life-saving activities. Particularly in these situations, a good understanding of the political economy should be possible. However, this will probably only be developed gradually; at times, analysis will be unavoidably partial or difficult to substantiate.

Agencies' institutional understanding of these situations may be limited by rapid staff turnover, and by poor communication and information-sharing between the field and national, regional and international headquarters. Wherever possible, political economy analysis should build on the existing, often extensive, knowledge and understanding of staff at all levels, including field staff, partners and beneficiaries. Ideally, analysis should be conducted in a team context, with a team leader ensuring that, where possible, specialists, international and local staff and partners work together to share expertise, insights, data, skills and tools throughout the process of analysis.

Rather than carrying out one-off, stand-alone studies, political-economy analysis is best conducted flexibly and creatively alongside and within agencies' and their partners' operational activities. Ideally – particularly given the nature of conflict and crisis – it should be a continuous process, carefully integrated with the various assessment and other activities that agencies are engaged in. Instead of adopting entirely new frameworks and ways of working, this may entail, in the first instance, adapting existing assessment and other operational frameworks, widening

the scope of issues examined, and incorporating some of the questions and data needed for political economy analysis.

However good the research team, there is never a single 'right' analysis, and what information and data is available to agencies will vary a great deal in scope, reliability and detail. For this reason, agencies should seek to build their understanding by drawing on a wide range of sources, and all information and analysis should be constantly checked and cross-referenced against that from other sources (including media contacts and academic research).

Given the time and resource constraints facing operational agencies, there is a danger that the copious amounts of data that might be generated and collected cannot then be effectively integrated with or connected to programming. Again, this points to the need to integrate political economy and livelihoods research into practical programming, to ensure that the appropriate focus is maintained and to maximise the potential for the research and analysis to inform programming on a continuous basis.

## Research methods

The collection of field data to support political economy and livelihoods analysis is likely to draw on rapid appraisal methods – principally key informant interviews, direct observation and, where possible, mini-surveys – and oral testimonies, individual and household case studies and other informal qualitative research exercises, such as wealth ranking. Ideally, political economy analysis and associated livelihoods research should use both qualitative and quantitative research. Since formal methods of quantitative research, for example large-scale questionnaire surveys, will usually not be possible in conflict situations, any quantitative data will probably need to be collected using more informal methods, such as structured interviews with a pre-selected sample of respondents. Research for the ODI case studies included:

- *Macro surveys*

To build up a picture of the history and dynamics of the political economy at the national, regional and international levels, the case studies drew on reviews of secondary and 'grey' literature, and field-based interviews with a wide range of key informants, including diplomatic and security experts, agency representatives at headquarters and in the field, journalists, refugee groups and business people.<sup>1</sup> In Afghanistan, a focus group was held with a number of

<sup>1</sup>'Grey' literature is unpublished material from governments, academia, business, industry, NGOs and other non-governmental sources.



**Box 10: Interviews and community-level surveys: lessons from the Casamance***Semi-structured interviews*

A key source of data for the Casamance study was semi-structured interviews with key local informants, including agency staff, MFDC members, local elected representatives, civil servants, journalists and traders. As in any conflict situation, some interviews had to be conducted with particular care, particularly those with MFDC members.

With sensitive actors, credentials had to be demonstrated and trust built up steadily, with sensitive questions posed only on the basis of the degree of openness that an interviewee had already demonstrated. Going beyond this risked causing embarrassment or offence. Some aspects of the conflict could not be tackled at the opening of an interview, or indeed during a first interview; it was only later in the fieldwork that more useful testimonies were forthcoming. With civil servants and some agency officers, asking them simply to describe their work and identify the problems they encountered gave them an opening to discuss the situation in the Casamance. Lastly, sources in the NGO and media communities were very willing to discuss the conflict and keen that it should be more widely publicised. They saw a European researcher as having more opportunities and running less risk in this respect, while they themselves were more constrained, by means and by concerns about local sensitivities and reprisals.

*Stakeholder surveys focused on the timber trade*

Both the Senegalese armed forces and rebel elements are sensitive about their involvement in the timber trade, and the government's forest service is understandably guarded. For research purposes, the easiest access point proved to be the local carpenters who handle much of the timber in the Casamance. Rather than present them with a European researcher, the local assistant carried out a survey of 40 workshops in Ziguinchor and Bignona, arriving in each with only a few, open questions: not about the conflict or combatants, but about the respondents' trade in general, to see how highly certain actors and activities figured. This was sometimes done under the guise of market research for a planned sawmill, and results were noted only after leaving. While by masking the questions as market research the survey involved some deception, the results ultimately presented are made anonymous and aggregated in a frequency table and so cannot be connected directly with individual respondents.

aid agencies in Peshawar before the fieldwork to check and validate the questions and research design. Ensuring that a wide range of informants was included in the interviews helped to crosscheck and 'triangulate' the data and analysis from each source. It is important to complement a review of secondary and grey literature with interviews and vice-versa, since both may often be biased, inaccurate and uneven in coverage, availability and accessibility (Van Brabant, 2000: 37–38).

- *Community-level surveys*

Community-level surveys were also conducted in Afghanistan and the Casamance. In Afghanistan, research questions covered livelihoods (assets, strategies and outcomes), aid, conflict and security, social relations and social capital, governance and local institutions. Qualitative Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)-type methods used included observation, semi-structured interviews, mapping (geographical, resources flows and institutions), historical timelines and focus-group interviews. (PRA methods prioritise

the direct participation of community members in the identification and analysis of the causes of and solutions to their own poverty and vulnerability. PRA methods can be applied to urban as well as rural situations.) Up to four researchers spent approximately a week in each location. In insecure locations, it will often be necessary to adopt a very low profile, collecting oral histories that can be used incrementally and indirectly. The best and safest entry point may not be direct questioning, for instance about the opium economy, but instead an analysis of people's livelihoods, coping strategies and social institutions (Goodhand, 2000: 88–99).

In the Casamance, livelihood surveys were undertaken of four sites reflecting different security environments, and of IDPs from a rural community on the Guinea-Bissau border. A simple structured random sampling regime was used, although village notables had to be interviewed for reasons of courtesy. Apart from asking about displacement history, the conflict was not tackled directly in the

questionnaires so as to avoid upsetting respondents. Overnight or longer stays in survey villages proved particularly valuable because they provided opportunities for social visits, when local affairs could be discussed more informally. The livelihood surveys were a more dilute source of information on the political economy than key-informant interviews and stakeholder surveys, but provided important insights into economic strategies employed by combatants, without asking for such information directly. The livelihood surveys were very time-consuming, however, and would not always be possible or appropriate in a more pressured operational context.

The case studies conducted in Afghanistan, Congo and the Casamance all involved less formal stakeholder research using ethnographic and informal interview techniques to provide background data and personal testimonies relating to particular aspects of the political economy and livelihoods. Such highly individualised testimonies proved a remarkably useful source of information. In both the Kivus and Afghanistan, conversations with traders proved particularly valuable for documenting how particular markets and livelihoods had changed over time and what the implications were for local people. In Sierra Leone, collaboration with a local NGO enabled an 'action research' approach with direct participation in field-based project design,

#### Box 11: Informal stakeholder interviews and personal testimonies in the Kivus

The site is a typical mine in the Masisi at Kichanga, near Matanda-Bitonga Localité. It is reached after a few hours' drive up rutted dirt-track roads into the Masisi followed by a two-hour walk over hills. Lying in a small valley, the mine was first worked in 2000. Nzita describes how he entered mining:

*I started in the business because my Uncle had a field which showed some promise. I employed three diggers to work for me, all from the Matanda area ... To begin with the business went really well, we dug perhaps ten kilos a week ... With the five kilos I sold, I would pay my children's school fees in Matanda ... The coltan would be sold to purchasing companies ... After that, I don't know where the stuff went – that's their secret! ... Now things aren't going so well. With the much lower price, it is very difficult to get diggers ... Things started to go badly in 2001 ... There were too many taxes, not enough profits coming back. They [the RCD administration] demanded \$1,000 to be a seller to a comptoir [syndicate] and so I could not get into that.*

Axel has dug for two years at Numbi mine, near Minova in South Kivu:

*There is a very big mine there, with many diggers. They are from Bukavu, from South Kivu all over. You can't count the number. The owner is Kamali, a big rancher – he had so many cows once! Kamali took refuge in Rwanda during the difficulties. Then he came back, and when he did he found that people had been digging successfully for coltan on his land. So then he picked it up from there and he started looking for diggers ... Do I have lots of money now? No, coming from Numbi I met bandits and they took \$120 off me ... They were just bandits, no uniforms, no guns even, but they intimidated me ... At Numbi there are soldiers who guard the mine, with a staff officer. There are RCD, Rwandans, Tutsi ... The soldiers never dig.*

Filbert is a taxi driver who made a couple of trips around October 2001 to mines near Kamituga, Maniema Province, swapping dried fish for raw ore:

*Once I bought my 55 kilos of coltan, I took the plane back. By then, the flight had gone down in price. \$50 for me and \$1 per kilo. I paid by borrowing the money from X in the purchasing house against the coltan I had. He gave me \$1,050 in total for the coltan, about \$19 the kilo. I sold it all to X. And he was the one, his comptoir, was the one who arranged things with the customs when I arrived so I don't know. They would measure the quantity and so on. The coltan remains in the plane and the comptoir sends a truck for it to Kavumu [Bukavu airport]. X sends it from there to Kigali and then to South Africa. He doesn't have to deal with the customs, it just passes. X is a Rwandan ... I don't know how he does it!*

**Box 12: The household economy approach and political economy analysis**

A number of humanitarian and development agencies have developed frameworks for assessing and analysing household and local food economies. Most are based on the 'entitlements' approach developed by Amartya Sen (Sen, 1981). Sen's concept of entitlements refers to the 'commodity bundles' that a person or group can access or command using the rights and opportunities open to them. This approach shifts the focus away from food availability towards the inability of groups to acquire food, for instance because of their poverty. In this reading, famines may be the result of certain groups' declining access to food, irrespective of overall food availability (see Devereux, 2001; Edkins, 1996).

Food insecurity, therefore, is about the relationship people have to food commodities. This, in turn, encourages attention to specific households and specific groups at the local level. Instead of studying populations and food per capita, the focus is on particular household groups and their vulnerability and coping strategies. Save the Children (UK)'s Household Economy Approach (HEA), for instance, aims 'to provide an understanding, in quantified terms, of the way in which typical households in defined income/wealth groups gain access to food and non-food goods and the relationship between these households and the wider economy. This information permits modelling of the likely effect of changes in economic context, e.g. the inclusion or removal of food aid or a price change, on the economy of defined households' (Seaman et al., 2000).

In the context of political economy analysis, it is important to note that the entitlements approach (and thus household economy and other assessment frameworks based on it) is essentially apolitical to the extent that it presents food insecurity as a failure in an otherwise relatively benign system, and therefore as an essentially technical problem: agencies need to identify what has gone wrong and intervene to correct these failures, for example by supplying food aid to bring prices down. Sen encourages a view of famine as an 'economic disaster' which avoids attention to the politics of famines (Keen, 1994; de Waal, 1997; Devereux, 2001). The entitlements framework does not incorporate, for instance, the possibility or likelihood of deliberate asset stripping or other forms of economic violence, or the systematic political exclusion of certain sections of the community. Political economy approaches challenge this by examining famine as a process, rather than in terms of breakdown, in which benefits accrue to one section of the community while losses flow to the other (Rangasami, 1985; de Waal, 1997; Keen, 1994).

Because household economy frameworks, based on the entitlements approach, are essentially apolitical and descriptive, they tend to focus on 'what?' rather than 'why?' questions: what are the criteria that differentiate poor and rich households?; what proportion of the population falls into each group?; what are the sources of food and non-food income? A supplementary set of questions drawn from a political economy approach might include:

- Why are some household groups wealthier than others, and how and why have the fortunes of these different groups changed over time?
- Have sources and proportions of food and non-food income changed for particular groups, and if so, how and why?

A political economy perspective would also widen the scope of vulnerability factors included in household needs assessment, for instance by encouraging attention to political and social exclusion, as well as food insecurity.

tendering and monitoring. This allowed conversations and interviews to be conducted with people at every level of the aid 'commodity chain', from representatives of government offices and donor agencies down to former combatants employed on a local vocational training scheme.

## Frames of reference

Given the range of factors of concern to political economy analysis, the dynamic nature of these processes and the variety of agencies' own concerns in the field, any analytical frameworks used to support

political economy analysis need to be applied flexibly and interchangeably, with constant cross-linking between different frames of reference. A number of discrete analytical frameworks might be used to highlight and investigate particular aspects of the local or wider political economy. These could supplement and expand a number of assessment and other frameworks already used by operational agencies, such as household economy and other needs assessment frameworks, early-warning systems and evaluation frameworks.

#### 'Commodity chain' and livelihoods analysis

The case studies conducted for this study drew directly on two frameworks that lend themselves particularly well to supporting political economy analysis, particularly where it seeks to link the local level to the meso (sub-national) and macro (national and international) levels: 'commodity chain analysis' and livelihoods analysis.

The Afghanistan, Congo and Casamance case studies all used commodity chain analysis for selected resources connected with war economies, such as coltan, opium, hashish, money-changing, timber and tree crops. Commodity chain analysis identifies power relations, governance structures and exchange relationships within commercial networks, from primary production through to consumption, and from the local up to the international levels (see Gereffi and Korzeniewicz, 1994; Gereffi, 1995; and Raikes et al., 2000). Of particular interest to political economy analysis is the identification of who controls commodities and exchange at particular levels. A commodity chain may be predominantly controlled and driven by producers or by commercial intermediaries, or by buyers at the consumer end of the chain.

It must be stressed, however, that the direct investigation of commodity chains in situations of conflict and political crisis is likely to be highly sensitive, and so conventional research methods appropriate for peaceful situations will not be suitable. The safety and security of researchers, respondents and the agencies



*The Afghanistan case-study uses commodity-chain analysis for selected resources, including poppy cultivation and opium production*

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and beneficiaries that they are connected with is paramount; any investigation should err on the side of caution if it is unclear whether a particular approach or line of inquiry is safe to pursue. Again, understanding is best developed incrementally and indirectly, drawing on a wide range of sources. Agencies, or their field staff and partners, may already have or be collecting much of the information that they need concerning commercial activity in the areas where they are operational. A key challenge is to draw effectively on this existing knowledge, including

relevant information collected through household economy and other assessments and field surveys.

Gereffi identifies four dimensions of global commodity chains: the input–output structure of the chain, the territory it covers, its governance structure and the institutional framework. The governance structure includes notions of barriers to entry and coordination within the commodity chain, and distinguishes producer-driven from buyer-driven (and intermediary-driven) structures and processes. The institutional framework determines how key or 'lead' actors within the commodity chain involve less powerful or subordinate commercial actors through their control of market access and or information (including technological and commercial information), for example by monopolising export and marketing networks.

The coltan commodity chain in DRC, for instance, was highly fragmented during the price boom, with a large number of independent miners and intermediaries involved at the lower levels. Primary production was concentrated in mines in the east, while purchasing, processing and sale onto international markets was concentrated in Rwanda. At the tail-end of the boom, the RCD/Rwandan authorities tried to centralise all coltan purchasing under a single buyer, SOMIGL, but this was abandoned following the price crash. Since then, military control of the commodity chain has been consolidated, forcing out most of the independent producers and intermedi-

aries who used to operate at the lower levels of the chain and making the trade increasingly violent. An unknown proportion of coltan flows through informal channels, with profits probably accruing to Rwandan politicians and military officers. The commodity chain is buyer- and intermediary-driven – primary producers have little control, and are vulnerable to price fluctuations and violence at the hands of those higher up the chain.

Many of the issues and questions of concern to political economy analysis can also be viewed through the lens of livelihoods analysis. The livelihoods approach starts by investigating how individuals, households and communities try to achieve and sustain their livelihoods. Livelihoods analysis is cross-sectoral, and seeks to take into account the totality of economic, political, social and cultural factors affecting people's lives and livelihoods from the local up to the national and international levels. It thus has the potential to complement or be combined with more conventional political economy analysis, which is often approached from the 'top down', and frequently fails to connect effectively with the local level.

Most of the livelihoods literature has focused on relatively stable development situations, and so says little directly about how this approach could help humanitarian and other agencies working in situations of violent conflict and political instability. Nevertheless, it can provide much of the data that political economy analysis requires concerning local and meso-level political and economic relationships and processes in society; it provides a framework and a methodology for researching these processes at the local level that is largely missing from the political economy literature; and it is grounded in poor people's own perspectives, as opposed to the 'outside looking in' approach that tends to dominate in most political economy analysis (compare Moser and McIlwaine, 2001). Livelihoods analysis also has the additional advantage of providing a comparatively safe way of investigating sensitive issues in insecure environments, since these are only tackled indirectly through exploring how people live.

Like Sen's entitlements approach, livelihood analysis has been criticised for not sufficiently incorporating or addressing issues of power and politics. While some relatively detailed work has been done to bring more politics in (for example Baumann, 2000; Hopley and Shields, 2000), it is probably equally valid to draw flexibly on other frames of reference, such as those reviewed here, in collecting, analysing and interpreting livelihoods data (Ashley and Carney, 1999: 35).

There are a number of disparate and partly overlapping methods of studying livelihoods. Murray, for example, outlines three core principles for livelihoods research:

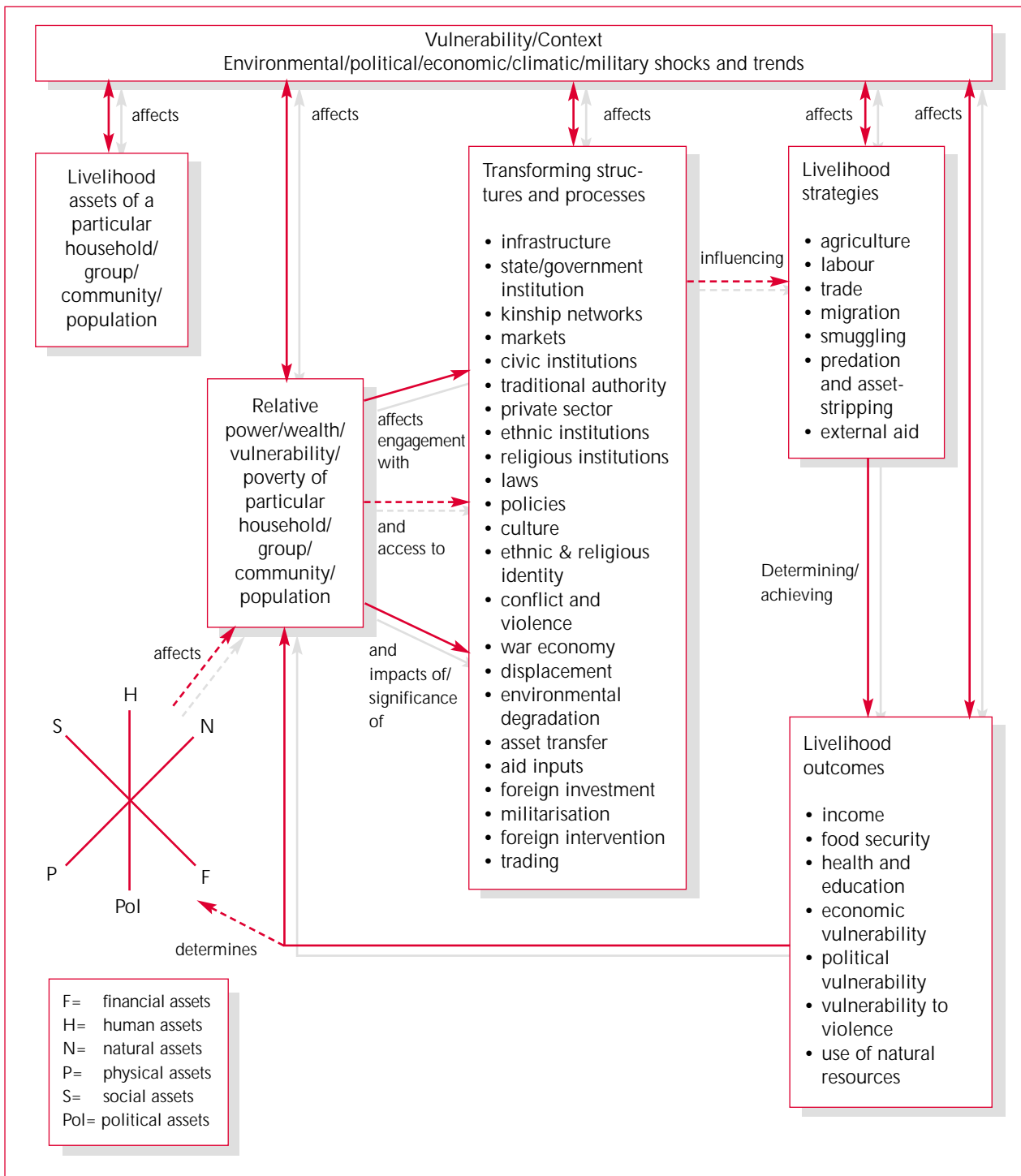
- It is carried out at the micro-level of households and communities. It involves empirical investigation of combinations of modes of livelihood and of the relationships between them, and changes over time.
- This micro-level investigation is placed clearly within a macro context, with a clear time-frame and recognition of key variables and trends.
- It seeks to explain the circumstances of, and reasons for, poverty and vulnerability through analysing social relations in a particular historical context. This implies a relational view of poverty, and an understanding of the persistence, intractability or deepening of poverty driven by questions about inequalities of power (Murray, 2001).

The dominant livelihoods approach is represented by the 'sustainable livelihoods' (SL) framework and approach developed by DFID (see DFID's SL guidance sheets at [www.livelihoods.org](http://www.livelihoods.org)). This approach focuses on people's human, natural, financial, physical and social 'assets' – such as education, land, waged income, access to water, and kinship and other social networks – and how people convert these into livelihood outcomes. A single asset can generate multiple benefits: if someone has secure access to land (natural capital), for example, they may also be relatively well endowed with financial capital because they can use the land for productive activities, lease it out, or use it as collateral for loans.

It is important to look beyond individual assets such as land to explore how these are related to others, such as young people to farm the land. It is also important to incorporate a time dimension into the analysis: information needs to be collected on trends in overall asset availability – the overall stock of social capital might decline if societies fragment during conflict, for instance – as well as on which groups are accumulating assets, which are losing them, and why. Where 'social exclusion' is at work, those who are already poorly-endowed may well become more marginalised.

Different social groups within a community or population typically experience differing risk factors in their livelihoods, and people's ability to exercise choices may be constrained by social and governance factors that are not immediately obvious. Analysis of livelihood strategies should therefore include

Figure 1: A sustainable livelihoods framework in situations of conflict and political instability



questions such as: what does the livelihood ‘portfolio’ of a given social group look like? How and why is this changing over time; is it a long-term response to environmental change, a response to changing market conditions, or a short-term response to a direct threat? How long-term is people’s outlook, and how is this reflected in the way they use and manage their assets? Are they saving or depleting their assets for the sake of immediate survival?

An important weakness of much livelihoods analysis that is not fully addressed in DFID’s framework is the insufficient attention that it gives to competition and exploitation between individuals, households and groups. The potential for competing livelihood strategies is partially acknowledged in the guidance sheets accompanying DFID’s framework, where it is noted that ‘people compete (for jobs, for markets, to secure better prices, etc.) ... [which] makes it difficult for

everyone to achieve simultaneous improvements in their livelihoods', but the problem is not tackled directly. Understanding competitive and sometimes destructive relationships between the livelihoods of different groups is essential for understanding how livelihood strategies translate into power and wealth relations and, potentially, violence and/or the systematic marginalisation and exclusion of particular groups. This is a key area where other frames of reference that bring in a stronger political economy dimension might strengthen livelihoods analysis. Figure 1, based on DFID's livelihoods framework, illustrates how questions focused on changing livelihoods at the local level might incorporate questions and issues relating to the local and wider political economy.

### Other frameworks

A range of other frameworks may also usefully inform political economy analysis.

- DFID's *good-governance assessment framework*, for example, uses a series of checklists for eight major areas: state viability and sovereignty, government structure, transfer-of-power and electoral arrangements, levels of government, government effectiveness (institutional and economic) and treatment of the population. It includes questions such as: is political power exercised fairly? If not, who is disadvantaged? How efficient and accessible are local service providers? Are government organisations honest, efficient, effective and accessible? Are basic human rights protected and enforced through the rule of law? Are property rights clear and enforceable? Does everyone have equal access to the formal justice and legal system? Do informal/traditional justice systems discriminate against certain groups?
- *Participatory poverty assessments* (PPAs) can be important in understanding poverty and vulnerability from the perspectives of a range of stakeholders. PPAs enable the poor themselves to define the nature of poverty in a particular area or among a particular group.
- *Strategic conflict assessment*, such as DFID's 'Conducting Conflict Assessments: Guidance Notes' (DFID, 2002), draws on political economy analysis, but differs from it to the extent that it has an explicit peace-building focus. It is therefore designed primarily with a view to assessing the risk of conflict affecting development programmes, assessing the risk of programmes or policies exacerbating conflict and identifying opportunities for increasing the contribution of development interventions to peace-building and conflict prevention and reduction. It includes the identification of strategic opportunities for peace-building, such as building local capacity, and defines and monitors conflict-management strategies.
- The '*local capacities for peace*' framework ('do no harm') analyses and assesses how aid can support peace or fuel conflict by weakening or strengthening tensions and connections between groups at the local level (Anderson, 1999).
- Gender analysis explores gender differences across a variety of issues, such as social relations, livelihood activities, access to and control of assets, services and networks of power and authority, and needs. This kind of analysis may also be applied to differences and relations between generations.





# Conclusion

Much writing and policy debate treat the outbreak and persistence of conflict, and its associated humanitarian and other costs, as a breakdown in 'normal' or 'peacetime' social, political and economic conditions. Our research, however, indicates that the dichotomy of 'peace' and 'war' is usually false (Berdal and Malone, 2000). In many conflicts, violence has become entrenched in the fabric of society, manifest as prolonged or recurrent warfare and insecurity, persistent political instability and, of course, acute and enduring humanitarian crisis. Thus, in many countries of the world – particularly those with weak governance and faltering economies – one is faced with neither total 'war' nor total 'peace', but a chronic state of political, economic and social instability (Le Billon, 2000).

It is often difficult to disentangle the causes and effects of violence and conflict from wider processes at work under these circumstances. It is also usually difficult to identify where conflicts and political crises start and where they end – whether across time or geographical space, or across different sectors of the political economy or different groups in society. Societies or areas that are 'in conflict' may be difficult to distinguish from those that are not; different groups and areas may be affected in different ways at different times, with some experiencing high levels of insecurity and open warfare, and others living in relative security. Meanwhile, as the experience of post-conflict aid delivery in Sierra Leone shows, the potential for the kind of violence examined in this paper may be as great in a nominally 'post-conflict' situation as it is in a society in the midst of open conflict. And, as all our case studies indicate, even in a situation of open conflict the economics of war, development, profiteering, coping and survival are usually very closely intertwined at all levels.

For some time, humanitarian agencies have acknowledged the need for political and economic analysis of the societies in which they are operating, irrespective of

whether there is open conflict there. But accepting the need for such an analysis is not the same as working out how to go about getting it, and doing it does not necessarily imply that the results are acted upon. A recent ALNAP review of evaluations of humanitarian programming in Kosovo observes that humanitarian agencies often lack an adequate understanding of the contexts in which they are intervening, and asks why agencies have so much difficulty developing this analysis. There are clearly a number of reasons why this is so, including the short time-frames of much humanitarian programming. Competing demands come from other forms of information collection and management, and from the detailed monitoring and reporting of project inputs and outputs. Another factor may be a lack of appropriate analytical tools – something that this paper has tried to address. Where the humanitarian community is *de facto* engaged on a long-term basis, the most appropriate approach for many agencies will be to draw on a wide variety of sources and frames of reference (including the knowledge of their own field staff and local partners) on a continuing basis, and to try to integrate political economy analysis into assessment and other frameworks that they are already using in their operations, such as household economy analysis. Our research also demonstrates that much of what relief agencies need to know about the political economy can be obtained from a close examination of changing livelihoods.

While the practical, methodological and institutional constraints on doing effective political and economic context analysis are considerable, the constraints on *acting* on this kind of analysis may be even greater. Often, the necessary analysis and understanding may exist in one part of an organisation, perhaps at regional or headquarters level, but is not linked to ground-level operations; or individual staff or partners at field level may have a very good understanding of the context in which they are working, but this is not shared within the organisation as 'institutional knowledge', and is

therefore easily overlooked amid rapid staff mobility and turnover. Equally, a few organisations may have a good understanding of the context and be acting upon it effectively, but this is not transferred to other actors working in the same place.

Even if the understanding is there, it will not always be clear what the implications are for individual humanitarian agencies or programmes, or for the wider humanitarian community. Often, the key economic and political forces identified by an agency – such as the changing international price of a particular commodity, the structure of a key commodity chain or the causes of an upsurge in militia violence – will be far beyond the agency's influence or control. Humanitarian agencies may also legitimately ask whether it is *appropriate* for them to seek to exert such influence for reasons of neutrality or for practical reasons; analysis could be incomplete and the consequences of a particular action difficult to gauge and manage.

Much will depend on individual organisations' objectives and motivations – whether their focus is on short-term relief, or whether their activities extend to a broader range of protection and other interventions including livelihoods support, peace-building, advocacy or rights. Judgements about how to use political economy analysis appropriately will be agency- and context-specific. In some cases, it may encourage a broadening of agency activities, to encompass advocacy for instance. In other situations, it may lead agencies to restrict their activities, perhaps avoiding direct engagement with a particular faction, or suspending peace-building activities where it is not clear who the peace-builders really are. In DRC, for instance, understanding the coltan commodity chain might lead multi-mandate agencies to refine or expand their advocacy related to mineral extraction in the Kivus; in Casamance, an understanding of the ambiguous role of the MFDC's northern wing might lead agencies to restrict direct contacts; and in Sierra Leone, understanding the complex political grievances surrounding chieftaindom authorities should encourage agencies to tread carefully in their dealings with chiefs and in the distribution of relief goods at district and local levels. It is where humanitarian relief meets protection, peace-building, rights-based programming and livelihoods support that these judgements may be most difficult, and where good analysis may matter most.

As understanding of the political and economic dynamics of conflicts and humanitarian crises improves,



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*Hunting for diamonds in Sierra Leone. Even where conflict is open, war economies, 'shadow' economies and survival economies are closely inter-connected*

so too will understanding of the role of humanitarian and other aid actors in these environments. Agencies may seek to restrict themselves to immediate lifesaving activities, but in situations where the vulnerable need protection as much as assistance, and where people's coping and survival depends on securing or maintaining livelihoods as much as it relies on immediate access to food, water or shelter, humanitarian actors will be damned as much by what they don't do, as by what they do – inadequate political and economic analysis can result in errors of omission as easily as errors of commission. Whatever the scope of their activities, relief agencies are important political and economic players, if only because they control significant flows of resources into the local political economy. Given the scale of humanitarian crisis across the world and the limits on international humanitarian aid, it is crucial that humanitarian actors are able to account for their actions not only in terms of whether they do 'no harm', but also whether they do maximum good. No agency will be able to answer this question convincingly unless its operations are based on a sound knowledge and understanding of the social, political and economic environments that they are working in, and of the role that their own operations play – as has long been recognised in the development domain. While the practical constraints are considerable, the tools are there. The most significant challenge is an institutional one – how to integrate political economy analysis into the mainstream of agencies' activities at all levels, and how to ensure that this analysis is linked effectively to – and informed by – operations at field level.

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