

**POVERTY, CONFLICT AND INTERNATIONAL  
SECURITY:  
AN ANALYSIS OF LINKAGE**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The phenomenon of poverty is, no doubt a reigning force pre-occupying developing countries of Asia, Latin America and Africa. It is in view of the above imperatives that this study, through the use of poverty and violence conflict attempts an explanation of poverty, conflict and international security. It further understands that poverty and environmental scarcity as theoretical underpinning are integral to the spark of conflict in most developing societies which, in turn, threatened international security. The study also examines the link between poverty, conflict and international security. And it finally, recommends that, since it is obvious that most poor societies are susceptible to the spark of conflict as a function of poverty, hence, international security will continue to be in jeopardy. There is every need to address the scourge of poverty at whatever level, which has the capacity of breeding conflicts and threatening international security. This could be achieved through developing strategies capable of ameliorating or outright alleviation of poverty.*

**Key Words: Poverty, Conflict, International Security,  
Developing Countries, International Organizations**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The entire world has increasingly become a global village, and events in one country have significant consequence on the other country, if not the rest of the world. The phenomenon of poverty is, no doubt a reigning force pre-occupying developing countries of Asia, Latin America and Africa. For the obvious fact that, countries of the world are interconnected and interdependent has exacerbated the vulnerability for International Security to be threatened by multifarious factors leading to violent conflict and contestation. This shows that extreme poverty easily sparks annoyance and literally, kills (Lael and Derek, 2000). These claims are seen through hunger, malnutrition, disease and by leaving poor countries vulnerable to domestic upheaval and war and by generating transnational threats that endanger regional and international security.

However, Ohlsson (1999) observed that poverty is caused by environmental scarcities of arable land and water resulting in loss of livelihoods. And a common denomination for causes of conflict in many recent international wars is the loss of livelihoods resulting in young men being unable to reach the positions in life earlier generations of men could expect. It is perhaps self evident observation that the common denomination for many, if not most, of the internal wars and conflict plaguing Africa, South, Asia and Latin America during the last decades is poverty which further metamorphosed to loss of livelihoods. While poverty is an endemic condition in certain societies, loss of livelihood marks a rapid transition from a previous table condition of relative welfare into a condition of poverty or destitution (Gasana, 2001).

In view of the above imperatives, it is truism that poverty is one of the key factors that can injure societies and international security at large, through spark of internal conflict. In the same

vein, policy attempts to break the vicious path to conflict need to address poverty issue.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS**

Due to the magnitude of this study, the theoretical underpinning that best explain the analysis on the said topic could be said to be the theory of “poverty and violence conflict”. It is a combined idea of Collier, Hoeffler, Doyle, Stewart, Fitzgerald and Sambanis. The central thrust of the theory anchored on the assertion that the empirical analyses of internal conflict point to low-per capita income (poverty) as one of the most robust explanations for the outbreak and duration of violent internal conflict (Collier et al., 2004 and Stewart and Fitzgerald, 2001). This submission is further complimented by Karl Max, a famous philosopher, who posited that conflict is inevitable in human society based on the fact that there is consistent struggle among individuals and states in order to have a better livelihood.

These societies are structured into two antagonistic classes (ie the wealthier “attajirai” and the poor “talakawas”) with wider gap in the means of livelihood as a result of exploitative contacts perpetuating the relations leading rich to be richer and the poor to be poorer. This kind of situation has the capacity of breeding violent conflict within and even beyond internal cycle capable of threatening international security. Although this evidence rests on implicit assumptions on what makes low national or sub-national incomes a condition for violent conflict – association with weak state institutions, large groupbased grievances and low economic opportunity costs of fighting – existing research offers only limited systematic accounts of the micro-level channels through which low incomes amongst a large fraction of individuals in society

affect the viability of violent conflicts.

It is however important to accentuate that a hungry man is an angry man vulnerable of participating in armed rebellion in pursuit of one single interest or an aggregate interests. In particular, levels of poverty may drive individuals into conflict as some may gain more from being fighters than from peacetime activities, notably when productive activities are scarce, unemployment is high and returns from agriculture work are low (Grossman, 2002; Walter, 2004). The fulfillment of basic needs and access to livelihoods is closely related to another reason for participation that has remained elusive in the literature, notably the fact that, in many circumstances, people simply cannot afford to stay out because non-participation is very costly.

In this case, armed groups may offer protection from indiscriminate violence from opposing factions, as well as the privileged access to resources, information and skills invaluable in fighting zones (Kalyvas and Kocher, 2007). This argument can be easily extended to issues of economic protection as the (in)ability of households to protect their economic status in conflict areas may well increase substantially the risk of non-participation (i.e. the probability of poverty and destitution). Armed groups periodically manipulate the perception of such costs to guarantee population support since such support will affect the effectiveness of initial outbreaks of rebellion and the strength of strategic objectives throughout the conflict. Weinstein (2007) provides evidence on how some armed groups manipulate population support to their own advantage when other resources are scarcer (Azam, 2006). Also, road blocks, the issue of permission for access to infrastructure and markets,

and restrictions of population movements are a commonly used strategy by armed groups to control populations and guarantee their support, or at least some level of cooperation.

In addition, ordinary citizens draw on armed groups to protect their economic status when anticipating outbreaks of violence, and during conflict, when the costs of non-participation may signify poverty and destitution (Kalyvas and Kocher, 2007). Armed groups in turn make use of different levels of support from local populations to advance their strategic objectives. This symbiotic association between armed groups and populations in combat areas will affect substantially the probability of a conflict starting and its effectiveness thereafter.

Part of this process of adaptation to violence is the establishment of relationships between armed groups and individuals and households living in areas they control or wish to control. Rarely will a civil war start or progress without opposing factions securing significant population support (Azam, 2006; Weinstein, 2007).

### **POVERTY – ENVIRONMENT CONTROVERSY**

The quest for explanatory clarity sometimes creates unwarranted and counter-productive controversies such as for example, whether poverty or environmental degradation is the major source of conflict. Such disputes arise from a misunderstanding of what the scientific need of studying a limited number of variables at a time (Ohlsson, 2000).

If two studies, each pursuing the search for explanations of conflict and causal mechanism leading up to them from different independent variables e.g poverty and environment are poised against each other; the resulting controversy may

become extremely counter-productive for at least three (3) reasons such as: 1) explanatory pathways departing from poverty and environment, respectively, are best viewed as complementary rather than contesting; 2) further studies may very likely reveal that both poverty and environmental degradation work together in common or parallel causal mechanism; 3) if so, the need of policy making for rich variety of explanations are ill served by pitting the two sets of explanations and causal pathways against each other.

For explanations on a higher level, that would bring two independent variables already studied in detail, such as "poverty" and "environment" together in a new explanatory pathway. It builds on the supposition that there are important causal mechanisms both poverty and environmental factors to conflict. It promotes as a hypothesis, that "livelihoods" will be hitherto linked in formulating such mechanisms. The argument is based on the concept "poverty", and rich volume of research departing from it (Homer-Dixon, 1999). The end results of the vicious circle entailed by growing poverty and environmental scarcities are variety in increased social inequalities, a rapid increased of economically marginalized people, and as a consequence of the threatening livelihood, the involuntary need of those marginalized from that point and onward utilized the resources unsustainably. The conflict mechanism put in process include relative deprivation and the strengthening of bonds along ethnic, linguistic, national or regional fault lines prevalent in almost all societies, but not gaining full salience until livelihoods are threatened in rapid, and sometimes dramatic processes of change. The concept is uniquely applicable for the linking poverty and environmental factors as casual pathways leading to conflict, since it includes economic, environmental and social factors (Michael, 2000).

## **POVERTY, CONFLICT AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY: THE NEXUS**

In the words of Lael and Derek (2007), extreme poverty literally kills. This claim is true-through hunger, malnutrition, disease and, by leaving poor countries vulnerable to domestic upheaval and war and by generating transnational threats that endangers regional and international security. At the same time, the poverty-in-security nexus constitutes a “tangled web” with overlapping threads of intervening variables and stands of reverse causality (Collier et'al; 2003).

Poverty and violence reinforce one another, but their specific relationship is mediated by context specific drivers ranging from resource scarcity to weak institutions to malignant political leadership to demographic trends. Like spider's webs, each country is unique; there is no single path route to prosperity (or penury), no single pathway to peace (or war). However, the most interesting point here is the Rice's examination of the negative implications of developing country's poverty for global (as opposed to human) security, she makes an impassioned case that poverty breeds such as, basic physical security, legitimate government, economic growth and social welfare (Rice, 2005). Beyond bringing misery to their inhabitants, such poverty induced capacity gaps produce negative “spillovers” for regional and global security in the form of cross-border terrorism, crime, disease, and environmental degradation. Rice (2005), further contends that in an age of global threats from terrorists in Mali to Ebola in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the United States cannot afford to be indifferent to poverty that weakens state capacity.

It is however important to accentuate that, the world is full of

weak states, of course, and not all generate negative spillovers, much less those of the same type or magnitude, which suggests that intervening mechanisms and situational variables are involved. In view of the above imperatives, Rice (2005) raises some questions as thus:

*Are states that suffer from particular types of weakness more susceptible to particular types of threats? And does a state's vulnerability depend on whether its weak performance is a function of the political will of its governing regime, a low level of state capacity, or some combination of the two? She is more persuasive in showing the linkage between weak states and transnational spillovers than in demonstrating how poverty is linked to state weakness, which in turn engulf into conflict. Although, she qualifies her argument by nothing that "though poverty underlies state weakness" the latter is "also a consequence of other capacity deficits," her use of the bloodless terms "capacity gives to short shrift to the role of human agency and particularly the role of corrupt, misgoverning elites in generating poor state performance (Rice, 2005).*

Kahl (2006) noted that poverty and abundance can occur simultaneously at different level of analysis. For instance, abundance in one resource can create scarcity (poverty) in other different sorts of resources present different risk for developing countries; and the pathologies of poverty and abundance can occur and interact with one another in the same country over time. Kahl's distinctive contribution is to recognize that resources scarcity is not only a natural but also a social phenomenon, reflecting political and economic competition, and that the relationship between demographic



and environmental pressure and conflict are mediated by the strength of the state, the natural and quality of its governing institutions, and the identity, solidarity, and power of society groups (Kahl, 2006).

According to Miguel (2005), the poverty-violence link is arguably the most robust finding in the growing research literature investigating the causes of civil Wars. But is poverty breeding violence or vice versa? To answer this question Miguel employs an intriguing natural experiment. He analyses the impact of drought a purely exogenous economic stocks that increases poverty on state propensity for conflict in Africa which further threatens international peace and security. In contrast, Miguel finds little correlation between violent conflict and variables like political repression, democratic freedom, ethnic fragmentation, colonial history and population density. In some economic factors trump all others in causing African civil conflicts (Miguel, 2005). He lastly suggests that, this robust finding has clear policy implications. Very little foreign aid, he observes, addresses the immediate triggers of civil conflict. Donors could change this by directing a significant proportion of external assistance towards helping countries cope with the sharp income fluctuations created by exogenous shocks, such as poor weather or collapsing commodity prices. By extending such insurance, the international community could help remove support for rebel movements.

## CONCLUSION

Most of the armed conflicts, whether domestic or international,

are concentrated in regions heavily preoccupied by poverty such as South Asia, Africa and parts of Latin America. The researcher contends that the causal link being poverty is defined as the lack of physical, human and social capital. The lack of these factors generates conditions that are unfavorable for development and hence for peace. Conflict producing conditions that may emanate from poverty issue such as inaccessibility to basic needs is a clear manifestation of the incapacitation of social and political system to handle such crisis. Moreover, capricious politics is likely to create conditions of underdevelopment such as low economic growth and simultaneously cause extreme grievances that drive individuals and groups to take up arms. It is however important to note that a "hungry man is an angry lion" who does not mind to die even at a spot. U.N is primarily designed to ensure global peace and security as embedded in the charter and this is obtainable through the various agencies of the U.N United Nations Security Council as organ of U.N is saddled with the responsibility of deploying troops to the war-ton area. The exercise has took place severally and in different parts of the world, particularly developing nations where conflict is predominantly caused by poverty. Though there are immense difficulties facing the international community in bringing these devastating conflicts to an end. A tacit and common understanding underpinning such attempts is that both parties to an internal war share interest in ending their strife. The warring parties instead may have a common interest in keeping the war going. So also the key to peace making is to build the societies, where such common goals may be attained by peace rather than by War.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- i. There is every need to address the scourge of poverty at

whatever level, which has the capacity of breeding conflicts and threatening international security. This could be achieved by developing strategies capable of ameliorating or outright alleviation of poverty.

ii. The unequal structure of the world system and internal structure of the independent states could not be left out of the blame, hence, need to be restructured to avail every part and individual a sense of belonging and equal opportunities. This could be achieved by restructuring the existing system and provide one capable of reducing the monumental gap that exist between rich and poor at global and domestic levels.

iii. There is also need for United Nations (U.N) as global organization to be watchful and considerate in their operations to carter for the need of the moment with fairness, particularly in developing countries where poverty and conflicts are predominantly embedded. The above suggestion could be attained through vibrant organs of the U.N such as U.N Security Council, ECOSOC and FAO to check poverty and conflict situations of this part of the world.

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