

Chapter 1

What is Armed Violence?

This chapter addresses:

- The impacts and costs of armed violence for development
- Key features of armed violence
- Key drivers: Structural and proximate factors

Armed violence consists of *the use or threatened use of weapons to inflict injury, death or psychosocial harm, which undermines development*. Although present in all societies, armed violence disproportionately affects low- and middle income countries (WHO, 2008; CICS, 2005a, 2005b; UNDP, 2005a; Small Arms Survey, 2003). It is not just Afghanistan, Somalia, Sri Lanka and Sudan, but also South Africa, Guatemala, El Salvador and Jamaica that are badly affected.¹ The World Health Organisation (WHO) reports that armed violence is among the top five leading causes of deaths for adults (WHO, n.d., 2006, 2008).

The human costs of armed violence are far-reaching. It destroys lives and livelihoods, disrupts access to education, health and social services, reduces social and human capital by sowing fear and insecurity, and results in high economic costs owing to years of lost productivity. Armed violence can induce large-scale displacement, restrict mobility, reduce investment and access to credit and trade, and contribute to the growth of illicit markets and power structures. It can also undermine governance and state stability, while creating or taking root in under-governed spaces.² Armed violence is a cause and consequence of a range of risk factors such as horizontal inequalities, poverty, socio-political exclusion and governance challenges.³

1.1 The impacts and costs of armed violence for development

Armed violence impedes the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs – Box 1.1). More than 20 of the world's 34 poorest countries are affected by or emerging from armed conflict, most of them in Africa. Likewise, homicidal violence and violent crime are heavily

¹ A number of countries in southern Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean experience homicide rates of more than 20 per 100 000 per year compared with the global average of roughly 7 per 100 000.

² Under-governed areas include those lacking the presence or authority of formal state structures/representatives. In fact, most “under-governed” areas feature some form of traditional or alternative governance institutions, leaders and practices. These alternatives are often regarded as more legitimate and representative than the central government in the eyes of the local population. However, alternative governance structures can also be coercive and exploitive (while lacking legitimacy), especially when authority is based on enforcement by armed non-state actors linked to criminal enterprises. See Clunan and Trinkunas, forthcoming, and Lamb, 2007.

³ “Horizontal inequalities” refers to inequalities among groups living in the same society. For further discussion, see Stewart, 2008; Stewart, Brown and Langer, 2008; Diprose and Stewart, 2008; Collier and Hoeffler, 2004; and Collier *et al.*, 2003.

concentrated in many lower- and middle-income countries. Even certain countries that appear to be making strong national progress on the MDGs can suffer from localised pockets of chronic armed violence. For example, while Brazil is well on its way to achieving its MDG targets for education, two-thirds of the residents of the violence-affected *favelas* do not possess primary school certification.

Armed violence exacts a major economic toll, particularly on the poor and vulnerable segments of society. War-affected countries often experience a reduction in the annual growth of their economies of 2% of gross domestic product (GDP)⁴ and low growth rates persist long after the shooting stops (Collier, 2007). The average cost of a civil war is estimated at approximately USD 65 billion dollars.⁵ Likewise, the global cost of homicidal violence to societies around the world is USD 95-160 billion a year (Geneva Declaration Secretariat, 2008). As much as USD 400 billion is lost when considering lost productivity from lives prematurely cut short by violence.

Armed violence leads to the destruction of lives and property and also undermines local and foreign investment. It contributes to “unproductive” expenditures. Research suggests that developing countries may spend between 10-15% of their GDP on law enforcement, as compared to 5% in developed states (Geneva Declaration Secretariat, 2008).

The impacts of armed violence on national economies cannot be overstated. In Guatemala, for example, armed violence costs the equivalent of 7.3% of GDP in 2005, far outstripping spending on health or education (UNDP, 2006a).⁶ Likewise, if Jamaica and Haiti reduced their homicide rates to a level commensurate with Costa Rica, their respective annual growth rates could increase by an estimated 5.4% (World Bank and UNODC, 2007).

⁴ See Geneva Declaration Secretariat (2008). Between 1990 and 2005, armed conflicts in Africa cost some USD 280 billion, which approximates the amount of international aid flows by principal donors during the same period. See Oxfam, IANSA and Saferworld (2007).

⁵ See Collier and Hoeffler, 2004b. Their model assumes a seven-year war, and a fourteen-year post-war recovery period. This estimate includes: over USD 49 billion in military expenditures and economic losses, another USD 10 billion in post-conflict effects, and roughly USD 5 billion in healthcare costs.

⁶ Estimate includes health sector costs, institutional costs, private security expenditures, impacts on the investment climate, and material losses.

Box 1.1. Armed violence obstructs attainment of the MDGs

Millennium Development Goal	Armed violence effects
Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger	Loss of livelihoods; unemployment; displacement; malnutrition; changes in household composition; increased number of female-headed households; disruptions in service/welfare provision, internal trade and markets; reduction in access to food and fee-based health and education services (especially by girls).
Achieve universal primary education	Destruction of schools; disruption of schooling (especially for female children); diversion of state revenues from social expenditures to military/public security.
Promote gender equality and empower women	Increased number of female-headed households; Increased rates of gender-based violence; deepening poverty, including loss of land and homes when husbands are killed; ill-health resulting from HIV, prostitution and other illicit or dangerous means of income-generation; recruitment of women and girls into armed groups; lack of access to disarmament benefits during disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes.
Reduce child mortality	Destruction, disruption and/or overburdening of medical facilities; disruption of livelihoods; Reduced food security; increased mortality due to disease and malnutrition (especially for females); decreased protection/welfare due to changes in family composition.
Improve maternal health	Destruction, disruption and/or overburdening of health infrastructure; restricted mobility.
Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases	Destruction, disruption and/or overburdening of health services and sanitation; poor living conditions for the displaced; Increased exposure to sexual violence and prostitution.
Ensure environmental sustainability	Accelerated rural-to-urban migration and growth of slums; Reduced access to safe drinking water and sanitation (including destruction of infrastructure); Unregulated resource exploitation and deforestation.

1.2 Key features of armed violence

Armed violence is often restricted to specific geographic areas of a region, country or municipality. While certain areas of a country or city may function normally, others can suffer from acute levels of armed violence. Peripheral, marginal and historically neglected regions such as border areas and city slums are often under-governed and vulnerable to the growth of informal and/or predatory power structures. Examples include the paramilitary-dominated areas of northern Colombia, rebel-held regions of Sri Lanka, southern Lebanon, militant-controlled neighbourhoods of Mogadishu (Somalia) and the urban shantytowns of Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo (Brazil).

Armed violence can exhibit regional and transnational dimensions. For example, it can rapidly spread across territorial borders, such as during clashes between rival pastoralist groups, or among criminal groups that traffic arms from country to country across the Horn of Africa. Meanwhile less visible, organised international criminal syndicates, diaspora groups and criminal gangs can also directly influence the localised dynamics of armed violence.

Armed violence is deeply gendered. Across all societies, young males are the most common perpetrators, as well as victims, of armed attacks. Although women, boys and girls suffer as direct victims, many more emerge as survivors of non-lethal attacks, caretakers of male victims and as newly *de facto* heads of households. Gender-based sexual violence is endemic in most war zones and perpetrators are seldom brought to justice. Women and children's victimisation by armed sexual assault and human/sex trafficking often goes unrecorded (Box 1.2).

Widespread armed violence constitutes a failure of public security. Chronic levels of armed violence signal a *fragile situation* in which the state does not exercise a monopoly over the legitimate use of force in all its territory, or uses force excessively to quell dissent or crime (Annex A). In such contexts, many civilians may feel better represented, serviced or protected by armed groups than by the public authorities. They may also access better economic opportunities and security through participation in related illicit markets than in the formal economy (even if the local armed actors extract protection monies and engage in other predatory behaviours).

Box 1.2. Armed violence and women: Bearing the burden

Men are the most common direct victims of armed homicide. However, women, children and other vulnerable groups like the displaced suffer disproportionate impacts, such as: the loss of a male breadwinner and/or male protector, the burden of care for injured family members, the collapse or inaccessibility of health and education services, disruptions to livelihoods, impoverishment and/or forced flight, and sexual violence.⁷

Armed violence is often accompanied by gender-based sexual violence, and not only in conditions of war. Rape, domestic violence, murder and sexual abuse are significant causes of female mortality and leading causes of injury for women aged 15 to 44. In conditions of chronic or acute armed violence, female mobility is constrained, often affecting the gathering of wood, water and access to local markets without threat of armed sexual attack, as in the cases of Darfur, Kenya and Burundi. In post-conflict settings, stress combined with the availability of small arms leads to a rise in established-partner violence. In non-conflict settings, research shows that women are more likely to be attacked by a partner if a gun is available.

Although data are not comprehensive, WHO claims that 40-70% of all female homicides are committed by an established partner (WHO, 2002). In South Africa almost half (43%) of all reported female homicides were committed with firearms in 2000, making it a major external cause of death for women. Rather than contributing to higher levels of protection, gun ownership at home can increase the risk of homicide by a family member.

The experience of armed violence is influenced not only by gender but also by other factors, such as age, race, ethnicity, class, and religion. During the civil war in Guatemala, for example, women and children of ethnic Mayan origin were specifically targeted. In the Rwandan genocide, gender-selective killings targeted specifically Tutsi men, whereas Tutsi women frequently became the victims of sexual violence. Acts of gender-based violence do not necessarily always involve the use of weapons, but arms are often directly or indirectly linked to violence.

Knowledge of how armed violence affects women and development is not well understood. Impacts tend to be hidden in the power structures that marginalise and restrict women's voices and participation. More research is needed to understand the full range and weight of consequences for individual women, as well as their families, communities and societies.

Source: IRIN, 2008; Geneva Declaration Secretariat, 2008; UNODA and OSAGI, 2001; WHO, 2002; Jackson *et al.*, 2005; Johnson *et al.*, 2005; Amnesty International, IANSA and Oxfam International, 2005; IANSA, 2006.

⁷ When husbands are killed, women frequently lose their access to farmlands and the right to live in their marital homes. The resulting survival choice for many affected women and children is prostitution, commercial labour or domestic servitude. This has consequences for ongoing exposure to violence and ill health from communicable diseases and poor working conditions, as well as future community exclusion.

Armed violence is routinely used to control territory, specific populations, natural resources, local economies and state institutions, with no regard for the rule of law. Armed non-state actors are seldom signatories to key legal standards or instruments that regulate the use of force.⁸ They are rarely accountable to international oversight or transparency mechanisms (this can also be a problem with state security services). As the UN Secretary-General points out, “where the use of armed violence becomes an engrained means for resolving individual and group grievances and conflicts, legal and peaceful dispute resolution mechanisms are eroded and the rule of law cannot be upheld” (United Nations, 2008).

1.3 Key drivers: Structural and proximate factors

Each situation of armed violence features its own unique combination of drivers, dynamics and effects. Any external intervention must be sensitive to the particular context in which armed violence occurs. Despite their unique characteristics, however, most situations of armed violence also share a number of common underlying structural and proximate risk factors.

Structural risk factors include social, political and economic inequalities/exclusion; systemic unemployment and underemployment; rising perceptions of economic deprivation or grievances; rising expectations in the face of limited or non-existent opportunities; weak or problematic governance (including impunity in the judicial system and an ineffective criminal justice system, public security failure, corruption, lack of effective service delivery, penetration by organised crime and illicit markets, insufficient investment in social policies and programming, under-governed spaces and other deficits that compromise effective, impartial governance); resource scarcity and competition; rapid and unregulated urbanisation; demographic youth bulges, especially of young males in areas with limited education and employment opportunities; and unequal gender relations.⁹

*Proximate risk factors*¹⁰ include sharp economic shocks; natural (and human-induced) disasters such as drought; easy access to alcohol, narcotics

⁸ Private security actors are playing an increasingly prominent role across different contexts of insecurity – whether as official support to military and security operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, Liberia and elsewhere, or hired by governments as privatised adjuncts to official forces or hired by communities and individuals for protection in violent contexts.

⁹ See Geneva Declaration Secretariat, 2008 for a review of the literature on structural risk factors.

¹⁰ For more detailed analysis of risk factors see WHO, 2002 and Small Arms Survey, 2008.

and small arms; and fresh exposure to past violence – whether this has occurred at the national, community or familial level.¹¹ Gang membership appears to be associated in part with family origins characterised by domestic violence and other proximate factors.¹²

In certain cases, unregulated small arms can serve as a major risk factor: they can act as a trigger, turning a non-violent situation into a lethal encounter. Small arms and light weapons (SALW) control therefore offers an important entry-point for donors, affected governments and civil society actors.

¹¹ Civil conflicts can often reignite, and/or sustain high levels of armed violence linked to crime. A violent family history, including gender-based violence, is strongly correlated with higher incidences of individual violence. For more discussion of the links between early childhood influences and later propensities for violence, see Pinheiro, 2006.

¹² For example, the explosion of gangs such as *pandillas* and *maras* in Central America is linked to the exposure of youth to armed conflict and the widespread availability of arms in post-conflict settings, as well as the connections to organised transnational crime and the presence of convicted felons deported from developed countries. For a thorough review of gangs in Latin America and the Caribbean, consult www.usaid.gov/locations/latin_america_caribbean/democracy/gangs.html. See also Jutersonke, Muggah and Rodgers, forthcoming for a discussion of gangs in Central America.

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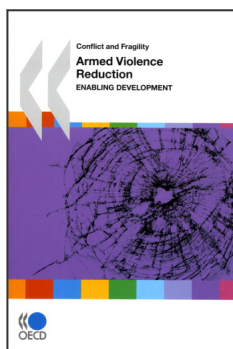
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