

PRESS RELEASE

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New insights into the effects of long term conflict on African households

Despite the pervasiveness of civil wars in Africa, research on the welfare impact of conflicts is surprisingly scarce. In the first household study of its kind in Burundi, researchers working with MICROCON, a research programme coordinated by the Institute of Development Studies, have been studying how poor people are affected by, and react to, violent conflict. It is hoped that the findings will give policymakers a much better idea of how to provide assistance to poor people during transitions to peace.

The research, led by Dr Philip Verwimp of the University of Antwerp represents a significant step forward for conflict studies – long term surveys to study the impact of violent conflict on welfare have very rarely been carried out in Africa, and never before in Burundi. By tracing participants of a national survey carried out in 1998 in order to analyse the dynamics of well being and civil war, the researchers found that:

- Poverty is persistent, while prosperity is not, particularly in war-affected areas
- 25 war-related deaths or woundings at the village level reduce consumption growth by 13%
- Consumption growth of a household living in the most violent village was reduced by over 50%
- Violence afflicted on household members decreases growth whereas membership of rebel groups increases it

The detailed nature of the information gathered means that it is possible to establish a dynamic poverty profile for Burundi, from 1998–2007 – making it possible to test important hypotheses about the relationship between violent conflicts and the choices of economic activities of affected households. The research team will also attempt to quantify the welfare losses of households that have experienced considerable war shocks. Information gathered about the ‘split-off’ households will be used to analyse geographical effects of the conflict.

Dr. Verwimp and his team sought to trace and interview 1000 of the households involved in the original survey and managed to re-interview 872 of the original households. “Collecting welfare data in very poor, conflict-affected countries is obviously difficult. But collecting household data over long periods in these environments is even harder” says Dr Verwimp. “Members of a household may leave to form new households – so-called ‘split-off’ households – which are often missed out of surveys, significantly affecting their accuracy.”

The civil war in Burundi began in October 1993, triggered by the assassination of the first democratically elected president, a Hutu, by paratroopers from the Tutsi-dominated army. By 2007 around 300,000 people had been directly killed in the violence, and the indirect mortality resulting from the breakdown of the economy and the health-care system is believed to be far higher. A battalion of 600 Burundian ex-soldiers is currently fighting alongside General Nkunda in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

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NOTES TO EDITOR:

In the original 1998 national survey, the World Bank and the Burundian National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (ISTEEBU) interviewed 6600 households.

Dr. Verwimp, of the University of Antwerp, and a small team of European researchers worked with ISTEEBU and a team of 50 Burundian interviewers sought to trace and interview 1000 of these original households, as well as locating 500 of the 'split-off' households. This was an extremely challenging logistical exercise, but the team managed to re-interview 872 of the original households, and 536 split-off households.

Dr. Verwimp (philip.verwimp@gmail.com) is available for interview.

The first working paper based on this research is available for download at:

http://www.microconflict.eu/publications/RWP9_PV_TB.pdf

MICROCON, or 'A Micro Level Analysis of Violent Conflict' is a five-year research programme funded by the European Commission, which takes an innovative micro level, multidisciplinary approach to the study of the conflict cycle.

Almost one third of the world's population lives in conflict-affected low-income countries. At a fundamental level, conflict originates from people's behaviour and how they interact with society and their environment - from its 'micro' foundations. Yet most conflict research and policy focuses on 'macro' perspectives. MICROCON seeks to redress this balance. Find out more: www.microconflict.eu.

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