

## **Conference Report: Policy and Practice in Violence Affected Contexts: What Can the Latest Conflict Research Teach Us?**

**30<sup>th</sup> June – 1<sup>st</sup> July 2011**

**Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, UK**

The MICROCON programme held a two-day conference between 30 June - 1 July 2011 for approximately 70 participants to debate, learn and share the latest in research, policy and practice concerned with the micro-level analysis of conflict.

In addition to presenting the latest advances in research, the conference focused on six thematic areas in order to explore micro-level conflict in relation to i) empirical advances; ii) household strategies for navigating violent conflicts; iii) health outcomes; iv) individual perspectives on violent conflict; v) poverty, inequality and exclusion; and vi) institutions and governance. Delegates were drawn from across the development sector and included academics, field practitioners, policy advisors, aid agencies and multilateral organisations.

The Conference aimed to:

- showcase MICROCON findings
- establish MICROCON and its researchers as a vital source of reliable and useful information for policymakers
- forge lasting links with a range of different policymakers that MICROCON researchers can engage with, in their future work.

The following report summarises the presentations and discussions that followed. The full presentations and papers are available online at:

[http://www.microconflict.eu/events/final\\_conference.html](http://www.microconflict.eu/events/final_conference.html).

### **Day 1**

#### ***Welcome and Introduction***

**10:00am-10:15am**

#### **Speaker: Lawrence Haddad, IDS Director**

Lawrence Haddad discussed the intent and purpose of MICROCON. He noted that currently very little empirical evidence exists that discusses the relationship between conflict and poverty. MICROCON and HiCN are acting as influential research bodies focusing on the issues surrounding conflict including: how people live with conflict; which groups and institutions tend to generate conflict; how they emerge from conflict; and the best ways of handling conflict. One of the main objectives is to analyse what research means for policy and practice as well as for the future research agenda. MICROCON has already helped the

World Bank design modules on poverty and conflict, and has fed into the Bank's development work. The programme's research involves working with organisations, such as non-state actors, that vary in values and perspectives.

## **SESSION 1**

**10:15-11:15am**

**Speaker: Patricia Justino, MICROCON Director, IDS**  
**'Synthesis and Reflections'**

Patricia Justino analysed the long-term effects of conflict on society and the importance of examining violent conflict at a micro (human-centred) level as opposed to through a state security/ capacity lens. This means encouraging more research in the development field that focuses on understanding the full conflict cycle (individual and group behaviour that leads to and result from violent conflicts), and its negative impacts on the existing social contract. In doing so, policymakers will be able to create more informed domestic, regional and international conflict policies, which place individuals and groups at the centre of interventions.

In her presentation Justino mentioned that conflict has long-term effects on a society, including the negative impact on children who typically experience a worse quality of life (shorter lifespan, mental health issues, minimal education, employment barriers, etc). There is currently insufficient impact assessment available to determine whether or not the conditions would significantly worsen without humanitarian aid. Conflict is also known to be linked with increased domestic violence (e.g. in Colombia) and is conducive to survival tactics that alter the behaviour of the people who have to struggle to live. There is an urgent need within the development field to offer more long-term peace-building strategies that have a micro-focus, which strengthen incentives to avoid conflict and are directed towards the most vulnerable populations that may be difficult to reach. The existence of a state that implements policies on the ground, which include issues such as property rights, distribution of public goods, etc. is necessary.

## **SESSION 2**

**11:45am-1:15pm**

### **PRESENTATIONS**

**Speaker: Anne Hatløy, Research Director, Fafo AIS**  
**'Advances in Qualitative and Quantitative Fieldwork'**

Anne Hatløy discussed the issue of data collection in the MICROCON research context. She reiterated what makes up "good data" and addressed the challenges, such as safety and ethical issues that researchers face in collecting data within conflict zones. Respondent-driven sampling and panel studies were offered as possible solutions. She touched on existing data, which is mainly quantitative (household surveys, CE-DAT, etc.) and newly gathered data, which is mainly qualitative (in-depth interviews, semi-structured narratives, etc.). Ethical issues within MICROCON research include, but are not limited to: protection of respondents, protection of field staff, informed consent, who is served by the research, and positioning.

**Speaker: Tilman Brück, MICROCON Deputy Director, DIW Berlin**

**'Measuring Conflict at the Micro-level'**

Tilman Brück continued the discussion on research in conflict areas by addressing how to incorporate these micro-level findings in a larger context, how to connect research with policy, and how to identify and address any knowledge gaps that still remain. He suggested utilising a more comparable measure of conflict that comes from the household level, but which also accounts for the differences in the effects of conflict within the household. He reiterated that if conflict is ignored, then the data will be invalid; thus, it is necessary to control for conflict both at a micro and macro level. Developing a standardised conflict module would be an effective way to move forward.

**DISCUSSION**

**Discussant 1: Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, Professor, University of Essex**

Kristian Gleditsch provided further analysis of what data on single entities versus groups would be. He examined MICROCON's contribution in assessing the consequences of conflict, especially in relation to health issues. He also inquired as to how the information could be extended to non-combatants, and discussed what the policy implications for disaggregated research might be. For instance, survey data may be able to highlight false claims about causalities and the impact of conflict on civilians.

**Discussant 2: Gary Milante, World Bank**

Gary Milante noted that there will always be a selection bias of individuals who remain and have not been displaced, and researchers must describe the results conditionally based on who they have talked to. Policymakers must know how researchers have qualified their results. He also commented on the issue of "survey burnout" among respondents: people who [frequently] participate in these research studies expect their input to have an effect on policies, and when it does not it may lead to "burnout". It may be important to coordinate a method of surveying to reduce this type of respondent experience.

**SESSION 3**

**2:30pm-4:00pm**

**PRESENTATIONS**

**Speaker: Roger Zetter, Director, Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford**

**'Violent Conflict and Mobility: A Micro-Analysis'**

Roger Zetter explored how shifts from the macro to the micro level of analysing both migration strategies and violence have opened up new ways of linking these phenomena to gain a better understanding of their interaction. Extant micro-level analysis of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), tends to focus on the lived experience of the displaced populations, less on analysing the causes, consequences, and experiences of mobility within conflict situations. Zetter argued that the "political economy of livelihoods approach". Provides a valuable framework to address these dimensions.

Zetter also examined the complex relationships between conflict and patterns of migration. He discussed three overarching dimensions including: 1) the dynamics of conflict and migration and the different strategies which households adopt to cope with these processes; 2) the in-country impacts on those who are displaced, in terms of economic consequences,

social exclusion and coping strategies; and 3) an exploration of the transnational links and their implications for diasporic households in relation to integration policies, continuing social obligations and the transmission of violence.

**Speaker: Philip Verwimp, MICROCON Deputy Director, Université Libre de Bruxelles  
'Livelihoods and Coping Strategies'**

Philip Verwimp discussed the household strategies that exist in conflict situations, which navigate behaviour in order to ensure survival, such as selling assets for consumption, which can be directly linked to generating poverty, and hiding in order to prevent being drafted, etc. He also highlighted the issue of control, and noted the dangers present when control is lacking, which is typically conducive to the worst atrocities (e.g. Afghanistan). Observed behaviours during these situations include: altruism, self-serving actions, and peer-guided behaviour. What is considered an asset during times of relative peace may become a liability during a conflict situation. Policy recommendations include addressing the actual, not presumed, needs of people.

**DISCUSSION**

**Discussant 1: Andy McKay, Head of Economics Department, University of Sussex**

Andy McKay argued that due to MICROCON's research there actually is extensive micro-level data available, and that the continued assumption that this is lacking is incorrect. He raised the issue of poverty traps and sought to open the discussion to suggestions of to move out of those traps. Also, he questioned the nature of conflict as a "shock" and how it compares to other shocks. Could it be considered more severe? What makes its effects, or the circumstances that initiate it unique?

**Discussant 2: Angela Raven-Roberts, Executive Director, Humanitarian Accountability Partnership**

Angela Raven-Roberts discussed the notion of agency and structure, i.e. the presence of the state, NGOs, government agencies, etc., given that they are highly influential and heavily influenced by the negotiation of communities. A greater understanding of how research incorporates this presence would be beneficial to increasing knowledge of the negotiations between individuals and the household. She also addressed the idea of history, and the importance of being able to trace stories through collecting data, artefacts, etc. during the recovery process. Raven-Roberts also suggested: a) further discussion on the type of livelihoods model being referred to (e.g. militarised livelihoods); b) integrating more gender issues into the discourse (myths on gender, de-masculinisation of men, etc.); c) more analysis of the key "buzz words" in the field (e.g. *risk reduction, prevention recovery, etc.*) to move away from the economic focus and shift to a more community-based perspective.

**SESSION 4**

**PRESENTATIONS**

**Speaker: Chiara Altare, Research Fellow, Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters**

**'Health: Perspective of an Epidemiologist'**

Chiara Altare discussed the notion of health within a conflict context. Health is an internationally recognised public good that affects every individual. People care about their

own health and the health of their families/ children. During conflict, health deteriorates. Diseases, malnutrition, food insecurity, and mortality are all issues, among many more, that present themselves within violent conflict. Mortality and morbidity patterns tend to differ among population groups (Internally Displaced People, residents, refugees). For example, IDPs are more likely to die from diseases and community residents are more likely to die from existing violence. By identifying and understanding patterns, informed decision-making can take place and interventions are more likely to respond to population's needs. However, it is important to note the difficulty in generalising, given the heterogeneous nature of conflict settings.

**Speaker: Philip Verwimp, MICROCON Deputy Director, Universite Libre De Burxelles  
'Health: Perspective of a Development Economist'**

Philip Verwimp discussed the significance of health as an indicator of human well-being. Even temporary shocks to health in childhood can have severe effects over an individual's lifespan, which may be why human biology has become such a vibrant area of research. Children, most especially, can carry the impacts of negative shocks during their lifetime – so how does violent conflict affect a child's health? Malnutrition, for instance, can lead to lower income opportunities, less access to schooling, a shorter lifespan, etc. Malnutrition can also escalate due to the trauma of displacement, which typically means there is little to no access to health services. In comparison to famine associated with crop failure, which typically affects more girls from poor households than boys, all children fall victim to the negative health effects associated with conflict. Prevention and intervention at an early age is thus key to assisting with human development over the long-term.

***DISCUSSION***

**Discussant 1: Lawrence Haddad, Director, IDS**

Lawrence Haddad expanded on the discourse regarding the health of infants, who are the most vulnerable group to any kind of shock, within a conflict perspective. He also discussed the indiscriminate effects of conflict shocks (targeting resources by age versus by malnourishment), the reliability of indicators (inclusion of age span as opposed to just weight/height), the resurgence of intra-household conversations (commentary on the unpredictable nature of relationships within conflict settings), and the implications of interventions (targeting based on vulnerability).

**Discussant 2: Gary Milante, World Bank**

Health is indicated as a good entry point within conflict environments, but how can this be reconciled with ethical issues? There is also commentary on the phenomenon that civil wars negatively impact the health of children despite gender, whereas during famine, mostly girls are the ones affected. Gary Milante suggested that there must be some type of strategic response within families during crop failures that do not occur during conflict situations. Given that there is only a fixed set of resources, Milante sought to expand the discussion to how to compare and prioritise intervention strategies within complex cross-sectoral work. This prioritisation could really influence policy and assist policymakers.

## DAY 2

### SESSION 5

#### PRESENTATIONS

**Speaker: Yvan Guichaoua, Lecturer in Politics and International Development, University of East Anglia**

##### **'Participation in Collective Violence'**

Yvan Guichaoua pointed out how MICROCON research has tried to further current understanding of collective violence and analyse significant questions regarding who the actors within conflict situations are, and why they (activists and perpetrators of violence) decide to participate in violent activities. His analysis demonstrates that a huge heterogeneity of causes, processes, and outcomes exists, as collective violence is ultimately "interactive", and can be heavily influenced by outside factors. In the 1990s, dominant models that looked at how processes of violence emerged suggested that people would rebel driven by greed motivations (Paul Collier, WB). However, there was insubstantial micro-level empirical evidence at the time to really validate or support these claims.

More recent models (e.g. Weinstein) focused on two types of rebels, opportunists and activists, and acknowledged that differentiation occurs based on the role of finance. Even this approach, however, was mostly taken from a "top-down" perspective, and has serious empirical limitations, as, notably it does not pay sufficient attention to the evolution of irregular armed groups over time. 'Social navigation' that addresses perceived opportunities and the contingency inherent to wartime situations may be a more accurate model in that it assumes people have some degree of choice and are able to act or decide on what is best for them. Guichaoua reiterated that violence needs to be analysed separately from conflicts, and that there is not necessarily a direct continuum between violent protests and insurgencies. Also, he examined the role of the "Entrepreneurs of Violence" and further analysed the behaviour of armed groups. Currently, a consistent challenge is tying both macro and micro levels of research analysis.

**Speaker: Colette Harris, Senior Lecturer, University of East Anglia**

##### **'What Can Applying a Gender Lens Contribute to Conflict Studies?'**

Colette Harris discussed MICROCON's efforts to position gender centrally among all projects and encouraged researchers to use a gender lens for their analyses. She emphasised how gender works at a political level and reiterated the importance of understanding gender categories in order fully to comprehend the social and political world. She reviewed the gender work that MICROCON had carried out on four conceptual levels: 1) sex disaggregated data; 2) gender as a proxy for women or women's rights; 3) gender in the sense of men's and women's identities and roles; and 4) gender as embedded in power structures and politics (e.g. rhetoric within the US White House in regard to WMDs). In her presentation Harris demonstrated that much can be gained by using a gender-analytical lens in research endeavours, not only as a tool to support the most marginalised and discriminated against but also to enable scholars to look beyond the surface to see how gendered platitudes conceal the machinations of the powerful.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Discussant 1: Graham Brown, Director, Centre of Development Studies, University of Bath**

In regards to Guichaoua's analysis, Graham Brown suggests pushing a little further and thinking of the distinction between the first movers and the rank-and-file. For instance, how do people move from rank-and-file to leadership positions, or get displaced from leadership, and what does that say about violence in conflict? He also expressed a desire for more conversation between Guichaoua and Hariss' papers, in order to understand the level at which gender plays a role in recruitment (i.e. the gender dimensions of recruitment). Due to the difficulty of breaking into conflict research outside of MICROCON, Brown also discussed the challenge of moving forward with the policy implications of these papers within a relatively closed-off area of academia.

### **Discussant 2: Wayne Bleier, Programmes Director, War Child**

Wayne Bleier reiterated how Guichaoua's work emphasises the necessity of deconstructing the reasons for why individuals join conflict. He commented on Guichaoua's matrix, and suggested it could be improved if it were related to the context rather than the researcher since conflict cannot be generalised. Also, he suggested including a timeframe within the matrix which takes into consideration why people participate in the conflict at particular points in time: as a war progresses, the rationale for why individuals may get involved changes over time.

## **SESSION 6**

**11:30-1:00pm**

## **PRESENTATIONS**

### **Speaker: Frances Stewart, Emeritus Professor, University of Oxford 'Inequality and Violent Conflict'**

Frances Stewart began her presentation by providing an overview on the various forms of violence that exist (e.g. domestic violence, criminality, riots, large-scale civil war, terrorism, and genocide) and acknowledged the crucial role of inequality in conflict situations. She also reviews MICROCON's work on identifying the main causes of various types of violence including: civil wars and genocide, civil unrest (riots) in India, 'routine violence', global inequalities, and terrorism. She also noted the socio-economic and political similarities and differences that empirical research had found between civil wars and genocides, as was the role of horizontal inequality in India's civil unrest, and the benefits of decentralisation in abating routine violence (e.g. in Indonesia).

Stewart also expanded on research findings that suggest how reduction in poverty and horizontal inequalities correlate with a decrease in violence. She further discussed the beneficial policies (cash transfers, progressive taxation, anti-discrimination laws, affirmative action, etc.) and political systems (e.g. consociationalist structures, and/or proportional representation systems) that assist in reducing conflict situations.

**Speaker: Julie Litchfield, Senior Lecturer, University of Sussex**  
**'Conflict and Poverty, Welfare, and Social Justice'**

Julie Litchfield discussed the urgency and duty of conflict researchers to produce policy recommendations based on their findings and acknowledged the fine line between “engaging with” versus “meddling in” political systems. The presentation synthesised MICROCON’s work on the complex links between poverty and conflict. First, she dealt with the scope of research and the conception of poverty, emphasising the importance of taking endogeneity into account, and raising awareness of the risks associated with focusing on observed conflict as opposed to potentialities.

Within this analysis was a discussion on the role of *grievances* (relative deprivation and horizontal inequalities) as well as the concept of *greed*. She also discussed the *poverty-to-conflict nexus*, highlighting how the breakdown of the social contract contributes to sustaining mass violent conflict. She addressed one of the insights of MICROCON’s empirical research on water conflicts, which suggests that while greed may be an important factor in the context of water scarcity, the sense of exclusion may be more of a determinant within the poverty-to-conflict nexus. She further explored the flip side of the coin: the *conflict-to-poverty nexus*. She reviewed the direct and indirect effects of conflict on households (e.g. asset losses, productivity, social networks, poverty traps etc.), but also used examples, such as MICROCON’s work in Colombia and Rwanda to demonstrate how the effects of conflict are not limited to these issues. These case studies also show a change in people’s behaviours that are not likely to be seen in other types of shocks, such as the willingness to take risks. She ended the presentation by reflecting on how formal and informal institutions differ in mediating poverty, relative deprivation, and inequality and inquiring into how policy interventions should be targeted.

***DISCUSSION***

**Discussant 1: Juan F. Vargas, Universidad Del Rosario**

Juan Vargas highlighted the effective advances of micro-level research analysis, thanks to the efforts of MICROCON. He noted the institution’s efforts to move past the simplistic dichotomy between greed and grievances approaches to bring back crucial factors including political exclusion, horizontal inequalities, etc. On the other hand, given that MICROCON has only existed for five years, he suggested it may be too soon to put forth policy recommendations based on research findings. A greater understanding of why grievances cause conflicts in some countries, but not others, and more knowledge regarding local level institutions is necessary.

**Discussant 2: Katrina M. Aitken, Conflict & Security Advisor, Saferworld**

On the other hand, Katrina Aitken emphasised the importance of moving forward with the policy implications of MICROCON’s research findings. She addressed some of the issues at the heart of this debate including, but not limited to: how to transfer political and economic debates to policy interventions; how to link local level politics to national peace transitions; and how to further understand the role of non-foreign local authorities. She also mentioned the necessity of looking at funding and planning processes to make them more flexible so that they are able to assist local people in defining what they need, and questioned whether the increase in tendency for aid alignment is the right choice, particularly in instances when the state is one among a number of actors within the conflict.

## **Session 7: Institutions and Governance**

**2:00-3:30pm**

### **PRESENTATIONS**

**Speaker: Nathalie Tocci, Deputy Director, Istituto Affari Internazionali**  
**'The Role of Civil Society'**

Nathalie Tocci analysed the concept of civil society. Civil societies, which are practically a reflection of society and can act as agents that promote peace and conflict, act somewhat like glue since they operate at both mid and grassroots levels. Civil society is linked with conflict resolution and assists in encouraging leaders to form agreements.

She also examined the interaction of the European Union (EU) with civil society and argues that by engaging too such an intensive degree, the international body has over-politicised organisations in making them responsive to it. There has also been an explosion of the NGO sector at the expense of other movements, and conflict settlement strategies tend to be absent.

**Speaker: Koen Vlassenroot, Coordinator, Conflict Research Group, UGhent**  
**'Governance with no government'**

Koen Vlassenroot presented some conceptual conclusions from research based in South Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Despite micro-level research, post-conflict reconstruction efforts are still structured at a national and international level, and he invited researchers to put more emphasis on analytical/ ethnographic research on livelihoods in conflict.

He also reiterated the notion that while there might be a collapse of *government*, that does not necessarily translate into the demise of *governance*. In an effort to exploit opportunities, various actors shape regulatory objects that provide services; thereby, reshaping structures and institutional contexts at a profound level. That state continues to be a significant, if not the only dominant actor, within the institutional landscape.

### **DISCUSSION**

**Discussant 1: David Anderson, Professor of African Politics, University of Oxford**

David Anderson noted how the complexity of research findings serves as a major challenge when the intent is to put forward key policy decisions. He also mentioned the *ambiguity of roles* that exists as well as the notion of *conflict capital*. With regards to the *ambiguity of roles*, a local actor could be an expert in local peace building, while also being a perpetrator of violence in another sense. The idea of "conflict capital" would serve as a subset of social capital and the term acknowledges the notion of transactions that are a consequence of conflict that give rise to assets, or skill sets, that may both reduce and prolong conflict situations.

**Discussant 1: Tony Dykes, Director, Action for Southern Africa**

Tony Dykes noted the discrepancy between 'Conflict Transformation' and 'Conflict Management', using the EU's engagement in Palestine as an example. He also expanded on the notion of homogeneity within civil society that was discussed in Nathalie Tocci's paper, and further emphasised the importance of looking at the organic link between NGOs and grassroots. He also provided feedback on Koen Vlassenroot's paper, and examined the

example of taxation, arguing that there are some cases where taxation may only be intended for private appropriation by tax collectors, not public use. He also noted he would recommend including commentary on the situation of state by proxy (i.e. by militia).

### ***Final Plenary***

**3:30-5:00pm**

**Panel: Cynthia Koons, Project Manager, UNICEF; Mark Segal, Senior Conflict Advisor, DFID; and Katrina M. Aitken, Saferworld**

#### ***Summary of topics addressed:***

- How to provide security for poor people given that it is absolutely necessary?
- Justice is a crucial issue for the poor—what is the recourse for problem situations that do not involve the ‘local man with a gun’?
- How do we promote inclusive political settlements, and what does that mean exactly?
- DFID’s agenda is focused on results, and these results are based on evidence. When policy recommendations are vague and general, it makes it difficult for such institutions to move forward effectively.
- UNICEF has a fixed set of resources and time, and these constraints should impact the way one thinks in regards to policy implications.
- UNICEF also must try to move beyond national data and focus on the most marginalised/ hardest to reach populations in a given context.
- As previously noted, it is important to bring conflict research to a micro-level, and remind ourselves who is being affected by the conflict.

#### **About MICROCON**

MICROCON, or ‘A Micro Level Analysis of Violent Conflict’, is a five-year research programme funded by the European Commission. It takes an innovative **micro level, multidisciplinary** approach to the study of the conflict cycle, and aims to go beyond merely reactive theorisations of conflict to look at the complete dynamics (across intensities, actors, triggers and effects) of violent mass conflicts.

The programme aims to promote understanding of **individual and group interactions** leading to and resulting from violent mass conflicts, with the purpose of uncovering much-needed fundamentals for better informed domestic, regional and international conflict policy, which places individuals and groups at the centre of their interventions.

<http://www.microconflict.eu/>