

Violent Conflicts: Key Obstacles for Sub-Saharan Africa to Achieving the Millennium Development Goals – Where is the Evidence?ⁱ

Dereje Wordofa

About this paper

This paper aims to stimulate a debate on how violent conflict (ranging from communal violence to civil war or war among states) is a key obstacle for countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It briefly examines progress with the MDGs in Africa using officially published United Nations Reports and global MDG monitoring information. It also provides readers with a preliminary exposition on how violent conflicts pose the greatest challenges to progress with achieving the MDGs. It argues that violent conflict makes chronic poverty even worse – from household to national levels – and can create a downward spiral; some specific examples of this are given. The paper warns that many countries in SSA will fall far behind in attaining the MDGs by the targeted date of 2015 unless African states and regional institutions such as the African Union can put a decisive end to the current conflicts and address the threat of new conflicts. Having presented comparative evidence from various countries (those on track to meet the MDGs and those lagging behind), the author underlines the significance of conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peace-building in increasing the likelihood of Africa's achieving the MDGs within the timeframe. Highlighting the critical importance of strengthening the link between durable peace and sustainable development, the author concludes that the MDGs, as a framework for policy, programs and international partnerships to reduce poverty, must explicitly articulate how to end violent conflict and support war-torn countries (and those emerging from conflict) as a matter of priority and that they must receive special consideration.

The UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

The MDGs are an international commitment to the reduction of poverty and to promoting human development across the planet. The goals are measurable targets attached to a timeframe for making a difference in the lives of billions of people. In September 2000, over 189 member states at the United Nations General Assembly endorsed the MDGs (UNDP, 2003). The goals are also recognition of the fact that 60 years after the end of World War II, the world remains far from achieving the ideals of peace and prosperity inspired by the end of that global conflict (UN, 2006). The MDGs provide a strategic framework for developing, implementing and monitoring poverty-eradication programs at national and international levels.

The MDGs (contained in the eight goals, 18 targets and 48 indicators) embody several national and international development initiatives. Among a number of previous declarations and global initiatives, the following are included: the 1995 Copenhagen UN World Summit for Social Development; the 1995 Beijing Fourth UN Conference on Women; the 1994 Cairo UN International Conference on Population and Development;

the 1979 Convention on All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); and the 1992 Rio UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). In 2002, the UN member states reaffirmed their commitment to meeting the MDGs at the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg, South Africa. “MDGs are now the driving force behind a new era of international development. There is explicit recognition, at the highest political level, that poverty in the poorest countries can be reduced if well-designed and well-implemented plans are put in place by developing countries and if rich countries simultaneously match their efforts with substantial increases in support” (UNDESA, 2007).

Many African countries have launched programs to implement the MDGs through a network of partnerships between government, the UN, civil society and the private sector. This has generated a new momentum to focus on poverty reduction programs. African governments have therefore adopted the MDGs as a tool within their wider national development planning frameworks and are using them to ensure that their citizens are provided with basic human rights, such as health, education, shelter, food and water. By making the goals work as tools for coordinating development policy within broader national priorities, African states are aiming to tackle the conditions of extreme poverty. For example, as many as 49 countries have adopted the MDGs in the context of a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) and they monitor progress towards meeting the goals (UNDP, 2005). There is no one-size-fits-all Strategy Paper: it depends on the political, social and economic situation of a particular country. However, national ownership of the process of designing a PRSP – by governments and communities – and inclusive participation are key to success.

Kemal Derviş, Administrator of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) said at the 2006 General Assembly (Derviş, 2006), “the goals have made an unprecedented contribution to focusing attention and galvanizing global action around one of the greatest challenges of our time: the fight against poverty. One of the commitments is that the international community established a framework of global partnership between rich and poor countries to combat widespread and chronic poverty around the world at the International Conference on Financing for Development in 2002, Monterrey, Mexico. Governments in developing and developed countries have jointly committed themselves to provide the resources and the appropriate policies to implement these goals.” Continued political will and increased support from international partners will be crucial to keep the momentum and attain the MDGs across the African continent.

The Link between Violent Conflict and the Millennium Development Goals

This paper focuses on violent conflicts (and insecurity) within Africa, with particular emphasis on full-scale armed conflict between state and non-state armed groups within a country (civil war), which can include insurrections against a state (legitimate or illegitimate) such as in Darfur, Somalia and Cote d’Ivoire. Violent conflict also entails short periods of communal violence within the boundaries of a stable government, such as among pastoral communities in East Africa. In addition, wars between African states, irrespective of their complex origins, and major terrorist attacks (or threats of attack) with

significant political and economic impact, can fall into the category of violent conflict and insecurity. This paper does, however, acknowledge the fact that the number of conflicts between sovereign states in Africa has recently declined, although conflicts between different groups within the same country is on the rise due to tensions rooted in inequalities of power aligned with divides along ethnic, religious or racial lines. These conflicts are, in many cases, exacerbated by the historical enmity of tribes towards each other.

How then do violent conflicts affect the efforts at achieving the MDGs? Is there a link between lack of progress in achieving the MDGs and violent conflict? What are the nature and characteristics of the relationship, if any? There has been very little research on the correlation between violent conflict and achieving the MDGs, whereas there is plenty of literature explaining the causes of violent conflicts within different socio-economic, historical and political contexts. Chapter 5 of the Human Development Report 2005 (UNDP, 2005) focuses on violent conflict – bringing the real threat to MDGs into focus. This report argues that insecurity linked to armed conflict remains one of the greatest obstacles to human development and the achievement of the MDGs, highlighting the fact that violent conflict is both a cause and a consequence of mass poverty.

While there is no automatic link between poverty and violent conflict, the Human Development Index (HDI) is a useful tool for looking at the long-term costs of conflict. Although there are many factors that affect the HDI ranking, there is a strong association between low human development and violent conflict. According to research findings, “violent conflict is one of the surest and fastest routes to the bottom of the HDI table – and one of the strongest indicators for a protracted stay there. Of the 32 countries in the low human development section of the HDI table, 22 have experienced conflict at some point since 1990 and five of these experienced human development reversals over the decade” (UNDP, 2005). As a result of these development reversals, countries suffering violent conflict are among the group that are furthest off track for achieving the MDGs. In support of this statement, evidence from some countries is provided in the next section of this paper.

In more general terms, there are some obvious and immediate outcomes of violent conflict that affect progress with achieving the MDGs directly and indirectly, such as the loss of life, sexual violence, and the forced displacement of people or refugees. Violent conflict can also lead to the spread of infectious disease, chronic hunger and malnutrition, lack of water, the destruction of private and public property, and the disruption of basic social services such as education and health. All these outcomes directly or indirectly spoil the efforts to achieve every target in all the MDGs. This happens partly because protracted violent conflicts not only take the focus and resources away from the MDGs, but also diminish the human resources capacity of a state for planning policy, making decisions and designing programs.

As of 2007, there has been a downward trend in the violent conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) (UN, 2007), which is very encouraging for those committed to halving poverty across the continent. Democratic elections in Africa have a long way to go, but a

fair number of governments on the continent have continued to witness a peaceful transition of state power. This is an unprecedented contrast to the 1960s and 1970s when voting African leaders out of office was taboo. In spite of poorly managed elections and post-election chaos recently in Kenya and Ethiopia, the current 'big picture' reveals that Africa has an optimistic future for peace. However, it is important to recall that since 1990 more than 3.6 million people have died in armed conflicts and many millions more have been injured. It is particularly tragic that civilians (including children), not soldiers, are increasingly the victims. The conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is, for instance, estimated to have caused nearly 4 million deaths – the vast majority not from bullets but from malnutrition and disease (UNDP, 2003).

The UN official statistical report (UNDP, 2005) indicates, “in Sudan conflict has created conditions under which human development reversals are transmitted across generations. Only in Southern Sudan, 1 in 5 children attend school, less than one third of the population has adequate sanitation, and the material mortality ratio (763 deaths per 100,000 live births) is one of the highest in the world.” More recently, because of the ongoing tragedy in the Darfur region, an estimated 2.3 million people have been displaced and another 200,000 or more people have fled into neighboring Chad. Consequently, an estimated 40% to 60% of people have no access to potable water. The child mortality rate in northern Darfur is three times the SSA average and in western Darfur it is six times the average (UNDP, 2005). As the case of Darfur shows, violent conflict claims lives not just through bullet wounds, but also through the broader erosion of human security and by breeding more poverty. It demonstrates how efforts or gains relating to the MDGs can easily be wrecked, i.e. instead of halving Africa's poverty, violent conflict can effectively multiply the number of people living in poverty.

Other human costs which are less immediately visible are psychological stress and trauma, e.g. the impact of the disintegration of families and communities, life as a child soldier and the rape of women and girls. In the long term, violent conflict can also wipe out the useful and essential 'social fabrics' and 'social cohesion' nurtured over many years. This can be more costly to a society than destabilized governments, undermined economies and damaged major infrastructure. According to the 2005 Human Development Report (UNDP, 2005), the immediate human costs, such as those outlined in the previous paragraph, though enormous, represent a small fraction of the price countries pay for conflict.

According to research done by Oxfam International, IANSA and Saferworld (Oxfam, 2007), 15 years of conflicts have cost Africa approximately US\$300 billion. This cost to African development of violent conflict was calculated on the basis of data from countries such as Algeria, Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, Chad, the DRC, the Republic of Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sudan and Uganda. This amount equals the amount of money received in international aid during the same period and is really an underestimate because it does not include the economic impact on neighboring countries, which could suffer from political insecurity or a sudden influx of refugees as a result of conflicts. The Oxfam study only covers

periods of actual combat, but some costs of war, such as increased military spending and a struggling economy, continue long after the fighting has stopped (Oxfam, 2007). Nevertheless, the underestimated cost of US\$300 billion remains shocking. The critical question is: how, then, can the African continent invest in programs to attain the MDGs while being drained by the cycle of violent conflict?

Tracking Progress on the Millennium Development Goals and Violent Conflict in Africa

Africa, like the rest of the world, is now halfway to the critical milestone of 2015, when all countries are expected to meet the targets set out in the eight MDGs. The most recent UN report, entitled “Africa and the Millennium Development, 2007 Update”, which contains the most up-to-date and comprehensive statistical evidence on progress towards achieving the MDGs in SSA, states that the African continent remains ‘off track’ on meeting the goals for fighting poverty (UNDESA, 2007). The Africa MDGs Progress Report (UN, 2007) also reveals that “while the proportion of people living on one dollar a day or less has declined from 45.9% to 41.1% since 1999, reaching the MDG target of halving the extent of extreme poverty by 2015 requires that the current pace is nearly doubled.” These statements from the UN illustrate that the current trends on the continent could obliterate the dreams of achieving the MDGs by 2015.

Why does Africa remain off track on meeting the MDGs? What are the main impediments to implementation of the MDGs? Which African countries are falling behind? Is violent conflict an important obstacle to achieving the MDGs? How can SSA accelerate the pace of achievement while it is experiencing violent conflict which produces more poor people? These are some of the hard questions that come to mind in the face of the gloomy pictures.

Africa faces multiple challenges and obstacles to meeting the MDGs within the timeframe. These include lack of progress in international trade, failed promises to increase development assistance and lack of clear strategies in some countries. Simply put, trade, debt relief and aid for development are essential because if the “international partnership for development”, which is Goal 8, does not materialize, then most of the goals will not be achieved. At a recent press conference (UN DPC, 2007: 2-3), Asha-Rose Migiros, who is the UN Deputy Secretary General, summarized the obstacles as follows: “for a typical country in SSA, even with excellent governance, achieving the goals had been impossible. The fact that not a single country in SSA was on track is clearly the result of lack of adequate financing.” Aid projection is completely flat and the required scale-up has not happened. It is very important to conclude a genuine development package agreement in the Doha round of trade talks and to provide adequate international financial and technical support, for example operationalizing the Aid for Trade initiative and arranging for debt relief. Net official development assistance to SSA has actually increased only by 2% in real terms since 2005 (UN DPC, 2007: 2).

Moreover, the World Bank's Global Monitoring Report strongly supports the UN reports, stating that "nearly seven years after the Millennium Summit and five years after the Monterrey Summit, there is yet to be a country case where aid has been significantly scaled up to support a program to reach the MDGs" (World Bank, 2007). Donors need to accelerate their plans to scale up assistance to maintain the credibility of their pledges at the G8 Summit 2005 in Gleneagles to double aid to Africa by 2010. Progress at the Doha round of talks to create a development-friendly world of trade systems must be accelerated so that the poor can trade out of poverty.

In addition to external financing, achievement of the MDGs requires conducive and appropriate policies and programs, and the institutional capacity to implement them. A government in power must promote transparency and accountability, and demonstrate competence and commitment to reduce poverty. A government must also empower both men and women, particularly the marginalized and vulnerable, in order for them to participate in the decisions and matters that affect their lives. The causes of African conflicts are rooted in these very aspirations and any transgression of them leads to tensions and violence. In other words, when governments are characterized by lack of accountability and lack of transparency, and tend to ignore the 'voice' of marginalized people in favor of the ruling elite, as witnessed in many African countries, peace and stability become fragile, leading to violent conflicts. However, there remain the multiple impacts and consequences of violent conflict on the MDGs. Even with additional development financing, therefore, countries could find it extremely difficult to make progress.

As discussed in the previous sections, the prevalence of violent conflict poses the greatest obstacle to achieving the MDGs. Irrespective of the causes, violent conflict has negative impacts on all eight goals, i.e. it simply hinders progress and even reverses achievements. According to the MDG Progress Reports (UN, 2006; UN, 2007), Africa has already shown the slowest progress overall and has suffered reverses in certain crucial areas. SSA, in particular, is not on target to meet the MDGs by 2015 as conflict in the region stands as a huge obstacle. In short, SSA lags behind the rate of progress required to achieve the MDGs. It has become apparent that violent conflict is the key obstacle to planning, mobilizing and implementing programs to achieve the MDGs by 2015.

Examples from Some Countries to Illustrate that Violent Conflict is the Key Obstacle to Achieving the MDGs

Are there differences in progress between the countries 'without violent conflict' and those that have been involved in major conflict in the last decade? Yes – impressive results and stories are emerging from countries that are not and have not been entangled in a major violent conflict. For example, there is clear progress in Malawi where there has been rising agricultural productivity. Countries such as Ghana, Kenya, the United Republic of Tanzania and Uganda have improved the extent of primary school education with enrolment increasing from 57% in 1999 to 70% in 2005. Besides, recent data (World Bank, 2007) also reveal that several countries that have expanded their primary completion rates (all by over 10% per year between 2000 and 2005) were in SSA (Benin,

Guinea, Madagascar, Mozambique, Niger and Rwanda). These countries have not been involved in major internal violent conflicts in the last 10 years. Moreover, the MDG update adds, “in Niger, Togo, Zambia and Zanzibar, malaria control had been achieved. Access to basic rural health services has increased in Zambia. There was also large-scale reforestation in Niger and increasing access to water and sanitation in Senegal and Uganda” (UN, 2007).

On the other hand, there are striking differences between SSA (the majority of the countries were involved in violent conflicts in the last two decades) and most of North Africa – the latter is likely to attain nearly all of the MDGs within the timeframe. In contrast, with a few exceptions, SSA lags behind. Table 1 gives a good summary of the situation.

Table 1: Progress with the MDGs in Africa (Goal 1 to Goal 7)

Goals	Targets	Countries likely to achieve the targets
Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than a dollar a day • Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty: Algeria, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Egypt, Ghana, Lesotho, Libya, Mauritius, Morocco, South Africa, Tunisia and Uganda • Child malnutrition: Botswana, Chad, Egypt, Gambia, Mauritania, Sudan and Tunisia • Overall undernourishment: Algeria, Angola, Egypt, Ghana, Libya, Malawi, Morocco and Tunisia
Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education	Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling	Both net enrolment and completion rate: Algeria, Botswana, Cape Verde, Egypt, Gabon, Mauritius, Namibia, Rwanda, São Tomé & Príncipe, Seychelles, South Africa, Togo, Tunisia and Zimbabwe
Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women	Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and in all levels of education no later than 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary level education: Botswana, Lesotho, Mauritius, Namibia, Rwanda, Swaziland and Zimbabwe • Secondary level: Algeria, Botswana, Lesotho, Libya, Namibia, Tunisia and Rwanda
Goal 4: Reduce child mortality	• Reduce by two thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate	Algeria, Cape Verde, Egypt, Libya, Mauritius, Morocco, Seychelles and

		Tunisia
Goal 5: Improve maternal health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce by three-quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality rate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Algeria, Botswana, Cape Verde, Egypt, Gambia, Libya, Mauritius, Morocco and Tunisia
Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS • To have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HIV/AIDS: Algeria, Botswana, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Uganda and Zimbabwe • Malaria: Algeria, Benin, Cameroon, Central Africa, Comoros, Egypt, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia and Rwanda • Tuberculosis (TB): Algeria, Angola, Egypt, Gabon, Gambia, Libya, Madagascar, Morocco, South Africa, Swaziland, Tunisia and Zambia
Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programs and reverse loss of environmental resources • Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation • By 2020, to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable development (forest area): Algeria, Cape Verde, Egypt, Gambia, Libya, Morocco, Swaziland and Tunisia • Access to safe drinking water (rural): Algeria, Botswana, Burundi, Egypt, Gambia, Ghana, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, South Africa and Tanzania • Access to sanitation (urban): Algeria, Egypt, Ghana, Libya, Mauritius, Morocco and Tunisia

Source: UN (ECA, 2005)

As the above table illustrates, the regions with a relatively good prospect of meeting the MDGs include North Africa, which, on current trends, is likely to achieve most of the goals except Goal 3 on promoting gender equality and empowering women, and Goal 5 on improving maternal health. It is important to note that these countries are neither in conflict nor in the ‘fragile states’ category. The biggest problems on the road to the MDGS are experienced in SSA where, on current trends, none of the goals is likely to be met (UN, 2007).

Among the top and high-priority countries for achieving the MDGs, 13 experienced serious violent conflict in the 1990s (UNDP, 2003). The DRC, Sudan, Somalia, Angola, Burundi, Liberia and Chad, to mention a few, were and are off track for attaining the MDGs partly because of protracted violent conflicts, which have claimed the lives of many people, led to gross human rights violations, disintegrated the fabric of society and squandered economic resources. These countries will inevitably not achieve the MDGs by 2015 because they have already redirected their meager resources and national focus away from implementing programs to achieve the MDGs. Besides, the ongoing conflicts

will continue to disrupt livelihoods, destroy infrastructure, reverse gains and damage the climate for development and poverty reduction.

Oxfam, IANSA and Saferworld (Oxfam et al., 2007) calculated what the GDPs of countries in conflict would have been if there had been no conflict by comparing them with peaceful countries of a similar economic status. According to Oxfam, for example, during “Guinea-Bissau’s conflict in 1998/99, the projected growth rate without conflict would have been 5.24%, whereas the actual growth rate was minus 10.15%” (Oxfam et al., 2007). It is true that countries without conflict could have performed better in achieving the MDGs as the case in some SSA countries and all countries in North Africa illustrates. To put it simply, the fact that increased numbers of people will be thrown into absolute poverty because of protracted violent conflicts means that achieving the MDGs has become an illusion for many countries in SSA.

How Violent Conflicts are the Key Obstacle to Achieving the MDGs in Africa

1. Violent conflict multiplies poverty and suffering in contrast to the mission of the MDGs to halve global poverty

Violent conflict has been and still is shaking the African continent. Africa’s poor, particularly women and children, remain the most affected by violent conflicts and these are the primary target population of the MDGs, i.e. poor and marginalized people who often end up being the main victims.

If violent conflict leads to hunger, spreads diseases, increases poverty and makes communities vulnerable, it is an obstacle to achieving the MDGs. If it results in the destruction of economies and local administrative norms, and drains resources for essential services, then it grinds down and reverses the gains of the MDGs, as well as discouraging international partners from providing adequate assistance. If it has the consequences of destroying productive human capacity and the infrastructure necessary for development, it damages the necessary conditions for implementing the MDGs. This in turn disrupts and weakens social, economic and political structures and, ultimately, contributes to more poverty and suffering. Conflict has deepened inequality: many suffer, while few benefit. Therefore, violent conflicts are the major reason why countries slide into fragility and even become ‘failed states’. Because they extract high costs in terms of lives and physical damage, they reduce economic growth.

People in conflict-affected areas are particularly vulnerable to severe malnutrition as food production declines and conflict disrupts normal relief efforts. The poor communities and countries, which are the prime target of the MDGs, become poorer and more vulnerable because of violent conflict. For instance, the UN report notes that the number of people living in extreme poverty (on US\$1 dollar or less a day) in Sub-Saharan Africa increased by 140 million between 2002 and 2003 (UN, 2006). Furthermore, 34% of the Sub-Saharan African population suffers from chronic hunger. The number of Africans going without enough food is increasing and has become the highest in the world. There is much evidence of this, but it would be useful to examine briefly a couple of examples to

illustrate the impact on national economies. According to the UN HDR 2003, “on average, the countries hardest hit by conflict between 1960 and 1995 experienced significant declines in economic growth, reduction of export production, falling consumption levels, and diminishing government revenues (as a percentage of GDP) compared with non-war countries” (UNDP, 2003). The World Bank gives a picture of the decline: “with enormous negative impact on GDP growth averaging 12% decline per year of violent conflict” (World Bank, 2007). Moreover, the study *Africa’s Missing Billions* (Oxfam et al., 2007) is the first time that analysts have calculated the overall effects of conflict on GDP. This report shows that, on average, a war, civil war or insurgency shrinks an African economy by 15%. The continent loses an average of US\$18 billion a year due to armed conflict.

The immediate and long-term consequences of conflicts are enormous. Immediate ones include increases in the numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees, and the destruction of property and the environment. Statistics from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, for instance, show that at the end of 2005 there were almost 8.4 million refugees worldwide, of whom about 2.75 million, or some 33%, were in Africa. This figure does not include IDPs. Kenya, Tanzania and Zambia, for example, host large conflict-related refugee populations and have suffered the impact of conflict although they were not directly involved.

Finally, violent conflict has had a role in the spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. It fuels the spread of HIV through population movements and the use of rape as a tool of war. This was evident in Rwanda, where migration and rape resulting from the genocide led to a six-fold increase in HIV infection. In 2003, of the 17 countries that had more than 100,000 children orphaned by AIDS, 13 were in conflict or in the midst of emergencies. Several factors can contribute to the spread of HIV during a violent conflict situation: population displacement, breakdown of relationships, use of rape as a weapon, increased sexual coercion in exchange for money, food or protection, and collapse of the health system (UNDP 2005). All of these factors are damaging the slim chances of making progress towards achieving all the MDGs, which means that they are in effect doubling poverty.

2. Violent conflict triggers states of instability and insecurity, which are impediments to the implementation of the MDGs

Countries experiencing violent conflict have no stability and security for implementing programs to achieve the MDGs. Those affected by violent conflict live with the constant threat of insecurity and do not dare to engage in productive and economic activities such as farming, commuting for business or trading. Rather, unstable and insecure environments generate refugees and the internal displacement of people, illegal trafficking across borders of arms and other merchandise that fuels the wars and the AIDS pandemic.

Moreover, unstable and insecure environments represent powerful disincentives for domestic and foreign investment, and are simultaneously powerful incentives for capital

flight. Alongside falling investment, there is loss of years of development through the destruction of physical capital – destroyed roads, bridges and power systems. The economic costs associated with insecurity and instability are not neatly contained within national borders. The most immediate spillover effect of such a situation on a neighboring country is the exodus of refugees, such as Congolese and Burundians in Tanzania, Somalis in Kenya, and Sudanese or people from Darfur in Chad. Violent conflicts can also spill over into neighboring states, undermining security and stability, and creating a cross-border cycle of violence. For example, the West African regional war that began in Liberia in 1989 migrated to Sierra Leone, returned to Liberia (where it undermined a disarmament process in 1997) and then moved into Guinea. In September 2002 combatants from Liberia and Sierra Leone were involved in the fighting that erupted in Cote d’Ivoire (UNDP, 2005). This kind of spillover effect blocks trade routes and creates unfavorable conditions for implementing programs focused on achieving the MDGs.

The recent violent conflict in Kenya, after a poorly managed election and electoral disputes, disrupted economic activities not only in that country, but also in the neighboring countries, primarily Uganda, Somalia, Rwanda and the DRC (land-locked countries), resulting in a shortage of fuel, disruption of the flow of industrial commodities, and cancellation of flights and land transport. The humanitarian service flights to Somalia were cancelled; Uganda received refugee populations; food shortages in Rwanda were reported; MONUC staff in the DRC could not obtain provisions for some services and petrol prices in Uganda soared. The true economic cost has not been calculated yet, but rough estimates indicate over a billion dollars in less than two weeks.

Insecurity and instability can also prompt ‘travel warnings’, which can be very damaging to fragile economies (Okumu, 2007) whether fairly or unfairly applied. For example, a study conducted by the Kenyan Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2004 on the impact of travel bans on tourism in the country estimated that the direct impact of the travel ban imposed by the UK government alone amounted to UKP 3.5 million – an amount equivalent to 1.6% of the country’s national wealth. Besides the tourism industry, which experienced massive layoffs, the country’s horticultural industry also lost UKP 3.5 million due to flight cancellations and the expenses associated with premium freight costs. Another victim was the Kenya Wildlife Services (KWS,) which lost revenue estimated at UKP 7 million; this impacted on the wildlife and ecology of the country (Wachira, 2004). Therefore, people who are employed in these sectors and communities that are dependent on these economies become insecure in terms of their livelihoods as the direct result of insecurity and security alerts.

It is also important to recognize the fact that, beyond the macro level, the cost of insecurity and instability falls, disproportionately, on poor and marginalized people. Fears of violent conflict can disrupt local trading systems and cut people off from the markets on which their livelihoods – and sometimes their very survival – depend. In Sierra Leone, for example, where some 500,000 farming families were displaced, “production of rice (the main staple crop) during the 1991-2000 civil war fell to 20% of pre-war levels” (UNDP, 2005). This is a useful illustration of how it would be difficult to

implement MDG 1 (the goal of reducing hunger and malnutrition) in the context of violence, insecurity and instability.

Let us look at another example that demonstrates the impact of insecurity and violent conflict on MDG 2, i.e. achieving universal primary education. Violent conflict destroys education infrastructure, reduces spending on schools and teachers, and prevents children from attending classes. Schools are often targets for groups hostile to government because of their association with state authority. During the Mozambique civil war (1976-1992), almost half of all primary schools had been closed or destroyed by 1989. Because of insecurity and instability, parents are reluctant to send their children to schools when there are security risks (UN, 2005). Therefore, it becomes obvious that security and stability are fundamental to reducing poverty, protecting human rights and achieving the MDGs.

3. Post-conflict countries require huge resources and longer time for reconstruction and recovery, and drain scarce resources away from implementing the MDGs

The challenge of post-conflict reconstruction and development is enormous. While cessation of hostilities provides an opportunity to rebuild economies and rehabilitate affected communities (often difficult during times of violent conflict), the process must involve fundamental examination of aspects of issues and the participation of all stakeholders in a country. The key purpose of post-conflict reconstruction should not be merely to reconstruct and rebuild what has been destroyed, but must be to reorganise and rehabilitate the structures and institutions that caused conflict in the first place. This may mean rebuilding social networks from scratch, forming communities and civil institutions, introducing reforms and restructuring government, implementing well-designed disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programs, introducing political reforms acceptable to all parties and implementing macro-economic policies and programs that tackle poverty and inequality.

Although much depends on the nature, scale and magnitude of the devastation, post-conflict countries need significant support and longer time not only to avoid recurrence of strife, but also for rehabilitation and reconstruction. During a conflict and right at the end of a violent conflict, scarce resources are committed to essential life-saving programs. As discussed extensively in this paper, violent conflict significantly derails the development process as huge sums of money, which may otherwise have gone into improving human conditions, have to be redirected for relief assistance and post-conflict reconstruction. Moreover, social spending cutbacks are often compounded by depletions of human resources, such as teachers and doctors who flee conflict-affected areas. And the cutbacks are worsened by unpredictable breakdowns in delivery mechanisms (UNDP, 2003).

During conflict, African leaders often shift scarce resources away from basic social services, such as fighting HIV/AIDS, improving water and sanitation, education and medical services, and developing infrastructure, to bolster their armed forces. Most countries have faced rising budget deficits and spiraling debts as significant increases in military expenditure were met with substantial declines in government revenues. It is

obvious that military spending will increase during violent conflicts and civil wars. On average, a violent conflict results in additional military spending of 1.8% of GDP. In 2002, countries with low HDIs spent an average of 3.7% of GDP on military expenditure and 2.4% on health. In some cases – for example Burundi and Eritrea – countries allocate a much higher share to military expenditure than to education and health combined (UN, 2005). If peace and security were in place, these are resources that could have been more productively deployed in implementing the MDGs.

The costs of violent conflict can be incurred in a huge variety of ways. There are the obvious direct costs of armed violence – medical costs, military expenditure, the destruction of infrastructure and the care of displaced people – which divert money away from more productive uses. However, the indirect costs from lost opportunities are even higher. Economic activity falters or grinds to a halt. Income from valuable natural resources ends up lining the pockets of individuals rather than benefiting the country. The country suffers from inflation, debt and reduced investment, while people suffer from unemployment, lack of public services and trauma. More people, especially women and children, die from the fall-out of conflict than die in the conflict itself (Oxfam et al., 2007).

In some cases, countries allied to the war on terror are given carte blanche to subvert the process of democratization and opt for military solutions instead of peaceful resolutions of social conflicts. As a result, they have abandoned the war on poverty reduction as outlined by the UN MDGs. Consequently, the MDG of reducing poverty by half in Africa by 2015 is apparently becoming untenable (AU, 2005)

The MDGs Must Embrace Conflict Resolution and Peace-building

The framework of the MDGs, at both the conceptual and practical levels, illustrates that poverty reduction is an interdisciplinary subject. The programs for achieving the MDGs will have to embrace several dynamic variables in the spheres of economics, social issues, politics, gender, culture and environment, to mention a few. Noticeably, these variables are not only interlinked, but are also at the root of violent conflicts within a given state or between different states in Africa, for example the conflict in the DRC or between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Thus, there is a need to take conflict-resolution theory and instruments into consideration when planning and implementing programs for achieving the MDGs.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the Millennium Declaration does not specifically and adequately elaborate on peace, security and disarmament, and the protection of civilians as a foundation for achieving the MDGs. It should not be surprising that halfway between 2000 and 2015, many Sub-Saharan African countries remain off track to achieving the MDGs. In order to make important progress in these countries, it should therefore be mandatory to consider conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peace-building in all public policies and programs aimed at implementing the MDGs. This means that African states, civil society organizations and the United Nations institutions working towards achieving the MDGs must at least place ‘ending violent conflict’ at the

center of their policy analysis and programming. Moreover, the debate regarding the implementation of the MDGs in countries experiencing violent conflict should make the connection between peace-building and sustainable development at both the policy and practical levels.

It would be unwise even to imagine halving the number of people living in extreme poverty in Africa by 2015 without doing more to understand and address violent conflict on the continent. The question is, what can the UN and international partners do to prevent violent conflict, as opposed to managing the crisis once a conflict has exploded? Undoubtedly, the causes of conflict in Africa are complex and diverse. It is no longer accurate to draw distinctions between inter-state and intra-state conflict, or between local, national and international conflicts. As a result, there is no ‘silver bullet’ for preventing or resolving conflict. Policy- and decision-makers should rather develop strategies on the basis of a comprehensive ‘conflict analysis’ that examines the current and historical realities of a particular violence. The bottom line is that without significant effort to address violent conflict, African states cannot hope to achieve the MDGs. Thus, it is imperative to factor in the approaches to conflict resolution in the programs for achieving the MDGs. Some of the approaches and considerations are discussed below.

Putting in place conflict prevention and early warning systems

Reacting effectively to an outbreak of violence is not an adequate response. More importantly, prevention of violent conflict and peace-building must be at the heart of policy and program planning to achieve the MDGs in Africa. ‘Early warning systems’ to identify the key elements of violent conflict and measures to address the root causes of conflict will diminish the tendency to wait until violence breaks out and insecurity prevails. Effective use of the information from an early warning system and making a concerted effort to prevent violent conflicts will certainly minimize the heavy costs of violent conflicts.

In the absence of accountable governance, people turn to violence in their search for alternative livelihoods, or are induced to fight for ‘justice’ with impunity, thus igniting a new cycle of violence. This paper has already discussed the fact that respect for human rights and the rule of law, essential to durable peace and long-term development, is absent in many parts of Africa. Justice is often elusive or non-existent. The UNDP Administrator has rightly said that “given that conflict is such a critical factor in hindering or reversing development in too many places, it is clear that we must also strengthen efforts to prevent conflict and help countries recover from violent conflict when it does occur. If we were to exclude countries in conflict or in immediate post-conflict situations from our calculations of progress, we would find much more impressive achievements towards the MDGs. We also know that economic and social factors are at the root of most conflicts. The UN cannot, therefore, be successful if our actions are confined to mediation. We must work on these root causes of conflict” (Derviş, 2006).

Prevention of conflict may directly and indirectly include tackling poverty through a massive scaling up of public investment, capacity-building, and domestic resource mobilization. At national level, there is a need to create the conditions that allow African countries to function as legitimate states. This means states that are accountable to their citizens and capable of providing them with security and the rule of law, conditions for safe and secure livelihoods, as well as public services such as health and education. This will require much greater engagement with social movements and civil society on the part of African leaders.

Proper sharing of power and creating conditions for ‘democratic rule’ by separating the different branches of government (executive, legislative and judicial), and conducting free, fair and transparent elections are key. The absence of these factors has created havoc in many countries in the past. The politics need to possess an adequate level of the culture of tolerance for opposing views and opposition parties. Transparency and accountability through promoting independent media as a source of credible information for the citizens will diminish the chances of violent conflict.

Paying attention to post-conflict reconstruction and peace-building

Peace-building, for the purposes of discussion in this paper, is defined as “those actions undertaken by international and national actors to institutionalize peace, understood as the absence of armed conflict (‘negative peace’) and a modicum of participatory politics (as a component of ‘positive peace’) that can be sustained in the absence of an international peace operation” (Call and Cousens, 2007: 2). However, “whether external actors have knowledge, tools and techniques, resources or legitimacy to contribute to what is frequently referred to as ‘state-building’ is central to the question of the efficacy of peace-building” (Call and Cousens, 2007: 1).

Many structural changes and measures are required to support countries that have just emerged from protracted violent conflict. These may include political democratization, reconstruction of the economy and the judicial system, and reform of the security sector. On the other hand, there are measures that are not necessarily structural, for example, reconciliation, trauma healing and supporting community cohesion. These kinds of intervention, if well designed and implemented, enable a country to expedite post-conflict reconstruction and peace-building that will have a positive impact on attaining the MDGs.

In 2005, the UN called for state institutions to be placed at the center of post-conflict efforts. In the past, unfortunately, peace-building policies and programs have generally tended to neglect or omit ‘state-building’ because of emphasis on either social relations among conflicting groups or economic determinants of peace. They tended to take state capacity as a given, and did not recognize the disputation over state design or function.

Nevertheless, successful state-building supports the consolidation of peace in a number of ways. First, it enhances the mechanisms for security and conflict resolution at national level, which should carry legitimacy in the eyes of the populace and the outside world.

Such mechanisms – be they justice systems, policing systems or service-delivery systems – provide a credible arena and framework (or at least a foundation for a framework) for social groups to express their preferences and to resolve their conflicts non-violently (Call and Cousens, 2007: 7). Having said this, the challenges have never been easy. It is vital to appreciate the complexity of post-conflict transitions, the mismatch between expectations for rapid recovery and the processes that historically have taken considerably longer, and the crucial issues of state-society relations, as well as the type of state institutions needed to sustain peace, especially in fragile states, weak and failed states in Africa where most armed conflicts occur (Call and Cousens, 2007: 1-2)

Increasing the effort to pull countries out of violent conflict

International partners must commit more financing and exhibit more policy coherence to assist conflict-prone, fragile and post-conflict states in Africa. They should also be generous enough to support efforts at peace-building or governance reform in these countries. This will help not only to speed up rehabilitation, reconstruction and recovery, but also to increase the pace of progress towards achieving the MDGs in countries that are off track. The UN, donors, NGOs, states and other regional institutions should design and implement post-conflict strategies with the focus on the disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration (DDRR) of ex-combatants.

It is important to note that “the costs of failing to build peace are stark and manifold. By most accounts, a significant number of violent conflicts relapse to war and many ‘new’ wars occur in countries that have failed to consolidate peace. When peace-building fails, parties to conflict unleash greater violence than the prior war, as was grimly attested to by the nearly 2 million dead after the peace unraveled in Angola in 1991 and Rwanda 1993-1994” (Collier, 2003).

Accelerating progress towards the MDGs in fragile or conflict-prone states requires attention to several issues and to the lessons of recent experiences. “First, since many fragile states are emerging from conflict, the sequencing and coherence of support for security, electoral efforts and aid financing to boost growth and employment are critical for minimizing the risk of reversion to conflict. Donors need to consider whether the current instruments provide adequate continuity of support to minimize risks of renewed conflict” (World Bank, 2007).

Strengthening initiatives and efforts by regional and sub-regional institutions

At regional level, there is a need to re-invigorate forms of political and economic cooperation, especially with regard to peace-building and peacekeeping measures. It is perhaps at this level that the best chance lies for finding new approaches to deal with those accused of committing crimes against humanity, war crimes and profiteering from war economies, as well as to combat corruption. While it is important to tackle issues such as impunity and corruption, it is equally critical to find ways of healing the socio-cultural fabric of countries that have been exposed to conflict. African regional and sub-regional institutions can play useful roles in all these efforts.

It is very important to enhance the capacity of the regional and sub-regional institutions to design and implement a principled approach to regional conflict resolution and to preventing violent conflicts from occurring using early warning systems. The African Union (AU), through the establishment of the Peace and Security Council (PSC) in 2004, for example, is forging ahead with preventing conflict and building peace as has never been done any time before. The AU's 15-member PSC has been mandated to carry out peacemaking and peace-building operations and therefore has a collective security arrangement to facilitate effective response to conflicts and crises in Africa timeously. It also expects to be able to anticipate and prevent conflicts, and to promote and support peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction, among others aims (AU, 2002:1).

The AU's engagement with and involvement in the conflict situations in Sudan/Darfur, Burundi and Somalia, and Togo has demonstrated its interventionist measures. On the other hand, in the 1990s the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), for example, intervened to stop violent conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Based on these experiences, ECOWAS adopted a protocol for conflict prevention and resolution, peacekeeping and security (ECOWAS, 1999). Other sub-regional bodies are the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECASS), which have adopted similar conventions and mechanisms. The capacity of all these bodies and their mechanisms to respond to new and old violent conflicts must be strengthened in order to prevent violence and restore sustainable peace. However, the AU's PSC and these sub-regional organizations are apparently under-resourced. International donors should not be the only sources of grants for this purpose. Primarily, African governments must be committed to, and take responsibility for, generating adequate resources for collective peacekeeping and security.

A key initiative by African leaders, approved by the AU, is the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NePAD), which argues that Africa's future is in its own hands. NePAD calls for a genuine relationship between Africa and the international community based on a commitment to good governance, democracy and human rights. The NePAD analysis recognizes that Africa cannot be understood without an understanding of the legacy of the continent's history, and its interaction with the rest of the world. The international partnership, as articulated in MDG 8, must be strengthened to enhance the capacity of regional and sub-regional organizations in Africa.

Finally, the African Peer Review Mechanisms (APRM), supported by a Panel of Eminent Persons, has been created to improve governance, promote respect for regional and international standards, such as the African Charter of Human and People's Rights (ACHPR), and promote development, which includes preventing violent conflict and a mechanism or process for this purpose. These are not the only mechanisms for preventing and resolving conflict. However, it is self-evident that this rhetorical commitment to peace, security and stability must assist the efforts towards achieving the MDGs.

Conclusions

The world leaders committed to the MDGs, which are time-bound and quantified targets, in the UN Millennium Declaration of 2000, at the 55th session of the UN General Assembly. Their commitment is to eradicating poverty and hunger, ensuring universal primary education, promoting gender equality, combating the HIV/AIDS pandemic and malaria, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health and promoting environmental sustainability. If all countries in the world work together as promised, these MDGs are attainable, even in post-conflict countries. “MDGs are too important to fail. For the international political system, they are fulcrums on which development policy is based. For the billions-plus people living in extreme poverty, they represent the means for productive life. For everyone on Earth, they are the linchpin to the quest for a more secure and peaceful world” (UN, 2005).

However, many of the Sub-Saharan African countries in violent conflict are in danger of failing to meet most of the goals by 2015. As evidenced in this paper, violent conflicts have caused great suffering and the loss of numerous human lives. They have destabilized governments, destroyed the livelihood of poor people, undermined national economies, damaged infrastructure, led to the exodus of people, and disrupted the delivery of education and health services. Based on the current evidence and trends, countries with violent conflict, such as Somalia, the DRC, Cote d’Ivoire and Sudan/Darfur, have more poor people now than they had at the time of the Declaration of 2000.

It is apparent that the UN continues to deliver assistance within its core functions by sending ‘peacekeeping’ forces or missions to troubled regions, providing humanitarian aid for victims of violent conflict and attempting to improve human conditions. However, the progress that has been made is inadequate given the realities of Africa today and its prospect of attaining the MDGs. Not only the UN, but also the AU as a continent-wide body established to foster peace and development, and the African leaders (as being accountable for development or as precipitators of conflicts) are all challenged by the complex nature and consequences of violent conflicts across the continent. In the face of Africa’s continuing struggle to achieve the MDGs, it is plain that there is an inherent chronic weakness with regard to ending conflict and restoring stability and security. This is not to deny the progress made thus far, but it needs to be highlighted how far Africa is from sustainable peace.

It is naïve, however, to believe that violent conflict is the only obstacle to progress. There are, of course, equally important impediments, including inadequate international support and failed promises from international partners. If Goal 8 on the global partnership for development, involving enhanced Official Development Assistance (ODA), greater market access in the global trading regime and debt relief, is not met, it will be difficult for African countries to achieve Goals 1 to 7. Apparently, despite the scale of needs and challenges, there is at present less external assistance than ever – the international trade rules are still rigged against the poor in Africa, and debt relief has not been sufficient to allow African countries to invest in measures for poverty reduction. The international partners should keep their promises and deliver on the pledges.

The people of Africa demonstrate hope and resilience. The continent is rich in human and natural resources and the diversity of its people and cultures, combined with its natural environment, give Africa unprecedented potential for growth and development. Women, men and young people on the continent have shown their commitment to good governance, peace and development. More wars have ended than started since the mid-1980s. Long-standing leaders have yielded power peacefully in democratic elections in Ghana, South Africa and Senegal. It is the courage and resourcefulness of the African people that needs to be harnessed to attain the MDGs.

Few countries in Africa will meet the goals within the timeframe and those involved in violent conflict will meet none of them at all. The MDGs cannot be achieved in the midst of insecurity and violent conflicts because each violent conflict (small-scale or large) has direct implications for stability, security and development. The social, political, economic and environmental costs of conflict are also huge. Prosperity and peace in Africa can only be achieved when the local, national, regional and international dimensions of the current crisis are addressed. Now is the time when words might actually be turned into deeds, when Africa might be helped to end violent conflict across the continent.

Finally, peace, stability and security must be the foundations for achieving the MDGs as 2015 draws nearer. Therefore, preventing conflict, resolving conflict and supporting post-conflict reconstruction are vital prerequisites for the attainment of the MDGs. The challenge for Africa is not wondering which approaches and institutions to use for ending violent conflicts because they are the greatest threats to achieving the MDGs, but to generate the 'will' to end them across the continent.

About the author

Dereje Wordofa is currently the Regional Director for Africa based in Pretoria at the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), which is a Quaker organization committed to peace and social justice. Prior to this, he worked as Head of Regional Policy Team, and Country Director for Oxfam GB based in Oxford and Kampala respectively. He has also worked for Save the Children for 10 years in Ethiopia in different roles. He focuses on international policy issues, sustainable development and humanitarian assistance. He obtained MSc (Econ) Degree in Social Policy Planning in Developing Countries from the London School of Economics.

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ⁱ The views expressed in this paper are those of the author, do not necessarily reflect nor represent the views of AFSC.