Research Article

Poverty and Conflict: Causal Factors and Resolutions

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Abstract.
The article examines the relationship between poverty and conflict. Violent conflicts will likely occur in developing countries or regions, such as Sub-Saharan Africa, Africa, Eastern Europe, or Southeast Asia. The main question is whether they are caused by extreme poverty, so there is a scarcity of resources that leads to violent conflicts, or whether there are enough resources. However, only a handful of people in that society can access the resources, which in the end, creates friction and conflict. The conflict has multifaceted dimensions; usually, there is no single cause of conflict. Instead, it involves many aspects, such as political, social, economic, cultural, and other conditions. Economic disparities, gender inequality, unequal distribution of power, power struggles within different societies, climate crises, ethical tensions, genocides, and many other reasons may serve as the causes of conflict. This article will analyze the two factors likely to cause conflict, greed and grievance. Greed and grievance are seen in the case studies presented in this article - the civil war in the aftermath of the Cold war period, which occurred in the 1990s.

Keywords: Conflict, Greed, Poverty, Civil Wars

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1. Introduction

The novelty of this article is in using global initiatives such as MDGs and SDGs in the examination of the relationship between poverty and conflict. In analyzing conflicts in the aftermath of the Cold War Era to global initiatives to lessen violent conflicts. Violent conflicts will likely occur in developing countries or regions, such as Sub-Saharan Africa, Africa, or Southeast Asia. The main question is whether they are caused by extreme poverty, so there is a scarcity of resources that leads to violent conflicts, or whether there are enough resources but other factors spurred the escalation of conflict in those regions. Factors such as unequal access to wealth, injustices toward marginalized communities, and lack of transparency in development can be contributing factors. There are cases where natural resources are abundant, however, only a handful of people in that society can access the resources, which in the end, creates friction and

conflict. Conflict allegedly has multifaceted dimensions. Usually, there is no single cause of conflict, and it involves many aspects such as political, social, economic, cultural, and other conditions. Economic disparities, gender inequality, unequal distribution of power, power struggles within different societies, climate crisis, ethnical tensions, genocides, and many other reasons may serve as the causes of conflict. In the first section of this essay, we will analyze the cause of recent civil conflicts or civil wars and argues that poverty has contributed in various ways to the escalation of violence. There will be a discussion of strategies to eradicate global poverty, such as implementing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) worldwide. The central hypothesis of this article is to address the relationship between poverty and conflict and investigate whether increasing wealth and social justice might considerably lessen violent conflicts worldwide.

2. Method

This article employs a qualitative methodology to inquire about the validity of the hypothesis posed above. The qualitative methodology we use is mainly literature research or library research, using the extraction of data from journal articles, official websites, newspaper articles, books, and working papers on relevant topics. Neuman [1] explained a literature review as "based on the assumptions that knowledge accumulates and that people learn from and build on what others have done" and scientific research as "a collective effort of many researchers who share their results with one another as a community...researchers read studies to compare, replicate, or criticize them for weaknesses." Based on those explanations, this article analyzes the correlation between poverty and conflicts using literature research.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Civil War at the End of the Cold War Period (the 1990s)

Several cases of civil conflicts have occurred in the past decades, especially in the Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) Countries as examined by Luckham *et al* [2]. At least fifteen South Saharan African countries were listed as never-fully terminated conflicts [3], which means that those countries are always in a state of the fragile peace that can escalate into violent conflicts at any time. The casualties in each of those countries ranged between one thousand to one and a half million people, as seen in Rwanda's ethnic conflicts in 1996 and Angola during the 1992-1997 civil conflict. Liberia suffered from the civil conflict

that began in 1989 and resulted in rape, murder, torture, massacre, looting, and forced child labor, including the embodiment of child soldiers [4]. In Mozambique, especially in Manica province, when there was political turbulence from 1980-1992, approximately 250.000 people out of a total of 635.000 population were displaced as researched by Chingono [5]. The displaced people later caused problems of hunger and civil unrest in the neighboring countries. In Liberia, at the beginning of the 1990s, the civil war caused by the Coup d'etat action against Doe's government led by Charles Taylor, and it has brought considerable suffering to Liberia's people. Charles Taylor's government controlled almost 90 percent of the country's natural resources and exploited them in ways that contributed to the maintenance of power. The atrocities included diamond smuggling into cross-border countries to support military and political activities as cited by Brown in Ferguson [6]. Over two hundred thousand people perished during the conflict. Two-thirds of the population (from a total of 2,5 million people in the pre-war situation) have been displaced and forced to flee to other West African countries [7]. Apart from the African region, violent conflicts in the Balkan region of the former Yugoslavian state started after the declaration of independence in Croatia and Slovenia in 1991 [8]. Thus, the beginning of one of the most gruesome civil conflicts in the region resulted in the death of over 100,000 casualties and thousands more fleeing the conflicting areas. The conflict ended in 1995 when "NATO bombed the Bosnian Serbs, and Muslim and Croat armies made gains on the ground [9]." From 1995 until today, relatively no other violent civilian conflicts have occurred in the Balkan region. Although the Balkan conflict is mainly driven by identity politics between different religious-ethnic groups, there was a growing concern regarding the distribution of resources within the former Yugoslavian state.

In some areas of the world, the tendencies of horizontal conflict are likely to occur. The term horizontal conflict is derived from the concept of horizontal inequality, which means "situations in which groups are excluded from parallel political, economic, and/or social dimensions [10]." Suzanne Verstegen [11] explains that religion, ethnicity, and clan identifications might be the reasons for exclusion from access to natural resources. The exclusion was also caused by a lack of political power from marginalized groups, and it hindered their access to fair access to natural and other resources. This situation can lead to social inequalities, which may create resentment and catalyzes open violent conflicts. The next question is, why did this happen? Why would a government or other authoritative figures adopt and implement unfair policies toward their own people? Is it merely coincidental, or is it a result of the power battle at the elite level? We tend to

assume that the main reason is the complex relationship between ineffective development policies, unequal distribution of economic and political resources, injustices, and struggle for power. Ohlsson [12], A global social scientist, argues that "the rapid process of change resulting in a sudden fall of poverty, more than the endemic condition of poverty, which creates the potential for what here will be termed *livelihood conflicts*." The livelihood conflicts occurred in several cases of conflicts in various regions, such as in Sierra Leone, Congo, Afghanistan, and Colombia. Those conflicts are case studies in which the rapid loss of livelihood escalates into violent conflict and civil wars. Ohlsson strongly emphasizes that:

"Unemployed young men, in cities as well as in rural areas, become easy targets for hate-propaganda directly at easily identifiable ethnic, linguistic, national, or regional cleavages in a particular society. From there it is but a short step to accept the promise of a salary-and the perspective of looting-held out by joining one or another militia under a powerful emerging leader...young women may be equally susceptible to hate propaganda: their gendered role, however, rather prescribes for them to abandon all expectations of even getting started towards bettering their lives [13]."

Ohlsson's work was published in 2000 but it still resonated with major problems in the world today. There is another study proposed by Steward [14]. Stewart proposes four causes of civil war; they are: a) Group Inequality; b) Private Motivation; c) Failure of the Social Contract; d) Green War. Group inequality refers to unequal access to political power and is interlinked with the under-representation of the outcast or marginalized group in the decision-making process, including development and social and political policies that can impact them in the end [15]. Personal or private motivation causes come in various forms, from the intention of a particular leader to monopolize certain economic or political sources to the motivation that inspired young and poorly educated males to join the militia in exchange for money and social status. The private motivation reason also correlated to the Greed hypothesis tested by Collier and Hoeffler [16], arguing that greed conflict is based on economic source monopoly by a particular group of people, including greedy citizens and elites in one state. In terms of vulnerability to violent conflicts, countries with abundant resources have the same vulnerability as the ones with limited natural resources and poor governance, especially if the former were performing centralized government and unequal development policies. Under the New Order regime (1967-1998), Indonesia practiced centralized government and the share of natural extraction between local-center governance was perceived as unequally distributed. Those practices created social, economic, and political resentments, which erupted in the Dayak-Madura conflicts in Sambas, West Kalimantan, in 1999 and Sampit, Central

Kalimantan, in 2001 [17]. Failure of the Social Contract, as explained by Stewart [18], is based on the Econometric studies that show countries with low per capita incomes, life expectancy, and economic growth are more prone to violent conflicts. The start of the conflict can stem from the fact that this is where some of the International Finance Institutions, namely: the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), Asian Development Bank (ADB), and other similar institutions, come and offer economic/financial assistance to the developing countries. Those financial assistances usually lead to Growth-oriented policies, manifested in the form of infrastructure buildings (roads, bridges, power plants, huge water reservoirs, and others), agriculture reforms, financial system reformation, industrialization, urbanization, and overall modernization. However, there are risks that those growth-oriented development policies are spurring sudden changes in society and creating fractions between different ethnic, social classes, and groups. The Green War hypothesis tries to understand the links between environmental scarcity and conflict. In a situation where the environment cannot support the demand of people for food, water, and general livelihood, then conflicts are more likely to occur. The civil conflict in Rwanda is an example of the competition for resources that resulted in genocide and conflict. Rwanda is predominantly a rural-based society that relies on the agricultural sector [19]. From the late 1980s onwards, there were several problems in Rwanda's rural areas, such as soil exhaustion, drought, erosion, and irrigation problems, which led to the social effects Percival & Homer-Dixon identify [0]. Environmental scarcity and agricultural problems forced the affected population to migrate to other places, and frequently, this condition created conflicts between migrants and natives. UNHCR Global Trends Report 2021 mentioned, "people forced to flee are heavily impacted by food crises, with many refugees, asylum seekers and people displaced within their countries struggling to feed their families [21]." The same report also highlighted that "Violent insurgencies in the Central Sahel region of Africa continued to drive internal displacement, particularly in Burkina Faso. The root causes of conflict in the region include extreme poverty and chronic underdevelopment [22]." Extreme poverty and chronic underdevelopment are made worse by the climate crisis happening today, in which "temperatures in the region rising 1.5 times faster than the global average [23]." The Green War hypothesis explains that the climate crisis is the fourth cause of conflict [24]. The Green War hypothesis is fundamental since it concerns the environment which human relies solely on it. Renewable and non-renewable natural resources are essential to people's lives in every region; that is why there should not be any form of monopolization of natural resources since they can be categorized

as crimes against humanity. In situations where there is unequal access to natural resources, violent conflicts might arise as a result.

3.2. Global Initiatives to Lessen the Violent Conflict.

The main discussion of this section is the correlation between increasing global economic initiatives and lessening violent conflicts. Since the end of the Cold War, the world is expanding the global market economy involving major economic players such as Multinational Corporations/MNCs, and the Bretton Woods institutions such as World Bank, World Trade Organization, IMF, and wealthy countries such as The United States, Germany, France, United Kingdom, Japan, China, and others. Modern global economic practices are criticized because they create significant disparities between rich and developing countries. In 2000, there was a global-scale declaration of solidarity and determination to eliminate poverty, the United Nations (UN) Millenium Declaration [25]. MDGs enhanced the global commitment to pursue eight objectives, and they are: 1). Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; 2). Achieve universal primary education; 3). Promote gender equality and empower women; 4). Reduce child mortality; 5). Improve maternal health; Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; 6). Ensure environmental sustainability, and 7). Global partnership for development [26]. The eight goals of MDGs were set to end by 2015, and it continues into the new program, the Sustainable Development Goals or SDGs, which was adopted by all UN member states in 2015 [27]. There are seventeen goals of SDGs, including 1) No poverty; 2) Zero hunger; 3) Good health and well-being; 4) Quality education; 5) Gender equality; 6) Clean water and sanitation; 7)Affordable and clean energy; 8) Decent work and economic growth; 9) Industry, innovation, and infrastructure; 10) Reduced inequalities; 11) Sustainable cities and communities; 12) Responsible consumption and production; 13) Climate action; 14) Life below water; 15) Life on land; 16) Peace, justice and strong institutions; 17) Partnerships for the goals [28]. Both the MDGs and SDGs are considered global initiatives to lessen the inequality, injustices, and economic discrepancies between developed, developing, and less developing countries. All seventeen goals are expected to be fulfilled by 2030, particularly goal number sixteen on peace, justice, and strong institutions, which is directly related to the effort to lessen violent conflicts globally.

4. Conclusion

Poverty and weak state institutions can lead to violent conflicts amongst populations within the same state or across borders. Throughout this article, we have showcased the link between rapid loss of livelihood, poverty, resource scarcity, unequal access to resources, and the growing number of unemployed young people to the escalation of social resentments to violent conflicts and civil wars. This article has showcased several violent conflicts that happened after the end of the Coldwar era, ranging from conflict in the Balkan region to conflict in Southeast Asia and Africa. The international community has addressed this problem by launching first the Millenium Development Goals/MDGs in 2002 and the Sustainable Development Goals/SDGs in 2015. These international initiatives aim to create a more just, peaceful, and prosperous global community and eliminate violent conflicts everywhere.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to the writing or publication of this article.

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