MICHELLE SWEARINGEN

E-mail: mswearingen@usip.org

Phone: 202.429.4723

Group Inequality and Conflict: Some Insights for Peacebuilding

Summary

- Political, socioeconomic or cultural inequalities among groups could potentially motivate political violence in societies. Research has shown that political inequalities between groups are most likely to motivate leaders, while socioeconomic inequalities motivate followers.

- Political violence is most likely to occur when there is a confluence of exclusionary governance and economic and social marginalization imposed by one group on another.

- In order to minimize the likelihood of conflict, policies should first address the political inequalities that most often provide a catalyst for the leadership of a violent uprising. Reducing the immediacy of conflict allows for subsequent work to address the socioeconomic inequalities that could eventually mobilize the group members at large.

- Going forward, there should be more research into group dynamics and conflict-triggers, coordinated international assistance to ensure optimal policy sequencing, inclusion of equality as an aspect of humanitarian and development programs and increased training and sensitization to group inequalities.

> "By more fully incorporating group dynamics into conflict management and peacebuilding strategies, we can more efficiently target the immediate drivers of conflict and defuse threatening situations."

Introduction

Political, socioeconomic or cultural[1] inequalities among defined groups could potentially motivate political violence in societies when groups have strong identities, and grievances mobilize both the group leaders and followers. These differences have been termed 'horizontal inequalities,' which galvanize group action to address actual or perceived inequalities. [2] These dynamics should influence peacebuilding efforts as they reveal underlying motivations for grievance and mobilization, require specific policy action to address the differences among groups and finally inform sequencing of policy implementation.

Vertical inequality, which measures differences between individuals, often gets more attention, but it is the differences between groups that have been more concretely linked to conflict.[3] The three broad areas of group differences include: political, demonstrated by participation in government and the security sector; socioeconomic, including access to land, private capital and government infrastructure, and levels of income and employment in the private and public sector; and cultural, nationally recognized languages, holidays and cultural or religious sites. Research has shown that political inequalities between groups are most likely to motivate leaders, while socioeconomic inequalities motivate followers. Empirical data suggests that when a strong combination of political and socioeconomic inequalities is present, leaders emerge and disaffected groups

choose political violence to address injustice. By more fully incorporating group dynamics into conflict management and peacebuilding strategies, we can more efficiently target the immediate drivers of conflict and defuse threatening situations.

This Peace Brief will outline ways that inequalities between groups can trigger conflicts, policy measures that reduce the destructive inequalities and steps for sequencing these policies. It will conclude with recommendations put forth at a public event at the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) held on February 22, 2010.

Group Dynamics and Conflict

Group Identities

A strong group identity is a vital component of mobilization. Whether group identities are based on ethnicity, religion, race, caste, class or region, they must have defined and relatively imperme-able boundaries. If group's identities are fluid, they will be less easily mobilized for violence, as group members will maximize their opportunities by switching to the better-off group. This is one explanation for the lack of race riots in Brazil where blacks have been severely disadvantaged compared to their white and 'mixed' or 'brown' peers. The 'mixed' or 'brown' category made up 43 percent of the population in 1993, while only 5 percent of the population considered themselves black.[4] The racial categories were fluid, diluting the threat of group mobilization. Black South Africans under apartheid, however, were evaluated and assigned a race by the Race Classification Board, leaving no opportunity for fluidity between groups.[5] Their organized and widespread rebellion brought down the apartheid regime in the early 1990s.

Mobilizing Factors

The work of Frances Stewart, leading expert on horizontal inequalities, has shown that there are different mobilizing triggers for leaders and followers in rebellion movements. While it is often political inequalities that spur leaders to accentuate and rouse group identities to foster rebellion, it is more often the economic and social inequalities that lead group members to follow. For this reason, mobilization of violent groups is most likely to occur when there is a confluence of political exclusion and economic and social marginalization imposed by one group on another.[6]

Although inequalities in cultural recognition are important, they are not a critical part of the analytical framework for group inequalities and conflict. The conflict in Northern Ireland, which was fought between Catholics and Protestants along religious lines, was overlaid on serious and long-lasting political and socioeconomic inequalities between the two groups.[7] The policies most effective in ending the conflict were those targeted at reducing political and socioeconomic inequalities between the disadvantaged Catholics and the Protestants, such as strengthening the Fair Employment Act of 1989 and improving equality in housing and education.[8]

Scenarios and Outcomes

Just as groups vary, the results of group dynamics vary and may produce either peaceful or violent outcomes. In some situations the violence manifests in a coup, while in other cases there is rebellion, political violence, riots or increased crime. Most often, group inequalities fit into one of two scenarios. Either one group is both politically and socioeconomically privileged over another group or one group is politically dominant while the other is socioeconomically advantaged.

One-sided deprivation or simultaneous political and socioeconomic deprivation of one group has been found in Mexico's Chiapas state, South Africa under apartheid, the United States, Brazil,

Northern Ireland and Sudan.[9] Under apartheid, black South Africans were disadvantaged both politically and socioeconomically. They had one-tenth the per capita income of whites and even less representation in managerial civil service jobs. Their life expectancy and literacy rates were also considerably lower than those of white South Africans.[10] After peaceful protests failed to bring about change, an armed rebellion began in 1976 that persisted until 1990 when changing international dynamics, economic sanctions and the black resistance contributed to the end of the apartheid regime. Although the blacks continue to be socioeconomically disadvantaged, the conflict ended with political compromise and the South African government continues to work to reduce the socioeconomic inequalities peacefully.

Sudan presents another example of one-sided deprivation. The United Nations Development Program, the agency responsible for measuring the progress of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) reports that Southern Sudan is drastically worse off than the North. After nearly a decade of working towards attaining the MDGs, 90 percent of the Southern population is categorized as living in poverty, compared to 50 percent in the North. Only 20 percent of children in the South are enrolled in primary education compared with 62 percent in the North, and rates of maternal mortality in Southern Sudan are more than three times as high as in the North.[11] Only after decades of civil war has the government in Khartoum made any steps towards including Southerners in the political institutions of the country.

Shared deprivation with one group that is politically powerful yet socioeconomically deprived has been found in Malaysia, South Africa after apartheid, Uganda, Sri Lanka and Rwanda. In the case of Malaysia, despite drastic group inequalities at independence that left the majority Bumiputera population with a severely low level of education, economic assets and opportunities, relative to the minority ethnic Chinese population, the country was able to implement successful policies to reduce violence along with the pervasive inequalities. The position of the Bumiputera as the majority in a country with "broadly democratic institutions" enabled the implementation of policies such as "quotas, target and affirmative action with respect to land ownership, public service employment and ownership of quoted companies."[12] During this time, Malaysia experienced record growth, allowing the Chinese to succeed as well. The balance of inequalities between the two groups encouraged a cooperative approach to resolving the issue nonviolently.

Strategic Approaches to Reduce Inequalities between Groups and Build Peace

Policy Categories

If addressed conscientiously, group inequalities, as well as the conflict they trigger can be mitigated. Stewart proposes three types of policy interventions to reduce group inequalities: direct, indirect and integrationist.[13] Direct policies include affirmative action and quotas. These policies are attractive, as they immediately target the disadvantaged population. They are most effective in the short term but if incorporated into long-term strategy can serve to calcify group identities, leading to further conflict down the road. Indirect policies include progressive taxation and antidiscrimination legislation. They work well over the long term and ultimately are more likely to reduce a strong sense of identity differences. However, these policies are less precise. Finally, integrationist policies, which work to dissolve group boundaries are theoretically attractive, but often lead to suppression of information about groups and group identities without actually reducing inequalities. Integrationist policies include bans on political parties defined solely by ethnicity or religion and requirements for muliticulturalism in schools or other institutions.[14] As each category of policies has different strengths, weaknesses and timelines, it is critical that approaches to peacebuilding

that seek to reduce group inequalities include a combination of direct, indirect and integrationist policies that address the specific political and socioeconomic inequalities that underlie the conflict and could trigger violence.

Strategic Sequencing

In order to minimize the likelihood of conflict, policies should first address the monopoly on political power and resulting political exclusion that most often mobilizes the leadership of a conflict. This could be done by addressing the monopoly on political power through reservations for under-represented groups in all levels of government and the security sector, citizenship expansion, enactment of human rights legislation and other measures.[15] This would reduce the immediacy of conflict and allow for work on the next step, addressing socioeconomic inequalities between groups. Socioeconomic inequalities can be addressed through any of the approaches outlined above and include policy measures such as employment and education quotas, antidiscrimination legislation, progressive taxation, incentives for inter-group economic activities and other steps.[16]

Potential Applications

Sudan and Rwanda, two previously conflict-affected states, are once again facing increasing tensions between groups. Sudan's longstanding civil war between the politically and socioeconomically advantaged North and the poor, yet resource-rich South ended in a peace agreement in 2005. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) addressed political inequalities and bought the country time to address the socioeconomic disparities. But many of the initial grievances have not been addressed and now that the CPA is expiring, the country is facing the threat of renewed conflict.

The 1994 genocide in Rwanda, responsible for the death of more than 500,000 people in less than 100 days, arguably resulted from decades of group inequalities. Following the genocide, the regime of Paul Kagame instituted integrationist policies, forcing the suppression of group—in this case ethnic—identities. Sixteen years later, tensions run high in Rwanda as ethnic violence has increased, along with state suppression. It is not the group identities, or even religious identities (such as the greatly publicized Muslim North and Christian South in Sudan) alone that drive these conflicts. It is the combination of political and socioeconomic exclusion, and the failure to adequately address the group inequalities that led these two countries into conflict initially and threatens to do it again. In order to effectively diffuse these situations, our approaches to development and peacebuilding in countries like Sudan and Rwanda must reflect the power of group inequalities to cause conflict.

Policy Recommendations

1. *Increase research into group dynamics:* There is a need for increased data and research regarding group dynamics and conflict to complement current work on individuals and conflict.

2. *Coordinate international assistance to ensure optimal policy sequencing:* The many bilateral, multilateral and nongovernmental organization actors in a conflict-affected country should coordinate their policies to diffuse the conflict by first targeting the immediate problem of political exclusion and then implementing policies to attack socioeconomic inequality.

3. *Integrate equality into foreign assistance programs:* Equality should be a strong factor in development and humanitarian programs, promoting stronger, more stable and more just societies.

United States
Institute of Peace

1200 17th Street NW
Washington, DC 20036
202.457.1700

www.usip.org

USIP provides the analysis, training and tools that prevent and end conflicts, promotes stability and professionalizes the field of peacebuilding.

For media inquiries, contact the office of Public Affairs and Communications, 202.429.4725

4. *Conduct training and sensitization programs on reducing group inequalities:* Increasing education and awareness about the value of correcting group inequalities will improve policies in and towards conflict-affected countries.

Endnotes

1. For the purposes of this paper, we rely on the definition provided by the Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity in an article written by Arnim Langer, "Cultural Status Inequalities" in the August 2006 newsletter. Cultural inequalities can be defined as "differences in recognition and (de facto) hierarchical status of different groups' cultural norms, customs and practices."

2. F. Stewart. Presentation at the U.S. Institute of Peace, "Will Addressing Horizontal Inequalities Decrease the Likelihood of Political Violence?" February 22, 2010.

3. Stewart has documented that horizontal inequalities increase the likelihood of conflict, while Collier & Hoeffler and Fearon & Laitin have documented that grievance based on vertical inequality does not increase the likelihood of conflict. Ibid. P. Collier & A. Hoeffler. "Greed and Grievance in Civil War." *Oxford Economic Papers,* 56 (4): 563-595; J.D. Fearon & D.D. Laitin. "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War." *American Political Science Review,* 97(1): 75-90.

4. F. Stewart. "Horizontal Inequalities: A Neglected Dimension of Development." CRISE Working Paper, p. 30. Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity, CRISE.

5. BBC World Service. "The Story of Africa: Apartheid Law." Retrieved March 19, 2010, from BBC World Service: http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/features/storyofafrica/12chapter7.shtml

6. F. Stewart. Presentation at the U.S. Institute of Peace, "Will Addressing Horizontal Inequalities Decrease the Likelihood of Political Violence?" February 22, 2010.

7. Ibid.

8. F. Stewart. "Horizontal Inequalities: A Neglected Dimension of Development." *CRISE Working Paper,* p. 27. Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity, CRISE.

9. Stewart's research includes Chiapas, South Africa before and after apartheid, the United States, Brazil, Northern Ireland, Malaysia, Uganda and Sri Lanka.

10. F. Stewart. "Horizontal Inequalities: A Neglected Dimension of Development." *CRISE Working Paper,* p. 24. Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity, CRISE.

11. United Nations Development Progamme Sudan. "UNDP Sudan: Status of MDGs in Sudan." Retrieved March 19, 2010, from UNDP Sudan: http://www.sd.undp.org/mdg_fact.htm

12. F. Stewart. "Horizontal Inequalities: A Neglected Dimension of Development." *CRISE Working Paper,* p. 19. Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity, CRISE.

13. F. Stewart. Presentation at the U.S. Institute of Peace, "Will Addressing Horizontal Inequalities Decrease the Likelihood of Political Violence?" February 22, 2010.

14. F. Stewart, G. K. Brown and A. Langer. *Policies towards Horizontal Inequalities,* in "Horizontal Inequalities and Conflict: Understanding Group Violence in Multiethnic Societies." Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

15. Ibid, p. 304.

16. Ibid, p. 304.