

## **Poverty as Root of Conflict That Led to Livelihood Destruction**

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**ABSTRACT :** *Today, humankind globally is facing numerous problems differently according to their unit issues and challenges in their environment, but the most common to all is the issue of poverty, conflict, and livelihood related matters. The so-called developed worlds of today also experienced or are experiencing these inter-related problems. Poverty, conflict and livelihood are issues that are fundamentally inter-related in determining the phases of in any given community. Most livelihood destruction are as a result of conflict and most conflicts are as result of poverty. Therefore, the paper argues that poverty is the root of most conflicts and if not handle properly may eventually lead to violence. Violence is the highest stage of conflict that may destroy the basic structure of human livelihood. In view of this major frightening issue, the paper dwells on causes of poverty and stages that may lead to conflict and focus on those that are most likely to lead to violence (or renewed violence) in a particular context and provides the creative ways to address the most vital needs of those affected. By so doing, the paper integrates or "mainstreams" the possible causes of conflict and livelihood destruction to poverty issues in an environment. Increasingly, the paper dwells on possible strategies to adhere and the best practices in conflict management and mitigation in countries experiencing growing fragility, instability and in some cases insurgencies.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Poverty, Conflict, Violence, Peace, Livelihood, Destruction.*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The concept poverty and conflict are multidimensional and complex in nature and manifests themselves in various forms far beyond the understanding of majority of people. Different people perceive poverty differently, some limiting the term to mean a lack of material well-being and others argue that lack of things like freedom, spiritual well-being, civil rights, and nutrition. Conflict on the other hand refers to a chaotic situation of lack of peace and stability and varies in types and levels of momentum that it generated. Conflict arises due to a complex set of variables coming together and reinforcing each other at multiple levels and at critical junctures of a country or region's development. It leaves in its aftermath significant development and humanitarian challenges. Livelihood is the means by which households obtain and maintain access to the resources necessary to ensure their immediate and long-term survival. Conflict is a major threat to livelihood by restricting or blocking access to one or more of these resources. It is obvious, all human development history, were characterized with either the problems of poverty or conflict if not violence. Some are facing poor natural economic resources that consequently result into absolute poverty. Others are suffering because of bad or weak leaders, despite the fact that their land is blessed with both human and natural resources. While others are with good leaders and sound economic strength, but facing insecurity either because of human activities such as terrorism and natural disasters like earthquakes and diseases. Because of the inevitable problems that the World is faced with, all human efforts toward scientific and technological innovations in addition to ideological inputs at the expense of spiritual pursuance are to live a good livelihood, that are free of poverty, conflict, or violence and to be free from them while afflicted.

As the effects of conflict increasingly felt at both community and individual levels, others linked to protection or restoration of livelihoods will frequently supplant the original causes of a conflict. People affected by conflict have two overriding concerns: surviving immediate physical threats and overcoming long-term threats to their livelihoods.

#### **1.2.1. MULTI-DIMENSIONAL NATURE OF POVERTY**

Poverty is multi-dimensional and complex in nature. Its definition may include inadequacy of income and deprivation of basic needs and rights, and lack of access to productive assets as well as to social infrastructure and markets. The material well-being perception of poverty in which the poor is defined as those

members of society who are unable to afford minimum basic human needs, comprised of food and non-food items. (Clifford. E. and Thorbecke, E. 1970)

According to the Social Summit Programme of Action, "Poverty has various manifestations. It include lack of income and productive resources sufficient to ensure sustainable livelihoods; hunger and malnutrition; ill health; limited access or lack of access to education and other basic services; increased mortality from illness; homelessness and inadequate housing; unsafe environments; and social discrimination and exclusion. It is also characterized by a lack of participation in decision-making and in civil, social, and cultural life. There are sudden poverty because of disaster or conflict, the poverty of low-wage workers, and the utter destitution of people who fall outside family support systems, social institutions, and safety nets.

Poverty level has defined lines of relative poverty and absolute poverty. Relative poverty line however used to refer to a poverty line, which is proportional to the mean or median income or expenditure. For example, many studies have used two-thirds (2/3) of the mean to define relative poverty. In this first stage of poverty people status are marginal and most threats are adjustable. On the other hand, absolute Poverty is a situation when people are unable to meet the requirements considered adequate to satisfy minimum human basic needs, such as food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education, and information. It depends not only on income but also on access to social services. Specification of these minimum requirements is inspired by the universal valuation of human dignity. (Jomo, K.S. 2001)

Those that are within the scope of absolute poverty are leading dehumanizing lives according to universal norms of human dignity: facing starvation, lack of shelter, or the prospect of turning to immoral activities for survival. The analysis of poverty has revealed that there is a 'hardest-hit' category of people consisting of those who cannot afford to meet the basic minimum food requirements even if they allocated all their total spending on food. This group frequently referred to as the Hardcore Poor or the ultra-poor in the literature of poverty. (Lopes, F. 1998)

### **1.2.2. FACTORS THAT LED TO POVERTY**

Diverse communities have different perceptions of the causes of poverty. The major possible causes that are common to most societies include low agricultural productivity and poor marketing. This factor in most cases is a natural phenomenon, though aggravated by human factors. When a region or country experiences low agricultural output because of either natural drought or failure to obtain and apply all agricultural requirements efficiently, the very region may certainly experiences poverty. Similarly, poor marketing activities such as lack of enough goods supply and poor marketing networks are factors that cause poverty in a region.

Secondly, insecurity in a country is a factor that causes poverty. Lack of peace and stability may not allow people to settle and pursue their daily activities efficiently and effectively. Regions that lack adequate security measures are vulnerable to open chances of poverty because of lack of peace and stability mostly due to conflict, violence, and insurgences.

Thirdly, unemployment and low wages are major factors that cause poverty. Unemployment and low wages in any society weakens the basis of all social institutions and political system's legitimacy and stability. Poor marketing structure causes poverty; also, in this regard, if the ability of the market to absorb a sudden surplus of job seekers is limited; a large pool of unemployed people arises.

Furthermore, weak political structure and bad governance are major factors responsible for all human suffering, more especially the issue of poverty and livelihood. Government structure that is characterized with weak leadership and high level of corruption with poor economic management may eventually lead its people into an acute level of poverty.

Nevertheless, poor physical infrastructures are greatly contributing to poverty in a society. Modernization and development cannot be possible in the absence of good and adequate infrastructural facilities such as good road and electricity. Regions that lack physical infrastructural facilities more especially good road networks that link production and market centers and sufficient electricity supply are mostly victims of poverty.

A high cost of basic social services is an agent of inflation and inflation in a nation generally trigger poverty. When basic social amenities are costly beyond ordinary people's affordability, the rate of poverty level will be high and most threats to human suffering will be the order of the day.

Largely, gender imbalance is also a factor accelerating poverty in a society. Male and female discrimination at social status may signify backwardness and may therefore be associated with lower economic growth. In most countries of the world, females experience some wage discrimination in formal sector employment which shows up as the unexplained portion of the female-male wage gap in earnings regressions (Horton, 1999; Tzannatos, 1999; World Bank, 2001).

## **II. INFLUENCE OF POVERTY ON CONFLICT**

Poverty is the major cause of most human problems, more especially the problems of conflict and livelihood destruction. Although, conflict is, an inherent and legitimate part of social and political life, and is often a precursor to positive change.

Conflict can result from a wide range of factors, including competition for scarce resources, ethnic or religious tensions, and competition over political power, dissatisfaction, or desperation on the part of marginalized groups, or deliberate attempts by the state to subjugate particular groups or extract resources from areas where there are competing claims. (Sarah, C. ed. 2003)

When such negative developments manifest in an environment, certainly the very society is bound to enter into conflict. However, the influence of poverty on conflict is greater than any other factors. Perhaps, most specifically those directly caused by competition for essential livelihood resources. Unemployment is major factors that cause poverty. The economic causes of unemployment are a major factor that has direct impact on violent conflicts. If people on a greater scale are kept out of the labor market, it is likely to cause poverty. If the ability of the market to absorb a sudden surplus of job seekers is limited, large pools of unemployed and frustrated people arise. Such coincidences generate despair among people that move them towards the use of violence. People will be especially vulnerable to unemployment if it coincides with periods of serious economic decline. Unemployment in any society weakens the political system's legitimacy and stability. Likewise, such conditions produce a climate of radicalism particularly among unattached poor people that are facing ultra level of poverty and have the least to lose in the gamble and struggle for revolutionary gain (Braungart, 1984: 16).

The willingness of people to embark on conflict because of poverty depends on their other income-earning opportunities. If young people are left with no alternative but unemployment and poverty, they are likely to join rebellion as an alternative way of generating an income. The 'alternative income' they earn from participating in armed conflict can be high. The less opportunities for people to get a job, the more likely that they engage in violent conflict. (Collier and Hoeffler, 2001: 6).

When a society reached the level of absolute or ultra poverty, the very society is on hot stage of conflict. However, triggers may include natural hazards, such as droughts, and economic shocks, such as collapses of banking systems, sharp increases in unemployment, or major fluctuations in food prices. Even where there are other primary causes of an escalation of tensions, livelihood failure can contribute to the emergence of conflict by weakening the social fabric, making people resort to desperate means to obtain resources, and deepening vulnerability to exploitation by those with an interest in promoting conflict for political or economic gain. (Alex, D. W. 2005) [1989].

### **2.3. IMPACT OF CONFLICTS ON LIVELIHOOD**

Livelihood is the means by which households obtain and maintain access to the resources necessary to ensure their immediate and long-term survival. These essential resources are categorized into six: physical, natural, human, financial, social, and political. Households use these assets to increase their ability to withstand shocks and to manage risks that threaten their well-being.

During conflict, civilians are not only at risk of being killed or injured, but also of having their livelihoods deliberately undermined. Livelihood destruction can be quick: a village may be burnt to the ground in minutes, destroying food stores, properties, and productive equipment. In situations of chronic conflict and political instability, livelihood damage may be protracted, with repeated shocks gradually breaking down resilience, eventually causing destitution and large-scale human suffering. Some of the more common types of shocks that conflict brings include:

- Interrupting food access or production restricting access to agricultural or grazing land
  - Restricting access to water and other natural resources
  - Preventing markets from operating, causing price spikes, or destroying or blocking market and trade routes and causing the labor market to collapse
  - Disrupting banking systems and government services, either as a result of capacity failure or deliberate action
  - Stripping, burning or looting assets of marginalized or targeted groups
  - Displacing civilians and destroying infrastructure
  - Encouraging or aiding sexual violence against women and girls because of breakdown of law and order.
- (Tanya B. and Philippa, C. 2002):

Each of these shocks has a direct impact on livelihoods. Understanding the impact of these losses and the ways in which people respond to these challenges should be the basis of appropriate support mechanisms.

While conflict has an enormously destructive impact on both life and livelihoods, more people survive than perish. Survival is rooted in action: people under threat cannot afford to wait for help. They must actively seek ways to survive in the face of constantly changing risks. People affected by conflict have two overriding concerns of surviving immediate physical threats and overcoming long-term threats to their livelihoods. Whether the disruption to livelihoods is quick or protracted, households respond by adapting their strategies to

ensure their survival. Households often show remarkable resilience and, even in extremely acute situations, pursue a mixed strategy of balancing short-term needs with longer-term survival concerns. (Sue, L. 1997)

Populations adjust their livelihood strategies to mitigate the effects of conflict, even if the adjustments themselves involve a violent response, such as fighting over access to natural resources. Livelihood strategies may be creative and positive, such as when people find new ways of trading with each other, make new alliances to negotiate use of another group's grazing areas, or diversify their economic base.

Other livelihood strategies may be negative, involving criminal activity or activities that may be unsustainable or harmful in the long term despite their apparent short-term benefits.

Negative livelihood strategies are often key elements of war economies. Out of desperation and a lack of alternatives, people are involved in activities that fuel conflict and are ultimately destructive. Examples include the production of opium in Afghanistan, coca in Colombia, looting in Sudan and Bosnia, trade in valuable natural resources in Democratic Republic of Congo, or trafficking in women and children in many parts of the world. (Goodhand, J. 2000)

Other destructive livelihood strategies are large-scale exploitation of natural resources, e.g. forest products, minerals, and other resources. As the natural resource base depleted, options for pursuing productive livelihood strategies are further reduced, creating a circular effect that is difficult to break.

In conflict, challenges to livelihoods often lead to dramatic shifts in gender relations and roles. Men may leave the household to fight, take the family's animals and other assets to more secure areas, or seek employment in urban centers. In cases of forced displacement, there are often a disproportionate number of female-headed households. When women assume the role of primary breadwinner, even temporarily, they take on new economic and political roles. In some situations, women's roles revert to forms that are more traditional when the conflict is over. In others, women maintain their new position as primary breadwinners. Such changes may generate tension between men and women, particularly in the aftermath of conflict.

Conflict and pervasive instability often creates a situation where official markets collapse when captured by warring parties. When this happens, local people may turn to or create informal markets in a bid to survive. This was the case in Mozambique, where the war and displacement accelerated the transformation of peasants into 'barefoot' entrepreneurs by forcing them to become innovative and flexible in pursuing economic opportunities. Informal markets continue to operate even when conventional wisdom suggests that the economy has collapsed. Women are often critical traders in these markets. It is important to understand and support economic activity that has emerged in unstable settings wherever it constructively promotes livelihoods. Such support may be the best means of assisting people to cope, as it builds on their own efforts and strategies. (Tsikata, Y. M. 2001)

Commercial sex work is one of the most notorious activities that flourish under the conditions of conflict. Although, it provides income for both women and men, it carries heavy long-term costs in terms of health and mortality. Conflict areas provide a thriving market for commercial sex workers. Soldiers have both disposable income and plenty of time as they wait in garrison towns for the next round of fighting. The spread of HIV/AIDS is a major problem in such settings with the risk transmitted back to soldiers' and sex workers' families and local communities at the end of the conflict. (Montgomery, M. R. and Hewett, P. C. 2005)

### **2.3.1 NECESSARY AND IMMEDIATE INTERVENTION MEASURES**

Most people turn away from destructive activities if presented with better alternatives. Livelihood interventions are important throughout all stages of a conflict but become critical at specific junctures. An understanding of how livelihoods affected at different stages of a conflict can help channel resources. Generally, emphasis moves from protection of livelihoods prior to the outbreak of conflict to emergency relief during the acute stage of the crisis. Yet even at this stage, livelihood support is critical. Immediate distribution of food aid to rural areas will greatly prevent people from selling off their last remaining productive assets and migrating in search of relief. As the crisis subsides, emphases are normally shifted to rehabilitation of livelihoods.

Conflict often causes civilians to flee their homes, either to save their own lives or to protect their assets. If the threat is highly localized, the number of displaced and the distance they travel to reach safety is usually relatively low. However, when waves of refugees pour over a border into makeshift refugee camps - as was seen with Rwandans in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Tanzania in 1994, Kosovar refugees in Macedonia in 1999, and Sudanese in Chad in 2004 - there is a need for immediate humanitarian relief. (Sue, L. 1997)

Assistance for refugees and internally displaced persons is often based on the assumption that they will soon be able to return to their homes. Little if any effort made to provide livelihood support in the weeks and months after the initial influx. Yet return may not be possible for months or years, and many refugee camps become holding centers: 7.4 million of the world's 12 million refugees have been living in camps or settlements for more than a decade. (Jeff, C. 2003)

Effective livelihood programming in pre-conflict, conflict, and post-conflict situations require creative thinking, flexibility, an understanding of the dynamics of the particular conflict, and recognition of its local impact. The following initiatives offer important points for future action on what does and does not work in promoting livelihoods during conflict.

An essential first step to develop livelihood-sensitive program is to identify the basic components of civilian livelihoods and the impact the conflict has had or could have on them. In the first instance, baseline assessment to identify the essential component that make up the livelihood of a particular group during a “normal” (i.e. non-conflict) time is necessary. This information can be collected quickly through the use of baseline information where it exist, review of historical market and food production data, and interviews with civilians including traders, farmers, the displaced, and their hosts. (Susanne, J. and Jeremy, S. 2002)

Secondly, an estimation of the impact of shocks of the conflict on livelihood (e.g. disruption in agricultural production due to displacement, loss of employment, and destruction of assets) in terms of income, food consumption, and other critical benchmarks.

Thirdly, determine the ways in which households modify their livelihood strategies to minimize the impact of the conflict shocks.

Fourthly, identify appropriate forms of support aimed at minimizing the impact of the shocks.

Nevertheless, livelihood support in a violent or fragile environment can be effective if the following points are kept in mind:

- Determine where State control is most precarious, i.e. where government services, law, and order are most likely to break down.
- Identify ways in which access to resources are threatened by State weakness.
- Prioritize assistance to fill essential livelihoods service gaps.
- Create viable alternatives to the opportunistic support that extremist groups may provide. This includes responding to real needs on a meaningful scale and on a prolonged basis. (Mary, A. 1999)

For people at the local level, the state, if it exists at all, is primarily evaluated in terms of whether or not it provides basic services, with the most important service being the provision of human security. A state unable or unwilling to provide those services loses legitimacy, heightening the risk of conflict or outright collapse. Where the State has no legitimacy, assistance may be better invested with non-State actors who are more widely supported and trusted. Strong civil society, local NGOs, religious groups, parent-teacher associations, women's associations, local chambers of commerce or producers' cooperatives, and other grass-roots community development groups may be better vehicles for livelihood support than State institutions. However, this is the right time and chances that opportunistic or extremist groups may enter to provide their own alternatives. Such groups tend to establish their presence by offering support to local communities who are desperate, without options, and willing to seize any opportunity to protect their livelihoods. (Sobhan, R. 1998)

### **III. MEASURES TOWARDS RESTORING PEACE**

Since conflict damages livelihoods, helping restore access to resources can build a foundation for peace and reconciliation. Livelihood support should not be seen as a substitute for the important tasks of conflict resolution and peace building, but it may resolve some of the tension and urgency surrounding the conflict. Therefore, it can be an important tool for ending hostilities.

In local conflicts, livelihood support is an important mechanism for encouraging people to cooperate with each other and serves as an entry point for building trust between combatants.

Where conflicts are caused or exacerbated by disputes between two or more states, or where international interests fuel tensions, effective conflict resolution and peace building should be carried out in tandem with livelihood support. Although, livelihood support on its own is not likely to bring about a resolution to the conflict, it can mitigate the effect of the conflict on the lives of civilians and facilitate peace-building activities. (Susanne, J. and Jeremy, S. 2002)

Reconciliation and peace building efforts are more likely to succeed if built on a platform of shared interest and pragmatic cooperation. People may be more willing to reconcile if they see that continuing the conflict has a high economic cost. In designing assistance programs to support resilience, timing is critical. Support that is well conceived but provided before people are ready to begin collaborating with each other will likely fail. On the other hand, if people are ready to start working together and assistance providers are not ready to act, important opportunities may be lost. The best way to determine what type of support is appropriate and the best time to begin implementation is to watch for patterns of pragmatic cooperation and to build on them. Some of these patterns include the following:

- Ask local people what form of trust and cooperation have been broken by conflict and what people want to put in place to work together again;

- Identify entrepreneurs who are willing to be among the first to forge links with people on the other side of the conflict. Pay particular attention to the role women play in informal economic activity;
- Provide support that will promote pragmatic cooperation at a pace and on a scale that is manageable (i.e. avoid pushing too fast or providing too much assistance all at once, but be ready to provide assistance as soon as the parties to the conflict signal that they are ready to begin collaborating). (Mary, A. 1999):

When supports provided in these areas and timely, can help prevent opportunistic groups from establishing a foothold and fomenting violence. However, effective support must be provided on a scale sufficient to address the needs that are of highest priority to local people. When assistance perceived as favoring one group over another, its programs, staff, and beneficiaries are exposed to greater levels of risk. Humanitarian aid workers increasingly targeted when they perceived to be partisan. Therefore, providers of assistance need to be sensitive to the dynamics of the conflict and to the livelihood strategies that people are revising to respond to changing threats.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

The study concludes that poverty, conflict and livelihood are inter-related issues that require good planning more than other forms of development assistance where project timelines are set in advance. Working in conflict situations requires a great deal of flexibility in terms of scheduling and budgeting. Normal project-based approaches are not designed to respond quickly to rapidly changing environments, and are not strategically oriented to support livelihoods that are constantly adjusting to shocks. Some of the most innovative and successful responses have come from people who have challenged the bureaucratic status quo as such, flexibility must be built into the programming cycle itself.

Since poverty is the cause of most conflicts that destroy the very basis of human livelihood, the following recommendations are the measures that both the government and NGOs should do to reduce it. In the first place, maximum-security measures that will ensure peace and stability which provide protection of lives and properties is the backbone of poverty control measures. In the same vein, good economic management that is free from all sorts of corruption and embezzlement is a first and key element toward poverty prevention and control. When security and good economic management are achieved, government should embark on mass employment in order to provide means of livelihood to its people. Credit facilities, information, and access to markets are services that reduce and prevent the risk of poverty. There is the need to improve technological development and expansion of infrastructural facilities such as sufficient electricity supply and good roads networks alongside with social services such as water, education, and health services. Intensive agricultural programmes and community participation in all aspects of development are unavoidable measures toward poverty control.

Largely, in spite of some of the shortcomings of this micro study on how poverty influences conflict that cause livelihood destruction it forms not only a good benchmark for poverty monitoring and control, but also a springboard for conflict managing techniques and livelihood improvement measures.

*DEDICATION:* I consciously dedicated this study to all those affected with poverty in their country and calls on their leaders to embark on appropriate poverty reduction measures, to avoid a situation that will escalate to conflict and violence that led to the destruction of their means of livelihood.

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