



issue brief

What Is It?

Extended fight or struggle; war.

Conflict—whether neighborhood crime and violence, civil war or war between two countries—is often both a cause and a consequence of poverty.

Research shows that the combination of **poverty, economic decline** and **dependence on exporting natural resources** drives conflict across all regions.

Many of the poorest countries are locked in a vicious circle in which poverty causes conflict and conflict causes poverty.

- The book *Breaking the Conflict Trap* analyzed 52 major civil wars between 1960 and 1999. The typical conflict lasted about 7 years and left the countries poor and disease-ridden.
- The incidence of civil war globally has been rising over the past 40 years. In the past 15 years, 80% of the world's 20 poorest countries have suffered a major civil war.
- Countries coming out of war face a 50% chance of relapsing in the first 5 years of peace.
- Even with rapid progress after peace, it can take a generation or more just to return to pre-war living standards.

Why Should I Care?

Conflict, especially civil war, is expensive and can affect everyone, even those living on other continents!

Within the Country: The cost of war continues long after the fighting ends.

- *Deaths:* Combatant deaths are small fraction of all deaths, injuries and misery. Declining health services can lead to more people dying—combatants and non-combatants. About half the deaths happen after “peace” is declared.

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Why Should I Care? (continued)

- *Flight and Disease:* Numerous people flee combat. Refugees often pick up diseases as they flee spreading them across borders as they seek sanctuary.
- *Lost Childhoods:* Generations of kids and young people miss out on a stable home, childhood and school. Often they are recruited as soldiers. Once the war ends, it is challenging for these young people to lead their countries into the future.
- *Landmines:* Landmines left in battlefields turn fertile fields fallow for years making it difficult for farmers to produce food. Many countries find it is too expensive to find and remove landmines.
- *Poverty and Isolation:* Countries that suffer a civil war often get locked into high levels of military expenditure, capital flight, infectious disease, low growth and entrenched poverty.

Regionally: Neighboring countries suffer immediate and long-term consequences.

- *Refugees:* Providing for numerous refugees can strain the economy and healthcare systems of neighboring countries, which often are poor themselves.
- *Infectious Diseases:* Refugees spread diseases like malaria, HIV, and tuberculosis. For every 1,000 refugees moving across the border into another country, malaria cases in the host country increase by about 1,400 cases.
- *Economic Costs:* Investment dries up and economic growth declines in neighboring countries, which make it possible for the existing civil war to spark others or to evolve into a regional conflict.

Globally: Three major social challenges are largely the by-product of civil wars.

- *Drugs:* About 95% of drug production occurs in civil war countries because it is easier to produce large quantities in territories outside the control of a recognized government. Colombia or Afghanistan for examples.

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IT'S A FACT

Conflicts over natural resources cause about five-sixths of the world's civil wars.

Natural resources help finance rebel groups, who either loot them or use extortion by kidnapping workers. These are the most common ways rebel groups gain access to oil income.

In the past, significant natural resources have tended to be very badly used by governments, which has caused resentment in the regions where these resources are located. This resentment has, in more than one country, caused secessionist pressures to boil over.

LEARN MORE

Explore these sites:

Beyond the Fire
www.itvs.org/beyondthefire/

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
www.carnegieendowment.org/npp/

Clear Landmines
www.clearlandmines.com

Freedom House
www.freedomhouse.org

Global Witness
www.globalwitness.org

International Conflict Research
www.incore.ulst.ac.uk

International Campaign to Ban Landmines
www.icbl.org

International Relations and Security Network
www.isn.ethz.ch

Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
www.sipri.org

UN Peacekeeping Operations
www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/

Why Should I Care? (continued)

- *HIV/AIDS and Other Diseases:* Wars result in mass rape and flight, which spread infection fast. Research suggests the initial spread of HIV was closely associated with the 1979 civil war in Uganda, and the large number of rapes along the border with Tanzania.
- *International Terrorism:* Territories outside the control of a recognized government become havens for terrorist groups to set up headquarters and training grounds.

What Is the International Community Doing?

The World Bank sees conflict as the opposite of development and works to prevent conflict from arising.

In February 2007, the Bank approved a new policy framework for a rapid and effective response to crises and emergencies. The new policy is better aligned with the emerging international consensus on the challenges of engagement in fragile states, and supports the Bank's complementary role to other partners, including the United Nations and regional organizations.

In March 2007, the Bank puts its new policy into action by granting US\$180 million to help fund emergency rehabilitation of basic urban and social infrastructure in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), a country emerging from conflict.

The international community works to:

- Increase and better-target aid for countries at risk
- Increase transparency and scrutiny of the revenue derived from natural resources
- Track natural commodities to keep the money away from rebel groups
- Improve post-conflict peacekeeping and aid

For example, new international regulations in the diamond trade have cut financing for rebel groups dependent on "blood diamonds," helping to end rebellions in Angola and Sierra Leone.

Developed countries have agreed to make bribery of developing country officials a crime. This has reduced corruption, which is often a contributing factor in the onset of conflict.

An international ban on landmines instituted in 1997 has already halved the number of casualties.

In the Great Lakes Region in Central Africa, the international community is working to disarm, demobilize and reintegrate some 450,000 former combatants into society.

What Can I Do?

Learn about current events, other people and history, so you can help prevent misunderstandings instead of adding fire to them. The "Learn More" box near the top of this page has several web sites to explore to learn more. Especially interesting is Beyond the Fire, where you can read the stories of 15 teens, now living in the US, who have survived conflict in seven war zones around the world.