

1 **Unraveling the Complex Nexus: Exploring the Interplay of Conflict, Development, and** 2 **Injustice**

3
4 For a long time, the discussion of the relationship between conflict and development has been a
5 major issue in area studies. Classical theorists such as Karl Marx and Max Weber framed their
6 conflict theories based on society and social groups. For instance, Marx centers on the
7 competition among social groups over inadequate resources; and Weber focuses on inequalities
8 in the economy, social structure, as well as political power. Also, many case studies from
9 conflict-affected regions prove that violent conflicts can undermine economic and social
10 development, as well as abuse human rights, and increase refugees and IDPs. Therefore, it is
11 important to understand the way how violent conflict makes an impact on individuals and social
12 groups, and how to realize development especially economic development such as by reducing
13 poverty and equally distributing social resources. In terms of the regional violent conflict and
14 different forms of violence such as structural violence, according to Mercy Corps, the major
15 drivers of political violence are injustice, such as discrimination, corruption, and abuse by
16 security forces, rather than poverty (Mercy Corps 2015, 2); in the article, *Terrorism and*
17 *Development: Using Social and Economic Development to Inhibit a Resurgence of Terrorism*,
18 Kim Craigin and Peter Chalk argue that poverty can only magnify existing grievances, rather
19 than essentially cause violent conflict and terrorism (Craigin and Chalk 2003, 31). Although both
20 of the articles state that there is no direct relationship between poverty and conflict, is this
21 conclusion convincing enough? From my perspective, these two pieces of research can further
22 trigger an interesting question, that is, is conflict a cause, an effect, or a failure of development?
23

24 In this research, I will start by looking critically at two major notions of conflict and
25 development with an emphasis on what is conflict and its roots, what is development and its
26 characteristics. Also, I will explore the relationship between poverty and conflict, and what are
27 the reforms to deal with the causes of the conflict, such as considering the importance of pro-
28 poverty growth, and how it can help in building positive peace. At last, I will explore how
29 poverty and injustice can interact with processes of conflict, and how can development come
30 about.

31 The Clarification of Terms

32 In this research, the first is to identify two terms: conflict and development. There are two
33 categories of conflict: external and internal conflict. In this paper, I will mainly discuss internal
34 conflict, which is the conflict against civil war, such as terrorism. As an extreme instance of
35 conflict, terrorism can reflect a certain level of organized groups of conflict. It is operated by
36 rebel groups unrest in civil wars of non-state actors. Also, conflict is an external and internal
37 deficiency caused by development and governance, internal deficiencies such as lacking
38 economic opportunity, unequal distribution of gains from development, and political
39 marginalization; external impacts such as economic blows, violent insurgencies and rebellions,
40 terrorism, genocide, political repression, and civil war. Therefore, conflicts can occur in
41 underdevelopment, developing, and developed regions. The only difference is that developed
42 regions can handle the conflict better due to rapid and stable economic growth, job opportunity,
43 and better political and social institutions. However, the adverse effects of conflict are more
44 severe in regions with weak states, bad geography, and weakly integrated economic markets,
45 which can limit their pace of economic growth and poverty reduction in underdevelopment
46

47 regions. The word “development” has broad dimensions in the aspect of economic, social, and
48 political. For instance, economic development aims at improving the living standard, involving
49 growth and poverty reduction. Political development can be implemented by means of
50 democratic governance and the emergence of liberal civil societies.

51

52 Is Poverty a Main Cause of Conflict?

53 According to Craigin and Chalk, poverty does not actually cause conflict or terrorism; rather, it
54 only contributes to and magnifies underlying grievances that already exist (Craigin and Chalk
55 2003, 35). Although there is no statistical effect of joblessness rates on conflict overall, after
56 studying the incentives of conflict, I reckon that it is important to examine the relationship
57 between poverty, the lack of opportunities for youth and the intensity of the conflict. In other
58 words, there is a certain linkage between increasing conflict intensity and growing
59 unemployment. Although the link between poverty and conflict/ terrorism may not be
60 perceivable immediately, it remains essentially consequential. For instance, terrorists can
61 capitalize on poverty to lead to conflict, such as by exploiting the lack of social security and
62 welfare that characterizes impoverished states. By expanding the assistance of social services
63 and providing opportunities for youth, terrorists can expand their influence in such states and
64 regions. For instance, the so-called “welfare terrorism” can serve from Hezbollah establishing
65 schools, medical facilities, and agricultural schemes, to Hamas investing in educational,
66 healthcare, and social infrastructures. In Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Taliban have also adopted
67 such strategies by financing madrassas and educating the impoverished youth. In fact, such
68 forms of “Islamist social welfare (Cammett and Pauline 2022, 769)” have played a key role in
69 the growth of terrorist groups in poor states or regions. In sum, a lack of social opportunity,
70 poverty, and the inequalities of resource distribution can create an environment in which
71 terrorists can take advantage of. Therefore, if the authors broaden the understanding of poverty, it
72 will show some of the links that bind different manifestations of poverty with conflict.

73

74 As a global humanitarian agency, Mercy Corps aimed at saving and improving lives in the
75 toughest places around the world. In the report *Youth and Consequences*, the main argument of
76 Mercy Corps is that there is no relationship between unemployment and a youth’s willingness to
77 engage in and support political violence (Mercy Corps 2015, 2). Through doing interviews and
78 surveys with youth in Afghanistan, Colombia, and Somalia, they find that the major drivers of
79 political violence are not poverty, but experiences of injustice, such as discrimination, corruption,
80 and abuse by security forces. For many youths, narratives of grievance are triggered by weak and
81 violent states. In other words, youths take up the gun because they feel grievance rather than
82 living in poverty.

83

84 Although the report presents that in some cases, economic incentives may induce someone to
85 join an armed group, it is uncommon due to further analysis. It is true that joblessness is often
86 emblematic of frustration and marginalization, yet employment alone cannot be a determinant
87 factor in whether a youth is likely to be a part of an insurgency. In other words, violence can
88 make youth poor, but poverty doesn’t seem to make them become violent (Mercy Corps 2015,
89 17). However, based on previous pieces of literature, hunger, and poverty are two major factors
90 of structural violence, that is, poor and unjust economic structures do harm youths’ physical and
91 psychological conditions, and lead to violence. For instance, youth lack access to get adequate
92 educations, which further limits their access to decent jobs with good salaries when they grow

93 older. In turn, this also limits their access to healthcare, legal protections, political power, and
94 other important social resources. Therefore, this cycle of poverty leads to an entire society
95 subject to regular political violence and conflict.

96
97 Muhsin Hassan in his article *Understanding Drivers of Violent Extremism* discuss two driving
98 elements for conflict: push and pull factors (Hassan 2012). In his opinion, push factors refer to
99 the negative economic, cultural, and political features of a social environment that drive
100 vulnerable groups into violent conflict. In other words, push factors can be regarded as root
101 causes, such as poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, and political or economic marginalization.
102 While the pull factors refer to the extremist groups take advantage of positive features and
103 benefits to pull vulnerable individuals to join. Benefits such as the group's ideology, sense of
104 belonging and achievement, the bright prospect, and other socialization advantages (Hassan
105 2012). According to Hassan, five of the fifteen youths regard al-Shabab as a form of employment,
106 because they can get paid well, and all they need to do is just carry around a gun and patrol the
107 streets. Consequently, some youths joined al-Shabab because it enabled them to raise themselves
108 and their families. Although poverty is not the only reason for joining violent groups, these cases
109 show that there is indeed a relationship between poverty and political violence.

110 111 Is Development the Only Way to Address Conflict?

112 Firstly, Craigin and Chalk point out that development alone can not eliminate the threat posed by
113 conflict/ terrorism. In addition to economic and social development, measures such as political
114 negotiations, military operations, and community relations building, can be developed as part of
115 wider approaches to address the violent conflict as well. I agree development is not the only way
116 to address the conflict, however, I argue that the authors did not further explain its reason.
117 Moreover, their opinions about political negotiations, military actions, and community dialogue
118 can be categorized as development aid yet they did not illustrate how these measures work in
119 detail. As a supplement to this limitation in Craigin and Chalk's article, Olympio Barbanti, Jr. in
120 his article *Development and Conflict Theory*, shows that most development does not try to make
121 social structural change across the society (Barbanti 2004, "Development and Structural
122 Change"), yet political negotiations and community relations building can be viewed as
123 strategies for bringing about social change. Hence, such disconnect causes a vicious cycle, that is,
124 development leads to conflict, and the lack of conflict resolution influences development to make
125 a further step. Also, the relationship between development and conflict theory emphasizes the
126 provision of development aid in cases of violent conflict. Peacebuilding after conflicts reflects
127 the same concerns as development interventions. Evidently, development and its aid play an
128 important role in post-conflict building, yet development aid does not directly address conflict
129 (Barbanti 2004, "Development and Conflict"). Therefore, Craigin and Chalk need to provide
130 more evidence to prove why development is not the only way to address the conflict, and what
131 are the alternatives to the solutions of the conflicts.

132
133 Furthermore, the efforts of development should be rooted in peace-building dialogues, rather
134 than merely within communities, where there can be a consensus of grievance, but also between
135 those with differing views, which reflects the importance of community relations building in
136 addressing conflict. However, although some NGOs understand the local context and can
137 navigate stateless spaces, some of the difficulties of effective development are rooted in the
138 development architecture itself since it is long and hard work to build local trust. For example,

139 local ownership can be a victim of bureaucratic and administrative constraints, and the political
140 push for quick results (Mercy Corps 2015, 3). Also, some resolutions provided by humanitarian
141 agencies show how economic, social, and political development plays a major role in addressing
142 conflict. For instance, in Afghanistan, Mercy Corps implemented the INVEST program, which
143 aims at increasing youth employment in Helmand province, which proves that rapid and
144 sustained economic growth aids in poverty reduction and reduces the potential occurrence of
145 conflict. In Colombia, Mercy Corps implemented European Commission-funded reintegration
146 programs for former youth fighters. In Somalia, Mercy Corps leads the “Somali Youth Learners
147 Initiative” funded by the U.S. Agency. Moreover, it is important to solve the sources of violence,
148 not merely the symptoms, which requires development to explicitly and systematically address
149 drivers of violence. Therefore, I argue that it is important to figure out how to make development
150 become the solution to the source of conflict.

151

152 How Injustice Can Interact with Conflict and Development?

153 Craigin and Chalk argue that all members of the communities involved in the study regarded
154 conflict/ terrorism and its relevant activities as a viable response to political, economic, and
155 social injustices, which sustains a group of willing recruits (Craigin and Chalk 2003, 34).
156 Although development aid itself is not necessary to hinder conflict/ terrorism, it does have
157 positive benefits in two respects: stopping the flow of potential recruits and facilitating the rise of
158 a new middle class.

159

160 Similarly, based on the report of Mercy Corps, the drivers of political violence are rooted in the
161 social structure of weak states, such as routine injustice, corruption, normalized violence, and
162 legitimate narratives of grievance (Mercy Corps 2015, 24). In other words, fragile states are
163 places of routine injustice. For instance, the children of elites study in foreign universities and
164 can easily get access to government jobs, while most youths struggle to survive. Also, the most
165 marginalized are usually cheated by employers or harassed by police, with no way to appeal. For
166 example, in rural Colombia, youths lack significant opportunities for employment or education,
167 and are subject to daily offenses, which means child abuse and gender-based violence are
168 common. According to Mercy Corps and the International Organization of Migration (IOM),
169 women especially young women are living under the daily humiliations of misogyny. Therefore,
170 youths joining armed groups or terrorist groups can capitalize on the failure of fragile states to
171 provide alternative sources of meaning. Although youths are important to the future of their
172 societies, and to reform political institutions, in some cases, civically engaged youths seem to be
173 more supportive of political violence, not less. Also, civic engagement programs are unlikely to
174 mitigate political violence, which is isolated from meaningful governance reforms. Also, such
175 civic engagement programs can be priming a confrontation between elites and these youths.

176

177 Therefore, it is important to combine economic development and meaningful improvements in
178 governance to improve social injustice, and further reduce and even eliminate conflict. These
179 have been part of the discussion of development for a long time. However, why are people still
180 getting it wrong? There are two reasons. First is the architecture of development, that is, how
181 programs are funded, administered, and designed, which is not a way to address the appeal of
182 violent conflicts. Second, different sectoral teams may lack coordination (Mercy Corps 2015, 50).
183 Therefore, there are two kinds of intervention: a single approach such as job skills training, and
184 an integrated approach (Mercy Corps 2015, 45). Mercy Corps suggests that an integrated

185 approach should be adopted to break cycles of violent conflict. Moreover, the United Nations
186 and multilateral donors need to enhance coordination across political institutional, and
187 development initiatives. Host governments and bilateral donor governments should develop
188 democracy and governance and countering violent extremism (CVE) strategies to better analyze
189 the political, social, and economic factors that drive political violence. NGOs should cultivate
190 local communities, such as bringing youths together to transform their attitudes, enhance
191 linkages, and harness local expertise.

192
193 However, those who feel they have been the victims of injustice or discrimination may feel
194 justified in seeking revenge, which can lead to further injustice and cause conflict. Also, injustice
195 can be dangerously exploited. For instance, the feeling of anger can motivate people to challenge
196 injustice and make them more prone to manipulation by corrupt or extremist leaders. That is why
197 conflict can easily develop when people become convinced that waging war is the only way to
198 rectify social injustice. Therefore, to reduce violent conflict, it is necessary to take concerted
199 international action to address systemic injustice. For example, states need to develop institutions
200 of fair governance, help provide health care and education, and establish an inclusive society. In
201 sum, addressing injustice is core to the resolution of violent conflicts.

202
203 Therefore, how can societies effectively address feelings of injustice and discrimination without
204 inadvertently fueling further conflict or exploitation by extremist or corrupt entities? More
205 specifically, how to equitably satisfy the legitimate needs of various groups of the community
206 since the lack of fair distribution of resources, as well as rights can lead to conflict. In general,
207 the solution needs to prioritize inclusive governance by fostering transparent, participatory
208 institutions that uphold human rights and the rule of law. Economic disparities must be addressed
209 through targeted welfare programs, and initiatives promoting economic development and
210 opportunity for marginalized groups. Investing in accessible and quality education, along with
211 healthcare services, is crucial to empower individuals and enhance community well-being.
212 Promoting social cohesion through dialogue and community engagement, supporting civil
213 society organizations, and combating corruption are also vital components. By implementing
214 these measures collectively, societies can build resilience, reduce intergroup tensions, and
215 prevent conflicts driven by grievances related to inequitable resource distribution and rights.

216 217 218 Conclusion

219 In conclusion, this research examines the relationship between conflict and development,
220 especially discussing the possibility of realizing development by reducing poverty and equally
221 distributing social resources. Also, the relationship between conflict and development
222 highlighted in this research underscores the multifaceted nature of violent upheavals within
223 societies. While poverty is recognized as a contributing factor that amplifies existing grievances,
224 scholars like Craigin and Chalk challenge the notion that poverty alone directly causes conflict or
225 terrorism. Instead, deeper-rooted issues such as injustice, discrimination, and political
226 marginalization emerge as critical drivers that fuel resentment and violent responses from
227 marginalized groups. This nuanced understanding emphasizes the importance of addressing
228 structural inequalities and systemic injustices as fundamental steps toward mitigating conflict
229 and fostering sustainable peace.

230

231 Moreover, the research emphasizes that development interventions alone are insufficient to
232 resolve conflicts. Although economic and social development initiatives play a crucial role, they
233 should be accompanied by political negotiations, community engagement, and governance
234 reforms to address the underlying causes of violence effectively. Also, an integrated approach
235 that combines economic empowerment with meaningful improvements in governance and social
236 justice is essential for breaking cycles of violence and promoting long-term stability. By
237 prioritizing inclusive governance, equitable resource distribution, and empowerment of
238 marginalized communities, societies can build resilience, reduce intergroup tensions, and pave
239 the way for sustainable development and peace.

240
241 What and how we should do next? In my view, reducing conflict and realizing development need
242 collaboration from every part such as individuals, civil groups, enterprises, communities, legal
243 institutions, local and national governments, NGOs, and so forth. Together, people can reduce
244 poverty, put an end to social injustice and inequality, to restrain conflict to enable much-needed
245 political economic, and social development.

246
247
248
249

250 Works Cited

- 251 Barbanti, Olympio. "Development and conflict theory." *Beyond Intractability*, 2004.
252 https://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/development_conflict_theory
- 253 Cammett, Melani, and Pauline Jones, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Politics in Muslim Societies*.
254 Oxford University Press, 2022.
- 255 Cragin, Kim, and Peter Chalk. *Terrorism and development: Using social and economic*
256 *development to inhibit a resurgence of terrorism*. Rand Corporation, 2003.
- 257 Hassan, Muhsin. "Understanding drivers of violent extremism: The case of Al-Shabab and
258 Somali youth." *CTC Sentinel* 5, no. 8 (2012): 18-20.
259 [https://ctc.westpoint.edu/understanding-drivers-of-violent-extremism-the-case-of-al-](https://ctc.westpoint.edu/understanding-drivers-of-violent-extremism-the-case-of-al-shabab-and-somali-youth/)
260 [shabab-and-somali-youth/](https://ctc.westpoint.edu/understanding-drivers-of-violent-extremism-the-case-of-al-shabab-and-somali-youth/)
- 261 "Youth and Consequences: Unemployment, Injustice, and Violence," Mercy Corps, 2015.