



**The North-South Institute
L'Institut Nord-Sud**

**Agrarian structures, agrarian policies and violence in
Central America and Southern Mexico**

Research project report

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1	INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW.....	2
2	DETAILED REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH	3
2.1	RATIONALE.....	3
2.2	METHODOLOGY.....	5
2.3	KEY FINDINGS.....	5
	2.3.1: <i>What do we learn about the cases themselves?</i>	6
	2.3.2: <i>What do we learn from the cases about conflict impact assessment?</i>	8
3	LAND AND VIOLENCE: A FRAMEWORK FOR CONFLICT IMPACT ASSESSMENT	100
	3.1- APPROACHING LAND POLICY, VIOLENCE AND CONFLICT	11
	3.1.1 <i>Conflict Impact Assessment</i>	111
	3.1.2 <i>Land, land policy, and violence</i>	14
	3.2- LAND AND VIOLENCE: AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK.....	15
	3.2.1 <i>Land and land policy</i>	155
	3.2.2 <i>Land politics</i>	19
	FINAL REMARKS.....	20
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	21
	RELEVANT PUBLICATIONS OF THE MEMBERS OF THE RESEARCH TEAM	21
	GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	22

1 Introduction and Overview

The North-South Institute has realised a study of the conflict impact of land policies and structures in Southern Mexico and Central America. The project was intended to develop a better understanding of the articulation of agrarian structures and policies with social structures and political dynamics and to assess the impact of that articulation on the emergence and defusing of violence and conflicts. In addition, and above all, it aimed to identify the basic parameters of a peace and conflict impact assessment methodology that could be used for development and public policies.

A series of case studies were realised in Central America and Mexico, all of which involved field work by researchers with extensive previous knowledge of agrarian issues in the countries chosen. These case studies explored the behaviour of a core group of variables that preliminary research and discussion had identified as potentially critical, and they contributed very detailed assessments of the linkages in these countries between agrarian policies and violence. Through regular exchanges and thanks to two meetings of the core research team, the project generated a very interesting discussion of its very own premises and produced results that were to a large extent unintended.

Indeed, the project was first conceived as a contribution to the building of a model of peace and conflict that could usefully be integrated into the general policy work of international co-operation agencies and their partner governments in developing countries. Building primarily, but not exclusively, on the policy-oriented work being done on Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment and on the political economy of conflict, the idea was to develop an effective programming tool to identify both risk factors and general peace potentials. From the latter standpoint, the outcome of the project is utterly negative: no peace and conflict impact model was generated or indeed supported by the studies done. Following much debate and discussion among the researchers, the analytical framework remained general and no specific analytical tool was developed to be used in all the studies. This stemmed in part from the diverse background and theoretical outlook of the people chosen, which resulted from the emphasis put, in their recruitment, on a very detailed knowledge of the specificity of the situations to be studied, not on their general expertise in conflict studies or in their knowledge of a specific theory or methodology. Left free to use any technique or method they deemed suitable, the results that they found challenged the very usefulness of the endeavour.

The project points to the need to develop tools that, far from building on general theories or models of peace and conflict, focus on the characteristics and determinants of conflicts in specific situations. Moreover, the weight of case-specificity, and the contradictory implications of a number of factors often considered to have positive impact on the prospects for peace—such as a more equal distribution of land ownership, social capital/organisational density, effective land titling—led to a serious questioning of the very possibility of designing policies that foster peace. In the end, that discussion led to what could be called the need for "operational modesty" and for systematising attempts at "doing less harm," instead of engaging in ambitious and highly uncertain "peacebuilding" endeavours.

As a result of that re-examination, the very theme of the project went from "peace and conflict impact assessment" to a more limited "conflict impact assessment." The tools developed on the basis of the team's work, logically, are also very different from those expected at the beginning of the process. Instead of a general model enabling programming officers to assess the conflict and peace potential of given public policies, we have instead a

series of broad parameters and a dedicated land policy analytical framework that are designed to feed a classic *political* analysis of the implementation of a given policy, trying to identify the points of friction and the political potential that such a policy is likely to create.

Three groups of results were generated: interpretations of the five specific cases studied; contribution to a general understanding of agrarian conflicts; parameters for the conflict impact assessment of agrarian policies. As the researchers questioned the very possibility of coming to a general understanding, this second group of results was not zero but instead it bears a negative sign. To a large extent, it is on this very impossibility that the third group of results was built, as parameters for operational conflict impact assessment and a framework to do it were developed that were consistent with the ambiguity of general interpretations.

This report outlines the process through which the results were generated, outlines the ones that are most relevant and then presents the framework that was built on the basis of those results. The case studies per se are annexed and their authors duly identified. I am solely responsible for the interpretations that are found in the report per se and for the analytical framework.

2 Detailed review of the research

2.1 Rationale

This research project is part of a broader program that intends to explore the peace and conflict impact of public policies projects, as well the implications of the human security agenda for development policy. It focuses on public policies, more specifically on the impact of agrarian policies and examines three countries where agrarian issues have been closely associated with social tensions and violent conflict. The project intends to identify parameters of action for foreign donors whose interventions, leveraged through their impact on public policies, can favour or impede the development of conditions favourable to violent conflicts.

Access to material resources [Skocpol-1980; Booth-1993], power [Dahrendorf-1968; Crozier and Friedberg-1977] and symbolic value [Tajfel-1981; Horowitz-1986] are at the core of social conflicts, relating respectively to economic, political and identity-related conflicts. The distribution of the stocks of these assets, as set in structures, has long been associated by scholars with conflict and sometimes violence at various scales. Effective or attempted changes in their distribution, through social mobilisation or public policies, have also been associated with conflict and violence [Brass-1986; Furet-1988; Tilly-1976]. Most current distributions of economic, political and symbolic assets are regulated—formally and informally, positively or by default—by state policies. The latter play a key role in the production and or reproduction of those distributions and are privileged means of acting upon them. As such these policies are in most instances the immediate stakes of distributional conflicts.

There is much debate on the nature of the associations between the distribution of social assets and conflict although a consensus has been developing around the incapacity of the first alone to trigger the latter [Przeworski-1985, 1986]. The focus of conflict studies has thus moved increasingly to mobilisations and to institutional arrangements [Huntington-1968; Tilly-1978; Scott-1986; Tarrow-1993; Berejikian-1991; Przeworski-1993].

Mobilisations are social enterprises, be they society- or state-centred, that challenge the distribution of social assets and the state policies that sustain them, and generate support and resistance, sometimes in violent forms. There is not yet much clarity on the conditions under which mobilisations succeed in generating sufficient support or resistance for the conflict to become significant. The resource mobilisation school [Obershall-1984; Zald and MacCarthy-1977, 1982, 1991] has taken an extreme position by holding that a social enterprise can always find enough grievances to generate support for a given mobilisation. Most authors, without going that far, would suggest that the existence of some conditions create tremendous incentives for mobilising elites to “exploit” and turn into a state- or society-centred mobilisation. In either of these perspectives, the particular dispositions and ideological orientations of elite groups, and the specific structure of incentives to which they are confronted, play the key role of detonator [Wickham-Crowley-1993; Furet-1995; Grenier-1999].

Institutional arrangements articulate rules, explicit or not, as well as organizational structures. They enable the non-violent management of social conflict through mechanisms for the distribution of assets or through the incentive structure they create for elites to play by the rule. To the extent that they always exclude a given range of outcomes, make some more likely than others [Przeworski-1993] and, therefore, that they favour a specific range of distributions of social assets, they are themselves potential stakes for mobilisation and objects as well as outcomes of conflict [Przeworski-1988].

One could thus consider that there are three main entry points for acting—preventively or not—upon violent conflicts: structural or conjunctural contexts that create incentive structures for mobilisations; institutional arrangements that mediate interaction and create participation or defection incentives for elite; and elite attitudes, dispositions and passions.

This project focused on the first of those entry points: structural and conjunctural contexts, as defined by public policies.

- External policies of developed countries and conflict in the developing world

Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA) has “traditionally” targeted aid policies per se, focusing on the assessment and anticipation of “the impact of development projects on the space and conflict environment within which they are set” [Bush-1998:v]. This project assumes that the conflict impact of aid policies is also related to its indirect influence on the public policies of the target country. Although foreign aid represents in quite a few cases a crucial component of the political and economic effort of developing countries, in most instances the value of aid is not per se large enough to have in itself a critical impact on conflict potentials. By contrast, through its influence on public policy, a given aid program can leverage its impact in such a way as to have a disproportional influence on the conflict environment. For that reason, and while conflict impact assessment should be made part of the design of every development project, this specific research is trying to go beyond and explore the impact of policies that can be influenced by foreign donors.

- Agrarian issues and conflict

Agrarian issues have been chosen for five main reasons: 1) Historically, agrarian issues have played a central role in most large scale civil violence; 2) because of their continued prominence as economic, social and political issues in a majority of developing countries ; 3) because of their role in a large number of recent conflicts, where they meshed with ethnic, ideological and political dynamics, both domestic and international; 4) because

agrarian reforms of various sorts are often part of the policy packages put together to end conflicts and hopefully to establish long-lasting peace; and finally 5) because agrarian policies, and agrarian reforms in particular, are complex and expensive endeavours for which the counsel and resources of external actors are often sought and even, in the case of poorer developing countries, central to the enterprise; because this policy area, in other words, offers significant scope for leverage and influence on the part of external actors.

- Central America and Southern Mexico

This research project focused on three countries where, in the last few years, there has been civil violence and in two instances all-out civil wars. In the three cases, agrarian structures and policies were among the key issues at stake in both the origin and the resolution—or not—of the conflicts. Nicaragua, El Salvador and Mexico (Chiapas and Yucatan) were chosen as case studies because the literature on these cases gives an important role to agrarian issues, at the origin of the conflicts (in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Chiapas), and in the measures contemplated, adopted, or demanded to end them. Yucatan was brought in because in a situation broadly similar in terms of agrarian structure and similar in terms of policy context (liberalisation and dismantling of traditional communal ownership) and national political environment, it did not see the kind of violent mobilisation that developed in Chiapas. Moreover, the tight interweaving of domestic and international context in the three cases offer very interesting conditions in which to test hypotheses regarding the peace and conflict impact of agrarian structures and policies in general.

2.2 Methodology

The research agenda contemplated by the team was fairly broad; the parameters of the study needed to address the many preoccupations expressed both by the researchers and by the advisory committee.

A core agenda was proposed and adopted whose starting point was that agrarian issues will remain part of the core policy agenda in developing countries, and so will conflict. To the extent that, in context, the two broad *problématique* are likely to be interrelated, for better or worse, it would be interesting to build on in-depth knowledge of these cases to feed the policy process, both of governments and of aid agencies.

Instead of trying to come up with a checklist, the research would approach the topic in a much more comprehensive manner, looking at what those cases tell us about the links that exist between agrarian policies and structures on one side, and violence, both social and institutional, on the other. More specifically, the research would try to answer the following four questions: 1) do agrarian policies and structures matter? 2) for what exactly and in what conditions? 3) if and when they do, can one deal with those links, policy-wise, and 4) how has it been done?

2.3 Key findings

The research generated two groups of findings. The first regard the case studies per se and are overviewed briefly here. The second group, more important to the purpose of the project, concern the theoretical and methodological parameters that the research suggests should guide conflict impact assessment.

2.3.1 What do we learn about the cases themselves?

Post-war El Salvador: Agrarian inequality and social violence

El Salvador is one of the most violent countries on earth and, after Colombia, the Latin American champion of the category. It has been so during the civil war of the 1980s and before as well. It is also a country of tensions in rural areas and where agriculture still plays a significant economic role, especially for the poor. For their case study of El Salvador, Vince McElhinny and Mitchell Seligson used quantitative methods to test the relevance of land inequality and a number of other variables on levels of violence, using victimisation as a proxy. The results were extremely interesting as one of the authors—Seligson—had published a landmark study questioning the relevance of land inequality as a predictor of violence [Muller and Seligson-1987], and as the study could build on a dataset that enabled it to look at those variables at the department and micro-level instead of staying, like previous studies, at the national level.

The study contradicts Muller and Seligson and shows that "land inequality is a robust predictor of victimisation (violence), even though agriculture is relatively less significant to the economy of El Salvador than when civil war ignited in 1980" (Annex 5, p. 58). It points to a number of surprises and ambiguities regarding variables often used in studies of land violence: "Income inequality ... is negatively associated with land inequality and turns out to have an insignificant effect on post-war violence" (ibid.). As a rule, "the inequality-violence nexus is mediated by urbanisation, education, gender and organisational density. Deterrence, poverty/wealth, and local political opposition prove to have little significant effect on violence" (Ibid.). The study also notes that out-migration has provided a safety-valve for many departments. Most disquieting however, considering the main result of the study, are the strong indications that "a reconcentration of reform properties may be offsetting past gains in levelling inequities in access to land."

Finally, as will be discussed in the next sub-section, McElhinny and Seligson show strikingly how deceiving national-level data can be when assessing conflict potentials, an insight that the other case studies further shore-up.

Mexico: Chiapas and Yucatan

For a start, Mexico in the 1990s has seen both a massive re-orientation of its land policy, as part of a broad and radical program of economic liberalisation, and one of the most publicised insurrectionary movements in the western hemisphere. As such, it promises to generate interesting insights into the potential conflict impact of agrarian policies. To put the Chiapas events in perspective, two studies were commissioned, one on Chiapas per se, and another one on a traditional agrarian state with an old history of peasant violence, Yucatán.

The results are extremely interesting. Henri Favre shows that in Chiapas, the insurrection emerges in the midst of a very specific constellation of circumstances defined by seven variables: 1) the agrarian structure; 2) demographic pressure; 3) social relations ; 4) public policies ; 5) agents of "consciousness-raising" and mobilisation ; 6) political mediations; 7) a specific development model. His study (Annex 3) shows how the agrarian structure of the region is dominated by social *not* private property (*ejidos*), characterised by pulverised yet polarised tenure—devoid of latifundio but replete with plots too small to ensure subsistence—and above all extremely insecure tenure, essentially because of the poor quality of land registries. This picture, which challenges many portraits of the region, is further enriched by a detailed overview of the other variables, whose behaviour is also

sometimes surprising with, for instance, the strong presence of churches and church organisations, a good indicator of social capital, playing an important role in heightened tensions and sometimes open social conflict in the region. In the end, Favre shows that Chiapas was probably indeed, but for a complex or reasons, a powder keg, but that even so conflictive a situation only led to insurrection per se as a result of highly contingent circumstances.

The study of Yucatán done by Marie Lapointe with Othon Baños Ramírez (Annex 4) validates Favre's insistence on the very idiosyncratic character of conflict potentials, even in the seemingly "controlled" policy environment of a single country. To start with, this case study shows that even in liberalising Mexico, the federal state increased its presence in the state between 1982 and 1988. It emphasises the critical role that economic and political *regional* elites can play to muddle through the impacts of liberalisation in a manner that ensures a modicum of social stability. The weight of a broadly-(if elite-)based model of development, and of the ability of political leaders to mobilise their links to the federal capital and the outside world (the US, in this case) are put in stark relief. Above all, the case study shows how the so-called neo-liberalism can morph, on the ground, into a neo-corporatism that enables the political system and the economy of a state with important and poor rural masses to negotiate the contradictions of the economic model without violent social conflicts.

Nicaragua: The revolution and after

During the 1980s, Nicaragua went through a civil war in which foreign intervention and peasant discontent with the government's agrarian policies combined to devastating effect. Even after it ended, however, violence continued and in many areas even got worse. Over the period, rural areas were radically transformed and the cases promised to generate many insights into the implications of a variety of policy-related variables.

With Edgar Fernández, Eduardo Baumeister examines the impact of the strong state intervention in rural areas that took place under the revolutionary regime (Annex 1). The study focuses on the Sandinistas' agricultural modernisation policies through collective and state forms of production as it was deployed in the region of Matiguás, a large sub-state administrative division ("municipio") of the central department of Matagalpa that became a hot-bed of insurrectionary violence. The case clearly shows that while hampering the extension of an agricultural model whose technological dimensions were adapted to local conditions, government policies contributed to the uprising of peasants and small producers and to their support for the counter-revolution. The study emphasises the importance of local contexts and centrality of the *political impacts* of public policies. It shows how ignorance of the diversity of local conditions and the resulting fallacy of composition can comfort technocratic readings of the situation and lead to the design of utterly mis-adapted agrarian policies with direct and massive conflict impacts.

Elvira Cuadra and Angel Saldomando take a careful at the following decade and what they find is not encouraging (Annex 2). Agrarian policy during the 1990s is driven in part by the imperatives of pacification, but above all, indirectly, by the privatisation of the public sector and by the drastic structural adjustment—in the absence of a real development policy—the Nicaraguan economy has been submitted to. The authors identify three types of conflict: those related to the reinsertion of the combatants involved in the civil war, those that stem from land tenure per se, and those that result from the deepening and extension of poverty and marginalization in rural areas. The study characterises the specific evolution of each type of conflict but also shows how they have now become tightly articulated with one another and deeply embedded in the highly problematic and truncated political and

economic transition the country is going through. In the end, they conclude that the lack of an organised expression of existing discontent, violent or not, results from the fragility and exhaustion of the actors involved and on the inability of existing institutions to canalise it. This certainly is not the kind of "factors of peace" on would bet on.

2.3.2 What do we learn from the cases about conflict impact assessment?

Above and beyond the specifics of each case, the studies as a whole point to a number of issues that are key to the development of effective tools of conflict impact assessment. The first and possibly most important one regards methodology, in particular level of analysis and the understanding of key concepts, conflict and violence. A number of insights have also been generated on the behaviour of a range of variables and especially on the context-dependency of their conflict impact. Among those variables, the critical ones are the raw concentration of land ownership; sheer state presence and intervention; attitude of regional elites, both economic and political, as expressed particularly in the presence or absence of a broad development model in which agrarian policies are embedded; land reform/agrarian reform, not only its basic characteristics but the process by which it is implemented; land titling and especially the process by which titles are given or not; and finally social capital.

The most interesting results that are developing centre first around the difficulty to identify a consistent articulation between any of the variables chosen and conflict or peace. The embeddedness of the variables appears critical. For instance, while "as a rule," land redistribution and titling might appear to be factors of peace, the process by which these are implemented, as well as the specific social and economic characteristics of the region where they are implemented can lead to much increased social tensions and strong conflict potentials.

The second group of results that are interesting and policy-relevant centre around the level of analysis chosen to assess the impact of variables, alone or in conjunction, on peace and conflict. All the case studies of the project point to the unreliability of national-level results and to the need to go to a significantly lower level of analysis to get reliable correlations and a good idea of the mechanism at play. The case of El Salvador is particularly illuminating. As mentioned, previous research by one of the researchers (Seligson) had suggested that, when considered at the national level, there is no relationship between the concentration of land ownership and violence, a result that is now massively contradicted by the strong relationship established when municipal-level data is brought to bear. Similarly, the study of Chiapas shows that the small region where the insurrection took place in 1994 is a zone of collective land ownership, where large landlords are absent, which points to sociological dynamics and a complex of variables to provide a satisfactory explanation.

More broadly, the cases would support an approach that emphasizes the following parameters:

- From peace-building to conflict awareness

Nothing in the case studies suggests that one could predict with any security that a given measure could favour peace. While for instance McElhinny and Seligson provide a strong case in favour of land distribution, the other cases point to the complexity of the process involved and the resulting uncertainty regarding the "peace impact" of such policies. The same holds for social capital which can obviously "blow back" in the form of a coherent insurrectionary movement. Conflict impact assessment appears to stand on slightly firmer ground: reconcentration is a clear danger, systematic land titling in the context of contested

tenure is also a danger, the presence of "consciousness-raising" and mobilisation organisations and actors is also a factor of conflict. This last point, however, also shows how an emphasis on narrowly-defined peace can be deceptive: lasting peace does not need to be based on justice. Instead, effective repression (Favre), effective co-optation (Lapointe and Baños Ramirez) or ineffective mobilisation (Cuadra and Saldomando) can deliver just as well or perhaps even better. The point, in other words, has to be the identification of conflict potentials, but not necessarily for the purpose of smothering them. Public policy must be conflict-aware, not necessarily conflict-averse.

- Public policy-orientation

While some of the case studies (Baumeister and Fernández) point to the role of international co-operation in the conflicts studied, it is clear that national public policy is the core determinant of the violence studied here. National governments mediate —by action or omission— external pressure and often make the policy choices that precipitate conflict: nobody imposed their agrarian policies to the Sandinistas and, in Mexico, the attitude and abilities of state governments played a key role in the very different path followed by Chiapas and Yucatan. It should be possible to generalise this insight: as has long been pointed out, foreign influence is exerted less through development projects than through broad policy pressures or conditionalities, both of which are mediated by national and state governments who ultimately are the ones that define the specific context in which tensions and conflict emerge, or not. Peacebuilding projects per se were certainly irrelevant to the conflicts examined here and only exceptionally are they likely to be critical. Their impact must certainly be carefully assessed, but responsible attempts at mainstreaming a concern for conflict in development co-operation simply could not focus primarily on them.

- Embeddedness and case-specificity

The most cursory look at the case studies should suffice to show how context-specific they are. The assessment of the conflict impact of a given agricultural policy must thus seek to identify the specific constellation of variables that define a given conflict potential and characterise the context in which it merges.

- Sub-national level of analysis

All the case studies point to the necessity of going below the national level to understand the conflict impact of given land policies. Baumeister and Fernández even show how a fallacy of composition in the mindset of critical actors in the policy process can by itself contribute to conflict.

- Importance of political dynamics

In the end, the case studies point to the need to embed public policies in their political context to understand their conflict impact. Politics should not be seen as an obstacle to be transcended, but as an integral part of the policy process itself.

3 Land and violence: A framework for conflict impact assessment

This section outlines a framework designed to assess the conflict impact of specific land policies in specific countries. It builds directly on the insights generated by the case studies but it also stands alone and has in fact been designed to be separated from the rest of the report and used for case studies. As a result, it integrates many elements that have already been discussed and does not try to avoid repetition.

The framework is not meant as a tool of peacebuilding or as a contribution to a general theory of conflict. It has been designed, more modestly, as an instrument that can be used to do "less harm" through land policy.

In a manner that is less systematic than opportunistic, the framework builds on the work done recently on the economics of conflict, as well as on a number of intuitions generated in the debate around Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA). It relies primarily, however, on an extensive review of case studies of land-related conflicts. Such a parasitic strategy derives from the use of land policy per se, with its specific objectives, as the point of departure. This national public policy orientation contrasts with much recent work on conflict that has been donor-oriented, peace-oriented and, naturally, conflict-oriented, all of which limit its direct relevance to this work.

"Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment" under its various guises has been meant as an instrument of peace-building, primarily for donor countries and the development industry. Its focus is on the impact of peace-building and development projects, primarily in conflict or post-conflict situations, on prospects for peace. The emphasis on projects has taken the discussion towards "evaluation" techniques and methodologies meant to be used by donor countries and agencies, and away from the public policy process that is embedded in the national polity. Moreover, the primacy of peace-building has led to a focus on activities explicitly or potentially favourable to such an outcome and to the effective neglect of "really-existing" public policies, most of which are oblivious of such preoccupations.

The economics of conflict has focused on the identification of key risk factors and explored the impact of various policy options on the evolution of those factors. It thus offers a neat point of departure for assessing the potential impact of specific land policies, as well as broad parameters for devising land policies that are likely to lessen those risk factors. The approach, however, offers little guidance for an assessment of the full conflict impact of a given land policy. For that purpose, only a full case study can provide a more comprehensive picture. This is the kind of study for which this framework is meant.

The approach adopted here points to a more classic political analysis of conflict and conflict potential in specific conjunctures. It suggests that such analysis, although it involves the examination of a relatively large number of issues, can be quite straightforward and does not necessitate particularly complex models or methodologies.

The following section specifies this understanding of the conflict impact assessment of land policies. In a second part, a basic analytical framework, centred on the various components of the political economy of land policy in individual countries, is presented.

3.1 Approaching Land Policy, Violence and Conflict

3.1.1 Conflict Impact Assessment

This section outlines the basic parameters of the approach favoured here. It looks at a few basic principles, defines the approach per se, identifies its main foci and the spatial and temporal frames to be used.

a) Principles

Embeddedness: An assessment of the conflict potential of a given project or policy must consider the environment in which this project or that policy is inscribed. Conflict and land policies are embedded. They may affect one another directly, or indirectly. Each must not be taken out of context, and neither should their interaction. The delimitation of the relevant context must be generated as part of the case study.

Case-specificity: The approach considers that any given conflict is under-determined by its structural context. It does not deny the possible relevance of theories that build on large samples of cases but must assume that the case at hand might be the exception and that the conflictual dynamics it identifies can derive from factors that are peculiar to the situation observed.

Suspending assumptions: A direct implication of case-specificity is theory-scepticism. A number of generalisations, statements and "lessons" have been generated and "learned" in recent years on the determinants of conflict. All must be turned into hypotheses, checked against data from the case at hand. To take a few popular examples, one could note, for instance that transparency does not necessarily lessen tension, and more public access to information, however worthwhile from the standpoint of democratic governance, can well generate conflict. Similarly, the recent fondness for social capital in development theory has led some analysts to take for granted that social capital, expressed for example as density of organisations, is necessarily favourable to conflict reduction. Such a conclusion is somewhat difficult to reconcile with, for example, the frequent rise of tensions associated with the multiplication of Pentecostal churches in Latin America, in Chiapas for instance. Above all, especially in the case of land policy, it would be very dangerous to assume that low levels of concentration of land ownership necessarily leads to less social tension; such a conclusion, indeed, would fly in the face of an historical record showing that regions where land is quite equitably distributed and where landlessness is low, such as Northern Nicaragua, can still see the peasantry rise up or join an insurrectionary movement.

The point is, one needs to check all those assumptions in each case.

b) Definition/delimitation

What?

Conflict impact assessment is distinct from "peace and conflict impact assessment." It is oriented to the tensions generated, not to those lessened. It does not assume that conflict emergence and conflict resolution have the same determinants, only of opposing signs, or that they follow the same paths, only in opposite directions.

From the recent work in the economics of war and older work on resource mobilisation, the approach assumes that there is no direct relationship between grievances and violent mobilisation and conflict, that the latter obey their own rules. From that standpoint policies and projects create potentials and political opportunities that can be exploited or not by political or social enterprises. The problematic link between the grievances generated by land policies and the mobilisation of those grievances thus points to the need for a broader consideration of political dynamics. Such consideration must also be broad and it would be a mistake to focus on so-called insurrectionary violence, for much of rural violence throughout this century was the result of oppression and repression by landed elites and state bureaucracies.

For what?

The framework is not geared to conflict prevention or peacebuilding, but to conflict awareness. This flows from a recognition that if a given policy context can be rife with tensions, the process through which that context is to be changed and the resulting policy context are unlikely to be free of them. In fact, policy change and the resulting outcome might well be much more conflict prone than the original situation. The kind of changes introduced by land reforms, for instance, while they tackle issues wherein conflict potential lies, also generate new ones. The objective, in other words is to systematically bring to bear, in policy design and implementation, the existence of conflict risks, without precluding the possibility that such risks will be run, for reasons of equity, historical justice, or economic efficiency, for instance.

The point is to explicitly and effectively bring conflict to the core of public policy discussion, planning and implementation. Not necessarily to reduce or avoid it, but to take it into account and sustain the search for ways to manage it (eliminate, contain, exploit, etc.).

Of What?

The discussion of conflict impact assessment has focused on the policies of donors and on the projects of implementing agencies, be they explicitly oriented to peace-building, or not.

This framework is oriented to public policy in the recipient country, not to donor policy, not to development agencies or non-government organisations, nor to specific projects. It has no particular interest in peacebuilding projects. Instead, it hopes to help conflict awareness move away from the ghettos of "peacebuilding and reconstruction" programs, divisions, and from the fields of activity of the development industry, public or private.

Public policies, by action or omission, i.e. the activities of national government agencies, represent the most significant action on national societies and as such are likely to be most consequential in terms of creating or increasing conflict potentials.

Even in the case of extremely poor and poorly governed countries, think of Haiti or Sierra Leone, government decisions, actions and inactions at the very least mediate international policy or structural pressures, "translating" them into specific measures to be applied in the country. Consequently, any attempt to seriously tackle the problems of conflict must focus on public policies per se, on their current impacts, and on the consequences of their modification.

c) Foci

The twin-focus of the analysis are the grievance-centred conflict potentials created by public policy and the willingness and ability—in organisational and financial terms— of organisations and movements to exploit those potentials. As mentioned, the studies do not assume that conflict needs grievances, only that it might feed on them, or feed them through its economic and political impact. Moreover, the organisations examined are not just "insurrectionary", but also repressive and administrative. The "movements" to be studied must include guerrilla groups, Churches, paramilitaries, business associations and political parties, to the extent that they are involved in the broad political economy of the public policy considered.

Building inter alia on the massive literature on ethnic conflict, the framework emphasises the identity base of the groups affected and of the agents involved in public policy and in the mobilisation processes. However, it does not assume that ethnicity per se is the only identity-basis that would be relevant: gender, nationality broadly understood, class, and political families and networks can also play a role in specific instances.

d) Frames

The framework is designed to be applied to a clearly delimited geographical area and timeframe. For the purpose of theory-building, consistent and clearly-defined criteria would need to be used. For the case-studies this framework is designed to support, this is not necessary and could even be counter-productive. The obvious problem is the inability to readily exclude the possibility of a definition of the relevant region that will serve the confirmation of an hypothesis. This needs to be kept in mind but can be dealt with through qualitative tests. The advantage of this approach, however, is that it readily makes it easier to deal with fallacies of composition, which so often hinder analysis and public policy design. When assessing issues such as the impact of ethnic predominance, it should be obvious that to remain at the national level is often likely to produce the strangest results, given the rare occurrence of a smooth geographical distribution of ethnic groups. The same holds for land concentration and rural population density, among other factors.

Space

The level of analysis privileged is the "region." The study needs to look at the conflict impact of land policy below the national level, in areas that make sense from the standpoint of the specific political economy of land policy. The context in which land policy is primarily embedded is not national. A given land reform will not have the same implications in large frontier area, in a region of extensive cattle-raising or intensive Soya plantation, or in mountainous areas where coffee is produced in small and mid-size plots.

Ultimate definition of the relevant region needs to be case-specific. It might or might not correspond to natural sub-divisions (tropical, dry lands, mountain), to product-specialised zones (bananas, coffee, cacao), to ethno-cultural areas of distribution, or bureaucratic/institutional delimitation.

It is NOT possible to define these regions a priori or to decide which factors must be given precedence. However, it is typically not difficult to delimit areas that are quite self-contained and whose boundaries are economically, politically, culturally and socially-relevant, and that are broadly recognised as such. The point is to identify the regions in which land policy will have distinct implications.

As noted, it is important to embed the region in the broader national context, but ultimately, it is at the regional level that conflict is likely to be played out, and this is where it should be analysed in the first place.

Timeframe

The same holds for time. The period privileged here is the conjuncture, what Fernand Braudel called "le temps moyen," because conjuncture is the time of politics and strategy, the time of mobilisation and, as such, the time of conflict. It is also the time of policy design and policy implementation. As in the case of space, however, it is not possible to identify objective criteria that could be used to define the relevant conjuncture: in a given country, it can be the ten years since the end of a war, and in another one the five years since the last election or the three since the fall of apartheid. For these reasons, once again, the specific division of the relevant timeframe must be left to the analyst and will be specific to the case.

3.1.2 Land, land policy, and violence

Land is a central issue in development theory, in development policy, and in the study of conflict. The role of agriculture and the peasantry in economic development and the role of peasants in revolutions and revolutionary movements are both classic topics on which truckloads of studies have been written, but where consensual results are few and far between.

That the concentration of land ownership is a cause of tension and conflict and, conversely, that agrarian reform is an important way to lessen those tensions and prevent—or resolve—those conflicts remains a mantra in much of the literature and has in fact led to the promotion of land reform for counter-insurgency and pacification purposes. No systematic quantitative analysis, however, has shown such a relationship to exist. In fact recent work from the most diverse theoretical horizons have suggested that the relationship between grievances, land-related or otherwise, and insurrectionary violence is problematic and that the role of revolutionary elites (Wickham-Crowley-1992), ideological factors (Grenier-1999), and financial resources (Berdal and Malone-1999; Collier and Hoefler-1998) provide more convincing causal explanations.

That being said, recent work has established a strong correlation between the concentration of land ownership and social violence, with rates of victimisation as a proxy (McElhinny and Seligson-2001). Moreover, insurrectionary violence is only one dimension of conflict in rural areas as, throughout this century, peasants have been the victims of massive slaughters engineered by states and landed elites. In addition, civil wars and conflicts, such as those that have wracked sub-Saharan Africa in the last decade, have had a massively negative impact on rural areas and on their populations. While, in sum, it is often difficult to specify the relationship that exists between land, land policy and violence and conflict, it is clear that the two are profoundly intertwined.

For development policy and, more broadly, for public policy in developing countries, this is extremely important, for rural areas still harbour large sectors of their population, these sectors are typically the country's poorest, and as a result the field is one of the main targets of development projects, programs and resources. These interventions invariably impact on conflict potentials and simply cannot eliminate them: the status quo, attempts to change it and success in changing it involve competing and conflicting interests and as such can form the bases of mobilisation, potentially violent ones.

The framework proposed here thus assumes a complex relationship between land policy and conflict without postulating any specific general causal relationship. It also assumes the inevitability of land-related conflict—if not of its taking violent forms—and the consequent need to integrate systematically its consideration in the design and implementation of land policy, whether in war-affected countries or not.

3.2 Land and Violence: An analytical framework

The following section outlines a framework for identifying land policy-related conflict potentials. First, it specifies dimensions of the land situation and of land policies that case studies suggest might be sources of tensions. The process is inductive and resulting list should be seen as an indicative checklist, not as a closed classification. A second sub-section focuses on the politics of land through the players involved and the ways in which they frame land issues. The framework does not claim to be comprehensive and must be used while keeping in mind the parameters examined in the previous section.

3.2.1 Land and land policy

In breaking down land issues, land policies and immediately related questions, six groups of problems have been identified:

- 1) Land quality, occupation and use
- 2) Legal framework
- 3) Land tenure and market
- 4) Input provision, financing, commercialisation
- 5) Land reform process
- 6) Related policy areas

For each one, a series of general issues are specified and attention is called to specific factors that appear to be particularly sensitive.

1) Land quality, land occupation, land use

General overview:

- Relative scarcity of agricultural land, environmental dynamics (erosion, flooding), rural population and density, population growth, migrations, sub-regional distribution, existence or not of colonisation fronts, unfarmed areas, presence of natural reserves;

- Types of crops, cattle, export, subsistence; relative importance in the national economy; recent changes, transitions, prospects;
- Ethnic distribution, both geographic and among the various types of occupation and use.

Special issues:

- Illegal crops: localisation, importance, economic and environmental impact;
- Natural resources: presence or effective exploitation; scale of exploitation; legal status; environmental impact; regional economic impact including on labour market.
- Industries: agricultural processing facilities, natural resources transformation facilities, maquilas; scale; regional economic impact including on labour market.
- Energy and other infrastructure: dams, refineries, ports; scale; environmental impact, regional economic impact;
- Land mines: localisation, impact on land use and occupation.

2) Legal framework

General overview:

- Characteristics, relative prevalence/relevance and strength/effectiveness of traditional or informal systems of land rights;
- Characteristics, relative prevalence/relevance and strength/effectiveness of formal system of land rights;
- Basic rules, scope (land only, trees, cultures), governance structure, conflict resolution mechanisms, recognition/treatment of secondary rights.

Special issues:

- Regional, gender, ethnic and religious differentiation.

3) Land tenure and land market(s)

General overview:

- Size: latifundio, minifundio, mid-size;
- Type: haciendas, landlord estates, collective property (communal, co-operative);
- Land concentration and landlessness;
- Security of tenure: both primary and secondary;

- Land registration: quality of the registry, functioning of the registration process, technical capacity of employees, control at the national and local level, transparency, conflict resolution mechanisms;
- Effective land delimitation: Are the titles acted upon? What are the consequence of action (especially when land registration is poor, i.e. where titles overlap)? What are the consequences of delays?
- Land market(s): existence, formal or informal, scope, mechanics, control and oversight, effectiveness, competitiveness;
- Security of tenure: degree, distribution (whose tenure is secure?), mechanics;
- Regional, gender, ethnic, religious differences.

Special issues:

- Social structure of local areas: characteristics of social networks (extended families, compadrazgo, massified rural proletariat).

4) Input provision, financing, commercialisation

General overview:

- Provision of seeds, pesticides, fertilisers: sources, prices, control.
- Financing: presence and role of the state, the private sector, co-operatives, social/religious networks, traditional lenders; rates and security.
- Commercialisation: effectiveness and control of channels, link with transportation infrastructure and proximity of markets; impact on prices paid.

Special issues:

- Regional, gender, ethnic, religious differences and implications; ethno-cultural differences (traditional lending, merchant functions; de facto control of financial or commercialisation networks);
- Penetration of foreign companies, issues of intellectual property rights.
- Importance of informal or criminal organisations or networks.

5) Land reform

General overview:

- Scope: relative and absolute extent of land affected;
- Type: colonisation, redistribution, re-allocation between and among social sectors, ethnic groups;

- Targeted areas: natural, economic, social and ethnic characteristics;
- Targeted sectors or groups; for confiscation, appropriation; for benefits;
- Financing (sources: domestic or foreign);
- Implementation: degree of centralisation of the process; selection of targeted land; selection of beneficiaries; modalities of transfer (confiscation with or without compensation; negotiations); transparency of the functioning; control of the process and the administrative structure, at the national and regional level;
- Availability of technical assistance: from state agencies, the private sector or non-governmental organisations.

Special issues:

- Extent to which the policy is driven by pacification objectives;
- Dependent policy? Extent to which the policy orientation is driven from the outside through financing, conditionality or political pressure.

6) Related policy areas

General overview

- Broad development plan;
- Natural resource management;
- Water policy;
- Environmental policy: colonisation schemes in preserved areas;
- Energy policy: dams, oil exploitation;
- Industrial policy;
- Trade policy: liberalisation of imports; encouragement to niche exports;
- Decentralisation;
- Pacification.

Special issues:

- Degree of policy dependence in these areas;
- General administrative ability of the government and extent and degree of its control over the national territory.

3.2.2 *Land politics*

The analysis needs to identify the social enterprises involved in land policy and in related areas, and to see how they define, and relate to, land issues and land policy. For the sake of commodity, the field has been broken into three conventional categories: national, regional (i.e. sub-national) and international.

The questions to be answered here are basic to conjunctural political analysis: Who are the players? Where do they stand on land issues? Which issues are most important to them and divisive among them? What do they stand to gain or lose now and in the near future? What do they appear likely to do about it? What resources (financial, organisational, political) do they have? What kind of alliances are they likely to establish?

a) National

- The state as a whole and state agencies, especially those devoted to land issues and land policies; state corporations, the military and other security agencies;
- Political parties and networks; government and opposition;
- Ethnic and religious organisations;
- Peasant and farmers organisation;
- Insurrectionary and paramilitary groups;
- Private sector companies and associations;
- NGOs and civil society coalitions and associations.

b) Regional and local

- Local representatives of central and regional governments and agencies;
- Local governments;
- Local coalitions, broad family networks, religious and ethnic organisations;
- Local landlords;
- Local units of insurrectionary and paramilitary groups;
- Private sector, resource companies (national or foreign), banks and other financial institutions;
- Local units or representatives of IGOs;
- Local NGOs and local representatives of national and international NGOs involved in land, human rights and broad development issues.

c) International

- IFIs
- Major donor countries or groups (EU, Japan etc.)
- Major international NGOs involved in land, human rights, peacebuilding and broad development issues.

Final Remarks

This framework has been developed specifically for the realisation of case studies that would be conceived as basic diagnoses of the potential impact of given land policies. It should thus be read as very detailed terms of reference for such studies. As should be clear, however, it also pursues the more ambitious objective of contribution to the development of a programming and monitoring tool that would make it possible to fully integrate an awareness of conflict in the design and implementation of public policy in developing countries. Its concrete use for case studies will no doubt lead to further specification of the framework per se and possibly to some changes in the conflict impact assessment parameters proposed. At this point, it should thus be read as a work in progress.

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