The Impact of Conflict on Households: A Conceptual Framework with Reference to Widows

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Abstract

Motivated by the spread of conflicts with mass violence, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, this paper focuses on the channels through which conflicts affect households. The paper contributes to the literature in three ways: First, it identifies three gaps in the current micro-level literature on conflict. Second, it provides a conceptual framework to address these gaps. Third, it applies the framework to widows, one example of a conflict-affected group which typically amounts to a large population share in post-conflict societies.

1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the number and intensity of mass violent conflicts has decreased worldwide (Human Security Centre 2005). However, this trend does not hold true for sub-Saharan Africa, where most of the world's armed conflicts currently take place. At the turn of the 21st century, more people were killed in wars in this region than in the rest of the world combined (ibid.: 24f., 32f.). Some authors state that "armed conflict is arguably now the single most important determinant of poverty in Africa …" (Luckham, et al., 2001). Yet little is known about how mass violent conflict affects poor households and how poor households cope with conflict.

The paper has three objectives: First, it identifies three gaps in the current micro-level literature on conflict. Second, it provides a conceptual framework to address these gaps. Third, it applies the framework to widows, one example of a conflict-affected group which typically amounts to a large population share in post-conflict societies. For example, it has been estimated that the wars in Afghanistan and Vietnam and the 1994 genocide in Rwanda caused 700.000, one million and 500.000 women to become widows, respectively.[1]

The structure of the paper is as follows: The next section summarizes recent research on the household, economic studies on conflict, and widows of conflict. The subsequent section points out gaps in current research and formulates three research questions. Section four provides a conceptual framework to address the impact of mass violent conflict on household structure and production decisions for farming, and also introduces groups of households as a unit for analyzing the impacts of conflict. The conclusion is in section five.

2. State of the art of research

2.1 Literature on the household

The household is often considered in economic literature as the smallest analytical unit of production and consumption. Because of its feature of co-residency, the household is also a relevant unit for policymakers, as households are perceived to be congruent with housing. Furthermore, it is often assumed that the family is a precondition for the household; therefore the household is often assumed to be the basic decision-making unit regarding fertility, divorce, and migration (Kuijsten and Vossen, 1988: 4f.). It has been argued that definitions of the household are influenced by statistical offices and census bureaus. These organizations are typically concerned with collecting household survey and census data and, hence, require clearly defined units that can easily be identified in the field (Keilman and Keyfitz, 1988: 255f.).

However, several authors have pointed out difficulties in applying the household concept to non-Western societies. They caution that household members are not necessarily tied by blood or marriage

[1] Estimates for Afghanistan and Vietnam: Stewart (1993: 371); estimates for Rwanda cited in United Nations (2001: 9).

(Hammel and Laslett, 1974). For example, Chant (1997: 7) finds evidence with respect to female-headed households, stating that these women are not necessarily the mothers of the children they reside with. Carter is particularly critical of using the household concept in West African societies as "the rights and duties of male and female household members are quite unlike those found in Eurasian households" (Carter, 1984: 52). This point has been elaborated by Koopman, who argues that "the assumptions of shared preferences and of pooled incomes and resources fundamentally misrepresents the structure and processes of production and consumption in most African agricultural households" (Koopman, 1991: 152). According to her, the head of the household, and his wife or wives (a gender constellation common to most households), conduct separate income-generating activities, have different schedules for work and leisure, and are subject to very different gender-specific social expectations and sanctions. The keeping of separate budgets among spouses was also empirically confirmed by other studies on Sub-Saharan Africa (Clark, 1994, Schindler, 2006). Furthermore, Clark (1994: 331-334) argues that in matrilineal African societies, the duolocal residential rules for spouses after marriage contradict the assumption of co-residency of the conventional European household concept. Similarly, Chant (1997: 6) cautions that some core household tasks, such as reproduction, take place outside the household boundaries and are performed within wider networks of relatives, friends and neighbors in non-Western societies. As a conclusion, she critically asks if a general definition of household is desirable, given the fact that "´households` mean different things to different people in different places" – for example a kinship unit, economic unit, or housing unit (ibid.: 5).

Assuming a Sub-Saharan African context, this paper employs a slight modification of Netting's original definition (Netting, 1989: 231). The household is a socially recognized domestic group. Its members are likely to share a common residence and to organize and carry on a range of consumption, inheritance, and reproductive activities. The specific content, intensity, and frequency of these activities varies by society, stage in the life cycle, and economic status of household members. Household inhabitants may be kin, but they may include friends, lodgers, and servants, and there are certainly family members who are not temporarily or permanently co-resident and cooperating.

While mostly qualitative studies have contributed to the discussion of the household concept, literature on (farm) household models has provided insights to the production decisions of households (e.g., Bardhan and Udry, 1999, Chayanov, 1966 [1925], de Janvry and Kanbur, 2006, Singh, et al., 1986). More recently, these models have been adapted to better fit the characteristics of rural developing economies, such as imperfect, incomplete or failing commodity markets (de Janvry, et al., 1991), credit markets (Carter, 1989), and labor markets (Benjamin, 1992, Strauss, 1986). Part of this literature is used in the analysis of household behaviour during violent conflict, as described in the next section.

2.2. Economic research on violent conflict

There is a diverse economic literature on conflict, in which a variety of definitions of conflict are employed. For example, conflict over land may be low in intensity and use of violence, may involve only one district or region within a country, and may not be related to struggles over property rights and other assets. On the other hand, large-scale, violent conflict potentially has a structural impact on all spheres of the economy and society.

Conflict is grounded in the perception of at least partially incompatible interests between individuals or groups (Elwert, 2004: 26), often concerning the allocation of property rights. As such, conflict is inherent to all societies; it is systematic and dynamic, and constitutes social action that is based on rational behavior, as defined in a local context (Keen, 1997). Conflict involves various methods of mediation, which determine their intensity. The impact of conflict on a society may not be perceived in purely negative terms. While conflict may entail significant costs, it may also entail positive effects on social cohesion, the capability of mediating future conflicts, and the stability of institutions (e.g. through democratic debates in parliament). Traditionally, conflict has been perceived in the economic literature as temporary exogenous shock, whereas it has been acknowledged recently that conflict is intrinsically endogenous to the development process (Keen, 1997, Stewart, 1993). More specifically, *violent conflict* is characterized by three dimensions (Berdal and Malone, 2000, Keen, 1997):

1. Action which is non-cooperative, destructive, widespread and persistent;
2. violation or capture of property rights over assets, persons or institutions;
3. instigated through some degree of group (versus individual) activity.

These three dimensions combine to shape different types of mass violent conflicts. At one extreme there are international wars and civil wars, which involve potentially destructive and often long-lasting actions carried out by large groups or even entire nations (cf. Stewart and FitzGerald, 2001: 3f.). With declining degrees of violence, destruction, persistence, and a diminishing scale of group involvement, violent conflict also encompasses genocide, revolutions, uprisings, mutinies and civil unrest. Given the variety of modes of violent conflicts, and the resulting difficulty of identifying underlying similarities, this paper limits its focus to *mass violent internal conflict*.[2] However, it is acknowledged that some external groups, often of neighboring countries, are frequently involved in conflicts that are primarily internal in their scope.

In many settings, the actual difference between active conflict and (at least the early) post-conflict phase is not clear-cut. Levels of violence and insecurity often remain high even after the official end of a conflict as it takes time to rebuild institutions, trust, and the enforcement of property rights. Hence, the term *conflict-affected* is used to depict a setting in which mass violent conflict and insecurity are dominant features.

[2] Some authors have defined a minimum death toll in order to determine the scale of conflict, e.g. more than 1.000 death per year (e.g., Stewart and FitzGerald 2001: 3).

There are three branches within the economic literature on conflict: Macro-level literature, game theory approaches, and an emerging field, which analyzes the micro-level, i.e. the household. The macro-level literature suggests a variety of explanations for the causes of violent conflict. This literature has been strongly influenced by "greed" and "grievance" as two explanatory models for conflict, originating from the publications of Collier (1999a) and Collier and Hoeffler (2001, 1998). Using a large sample of conflict-affected countries, Collier finds in empirical results that the greed motive prevails. Similar arguments have been forwarded by Grossman (1999), who models rebellion as an industry that generates profits from looting. Even though research in favor of the greed theory is appealing because of the general conclusions drawn from large, cross-country comparisons, this approach has received much criticism. More recently, macro research on conflict tends to favor the grievance theory, which includes a variety of socio-political motives for violent conflict, such as religion, ethnicity, horizontal inequality or an unjust political regime (Ballentine and Sherman, 2003, Bates, 1999, Caselli and Coleman, 2002, Collier, 1998, Stewart, 2000, Stewart, 1998). A country's abundance of natural resources (Hodler, 2004, Sachs and Warner, 1995), weak institutions (Easterly, 2000), fragility (Keen, 1997), and poverty (Elbadawi, 1999, Sala-i-Martin, 1996) are perceived as further sources of violent conflict. While most of the literature focuses on one of the above mentioned causes of violent conflict, recent contributions aim at combining these approaches to a more complex picture (Nafziger and Auvinen, 2002). Another common topic within the macro-level literature is the analysis of economic consequences of conflict, using aggregate-level data. Specifically, authors focus on the implications of the shifts of human, physical, and financial assets out of countries in conflict for the national GDP (Collier, 1999b). In addition, focus is placed on the economic effects of military spending (Collier and Hoeffler, 2002b), the allocation of aid during civil war (Stewart and Samman, 2001) and in post-conflict societies (Collier and Hoeffler, 2002a), and macroeconomic policy during conflict (FitzGerald, 2001). Furthermore, Stewart (1993) and Stewart and FitzGerald (2001) provide a comprehensive framework on the human costs of war, linking the macro, meso, and micro level of the economy.

In contrast, game theory approaches model the incentives of a representative agent or group to engage in violent conflict. In his influential book, Gupta (1990) creates a model of an agent's participation in a rebellion, in which an individual's identity is composed of both individual and collective identity and perceptions. Skaperdas (1991), using a two-step model, analyzes how attitudes toward risk can influence the strategic choices of conflict parties. Using a similar approach, Hirshleifer (1995) provides a theory of conflict, which he defines as a situation where contenders try to hamper, disable, or destroy rivals instead of utilizing available resources for productive or consumptive purposes. In his model, preferences, opportunities, and perceptions are determinants of conflict. Finally, Skaperdas and Syropoulus (2001) apply their model to two countries, each having the choice between trade and security policies.

A new field in the economic literature on conflict focuses on the household-level.[3] The methods employed by household-level studies typically consist of quantitative econometric analyses of household survey data, thus complementing the other branches of the conflict literature. However, the analysis of household survey data entails one obstacle: Because of the generally unstable institutional framework, migration, and the interruption of administration and record keeping during conflict, household data collected in conflict-affected countries is generally of worse quality than data collected in times of peace. For some conflict settings, there is no data available at all.

Commonly, household-level studies of conflict assess the impacts of violent conflict at the micro-level. As Stewart and FitzGerald (2001) and Keen (2001) have pointed out, the impacts of violent conflict can be divided into direct and indirect effects: The first consists of killing and wounding, while the second comprise "the indirect effects on human welfare of war-induced changes in economic, social, and political life" (Keen, 2001: 46). Regarding the direct effects of violent conflict, several studies are concerned with estimating mortality rates in Cambodia (de Walque, 2006), Darfur (Guha-Sapir and Degomme, 2005), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (Tabeau and Bijak, 2006). On the other hand, poverty is a prevailing topic in studies that estimate the indirect effects of conflict (Justino, 2006). While some studies focus on direct poverty measures, such as income and consumption levels of households (Brück, 2001b, Justino and Verwimp, 2006, Luckham, et al., 2001), other studies are concerned with indicators of poverty dynamics in a conflict setting, often relying on a multidimensional poverty concept. For example, Alderman, Hoddinott, and Kinsey (2004) point out that civil war in Zimbabwe had a negative long-term effect on the height of children. In Burundi, the civil war and subsequent economic embargo mostly affected children of rural households (Bundervoet and Verwimp, 2005). Differentiating for gender, Akresh and Verwimp (2006) find that girls born in a conflict-affected region in Rwanda after the civil war have a significantly lower health status, while boys do not seem to be affected. Conflict was also found to have a gendered effect on education in Tajikistan, where school enrolment was much more impeded for girls than for boys (Shemyakina, 2006). Other household-level research has been conducted on the impact of conflict on particular assets, such as land (Ansoms, 2006, Brück and Schindler, 2006) and cattle (Verpoorten, 2005). Drawing a general conclusion, Stewart and FitzGerald (2001) find that during violent conflict "average levels of entitlement of all kinds are likely to decline" (p. 18).

Besides the econometric-based household literature on conflict, there is another body of empirical studies that focuses on livelihoods in conflict-affected countries. Cross-cutting several social science disciplines, livelihood studies mainly rely on qualitative research techniques. In a review of livelihood studies in conflict-affected settings, Holland et al. (2002) find three topics prevailing: Malnutrition and the mortality of children, famine as a deliberate strategy of war, and migration. Research focusing on the topic of migration includes Young's (2006) study on Darfur, where the conflict impeded migration

[3] See Binzel and Brück (2007) and Justino (2006) for a detailed review of the household-level literature on conflict.

and, hence, remittances, depriving the local population of an important income source. Similarly, Ogden (2000) shows in her study on Kosovo that households without family members abroad were the most vulnerable to food insecurity in the 1990s, because they did not receive remittances. On the other hand, Clark (2006) argues that conflict also brought new opportunities for Congolese youngsters in refugee settlements, who increased their influence on decision-making at the household and community level. However, given their reliance on qualitative research methods, findings from livelihood studies are often only representative for their particular research area. As a result, it is difficult to derive general conclusions from this field of research.

2.3 Literature on widows of conflict

A wide range of factors can lead to widowhood: Age difference between spouses, longer life expectancies of women in most parts of the world, a husband's untimely and sudden death due to an accident or a health shock, and a husband's violent death during conflict. Furthermore, there are "false widows" (Roussou, 1987: 38f.), whose husbands disappeared during conflict, with an unknown fate. Finally, there are "de facto widows" (Chant, 1997:12ff.), whose husbands live permanently apart from them, for example, as a result of a long-term migration or prison sentence. The focus of this paper is on widows of mass violent conflict. More specifically, households that are either headed by, or simply include, widows are considered (see section 4.3 below). We assume that those living as a head of a household face more challenges in reconstructing their livelihood.

A challenge for the analysis of widows of conflict is that they may arrange to remarry quickly in order to protect their livelihood. Also, widows may be constantly moving among different households of relatives and are therefore difficult to identify from survey data (United Nations 2001: 4). Furthermore, it is acknowledged that not all widows in a given post-conflict setting have lost their husband because of a violent death.

There are two branches of literature that concern widows of mass violent conflict: First, an academic literature, and second, empirical case studies and reports from policy-oriented organizations operating in conflict settings. Academic studies on widows mostly have their origin in the social sciences; to our knowledge, no economic studies have addressed widows of conflict so far.[4] In general, there are surprisingly few studies that specifically address the situations of widows in conflict settings. While much research has been conducted on the gendered effects of violent conflict, widows are only mentioned marginally, if at all (e.g., Afshar and Eade, 2004, Koen, 2006, Pampell Conaway, 2006, Ridd and Callaway, 1987). For example, in her book on women-headed households in developing countries, Chant (1997) only dedicates one paragraph to widowhood as a possible cause for female

[4] Economic research has been conducted on widows in Western societies, thus implicitly assuming a peacetime environment. Widowhood is typically conceived as a feature of aging societies. Common topics of this literature are widow's pension, state welfare, and life insurance (Brien, et al., 2004, Fitzgerald, 1989, McGarry and Schoeni, 2005, Skevik, 2004). A general finding of this literature is that widows in Western societies are often vulnerable to poverty (Hurd and Wise, 1991 and 1989, McDonald, el al., 2000, Weir and Willis, 2000).

headship. An exception is Turshen's (2001) study on sexual violence against women in violent conflicts. She finds Rwandan widows in the post-genocide environment to be very vulnerable to extortion and expropriation of their husbands' land. However, a widow has more bargaining power to claim her land if she is the mother of a son and can show her ability to farm. In this case a widow may claim custodianship of her son's inheritance until he reaches adult age (ibid.: 66).

In contrast, there is a large body of empirical case studies that address the role and fate of women during wartime and the reconstruction period. Many of these studies acknowledge that widows are not only a large-scale phenomenon in post-conflict settings, but that they are also particularly vulnerable to poverty (e.g., United Nations 2001: 4f.). Although few of these studies focus exclusively on widows, most of them allow considerable room to describe the specific challenges facing widows. Studies in this field can be grouped into two subcategories: On one hand, there are qualitative case studies that provide in-depth analyses of specific areas. Typically, these studies are based on extensive and original testimonies of victims. For instance, Newbury and Baldwin (2000) describe the challenges faced by widows of the Rwandan genocide in accessing land. Nowrojee (1996) points out that Rwandan widows in the post-genocide period are subject to discrimination in various regards, which significantly reduces their living standard as compared to other households. On the other hand, there is a variety of reports that draw general conclusions from a range of case studies on the impact of war on women and widows and formulate implications for policy interventions (El-Bushra, 2003b, Lindsey, undated, Rehn and Sirleaf, 2002, United Nations 2001, United Nations 2002, WCRWC 1997). To conclude, it seems that the policy literature on widows of conflict is far ahead of academic research in this respect.

3. Gaps in the literature and research questions

First, even though the micro-level literature on conflict focuses on the household as a unit of analysis, not much is known about how large-scale violent conflict affects household structure. It has been criticized that the household is often considered as a black box in the literature in peacetime (Wilk, 1990: 323f.); this applies even more to conflict settings. For example, while there is ample evidence from qualitative empirical case studies that gender roles within the household may change as a result of conflict this topic has not been analyzed systematically. This leads us to the following research questions: How does violent conflict affect the composition, function, and structure of households? How do gender roles and tasks of men and women within the household change as a result of violent conflict?

Second, it is not known in detail how individual households actually cope with violent conflict – particularly those households which are mostly affected by conflict. More specifically, very little quantitative research has been conducted on how households move between various income-generating activities as a response to different economic environments, and to protect their livelihoods. Of the few existing studies, Brück (2004) provides insight into the activity choices of farm households

in post-war Mozambique, which operate in an uncertain environment. Verpoorten (2005) shows how coping strategies of rural households in Rwanda changed during the genocide: While she finds that cattle sales were limited during times of peace, the sale of cattle increased enormously during violent conflict as a result of fear of raiding, need for food, and the migration of cattle-owning households. Hence the second research question asks: What are the coping strategies of conflict-affected households? Furthermore, as has been proposed by Justino (2006: 13f.), this question should link in with more detailed questions regarding the vulnerability of these households in terms of poverty, the role of assets in their coping strategies, and their capabilities to use choice-based, versus forced, strategies.

A third gap in the household-level literature on conflict is an analysis concerning the impact of conflict on groups of households. Groups have been a common topic in explaining the causes and motives of conflict, as mentioned in section 2.2. Most prominently, the concept of horizontal inequality has been employed to measure the relative share in entitlements between groups, classified by social class, ethnicity, religion and other cultural characteristics (Stewart, 1998). However, violent conflict affects households in different ways, as conflict may not only lead to economic, social and political disruption but may also foster new economic activities, such as military industry and foreign aid (Cramer, 1997, Keen, 2001). Clearly, violent conflict makes some households worse-off and others better-off, thereby affecting households' ability to reconstruct their livelihoods in the post-conflict period. So far, only a few studies have analyzed the impact of conflict on groups systematically. Some exceptions include the study on the differentiation of victims and perpetrators in the Rwandan genocide (Verwimp, 2003) and child soldiers (Blattman, 2006). The research questions addressing this gap are: How do groups of households cope with conflict? In how far do common features of group members determine households' coping strategies?

4. A conceptual framework for the analysis

The gaps are addressed in the following three sections. Each section first provides conceptual notes and then illustrates the proposed matters to widows as one example of conflict-affected households.

4.1 Household structure and intra-household issues

This section analyzes three channels through which mass violent conflict affects households, namely household boundaries, household activities, and intra-household relations and gender roles.

While the household is a flexible construct, as has been shown above, its definition and function are even more fluid during conflict. Household *boundaries* may become permeable during conflict as members may die, due both to acts of violence and indirect casualties, also called "excess death." While usually more men die of violence, it is commonly assumed that more children and women die as a result of indirect effects of violent conflict, including deteriorating supplies of food and health care and the loss of livelihoods. Furthermore, male adults may be mobilized for war, while in some

conflicts minors are abducted for service in militia groups. In general, the ratio of male to female household members is likely to decrease. Also, households may face the temporary or permanent separation of members due to displacement. New members may be integrated into the household, for instance orphaned or widowed individuals who may or may not be relatives. As a result, the overlapping of household membership and kinship – a common assumption in the literature – may not necessarily be the case. The integration of new members may lead to new constellations of households that go beyond the socially recognized norm of a given society in times of peace. For example, separated and orphaned children or individuals stranded in a refugee camp may form a household (Clark, 2006). Hence, the formation and dissolution of households during violent conflict is no longer primarily determined by life cycle events, such as birth, leaving the parental home, marriage, birth of children, departure of the children from home, death of a partner, and, simply, death (Willekens, 1988: 95).

Violent conflict also has an impact on households' *activities*, most importantly constraining households in earning a livelihood. Direct and indirect casualties affect a household's membership and potentially increase the ratio of net producers to net consumers in the household (Chayanov, 1966 [1925]). The surviving household members may be constrained in their ability to work because of injuries, psychological trauma after the experience of violence, the loss of family members, and malnutrition. Tasks that require individuals to move away from the household compound, such as water fetching from a distant well or cultivating fields outside the village, may be kept to a minimum because an insecure environment poses a threat to individuals. Also, the educational system may be interrupted during and after the conflict, thus obstructing children from acquiring human capital (Shemyakina, 2006). Other household activities which may no longer be performed as a consequence of the formation of new households in a conflict-setting are reproduction and inheritance. This may be the case if newly formed households consist of members who are not related through kinship or marriage, or are of the same sex. However, violent conflict may also stimulate new activities. For example, household members who conducted separate income-earning activities in times of peace may pool their resources and jointly generate an income in a conflict setting. Their motivation may change as a result of an insecure environment, which may have few insurance options and, therefore, expose individual income-generating activities to high risk.

Finally, *intra-household relations* and *gender roles* are affected by conflict. The allocation of tasks within the household may change across genders. For example, women may perform productive activities that are confined to men, during times of peace. Women's involvement in productive activities is in turn likely to increase women's decision-making power inside the household. Then again, depending on the type of conflict, women's liberty of action may be restricted during conflict, especially when women are targeted, as a deliberate war strategy intended to dishonor the enemy conflict party (Ridd, 1987: 3). In general, changes in gender roles have the largest impact when women become the head of a household. In post-war settings, female-headed households were found

to reach up 30 percent and more of all households (El-Bushra, 2003b: 18, Gervais, 2004: 304), which is a significant number. Besides gender, the roles and tasks of children and the elderly may also be affected by conflict, e.g. if labor input is needed to sustain the household's livelihood. Consequently, the allocation of income and resources within the household may be different in a conflict setting. Assuming that the household lives closer to the survival threshold, income and resources could be either more or less equally distributed among household members. Some studies caution that gender roles are only modified temporarily for the duration of conflict, but often return to the pre-conflict norm when conflict ends (Ridd and Callaway, 1987: 3f.). For these reasons, both analyzing and identifying households from the survey data is challenging as household boundaries, activities, and roles within the household may change.

War widows may face particular constraints as a consequence of their martial status and gender. While all households in a conflict setting may reorganize membership as a strategy to generate income (especially in labor-intensive agriculture), widows may adopt this strategy to cope with societal pressure against single women. Widows may reconfigure their household, form new ones, become widow-headed, take in orphans or other widows, or join the households of relatives. As a result, household membership in a conflict setting may not overlap with kinship, thus posing difficulties for widows to claim their rights to their husband's assets in societies which hand inheritance along the patriliny. Because of their sex, widows are more vulnerable to attacks and sexual violence in both the conflict and post-conflict period than men (Csete and Kippenberg, 2002, El-Bushra, 2003a). Widows are more likely to co-reside with their household members for security reasons, which may not be common during times of peace. The impact of conflict-induced changes in gender roles, in addition to the allocation of resources, income, and decision-making power on widows, depends on the household constellation they live in. For example, widows who become heads of households or who live in female-headed households may become the principle caretaker of other household members, and therefore assume responsibilities in decision-making and productive tasks (El-Bushra and Piza-Lopez, 1994: 181). In contrast, it is conceivable that widows lose decision-making power if there are working age male household members.

4.2 Coping strategies of households in conflict

Mass violent conflict affects the production inputs and, as a result, the household's choice of activities to earn a livelihood. Assuming a typical rural household, production inputs necessary to generate a farm income consist of labor endowments, land, capital endowments, and farm production technology (e.g., Singh, et al., 1986). This section considers each of these farm production inputs subsequently.

The channels and intensity of impact may range across the duration of conflict, its regional diffusion, and the degree of participation and mobilization. Most importantly, the impact on a particular household depends on the household's involvement in conflict (e.g. if the household is a passive unit that aims at avoiding conflict, or if its members actively engage in conflict and take advantage of the

opportunity to loot, extort, and appropriate). This in turn depends on the causes and motives of conflict, e.g. if some households are specifically targeted because of their religion, ethnic affiliation, or social class. Similarly, violent conflict has a larger adverse impact on poor households, as they may be more vulnerable to shocks and have fewer coping strategies available than relatively wealthier households (Binzel and Brück, 2007).

The previous section has shown how conflict may reduce a household's *labor endowments* because of direct and indirect war casualties.

Landmines confine a household from the use of its *land endowments*. Furthermore, the allocation of customary use rights over land may be interrupted if local institutions cease to exist (Moser and McIlwaine, 1999: 208). This in turn renders marginalized households vulnerable to loosing their access to land. While displaced households may not have land available for cultivation in their new environment, and therefore may not pursue agricultural production, the return of long-term refugees may create additional pressure on land (Ansoms, 2006). Households that lack access to land are likely to face constraints in the credit market as they lack collateral securities. Finally, farm households may also refrain from cultivating their fields since this may attract looters and endanger the security of household members.

Looting of property, pillage, and the destruction of existing *capital,* are typical features of mass violent conflict, as individual property rights over assets may no longer be enforced. For example, the number of cattle decreased significantly during the civil war in Mozambique (Brück, 2001a: 66), and also during the Rwandan civil war and genocide (McKay and Loveridge, 2005: 5). In addition, an insecure environment and the unpredictability of the course of conflict may reduce the household's incentive to invest. Lastly, markets for agricultural inputs, such as tools, seeds, and fertilizers, may be interrupted, thus rendering farm production less efficient. However, while on average the capital endowments per household are likely to decrease sharply during conflict, some households are certainly in a position to take advantage of the institutional breakdown during conflict and appropriate new assets.

As a result of physical insecurity to humans and the interruption of local markets, a household may decide to employ different income-generating strategies to cope with the conflict shock. For example, a household may retreat from the market and shift towards subsistence production (McKay and Loveridge, 2005) or may sell some of its productive assets for fear of looting (Verpoorten, 2005). A change in income-generating strategies may require a different *production technology*, i.e. a distinct set of skills and abilities. Also, societies experiencing violent conflict face a breakdown of social cohesion, trust and traditional social protection mechanisms (Moser and McIlwaine, 1999: 207f.), which may impede risk sharing, the formation of work-sharing groups, or communication networks. The combined impact of mass violent conflict on each of the production factors may lead to falling output, thus resulting in food shortages, which again poses a threat to the continuity of the household as a unit. From this it follows that an analysis of households' coping strategies should assess the

impact of conflict on all production inputs and assets in order to determine if a coping strategy was choice-based or forced by the circumstances.

As mentioned in section 4.1 above, widows are affected by shortages in *labor endowments*. This is particularly true if working age males are absent; as a result, widows lack their working and income-earning power (El-Bushra and Piza-Lopez, 1994: 181). Also, widows may face cultural taboos and discriminatory customary laws to own *land* (WCRWC 1997: 6), the most important physical endowment for a rural household. For instance, widows are at risk of losing the rights of their deceased husband's endowments to the husband's kin-group. A widow's position against claims from relatives is even weaker if they are childless, lost their children during conflict, or were victims of rape and so do not continue their husband's line. Similar to other land-constrained households, widows are also likely to be constrained in their access to credit (Nowrojee, 1996, WCRWC 2000: 9). Additionally, widows may face difficulties to access their husband's *capital endowments.* This particularly poses a problem if inheritance is passed through the male line, thereby making marriage the most important channel for women to access assets. As Turshen states, "any control women have over land and income depends on their personal relationships with individual men" (Turshen, 2001: 66). There is evidence that widows are disadvantaged in inheriting land and other productive assets even in peacetime in developing countries (Deininger and Castagnini, 2004, Parpart, 2000). Widows may also face constraints in earning a livelihood. Some (typical for female) income-generating activities, such as petty trade, may be impossible during conflict because of threats to their security or interrupted markets. Also, cultural taboos may inhibit women to perform particular productive tasks; for instance, Gervais (2004: 307) reports a taboo for women to engage in the construction of housing in Rwanda. While the absence of men obliges widows to assume new responsibilities, they may be ill-prepared and lack the *production technology* to shift to new income-generating strategies (Csete and Kippenberg, 2002, Tercier Holst-Roness, 2006, WCRWC 2000). Furthermore, widow-headed households may face difficulties to access output markets in societies where markets are traditionally a male-dominated domain (El-Bushra, 2003b). Widows may also be marginalized socially as they are a symbol of disorder, and may be feared of destructing existing marriages (Chant, 1997: 63, Nowrojee, 1996). As a consequence, widows may be excluded from risk-sharing networks, which increases their vulnerability to poverty and food shortages.

4.3 Group behavior in conflict

Groups can be classified along various dimensions. First, the changeability of common features that identify an individual as a member of a group may range between the extremes of fixed features, such as place of birth, and highly adaptable features, such as membership in a union.[5] Second, common features may visibly and univocally distinguish individuals of various groups, while on the other extreme, features may only be known to the members themselves. Examples for the former are skin

[5] A similar definition is employed to define ethnicity (e.g., Bates 1999, Van Hoyweghen and Vlassenroot, 2000).

color or sex, while the latter may be represented by political attitude. Third, the degree of individuals' perception to share common features with other individuals may range considerably. On one hand, individuals sharing common features may have no sense of belonging. On the other hand, individuals may have a strong sense of sharing common features and interests with each other and strongly identify with the group. This dimension correlates with varying degrees of group organization, ranging from no organization at all, such as all males in a given society, to highly active lobby groups.

These three dimensions combine to create various types of groups. According to this definition, members of one household would also form a group, sharing the common feature of co-residence. However, the household, and not the individual, is considered as the unit of analysis, given that individual-level data on consumption and assets is not available. As a result, only *groups of households* are considered; it is assumed that one or more household members carry a feature that marks the household, as a whole, as member of a particular group.

Such a definition of the group leads to considering how mass violent conflict affects a number of households that are alike in some regards, but which are not necessarily organized. As Keen (2001) pointed out, households perform differently in the post-conflict period – hence there are winners and losers when conflict is over. Factors that contribute to these differential influences include households' involvement in conflict as active or passive agents,[6] their status as perpetrators or victims, and households' exposure to attacks, such as their ethnic, religious, regional or political affiliation and the location of residence. An interesting topic of research following out of this could be a comparison of within-group effects of conflict with between-group effects intended to determine the impacts of certain group features. Further research could analyze if and to what degree common features of a group determine similar coping strategies of households.

Households that that include one or more widows of conflict are considered one example of a conflict-affected group. Considering the above-mentioned definition, widowhood is a fixed feature at least in the short term. Although not directly visible, the marital status of individuals is very likely to be known to community members. It is assumed that widows have a perception of the fate of other widows, while their involvement in a common interest group depends on the particular setting. There is evidence from very active widows organizations (Rehn and Sirleaf, 2002: 77). However, widows of conflict are also a diverse group: They may differ widely in age, the number of children, and in their social position, within both the household and the community. Similarly, their experience of conflict may be very different, depending on their social class (El-Bushra, 2003b: 24). Also, the way their husband died – e.g., as a civil casualty or killed in combat – may affect widows' social standing in the post-conflict period. The common feature is their marital status as widows, which is an important determinant for their material circumstances and their moral standing within the society (Chant, 1997:

[6] While participation in conflict is carried out at the individual level, it is assumed that the decision regarding which household members participate in conflict in what ways is made at the household level, taking consumption, production and risk for all household members into consideration.

11). As mentioned earlier widows face even more challenges if they become heads of household. For example, female-headed households have been identified to be potentially vulnerable to chronic poverty in peacetime in many developing countries (Chronic Poverty Research Centre 2004: chapter 2), which is even more common in a conflict environment.

In order to determine the impact of widowhood, several different constellations of households could be compared: First, male-headed households that include widows of conflict as members versus male-headed households without widows; second, female-headed households that include widows (but not as heads of households) versus widow-headed households; third, widow-headed households that also include working age male members versus widow-headed households without adult males; and fourth, male-headed households without widows versus widow-headed households without adult male members. We hypothesize that the fourth case comparison will display the largest differences in terms of asset endowments and choice of coping strategies, because it includes the combined effects of widowhood, female-headedness and adult male members. Also, the third case comparison may expose a large effect.

5. Conclusions

Several transmission channels of mass violent conflict on the household have been pointed out, which affect both the household as a unit and its choice of strategies for coping with conflict. This underlines the need to analyze the impact of conflict at the household level. Furthermore, the concept of group proposed in this paper may be used to find out if some common features determine the choice of coping strategies of some groups of households; this may indicate the existence of a poverty trap. Determining the impact of conflict empirically poses several challenges – for instance, grasping the local concept of the household or identifying important groups of households that are affected by conflict in a common way. This may call for a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods.

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