

## **Land Policies and Violent Conflict: Towards Addressing the Root Causes<sup>1</sup>**

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In every society access to land provides both a home and possibilities for production, first in terms of mere subsistence and beyond in terms of generating surplus. Land is precious and central to the livelihood processes of any society, so it is not surprising that it has often figured as the object of conflict. What is surprising is that with people's livelihood in most "fragile states" so dependent on agricultural sources of income, there is not more focus on both this sector and on land in recent debates about, and plans for, managing conflict and promoting development in "fragile states". There is a complex relationship between land and conflict. Seldom is a violent conflict uniquely about land, but access to land and disputes over land rights have loomed large in almost every episode of prolonged violence and war.

Past attempts to predict violence based on prevalent land tenure systems have led nowhere since the extent to which land becomes an object of violent conflict is determined by political and institutional factors that cut across land tenure regimes. In this brief paper I draw on some of the emerging insights of research carried out at the Crisis States Research Centre to look at the varied ways in which land becomes an object of conflict and why violent conflict has been avoided in some countries even as they experience deep-rooted and persistent rural poverty.

### **Rural Populations in Low-Productivity Agriculture**

In countries where a significant proportion of people still depend on income (or subsistence) from agriculture (land cultivation and livestock husbandry) for their survival, the way the land is managed, patterns of access to land and water, as well as investment in making the land and people on it more productive, are central to the conditions in which conflict is managed. We know that the major revolutionary upheavals of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Bolshevik, Chinese and Vietnamese revolutions) were all dependent for their success on marrying ideological projects of socialism with peasant hunger for secure access to land and they heavily drew on poor peasants to fill the ranks of their armed forces. Despite the penchant to see the wars that have so disrupted the lives of people in many African countries over the past two decades as "new wars" (Kaldor, Ignatieff, Duffield), or wars motivated by "greed" (Collier), in one way or another land has usually figured prominently in the logic of these violent confrontations.

In Table 1, I take as an example four countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, two of which – the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Rwanda – have been sites of major episodes of violent conflict, and two -Tanzania and Zambia- where conflicts have been managed peacefully over long periods of time. In all four countries the majority of the population

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<sup>1</sup> This is a first draft and not to be cited without the author's permission. However, comments and criticism are welcome.

as well as the majority of the economically active population depend primarily for their income on agriculture. This is so in the mineral rich countries of the DRC and Zambia, as well as well as in the other two countries where mineral wealth (at least until recently) has not figured prominently in the economy. In fact, this pattern of dependence on agriculture and husbandry is prevalent across most of Sub-Saharan Africa. The structural transformation of these countries in terms of sources of livelihood has changed at a snail's pace since independence. The most extreme case is Rwanda where some 89% of the population still depend on agriculture (often subsistence farming) for their survival, just slightly fewer than in 1960.

**Table 1: Changing Structure of Employment five African countries(percent)**

	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
<b>Tanzania</b>						
Agricultural population*	91.6	88.7	84.0	82.5	78.2	73.0
Non-agricultural population	8.4	11.3	16.0	17.5	21.8	27.0
Agriculture as % of Total Economically active**	92.6	90.1	85.8	84.4	80.4	75.7
<b>Zambia</b>						
Agricultural population	84.6	79.0	75.9	74.4	69.2	63.2
Non-agricultural population	15.4	21.0	24.1	25.6	30.8	36.8
Agriculture as % of Total Economically active	84.6	79.0	75.9	74.4	69.2	63.2
<b>DRC</b>						
Agricultural population	79.3	75.5	71.6	67.8	63.2	58.3
Non-agricultural population	20.7	24.5	28.4	32.2	36.8	41.7
Agriculture as % of Total Economically active	79.3	75.4	71.6	67.8	63.2	58.3
<b>Rwanda</b>						
Agricultural population	94.7	93.6	92.8	91.8	90.6	88.9
Non-agricultural population	5.3	6.4	7.2	8.2	9.4	11.1
Agriculture as % of Total Economically active	94.7	93.6	92.7	91.8	90.6	89.0

Source: UNFAO, Popstat, 2007

\* The percentage of the population who depend on income from agriculture for more than 50% of income

\*\* The percentage of economically active workforce that depends on income from agriculture

What is more, these agricultural systems have experienced only very gradual improvement in terms of land productivity, whether observed in their principle staple crop or in their principal export crop. In the staple crop of maize, the African cases saw a slight improvement in yields per hectare over the past forty years, except for Rwanda where they have declined. However, none of these countries has achieved anything like the productivity rises in Asia, as illustrated for staple crop production in Chart 1 by the exceptional performance of China. Looking at coffee, the principle commercial crop cultivated for export, productivity per hectare has also remained extremely low, in contrast to the magnitude of gains in Asia, this time illustrated by Vietnam (Chart 2). Recent achievements in Rwanda are an exception and I will return to this later.

Chart 1

Maize Productivity 1960 to 2006

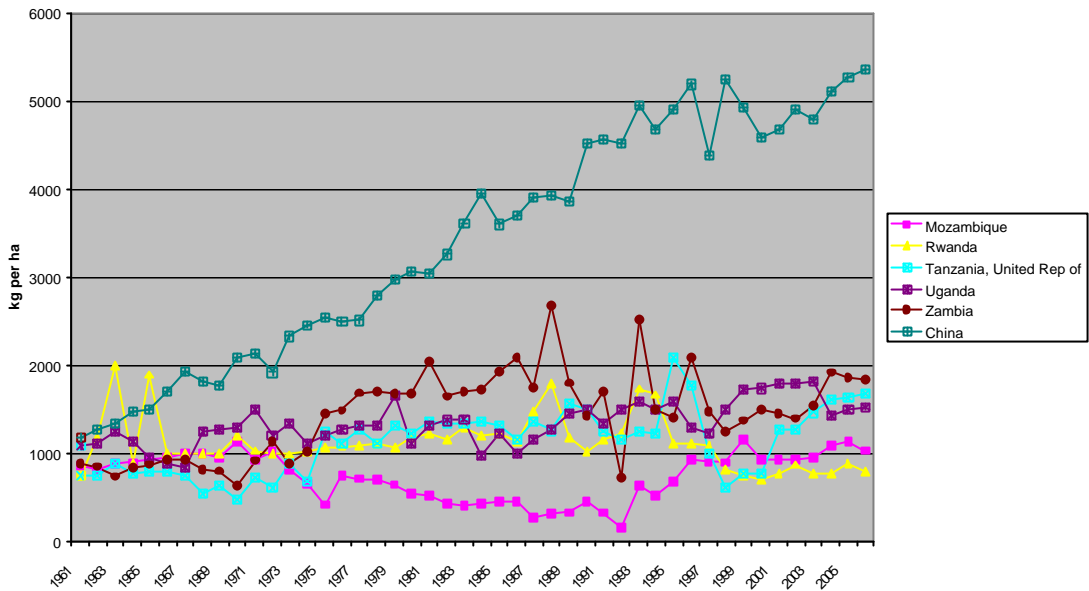
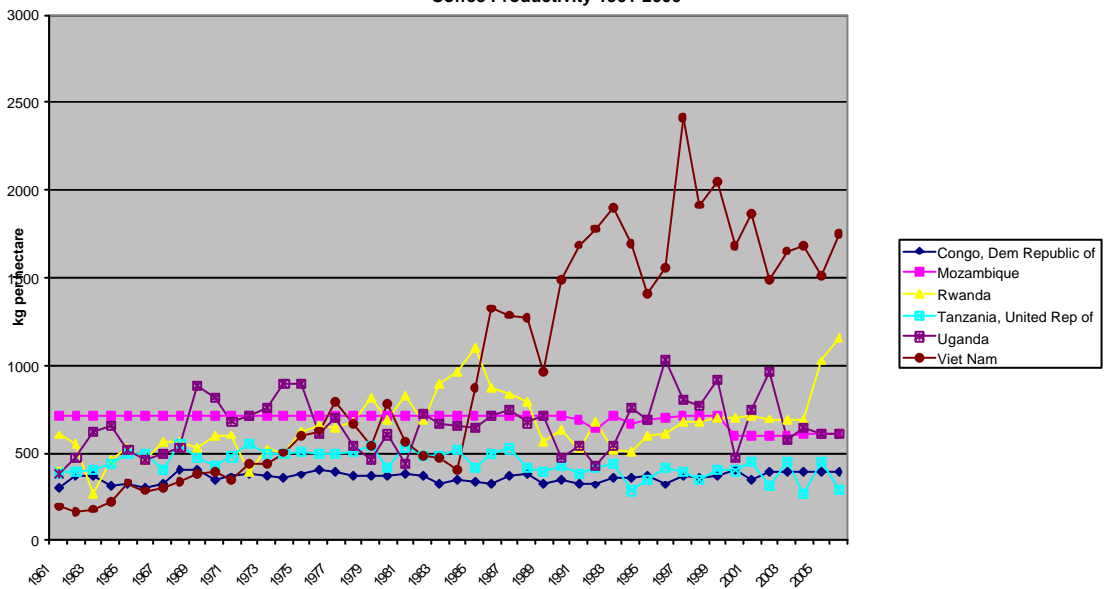


Chart 2

Coffee Productivity 1961-2006



At the root of state fragility in Africa are economies where the majority of people eek out subsistence in low-productivity agricultural systems. These conditions give rise to desperate populations that live on the edge of subsistence. Such rural societies are

particularly vulnerable to shocks. These can take the form of a sharp fall in an agricultural commodity price, as happened with coffee prices in Rwanda just before civil war began. Or they can come as natural calamities like drought that has crippled Zimbabwe, or a volcanic eruption, as in Goma in the DRC or Mt Pinatubo on Luzon in the Philippines. Such shocks can also take the form of a sudden influx of refugees or internally displaced people into an area of high population density and low agricultural productivity, like in the Eastern Congo.

Land hunger, poverty, vulnerability to shocks and state neglect of agricultural and rural development create rural populations (or pockets of the population) susceptible to mobilisation by those who would organise violence. They are potential breeding grounds for violence, whether it is organised by challengers to state authority or even by the state itself. This latter point is seldom discussed in recent literature, but it is worth remembering that the earliest modern advocates of redistributive land reform in the immediate aftermath of World War II were as worried about land inequality and rural poverty serving as a basis of social support for fascist movements launched *within* the state as they were about them creating the conditions for Communist-led armed movements bent on seizing state authority.<sup>2</sup>

However, rural poverty, low productivity in agriculture and the absence of structural transformation in the economy do not in themselves give rise to violent conflict. Long term stability in countries like Tanzania and Zambia illustrate this point.

### **Property rights, ethnicity and violence by non-state and state actors**

When access to land is associated with ethnicity, the struggle over land rights can become particularly violent, whether violence is unleashed by non-state challengers to state authority or by the state itself. This is partly related to what Albert Hirschman(\*\*) referred to as “divisible” and “indivisible” conflict. Conflicts over land that are drawn in ethnic terms tend to “all or nothing” solutions where there is little room for negotiated settlements and thus the object of conflict, land, is seen as indivisible. Episodes of ethnic cleansing from the Balkans, to Eastern Indonesia and the Eastern DRC, all took on this character. Elizabeth Wood(\*\*) in her comparative study of conflict over land in South Africa and El Salvador looked at the challenge of transforming conflicts cast in “indivisible” terms to ones defined in “divisible” terms and thus capable of resolution through negotiation. All sorts of “horizontal inequalities” (Stewart, \*), when land, or incomes or access to social goods like health services or education are determined by ethnic, religious or language group, tend to be much more prone to violence than “vertical inequalities”, which are hierarchical distributional issues, more capable of resolution through negotiation and reform.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See the writings of Ladejinsky(\*\*) and see Putzel (1992, chapter \*).

<sup>3</sup> Of course, vertical distributional issues, such as land inequality in the non-Muslim regions of the Philippines can be cast in “indivisible terms” on the basis of ideology, as successive Communist organisations in the Philippines have done over the years promoting conflict over land in terms of “class warfare”. This has been important in distinguishing what I have elsewhere called the “revolutionary” approach to redistributive agrarian reform, from the “liberal approach” historically devised to insulate the state from the challenge of armed Communist movements (Putzel, 1992).

In many fragile states, access to land or security on the land, even for subsistence farmers, depends on an authority other than the state. This is a situation of “institutional multiplicity”, where the state’s rules governing social, economic or political activities within society compete with the rules derived from alternative sources of authority. This can happen when traditional authorities, related to tribe or language group, effectively control access to land, or equally when the rules of religious authorities, regional power brokers, warlords, criminal syndicates, or armed political organisations trump the rules of the state in governing behaviour within society. When such authorities are bent on unleashing violence against the state they are often in a powerful position to mobilise the rural poor to that end. This is due to both their coercive leverage over people, based on their authority to determine access to the means of livelihoods, and their persuasive power within a population, based on their role in ensuring the security of livelihoods. These patterns of institutional multiplicity have particularly characterised conflict, including struggles over land, that have beset Congo/Zaire since independence, briefly discussed here.

Population beset by land hunger and insecurity can also be mobilised in the pursuit of violence by state authorities. Recruitment to paramilitary forces that back the state against insurgent groups to some extent draws on the same social base as the insurgents themselves. This can be seen in the paramilitary forces mobilised by the state in Colombia and the Philippines over the past half century (Gutierrez \*\*, Putzel \*\*). This can take on a particularly virulent character when the state mobilises on the basis of ethnicity – targeting a group within its own population, often on the basis of their ethnic origins or religious persuasion, sometimes explicitly claiming them to be “outsiders” or somehow responsible for the plight of the rural poor majority. This also played a role in the crippled Mobutu’s state’s efforts to retain its power in Zaire/DRC in the 1980s and 1990s, as discussed below. The violence unleashed in the countryside in Indonesia on the eve of the seizure of power by the military in 1965 saw rural poor Muslims mobilised against so-called sympathisers of the Communist Party of Indonesia in these terms. But the extreme case was the Rwandan genocide of 1994 discussed here.

#### *Land, Ethnicity and Citizenship: Looking at the Wars in Zaire/DRC*

While one cannot argue that the wars of Zaire and the DRC were over land, land figured more prominently in the mobilisation of violence than is usually assumed.<sup>4</sup> Despite the expansive territory of the DRC, in the eastern part of the country pockets of high population densities on low productivity lands have also played a part in violent conflict. There, struggles over land have been intimately tied up with, and reflected by, debates over citizenship. An important dimension of on-going conflicts in the Kivus can be traced back to patterns entrenched in the colonial period where access to land was governed by “native authority”. The Banyarwanda population – those from the territory of what is now Rwanda who settled in Congolese territory even as early as colonial times – had no native authority of their own and thus no secure access to land. They were only “tolerated” on the land by a native authority (largely Hunde) that was not their own. Later some among

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<sup>4</sup> Vlassenroot et al.

them, with means, could purchase land, but the legitimacy of such contracts was never secure. Large scale violence broke out in the Kivu's just after independence in 1963-64, directed against Banyarwanda Congolese.

Despite the reputation of the Mobutu regime as the epitome of the “predatory” state (Evans, 1995, 45-47), during his first decade in power, the President presided over a period of significant state-building.<sup>5</sup> He attempted to overcome potential regionally and ethnically based challenges to central state authority by building a bureaucracy where appointments were detached from local origin, a centralised form of patronage, which he attempted to organise through his single party state. In 1972, after the massacre of some 200,000 Hutu in Burundi, there was a large movement of refugees into the Kivus, precipitating renewed violence against the Congolese Banyarwanda at the instigation of Hunde and other traditional authorities. This was the context in which Mobutu moved against tribal authorities with his 1972 Citizenship Decree recognising most of the Banyarwanda population as citizens of Zaire. In 1973, Mobutu's General Property Law nationalised all land, which also was seen as a measure to marginalize traditional authority. (Mamdani, 2001: 242-43).

However, while Mobutu promoted a few model farms as show-pieces for the international community, and while there was some expansion of plantation based agriculture, the agricultural sector and especially the vast expanses of subsistence farming received little attention from the Mobutu regime. When economic crisis set in during the late 1970s and deepened throughout the 1980s, there was a vast expansion of the informal economy and even the limited areas of export production in agriculture did not escape this trend. The period was marked by a decline in plantation agriculture and a sharp increase in smuggling of the most important export crop, coffee. By 1992 except for coffee, cocoa beans, and groundnuts, agricultural production was below production levels at independence. The vast majority of the “agricultural population” reported in Table 1, earned their living from subsistence farming (Leslie, 1993).

The failure of Mobutu to make any substantial progress in transforming the rural economy was one of the reasons he had to abandon his state-building project and actually engineered a shift in the patterns of patronage through which he was able remain in power. He abruptly moved from efforts to build a horizontal integration of elites, to rely on what Peemans (1997) called “networks of ethno-central penetration”. He attempted to maintain his power in the face of the decline of revenues that had funded the central state through promoting the multiplication of vertical networks based on ethnic and regional affiliation – reviving a tribalist logic within the state. It was at this time that he began to privilege his own ethnic group from Equateur in both administrative and military offices. Part of Mobutu's “about face” was directly evident in relation to patterns of land conflict. In 1982, in an effort to buy loyalty from traditional authorities, especially in the Kivus, he revoked the inclusive citizenship decree, reverting to the 1960 definition of citizenship, and thus rights to occupy and farm the land, as limited only to those who could trace their lineage in their territory to 1908. In the context of conflicts over

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<sup>5</sup> For detailed accounts of the state-building dimensions of the Mobutu regime, see Hesselbein (2007) and Putzel, Lindemann and Schouten (2008).

increasingly scarce land resources, “native” authorities in the Kivus took the revoked citizenship of the “non-native” Banyarwanda as justification for ethnic mobilisation, bloody persecution and exclusion of Banyarwanda from the land (De Villers 1998: 89). This decision on citizenship was reaffirmed as late as 1992, thus fuelling violent conflict over land in the era of multiparty politics the preceded the Congolese wars (Mutamba, 2003, 51ff).

The beginning of the end for Mobutu came when, under pressure from Western donors who sharply reduced foreign assistance, he introduced multiparty politics in 1990. During this period, problems of access to land, especially in the Kivus, were recast in tribalist terms. Local violence there escalated into full-scale warfare by 1993 opposing so-called “native” agriculturalists, particularly the Hunde against “non-native” Banyarwanda leading to thousands of dead and some 140,000 displaced people (Mathieu et al. 1997: 131ff.). With the massive influx of “refugees” on the heels of the Rwandan genocide in 1994, including the intact armed forces of the former Rwandan government, the FDLR, and the *interahamwe* militias that had perpetrated the genocide, eastern Congo was beset by large scale violence for control over land. Congolese populations of Tutsi origin became a target for both Hunde and other tribal groups who resented their socio-economic position and a target of the Hutu forces that had fled Rwanda. From 1996, the ethnic violence shifted to target the Tutsis of South Kivu – the Banyamulenge who had lived in the area for many decades. Laurent Kabila relied heavily on Banyarwanda forces that had emerged as self-defence groups when he successfully fought his way to power in 1996.<sup>6</sup>

These same patterns of conflict characterised the second Congolese war and conflict in the Eastern part of the DRC since the peace agreement of 2002. The persistence of institutional multiplicity and the association of access to land with ethnicity have fuelled conflicts in the Kivus right up to 2009. No basis of enduring peace can be found without a clear resolution of the citizenship question and strong state enforcement of universal laws over access to property rights. This also is necessary as a prerequisite for any sustained effort to increase productivity in agriculture in this country that remains primarily rural and needs to rely increasingly on agricultural production both for rural livelihoods and as a means to develop a manufacturing sector.

#### *A “Perfect Storm”: Land Dimensions of the Rwandan Genocide*

The association of access to land with ethnicity and consequent violent conflict is not limited to situations where the state is weak. Episodes of state-initiated violence have also been unleashed drawing at least in part on the association between ethnicity and access to land, as in Rwanda. The Rwandan genocide was not primarily a rural phenomenon, nor could it be claimed that the violence was unleashed primarily over issues of land conflict. However, land hunger played an indirect and a direct role in the 1994 genocidal violence

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<sup>6</sup> See Jackson’s (2006) on the ways in which ‘autochthony’ adopted by the non-Rwandophone population to denote “indigeneity” has served to mobilise grassroots violence against those labelled as “strangers” – a phenomenon which seems to be one of the sole bases of unity that national elites are promoting throughout the DRC’s territory.

perpetrated by those who had captured state power. High population density on low productivity land clearly formed a backdrop to the genocide in Rwanda as it reached the rural areas, though they were clearly not the proximate cause.<sup>7</sup> There, land politics were characterised by both horizontal inequalities between Hutu and Tutsi communities and agrarian class politics among the Hutu community.

The context in which ethnic politics was played out in Rwanda was one that saw extreme density of population on the land (an average of 275 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> by the early 1990s)<sup>8</sup> with almost no improvements in agricultural productivity as illustrated above.<sup>9</sup> Agricultural production was virtually stagnant throughout the 1980s, while population grew by 3% per year. The land tenure laws introduced at independence built on long traditions of equally dividing land among all descendants of a family leading to extreme parcelisation over time. Extensive agricultural expansion had reached lands of the steepest slopes and deforestation was extreme. By 1980, Rwanda could not produce more than 54% of its food requirements and the first of a series of intense famines beset the country in 1989. By that time, the regime was discussing plans of moving substantial parts of the population to less densely populated regions in neighbouring countries.<sup>10</sup>

While land holdings of rural poor Hutu families got smaller and smaller, holdings of wealthy Northern Hutu elites expanded with large lands accumulated by those close to the Hutu dominated regime pushing peasants into increasingly marginal uplands. It is estimated that by 1989 some 50% of cultivated land was on slopes of higher than 10 degrees.<sup>11</sup> Unemployment had reached almost 30%. The situation led to significant conflict *within* the Hutu community between the land poor peasants and the Hutu elite in power. Youth groups were mobilised among the rural poor in the south who engaged in episodes of violence against those associated with the regime. A collapse of world coffee prices radically reduced incomes. Acts of violence in the rural areas were concentrated in the worst food deficit areas. Gasana argues that it was to counter these actions that the regime mobilised its own youth groups, the *Interahamwe*, to defend members of the elite and leading politicians. This violence took on the character of growing class warfare. Generalised crisis was exacerbated by structural adjustment and pressure to introduce competitive party politics advocated by the donor community, as well as an attack launched by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), formed in exile among Tutsis long excluded from power, who took advantage of the weakened state of the regime in 1990 just as the country was hard hit by the collapse of coffee prices. Genocidal moves by Hutu extremists, at least in the rural areas, appear to have been, at least partially, motivated by an attempt to turn the ire of rebelling peasants away from the regime and towards the remaining Tutsi communities. This extremist mobilisation of a land poor and food poor peasant community by the *Interahamwe* and the Armed Forces of the regime likely contributed to the genocide of 1994.

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<sup>7</sup> Uvin points out that mobilisation for the genocide began in the cities and towns.

<sup>8</sup> Nohlen 1993: 584; In some areas density has reached 550 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> (Becker 1993: 114).

<sup>9</sup> This account draws on Hesselbein, Mutebi and Putzel, 2006.

<sup>10</sup> Becker 1993: 128

<sup>11</sup> Gasana, p. 28.



State authorities who came to power in the wake of the victory of the Rwanda Patriotic Front after the genocide in 1994 realise that no sustainable peace or prospect for development can occur without significant land reform and sharp increases in agricultural productivity. Rwanda's new land law is designed to address these issues (Government of Rwanda, \*). The state is undertaking a concerted effort to assist private entrepreneurs in investing in high value agricultural production and processing.<sup>12</sup>

### **When Land is Beyond the Jurisdiction of the State**

When the state's jurisdiction does not effectively reach throughout its statutory territory this may have little significance for stability and peace *if* the land is sparsely populated, with few possibilities for resource mobilization and is not contiguous with neighbouring countries rife with violent conflict. Historically, this was the case in middle income countries like Colombia<sup>13</sup> and the Philippines, but also in the least developed countries like Afghanistan. However, if any of these conditions change over time, then the absence of the state and its jurisdiction over land can lead to important sources of violent conflict.

#### *Middle Income Countries and Agrarian Conflict*

In Colombia, a failure to tackle agrarian inequalities through land reform due to intra-elite compromises that preserved oligarchic privileges on the land, gave rise to a trajectory that has seen forces promoting violent conflict become deeply rooted in territories beyond the purview of the state. Land outside of the effective jurisdiction of the state became home to ideologically driven rebel challengers to state authority in Colombia just as they did in the Philippines since independence in 1946. Over decades these radical movements have been able to point to state neglect of agriculture and to extreme inequality in the access to land rights and the means to make land productive, to enlist armed combatants to their cause. They have evolved their own alternative institutional systems that have underpinned and justified, with varying degrees of legitimacy in local populations, armed struggles against the state.

There is a further dynamic that can drive violent conflict in areas where the state for historical reasons has not established its territorial jurisdiction. When such lands become new sources of economic resource mobilization, as happened with the rise of the coca trade in Colombia, forces promoting violence can become deeply rooted territorially. Communist guerrillas, paramilitaries and drug barons have been able to sustain for decades their challenge to state authority (or often as is the case with paramilitary organisations, their alliances with state authority) by occupying such lands. This has occurred in Colombia, which is a middle-income country where agricultural incomes no longer figure prominently in the formal economy.

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<sup>12</sup> On-going research by Gabi Hesselbein of the CSRC is looking comparatively at the expansion of coffee production and the diversification of agricultural production and processing in Rwanda, the DRC, Zambia and Tanzania.

<sup>13</sup> For a detailed treatment of how land figures in the internecine violence of Colombia, see Gutierrez et al, 2007.

The larger point that is relevant here, for Africa and other regions of the developing world, is the way in which while the absence of the state's effective jurisdiction over land can appear to have no implications for conflict for decades, a change in demography, or the discovery of productive potential for licit or illicit purposes on such land, or a change in patterns of conflict in contiguous lands under another state authority, can give rise to, and sustain, forces promoting extremely violent challenges to the state.

### *Land Dimensions of the Conflict in Afghanistan*

Afghanistan, in a sense, reflects a combination of all these circumstances, where extremely low productivity lands nevertheless provide subsistence to the 67% of the population who depend on agriculture for their living.<sup>14</sup> Afghanistan has always been marked by institutional multiplicity in the terms described above, where authorities other than those of the state – determined by region, language group, religion and ethnicity – have governed access to land.<sup>15</sup> The command of local warlords over the land has given them both the coercive leverage and legitimacy among local populations ensuring both resources and combatants to engage in warfare among themselves, with those who command the seat of government at the centre and with foreign invading forces, as with those of first the Soviet Union and later the international coalition led by the United States.

The long episodes of violent conflict that have marked the history of Afghanistan have not been primarily conflicts over land. But land and control over land has figured in important ways in violent conflict over decades. The leftist government established in 1978 attempted to gain legitimacy by targeting big landlords, but as their regime tottered they tried to win back support by returning lands to the same. Even families that nominally received land in these reforms were not able to make it productive due to the violence that penetrated the rural areas by the late 1980s. Land reform was used in many cases as an opportunity to redistribute land between clans rather than from the land-rich to the land-poor (Giustozzi, 2009).

Later, in the war against Soviet occupation, new commanders gained authority at the expense of traditional leaders and landlords and used that authority in some instances to gain access over land, which became the basis of later conflicts after 2001 (Giustozzi, 2009). With large areas of the land beyond the jurisdiction of state authority, important sites of illicit poppy production have become deeply rooted in both the subsistence economy and the war economy that fuels continued conflict in the country.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The UNFAO (2007) data reported in Table 1 for four African countries, revealed that in similar terms the “agricultural population” of Afghanistan in the year 2000, stood at 67%.

<sup>15</sup> For a detailed discussion of the ebbs and flows of efforts to establish state authority in Afghanistan, see Giustozzi (2009).

<sup>16</sup> See Goodhand (2004) on the persistence of the parameters of war economy in Afghanistan.

## **Political insulation from violent conflict**

There is nothing determinant about the relationship between inequality and poverty associated with land or the failure to make it productive and the outbreak of violent conflict. As indicated above, these can create the conditions for the outbreak of violence but whether or not non-state or state actors tap this potential to mobilise rural populations in violent conflict is related to patterns of political organisation and institutional structures. This is clear in the two Sub-Saharan African countries that were highlighted in Table 1 – Tanzania and Zambia – where the agricultural population makes up a majority and where land productivity has hardly improved since independence in the early 1960s. Here we argue that it was the pattern of inclusive political organisation of the state, which consciously fought institutional multiplicity, that ensured peaceful management of conflict in both of these countries.

In other situations where developmental gains went much further than in Tanzania or Zambia, the state has used the dividends of development to “buy in” rival authorities, while maintaining an ethnic calculus at the heart of the state. This appears to have been accomplished in a relatively sustainable way in a rapidly developing country like Malaysia, but the dangers of this approach are highlighted in Kenya, where the introduction of competitive politics can be said to have renewed violence connected, at least in part, with access to land.

Of course, the most potent antidote to ensuring the peaceful management of conflict over land has been in countries that managed to invest in major productivity rises in agriculture and promote growth in the sector, while ensuring a relatively widespread share in the benefits of growth, and the expansion of manufacturing and service activities. In other words, development, even in situations of rising income inequality, has generally allowed the long-term peaceful management of conflict. Today’s developed countries achieved such patterns historically and, at least to date, this has characterised the developmental states of East Asia, from China, including Taiwan, to South Korea and Vietnam.

### *Political Organisation and Conflict Management in Tanzania and Zambia*

In Tanzania, despite the persistence of deeply rooted poverty, especially in the rural areas, where land productivity in agriculture has hardly increased since independence, the state has largely been able to manage conflict peacefully.<sup>17</sup> This too, despite the fact that Tanzania has been surrounded by countries experiencing extremely violent conflict and war and has as well hosted hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing conflicts and natural disasters in neighbouring countries.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> This section draws heavily on Lindemann and Putzel (forthcoming).

<sup>18</sup> Zanzibar which merged with Tanganyika in 1964 has been more volatile than the mainland and has experienced much more violent conflict (Kaya, 2004), marked by institutional multiplicity and a religious idiom in politics aggravated since the introduction of multiparty politics.

The reason why these conditions have not led to violence needs to be found primarily in the pattern of political organisation that has dominated the Tanzanian state since independence. From the earliest beginnings of the nationalist movement during the colonial period, there was a conscious effort to marginalise and subsume traditional authorities within the national political organisation (Omari, 1995). By the time the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) came to power at independence it had greatly reduced the influence of traditional authorities. TANU and its successor the Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) consistently worked to reduce the role of traditional authorities in the disposition of access to land and other economic resources.

The TANU/CCM controlled state pushed a politics of national integration, ensuring what Mobutu could not, in terms of the building of a horizontally integrated ruling party and bureaucracy, which while shunning multiparty politics nevertheless ensured a significant degree of internal democracy and participation (Dashwood and Pratt, 1999). Officials, teachers, party organisers and even secondary school children worked and studied in regions other than those where they were born (Hesselbein, Mutebi and Putzel, 2008). The state followed a practice begun by colonial authorities, which actively promoted Swahili as a common national language and the single ruling party established a presence throughout the territory, perhaps even more extensive than the state organisations themselves.

The Tanzanian state decided to nationalise all land in 1962 and this was more than a paper decree, thus challenging remaining vestiges of traditional authority (Hyden, 1980). It pushed a rather unsuccessful programme of land settlement schemes that had been proposed by the World Bank (Hyden, 1980, 71ff and Coulson, 1982, 45ff). It also launched a somewhat more successful land “improvement” programme to increase productivity and greatly expanded the cooperative movement to reach all parts of the territory with significant impact on the reduction of regional inequalities (Harnevik, 1993).

In 1967 the government adopted the Arusha Declaration, based on principles of “African socialism”, which emphasised public ownership, “self-reliance” and rural development. The government launched a villagisation scheme during the 1970s. The *ujamma* (literally: familyhood) scheme, aimed to create “communal village production units” (Hyden, 1980) and was directed against large landowners and towards achieving more equitable distribution. The compulsory villagisation policy was the “largest resettlement effort in the history of Africa” with about five millions rural Tanzanians being resettled (Hyden, 1980). Some have judged the ujaama scheme, if not an abject failure, at best to have had a neutral affect on agricultural production and productivity. But there is considerable evidence that not only did the programme provide significantly improved access to very basic social services for most rural Tanzanians, but it also played an important role in national integration (Klugman et al, 1999).

It is probably very likely that the peace in Tanzania was bought at a price, which actually pre-empted certain market reforms that potentially could have led to faster economic development. However, looked at in another way, the Tanzanian strategy succeeded in

consolidating the nation-state perhaps laying the basis for national unity that could manage future conflicts that might emerge with moves towards faster growth that otherwise could have led to aggravated violence.

Zambia's United Independence Party (UNIP) ruling party achieved something similar, though based far less on transforming the countryside.<sup>19</sup> Despite profound poverty it has escaped the kind of political violence that marked countries like the DRC (Burnell, 2005). Zambia was far more urbanised than most Sub-Saharan African countries, heavily dependent on mineral extraction. But during its formative years, the UNIP controlled state used establish an inclusive "elite bargain" that guaranteed reasonable pay for mineworkers and deployed rents in such a way as to ensure cheap food for urban dwellers by forcing agricultural producers to sell their products through state marketing boards often at below the international price (Pletcher, 2000)

Similarly to Tanzania, the shape of the Zambian state was such that traditional authorities were wholly marginalised. While little attention was given to agriculture alternative sources of employment were created in fast growing urban areas. As rent extraction was largely achieved through the mineral sector, land was not an object of conflict among elites. UNIP succeeded in becoming a genuinely national party by establishing a balance of representation of all ethnic groups and regions in the country. Nevertheless over the years it was more ridden by ethnic conflicts than the CCM in Tanzania, though the leadership consciously fought to oppose the organisation of politics on ethnic grounds. Perhaps the most important reason why UNIP was able to avoid large scale violent conflict was that ethnicity never became a principal means to secure access to land or other resources within the country.

Agricultural policy aimed to reduce the role of expatriate commercial farmers (Sandberg, 1990). Marketing boards, while often paying below international prices for produce, nevertheless gave small farmers a guaranteed price and access to transport and storage. Bates (1981) pointed out that this limited the expansion of large-scale farming and underpinned the maintenance of low land productivity, but this may well be one of the trade-offs that ensured peace over long periods of time. Not unlike Tanzania, poverty was equally spread across the countryside throughout the nation's territory.

#### *Buying in rival authorities: ethnic calculation, land and conflict*

Relative peace has been secured elsewhere in the developing world by buying in rival authorities to the state. In Malaysia the UMNO dominated ruling alliance bought in and marginalised traditional authorities. A consociational bargain between the dominant Malay and constructed identity, the bumiputra, or "sons of the soil", and the two other large Malaysia ethnic groups – Chinese and South Asian Malaysians, has ensured largely peaceful resolution of conflict since riots in 1969. But this sort of ethnic calculus keeps ethnicity alive. In times of shock, the state has opportunistically directed the animosity of the poor towards the Chinese minority. It insulates itself from criticism using guise of promoting the interests of the bumiputra. As long as the presides over long term

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<sup>19</sup> This account is based largely on DiJohn (forthcoming).

economic growth and improved life chances for all, it can contain and manage conflict – with no more than brief and relatively confined episodes of violence. But it is a precarious path to take in building a state.

This was shown most clearly in Kenya where a single ruling party bought peace through a kind of ethnic calculus. Elites of all the major ethnic groups were bought into the ruling “bargain”, even as there were perceptions at the base of society of Kikuyu privilege in access to land and the means to make it productive. The first signs of the re-emergence of violent conflict over land emerged with the introduction of multiparty politics. The recent violence that encompassed the country was very much connected to patterns of unequal access to land coloured by ethnicity.

### **Development Assistance in Fragile States: The Need to Bring Agriculture “Back In”**

Given that the violent conflict in various parts of the developing world has occurred very much in the context of primarily rural societies characterised by low productivity agriculture, it is surprising that debates about “conflict prevention” and the role of foreign assistance in fragile states has so far hardly focused on building capacity of states to manage the development of agriculture. Not only has the international aid community neglected issues of land rights, but there is a striking neglect of assistance to, or expertise in, anything directly related to productive activities in the fragile states, especially agriculture.

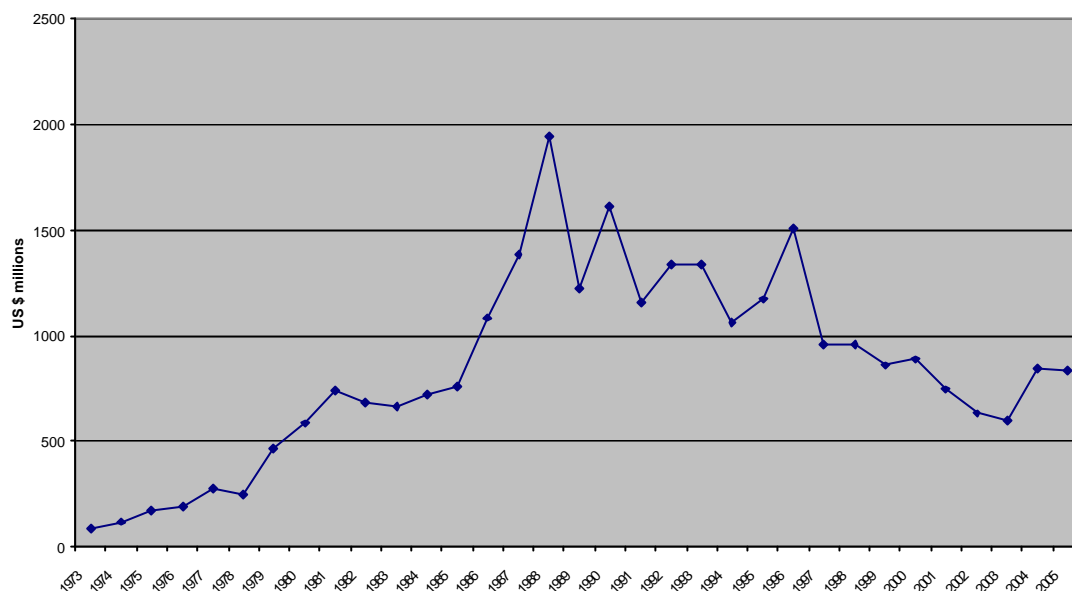
While poor performance in African agricultural systems was caused in no small part by governmental neglect throughout the region, interventions by the donor community have done little to improve things. The decade of structural adjustment in Sub-Saharan Africa following the Berg Report did not see any significant structural change in African economies, except perhaps the disappearance of embryonic efforts to establish manufacturing sectors. Bilateral aid to African agriculture has fallen by over 50% since its peak in 1990 (see Chart 3). The international community has moved away from promoting purely market based reforms on the continent, but it has not moved towards promoting the expansion of production.<sup>20</sup> This is starkly illustrated by the decline in foreign assistance to agriculture.

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<sup>20</sup> A good example of this lack of attention to agriculture is illustrated by the scant attention given in the UK government sponsored Africa Commission Report

Chart 3

Bilateral Aid to African Agriculture 1973-2005



In the DRC, as early as 1975, the World Bank criticised the government's lack of focus on agricultural investment and in 1982 the Bank assisted in implementing a recovery plan designed to increase food self-sufficiency, with plans for increased privatisation of the sector, liberalization of pricing policies, launching better marketing and extension services. While prices were liberalised and the private sector accorded a bigger role, successive donor programmes with the Ministry of Agriculture failed to bring about significant change. In fact, a report prepared for the World Bank (2006a: 10) noted that structural adjustment in agriculture dismantled state-run distribution and marketing systems precipitously before any alternatives had been developed, thus accelerating the collapse of the agricultural sector. There is a widespread perception even in a country like Zambia, that the decade of structural adjustment was ruinous for the rural population.<sup>21</sup>

In the DRC, the agricultural sector to this day is a subject of neglect. In interviews with all the leading political organisations that participated in the 2006 elections, every representative claimed that theirs was the "party of good government", but not one of these political formations had a programme for agricultural development. The World Bank's Agricultural Sector Policy Review demonstrated an almost complete lack of information about the sector. The Bank's review points to the urgency of revitalising the agricultural sector, especially the food-crop sector.<sup>22</sup> Aside from responding to what by all indications is an appalling nutritional condition of the rural and urban poor<sup>23</sup>, if

<sup>21</sup> Recent field research notes from Gabi Hesselbein, Crisis States Research Centre.

<sup>22</sup> The Bank's report (2006a) emphasises how poor the data on agriculture is with an almost total breakdown of the monitoring and statistical functions of the state over more than a decade.

<sup>23</sup> The World Bank (2006a: 15) reports that, "two-thirds of the population—over 35 million people—does not have enough food to meet their minimum daily caloric requirement".

agricultural production is ignored while the mining sector is restored, it will create the classic conditions of “Dutch disease”, whereby earnings from natural resources will expand food imports and further depress incentives in agriculture (World Bank, 2006a). The DRC retains a huge potential, both for developing agricultural production for an expanding urban population and in promoting industrial and high value crops. It could serve as a key to launching manufacturing in food processing activities, if donors and state officials looked upon agriculture in the manner for instance that state officials have in Chile or Malaysia. But there is no sign that this is on the general donor agenda in any serious way, backed up with resources and expertise.

The decline of foreign assistance to the productive sector in developing economies needs to be reversed. Greater attention needs to be placed on creating capacity within fragile states to understand, plan and promote agricultural improvement. Part of this assistance needs to be based on a better understanding of the way political organisations and institutions determine the relationship between land and violent conflict.

## **Conclusions**

Most violent conflicts are not “caused” by conflicts over land per se, but almost every major eruption of violent conflict has had a land dimension. Neglect of agriculture, increasing rural productivity and rural incomes is central in fragile states. The international development community needs to look anew at these issues in fragile states. It is always among the rural poor that rebel armies find their recruits and through coercion and protection gain legitimacy and sustenance. Even in middle income countries – it is in the rural areas beyond the purview of the state where armed challenges to the state can survive over time.

There is a pressing need to “bring agriculture” back in to the international development lexicon. Donor agencies possess much less expertise than they did in the past. In fragile states, part of the challenge of building capacity is to create capacity to understand, analyse and manage an expansion in agricultural production. The programmes for good governance that have dominated the development assistance community tend to steer developing country officials attention away from understanding and prioritising the expansion of production in both rural and urban settings. By doing so, it is not at all clear that development aid can get at the root causes of either persistent poverty or state fragility. An important part of this reorientation needs to look anew at how institutional arrangements and patterns of political organisation determine when land becomes an object of violent conflict. If this is not done, programmes that may be intended to promote participation or good governance may in fact contribute to aggravating conflict in fragile states.

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