Conflict Analysis Summary: Burundi

Peacebuilding, Education and Advocacy in Conflict-Affected Contexts Programme

This report summarizes findings from two studies\(^1\) undertaken as part of the UNICEF Peacebuilding, Education and Advocacy Programme (PBEA), funded by the Government of the Netherlands. Conflict analysis has been integrated into the Burundi Country Office research strategy, with these initial studies looking at specific issues. The first examines the inter-generational transmission of violence and the interconnections between macro and micro dynamics of violence, while the second examines the effects of conflict and violence on children and adolescents. The reports also make recommendations regarding the future agenda for peacebuilding and education programming in the country to support the consolidation of peace and to avoid relapse into violent conflict.

Methodology

The two studies that form this conflict analysis had distinctly different methodologies. Berckmoes and Reis reviewed existing research concerning Burundi’s political economy, conflict cycles, and children’s exposure to violence, using both classical and life-cycle approaches to conflict analysis. Sommers based his report primarily on informant interviews, both with international experts and with more than 205 local stakeholders in Burundi. He spoke with individuals in the rural areas of Gitega Province, primarily in the Bugendana commune, and in Makamba Province. Sommers also conducted interviews in the capital city of Bujumbura, including in the neighbourhood of Bwiza, which was a centre of civil war violence and experiences continued violence today. He also interviewed government representatives at the colline, commune, provincial, and national levels, with national and international NGOs, and UN agencies.

Context

Burundi is a country marred by cyclical violence at multiple levels of society and severe underdevelopment. Outbreaks of communal violence date back to the struggle for independence in the 1960s. The 1972 revolt by ethnic Hutu rebels from neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo, followed by a violent response from the predominantly Tutsi government, was a key event in the country’s history. The conflict left an estimated 300,000 Burundians dead and created 300,000 refugees. Ethnically driven conflict flared on and off over the decades, until in 1993, following a contentious election campaign, the first-ever Hutu president was elected. Three months later the army staged a coup, killing the president and civil war began. Over 300,000 civilians were killed and another 1.2 million displaced. These crises left an enduring impact on the population that is still felt today, including persistent fear of attack, social fragmentation, indiscriminate violence, and ongoing struggles for political power and resources. Incidences of violent conflict continue to recur, though the boundaries between communal and ethnic conflict and criminal activity are increasingly blurred. Burundi’s

The PBEA programme is a four year programme, ending in 2015, that seeks to build peaceful societies by strengthening the role of education in peacebuilding and integrating peacebuilding within the education system.

Multilevel Violence’. Amsterdam Institute of Social Science Research (AISSR) and UNICEF Burundi. Amsterdam: April, 2013.

insecure environment is compounded by chronic poverty and low levels of development. The majority of the population reside in rural areas and are dependent on subsistence agriculture. Vast numbers of children and adolescents are malnourished. Population pressures on land, declining soil fertility, and limited opportunities for non-agricultural employment contribute to ‘low horizons’ for Burundi’s youth.

Despite this dire picture, the 2000 and 2003 peace accords ushered in a new political structure that prioritized greater ethnic balance and gender representation in government that has contributed to a greater openness. This current period of stability, following relatively peaceful elections in 2005 and 2010, provides an opportunity to develop the resilience needed to prevent further relapses into violent conflict. However, with new elections in 2015 there are worrying signs with the political mobilization of youth wings, restrictions on opposition groups, and constitutional reforms that roll back previous power-sharing gains.
Underlying Causes and Key Dynamics of Violent Conflict at the National Level

The reports identified the following conflict drivers as key factors in Burundi’s long history of violence, many of which are still present today. Where relevant, linkages between conflict drivers and education and learning have been identified.

**Security and Justice**

- **Regional and national security concerns**: Ongoing war and conflict in the DRC and Great Lakes Region, and the threat of armed rebel groups who still operate in exile in neighbouring countries, has meant that the conditions for a recurrence of civil war have never fully abated. The politicization of refugee groups and the challenges in repatriating refugees due to insufficient resources and land scarcity remains a key priority in peacebuilding agendas.

- **Unresolved issues of abuse/violence**: The lack of truth, justice, and reconciliation in the country following the civil war has meant that many crimes have never been redressed and perpetrators have gone unpunished. On-going impunity for past atrocities contributes to existing fears and tensions and prevents healing for citizens.

**Politics and Governance**

- **Political corruption and exclusion**: Discriminatory governance systems, including key institutions such as the military, judiciary and education systems, are still dominated by ethnic and regional groups who employ violence and patrimonialism to gain power and control. Politics is seen as one of the few ways to access resources and improve livelihoods. Political culture has repeatedly favoured repression and violence over negotiation, to consolidate and legitimize power. There is a strong perception of state weakness amongst adults and youth who believe that the government is unable to help most citizens.

- **Inequitable access to education**: The discriminatory education system, which privileged certain groups until the war (Baganwa and Tutsi, and later the Tutsi from the South) has been a source of grievance. Efforts to implement free primary education for all are attempting to redress prior inequities, yet the impact of these policies on education quality, and continued costs for uniforms, learning materials and school construction makes equitable access to education an ongoing source of tension. Furthermore, secondary school and vocational training are not free, and the pressure on young people to find a sponsor to pay for their school fees enhances their vulnerability to violence.
**Economic Development**

- **Enduring poverty:** The majority of Burundians live in extreme poverty. Chronic hunger dominates daily life, with many Burundians eating only once a day or once every two days. At the school level, malnutrition impacts the ability of children and youth to learn at school. Expectations for children to contribute to the household income through work or domestic chores impedes school attendance. Many youth drop out and migrate to cities in search of work. The demands of survival have also altered parenting styles, with parents too busy to manage or support their children. While most Burundians still believe that education is the key to livelihood improvement, the irrelevance of education to the job market and increasing demands for pay in order to be hired is contributing to feelings of disenfranchisement, particularly for youth.

**Social Issues**

- **Ethnic divisions:** The deeply-rooted historical violence, competition for power and resources and animosity between Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups continues to be a source of fear, distrust, violence and political struggle at all levels. Fear of extermination by ethnic adversaries has led to pre-emptive attacks in the name of self-defence. The ethnic character of conflict is rooted in struggles for state power and access to resources, including education.
- **Youth alienation:** The population of Burundi is exceptionally young and there are huge barriers preventing youth from transitioning into adulthood, signified through the acquisition of land, a house or marriage. Opportunities for advancement or improved livelihoods are limited, due to a lack of off-farm employment, declining soil fertility, land scarcity, and limited access to secondary education and vocational training. Young people are increasingly vulnerable to risk taking behaviours including drugs, alcohol, transactional sex, crime and dangerous employment, as well as acts of physical and sexual violence. Adolescent girls and orphans are particularly vulnerable. Political parties have relied on youth wings to intimidate opposition members and to execute violence, including the destruction of property, physical abuse and murder. This political role for youth has been normalized and has contributed to a negative perception of youth as disruptive and violent and perpetuated an overall culture of fear.
- **Social norms related to violence:** Since the civil war a culture of violence has spread at multiple levels of society to encompass gender-based violence, violence against children, and political and communal violence. In Burundi’s patriarchal society, physical and sexual violence of girls and women is an expected occurrence in home, schools and communities. Girls who get pregnant out of marriage due to rape or prostitution are considered shameful and left with few options for themselves or their children. Children are subject to physical, psychological and sexual violence on a regular basis. Corporal punishment at home and in school is used to effect control over children and is considered normal. Violence is also used to resolve disputes within families, between neighbours and within communities. The extent and nature of community driven violence to resolve disputes is what distinguishes Burundi from other recent civil war and post-war contexts in Africa.

**Natural Resources and Environmental Issues**

- **Land:** One of the most significant conflict drivers in Burundi is land scarcity. Land is the most valued resource in the country, with 90% of the population subsisting on agricultural production. Decreasingly fertile land, an increase in land disputes compounded by returning refugees, internal population movements, and division of minimal land holdings through inheritance are aggravating factors. Consequences of land scarcity include conflict, violence, illegal migration, and the extreme disadvantaging of children and women. Land scarcity and depletion also exacerbates poverty, which prevents children of both genders from attending school because they cannot afford the fees and because they need to work to generate income for the family.
The Role of Education in Peacebuilding

Conflict and violence in Burundi have had a number of impacts on the educational system. The killing of educated civilians during the wars contributed to a lack of experienced and educated people in the government and civil service. Displacement of civilians resulted in the disruption of education for many children and youth. The normalization of violence within the school and home impedes the moral and cognitive development of children, as well as their psycho-social and emotional development. As such, they are more likely to perpetuate violence in their own lives and in the lives of their families as they grow up.

The introduction of free primary education seeks to redress historic inequities in education access. A strong belief in the value of education, combined with coercion by local officials, ensure most primary students enter school. However, the high costs associated with schooling are unaffordable for many families who have to choose between school and food, resulting in significant drop outs. For those students that persist, the quality of education is poor, with teachers expected to teach languages and subjects in which they have no training. This is a particular concern for refugee returnees that have been in school in other countries and learning in other languages. Rampant sexual violence and the growing phenomenon of adolescent, unmarried mothers in particular, excludes girls from schools and the opportunity to secure a future for themselves or their children.

Despite the overwhelming obstacles, there are several factors that are cause for hope. These include Burundians’ persistent belief in school as a way to improve their lives, as well as the opportunity to use education and vocational training as a peace dividend and a development strategy. There appears to be a significant population of young people who are optimistic and hopeful about their future and are working hard to improve their situation, which may make them more resilient against violence and the lure of armed conflict. While many cultural norms remain rigidly traditional, the censure against young people who have fallen outside of traditionally accepted roles, or who have failed to achieve adulthood in the traditional definition, seems to be lessening. Women’s representation in local administration has deterred violence and discrimination, and created greater freedom of movement, livelihood and educational opportunities for girls.

Peacebuilding Entry Points in Education and Learning

Political and Policy Responses

- **Actively demonstrate and promote inclusion**: Expand work with at-risk youth, particularly in urban areas, and advocate for increased inclusion of vulnerable and marginalized groups such as unmarried mothers, orphans, refugee returnees and ethnic Batwa. Avoid geographic favouritism. Provide public information via radio on inclusion activities and rationale for focusing on particular locations and groups.
- **Improve educational quality**: Improve teacher training, especially in foreign languages they may be required to teach. Develop peace and human rights education courses that include education on sexual
violence and the rights of orphans in Burundi. Invest in high quality monitoring and evaluation of programs for youth. Address government coercion, intimidation and threats to encourage primary school attendance and explore how school costs can be reduced.

Structural Reforms

- **Improve child protection**: Establish child protection systems at multiple levels of the country. Train law enforcement to better recognize and protect vulnerable children and youth. Create a hotline for reporting of rape, violent crimes and crimes against youth and orphans. Make issues related to sexual violence and rape of female students by teachers a major protection issue. Ensure children of unmarried mothers are registered to enable them to access education and health services.
- **Vocational training**: Create non-formal education programmes to support basic and technical skills education for youth to enable them to obtain employment or pursue entrepreneurship, particularly in the non-formal sector.
- **Address hunger and malnutrition**: Provide child nutrition supplements, school notebooks, soap and other basic commodities to areas of Burundi where child hunger and malnutrition is the worst to counteract the pervasive and debilitating impacts on learning and survival.
- **Strengthen evidence building and collaboration**: Undertake systematic research and evidence-based reporting on incidences and impact of violence on children and youth. Reduce fragmentation of resources and duplication of efforts through improved collaboration between government, UN agencies, universities and NGOs.

Individual and Interpersonal Changes

- **Facilitate community dialogue on social challenges**: Disseminate information in all national languages and develop radio programmes that facilitate community dialogue to address social challenges, including youth issues, such as legal marriage, becoming an adult, appropriate discipline, sexual violence, employment, and support for marginalized groups.
- **Address sexual violence**: Research and develop a public awareness campaign to educate citizens and reduce incidences of sexual violence. Train law enforcement representatives and provide appropriate support for victims of rape, sexual violence and sexual coercion.