

# Poverty and Conflict: Empirical Overlaps

## Transcript

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international development here that started in 2007. And while I am really here as a student of those who are having much more expertise on women, peace and security, what we wanted to do was share from the poverty angle a little bit about how we see the world in some of the same countries and contexts in which you all work. So I'll be presenting some of work on a global multi-dimensional poverty index that covers 6.3 billion people and some of how that poverty is experienced in situations of conflict. Then I will close a little bit by looking at some of the lived articulations of how poverty and peace might come together and perhaps why they should. When we think of multidimensional poverty, we are looking at non-monetary deprivations and we're looking at from the perspective of the protagonist, the poor man, woman or child. And we are looking at the overlapping deprivations that they face across a set of indicators. And so we create a profile for each person or each household of the deprivations they are experiencing. And if they have one deprivation, they're not necessarily poor. In the global MPI, if they are deprived in 1/3 of the weighted indicators, where every dimension is equally weighted, as are the indicators within it, then they are multidimensionally poor. And then we develop a measure that is a very simple multiplicative measure, but the value of the measure is that it creates a result where the level of poverty is like a stack of plates. Every deprivation of every poor person who's identified as poor is in that stack. And the height of each plate is the weight of that deprivation, the relative importance of that deprivation relative to other deprivations. And if any deprivation of any poor person comes down, poverty comes down. So to give an example, Nyakume is in one of the Mangotin camps for IDPs outside Juba in South Sudan, 22 years old, living with her father, stepmother, 7 siblings and four extended family members. And if you look at the indicators of the global MPI, they are deprived in nutrition because in terms of anthropometric measures, they have a low BMI in several members of the household. And none of the children are in school. They cook with wood charcoal. They have water that's an hour's walk away, often with a queue. So it's not safe and available drinking water. The sanitation is very much shared with many other families. They don't have electricity. Their housing is bamboo poles with non-durable materials. And they don't have more than one of a set of small assets, telephone, television, radio, refrigerator, animal cart, computer, bicycle, or motorcycle. They have two mobile phones, which is 1 asset category, but they don't have more than that. So this is in a sense the deprivation profile of their household, and it's 67%, so they're identified as

poor. So what we do as a research institute is we take the data from many countries and try to make a comparable measure. So first I'd like to just take you through in 4 minutes a briefing of the global poverty and then zone in into some of the conflict overlaps. and then finish with work from Colombia about why we need to think about poverty as part of peace building. I know Sheila already mentioned the positive peace work, that building peace is different than solving conflict and poverty reduction is certainly a part of that and it's part of the positive peace index measures that are used. So in 2025, when we most recently launched this, it covers 109 countries and 6.3 billion people in the developing world, which is over 92% of the population of those countries. And you can see the survey instruments, but the important thing is that it's disaggregated by children, by gender of the household head, by rural urban areas, by 1,359 subnational regions. Other years, we've disaggregated it by ethnicity. And if we look across those 6.3 billion people, 1.1 billion are poor, because each of them are deprived in one third or more of those dimensions. And if we cut it by age, half of them are children. And 27.8% of children across the developing world are poor. and it's 13.5% of adults. So poverty among children, that is people under the age of 18, is twice as high. And that, interestingly, is also the case in very low poverty contexts like Argentina, Dogo, or Jordan. Still, over half of the poor people in those low poverty contexts are children. Across all of the 10 indicators of the global MPI, there are lots of deprivations. and the biggest number are in cooking fuel, sanitation, housing, and undernutrition, followed by electricity, where more than half of the population can't turn on a light when night falls, as well as households in which nobody has completed six years of schooling. Our database has regional numbers, and 83% of the poor people live in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, with the level of poverty higher in sub-Saharan Africa, which is the leftmost top bar. And across the countries of sub-Saharan Africa, it goes from less than 1% in Seychelles to over 80% in Chad. And if we look at Burkina Faso, a country at war, then again, there's a range within Burkina Faso from Centre, where it's low, it's 20.6% to 88% in Sahel. And each of these regions, you can see the indicator composition of poverty and how that changes, which helps to act on it. It can be discouraging to think of poverty at this magnitude, but we have trends in 2025 for 88 countries, 5.6 billion people, and 30 of them cut their multi-dimensional poverty index by half. An example is India, where in 2005-6, 55% of Indians are poor, more than half, and in 2019-21, it's 16.4, one in six. And that means that 415 million people moved out of poverty in India. where 1.1 billion people are poor. That's a very high number and a significant number. Other countries with many people leaving poverty include China, Indonesia, Bangladesh, and so on. So that's a three-minute, four-minute briefing on global poverty. Now you're experts, congratulations, before your second cup of coffee in the morning. The real reason we, I just wanted to get that out of the way, is to think a little bit about conflict and gender. If you think of those poor people, a question, how many of them live in a household where no female girl or woman has completed six years of schooling? We've been talking about girls' education

for a very long time. But two-thirds of the poor people, over 800 million, live in households where no female has completed six years of schooling, and each of those households have a female who should have. So this is a very large problem, a very visible problem. Early in 2026, we will have gender disaggregation for undernourished children, for out-of-school children, and for females and males and their completed years of schooling, as well as inter-household comparisons both between people of those same deprivations. and of undernourished children in households where no female has completed schooling. There's never been a measurement study at this scale. So I'll have more to tell you about gender and poverty from April, but already we know it's a difficult issue and we're not as successful as we'd like to be. When it comes to conflict, this was our focus last year. There are many definitions of conflict, as you all know. They're controversial. And from a measurement perspective, nothing's perfect. So as a compromise candidate, we use three. If a country is at war, according to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program, if they are in a conflict or fragile affected situation by the World Bank, or if they are very low or low peacefulness by the Global Peace Index. And so that's how we used those terms. And of the 1.1 billion poor people, 40%, 455 million lived in a country with one of those conditions in the year in which they were poor. We matched the year of the survey and the year of the conflict. If we instead advanced it to 2024, that number went up. So it's a lower bound. and 218 million lived in war-affected countries. What is striking is that you want to know what is the level of poverty in those countries. And because of some that are in the news, you might not think that it's that high when it comes to this kind of acute poverty in developing countries. But actually, we found that on average, the next slide I'll show you, tease that out a little bit more, but on average, population weighted the level of poverty and conflict affected situations was much higher. So in countries at war, it was 34.8%. In the countries that were not in war nor with a minor conflict, it was 10.9%. So three times higher. If you looked at conflict-affected fragile situations versus the rest, it was three times higher, 45% versus 14.7%. And if you looked at very low or low peacefulness, it was over twice as high, 34% versus 15.1%. So what that means is that without talking about causality, in a situation of conflict, people are also trying to fight undernutrition flimsy housing, lack of education, no electricity, and multiple deprivations at the same time. Yakuma had deprivations in eight of the indicators, but on average, it's five or more. 80% of the poor people are deprived in five or more things at the same time. And this complicates your situation, whether you're the mother of a combatant or whether you're a combatant who has poverty problems at the same time. This is not the case in all situations. So the red dot is the population weighted average. And you can see that some countries at war have very low levels of poverty, whereas others have much, much higher levels. So just a data warning. This is not the case in just one indicator, but across all of the 10 indicators, the red bars are the percentage of the population who are both poor and deprived in that indicator. and in a country at war. The blue are deprived in that indicator, poor in a minor conflict, and the yellow-green are all other

countries. So you can see, on average, war has a higher deprivation in all of the indicators, though it's starkly higher in electricity, for example, which is really strong in Southern Africa in drinking water. Those are where battles have had the highest disparities. And the last bit of sad news, before we all go out and need a donut, is that when it comes to poverty reduction, poverty reduction in conflicts exposed to war, but it's the same if it's exposed to the two other kinds of definitions we used, is slower. So the annual step towards 0 poverty is smaller in the most conflict prone contexts. And that's the case, even though it can be higher in minor conflicts. And India would be an example of a country that was minor conflict for some of the years of its reduction. We, for each of the countries, we have a lot of details. So I'm not going to go into Afghanistan. I know, I think we know it is very problematic contexts, but I wanted to name it because it's problematic for gender concerns. in Afghanistan, and in a seven-year period, poverty rose and 5 million people in a country of less than 40 million fell into poverty. And it was higher both in rural and urban areas. And it was higher in not in every deprivation, but in most of the deprivations. But in years of schooling and school attendance, as well as housing and particularly assets, the deprivations went up much higher. But due to some of the international community's great investments in Afghanistan during that seven-year period, and remember that the change of government was in August 15th of 2021, electricity, for example, is much lower over the seven-year period, deprivations in electricity, which is a good thing, and drinking water is at parity. If we think of the sub-national regions of Afghanistan, Urozgan and Nuristan, you know, are the poorest. And very happily, they did have significant reductions. But the other sub-national regions in red had statistically significant increases of poverty. And in the blue shaded regions, there was no change. So it is a puzzling story, sub-nationally as well as nationally. And remember, Afghanistan was also hit by COVID with the returnees coming in from Iran and from that border. Off the slides, we also have the privilege to support now the UN agencies, previously the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in their national MPI work. And with the mixed survey, the UN agencies updated data for Afghanistan. And because of the ban of secondary school for females, we only looked at primary school. But even in primary school in 2022, 2023, we found that 49% of children were out of school, boys and girls on average. Of course, more girls out of school than boys. So it's not only a gender problem, it's also a pervasive problem, but there's a very strong gender aspect. So in the last four minutes, I'd like to share with you work from somebody, not us, who has worked on the border of peace and poverty. And this is from a book from Juan Man Santos, who is a patron of Oxpeace. And his first book after he left the presidency of Colombia, where he was president 2010 to 2018 and brought the peace in the 2016 Havana Accord, his first book was The Battle for Peace. But his second book was The Battle Against Poverty. And he writes about, he traveled together with the minister of finance to New York to participate in a meeting with a group of American CEOs. And during that meeting, news broke of a terrorist attack in Bogota. And the meeting was not very successful. And the

president of one of the companies approached him and said, as long as you have war in your country, it's going to be difficult to attract investment. Capital is no friend of war. So even if it's not about poverty, even if it's only about economic growth, we already know there's a story. And also, after Nelson Mandela turned over the UNCTAD leadership to, from where he had been president of UNCTAD, he said that peace is an essential condition for development and warned Juan Maran Santos, if you don't have peace, Colombia will not take off. And so that was very important as a goal, but he recognized as he took up the presidency that peace made it difficult to reduce poverty because war creates poverty. It destroys infrastructure, education, institutions, health institutions, roads, electricity, and energy centers. And vice versa, poverty can facilitate the emergence, protraction, and justification of conflict. and the guerrilla groups in Colombia were using poverty and inequality to justify their fight against the state. And often the first victims of violence were the poor, who had to fight on one side or the other in order to have an income. And battles, he says, are always fought by the poorest. The point also made by Amartya Sen in his Nobel lecture when he observed that one influential experience on his life and his interest in conflict was a poor worker who had come into his neighborhood and been attacked by it. So thinking about the socioeconomic status of the combatants, of the victims, and of the non-combatants, both in territory under government control and not under government control, is a part of the analysis. And this is where I wanted to commend to you the use of the poverty data of the global MPI and of national MPIs, all of which is online, public, and sub-nationally disaggregated. So Santos's book is a lot about his fight against poverty, but a couple of chapters look at the interface between poverty reduction and work during and after the conflict. So for example, during the conflict, the victims unit not only had historical records, land restitution and all of that, but it also had work to support the victims in socioeconomic terms in terms of housing and displacement. And the peace agreement also looked and very much name checked Colombia's national multi-dimensional poverty index, both in regions and in counties with a two-year time horizon. and the needs. And that was because they recognized very high levels of poverty, over 70% in the FARC affected territories. When Santos obtained the Peace Prize, he also gave a story of Pastor Ramira, and he brought her with him to receive the prize because she had taken in a wounded soldier, not asking who he fought for. And as he was recovering and was able to walk around again, then he saw a picture of her son. And her son had been murdered. And he began to weep. And he said, who is that? And she said, well, it's my son. And he said, well, I have to tell you that I was among the group that murdered him. And actually, we also tortured him. And she gave him a hug. And she said, this is a very important moment. He said, but how can you be reconciled with me because I should not have done this? And she said, as it says, I wouldn't have to live with hate for the rest of my life. So when it comes to poverty, the protagonists for reducing poverty are often the poor people themselves. When we ask them how they came out of poverty, 77 say, we blended together government, kinship, religious,

NGOs, but we had to put the pieces together. And similarly, as many of you will say in the presentations, the bottom-up story is equally important. So I've tried to give a four-minute briefing of global poverty, a little bit about poverty and conflict, and a little bit about the nexus. All of the data I've cited are online, and we look forward to listening and learning from you. Thank you.