Eradicating poverty amidst conflict dynamics and intersecting crises

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1. Introduction

Eradicating poverty is the first goal of the SDGs, but one which faces compounded challenges in conflict and post-conflict situations. Though a universal definition for these situations does not exist, they are often characterised according to a spectrum of intensity of violence, locality of violence from geographic areas to whole countries, and types of violence such as inter-state wars, armed insurrections, or other forms of organised violence. A large body of literature groups conflict and post-conflict contexts into a category of fragile, conflict-affected and violent situations (FCVS), where again definitions and country categories vary, but overall tend to point to heightened prevalence of monetary poverty and multidimensional deprivations in these contexts. For example, according to Corral et al. (2020), monetary and multidimensional poverty stood at 48% and 36% in FCVS, compared to 19% and 12% in other economies, respectively.

Challenges in eradicating poverty in conflict and post-conflict situations can be broadly grouped into:
- **The "conflict-dynamics" challenge**: There is a bi-directional relationship between conflict and poverty dynamics. This may vary by socio-economic drivers of vulnerability, but also conflict dynamics (e.g. conflict intensity, extent of civilian involvement/casualties, conflict duration, its waxing and waning, ideologies of conflict) which may have legacy effects. Responses need to better address multiple sources, dynamics and scales of vulnerability.
- **The "conflict-crises" challenge**: Conflict increasingly intersects with multiple crises that individually and collectively constrain pathways to zero poverty, yet responses are typically to single hazards contributing to ineffective or harmful policy and programming responses.

These challenges also affect each other. What this means together is that eradicating poverty in conflict and post-conflict situations requires strong grounding in dynamics of poverty amidst: 1) conflict, especially by tackling chronic poverty and preventing impoverishment (Shepherd et al., 2014) in areas of violent and chronic conflict where challenges may be particularly severe; and 2) intersecting crises, centring on principles of equity alongside risk reduction—see in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Addressing dual conflict challenges to promote sustained poverty eradication
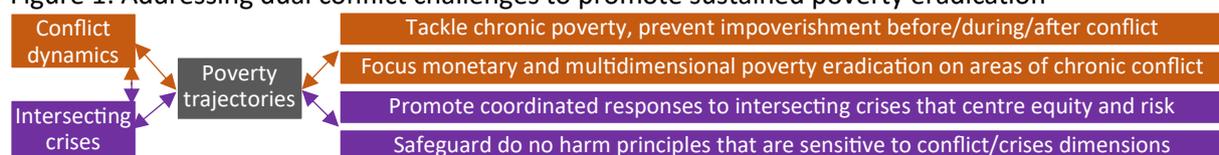
This paper examines these challenges, as well as gaps and progress in eradicating poverty in conflict and post-conflict situations. It draws on quantitative or mixed methods research on poverty dynamics and conflict in Afghanistan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Malawi, Niger, Nigeria, and Uganda undertaken by the author between 2018 and 2023; and policy and programming guidance on eradicating poverty amidst conflict and intersecting crises.

2. Challenges in tackling poverty dynamics amidst conflict and intersecting crises

2.1 Conflict dynamics challenge

Examining the dynamics of conflict is important in understanding its relationship with poverty. **Countries which are chronically experiencing fragility and conflict have some of the highest rates of poverty globally** - between 40-50% over the last 10 years, compared to countries that in the early 2000s experienced fragility and conflict but have escaped since then, which instead saw poverty drop from 44% in 2000 to 19% by 2019 (Corral et al., 2020). Multidimensional deprivations may also be particularly severe in areas of chronic conflict within countries. For example, districts in East India experiencing chronic Naxal-related violence between 2005 and 2012 saw reductions in years of

schooling particularly pronounced for girls (Diwakar, 2023a). This is especially concerning given the role of education in contributing to poverty escapes (Diwakar et al., 2021). In post-conflict situations, without remedial strategies, the legacy effect of school disruptions could thus theoretically be one of the factors that prolong the intergenerational persistence of poverty.

Our research in CPAN moreover highlights a variety of negative poverty trajectories in areas of new or persistent conflict within countries. In India, Nigeria and Uganda, rates of impoverishment and chronic poverty were higher in areas affected by violent conflict (Diwakar et al., 2017). Panel data from the early 2000s in Nepal also found that rates of chronic poverty were twice as high in post-conflict regions compared to elsewhere (Diwakar, 2018a). This relationship also extends to dynamic perceptions of insecurity, where households that had changed perceptions from safe to 'unsafe' in Pakistan and Uganda experienced reducing assets between 2012 and 2015 (Diwakar et al., 2017).

Ways in which conflict can create multi-scalar challenges that affects poverty trajectories are outlined in Table 1, with specific insights from CPAN mixed methods research in the text that follows. Much of this is bi-directional and mutually reinforcing, where for example loss of income or poor social cohesion can contribute to grievances fuelling the emergence or persistence of conflict. **Conflict and its dynamics can turn extreme poverty into chronic poverty through the poverty traps that it may generate** (Diwakar et al., 2017). At the same time, poverty is not just a problem of people in and near poverty; the non-poor often also have much to lose from conflict (Verwimp et al., 2019), as evidence on conflict-driven impoverishment suggests (Diwakar et al., 2017; Diwakar, 2023b).

Table 1: Examples of multi-scalar impacts of conflict on poverty dynamics

Level	Pathways of impact	Impacts on poverty dynamics
State/ economy (macro)	- Weak policies, limited finances and foreign direct investment - Ambiguous effects of aid - Low or volatile growth	- Limited aid and assistance targeted towards tackling chronic poverty - Immiserizing growth mirrored in impoverishment
Community (meso)	- Depressed local labour markets - Destroyed or weak systems and services including transport and other infrastructure, health and education - Adverse gender and social norms - Ambiguous effects on community trust and social cohesion	- Limited economic opportunities to sustain escapes from poverty - Inability to rely on education for resilience to remain out of poverty or health services to prevent ill health-driven downward mobility - Disrupted networks driving impoverishment and maintaining chronic poverty
Household/ individual (micro)	- Refugees and displaced people - Loss of assets/income, erosive coping - Demographic change (e.g. widowhood, orphanhood, family separation, death) - SGBV, physical/psychosocial ill health	- Loss of income (e.g. due to job loss, death), erosive coping and asset drawdown driving impoverishment - Loss of networks from displacement driving further impoverishment

Source: pathways summarised from rapid review in Diwakar, 2023, forthcoming

In addition, **the adverse ways in which vulnerable households may be driven to cope with new or chronic conflict can contribute to reduced ability to deal with future shocks and thus to escape or remain out of poverty.** In Nigeria, households were more likely to rely on credit and asset sales, and less likely to be able to rely on work or aid from an NGO or the government to cope with insecurity (defined as theft of assets, dwelling damaged/ destroyed, or kidnapping/ hijacking/ robbery/ assault) compared to other shocks such as disasters or ill health (Figure 2) (Diwakar and Brzezinska, 2023, forthcoming). This is alarming, suggesting that humanitarian and social protection systems are failing in conflict-affected contexts. When faced with direct victimisation especially common in areas of Boko Haram violence, after displacement the second most common consequence for households was to sell assets such as land, livestock or property particularly prevalent amongst households in chronic poverty (Diwakar and Brzezinska, 2023, forthcoming), which might contribute to further

economic polarisation. Together this points to ways in which the negative consequences of and adverse coping with conflict can prompt impoverishment as well as maintain chronic poverty.

Figure 2: Coping strategies for negative shocks by insecurity, 2010-19 pooled data from Nigeria

Source: Diwakar and Brzezinska, 2023, forthcoming, based on GHS 2010-19 and ACLED 2010-19 data

At the same time, the ideology of the warring parties can have sometimes unexpected legacy effects that can sometimes mitigate the relationship between violent conflict and negative poverty trajectories. For example, though rates of chronic poverty were higher in areas of conflict in Nepal, compared to areas unaffected by conflict, there were some exceptions. For example, an interviewee in rural Dailekh recalled her time working for the Maoists (Diwakar, 2018a):

> "They used to give us NRS 200 rupees (1.91 USD) per month for our expenses and all the other expenses were done by the party itself. They used to provide us all the necessities such as clothes, toothpaste, toothbrush, etc. After the certification [graduation], they started giving the members NRS 6000 (57.40 USD) per month."

This may reflect the egalitarian rhetoric of the Maoists. Indeed, some research points to improved enrolment of girls due to Maoist policing of girls' education in Nepal (Valente, 2014) and improved learning outcomes amongst girls in poor households in Naxal violence-affected areas in India (Diwakar, 2023b). Even so, such examples pale in comparison to the negative welfare outcomes in these contexts attributed to deaths, insecurity and destruction from Maoist-related violence.

2.3 Conflict-crises challenge

Conflict is rarely the only shock, stressor, or crises occurring in the area in which it is observed. For example, there is a growing literature on the conflict-climate nexus, where this relationship is also evident at the international cross-country level. For example, **there is a convergence of conflict fatalities, people affected by climate-related disasters, and populations in poverty, especially high amongst several LICs and LMICs** (Figure 3). Add to that pandemic-driven impoverishment and the food and price inflation that continues to exert pressures on people's welfare, and it is not difficult to imagine the polycrisis continuing to prevent progress on poverty eradication.

Figure 3: Populations affected by climate-related disasters and conflict by country, 2020-2022, weighted by number of population in poverty pre-pandemic
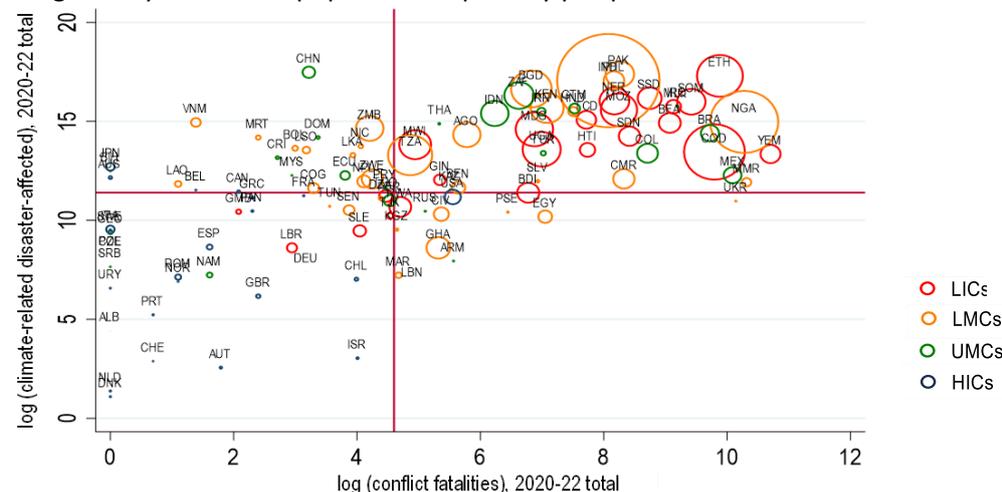
Source: authors' analysis of ACLED (2020-22), EMDAT (2020-22), and PIP (latest year after 2010) data

At the country level, the presence of polycrisis also contributes to downward mobility. For example, **in Afghanistan, analysis of nationally representative data from 2019/20 indicated that the probability of welfare loss was highest into the summer of 2020 when COVID-19 transmission rates were increasing and security conditions deteriorating**, and particularly high in areas where households felt that the security situation of their district was insecure (Diwakar, 2022). This layered on top of existing economic, environmental and political crises, brought about for example by the scaling back of troops and reduced aid pre-pandemic, followed by COVID-10 and the transition in power (Diwakar et al., 2022). As one interviewee in Afghanistan noted:

> *"In the last one year, the case of theft, robbery and other criminal activities has reached its peak… Looking to the economic situation, the insecurity, drought, lack of work, we may have people who died because of hunger." (*July 2021)

Polycrisis in turn was often observed to have particularly negative impacts amongst households in and near poverty. For example, in Nigeria, in areas of drought, a higher number of fatalities from Fulani militia violence was associated with a higher probability of transient poverty between 2010 and 2019 (Diwakar and Brzezinska, 2023). Moreover, households that pre-pandemic were in the bottom two welfare quintiles were more likely to engage in distress asset sales in response to negative shocks during the pandemic in 2020 (Diwakar and Adedeji, 2021). By 2022, these households were also likely to pay more petrol in 2022 during the economic crises, and report drought/ delayed rains expected to negatively affect them into the summer of 2022, signalling lower expectations for managing future climate-related crises (Diwakar and Brzezinska, 2023, forthcoming). All of this collectively points to impacts of conflict on the persistence of poverty through the mechanisms outlined in Table 1, but also through its intersection with other crises.

In addition to often macro-level polycrisis, there are a range of shocks and stressors in conflict and post-conflict situations that interact with crises to maintain chronic poverty or drive impoverishment. Some of these may be consequences of conflict itself. For example, **a common consequence of conflict is displacement, where IDPs and forcibly displaced populations are a particularly vulnerable group likely to have high rates of poverty and multidimensional deprivations** (Corral et al., 2020). In Nigeria, almost a quarter of households reporting direct victimisation[1] were displaced, with the prevalence higher amongst households that experienced only transitory escapes from poverty (Diwakar and Brzezinska, 2023, forthcoming). In the DRC, households displaced at baseline had lower asset wealth overall compared to those who had not been displaced. In Afghanistan, IDPs typically find it hard to find economic opportunities in the areas to which they are displaced, which may be due to lost social connections (Nemat et al., 2022):

> *When we were in our village, we had a good connection with our relatives. In a time of need, I was getting help from them, and in financial issues, I was taking a loan from them. However, when displaced to Herat province, everything has changed. I do not know anyone in this place. Therefore, in a time of need, I cannot ask for help or a loan*. (M, Herat, July 2021)

Conflict and post-conflict situations can also provide fertile grounds for various forms of crime amidst a wider context of insecurity, pointing to some of its legacy effects. In Nepal, for example, theft was common both during the Maoist conflict and in post-conflict years (Diwakar, 2018a). One interviewee's family got attacked twice in an urban area of Banke, but the family was reluctant to go to the police due to perceived inaction:

> *"Once, they stole the cycle. Then, they also stole our buffalo. Next, they tried to attack my grandfather. He had some money with him… So, they tied him to the bed and robbed his money… There wouldn't be much police investigation, since we are poor."*

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[1] Self-reported in the Nigeria General Household Survey as a situation between 2010 and 2015 where a family member was killed, suffered physical aggression, injured or disabled from a direct attack, suffered sexual violence, was forced to work for free, was internally displaced, or was captured/ kidnapped/ abducted/ robbed

In the Philippines, land-grabbing and burglaries were often linked to limited job opportunities in General Santos, Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, which in turn was fuelled by conflict:
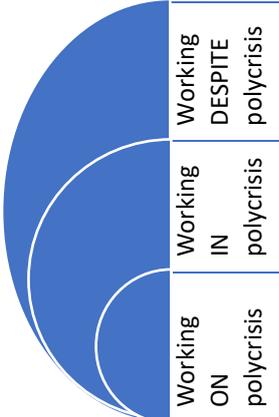
> "[his] family experienced several burglaries and bandits threatening his household at gunpoint to extort money during harvest… His parents "down-sized their livelihood" by limiting time spent on fields, corn planted and harvested, and by selling livestock as 'it was hard to maintain them… and we became more afraid due to the crime.'"

Though the household did not experience destitution as the interviewee's family was able to rely on other diversified livelihoods, the crimes amidst wider conflict-related insecurity prevented them from escaping poverty (Diwakar, 2018b).

3. Programmatic gaps: working 'in' conflict and intersecting crises

So how do current efforts to eradicate poverty stack up against these dual challenges? We might identify three strands of poverty reduction strategies, which work 'despite', 'in' or 'on' conflict and other intersecting crises (Figure 4). Some poverty eradication policies or programs implemented in conflict-affected situations may not address conflict or other crises at all. At the same time, responses to single hazards may themselves be largely inadequate as they could drive the creation of new conflict risks. This was observed during COVID-19 when members of social protests were arrested in the Philippines and Zimbabwe, on the grounds of attempting to control the transmission of COVID-19, yet in many contexts "the root causes of social unrest remained unaddressed or even worsened" (Hilhorst and Mena, 2021). As such, **working 'despite' conflict and polycrisis can contribute to ineffective poverty eradication strategies at best, or otherwise drive impoverishment and the persistence of poverty.**

Figure 4: Working DESPITE, IN and ON conflict and intersecting crises

Working DESPITE polycrisis	Poverty reduction strategies operating in parallel/ in spite of polycrisis, i.e. with minimal efforts made to address conflict and other intersecting crises, and risking creation of additional sources of vulnerability.
Working IN polycrisis	Poverty reduction strategies that actively respond to polycrisis in-situ, reflecting sensitivity to the context of layered crises, 'do no harm' and considering poverty, conflict and other crises trajectories.
Working ON polycrisis	Poverty reduction strategies that actively respond to polycrisis in-situ as well as seek to address/ alter conflict and intersecting crises by addressing root causes and maintainers of poverty (e.g. by strengthening resilience to different types of shock).

Source: adapted from Diwakar et al., 2021

Working 'in' conflict and amidst intersecting crises requires upholding basic principles of 'do no harm'. Projects in this category may be sensitive to conflict and other crises. Box 1 summarises examples from a rapid review of leading policy areas discussed in the literature in FCVS, some of which draws attention to addressing structural barriers and overcoming elite capture and power dynamics in conflict-affected areas that may otherwise limit poverty reduction. More directly acknowledging the context of polycrisis, other research also provides guidance on how to integrate conflict considerations into DRR programming, such as by adapting implementation of DRR tools, developing an integrated cadre of DRR and conflict specialists, and learning from people's experiences and ways of coping with disaster and conflict risks (Peters, 2019).

Box 1: Leading economic and social policy areas related to poverty reduction in FCVS
Economic development:
- **Job creation programmes**: Lessons from the literature on job creation interventions in FCVS (e.g. labour market programmes, but also micro-businesses and farming) suggest that projects should be more politically aware, address structural barriers to women's decision-making, and provide adequate financial

In addition, **many humanitarian contexts present protracted examples of conflict and intersecting crises, where programmatic responses often seek to work 'in' crises.** For example, the humanitarian response to Yemen's 2016/17 cholera epidemic was a "crisis within a crisis" given the prevailing conflict, drought and economic collapse (Unicef, 2018). Agencies intensified ongoing activities and targeted hotspots to reduce cholera transmission, though were constrained by limited access permissions in certain areas affected by conflict-related insecurity (Unicef, 2018). Thus, though they were sensitive to the conflict situation, limited preventive action working 'in' conflict constrained the effectiveness of responding to polycrisis (CPAN, 2023).

4. Progress: working 'on' conflict and intersecting crises

Working 'on' conflict and intersecting crises in ways that centre poverty eradication may be sector-specific, or require multi-sectoral coordination. Some strategies seek to safeguard people's livelihoods to promote resilience, as Table 2 highlights. Others may be sector specific and operate at different scales. At a regional level, several actors in Kenya (e.g. federal and county governments, NGOs and CSOs) promote water management in an attempt to respond to drought mitigation and peace building. As part of these interventions, the annual Ewaso Nyiro camel caravan passing through arid and semi-arid lands in the Northeast of Kenya support training of yearly restoration committees, lobby for ecosystem conservation, identify 'peace ambassadors' trained in conflict monitoring, and support social cohesion dialogues as informal conflict mediation (Tafere et al., 2023).

Table 2: Types of livelihoods interventions to respond to conflict and intersecting crises in Nigeria

Challenge	Examples of interventions
Asset drawdowns amidst sequenced crises	• Graduation-type approach, especially cash-plus interventions within this, which is proven to increase income and food security. • Interventions to guard against insecurity and risk, e.g. evidence-based insurance development in farming.
Inadequacy of agriculture amidst climate and conflict shocks	• Climate-smart agricultural practices, drawing on examples in place e.g. conservation agriculture in Borno, crop diversification, improved seeds, soil fertility management. • Adoption of technology in agriculture, such as drought-resilient crop varieties. • Pay attention to impacts of flooding and drought, insecurities due to violent conflict, and pre-existing vulnerabilities related to poverty and gender.

Volatile non-farm enterprises amidst conflict, COVID-19	• Better understand business environment (incl. economic/market/political context). • Consider how business environment reforms might affect vulnerable groups. • Use reforms to promote local conflict-resolution and peacebuilding.
Inadequacy of risk-informed development	• Focus on all interdependent facets of risk reduction "including preventing hazards, reducing exposure and vulnerability and building adaptive capacity" (UNDRR, 2021). • Support recovery programs to go on for longer than they do. • Develop flexibility of underlying political and economic governance structures and a commitment to multilateralism and partnerships.

Source: Diwakar and Brzezinska, 2023, forthcoming

Working 'on' conflict and intersecting crises is a case for building resilience, for example by promoting pro-poor access to justice, livelihood diversification, and "implementing policies like social protection, actions which support pro-poorest growth, widening and deepening educational access, anti-discrimination measures, and better disaster risk management… [to] help to reduce the possibility of future conflict" (Diwakar et al., 2017) while also limiting the adverse legacy effects of conflict. At the household level, diversification of livelihood sources can improve the probability of households sustaining escapes from poverty, while also contributing to a higher probability of enrolment of children including in conflict-affected areas in parts of sub-Saharan Africa (Diwakar, 2021). This in turn has scope to help reduce the intergenerational persistence of poverty when accompanied by interventions to limit dropout risk (e.g. through early childhood care, financing for education, cash transfers and school feeding), offsetting labour-related opportunity costs of learning and promoting sustainable peacebuilding in education (Shepherd et al., 2021; Novelli et al., 2017).

When supporting resilience, **people who are facing the most severe forms of poverty, intersecting inequalities, and impoverishment require explicit targeting**, as interventions may not otherwise reach them (Mazurana, 2014; Diwakar et al., 2020). Chronic conflict and the presence of intersecting crises moreover requires long-term equitable solutions, especially taking account of these horizontal and vertical inequalities, insurance against a range of risks. In humanitarian crises like Afghanistan, where a majority of people may be in or near poverty, it is moreover worth distinguishing gradations of vulnerability (Diwakar et al., 2022). In all of this, there should be conscious efforts to overcome potential wrongful exclusion through real-time learning and adaptation (Diwakar et al., 2020).

Governance (formal and informal) is a critical part of strengthening resilience and working 'on' conflict and intersecting crises. "Countries with better governance, stronger and well-coordinated institutions—backed by sufficient fiscal space… are better able to muster the multi-sectoral responses needed to mitigate damage" (Lind et al., 2021). Implicitly, this requires finding ways to manage competing sectoral priorities and improving the flexibility of funding sources and fiscal space in responding to polycrisis (CPAN, 2023, forthcoming). More research is needed on how to effectively support informal institutions (e.g. Zakat, Khums and Usher in Afghanistan and elsewhere), which are widespread and not necessarily exclusionary (Kantor, 2012; SIGAR, 2021). As part of this, engaging "local organisations and decision-makers more consistently to bridge capacity… with real-time adaptation to respond to rapidly changing contexts" is critical (Diwakar et al., 2022).

In all of this, it would seem that **a recasting of humanitarian-development-peace nexus thinking is overdue.** This partly requires stronger coordinated action across the nexus and on connecting peacebuilding to development objectives; however, practical implementation in both areas remains limited (ALNAP, 2022; Peters et al., 2019). The presence of intersecting crises moreover suggests the need to plan for humanitarian relief and recovery during crises, and more broadly a continuous need for recovery-type programming, yet we know that recovery programmes tend to be short-lived (Diwakar et al., 2017). Finally, a portfolio approach can help contribute to a longer joined-up recovery to promote poverty eradication in conflict and post-conflict situations, where sequenced and layered projects within portfolios could be "organisation-specific, area-specific, cross-donor, and/or cross-institutional, making efforts where possible to flexibly open up the space for discussion around reforms with the government" (Diwakar, 2023, forthcoming).

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