Conflict Fragile

Summary

Conflict-affected countries are the hardest places to end hunger. Their number has increased in the last decade, and so has the number of refugees and internally displaced people. Ending hunger by 2030 will depend on a much stronger response to the needs of people displaced by conflict. Diplomacy and defense, obviously crucial to preventing and ending conflict and securing peace, are not a focus of this chapter, which deals primarily with humanitarian and development activities in conflict and post-conflict environments.

Post-conflict societies are more likely to relapse into conflict as long as hunger remains a major problem. International support is crucial to helping national governments and civil society meet the challenges of reconstruction. Two of the most pressing issues in post-conflict countries are restoring services and creating jobs. Laying the foundation for sustainable development requires strengthening institutions and governance.

KEY POINTS

• Ensure that all people who are forcibly displaced are protected and their basic needs met.
• Provide more and better support to countries and communities hosting people who are forcibly displaced.
• Strengthen the capacity of national institutions in fragile states to deliver public services.
• Invest in sectors such as agriculture and infrastructure shown to have the greatest potential to reduce poverty and generate large numbers of jobs.
• Recognize and protect the legitimate land tenure right of vulnerable groups.
Conflict and Hunger

In December 2013, South Sudan, the world’s newest nation, descended into civil war after little more than two years of independence. By the end of 2015, 2.3 million South Sudanese had been driven from their homes to escape the violence.1 In interviews with aid workers, groups of forcibly displaced people who found protection at a U.N. camp inside the country explained how they survived the ordeal. As described by the aid workers, “The only water they could get was from swamps and they neither boiled nor filtered it … They described eating the ‘gum,’ the part of the tree exposed when one cuts a branch diagonally … People suffered days and days of hunger … The people we interviewed reported witnessing one woman who died of hunger on this long walk to the camp and hearing of others.”2

The highest hunger levels since the war began were reported in 2016.3 More than a third of South Sudan’s population faced severe food shortages. An estimated 237,000 children younger than 5 have received treatment for severe acute malnutrition—essentially starvation. Severe acute malnutrition can be quickly reversed with the right therapeutic foods. These include super-fortified pastes such as Plumpy’Nut. Even those who receive treatment and survive, however, may have suffered irreversible damage. They could have chronic health problems, limited physical and cognitive development, and lower lifetime earning potential. “South Sudan is now at risk of losing a generation of children,” the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) declared in 2016.4

Armed conflict is the impetus for the worst crimes by far that humans commit against each other—killings on a massive scale up to and including genocide, accompanied by systematic rape,

$13.6 trillion:
The cost of conflict, terrorism, and political instability to the global economy in 2015.1

Since the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011:
63 PERCENT
of the country’s population have fled their homes and are now refugees or internally displaced.2
torture, and wholesale destruction that leads to famine. Civil wars and other violent conflicts have been the main causes of famine both in the 20th century and so far in the 21st century. Many more people would have died of starvation in conflict situations were it not for the global humanitarian system, which for all its shortcomings has done a good job of minimizing the number of famines. Still, people in conflict-affected countries are three times more likely to suffer hunger than those in countries that are not in conflict.

In 2015, an estimated 12.4 million people worldwide were newly displaced by conflict or persecution. People were displaced at four times the rate in 2005. See Figure 1.1. No country has been more affected than Syria. The Syrian war is the largest driver of displacement in the world. By the end of 2015, 4.9 million Syrians had fled their country and were living as refugees and another 6.6 million were internally displaced. But the shocking numbers alone cannot convey the suffering caused by the Syrian civil war, especially among people trapped inside the country.

Conflict-affected countries are home to over 20 PERCENT of all children of primary school age, and nearly half of all the out-of-school children of that age.

Approximately 2 in 3 maternal deaths (due to causes related to pregnancy and childbearing) take place in countries affected by a humanitarian crisis or fragile conditions.
In Aleppo, once the most populous city in the country, homes and buildings have been bombed to smithereens or crumbling carcasses. People there have been targeted by combatants while in the queue for food aid and shot dead. In April 2016, a hospital run by the international aid organization Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders was bombed, killing 14 patients and two doctors. In September, a U.N. aid convoy carrying food and other supplies was bombed, killing at least 20 people. At this writing, 200,000 civilians in Deir ez-Zor are trapped in a battle for control of the city between the Islamic State (ISIS) and Syrian government forces, with airdrops the only safe way to deliver food aid.

Urban warfare clearly comes with its own horrors. But most conflicts occur in rural areas, where the vast majority of people are employed in agriculture. Food security deteriorates rapidly once conflict breaks out and agricultural production is disrupted. Fear of attack prevents farmers from working in their fields or taking food to markets. Combatants plunder crops and livestock. An aid worker in Liberia told us that he finally realized peace was at hand when he saw farm animals roaming freely again. In South Sudan, the livelihoods of 80 percent of the population depend on livestock. The livestock are not only people’s most valuable asset, but also the main source of nutrition.

Table 1.1 lists the conflict-affected countries with the highest levels of severe malnutrition and hunger. Humanitarian agencies use a five-level scale to indicate which areas need the most help. The people in the countries listed are at level three, crisis, or level four, emergency. Level five is famine.

We will need to find ways to more effectively assist people in areas of conflict—making schools available for the children, for example—and, more importantly, reduce conflict to get to the end of hunger. It is possible to make rapid progress against hunger once there is peace. Less than 10 years after the end of Nepal’s decade-long civil war, the nation’s hunger rate had been reduced by more than half.

## Putting People First

In 2015, the number of people forcibly displaced because of conflict, persecution, generalized violence, or human rights violations reached 65.3 million, the highest number since World War II, and an increase of nearly 6 million over 2014. Presently, there are more people forcibly displaced than the populations of the United Kingdom, France, or Italy.

### Table 1.1 Conflict-Affected Countries with Populations Facing Severe Levels of Malnutrition and Hunger (November 2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of people</th>
<th>Share of total population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan (18 vulnerable provinces)</td>
<td>2.5 million</td>
<td>25 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>2.3 million</td>
<td>23 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central African Republic</td>
<td>1.8 million</td>
<td>36 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake Chad Basin (includes areas of Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria)</td>
<td>4.6 million</td>
<td>25 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Sudan</td>
<td>4.8 million</td>
<td>40 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>8.7 million</td>
<td>37 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>14.1 million</td>
<td>51 percent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: FAO/WFP (July 2016), Monitoring food security in countries with conflict situations.
Twenty-five years ago, there was roughly an even split between the number of refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs). Today, IDPs make up two-thirds of all displaced people. IDPs are almost twice as likely as refugees to die from conflict-related causes, including starvation and diseases related to malnutrition. This is mainly because so many of them are beyond the reach of international protection.

More than half of all forcibly displaced people come from five countries: Syria, Colombia, Palestine, Sudan, and Iraq. When conflicts drag on and on, displaced people are said to be living in “protracted crises.” Temporary camps mutate into permanent settlements. The average length of time a person remains displaced has now reached 17 years. The political and social unrest created by countries in conflict are increasingly felt beyond their borders as people move to escape violence and power vacuums create opportunities for terrorists.

Developing countries host 86 percent of all refugees. Countries such as Kenya, Ethiopia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with humanitarian needs of their own, face perennial shortfalls in funding from donors to provide adequate support to refugees. The largest refugee camp in the world is Dadaab, located in northeastern Kenya along the border with Somalia. The “camp” is actually a sprawling city with a combination of tents and tin-roof buildings and a population of 330,000. In 2016, the Kenyan government announced that it would shut down Dadaab, citing concerns about infiltration of the camp by al-Shabaab, the Somali terror group that has waged deadly attacks inside Kenya. This is not the first time the government has said it will shut the camp down, but at this writing it appears resolute about following through. The refugees, most from Somalia, are to be returned to Somalia or sent to other countries. Among the older residents of Dadaab, few have a home in Somalia any longer—their land was seized during the country’s long civil war. Tens of thousands of other refugees were born and raised in Dadaab and have never set foot in their “home country.”
Hundreds of thousands of children and adolescents are growing up in refugee camps. Prince Tarnah was one of these. He was 13 years old in 1990 when his family piled into their car and fled Liberia to escape the oncoming civil war. For the next seven years, they and thousands of other Liberian refugees lived in a camp on the outskirts of Freetown, the capital city of Sierra Leone. The camp was run by the U.N. High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), the U.N. agency in charge of coordinating international action in all humanitarian emergencies worldwide.

UNHCR ensured that the refugees in Sierra Leone had shelter, food rations, basic medical care, and education. Tarnah finished secondary school while living in the camp. Had the family stayed in Liberia, he might not have had a school to go to, and it’s even possible he could have ended up a child soldier. Today, he has a law degree and has worked for international organizations on contracts with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). When the Ebola crisis broke in Liberia, the international staff of the organization he was working for evacuated the country, leaving Tarnah in charge to manage the ongoing work.

“Life in a refugee camp was far from pleasant,” Tarnah says. “But when I think of how far I’ve come, I owe much to the opportunities I was given there.” Families struggled to get by on the available food rations. Tarnah’s family was forced to trade some of their rations for firewood or cash to purchase other necessities. Tensions ran high between local people and refugees competing for resources, primarily the firewood both relied on for cooking. It was dangerous for Tarnah or other refugees to gather wood, although they did so when they had no other means of cooking their food. Today, aid organizations are more aware of the inherent tensions between refugees and local communities. “Conflict-sensitive assistance” is an approach wherein organizations providing in-kind aid make sure to include the local communities surrounding a camp.23

People living in refugee camps are the face of displacement. But in fact, only about 40 percent of refugees live in camps,24 and it would surely be fewer if people had better alternatives. The majority of forcibly displaced people, both refugees and IDPs, live in urban areas, where there are...
better opportunities to earn money than in rural camps. Tarnah’s father had been an electronics technician in Liberia, so he had valuable skills to trade. As his skills became known throughout the local community, people brought him their radios and other gadgets to repair. Outside the bartering that took place, it was a challenge for him to find employment. “Your skills as a refugee have to be exceptional,” says Tarnah. “Countries have their own problem providing jobs, and they don’t want the refugees to be seen as competition for employment with locals.”

International law on refugees requires states to guarantee a range of rights to refugees, including the right to work and the right to education. Governments in host countries find ways to get around international law. Refugee-hosting countries, aiming to protect national labor markets, adopt policies that limit the rights of refugees to work. Government leaders may also be concerned that refugees will not want to return to their country of origin. In 2015, only 1 percent of refugees chose to return home. The World Bank has offered to make grants and low-interest loans available to middle-income countries Jordan and Lebanon at rates reserved for low-income countries. These two countries are hosting large numbers of Syrian refugees. Lebanon’s overall population has swelled by a third with the influx of Syrian refugees. In the United States, this would be the equivalent of adding more than 100 million people to the country’s population.

More than five years into the Syrian crisis, rich countries have done far too little to support countries hosting large numbers of Syrian refugees. Long-term displacement carries significant costs to the host countries, from providing services to managing the domestic politics. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has encouraged governments of the host countries to integrate services for refugees into their national development plans. Understandably, the host governments have resisted. Their own people are impatient with the presence of so many foreigners, and it looks like a zero-sum game: money spent on refugees is money not spent on citizens.

Refugees can be viewed as assets to their host countries rather than liabilities. When refugees are permitted to work, they typically do more than just “earn their keep.” For example, a study of refugees in Cleveland, Ohio, found their economic impact over a 12-year period to be 10 times as much as the cost of refugee services. A study in Denmark, also over 12 years, found that the wages of Danish people in communities that hosted refugees increased more quickly than wages in communities that did not. In a study of refugees in Kampala, Uganda, researchers found similar positive impacts on the local economy.
In late 2012, fighting in the Central African Republic (CAR) between government forces and a group of various Seleka militia intensified. Three religious leaders, Pastor Nicolas Guerekoyame, an Evangelical leader; Archbishop Dieudonné Nzapalainga, Catholic Archbishop of Bangui; and Imam Omar Kobine Layama, leader of the Muslim community, met in Bangui to discuss the alarming situation and how they could respond to help define a path away from violence.

Their first action was to meet with then-President Francois Bozizé to convince him to cease the anti-Muslim rhetoric that only served to inflame the conflict by pitting the religious communities against each other. About half of the population in CAR is Christian; Muslims make up approximately 15 percent; and adherents to traditional religions represent the rest.

The Seleka forces originated in the Northeast part of CAR, an area dominated by Muslim populations. They were joined by other Muslim militia from Sudan and Chad to plunder the rich natural resources in CAR, including diamonds and gold. The faith leaders knew that the conflict was essentially a struggle among a handful of political leaders over power and access to mineral wealth. They desperately wanted to prevent the political conflict from being transformed into a religious one that would tear apart the social harmony that had always existed among the faith communities.

Despite a ceasefire negotiated in January 2013, the religious leaders’ first attempt at peacebuilding failed. In March 2013, the Bozizé government fell and the Seleka leader, Michel Djotodia, took power. Seleka forces roamed the country attacking villages and towns. The religious leaders’ worst fears had come true. Villages made up of Christians and animists fought Muslim communities in what became a “religious” conflict.

Throughout 2013 and 2014, Archbishop Dieudonné, Pastor Nicolas, and Imam Layama traveled throughout the country, at great personal risk, to engage Muslim and Christian/animist villages, urging them to stop attacking one another. The three leaders formed the Religious Leaders Platform (RLP) and traveled to Europe and the United States to raise awareness of the conflict in CAR and to call for international assistance.

In January 2014, Michel Djotodia was forced out of power and the National Assembly appointed an interim leader, Catherine Samba Panza, although fighting continued. In March and November 2014, the RLP traveled to Europe and the United States to persuade the international community to increase its support to the interim government. By this time, the religious leaders’ work had become better known and acclaimed. These faith leaders also inspired action by religious leaders in the United States. The State Department and USAID worked with the Catholic Church, the Muslim community, and Evangelical leaders to send a delegation to CAR in May 2014 in a gesture of solidarity. Catholic Relief Services, World Vision, and Islamic Relief Worldwide joined together to develop and implement an interfaith peace program that USAID co-financed. The program, which began in early 2016, gives the RLP a staff and the resources to rebuild the social fabric of CAR torn apart by the political manipulation of its past leaders.

In November 2015, Pope Francis made an unprecedented visit to the war-torn country to show his fraternal concern for a people suffering the misery of conflict. He visited the central mosque of Bangui. Many in the country report that his presence visibly reduced tensions in the lead-up to difficult elections. In February 2016, the first free and fair elections in CAR’s history came to fruition and brought President Faustin-Archange Touadera to power.

Archbishop Dieudonné, Pastor Nicolas, and Imam Layama braved violence and death threats to silence the drums of war and rebuild peace for CAR. They continue their work today, with the help of American faith-based groups supported in part by the U.S. government, to heal the societal wounds of conflict and to improve prospects for peace.
Many refugees are highly educated and motivated to work and would much rather not be dependent on humanitarian aid. Recognizing this, the Center for Global Development (CGD), a U.S.-based think tank, has proposed a plan to set up an investment fund that would help connect refugees with jobs. The fund, supported by donors, would make payments in the form of vouchers to countries willing to accept refugees if, in exchange, the refugees are guaranteed the right to work and access to public services.30 The host country could then choose refugees to admit based on the skill sets needed to fill shortages in their labor supply, with the vouchers covering the upfront costs.

This idea might appeal to several European countries with aging populations and a need for workers to pick up the slack and help finance their ever-growing pension programs. The Humanitarian Investment Fund, the name CGD has proposed, could be financed in the same manner as GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance—with private capital that donors repay over time.

States of Siege

“We cannot deny the humanitarian crisis,” said Pope Francis in February 2016, speaking at the U.S.-Mexico border. “Each step, a journey laden with grave injustices … Injustice is radicalized in the young, persecuted and threatened when they try to flee the spiral of violence and the hell of drugs … Then there are the many women, unjustly robbed of their lives.”31

In 2012, rising numbers of unaccompanied children started arriving at the U.S. southern border. By 2014, 70,000 minors were stopped at the border, 73 percent of them from the Northern Triangle countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.32 Despite stepped-up enforcement at the border, the children continue to come, alone or with a parent and other family members. See Figure 1.3. The women and children that Francis was talking about are

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**Figure 1.3** Unaccompanied Children and Family Unit Members Apprehended at the U.S.-Mexico Border, October 2009-May 2016

Source: Washington Office on Latin America
primarily fleeing the Northern Triangle and its staggering levels of violence from organized crime groups and street gangs.

Gang violence sounds almost too pedestrian to describe the nature of the threat people in the region are experiencing. The women and children who are apprehended at the U.S. border have been exposed to extreme levels of violence on a near-daily basis. In 2015, screenings carried out by U.S. asylum officers revealed that 82 percent of women from Northern Triangle countries would qualify for asylum or protection under the [UN] Convention against Torture. El Salvador and Guatemala rank first and third respectively in the world for countries with the highest female murder rates. Women and girls related to gang members are considered the property of the gang, and the rape and murder of female family members are common forms of punishment for betrayal, real or perceived. Boys who refuse to join or later try to leave put sisters, girlfriends, and mothers at grave risk, so it is common for the family to escape together.

The United States is their destination of choice, influenced in part by the presence of family members in the country. When the body of an 11-year-old Guatemalan boy was found in Texas, near the border with Mexico, in his pocket was the telephone number of a brother in Chicago. Mexico and other countries in the region—Belize, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Panamá—are also destination points. In Mexico, the second destination of choice, the number of asylum-seekers from the Northern Triangle countries tripled between 2011 and 2014. In 2015, 7,422 people were murdered in the Northern Triangle, a higher death toll than any war zone in the world except Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Northern Triangle countries have higher levels of violence today than during their civil wars that ended decades ago. It seems clear that they are fragile countries, but since there is no declared or recognized war, neither the World Bank’s nor the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’s (OECD) list of fragile states includes them. The cause of their fragility is weak government institutions that have been corrupted by organized crime. Criminal organizations have penetrated state institutions to such a degree that they can operate with virtual impunity. Only five percent of homicide cases in the region lead to a conviction. These countries are transport routes for illegal drugs moving north towards destinations in the United States and Canada. Gang violence and drug trafficking are not separate problems, since the gangs are heavily involved in the lucrative drug trade.

The situation in the Northern Triangle reinforces the argument that it is critical to bolster weak state institutions immediately after the fighting stops, in the early post-conflict period. El
Salvador and Guatemala, and to a lesser extent Honduras, illustrate the consequences of missing these opportunities during a post-conflict transition.

In 1996, Guatemala ended a 36-year civil war in which more than 200,000 people were killed. But when the war finally ended, the combatants never really became ex-combatants. Instead, paramilitary groups, including death squads and counterinsurgency forces, were joined by some former military and police in forming criminal organizations. The peace accord committed the Guatemalan government to dismantling these groups, but the government never followed through.39

El Salvador’s 12-year civil war ended in 1992. During the 1980s, hundreds of thousands of Salvadorans fled to the United States. Some of the children became members of street gangs as they grew up. Once the war ended, the United States began deporting Salvadorans who were incarcerated here. They reconstituted their gangs back in El Salvador. But these gangs were much more violent than the gangs that had been in El Salvador before.40 The country’s murder rate increased by 70 percent in 2015.41

Honduras alone of the three Northern Triangle countries did not endure a long, bloody civil war. It has been politically unstable, however. The most recent coup, in 2009, deposed a democratically elected president, making way for an administration that has shown little political will to reduce crime and improve security in the country. Honduras is on par with Guatemala and El Salvador in terms of sexual and physical violence. In fact, Honduras was the murder capital of the Western Hemisphere until El Salvador replaced it in 2015. See Figure 1.4.

Violence against women and children in post-conflict societies is often a feature of war. Governments must make deliberate efforts to restore the rule of law to protect vulnerable groups.
Otherwise, the breakdown in social and moral order that prevailed during the conflict will continue. People will shrug and say that it’s just how things are in that culture.

Change starts at the peace table. Peace agreements in which women play a substantive role are shown to be 50 percent more likely to be durable. Every peace process must deliberately include women in negotiating the terms of peace agreements, because it will not happen automatically. “Out of 1,168 peace agreements signed between January 1990 and January 2014, only 18 percent make any references to women or gender,” writes U.N. Women. Since 2000, the percentage of agreements that include such references has increased to 27 percent.

Women did participate in the writing of Guatemala’s 1996 peace agreement, but as U.N. Women observed in a critique, “Even though women’s organizations continued their advocacy after the agreement, and they had two reserved seats in the National Council for the Implementation of the Peace Accords, their efforts were mostly effaced by the lack of political will, the weakness of implementation mechanisms, the expansion of transnational companies engaged in extractive industries, the significant growth of organized crime (mainly drug trafficking), and the resulting insecurity and militarization.”

Government, working together with faith-based institutions and other civil society partners, has the power to change cultures of violence, achieve peace, and re-build livelihoods after a crisis, provided it has the will to tackle institutional reform. In Nicaragua, gender-sensitive reforms have earned the police force praise for its success in addressing sexual violence. Women hold half of the senior ranks at the National Police Headquarters and constitute a sizeable share of officers on patrol. Data show that women who have been sexually assaulted are more likely to report the crime when they know a woman police officer will be available. By 2008, there was a Comisarías de la Mujer y de la Niñez (Women’s and Children’s Police Station, or CMN) in each department and regional capital as well as one in each district of Managua. CMNs work closely with women’s organizations and other nongovernmental and state actors to combine policing, medical, psychological, legal, and other services such as emergency shelter.

Neither the United States nor Mexico has responded well to the humanitarian crisis in the Northern Triangle. The U.S. policy response primarily has been to double down on immigration enforcement and to pressure Mexico to do the same. Mexico as well as the United States has detained more unaccompanied children from the Northern Triangle. There was a 70 percent increase in 2015 over 2014. UNHCR estimates that as many as half of these children are fleeing...
for their lives, but the National Institute of Migration, Mexico’s immigration agency, granted a protected status to less than 1 percent of the unaccompanied children apprehended in 2015. The vast majority of these children are in detention or have been deported.

Since 2014 alone, the United States deported more than 10,000 children who arrived unaccompanied by an adult. As the main consumer of the illegal drugs shipped from the Northern Triangle, the United States bears a large responsibility for the violence that has forced so many families to flee. One barrier to assuming more of our country’s responsibility is that public discourse about undocumented immigration doesn’t recognize the distinction between people who are coming for “push” reasons and those who are “pulled” here. Women and children who have survived and witnessed brutality and violence and been pushed out of their own countries are viewed as no different than people who are motivated to come by the demand for labor in various industries.

Bread for the World supported President Obama’s proposal for a $750 million aid package to Northern Triangle countries that included additional funding for USAID to address the “root causes” of the violence in the region. Congress approved these funds in December 2015. When Congress takes up immigration reform, addressing root causes should also become part of U.S. immigration policy.

Building the Beginnings of a Durable Peace

At the end of a civil war, countries have approximately a 50-50 chance of lapsing back into conflict within five years. That statistic emerged from a World Bank study in the early 2000s by Paul Collier and colleagues. Since then, the number of major civil conflicts has tripled. The pressure is growing for the international community to help post-conflict societies improve their odds of remaining at peace. The primary objective should be to support government and civil society in building a durable peace. The renewal of violence in a post-conflict state, even beyond the cost in lives and livelihoods, has implications for regional and global security.

In a multi-country study of post-conflict societies, men typically saw peace in terms of political stability at the regional and national level, and they highlighted the need for jobs. Women, on the other hand, were more inclined to talk about peace in terms of the fulfillment of basic rights, expressed through service delivery such as access to food assistance, education, or being able to give birth in a hospital bed rather than on a dirt floor. The women also identified reducing gender-based violence as important to peace.
In the early phases of post-conflict reconstruction, policies that favor the women’s concerns have been shown to be very effective in promoting peace: policies that promote access to health, education, and other forms of social protection, especially among groups that have historically been excluded from these services. Inequality and marginalization are usually among the root causes of the conflict. See Figure 1.5.

In Rwanda, the government invested in universal health coverage after the 1994 genocide. At first the government presented universal health coverage as a vision for the future so that people understood that it would take time to put into place. Today, nearly 80 percent of the population is insured. Rwanda is not a model of democracy, but the fact that Tutsis and Hutus have lived together in peace after Hutus killed hundreds of thousands of Tutsis in an attempted genocide does say that they’re getting something right.

Providing services is a natural part of state-building and is something that aid agencies can support. After a protracted conflict, these partners may be the only ones able to keep schools and hospitals running. Food assistance that helps people meet their basic needs has been shown to build confidence in the peace process. Food-for-work or cash-for-work programs have been used to simultaneously assist vulnerable populations and rebuild infrastructure such as roads. Food assistance has been used to reintegrate ex-combatants and build social cohesion. Food assistance

Figure 1.5  What Are Citizens’ Views on the Drivers of Conflict?

In surveys conducted in six countries and territories affected by violence, involving a mix of nationally representative samples and subregions, citizens raised issues linked to individual economic welfare (poverty, unemployment) and injustice (including inequality and corruption) as the primary drivers of conflict.

can facilitate the return of refugees and IDPs. Food assistance to pregnant women and mothers of young children reduces the risk of child malnutrition while also contributing to women’s short-term needs and the nation’s long-term development agenda.

School meals programs also play several roles. In addition to feeding children and strengthening educational institutions, meals programs are potential markets for local farmers. The World Food Program (WFP), through its Purchase for Progress (P4P) program, is working to improve links between school feeding programs and agricultural development. USAID’s Feed the Future program operates in only a small number of post-conflict countries, and it also focuses on improving the livelihoods of smallholder farmers, while the McGovern-Dole Food for Education program supplies U.S. commodities for school meals in developing countries. It would be good to see more alignment between McGovern-Dole and Feed the Future in countries where both programs operate, focused on ensuring that smallholder farmers have a guaranteed market for their products and can get them to the schools.

School meal programs have also been shown to increase enrollment rates for girls, and this is an even bigger issue in conflict-affected countries than in other countries. Post-conflict societies have very high poverty rates, and parents may decide to pull daughters out of school to earn income to help support the family.

“Around the world, people believe a government that cannot feed its people has forfeited its legitimacy,” writes Alex de Waal, executive director of the World Peace Foundation at Tufts University. International actors operating in a country according to their own agenda pose a significant risk that the national government will be seen as illegitimate. Donors and international aid organizations should follow national leadership.

To put it succinctly: “Ownership of development assistance is intertwined with its legitimacy,” write Alastair McKeehnie and Marcus Manuel. Even if development assistance is funding most of a national government’s budget, donors should not undermine the country’s leaders and national stakeholders by establishing themselves as authorities who determine the country’s development priorities. It should be left to countries themselves.

The g7+, an alliance of countries that are or have been affected by conflict, state that their intent is to “rebuild and enable our own state institutions to raise revenues and meet the financing needs of our development. This is a key element of state building and the path to long term peace.” The average tax-to-GDP ratio in post-conflict countries is only 14 percent, compared to an average of 17 percent in other developing countries and 34 percent in the devel-
oped OECD countries. External partners with technical expertise can provide very valuable assistance by enabling countries to strengthen their public sector capacity to raise revenues.

Several low-income and post-conflict countries have shown that, with political commitment at the highest levels of government, it is possible to substantially increase domestic revenues. Between 2002 and 2012, Afghanistan, a member of the g7+, increased revenue ninefold, which allowed the government to implement a package of universal health services. The package is basic, but today in Afghanistan, every family is entitled to prenatal, obstetrical, postpartum care, and family planning services; child immunization; micronutrient supplementation and nutrition screening; and tuberculosis and malaria control.

Governments can gain legitimacy by showing the direct link between tax collection and public services. Between 1998 and 2005, Rwanda increased domestic revenue from 9 percent of its GDP to 14.9 percent. This has enabled the government to improve services, such as the expanded health insurance coverage we described earlier. Since 2005, Rwanda’s One Cow per Poor Family Program has used tax revenue to distribute more than 130,000 dairy cows to rural poor households. The cow’s milk is a source of protein, and the manure serves as fertilizer that can be used to produce biogas for cooking. To help build a sense of community responsibility, families are expected to give the first female calf to a neighbor.

Jobs, Farms, and Roads

Jobs are one of the most pressing issues in fragile states. In a typical fragile state, nearly 40 percent of the population is younger than 15, with populations growing at twice the rate of nonfragile states. The working-age population in sub-Saharan Africa, the most fragile region, is expected to increase by 74 percent between 2010 and 2030, requiring 13 million new jobs every year just to absorb new workers.

Researchers reviewing decades of data found that countries with large percentages of unemployed and uneducated young men are more prone to civil war. If the economy is not producing jobs, the country is at risk of sliding back into war. Gangs in the Northern Triangle stoke the frustrations of jobless young men. Jihadist groups exploit the humiliation of young men who cannot provide for their families. See Box 1.2.
Chapter 1

Box 1.2

Breaking the Cycle of Fragility in Somalia

Somalia is the fifth-poorest country in the world with a per capita income of less than $1.25 per day, according to the World Bank. More than 70 percent of the population is under 30—members of a generation that has known nothing but cycles of conflict and grinding hunger and poverty.

Two-thirds of the people of working age are unemployed. With few jobs and limited access to education beyond primary school, young Somali men are preyed on by militant groups such as Al-Shabaab that promise material and spiritual wealth and a chance to join a movement that carries status among their peers. The name Al-Shabaab is Arabic for “The Youth,” a name intended to challenge them to claim their destiny.

Set against these cynical and destructive forces, the Somali Agency for International Development (SAFID) works to empower young men and women to build skills and self-esteem by developing small businesses, rehabilitating public infrastructure, participating in community mobilization initiatives and vocational training, and attending seminars to build their leadership capacity. SAFID was established by a group of young Somali professionals living in exile. Led by executive director Mohamed Dore, SAFID returned to the homeland in 2011. In recent years, its activities have expanded to include joining the fight against female genital mutilation and forced marriage.

SAFID has helped to empower Gulled Adan Abdi, a 13-year-old orphan, to stay in school. Gulled has a talent for creating new things from salvaged metal and other leftover materials. Now he builds toy airplanes and armored cars, as well as fans, and sells them to help pay his school fees. SAFID has also worked with women’s groups to establish 240 small business enterprises. Amran Ali Sudi, 30 years old and a mother of four, is one proprietor. The income she earns by selling vegetables from a kiosk in Mogadishu makes it possible for her to pay school fees, the most important thing she believes she can do to protect her children from the militias. “Children are future leaders and if they can get good education they can change the current situation in the country,” she says.

The Global Youth Innovation Network (GYIN), based in Washington, DC, has provided a platform for SAFID to connect with donors and other youth organizations around the world. As U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has said, “To unleash the power of young people, we need to partner with them.” At a time when there are more young people in the world than ever before, and most are growing up in poverty, organizations like SAFID need partners in order to maximize the life-saving work they do in the most challenging of all environments.
In addition to creating much-needed jobs, job programs are an effective way to reintegrate ex-combatants into society. In 2002, at the end of the civil war in Sierra Leone, the government and its development partners launched a farmer field school initiative to support the reintegration of tens of thousands of ex-combatants. The young men most likely to participate in armed conflict were from rural areas, and many were ill-equipped to earn a living after laying down their arms. The farmer field schools were also crucial for food production because most farms had been abandoned during the war. In addition, the jobs program helped to promote social cohesion by being a catalyst for the establishment of new farmer organizations. This helped get the beneficiaries more invested in post-conflict reconstruction. Its success was corroborated by the high voter turnout in areas where the organizations were formed. This was a strong signal that the country would not lapse back into conflict, since people accepted that there was an alternative way to be heard.

Ex-combatants are often shunned by their communities for acts of violence committed during the war. An additional objective of reintegration programs is to help rebuild trust between ex-combatants and the rest of the community. In Rwanda, tens of thousands of ex-combatants also received training in farming. Surveyed more than a decade later, the majority of them reported that they were satisfied with their reintegration. Perhaps not surprisingly, the public does not always support such programs. In Cambodia, for example, people were outraged when the government gave land to members of the Khmer Rouge to farm in an effort to induce them to lay down their arms.

Most conflict-affected countries are agrarian societies. Jobs in the public sector and with registered private sector enterprises account for less than 10 percent of total employment. In Mozambique, more than 80 percent of the jobs are in agriculture. After gaining independence in 1975, Mozambique descended into civil war. Since the end of the war in 1992, the country has been remarkably stable and lauded for its good governance. But that has not been enough to escape the poverty trap. Today, young people are abandoning rural areas and moving to urban centers, where there are few prospects of finding regular employment that pays more than a poverty wage.

More off-farm employment is needed in these societies, but there is no way to get there without first investing in the agricultural sector. In 2003, at the African Union Summit, heads of state from across the continent pledged to reverse decades of underinvestment in agriculture. The Maputo Declaration that was adopted at the summit endorsed the African Union-led Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP) as the primary framework for agri-
cultural development on the continent. CAADP is designed to “help African countries reach a higher path of economic growth through agriculture-led development, which eliminates hunger, reduces poverty and food insecurity, and enables expansion of exports.” More than 30 countries have signed CAADP compacts that commit their governments to allocating at least 10 percent of the national budget to agriculture. So far, only a handful of countries have managed to reach this target.

One of the CAADP priorities is to improve rural infrastructure for smallholder farmers, especially women. Africa’s infrastructure deficit is an enormous development challenge in its own right, and weak infrastructure is one of the biggest barriers to developing the agricultural sector. Only one-third of Africans living in rural areas are within two kilometers of an all-season road, compared with two-thirds of the population in other developing regions. Some communities are still virtually inaccessible during the rainy season. Reliable roads make it easier for farmers to get their products into urban markets. A World Bank evaluation of rural road repairs in Uganda estimated the rate of return on investment to be as high as 40 percent.

Because infrastructure projects are labor intensive, they are one of the best ways to create off-farm employment. Investments in infrastructure do more than create jobs in post-conflict countries—they also provide hope by offering people tangible ways of watching their country rise from the ruins of war. External financing for infrastructure in sub-Saharan Africa tripled between 2004 and 2012. See Figure 1.6. Four of the top six recipient countries (calculated as financing per dollar of GDP) are fragile states, with Liberia leading the way.

China invests in infrastructure in low-income fragile states, but to a much lesser extent than in non-fragile low-income ones. See Figure 1.7. China is sub-Saharan Africa’s single largest trading partner. Africa figures prominently in China’s economic rebalancing. As operating costs increase at home, Chinese firms are looking to move more low-skill production offshore. More than 2,000 Chinese enterprises are currently operating in sub-Saharan African countries. Chinese investment in manufacturing could become a significant source of jobs, but without major improvements in infrastructure, the potential for this to happen will evaporate.

The largest source of external financing to fragile states, other than in the telecom sector, is official development finance from multilateral institutions (especially the World Bank and the African Development Bank) and OECD donor countries combined. Broadening the sources of financing to include more private investment will require national governments to put a significant emphasis on reforming governance and reducing corruption, especially as infrastructure is known to be a sector with a high risk of corruption.
Land and Peace

Once a peace agreement is reached, people who have been displaced take advantage of the improved security to return and reclaim the land they left behind—but when they arrive, they may find someone living there. The new people may have also been displaced from their original home during the war. It’s par for the course in countries whose conflicts have gone on for years, even decades. People are forced to move again and again and again.

Land disputes tend to mushroom as refugees and IDPs return. In Afghanistan, land disputes were a principal obstacle to the return and reintegration of refugees and IDPs.82 Not everyone returns at once. The timing depends on a number of factors, including how safe people feel. During the conflict, the rule of law broke down. An end to the fighting and a signed peace agreement don’t necessarily mean it snaps right back into place.

The conflict may have been about land in the first place—either overtly or as an underlying cause. Competition for scarce water resources in Africa’s dry areas has spurred many violent clashes between pastoralists and farm communities.83 Since 2000, land issues have played a significant role in 27 out of Africa’s 30 interstate conflicts.84 Impoverished families in rural areas depend on the land to provide food for their households and income to meet other needs. Encroachment is therefore viewed as an existential threat. Losing land puts the household’s very survival at risk.

Land is often seen as part of the “spoils of war,” which in turn means that people defend their own land at all costs. Combatants seize control of land for strategic advantage or to exploit natural resources. The expression “take that hill” could mean a homestead or a village. The war in Darfur, Sudan, was about land as much as it was about ethnic enmities.85 The Sudanese government lured pastoralists away from grazing areas in Darfur, promising them land with better access to water but in reality driving them straight into the guns of allied militia.86

It is essential that land rights be written into peace agreements. Often the focus is on broader issues, such as power sharing arrangements, drafting a new constitution, or scheduling elections. In 2016, the Government of Colombia and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) reached a peace agreement, ending 50 years of armed conflict that displaced hundreds of thousands of families from millions of acres of land. Comprehensive Rural Reform, the first point in the peace agreement, established conditions for equitable access to land.87 It is unprecedented for land reform to be front and center in a peace agreement, but land issues were recognized as central to why the war dragged on and on.

Land acquisition deals, less favorably known as “land grabs,” are another source of conflict. Commercial investors, sometimes in corrupt deals with governments or particular officials, can
take advantage of opaquely written laws to displace communities who had been informally considered the owners for generations. Land grabbing was one of the main reasons the fighting in Colombia continued for so many years. In Honduras, hundreds of thousands of peasants have been forcibly displaced to clear land for palm oil investors working with the country’s “agro-oligarchs.”

In Madagascar, an attempted land grab by a foreign company led to a political crisis that forced the president to resign. The government negotiated a deal with a South Korean company to lease more than a million acres of prime agricultural land to grow crops for export. In a country where a third of the population is hungry, and half of all children are malnourished, the public would not stand for it.

In 2014, Italian and U.S. researchers, examining a global dataset of large-scale land acquisitions, published a study showing that between 300 million and 550 million people could be fed by crops grown on these acquired lands. The land in these deals was in countries with some of the world’s highest rates of hunger and malnutrition. Governments in fragile states, desperate to attract foreign investment, have proved all too willing to trade land to investors at bargain rates. Agribusinesses typically claim that they will reduce hunger by applying modern technologies to increase productivity on the acquired land. In fact, many of these deals are intended to produce crops for export or to produce biofuels. Reducing hunger and poverty in the host country is not a priority when crops can instead go to paying customers.

The International Finance Corporation, the business lending arm of the World Bank, has been roundly criticized for its participation in land grabbing. It is a major facilitator of land acquisition transactions in developing countries. The Bank has an admirable set of voluntary principles on responsible land governance that it shares with clients, but the problem is just that: they are voluntary guidelines. The Bank should be doing more to uphold these principles.

Of the estimated 570 million farms worldwide, the vast majority, as many as 85 percent, are less than two hectares in size (roughly 5 acres) and run by families with no formal title. Secure tenure gives farmers the needed confidence and the incentives to invest in the land to improve productivity. Growth in the agriculture sector from improved productivity has been shown to do more to reduce hunger and poverty than growth in any other sector. In the early 1990s, a post-conflict, still fragile Vietnam enacted reforms that radically expanded land rights, leading to some of the most dramatic reductions in hunger and poverty the world has ever seen. Between 1993 and 2010, per capita food production in Vietnam increased by about 4 percent a year, and
the poverty rate fell from 58 percent to 10 percent.95

In Africa, land reforms that promote individual ownership have not achieved the same productivity gains as they have in Asia or Latin America. Individual ownership is not automatically considered the best way—in many African societies, local chiefs control how land is distributed. Land rights are conferred on individuals based on their membership in a community, clan, or other kinship group. National government efforts to change these systems are at best slow and complicated. In Nigeria alone, there are 350 ethnic groups, each with its own set of customary laws.96 In 2010, the African Union adopted the Framework and Guidelines for Land Policy in Africa, urging member states to recognize the legitimacy of customary systems.97 Botswana, the first African country to formally recognize customary systems in 1968,98 has been one of Africa’s most stable and free countries over the last half century.

Customary tenure systems are more adaptable, which can be a good thing in post-conflict situations where large numbers of people need to be resettled. In Liberia, for example, where 80 percent of the population was displaced during the two civil wars, communities were willing to grant land use rights to people not originally from those places, contributing to the country’s peaceful transition. “While not every post-conflict customary setting is as accommodating, it is hard to imagine such a thing happening in a situation with formalized land rights,” write Sandra Joireman and Laura Meitzner Yoder in a study on land tenure and customary law.99

The question of land rights is undoubtedly one of supreme importance to global food security. By 2030, the world population is projected to reach 8.5 billion.100 That means the world will need food for 1.2 billion more people—what amounts to adding a second India. FAO studies classify 33 percent of the world’s soil resources as degraded.101 Thus, whether it is possible to produce enough food to feed everyone will depend largely on how the land currently in use is managed. Land rights are at least as important to solving that problem as technologies to increase productivity and sustainable practices to restore degraded land.

There is no one right way forward that all countries should follow. As with other questions of institution building, the context means everything. At the national level, the best way forward may be to bring together all parties concerned to resolve differences and seek common ground. Change is bound to be slow, uneven, and hard to quantify—again, the way institutional change usually occurs. That doesn’t exclude international aid agencies from constructive involvement, but their most useful contributions may be to facilitate change, through support for dialogue and negotiations, rather than to play their more familiar role of trying to lead change.
The Convergence of Conflict and Climate Change

Mounting evidence points to a relationship between climate change and conflict. In this section, we focus on the destabilizing effects of climate change in some of the most conflict-affected regions of the world, and where these situations may be heading as climate change intensifies over the coming decades. We’re taking a regional approach, both because climate change does not respect national borders, and because climate change only multiplies the threats and complications already present in a region.

In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, there are four all-out civil wars—in Syria, Libya, Iraq, and Yemen. Egypt, Tunisia, and others in the region still feel the aftershocks of the Arab Spring. In 2016, the Turkish government put down an attempted coup. The longstanding Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues. Finally, MENA countries remain the primary recruiting ground of the terror group ISIS.

Climate-related pressures could make the region more unstable than it already is. The population of the MENA region is expected to double by mid-century. At the same time, climate change is worsening environmental conditions to the point that large areas might become uninhabitable. Researchers at the Max Planck Institute for Chemistry have been studying how temperatures can be expected to change in the region over the course of the century, and their findings are alarming. By the middle of the century, the region is expected to experience increases in heat extremes. Even at the lower end of global warming projections, there will be five times as many days in which temperatures reach 114 degrees Fahrenheit—up to 80 days a year.

More severe desert dust storms could also make many areas uninhabitable. In Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Syria, air pollution caused by desert dust has increased by 70 percent since the beginning of the century. The desert dust is largely caused by sand storms, which are increasing because droughts throughout the MENA region have been on the rise since the 1960s.

The MENA region is one of the most dependent of all on food imports, making it particularly vulnerable to instability and conflict when global food prices surge. Rising food prices were seen as a catalyst for the Arab Spring. In addition to the heat and dust, water scarcity will limit food production. Crop yields are expected to decline by 30 percent at the lower range of global warming projections and by as much as 60 percent at higher projections.

The Sahel region stretches from Africa’s west coast to its east coast, along a belt of countries that separate the Sahara Desert to the north from savannah terrain to the south. The Sahel is also where Africa’s Muslim north meets its Christian and animist south, where Arabs and Berbers in the north meet black Africans in the south.
The region has long been rife with conflict and instability. In the past decade, areas that have become uninhabitable desert have proven to be fertile ground for violent extremism and transnational terrorism. Organized crime and violent extremists can move freely throughout these areas because the Sahel’s resource-strapped governments have minimal capacity to police them and national borders are porous.

Agadez, Niger, is a desert outpost, on the southern tip of the Sahara. Agadez is one of the main thoroughfares in Africa’s booming human trafficking industry. Every week, thousands of migrants pass through, driven by climate change to try to cross into Europe. The migrants pay hundreds of dollars to make the perilous journey, guided by smugglers through war-torn Libya. The profits from human smuggling operations fund various armed groups, enabling them to corrupt government officials and penetrate state institutions.\(^{109}\)

We will discuss one of the Sahel’s subregions, the Lake Chad Region, again in the next chapter. Parts of Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon make up the Lake Chad Region. It has become Africa’s fastest-growing displacement crisis, with 2.8 million people forced to flee their homes\(^{110}\) by Boko Haram. In 2016, nearly half of the 20 million people who live here are in need of life-saving nutrition assistance. Boko Haram, the deadliest and perhaps most fanatical of the Sahel’s militant groups, originated in Nigeria’s Borno State, where desertification, recurrent drought, and government neglect provided the breeding ground.

The Congo River Basin is a massive territory in western and central Africa. The rainforests of the Congo River Basin are second only to the Amazon in providing the Earth with its best natural defenses against climate change. But tropical forests and the communities that depend on them are also particularly vulnerable to climate change, and the Earth’s “second lung,” as this region is sometimes called, is beset with conflict.

Nearly 60 percent of the entire Congo River Basin lies within the borders of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Other parts of the region are in the Republic of Congo, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Gabon, and Equatorial Guinea. The DRC has been plagued by conflict continuously ever since independence in 1960. It is the largest country in sub-Saharan Africa, and its conflicts radiate beyond its borders. The Central
The South Asia region includes Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. It is one of the world’s most politically unstable regions. With nearly 2 billion people, the region also has the largest absolute number of people suffering from chronic hunger and malnutrition. Climate change, in the forms of rising temperatures, irregular rains, sea
level rise, and floods, is already displacing people at a troubling rate. Every day, for example, an estimated 2,000 people displaced by sea level rise arrive in Dhaka, the sprawling capital of Bangladesh.

Water scarcity is another major problem as glacier melt accelerates in the region’s three giant mountain ranges, the Himalaya, Karakoram, and Hindu Kush. Together with the Tibetan Plateau, these mountain ranges have been called the “Third Pole” because they contain Earth’s largest amount of snow and ice on the planet after Antarctica and the Arctic. Forty percent of the world’s population depends on the rivers that drain from these mountain ranges for their water supply. Once glaciers have melted away they cannot be restored.

A 2016 report by three retired military leaders from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh warns that water scarcity could undermine peace and security in South Asia. In India, two consecutive years of punishing drought have led to water shortages in as many as 10 states, forcing authorities to post armed guards at dams in order to prevent desperate farmers from stealing water. In Afghanistan, drought has driven some young men to join armed groups as the only way to provide for their families. Pakistan is also facing acute shortages as ground water supplies are being rapidly depleted.

“Some may say that loose nukes and Islamist militant takeovers are the big fear for Pakistan. For me, the nightmare is water scarcity, because in Pakistan it is very real and already upon us,” says Michael Kugelman, South Asia expert at the Washington, DC-based Woodrow Wilson Center. “And worst of all is that the authorities have given no indication that they plan to do anything about any of this.”

In the Western Hemisphere, one region that is both conflict-affected and extremely vulnerable to the effects of climate change is Central America. As we saw earlier in this chapter, the levels of violence from gang- and drug-related activities in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, the subregion called the Northern Triangle, are comparable to those of most countries with acknowledged civil wars.

Central America is an isthmus, surrounded by the Pacific Ocean on one side and the Caribbean Sea on the other. This means it is in the path of tropical storms striking from either side. Extreme weather events such as droughts, heatwaves, and flooding caused by hurricanes have become increasingly routine. From 1994 to 2013, Honduras was the world’s top country affected by extreme weather events, with Nicaragua lining up fourth, Guatemala ninth, and El Salvador twelfth. In 2011, flooding in El Salvador, caused by tropical depression 12E, destroyed an esti-
mated 60 percent of the entire national corn and bean crops and led to a 4 percent loss in GDP. The people most exposed to all of these dangers are poor residents of rural areas.

No one can say for sure how much of the migration to the United States from the Northern Triangle is climate-induced. Climate change and violence together are closing off many of the options. In the past, droughts in Guatemala usually led farmers to go to the cities to find another way of earning a living, but cities are now seen as less of a viable option because of gang control. The deforestation rates in Honduras, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, among the highest in the world, are directly linked to drug traffickers, who clear large areas of the forests to create pasture for cattle production, mainly as a front to launder money. They rely on political influence and bribes to get state and local officials to turn a blind eye.

Traffickers also tear up forests to strengthen their control of territory and drive out rivals. “Narco-deforestation,” a new term for an increasingly common phenomenon, also leads to displacement of rural people as traffickers forcibly take land from farmers and indigenous groups. With both climate change and narco-violence making people in rural areas more desperate, and Northern Triangle cities no safer than a war zone, heading north to the United States may seem to be the only possibility.
We are the Democratic Republic of Congo

An essay by students of the Christian Bilingual University of Congo (UCBC), located in Beni, North Kivu Province, in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Dr. Paul W. Robinson, former member of Bread for the World’s board of directors, and a professor at UCBC, has been our liason to the students. Through Dr. Robinson’s class Global Perspectives, February-March 2016, we asked students to discuss how the international community can engage more constructively with the DRC to promote poverty reduction and sustainable development. The following is a collated and edited version of the class’s response.

We are young women and men, students studying at the Bilingual Christian University of Congo (UCBC), located in Beni, North Kivu Province, Democratic Republic of Congo. In this year, 2016, we continue to live in a war zone, despite the peace agreements of 2002 that marked the official end of our country’s Great War, and despite the presence of a national government first elected in 2006.

We live in a state of fear and anxiety. Militia groups, neighboring countries’ armies, international peace-keeping organizations, members of our own security forces, bandits, and others with various interests in our instability continue to wreak havoc on our villages, towns, and cities.

Our country is at best a fragile state, and at worst a failed state. In spite of the violence and persistent poverty, we refuse to despair; we live believing that change is possible in Congo. We choose to participate in the development of our country and to envision a future of hope.

We are Congo’s future leaders, in all walks of life, in all our communities, in our government, civil society and faith communities. We can and will be the change we want in Congo.

We are Congo’s Past

Between the 16th and late 19th centuries, our ancestors—young people like us—were seized and brutally taken from this land to be enslaved in the Americas and elsewhere. Between 1885-1915, during the first 30 years of Belgian colonial rule, 10 million of us were beaten, whipped, maimed, and killed; forcibly conscripted to build roads, railroads, and infrastructure for the colonial state to export rubber and other of our abundant resources.

Belgian colonial rule came to an abrupt end in 1960. But independence did little to change the violence and poverty that defined pre-colonial and colonial Congolese society. The European powers remained, joined by new players such as the United States, the Soviet Union, and the Peoples’ Republic of China, seeking to influence our loyalty in the Cold War and to assure a flow of our resources to their industries and consumers.

They (you) are still present, wielding influence and control over us and throughout postcolonial Africa. Our former rulers and new ‘friends’ promised to help develop us after independence, but that help has been largely conditional on the export of our wealth and cooperation in their interests. In this, we of course share the blame. But an African proverb affirms: “The hand that gives is always above the hand that receives.”

Between 1996-2002, six African countries and more than 30 militia groups raped, slaughtered, terrorized, and pillaged our country for control over our vast resources. Somewhere between 3-5 million people died. Nobody really knows how many Congolese died. Not many people around the world cared about Congolese deaths at the beginning of the 20th century; not many people cared at the end of the century.

We are Congo’s Present

We know what drove our most recent cycle of conflict and war is primarily our mineral wealth and our abundant and fertile land. We have suffered because we possess strategic and rare minerals that drive high-tech industries. We are induced to trade our minerals for empty promises of ‘development’ and weapons so that certain of our people can control and profit from this exchange. Our leaders bear much responsibility for our condition. They sign agreements in which we are obliged to develop our resources for the benefit of others.

We were told by Belgian colonialists—and the wider world since then—that to be developed was to evolve from being Congolese to being culturally and linguistically something other than Congolese. The goal of our parents’ and grandparents’ generations in being educated in the colonial era was to become Belgian rather than Congolese. To be successful in Congo, we still need to speak and think French and to be someone other than what we see when we look in the mirror. We do not value who we are, what we produce, or how we live. We are at best passive, at worst imitative.

Apart from cultures of poverty and violence, we have inherited very little from our long encounter with the outside world. We possess more than enough resources to live into a good destiny. We have fertile lands in a benevolent climate. We have abundant strategic minerals we can use for our benefit. Yet our poverty is such that we import our food from outside. We allow outsiders to come and exploit us with imbalanced contracts that essentially steal our wealth. Our own leaders have become the new benefi-
ciaries of the old inequalities. Corruption has become our daily bread at all levels of the state, business, and services of all kinds. We are passive when it comes to becoming who we could be, and we are passive in the face of injustices.

We ask ourselves the questions: "Why?" "Who are we called to be and what are we called to do?"

We are Congo’s Future

“Oh beloved country, Congo, we shall make you a country better than before.” This stanza from our national hymn sums up our vision for our country. We will be a voice for our nation and our people. We are committed to being a new generation of leaders who will responsibly lead our nation.

Living our destiny is not only a dream; it is possible if we truly want it. We have sufficient resources to make our vision a reality. We are endowed with 50 percent of Africa’s rainforests. We have rich, abundant soils, plentiful rainfall, and one of the most extensive riverine systems in the world. Our hydroelectric potential could power all of sub-Saharan Africa; our agriculture has the potential to feed much of our continent.

What we require and what we ask of those who would be our friends are three things: access, knowledge, and transformation. A popular saying states: Instead of giving me a fish to eat today, teach me how to fish and I shall eat everyday. We say that this is not enough. Yes, we need knowledge to know how to fish in the pond. But we then also need access to the pond. We long for the day when our country will have an equal seat at the table in the community of nations, when Congo will participate with self-respect and be respectfully heard. Listen to us; let us listen to one another.

We want to suggest two areas of transformation that we believe would impact our world for the better. The place where we must start is with global arms manufacture and trade, which simply increases violence and the misappropriation and misuse of wealth and power. We and our communities have been terrorized for four centuries by the transfer of weaponry and military technologies from Europe and North America. President Nyerere of Tanzania noted in 1985 (an observation that holds equally true in 2016) that: “All the guns you see in Africa are manufactured in the developed North. Just as there are pushers of drugs in your cities, so there are pushers of guns in our countries.”1 Underdevelopment, poverty, and hunger persist in Congo because of chronic violence and insecurity. We must work towards putting an end to the lucrative global arms manufacture and trade.

Additionally, we need developed countries to end their exploitation of our resources for their benefit. We need both to develop our resources to meet our needs and improve our lives, and then to develop our resources and engage in fair and legitimate trade that mutually benefits both producer and buyer. This requires transformation, and we believe this is best achieved as we come to the table as partners. As more than partners really. We need to recognize that our future is dependent on each other. So we say in Swahili, tukopamoja (we are together).

We long for the kind of collaboration that enables us to achieve our vision. Yes, we are Congo’s future. You, who read our words, are also our future.

Read more about Congo Initiative and the Christian Bilingual University of Congo (UCBC) at http://congoinitiative.org/ and www.ucbc.org.