

# Reducing Armed Violence, Enabling Development

The residents of low- and middle-income countries bear a grossly disproportionate share of the global burden of armed violence.<sup>1</sup> Insecurity and high levels of violence have profoundly negative consequences for societies and the quality of people's lives. Not only does armed violence in its different forms kill and injure hundreds of thousands of people every year, but the impact of wide-scale violence and armed conflict is devastating on a country's public institutions, national economy, infrastructure, and social cohesion (GD Secretariat, 2008, p. 31). Violence stops or even reverses development, especially in low- and middle-income countries. At the same time, weak governance, economic stagnation, and social inequalities contribute to the persistence of violence.

This *Research Note* relies mostly on the key findings of the 2008 and 2011 Global Burden of Armed Violence (GBAV) reports (GD Secretariat, 2008; 2011), as well as on the World Bank's *World Development Report 2011* (World Bank, 2011). It examines the negative relationship between armed violence and development by providing an overview of the impacts of armed violence and considering the links between armed violence and development; more specifically, it highlights the statistical evidence on the linkages between lethal violence and specific Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

A clear message emerges from this analysis: if countries and donors want to realize their development goals, then addressing the root causes of armed violence becomes a priority for policy-makers.

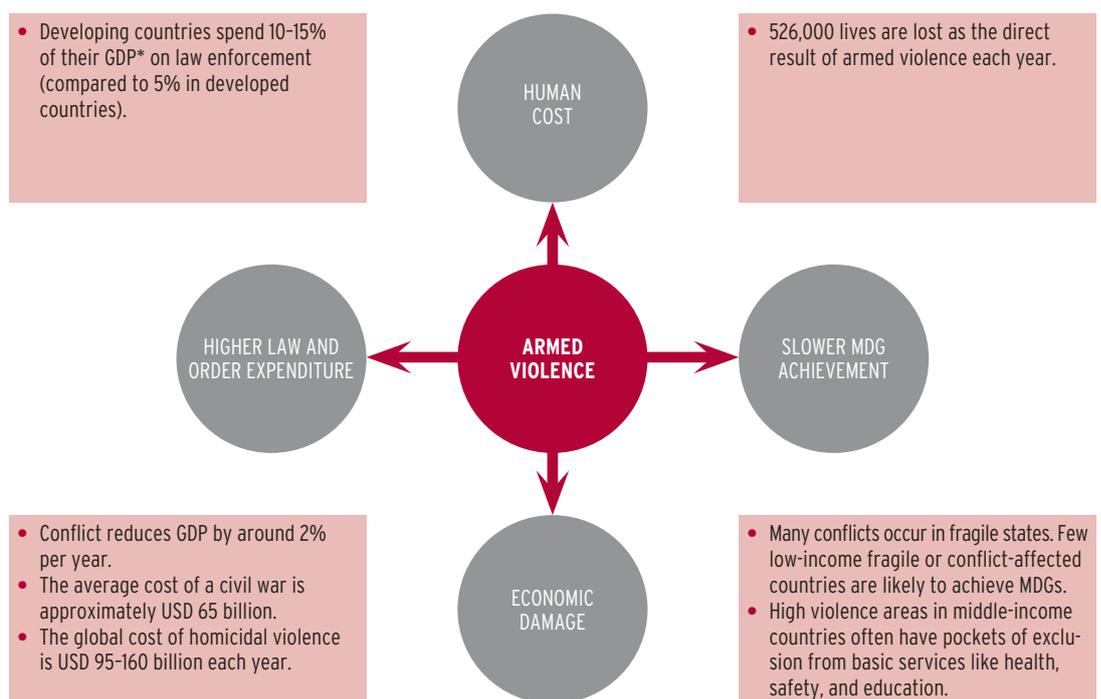
## The impacts of armed violence

On average, armed violence kills 526,000 people each year.<sup>2</sup> Three-quarters of the victims (roughly 396,000 people) die in situations of interpersonal and crime-related violence outside of armed conflicts, and the large majority of them live in low- and middle-income regions of the world (GD Secretariat, 2011). Many more are injured and experience prolonged physical and psychological consequences as a result of armed violence. Recent analysis finds that, on average, three people are injured for every person killed by firearm violence alone (Alvazzi del Frate, 2012).

Armed violence affects the fabric of societies to different degrees and generates costs across multiple levels (see Figure 1).

Different forms and levels of violence may have different impacts, but generally violence may erode a country's human capital,<sup>3</sup> reduce life expectancy at birth (Soares, 2006), destroy its productive capital, deplete its financial capital,<sup>4</sup>

Figure 1 Overview of the costs of armed violence



Source: OECD (2011)

and threaten its macro-economic stability. Furthermore, violence generates a number of significant multiplier effects on the economy both at the macro-economic level (lower rates of savings and investment) and individual level (e.g. lower rates of participation in the labour market, lower productivity, etc.) (Buvinic and Morrison, 1999, p. 4). Security expenditures may increase disproportionately, with parallel decreases in welfare spending. Situations of armed violence may impose significant stress on public institutions and erode their legitimacy. Finally, the increased risks associated with armed conflict and violence may cause the reallocation of development assistance (GD Secretariat, 2008, pp. 89–90).

In situations of armed violence and conflict, the poor and vulnerable bear the brunt of the impact of violence. The *World Development Report 2011* finds that, on average, 'a country that experienced major violence over the period from 1981 to 2005 has a poverty rate 21 percentage points higher than a country that saw no violence' (World Bank, 2011, p. 5).

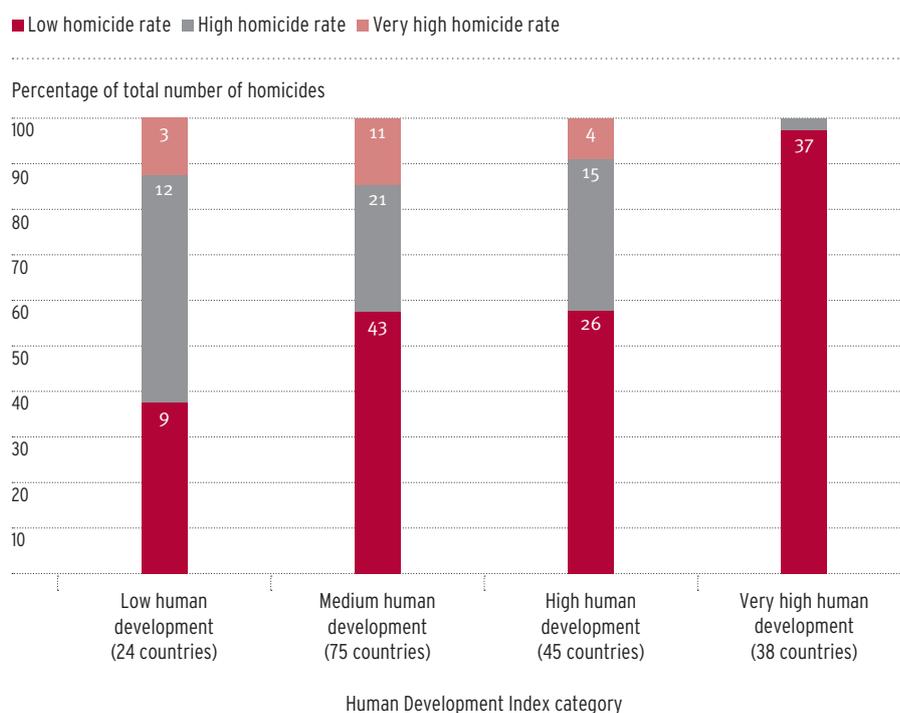
The human, social, and economic costs of armed violence and conflict adversely affect countries and societies, possibly for decades. The World Bank considers that 'the average cost of a civil war is equivalent to more than 30 years of GDP growth for a medium-size developing country' (World Bank, 2011, pp. 5–6).

## Links between armed violence and development

Figure 2 illustrates some of the results of a statistical analysis conducted among 182 countries distributed according to their Human Development Index (HDI).<sup>5</sup> Countries with high and very high homicide rates<sup>6</sup> are concentrated in the low human development band (GD Secretariat, 2011, p. 152).

In the medium and high human development categories, 51 of 120 countries also report severe homicide levels. Thus armed violence is not an exclusive concern of the poor. It is only in the very high human development category that almost all countries considered show low homicide rates. The negative relation between lethal violence and low development rates is confirmed when using income indica-

Figure 2 **Disaggregated homicidal violence for 182 countries by HDI, 1986–2009<sup>7</sup>**



**Note:** Numbers in the bars indicate how many countries fall into each of the three homicide rate categories (low, high, very high). The figure for the top segment in the right-hand bar is '1'.

**Source:** GBAV 2011 database and selected development and violence indicators

tors<sup>8</sup> (one of the main components of the HDI).

Geographically, armed violence is concentrated in specific regions and in a comparatively small number of countries: 63 per cent of all violent deaths (direct conflict deaths and intentional homicides combined) are to be found in 58 of the world's countries and territories that exhibit violent death rates of more than 10 per 100,000 population. However, more than one in four deaths are concentrated in 14 countries experiencing extremely high violent death rates—more than 30 violent deaths per 100,000 people. These contain less than five per cent of the world's population (GD Secretariat, 2011, pp. 152–53).

Besides poverty and income, both the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) underline that weak, illegitimate institutions and governance are related to insecurity and violence. Globally, roughly 1.5 billion people live in situations affected by fragility,<sup>9</sup> conflict, or large-scale, organized criminal violence. Furthermore, such people are more likely to experience impoverishment and lack of access to basic services than those living in stable, peaceful developing countries.

## Armed violence and the MDGs

Without security, attaining development goals is challenging for violence-affected countries. Research highlights a web of complex relations between lethal violence and the attainment of the MDGs. For example, the *World Development Report 2011* affirms that no low-income, fragile, or conflict-affected country has yet achieved a single MDG (World Bank, 2011).

The GBAV 2011 report presents a statistical analysis of the relationship between lethal violence and 7 of the 8 MDGs and 21 indicators. Table 1 summarizes the correlations between those indicators where a significant relationship was found. The right-hand column gives the direction (positive or negative) and the intensity and significance of the association (the size of the sign and the shade reveal the statistical significance of the association; a dark shade signifies a most significant association).

Analysis confirms that higher levels of homicide correlate to high poverty<sup>10</sup> levels (MDG 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger) and that a strong positive relationship exists between income inequality and lethal violence. Lower levels of homicide are correlated to low youth (15–24 years) unemployment (GD Secretariat, 2011, pp. 154–55).

**Table 1 The relationship between development indicators and lethal violence**

Development indicator	Relationship to armed violence
Adolescent birth rate (per 1,000 women)	+
Births attended by skilled health personnel (percentage)	-
Children under five severely underweight (percentage)	-
Children under five mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	+
Employment-to-population ratio, both sexes (percentage)	+
Infant mortality rate (0-1 year, per 1,000 live births)	+
People living with HIV, 15-49 years old (percentage)	+
Poorest quintile's share in national income or consumption (percentage)	-
Population below USD 1 per day (PPP,* percentage)	+
Poverty gap ratio at USD 1 per day (PPP, percentage)	+
Proportion of the population using improved drinking water sources (total)	-
Proportion of the population using improved sanitation facilities (total)	-
Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector	+
Slum population as percentage of urban population (percentage)	-
Total net enrolment ratio in primary education (both sexes)	-
Youth unemployment rate, aged 15-24 (both sexes)	+
Youth unemployment rate, aged 15-24 (men)	+
Youth unemployment rate, aged 15-24 (women)	+
Human Development Index	-

\* Purchasing power parity

Source: GD Secretariat (2011, p. 158)

Research also posits that countries with low primary education enrolment (MDG 2) also register higher homicide levels. This may be explained by the hypothesis that youth falling out of the education system at a particularly risk-prone age can make them more predisposed to violence and more susceptible to recruitment into armed groups (gangs or guerrilla groups) (GD Secretariat, 2011, p. 156). Research also finds that exposure to war in early childhood has a severe impact on early childhood health and educational attainment in early adolescence. The poor school performance of undernourished children is influenced by enrolment, grade-repeating, and early drop-out (Bundervoet, 2012).

High levels of homicide are also positively associated with high mortality rates of children under five (MDG 4), adolescent birth rates (MDG 5), and the number of births attended by skilled personnel (MDG 5). Likewise, a significant positive relationship exists between levels of lethal violence and the percentage of people living with HIV/AIDS (aged 15-49) (MDG 6) (GD Secretariat, 2011, pp. 156-57).

More than indicating a direct causal relation, these results may highlight the lack of access to health structures and basic infrastructures typical of situations of high violence and conflict. Lack of access to basic infrastructure seems also to explain the relationship between countries with high levels of lethal violence and lower access to drinking water and sanitation facilities (MDG 7). Finally, there is a negative association between the proportion of people living in slums and higher homicide rates (MDG 7) (GD Secretariat, 2011, p. 157).

If globally most victims are men, the percentage of women victims of lethal violence increases when the levels of armed violence decrease (GD Secretariat, 2011, p. 114-15). This indicates that violence against women has distinct characteristics from other forms of violence. It is a phenomenon with far-reaching repercussions for those affected, their children, and families, and, even in high-income countries, is one of the most poorly addressed forms of violence. Analysis of the current indicators related to the promotion of gender equality and

empowerment of women (MDG 3) indicates that improving the physical security of women would clearly assist the realization of other MDGs, and especially MDG 5 (OECD, 2010, p. 7).

## Monitoring the relationship

Building a good understanding of the context and a solid base of evidence is indispensable for the development of effective armed violence reduction and prevention interventions. However, monitoring armed violence and development trends is often a sensitive topic that is frequently subject to debate and politicization.

Globally, the ongoing process of reviewing the MDGs offers an opportunity to identify critical information gaps and needs regarding the way in which armed violence is affecting MDG progress and to integrate security-related themes into the post-2015 development framework.<sup>13</sup> Nationally, the strengthening of national and sub-national surveillance and data collection systems is a priority for countries affected by conflict, crime, and violence. Bringing together different sectors, government statistical institutions, academic groups, and NGOs will allow the building of a base of solid evidence for policy and programming decisions at the national and local levels.

## Conclusions

The above analysis reveals that armed violence has long-term, far-reaching, and costly effects on development. This is a global concern, but populations of low- and middle-income countries bear a grossly disproportionate share of the global burden of armed violence. Lethal violence in particular is associated with low attainment of human development and the MDGs. Many low- and middle-income countries are affected by repeated cycles of violence that stop and wipe out development investments. More positively, countries with low homicide rates also appear to achieve higher levels of human welfare.

If violence disrupts development processes, then investments in equitable and sustainable development yield lower rates of violence. From a policy-making perspective, in order to improve the capacity to attain development goals, it is essential to invest in the prevention and reduction of armed violence. ■

## Notes

- 1 'Armed violence is the intentional use of illegitimate force (actual or threatened) with arms or explosives, against a person, group, community, or state, that undermines people-centred security and/or sustainable development' (GD Secretariat, 2008, p. 2). This definition covers armed violence in both large-scale armed conflict and non-conflict situations, but not self-directed armed violence (suicide).
- 2 The GBAV database on lethal violence covers the period 2004–09. These deaths include 396,000 intentional homicides, 55,000 direct conflict deaths, 54,000 'unintentional' homicides, and 21,000 killings during legal interventions (GD Secretariat, 2011, p. 4).
- 3 This occurs, not only through the deaths of victims of direct violence, but also through the inability of the affected populations to access basic health-care facilities and sufficient nutrition, and through the destruction of their livelihoods. Displacement, out-migration, and reduced investment in public education further deplete the human capital of affected countries.
- 4 Capital flight, the depreciation of investments, soaring inflation, and rising transaction costs deplete capital (GD Secretariat, 2008, p. 89).
- 5 See UNDP (n.d.) for the classification of countries according to HDI 2009. There are 24 low, 75 medium, 45 high, and 38 very high HDI countries.
- 6 Homicide rates are categorized in three intervals: low ( $\leq 7.25$  per 100,000), high (7.26–18.57 per 100,000), and very high ( $>18.57$  per 100,000) (GD Secretariat, 2011, p. 151).
- 7 This graph excludes 12 UN member states with no HDI classification: Iraq, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Monaco, Nauru, North Korea, Palau, San Marino, Somalia, Tuvalu, and Zimbabwe.
- 8 Among the 97 low- and lower middle-income countries, 31 report high and 10 very high homicide rates. Among the 64 high-income countries, 4 report high and 3 very high homicide rates (GD Secretariat, 2011, p. 153); using the World Bank classification of countries by income group (2012a).
- 9 According to the OECD (2007, p. 2), states are fragile when 'state structures lack political will and/or capacity to provide the basic functions needed for poverty reduction, development and to safeguard the security and human rights of their populations'. The World Bank (2012b) 'defines a set of fragile situations. A fragile situation is defined as having either: a) a composite World Bank, African Development Bank and Asian Development Bank Country Policy and Institutional Assessment rating of 3.2 or less; or b) the presence of a United Nations and/or regional peace-keeping or peace-building mission . . . with the exclusion of border monitoring operations, during the past three years'.
- 10 Measured as the population living on less than USD 1.

- 11 The analysis considered the net enrolment ratio in primary school and literacy rates of 15–24-year-olds (GD Secretariat, 2011, p. 156).
- 12 There is an association between lethal violence and the share of women working in the non-agricultural sector, and with the ratio of girls to boys in primary and secondary education.
- 13 For more information, see UN Committee for Development Strategy (n.d.).

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For more information on the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development, please visit: [www.genevadeclaration.org](http://www.genevadeclaration.org).

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