

## **5. Policy recommendations**

The policy relevance of the research conclusions lies in recommendations for policy interventions and the formulation of programs to tackle the issues eventually leading to violent conflict. However, the usefulness of any specific recommendations will be depending on the actors involved and is largely determined by the politicians and policy makers.

This chapter is partly based on the recommendations formulated by individual researchers in the various research reports and partly on the regional policy oriented conferences that were held in the three regions. The South Asian conference was held on 20 and 21 of July 1997 in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The Central American policy conference was held in Heredia, Costa Rica between 10 and 12 August 1998 and the West Africa conference in Saly Portugal in Senegal on 14-16 October 1998. Finally a number recommendations emerged from the conference held in The Hague, Netherlands on 16 and 17 November 1998.

This chapter is structured along the major dimensions of the research; the political-military dimension, the socioeconomic dimension and the external dimension. Within each of these dimensions a number of recommendations were formulated; some at a general level, others at a regional and country level.

### **5.1 The political and military dimensions**

One of the major conclusions of our research was that political-military factors are closely related to outbreak of violent conflicts. In this regard themes were identified relating to the role of the state (the institutional capacity and legitimacy of the state), as well as the nature of the prevailing political system (among others: democratization, political culture, relations between the various branches and levels of government, characteristics of the degree of openness and decision making process, and the participation rate of various groups in society). The subject of democratization and the restructuring of the electoral process was widely discussed during the various meetings. In fact the subject of democratization covers a wide variety of issues. The democratization debate is strongly related to the institutional capacity of the state, its capacity and willingness to share power and consequently its legitimacy among the population.

Much attention focused on the institutional strengths and weaknesses of government institutions. The effective presence of institutions in all parts of a country was seen as a prerequisite of adequate governance. The management of government institutions was perceived as an important issue in itself, how are institutions organized, the degree of centralization, their efficiency and their effectiveness. However, the presence of an institution as such does not guarantee its quality. Therefore, most discussions centered on the performance of the service provision by government institutions as one of the most important preconditions for the legitimacy of a state (see also the socioeconomic dimension). As a result of historical developments many states have developed unbalanced development patterns, which, among others, is reflected in the uneven geographical distribution of state institutions. The governments of such countries have either ignored the necessity to develop their institutional presence or were unable to generate sufficient funds to maintain a proper institutional network. This issue therefore is strongly interrelated with the issues of decentralization and good governance.

Furthermore, recommendations focused on the various options to broaden public participation in the electoral process, on better relationships between government branches and on the unequal access to political decision making, especially by ethnic minority communities. It was concluded that such measures prevent the escalation of conflict within societies, as parliamentary advocacy and adequate power sharing formulas would provide alternative venues for debate amongst contending parties.

### **Recommendations**

- States in the South have inherited centralized government structures from their colonial and post-colonial past. Reform of the state has therefore become a prominent issue. Highly centralized and exclusionary forms of government enhance the risk on conflict. *In general the idea of promoting devolution of power was strongly supported in the various meetings.* In this regard a clear distinction needs to be made between federal and unitary states. In the former the promulgation of new states, as has been the case in India and Nigeria, illustrates the willingness to delegate power. In unitary states devolution of power involves the rearrangement of constitutional power relations along the different layers of government. Smaller countries in general did not favor the promotion of regional autonomy. Notably Sri Lanka continues to have a rather ambiguous experience in this field. Despite efforts to accommodate the wishes of the Tamil minority a cyclical pattern has emerged by which demands seem to escalate from a certain degree of autonomy towards secession and independence. In the Sri Lanka case it was suggested to devise institutional arrangements to ensure easy access of minorities to the highest decision making process and authorities. For India and Pakistan maximum provincial or state autonomy was recommended. For Afghanistan autonomy was recommended for specific ethnic groups. In West Africa the enforcement of the role of constituent republics in Nigeria was forwarded, whereas in Niger it was suggested that a possible change from unitary to federal constitution should be discussed. *Furthermore, in federal states the development of adequate power sharing mechanisms between the center and the different states should be furthered* (India and Nigeria are cases in point). Principles should be elaborated on which to base economic resource distribution between the constituent states.
- *In a number of cases the empowerment of local government was strongly supported. In all regions the issue of devolution of central power to the local level was forwarded as an important policy matter.* In West Africa the issue of legitimate and publicly acknowledged authority, enshrined in moral values that are widely shared, was forwarded as a crucial prerogative for devolution to the local level. For Pakistan the creation of a third tier of government was proposed to empower local communities, counter migration and rationalize public spending. Decentralization of power in itself, however, can generate new conflicts. For the Case of Niger it was said that competition for power between traditional elite groups and government officials could easily provoke new conflicts on the local level. Therefore the issues of legitimacy and "moral authority" need to be addressed at this level.
- *The establishment of Ombudsman's offices was proposed to give people an alternative recourse when abuse by government officers or -institutions takes place.* Such offices should be completely independent and enjoy institutional support. Transparency should be the central concern to improve government legitimacy. This recommendation was made

explicitly with regard to Central America, but applies to other regions as well. It can also be linked to the fight against corruption.

- *The state should develop an in built capacity to respond to genuine advocacy of minority rights as part of a deliberate strategy to prevent conflicts with such groups.* It was further suggested that minority rights should be integrated into the national constitutions of the various states. *Minority rights should be acknowledged and respected by majority governments.* This recommendation refers to the problems related to "majority" decision making in sharply divided societies. However, empirical evidence from the Sri Lanka case demonstrates that it is extremely difficult to reverse a policy decision once it has been adopted and implemented.
- *With regard to democratization recommendations were numerous and often region- and country specific.* In South Asia some countries have been democracies since their political independence (India, Sri Lanka), whereas others have experienced military regimes in between spells of civilian rule, and, although democratization has been adopted, still are considered authoritarian in nature (Pakistan, Bangladesh). Finally, in Afghanistan the political culture is based on primordial political allegiances. Hence, for Pakistan guarantees for free and fair elections were recommended as well as the abolishment of the practice of presidential ordinances in order to improve state legitimacy. For Afghanistan an adequate power sharing formula between the various ethnic groups was of the essence. In India recent experiences illustrate contradictory tendencies. Whereas the overthrow of rigid caste structures opens the way to broad political participation, this electoral emancipation has coincided with the emergence of Hindu nationalism. This seems to have compromised the secular nature of the Indian State. *For Central America the transparency and efficiency of the electoral process itself should be improved.* Furthermore, following the outstanding performance of the Indian system of electoral councils, the establishment of such independent and non-partisan electoral institutions was recommended also for the Central American region, as well as lifting all remaining restrictions that prohibit certain political parties to participate. *In West Africa free and universal elections were called for.* However, caution was voiced with regard to the introduction of liberal democracy in Sub Saharan Africa, because of the precarious demographic balance between ethnic groups. In West Africa the majority of citizens is entrenched in patron-client relationships, which are easily turned into vote banks when elections are held. Any democracy needs to take general developmental needs of such population groups into consideration. Democracy still largely remains an urban phenomenon and essential notions about it should be widely diffused. In this regard *local traditions and elite groups should be taken into account when democratization is applied.* *Political parties should learn to become really representative of the interests of their constituencies on the political level, rather than forwarding private, particularistic personal and group interests.* Such a process would greatly enhance political stability and the legitimacy of democratic practice.
- *The legislative and judiciary branches of government should be restructured and reinforced.* The judiciary has suffered, as it was overruled by the elite, imposing decrees of amnesty and granted impunity to perpetrators of gross human rights violations. This provoked a negative public image of the judiciary, looked down upon as centers for corruption and political favors, especially in Central America and West Africa. In South Asia the image is more shaded although in certain states groups in society are excluded

from impartial justice or trapped in feudal relationships. The executive should be impartial and enforce law and order based on equal human rights for all actors involved.

- *The reform of the security sector figures prominently in Central America.* This issue was discussed in great detail and very specific recommendations were formulated regarding the role of the military and the police forces. *The military sector should be brought firmly under civilian political control. The military budget must be cut down to levels that are commensurate with existing security threats and national resources. The military should be held accountable for their budget. The military should be retrained to fulfil their mandate for protection against possible external threats to the state and must never be used for internal security tasks. The military should be withheld from performing other tasks than their mandate allows, i.e. military should not protect natural parks, fight drug-trafficking, construct national infrastructure or other non military tasks as they were only used in order to justify current personnel and budgets, which were deemed disproportionate.* In the other two regions this topic received less attention. In West Africa the role of the military in most states, though very prominent, was hardly touched upon. Discussing the role of the security sector either seemed a taboo or their role as custodians of state unity and national identity was sometimes considered pivotal amidst chaotic civilian politics and ethno-linguistic cleavages. In South Asia the arms race between India and Pakistan and the Afghanistan imbroglio were discussed with reference to reform of the military and the arms reduction in the inter state realm. Within states the issue was hardly touched upon. During the final conference the relevance of reform was recognized, notably in Pakistan where the army developed a strong hold on the state and in the various regional conflicts in India and Sri Lanka. It was also recognized that such policies are politically very sensitive also regarding the public opinion at large.
- *In Central America, strengthening legitimate police forces through thorough restructuring, training and mentality change, will contribute to the development of public confidence.* The police forces should be modernized, the public trust in the police should be restored by training police officers in human rights and democratic values. The existing and widespread corruption within the police forces should be addressed. The privatization of police tasks by commercial firms needs to be carefully monitored and controlled. Decentralization of police tasks and responsibilities to municipal authorities needs to be discouraged because there is a serious risk that patronage networks might determine the functioning of the police.
- *Institutional rules should handle elite transition in order to prevent the outbreak of violent conflict.* In West Africa the question how former leaders can be inserted into society in a relevant way after having left office is important. This issue is related to power transfer and can call for transitional provisions accompanying the introduction of democratic systems.
- *In many so-called failed states a polycentric power design should form the basis of the restructuring of the state.* Power sharing should be institutionalized in the constitution at the local, regional and national levels. However, centralization of power to a certain extent is necessary for the reorganization at the national level. In failed states with polycentric power systems the buildup of power at the center is a painstaking and problematic process, since the state not only needs to be rebuilt institutionally but also conceptually.

## 5.2 The socioeconomic dimension

There is no direct relationship between socioeconomic factors and the outbreak of violent conflict. In fact, this cluster of factors refers to structural background conditions within societies that provide a potential breeding ground for discontent and political mobilization. Therefore, socioeconomic issues are primarily important for the long-term prevention of conflict. Underlying socioeconomic features of a society can act either as accelerators, or as aggravating and sometimes as mobilizing factors.

Poverty, although a major constraint for development, is a very complex problem that can be addressed by various policy instruments. The role of the state is considered vital in the redistribution and allocation of scarce resources. This was linked to socioeconomic inequality, which was considered to be a conflict prone factor. The perception of poverty in relation to other groups in society or a feeling of losing out on previously held privileges (relative deprivation) were considered to be important mobilizing factors. Economic decline and conflict almost never correlate directly, hence intervening variables need to be taken into account to highlight the possible relevance of this factor to the outbreak of conflict. In this connection, stagnant economies and a slowly growing labor market have been identified as important contributing factors to social discontent, especially among educated youth.

During most of the meetings it was postulated that states should allocate sufficient resources to the provision of essential services to the population at large. In view of scarcity of resources, crucial question pertains to which services are considered pivotal for any state to provide to the population. This issue was not resolved in an unequivocal manner but some essential elements were identified, i.e. the provision of health, education, security and administration. It has been demonstrated that most countries in our research sample do not perform well in one or more of these services. The governments of these countries tend moreover to discriminate against specific groups or regions. Furthermore, there are huge geographical differences in the distribution of these services. Finally, most states lack sufficient funds. Sri Lanka and Costa Rica are the notable exceptions. In these countries a constant effort has been maintained to invest in social service provision to the general public.

### *Recommendations*

- *Good governance with regard to the provision of services and responsiveness to the needs of specific groups in society is essential. Governments should fight extreme inequality and construct policies to reduce the income gap in society at large. The state should improve on its performance in the social sector. An improvement of state performance will give substance to state legitimacy. Moreover, the efforts by the state will counter the development of the so-called shadow economy, based on illegitimate trade of drugs and arms. In West Africa it was forwarded that national planning should be fine-tuned to the local needs for employment and resources. The concept of centralized national planning has strongly alienated local populations. A fair share of the profits gained from the exploitation of mineral rich areas should be directly re-invested in the area of origin. In Central America specific recommendations focused on the revision of the health system, and education, restructuring of the national housing plan and revision of the tax and fiscal system. Within the context of structural adjustment such a recommendation has become difficult to apply. Nevertheless, a more equitable distribution of the benefits, particularly through investments in basic education and health services is needed. A*

special responsibility lies with the various NGOs, who should collaborate more closely with the state and assure popular participation. It was mentioned that donors put too large an emphasis was on NGO activities as well as the channeling of resources to them instead of to the state could finally undermine and weaken the state. This process was already being observed in West Africa.

- *In Central America the most pressing recommendation is the wish to deepen the reconciliation process through the application of socioeconomic reform. In this region the implementation of and compliance with the land reform program was considered to be crucial, and the establishment of a land registry system a necessary prerequisite.* In West Africa land rights for the majority of citizens should be constitutionally guaranteed. At present different laws regarding land rights are in force in many countries, leading to insecurity among local population groups. In Senegal one of the root causes of the conflict is based on the modern constitution with regard to land rights. The so-called 'Loi sur la Domaine Nationale' should be discussed and amended in order to take into account local needs, customs and traditions. *The prevailing traditional land rights system should be used as a point of reference.*
- In addition, land distribution must be complemented by access to credit aimed at small and medium-sized producers. In addition, technical assistance should be provided. Land reform without such support is only a superficial solution as the reintegration programs in Nicaragua, Honduras and El Salvador amply illustrate.
- *States should maintain a neutral stance as impartial arbiter indifferent types of societal conflict.* Any riot or dispute between religious or ethnic group should be treated as a law and order problem. In South Asia, with its long history of communal violence between Hindus and Muslims as well as between other religious groups indicates that religious buildings and places of worship must be protected by law without discrimination. Related to the tensions between Muslims and Hindus the government should do its utmost to issue adequate data on the performance of these groups in society on selected socioeconomic indicators to counter unfounded allegations between the protagonists. Doing so, the state will simultaneously improve transparency of governance.
- *Development investments should allow a more balanced regional growth pattern. Furthermore, development policies should take local culture and livelihood strategies as a point of reference.* Such an approach would strengthen local economies and counter migration and urbanization.
- *The rapid urban development in most regions causes social crises that need to be addressed urgently.* National governments and municipal authorities should develop integrated approaches to deal with the rural-urban migration and the resulting urbanization. The problems of adequate housing and the creation of jobs in the urban labor market, as well as vocational training and education need to be tackled within the framework of a coherent strategy. In South Asia the rapid urbanization in Pakistan and India continues to feed conflict between various ethno-linguistic groups as well as communal identities. Crises in housing and labor provide the basis for political mobilization. In Central America the slums and shantytowns harbor the marginalized rural poor, who have been forced to migrate as their sources for a livelihood have been eliminated.

- The state should be cautious with strong market interventions in order to facilitate overall economic growth. As a rule many states in the South have a long history of unsuccessful meddling in economic affairs through various government bodies and nationalized economic activities. Despite this reality it was postulated that states have the responsibility to try to mitigate the negative effects of economic restructuring (notably the SAP policies).

### **5.3 The external dimension**

The final conclusions regarding the role of external factors were that they have mostly an aggravating effect and tend to prolong the duration of internal conflicts. Proxy wars between the then superpowers took place in Central America (Sandinista-Contra war) and South Asia (Russian invasion of Afghanistan). The presence of small arms was seen as aggravating conflict. The economic interventions of external powers were perceived as only marginally contributing to the duration and intensity of intrastate conflicts. In few cases a relationship between the application of Structural Adjustment Policies and poverty was postulated, in turn aggravating a potential conflict setting. Finally, the impact of the regional security setting on the likelihood of internal conflict was discussed. From the various case studies and regional reports no general conclusion could be inferred. It seems that direct intervention across international borders materializes when ethnic groups straddle international borders or when important resources, located in peripheral areas near international borders are coveted by external powers.

In general the principle of non-intervention was upheld during most of the meetings. However, it was sometimes suggested that external intervention can be the only remaining viable option to resolve a thorny internal dispute. In this regard diplomatic initiatives, combined with a policy of carrots and sticks, were favored. Nevertheless, political and economic interference with the internal affairs of developing countries continues to be a normal feature of international relations. The effects of development cooperation and other macro-economic interventions should be studied more closely to reveal the resulting dynamics of socioeconomic change in recipient societies.

- Migration should be regulated between states in order to minimize the risk of political agitation. Patterns of migration can threaten regional stability and alternatives should be forwarded. Poor and over populated countries in South Asia, notably Bangladesh, generate flows of migrants who go to neighboring India and aggravate potentially explosive political balances there. In the northeast of India the population balance between various ethnic and religious groups has given a strong impetus to policies of exclusion, covert or overt ethnic cleansing, and demands for greater autonomy on behalf of specific groups who feel threatened by such migratory movements.
- A negotiated settlement should be reached in a unified Afghanistan between all actors involved. As long as one group thinks it will succeed in winning a military victory over the other actors involved such a resolution is far away. Secondly all neighboring countries, Russia, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, should exchange views and come to an understanding about what would become the nature of the Afghan state and its relations with neighboring states. This in turn should lead to the withdrawal of support to the various factions currently waging war and consequently to a total arms embargo.

- Geo-political consequences of globalization need to be taken into account by the external powers. In the case of Niger in West Africa, its mineral resources provoke external economic interest. The most profitable exploitation often does not take local communities into consideration. Hence, external powers should encourage multinational companies to adhere to fair procedures and transparent contracts when they consider exploiting resources in poor countries. Complicity with local elite groups tends to exacerbate tensions and may lead to violent conflict.
- Regional economic integration may contribute to good relations between neighboring countries and reduce conflict potential. In Central America a strong emphasis was put on the necessity for regional economic integration. Since the so-called 'Soccer War' in the 1960s the Central American Common Market was abolished and comparative advantages were lost to the various economies. Being a comparatively small region economic integration contributes to economic performance. In West Africa the ECOWAS community is gradually improving the conditions for internal regional trade. For South Asia the perspective for effective regional collaboration remains a distant perspective although the SAARC initiative has given some impetus.
- For the Central American region the resolution of existing border problems was explicitly mentioned. Most of the remaining border issues can be related to the unfinished business of the colonial past. Most border areas are remote and peripheral to the respective core areas of the countries involved. Population growth has gradually led to agricultural expansion and migration to border areas has provided a temporary safety valve with regard to the land issue (notably for El Salvador). In South Asia such problems are omnipresent and policy recommendations have to be quite general. In view of the intractable character of the Kashmir issue and the Sino-Indian border such cautious recommendations are to be expected. In most cases the formalization of the actual lines of control was perceived as the most likely solution to the problem.
- As a matter of policy development aid should target states in which good governance prevails. Consequently, criteria and conditions for compliance should be formulated when states do not perform well or when dominant elites refuse to restructure government policies to meet generally accepted standards for good governance.
- It was recommended to monitor and contain the conflict-enhancing behavior of some expatriate refugee communities and their role in funding and supporting conflict in their countries of origin.
- A comprehensive approach to conflicts is to be introduced, in which environmental concepts are integrated, to arrive at a conflict impact assessment model that serves to guide policy decisions by outside actors. Also the potential impact of development programs on conflict should be assessed as a matter of routine.



## **Annex I: List of Research Documents**

### ***Regional Report: South Asia***

Silva, K.M. de (editor), March 1998

*South Asia- regional report*

### **Country studies:**

Conducted by: International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Sri Lanka

Ghosh, Partha S. and Lama, Mahendra P. (section 4 by Peiris, G. H.), March 1998

*India- country paper*

Khan, Abdur Rob, March 1998

*Bangladesh- country paper*

Rais, Rasul Bakhsh, March 1998

*Afghanistan- country paper*

Silva, K.M. de

*Sri Lanka- country paper*

Waseem, Mohammad, March 1998

*Pakistan- country paper*

### **South Asia case studies:**

Apart from the country papers, the South Asia group also produced 19 case studies which resulted from an "International Workshop on Causes of Conflict and Conflict Resolution"; 15-17 July 1996

Ahmed, Aftab, July 1996

*Ethnic Turmoil in the Chittagong Hill Tracts Region of Bangladesh: Modalities for the Resolution of a Conflict*

Ghosh, Partha S., July 1996

*Cross-Border Population Movements in South Asia and Regional Security*

Ghosh, Partha S., July 1996

*The Hindu-Muslim Question in India: Confrontation and Coexistence*

Hasbullah, S.H., July 1996

*Ethnic Conflict and Displacement in Sri Lanka*

Kaushal, Neeraj, July 1996

*Disputes Between Bangladesh and India*

Lama, Mahendra P., July 1996

*Identity-Based Armed Conflict in the North-East India: A Case Study of Gorkhaland Agitation*

Lama, Mahendra P., July 1996

*Identity-Based Politico-Armed Conflict on North-East India: A Case Study of Assam and Nagaland*

Lama, Mahendra P., July 1996

*Armed Conflicts By The Haves: A Case Study of Punjab*

Mehra, Ajay, July 1996  
*Caste Conflict in India*

Mehra, Ajay, July 1996  
*Naxalism and Militant Peasant Movements in India*

Peiris, G.H., July 1996  
*Insurrection and Youth Unrest in Sri Lanka*

Rais, Rasul Bakhsh, July 1996  
*India-Pakistan Rivalry: An Interpretation*

Samarasinghe, S.W.R.de A., July 1996  
*Tamil Plantation Workers of Sri Lanka*

Sen, Gautam, July 1996  
*Evaluation of Sino-Indian Strategic Parity and Indo-Pak Military Balance*

Silva, K.M. de, July 1996  
*Separatism in Sri Lanka*

Waseem, Mohammad, July 1996  
*Ethnic Conflict in Pakistan: Case of Mohajir Nationalism*

Waseem, Mohammad, July 1996  
*Sectarian Conflict in Pakistan*

#### ***Regional Report: West Africa***

Nwokedi, Emeka (editor), April 1998  
*West African Regional Report on "Causes of Conflict in the Third World" project*

#### **Country studies:**

Conducted by: Centre for Advanced Social Science, Nigeria and Council for the Development of Social Science Research In Africa, Senegal

Jong, Ferdinand de, April 1998  
*The Causes of Conflict in Africa: The Casamance Conflict in Senegal*

Nnoli, Okwudiba, April 1998  
*The Conflict Process in Ghana, 1950-1990*

Nwokedi, Emeka, April 1998  
*The Dynamics of Conflicts in Nigeria*

Sidikou, Hamidou Arouna, December 1997  
*Les Causes des Conflits au Niger*

#### ***Regional Report: Central America***

Arias Foundation and Mares, David, 1998  
*Central America- regional report*

Other contributors to the regional report. Pascal O. Girot, Alvaro de la Ossa and Raúl Rosende

**Country studies:**

Conducted by Arias Foundation, Costa Rica

Case studies into El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Honduras and Costa Rica ( Jaime Ordoñez)

The following authors contributed to the drafts of the country studies:

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Final editing of the reports was done by the Arias Foundation under supervision of Johanna Oliver.

***Synthesis Report***

Douma, Pyt, Frerks, Georg and Goor, Luc van de (Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael)

*Causes of Conflict in the Third World project, Synthesis Report (forthcoming)*