MICROCON

POLICY BRIEFING

Youth in Doruma, DRC, transport 25 tonnes of aid for the local Crisis Committee by bicycle. As getting to the town is dangerous, the aid was flown to a nearby airstrip and the youth were contracted to ferry the supplies. © Julien Harneis, 2009

- **What are the relationships between young people's livelihood chances, economic markets and local violence in the aftermath of protracted conflicts?**

From Making a Living to Making a Life in eastern DRC

Summary: This paper analyses what it means to be young, displaced and looking for a job in a war-affected town of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Young people fighting for survival lack access to decent jobs in a labour market that is explicitly political in nature. Daily survival and political marginalisation are therefore inherently connected. Young people often express this connection in their visions of a better life, forcing us to rethink critically the relationship between (continuing) armed violence, livelihoods and economic markets in the aftermath of protracted conflicts.

Introduction

Against the background of continuing armed conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) the condition of unemployed displaced youth stands out as problematic. Their situation adds to an already appalling humanitarian situation related to an almost complete lack of education and health infrastructure as well as extremely high mortality, morbidity and malnutrition rates. These rates are even higher in regions affected by recurrent violence.

This study analyses young people's life-making perspectives in the aftermath of war in the city of Butembo, and an adjacent rural periphery, Bunyuka, in the DRC. Social as well as power relations in reference to the urban labour market are found to be important in achieving a sustainable livelihood.

From war to peace - and back again

The DRC has experienced more than a decade of armed conflict since the first Congo war (1996-1997). The entire east of the country (including the provinces of North and South Kivu, Ituri, Maniema, and bits of Kasai and Katanga) still faces war-like levels of violence and poverty. Persistent fragmentation and re-territorialisation of the Congolese conflict means it has not been easy for external stabilisation

forces to effectively support the country's post-war 'transition'. The lives of forcefully displaced youth presented in this study should be interpreted and analysed against this background: with over a million people constantly on the move only in the Eastern parts of the country, the prospect of "settling in movement" has to be taken seriously for large segments of Congo's population in the aftermath of this long regional war.

Definition of 'youth'

The study defines 'youth' within the range of 12-36 years. This emerged from preliminary focus group discussions as the minimum and maximum ages when Butembo

adolescents usually get married, often a major marker of adulthood for both genders. 85% of young people encountered during the survey were aged between 18 and 26 years.

Dominant narratives of young people in (post-)war environments still too often frame children as passive victims of warfare without proper agency. This gender-insensitive and determinist perspective risks reducing the study of youth distress to pure matters of victimcy and impedes understanding of the life chances of displaced youth in post-war situations.

Youth and forced displacement
People officially registered as Internally Displaced People (IDPs) and the rural population of eastern DRC in general are extremely mobile. This makes it difficult to concentrate assistance. Of the 2.1 million IDPs in eastern DR Congo early 2010, for example, only 5.5% find refuge in UNHCR-run sites in the region, (IRIN, 27 January 2010). Besides this minority of camp-based IDPs, most displaced people continue to find shelter in so-called 'spontaneous sites' (makeshift shelters and forest dwellings) and, foremost, host families. This creates additional stress on already poverty-stricken households. Nonetheless, NGOs prefer to concentrate their efforts on fixed camp sites, thus detracting help from where it is most needed.

Related to this is cyclical migration; each time a conflict erupts, people flee in the opposite direction. This raises fundamental questions about the prospects of rural households to develop sustainable livelihoods during protracted conflict situations

Fewer displaced youngsters imagine a life in agriculture despite almost all having an agricultural occupation prior to forced displacement.
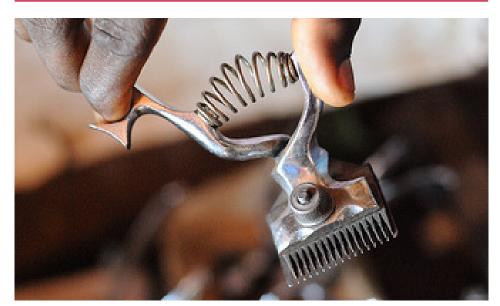
like the eastern DRC.

Cyclical mobility
Circular migration between original homesteads and new urban environments is frequent among displaced youngsters. School-attending IDPs frequently combine a more-or-less permanent residence in town during teaching semesters with regular stays at their parents' place during school holidays. Urban hosts usually expect contributions to cover basic needs, but school holidays are for saving and luxury spending as a form of status enhancement. Relationships between youths and hosts are therefore reciprocal with support and food shared sequentially. While this requires flexibility from young people's 'encadreurs' (sponsors), they are generally tolerant towards payment delays. This allows youth

to jumpstart livelihood options, calculate risks and support the livelihoods of relatives and friends. But debt-accumulation may lead to misuse, and money transferred through intermediaries frequently goes astray.

Cyclical migration relates to concepts of home for displaced youth. There is a gendered dimension: males emphasise the need to buy a proper plot of land ('une parcelle') to build a house and raise a family; females emphasise finding a good environment to 'develop one's qualities' and eventually raise a family. Young IDPs agree over being able to cover needs and not depend on others ('ne pas être sous tutelle') – the most important asset here is a stable job (Swahili: kazi).
Urban life worlds

New occupation for a former child soldier. Jose had been a fighter with a Mai Mai rebel group. After a couple of weeks in a host family in Uvira he returned to his village where Save the Children project staff arranged an apprenticeship for him with a barber. He now has a small barber shop with a friend by the side of the main road.
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Driving questions behind the survey were which occupations displaced youngsters in Butembo and Bunyuka were employed in, and what would be their desired job if these occupations were unavailable. These settings were chosen to i) compare differences between urban and near-to-rural settings; and ii) explore embeddedness and security, for example do 'stable' occupations in rural and urban settings result in less or more tolerance for violence?

The research finds occupations differ considerably between town and countryside and by gender. Urban youngsters combine income from irregular occupations, such as petty commerce, delivering packages and driving taxis. Many displaced urban youth are forced to do temporary jobs locally called 'bikakala' meaning 'through offer and demand'. This involves anything from digging toilets to crushing stones and carrying sand (usually by men), to preparing fritters, selling bananas and 'aracque', an alcoholic maize drink, on the side of the road (usually by women).

Opportunities in rural areas are more stable; agriculture is the main employer. However, rural IDPs lack access to second jobs to ensure sufficient income. These would usually be found outside agriculture, mainly in petty commerce and transport, but account for just 12.5% of countryside jobs. Close to half of displaced youngsters with second jobs were in petty trade, but only one third in agriculture had a second job.

Urban livelihood diversification suggests a gradual, steady integration of IDPs into more urbanised and 'modern' lifestyles, with important impacts on youth ambitions: fewer displaced youngsters imagine a life in agriculture despite almost all having an agricultural occupation prior to forced displacement. Many rural adolescents – 65.2% – see themselves in the commercial sector in the future. While it is premature to talk about fundamental shifts, these aspirations confirm tendencies in other post-conflict areas where 'particularly (…) young people (…) consider themselves to be urbanized and have no real desire to return to their rural origins' (Jacobsen, Lautze and Osman, 2001: 84).

Girls appear to adapt better than boys to the urban economy, easily accepting new and strident labour conditions; more girls seem to be engaged in the commercial sector than men at a ratio of about 2:1 – both as a second and an imagined future job – and in the countryside it is even higher.

The downside of social capital
The role of social capital, bridging ties with people outside immediate social circles, is also explored. One youth in Butembo's rural peripheries said: '[h]ere to get a job, you must have acquaintances. As we do not have those, we do not find work.' Butembo's economy is organised around a closed, oligopolistic circle of traders and employers controlling both transport networks and the commercial commodity chain. Most of these businesses are organised on a family basis – labelled as 'tribalism' – making it difficult for outsiders to gain a job in this 'second' economy, especially since the so-called first economy (administration and services) collapsed under the Mobutu regime. Butembo's young IDPs consider lack of linkages to the main providers of employment to constrain sustainable livelihoods.

Some displaced youngsters use the term 'stranger' (Swahili: wakujakuja) to describe their social situation. This notion of being a stranger in a 'tribal' environment evokes a social urban space where the entry of outsiders is highly regulated and confined by a closed community of Butembo citizens.

Policy implications
Two distinct trends emerge from this study. First, displaced youngsters in Butembo seem to follow the general trend of other African countries emerging from protracted conflict: a steady urbanisation coupled with a refusal of 'traditional' agricultural lifestyles. The combined consequences of war, rural underdevelopment and global marginalisation appear to be rapidly fostering a societal shift in the given context towards urban and more 'modern' lifestyles. The research suggests displaced youngsters in the Butembo area are determined to definitively leave their original rural backgrounds and construct a life that sits between agricultural and urban sources of income. When looking at their ambitions, however, the tendency is definitely towards urban professions and lifestyles: a large majority of interviewed youth (85%) do not want to maintain agriculture as a primary occupation but instead envisage a future in the city in, for example, commerce and services (about 40%), intellectual labour (17%), artisan occupations (10%), or administrative

"To get a job, you must have acquaintances. As we do not have those, we do not find work."

jobs (10%).

Second, youth access to decent jobs is severely blocked, not so much by their social capital and lack of stable attachments but rather by a market manipulated by a closed circle of oligopolist traders, some of whom have a vested interest in conflict economies. This has a pernicious effect on migrating youth. The study connects with more critical voices that have been raised recently in livelihoods research calling for greater attention to power relationships (for example De Haan and Zoomers, 2005; Prowse, 2008). These findings imply:

- Any social programme that envisages helping displaced youth to develop their capacities should involve awareness about this quest for a socioeconomic climate attached to the imagery of city life.
- A more sociological perspective can help illuminate how such power dynamics are not only informed by the immediacy of economic opportunity but also by imageries tied to people's ambitions in the social world. This social navigation is also informed by explicitly political notions of legitimate social action.

Credits

This Policy Briefing was written by Timothy Raeymaekers, University of Zurich. The views expressed in this briefing are the author's alone.

Further reading

De Haan, L. and Zoomers, A., 2005. Exploring the Frontier of Livelihood Research, in: Development and Change, 36, 1pp. 27-47

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Raeymaekers, T., 2011. Forced Displacement and Youth Employment in the Aftermath of the Congo War: From making a living to making a life, MICROCON RWP38, Brighton: IDS
http://www.microconflict.eu/publications/RWP38_TR.pdf

MICROCON, or 'A Micro Level Analysis of Violent Conflict' is a five-year research programme funded by the European Commission, which takes an innovative micro level, multidisciplinary approach to the study of the conflict cycle.

Almost one third of the world's population lives in conflict-affected low-income countries. At a fundamental level, conflict originates from people's behaviour and how they interact with society and their environment - from its 'micro' foundations. Yet most conflict research and policy focuses on 'macro' perspectives. MICROCON seeks to redress this balance.

For more information on MICROCON, please visit our website:

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SIXTH FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME

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