

Child Poverty in an Emergency and Conflict Context: A Multidimensional Profile and an Identification of the Poorest Children in Western Darfur

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Summary. — The conflict in Darfur represents a complex emergency situation. Challenges to humanitarian intervention are multiplied by inadequate information on local living conditions. This study applies the Alkire and Foster multidimensional poverty index to a set of dimensions of deprivation identified through a household survey, including dimensions usually missing such as economic exploitation, physical safety, empowerment, and psychological wellbeing. Our findings show that children with disabilities, particularly girls, are more often multidimensionally poor. We argue that multiple domains of deprivation complicate efforts to tackle poverty among children in Western Darfur and require a more comprehensive and coordinated approach by relief agencies.
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Key words — Darfur, Sudan, children, disability, multidimensional poverty

1. INTRODUCTION

The conflict in Darfur started in 2003 when two rebel groups launched an insurgency against the central government in Khartoum. The groups claimed to have been excluded from the peace discussions between the North and the South of Darfur (Ager, Boothby, & Bremer, 2009). The Government of Sudan (GoS) responded by arming and supporting Janjaweed militias who then instigated attacks against the non-Arab civilian population (Flint & de Waal, 2008). The attacks forced hundreds of thousands of refugees to flee from Darfur to Chad. The region saw systematic targeted assaults on specific ethnic groups, extensive destruction of crops, wells, and housing, causing widespread deprivation that devolved into famine conditions. Continued violence, the proliferation of the use of rape as a weapon of war, and methodical obstruction of humanitarian aid prompted human rights organizations and other observers to propose a serious hypothesis of genocide (Leaning, 2004).

To understand the roots of this conflict, one needs to examine the various political and economic events that have befallen Darfur since the 1960's (Flint & de Waal, 2008; Prunier, 2005). Prunier identifies four important factors that precipitated the breadth and severity of the present conflict: (1) A GoS-supported militia that served for decades in the war against South Sudan and have been carrying out violent attacks against civilians since the start of the current confrontation; (2) the progressive desertification of Darfur and competition over land resources that increased tensions between nomads and pastoralists; (3) interference by outside actors and states, particularly Libya-supported militias in conflict with the central government in Chad; and finally (4) the long-lasting neglect of Darfur by successive

Sudanese governments as well as local and other state politicians.

Armed conflict exacts particularly high tolls on families, communities, and societies because warring groups use systematic violence against civilian populations (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2008). Half of the poorest states are in a state of conflict and half that population is under 18, raising concerns about the threat armed conflict poses to the safety, health, and livelihoods of children (Panter-Brick, 2010). Globally, over one billion children living in conflict areas are victims of killing, abduction, and forced recruitment into labor or combat. These children are separated from family and become victims of trafficking, detention, and gender-based violence (UNICEF, 2009). Since 2000, conflicts have orphaned one million children, killed a further two million, left six million disabled, and forced 20 million to flee their homes (UNICEF, 2010).

To address this major challenge, UNICEF has established the protective environment framework as a reference tool to guide interventions for stakeholders, including governments, humanitarian agencies, and other actors (Landgren, 2005; UNICEF, 2006). The framework also lays a foundation for more long term post-conflict recovery and development. It remains difficult to assess the impact of interventions aimed at

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children and evaluate their needs in such contexts because of a lack of reliable data collection (Ager *et al.*, 2009). Therefore it is still unclear to what extent the framework will be effective in addressing child poverty and promoting child well-being.

African Union and United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) peacekeepers have so far been unable to protect the civilian population. Rape has been widely used by armed groups to terrorize women both in villages and IDP camps (Amnesty International, 2004; Human Rights Watch, 2005). The little literature that is available indicates that forced displacement and violence have taken a higher toll on children in Darfur than in other comparable armed conflicts (Ager *et al.*, 2009; Jason & Bex, 2006; International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur, 2005). All armed groups in the conflict—the Sudanese army, the Janjaweed, the Popular Defense Forces, the Justice and Equality Movement, the Sudan Liberation Army, and others—have recruited children; boys are forced to fight while girls take care of meals (UNICEF Sudan, 2005). UNAMID also coordinates the humanitarian assistance operation to address the needs of four million people affected by the conflict as well as nearly two million internally displaced, of which more than 775,000 were in West Darfur in 2006 (United Nations, 2006). Many have questioned the extent to which existing efforts represent a unified and enforceable program for the protection of people in Darfur. Yet, there remains limited literature on the impact of the current civil war on the circumstances of the local population, or reliable methods to identify and address their needs. This lack of evidence is particularly glaring in the case of children as their economic dependency puts them at a higher risk of poverty than adults.

This study explores disparities in various dimensions of child deprivation to better inform anti-poverty strategies. Recognizing the need for in-depth scrutiny of multidimensional child poverty, the present paper applies these concepts to investigate the situation of children in the specific emergency and conflict context of West Darfur. We explore patterns of multidimensional child poverty and how they vary based on demographic characteristics. Following the introduction, Section 2 explores the literature on poverty in emergency, conflict, and post-conflict settings with a particular focus on children. Section 3 describes the data collection and methods for measuring multidimensional child poverty. Section 4 provides results on child multidimensional poverty in West Darfur. Finally, Section 5 presents concluding remarks and offers further discussion.

2. BACKGROUND

(a) *Poverty in emergency, conflict, and post-conflict contexts*

A growing body of literature has established the strong link between poverty and conflict (Goodhand, 2003). War constitutes a major external shock for households that increases vulnerability, understood as the risk of falling into poverty (Dubois, 2008). Territories affected by conflict are left with fractured basic services and a disorganized economic system, resulting in diminished livelihood opportunities for the adult population. As a consequence, countries affected by armed violence have lower achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) than low income countries not affected by violence (UNICEF, 2009). Civilians in war-torn countries suffer serious health and economic damage through forced recruitment of household members, forced displacement, and migration. Lacking adequate healthcare services and frequently

exposed to traumatic events, these populations experience increased morbidity and disability as well as poor mental health (Azam & Hoeffler, 2001; Siva, 2010). Forced migration leads to considerable loss of assets, leaving displaced households in situations of poverty that are hard to overcome (Ibanez & Moya, 2010, chap. 4). Ibanez and Moya, 2010 argue that economic recovery is particularly unlikely for households at the lower end of income distribution. Their lack of assets creates a lasting poverty trap and structural poverty as they lack an economic buffer against shocks (Little, Stone, Mogues, Castro, & Negatu, 2006). Wealthier households are able to deploy various strategies to mitigate the impact of shocks on their livelihoods, such as conflict and famine (Corbett, 1988). These households are able to first reduce short-term consumption and sell non-productive assets to protect their productive assets such as land and animals (Carter & Barrett, 2006). But often, as it is the case in Darfur, armed groups extort resources from civilians, such as land, animals, and other assets, extending the conflict and jeopardizing the future capacity for families to recover (Engel & Ibanez, 2007). Finally, conflict has a strong impact on social relations, disrupting social networks and making it more challenging to raise capital, to find a job and mitigate shocks through risk-sharing (Adato, Carter, & May, 2006; Little *et al.*, 2006). In the midst of conflict, research shows an increased number of child-headed households due to separation and the disappearance of traditional social networks, which would otherwise have taken care of orphans (Ager *et al.*, 2009; UNICEF, 2009).

(b) *Measuring child poverty*

Following the entry into force in 1990 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), child poverty measurement has received increased attention, since signatory countries are obligated to promote children's rights and protection (UNICEF & Republique Democratique du Congo, 2008). In 2007, UNICEF initiated a study on child poverty and in 2012 54 countries were participating (Fajth, Kurukulasuriya, & Engilbertsottir, 2012). The mandate of protecting children encompasses the provision of basic needs such as nutrition as well as protection from abuse, neglect, and maltreatment (Barnes, Noble, Wright, & Dawes, 2009). Child poverty should be assessed using unique measures for a number of reasons (Feeny and Boyden, 2003; Gordon, Nandy, Pantazis, Pemberton, & Townsend, 2003a, 2003b; Minujin, Delamonica, Gonzalez, & Davidziuk, 2005; Roelen *et al.*, 2009; Waddington, 2004). First, the issue of child poverty is immense: 50% of children in low-income countries are living in poverty (UNICEF figures cited in Minujin *et al.*, 2005). Policy makers need clear definitions, measurement tools, and analysis to inform policy decisions (Corak, 2006b; Roelen *et al.*, 2009). Second, children rely on their parents, family, and their environment (for services) to cover basic needs essential to their development. Any type of deficiency (emotional, nutritional, educational, etc.) may have long term, sometimes irreversible consequences (Corak, 2006a; Waddington, 2004). Third, children can be entrapped into poverty, left chronically poor on several dimensions (Corak, 2006a; Roelen, 2010; Roelen, Gassmann, & de Neubourg, 2010; Roelen & Gassmann, 2012).

In the past decade there has been a shift in poverty studies from a uni-dimensional to a multidimensional perspective. Traditional models use welfarist univariate monetary measures based on income or expenditure to define poverty. In this model poverty can be absolute, in which people barely cover their basic needs, or relative, in which people's income is evaluated in relation to the customary standard of living in a given

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