

# 8

## Decentralisation, Conflict and Fragile Contexts

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The study of local government and decentralisation in conflict or fragile situations is a new, relatively small area of research. Much of the general conflict literature focuses on governance at a central level, although a small body of literature is now emerging that considers local level dynamics. Most of this research focuses on the question of whether and how decentralisation and local government impact on conflict or state fragility, primarily addressing the question of whether decentralisation exacerbates or mitigates conflict. Very little has been published that offers practical advice or technical approaches to local government in conflict/fragile environments. Most authors recommend a cautious approach, and some express concern that decentralisation in conflict, fragile or ethnically divided societies may risk intensifying conflict if it is not designed an appropriate way.

### Links between decentralisation and conflict

The resources below all tackle the question of whether decentralisation is good, or bad, for conflict. Most authors on this topic agree that decentralisation and local government can have positive or negative effects on conflict dynamics, depending on the institutional design, socio-political context and the nature of the conflict.

**Siegle, J. and O'Mahoney, P., 2007, 'Assessing the Merits of Decentralization as a Conflict Mitigation Strategy', report to USAID, Development Alternatives, US**

Does decentralisation contribute to social and political stability or does it accentuate ethnic, political and geographic divisions? What types of decentralisation increase and decrease the likelihood of conflict and under what conditions is decentralisation most likely to be successful? This paper from the US Agency for International Development (USAID) presents crossnational analysis and case studies from Colombia, Ghana, the Philippines and Uganda to examine the relationship between decentralisation and intra-state conflict.

*Full summary available in alphabetical appendix or online at:*

<http://www.gsdr.org/go/display&type=Document&id=2646>

**Schou, A. and Haug, M., 2005, 'Decentralisation in Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations', Working Paper no. 139, NIBR**

Is decentralisation an effective conflict management tool for both unitary and federal states? This article from the Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research (NIBR) reviews the existing academic literature on decentralisation. It offers recommendations for filling current gaps in the research and identifies mechanisms through which decentralisation can both mitigate and exacerbate conflict. No consistent evidence has shown the benefits of decentralisation in the context of conflict. Experience varies widely between unitary and federal states. Donors and governments need to conduct a variety of new studies in order to examine specific models of decentralisation.

*Full summary available in alphabetical appendix or online at:*

<http://www.gsdr.org/go/display&type=Document&id=2773>

**Tranchant, J-P., 2007, 'Decentralisation and Ethnic Conflict: The Role of Empowerment', Munich Personal RePEc Archive, Munich**

What effect does decentralisation have on the likelihood and intensity of ethnic conflict? What impact do conditional factors such as the regional concentration of groups have on the relationship between decentralisation and ethnic conflict? This paper from Munich Personal RePEc Archive analyses the effects of decentralisation on ethnic conflict, using a simple model of decentralisation as an empowerment mechanism. It finds that decentralisation reduces ethnic conflict when groups are spatially concentrated and/or have a local majority.

*Full summary available in alphabetical appendix or online at:*

<http://www.gsdr.org/go/display&type=Document&id=3308>

## **Policy guidance**

Whilst the nature of the exact impact of decentralisation on conflict and state fragility remains unknown, it is clear that local government has a role to play in local level conflict dynamics. The following resources consider how decentralisation reforms can be implemented and local government capacity developed in a way that does not exacerbate conflict. The literature emphasises the importance of having a slow, non-ambitious and carefully sequenced approach that takes account of informal non-state authorities and the local socio-political context. Issues of timing, institutional support and design, and centre-local relations are also covered.

**Jackson, P. and Scott, Z., 2007, 'Local Government in Post-Conflict Environments', report to UNDP, University of Birmingham, UK**

What role does local government (LG) play in post-conflict reconstruction? What are the key issues for LG in post-conflict contexts? This paper, published by the United Nations Development Programme, argues that further research is required on the

role of LG in conflict prevention, particularly on the contextual factors that enable LG to mitigate conflict. Donors should recognise the significance of LG and undertake political economy analysis to ensure that they engage with LG appropriately.

*Full summary available in alphabetical appendix or online at:*

<http://www.gsdr.org/go/display&type=Document&id=3287>

**Kyed, H. M. and Engberg-Pedersen, L., 2008, 'Local Governance in Fragile States', DIIS Policy Brief, Danish Institute of International Studies, Copenhagen**

Comprehensive local government reform is unrealistic in fragile states. This paper, published by the Danish Institute for International Studies, recommends using local service delivery as a point of departure for local governance reform. Strengthening local service delivery will slowly build sound local governance practices that can plant the seeds for more comprehensive democratic decentralisation in the future. Ignoring informal non-state authorities can considerably undermine any effort to reform local governance, whereas exclusive reliance on non-state authorities in service delivery can undermine efforts to strengthen state capacity and legitimacy in local arenas.

*Full summary available in alphabetical appendix or online at:*

<http://www.gsdr.org/go/display&type=Document&id=3374>

**Brinkerhoff, D., 2008, 'Good Enough Governance in Fragile States: the Role of Center-Periphery Relations and Local Government', Paper presented at the 4th International Specialised Conference on 'International Aid and Public Administration', International Institute of Administrative Sciences, Ankara, Turkey, June 23–27, 2008**

How can fragile and post-conflict states stabilise themselves and transition toward socio-economic recovery? This paper was presented at the 2008 International Specialised Conference on 'International Aid and Public Administration'. It argues that developing countries and donors should eschew ambitious idealised visions of good governance in favour of pragmatic approaches aimed at achieving 'good enough governance'. Drawing on evidence from stabilisation efforts in Iraq, it concludes that implementing this new strategy requires looking beyond the centre to the critical role of subnational levels of government in post-conflict reconstruction.

*Full summary available in alphabetical appendix or online at:*

<http://www.gsdr.org/go/display&type=Document&id=3366>

**GTZ, 2006, 'Decentralization and Conflicts: A Guideline', Division 42, Governance and Democracy, GTZ, Germany**

While decentralisation is often seen as an instrument for conflict transformation, little attention has been paid to whether and when it can mitigate or exacerbate conflict. This paper from the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) examines the connections between decentralisation and violent conflicts and consequent implications for decentralisation policy-making and implementation. To avoid unintentional escalation of conflict, development co-operation should

pay greater attention to decentralisation/conflict interactions and strengthen the involvement of central government and civil society.

Full summary available in alphabetical appendix or online at:

<http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Document&id=3373>

## Case studies

- Diprose, R. and Ukiwo, U., 2008, 'Decentralisation and Conflict Management in Indonesia and Nigeria', CRISE Working Paper no. 49, Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity (CRISE), Queen Elizabeth House, Oxford University.  
<http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Document&id=2995>
- Green, E., 2008, 'Decentralisation and Conflict in Uganda', *Conflict, Security and Development*, vol. 8, no. 4, pp. 427–450.  
<http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/21927/>
- Jackson, P., 2005, 'Chiefs, Money and Politicians: Rebuilding Local Government in Post-War Sierra Leone', *Public Administration and Development*, vol. 25, pp. 49–58.  
<http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Document&id=1208>

## Other resources

- McLoughlin, C., 2008, 'Decentralisation and Assistance to Sub-national Governments in Fragile Environments', GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report to DFID, University of Birmingham, UK:  
<http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Helpdesk&id=471>
- UNDP held a workshop on 'Local Government in Post-Conflict Situations' in Oslo in November 2007. All the workshop papers and presentations are available online:  
[http://www.undp.org/oslocentre/overview/workshop\\_nov07.html](http://www.undp.org/oslocentre/overview/workshop_nov07.html)