Abstract

Promoting post-conflict recovery of agriculture differs significantly from promoting development of an agriculture sector in ‘normal’ circumstances. The large body of literature on post-conflict recovery has yet to cover systematically the experience of efforts to revive the production sectors of an economy. Based on a selected review of project and programme materials, this article draws together evaluations and lessons learned from many countries’ post-conflict experiences in agriculture. It gives attention to the important links between this experience and resumption of long-term development, and with constraints imposed by the need to sustain peace. It is more difficult to rehabilitate agriculture in a post-conflict setting than it is to promote agricultural development under ‘normal’ conditions, that is, conditions of peace and security where violence is limited to ‘ordinary’ crime and banditry. This article explains why this is the case and shares some lessons learned from aid agency experience. Although a substantial body of literature focuses on post-conflict recovery, it does not differentiate between diverse experiences at the sectoral level.

Violent Conflict and the Effects on Agriculture

Violent conflicts in developing countries have differed in their effects on rural life and agriculture, depending on:

- The duration of the conflict;
- The scale of destruction (of irrigation works, livestock, draft animals, seed stocks and production inputs, etc.);
- The extent and duration of population displacement;
- The demographic impact (death and disability, female-headed households, urban migration);
- Institutional degradation (marketing systems, government agricultural services);
- Destruction of social capital (traditional labour exchange, community collective action, trust).

In some conflicts human capital has been targeted, including researchers and other agricultural professionals. Government infrastructure (research facilities, extension, veterinary services) has often been severely degraded. Commercial and subsistence agriculture face different recovery problems – and therefore require different solutions – because commercial agriculture depends on the recovery of transport and marketing systems in order to reach its consumers.
Because conflict damages both social and physical capital, efforts must be directed at restoring human as well as material resources. Recovery often requires retraining employees of the Ministry of Agriculture along with staff from associated ministries and state agencies. State trading companies may need phasing out; state processing and warehousing may need privatisation; new legislation and regulation may be needed. In addition, agricultural capacity-building efforts in countries undergoing post-conflict structural transition, unlike many reform programmes occurring under ‘normal’ circumstances, must also address urgent needs for production recovery.

In contrast to many parts of the Global North (the Industrialised ‘West’), agriculture in developing countries is often the largest sector of the economy in terms of output, employment and exports. In the course of conflict, substantial fractions of the rural population may have abandoned their land and moved into cities or crossed borders to escape war. However, even in places where many displaced persons remain in the cities after the fighting is over, agriculture has an important role in the reconstruction process. Although capital-intensive infrastructure projects (transportation, electric power, etc.) have typically absorbed much reconstruction aid (and attention), donors have also put significant resources into agricultural recovery.

It is critically important to note that aspects of the recovery process can enhance or hinder post-conflict peacebuilding, depending on their effects and implementation methods. Some of these aspects are discussed in further detail below, such as re-absorption of ex-combatants, settlement of land disputes, and sector policy reforms that may adversely affect some groups while benefiting others. General optimism over the course of the sector’s recovery can enhance the climate for sustainable peace. In contrast, the underlying conflict issues are likely to continue to fester in an atmosphere of pessimism and economic stagnation. A full treatment of the role of agricultural investment and policy in conflict prevention would take us well beyond this article and its focus on production recovery.

Drawing together evaluations and lessons learned from various country cases, the links between post-conflict experience and resumption of long-term development are examined, constraints identified and recommendations made towards the ways in which agriculture can sustain peace.

Sources for this Review

This article draws upon materials gathered from agencies, primarily the World Bank and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), that have been accumulating experience in post-conflict agricultural recovery. While evaluative analysis is still limited at this stage, the available assessment materials provide sufficient data for sketching a picture of the field and for drawing useful lessons regarding recovery efforts.

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According to a World Bank assessment of its post-conflict reconstruction experience in the 20-year period 1977-1997, agricultural projects amounted to about $600 million, or 9.75%, of its total lending of $6.2 billion to 34 post-conflict countries (World Bank 1998d 1:16). When looking at the funds given to agricultural projects within individual countries, the percentages ranged from 6 to 16% of the total Bank funds involved. These figures would be larger if they included other allocations, such as agricultural
imports (subsumed under a general imports category), multi-sector credits, funds given for roads and other purposes relevant to agriculture. Furthermore, any such accounting is only indicative; there is no hard-and-fast rule for defining a cut-off date separating a ‘recovery’ period from resumption of ‘normal’ development.

The World Bank assessment reviewed and assessed outcomes in nine countries. In restoring macro-economic stability, outcomes were judged ‘highly satisfactory’; in promoting liberalisation reforms, ‘marginally satisfactory’; social sector recovery was rated ‘modest to unsatisfactory’; and ‘rebuilding economic sectors’ – which, of course, includes agricultural recovery – was viewed as ‘marginally satisfactory’ to ‘satisfactory’. Completion reports on a sample of 20 World Bank agricultural recovery projects rated 18 ‘satisfactory’ and two ‘unsatisfactory’. On a separate list of 17 (mostly non-agricultural) post-conflict projects in only four countries, the assessment reports that the implementing departments scored ‘satisfactory’ for about 70% of the projects. An independent unit in the Bank scored only about 40% of the same projects as ‘satisfactory’. Although the World Bank’s overall long-term performance merits a 70% satisfaction rating, it would be surprising to find that post-conflict agriculture (or other) projects similarly merited this score, given the additional problems post-conflict projects face as compared with projects undertaken in normal circumstances.

In sum, overall performance judgments on post-conflict projects cannot yet be relied upon for comparative assessments. (Unlike World Bank project reports, the 13 USAID project completion reports obtained for this review did not follow a consistent format or use a common set of ratings.) How should ratings of ‘satisfactory’ or ‘unsatisfactory’ be defined in the post-conflict context? Should we expect, and accept as satisfactory, a lesser degree of accomplishment than is required from projects in ‘normal’ situations? Despite such reservations, the material reviewed here is rich in detail and useful for beginning explorations on this topic of post-conflict agricultural recovery.

Stages of Relief and Recovery: Timing and Sequencing

Several sharp conceptual and organisational distinctions exist between humanitarian relief and ‘normal’ development assistance. There are NGOs, aid agencies, and units within aid agencies, which have humanitarian response as their main function. Indeed, humanitarian relief is the salient concern during the first post-conflict period. This article, however, while citing some relevant lessons from emergency programmes, is primarily concerned with the recovery of agricultural production and establishing the basis for long-term agricultural growth.

Much of the post-conflict literature addresses the interface between emergency and resettlement on the one hand, and rehabilitation and development-resumption on the other, and how relief aid for the former can affect the latter (USAID 1998a:7). The potential disincentive effect of food aid on the revival of food production has been a major theme. The means for avoiding disincentive effects are summarised in the1998 USAID review of food aid experience (McClelland 1998). One way to avoid disincentive effects on food prices and market demand has been to target food distribution to disadvantaged consumers, such as destitute returning refugees. As noted below, however, targeting that excludes non-destitute families living in the same community can create discord. The trade-off between potential disincentive effects and social discord has been weighted on the side of
avoiding discord. Funds generated when the food is sold through domestic commercial channels have often financed two other benefits: short-term job creation, and rebuilding of agricultural infrastructure (such as roads and irrigation facilities). Lessons from food-for-work experiences can be found in a 2000 USAID evaluation (McClelland 2000).

Many evaluations recognise that it can be counterproductive if donors assume there is a neat sequence in which humanitarian agencies reach some clear threshold at which point they should hand over the problems to development agencies.

The primary objective of agricultural rehabilitation programmes should be to ensure food security for the medium term and, ultimately, to establish the base for progress to longer-term food security. Food aid is a better tool for short-term food security. If seeds and tools programmes are looked to for solutions to short-term food shortages, they are likely to be rushed and lead to inconsistencies and medium-term costs that will erode their impact (Tardif-Douglin 1997:283).

Experience in Kosovo illustrates how poor sequencing and harmonisation among relief and rehabilitation agencies can delay recovery. While emergency assistance was flowing into Kosovo in 1999, USAID funded a programme to lay a normalising basis for the second growing season. The Kosovo Emergency Agricultural Input Programme (KEAP) included a needs assessment and activities (such as providing marketing information to the nascent private dealers and helping establish entrepreneurs’ associations) to promote transition from state-enterprise institutions to a market-based input supply system.

While successful overall in an exceptionally challenging environment and with only an eight-month time frame, KEAP experienced problems that constrained realisation of its full potential. For example, by using NGOs to distribute free agricultural inputs and wheat flour, donors undermined efforts to activate private sector distribution and milling networks and brought uncertainty about their intentions to the markets. Credit for dealers remained scarce, and subsidised fertiliser from Serbia undercut commercial imports (USAID 2000:2). Despite these shortcomings, KEAP’s overall accomplishments were substantial. In addition to the humanitarian free-supply problem, a large follow-on project was complicated by the fact that the cessation of conflict had also set the stage for a transition to a private, market-based economy. The creation of credit processes to fuel the operations of private dealers illustrated the coordination problem and the drag of the past institutional-cum-policy inheritance. The USAID evaluation report states:

Credit was one of the main preoccupations of the project – from finding willing lenders for project clients to identifying and preparing bankable borrowers, to monitoring repayments and dealing with defaulters. Because of the socialist traditions and the influx of large humanitarian aid after the conflict, Kosovars initially made little distinction between loans and grants. All donors and financial institutions faced problems of default, especially in the agriculture sector because
of the many risks involved ... Over time, as the project helped the association members understand the nature of loans and obligations and collective responsibility, the record improved, but outstanding default on loans remains a problem (USAID 2003:12).

Even with a different institutional inheritance, restoring credit systems may be problematic. One report noted that ‘credit discipline no longer exists in rural El Salvador, and too many programmes have ended with excessive rates of delinquency’. It concluded that transfers to people left destitute by conflict should be given as grants in order to maintain the integrity of credit systems (USAID 1998a:8-9).

Another unsatisfactory credit intervention illustrates the risks when projects are mounted in haste under pressure for urgent response. In Uganda, USAID aimed to support a revival of commercial farming by injecting credit through local banks. The project was designed before the war broke out in 1985, was suspended during the conflict, and then activated post-conflict in 1986. Under pressure to move quickly, ‘actions were taken and others omitted which, while understandable for expediency’s sake, were the root cause of a variety of detrimental impacts on the smooth functioning of the project and ... negatively affected the project’ (USAID 1994). Time was not taken for a redesign exercise. Technical assistance provided to Ugandan banks was insufficient, the farmers lacked experience in using the machinery financed, and there was no technical assistance or training provided on this score. Almost half the animals imported under the project died.

As a consequence of this failure to redesign the aid package, ‘farmers ended up with a large burden of debt with many of the assets purchased only marginally productive, or totally non-productive’ (USAID 1994). In addition, the programme evaluation noted that credit was not necessarily the key constraint. ‘Credit-driven solutions that fail to adequately consider related problems in marketing, infrastructure, extension services, research, the macroeconomic environment, and agricultural policy may exacerbate farmers’ problems’ (USAID 1994). The speed problem might be more manageable if donors had sector-specific rapid appraisal guides tailored for post-conflict assessments.

World Bank experience in El Salvador provides an example of priority setting and sequencing that made a clear distinction between the initial response focusing on restoration and the subsequent return to a development-oriented mode. The World Bank explains the important of such mid-course flexibility:

Priorities in agricultural research and extension are dynamic. They change in response to local, national and international conditions and requirements. Thus, it is critical to have a system embodied in project design that will take these changes into consideration and adjust focus and priorities accordingly. Initially, the government correctly identified basic grains as priorities, given the need to ensure food self-sufficiency and support small farmers whose production was predominantly in basic grains. This was particularly important because the project was implemented immediately after the end of the civil war. When circumstances changed the project responded rightly – particularly when it was realised that improving the living standard of farmers through the production of basic grains was unattainable and most important, when farmers demonstrated their interest in diversifying their production to higher-value crops (World Bank 2003b:29).

It would be a mistake to view a return to pre-conflict status as a satisfactory goal of post-conflict recovery programmes; pre-conflict living standards in many cases were at poverty
levels and pre-conflict policies were often detrimental to agricultural production. Such standards and policies should usually not be reinstated. Some disabilities may persist long after the sector might be judged (based on production levels, for instance) to have reached pre-conflict status. For example, as a result of the conflict, many households will be left headed by women, and most of these households will experience a permanent deficit of male labour. Restoration of irrigation systems may take years. Thus, some elements of a post-conflict strategy may have to be continued while other elements are phased out as the beneficiaries return to a ‘normal’ development path.

Production Recovery: Interventions and Constraints

Economic recovery often depends on institutional and political rehabilitation, and cannot be achieved by technical fixes alone. According to Joachim von Braun, director of the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI):

Market institutions have to be rebuilt, and the trust in markets re-established. The transition from short-term assistance to development investment remains a challenge. Only with sound governance and an understanding of the institutional capacities in the specific situation can that be achieved. Rebuilding agriculture and the food systems after conflict is not just a technical, but a political matter’ (IFPRI 2003:12).

A similar finding cautions against overlooking connections between physical and social capital: ‘In the rush to replace physical infrastructure, the importance of creating or replacing social/organisational infrastructure should not be underestimated if improvements are to be sustainable’ (USAID 1998a:8). Ensuring that community social/organisational structures are in place is important for maintaining local infrastructure built to low specifications, such as irrigation channels and unpaved farm-to-market roads.

Agricultural recovery may be embedded in the broader problem of rehabilitating farming communities as functioning, healthy social entities. In some programmes agriculture was only one component of a total community re-establishment effort. The degradation of rural civil society and networks of trust can also impede farm recovery. Farmers have been seen to distrust extension agents and be reluctant to resume pre-conflict interdependence involving labour exchange and group projects (IFPRI 2003:12). A whole literature exists that expounds on problems inherent in rebuilding social capital (Cernea & McDowell 2000). Economic reconstitution may depend on the recovery of such communities as social entities and any technical effort overlooking this fact is likely to fail.

According to Kumar (1997:28, 269), recovery aid in agriculture has included:

- Seed stock and multiplication programmes;
- Farm tools and production inputs;
- Reviving extension services and research;
- Feeder roads and irrigation systems;
- Veterinary services and feed;
Repairing market sites and storage facilities;
Aid for harvesting, transporting, and marketing crops;
Designing policy reforms;
Capacity building of agricultural institutions (ministries of agriculture, co-ops, etc);
Providing credit;
Promoting cash crops and marine products for export.

Under normal circumstances, ‘government should become involved in a particular investment only if it raises real national income more than would be the case if the public sector were not involved ... and when such involvement improves the performance of the private sector rather than displaces it’ (McClelland 1996:42). In post-conflict situations, however, elements of both sectors will have been degraded or rendered inoperable. External agencies will have to assume greater roles than is normally feasible or desirable. Lessons from past (‘normal’) aid experience may have to be adjusted or temporarily disregarded.

On the other hand, some lessons from post-conflict experience reconfirm lessons learned from projects in normal circumstances:

Post-conflict experience with credit cooperatives has been poor (Kumar 1997:28), but cooperatives have had a mixed record even under normal circumstances. The post-conflict environment is probably less conducive to cooperatives in situations where conflict has destroyed local trust, but the evaluation literature as it stands does not provide a comparative analysis.

In Uganda and Mindanao, cash crops were introduced successfully as a post-conflict income-generating strategy. Substitution of higher- for lower-value crops in these environments would have been warranted even under normal conditions. On the other hand, a project in El Salvador demonstrated that even a heavily funded project under a conflict-driven agenda can fail if the promoted products (and enterprises) are poorly chosen for local agronomic conditions. ‘The evaluation concluded that much of the FIDEX agribusiness facility resulted in failure. The project was flawed by its dependence on the assumption of an exploitable comparative advantage in El Salvador for non-traditional agriculture’ (USAID 1995:18). Even if the choices are technically appropriate, introduction of crops or livestock to farmers not experienced with the crops or animals being provided may not be wise, or sustainable, as a first post-conflict intervention (World Bank 1998a).

Contract farming (often with local contractor-buyers employed by foreign agribusiness firms) has been an effective technology-cum-marketing innovation that enables small farmers to diversify into high-value crops, including for export. In some post-conflict situations also, where government services were debilitated, private contract farming was able to provide the inputs and assistance farmers needed for rapid recovery (Kumar 1995).

The perennial problem of poor aid coordination also appears in post-conflict responses. For example, because donors vary in their interests, some good options may go unattended: ‘The coffee and tea sectors, whose rehabilitation could rapidly have led to the very-much-needed monetisation of the rural economy, have been largely ignored ... The international community’s failure rapidly to help Rwanda rehabilitate export agriculture represents an important
missed opportunity ... Well timed and well placed assistance to the coffee sector would have had important financial and psychological effects both at the household and national level’ (Steering Committee 1996: 48). (For a case study analysis of general post-conflict donor coordination experience, see Schiavo-Campo 2003 & World Bank 2003a).

The point here is obvious. The lessons we have learned from years of aid for agricultural development remain important, but must be adapted to the local circumstances of each post-conflict situation.

Nine Specific Recovery Problems: Responses and Lessons

The following areas of response and learning are derived from the recorded experience of many agricultural recovery programmes, yielding pragmatic guidelines that should inform future post-conflict response efforts. The list is in no particular order.

1. Absorption of ex-combatants

An important element of all peace processes is the demobilisation of combatants and their absorption into the economy. Combatants may have lost previously held skills during long years of military life. Child soldiers may have never acquired agricultural (or any other) skills. A significant burden of reintegration is likely to fall on the agriculture sector. The easiest transition probably occurs where troops can return to their home farms. Rural reinsertion may be enhanced if soldiers also get training in skills for off-farm seasonal employment. In several cases, ex-combatants who have not found employment or been (re)settled in agriculture have turned to banditry, complicating the search for post-conflict stability. In the worst cases, unemployed ex-combatants have been re-mobilised for a resumption of conflict.

While most lessons on demobilisation have been drawn from non-agricultural programmes (Ball 1997), reinsertion in agriculture has figured in some World Bank and USAID-supported demobilisation programmes. The World Bank (1998d:31-33) drew the lessons from these experiences that:

An approach narrowly targeted on ex-combatants, as opposed to an area or countrywide approach, can create resentment among local populations ... The Uganda experience ...demonstrates that the availability of land is an important determinant of successful reinsertion and reintegration of ex-combatants. Land is not a guarantee of success, however, as illustrated by El Salvador, where a substantial number of ex-combatants provided land under the accord-mandated Land Transform Programme abandoned their land for a variety of reasons, including poor land quality, lack of supporting services and credit, and a lack of aptitude and interest ...Training schemes have had a mixed record ... Care must be taken to consider the special needs of the soldiers to be demobilised – they may come from rural areas, have little or no education, and increasingly they are mere children.

The USAID-supported programme in Mindanao has avoided the above-mentioned pitfalls, in part through offering ex-combatants many production options: training and technical
assistance, credit, and marketing arrangements. The majority of these ex-combatants actually had little prior agricultural experience. An evaluation attributed the programme’s success to: responsiveness to the beneficiaries’ capital, training, and technology needs; focus on quick-maturing crops with simple technology and ready markets; and avoidance of dependency by telling the beneficiaries that aid would be limited to two cropping cycles, after which they would have to ‘graduate’. The evaluation concluded that the beneficiaries had made a quick transition to readiness for long-term growth:

Since they are no longer subsistence farmers, any programme to support their continued development would have to focus on the next phase or stage of development. Results show that 89% of the beneficiaries have continued the prescribed technology. A large number seem, on their own, to have ventured into producing more lucrative crops in addition to the ...crops they were initially assisted with. Others have ventured into other crops and businesses (Lumawag et al 2001:29)

2. Input resupply and farm capital replacement

Resettled refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) are commonly bereft of production inputs (seed, fertiliser, insecticides, etc.) and other capital requirements (such as tools and equipment). This lack of resources similarly affects many of the farmers who remained on their land. Emergency resupply usually includes input and tools packages plus food aid for immediate consumption to tide families over the first production cycle. One problem with this strategy reported by CARE in Rwanda is that farmers may consume the seed if food aid is insufficient or if they are uninterested in planting the seed for a particular crop (Tardif-Douglin 1997: 276).

Input distribution ‘should be extended to all vulnerable farmers in war-affected areas. Individually targeted assistance not only sows seeds of conflict in the local community, but it is also difficult to administer because of poor information about intended beneficiaries and the potential for corruption’ (Kumar 1997:27-28). Where distribution is administered by local authorities, the most vulnerable may actually be excluded from eligibility, as in a project in Rwanda because they were unable to pay the unauthorised fee the authorities were charging for being listed.

Urgency may force donors to provide seed packages that are undifferentiated. For the second season, donors should have the leeway to tailor seed packages, ensure that inappropriate seed is not distributed, and promote local seed multiplication. One study concluded that donors who imported seed in Somalia had erred in overlooking the well developed local seed market. By equating relief with imported handouts, the seed programme bred dependence rather than reviving local capacity (Langley et al 2001). Another study found little rationale in Rwanda for continuing general distribution of seed and tools (or food aid) into a third year. Limiting third-year distribution to the remaining ‘vulnerable’ was difficult due to problems of definition and identification of intended beneficiaries (Steering Committee 1996:46-47).

International capacities for restocking are well developed. However, as experience in Uganda shows, it can be difficult to establish a well functioning seed regime for sustained production growth after emergency seed parachuting has ended. Despite restored stability
and general economic growth, ‘the absence of a clear government seed and planting material policy and a lack of private sector interest in seed ... restricted diffusion of superior crop varieties and adversely affected research impact’. Extension services were ‘almost non-operational (which) impeded feedback from farmer to research, thus limiting technological dissemination and adoption, and research impact’ (World Bank 2001c:11).

Reconstitution of genetic resources has been difficult where seed banks were non-existent before the conflict, were destroyed in the course of the conflict, and/or where there were no international seed banks that included a country’s genetic resources. For example, ‘Angola’s rich agricultural germ plasm is not, with very few exceptions, being conserved in international gene banks. Thus what is ... lost as a result of disaster and conflict cannot be re-introduced or regenerated, from internationally held material’ (Matos 1998:2). Consequently, collection of genetic material from Angola’s heterogeneous agronomic areas, the creation of gene banks and a multiplication and distribution system had to begin from scratch. The Angolan plant authorities developed an emergency seed collection programme using NGOs, extension workers and others as ‘paracollectors’ (Matos 1998:4). For those farmers lacking local seed sources, donors provided emergency ‘one size fits all’ packages. While the problems this created were recognised, and subsequently corrected, the initial distribution of inappropriate seed varieties retarded the pace of recovery (Nankam 1998:2).

3. Framing sector policies

A synthesis of USAID agriculture evaluations found a ‘threshold level of proper policies’, a sine qua non of agricultural development. If these particular policies are not in place, ‘it is seldom worthwhile for donors to make other investments in agriculture’ (McClelland 1996:vii). Much of the documentation dealing with this threshold identifies necessary post-conflict changes. However, several reasons exist for not applying these lessons too strictly. Proper design and installation of new policies takes time, but given urgent humanitarian considerations it is not likely to be feasible to make aid implementation contingent on donor-preferred policy reforms. For example, the post-conflict government may be incapable of formulating or installing new policy frameworks; or it may choose for political reasons to reinstate the old policy regime, a stance that has in some cases required time-consuming negotiations for effecting reforms.

Devastation and institutional disarray may open a window of opportunity for thorough policy re-evaluation. ‘In some countries, such as Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, Eritrea, Laos, Mozambique and Vietnam, where wars have lasted 10 to 20 years, there has been no question of returning to pre-war policies, because technology, markets and population have changed dramatically in the meantime. Post-war rehabilitation and reconstruction can be regarded and used as a chance to jump to a higher stage of technology and to recuperate the years lost’ (Schelhas 1998:27). This also speaks to the earlier point about needing to develop criteria for post-conflict recovery that are independent of pre-conflict conditions. Policy makers and aid agencies should not be constrained to past choices when considering the future, but rather should be encouraged to consider feasible options that fit local needs and existing resource (i.e. knowledge, social and technical) bases.

Where partial policy improvements are easier to install both technically and politically, the challenge is to identify the reforms that are most strategically useful for enhancing recovery. Rwanda provides an example of how partial policy changes can have mixed

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results. According to one account three years after the genocide, donors ignored the government’s re-establishment of pre-conflict land policies which were in obvious need of reform (Tardif-Douglin 1997:280). According to another assessment, the post-war government did start other reforms the year following the genocide, including liberalising trade and ‘key product markets such as coffee’ (World Bank 1999a). The trick with policy reform is to develop criteria to aid in assessing which reforms are necessary, useful and best promote the social as well as economic well-being of the country.

4. Aid to women-headed households

Many post-conflict households are headed by women. The loss of adult males reduces the cultivation potential of these households. In Angola ‘many of the farming chores that were divided between men and women are now shifted to women, or they have been dropped. For example, instead of ploughing, women simply till the land by hoe in the absence of men – and livestock and ploughs’ (IFPRI 2003:11). In cultures where women cultivate and men hunt and gather, loss of males means a reduction in important dietary components. Where women lack property rights and credit is normally extended only to males, new institutional/legal arrangements have to be made to give female household heads full economic rights.

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The problem of loss of males is a major challenge for recovery since ‘in many post-conflict countries a third or more of the working-age men have been killed and women are the productive base for restarting the economy’ (World Bank 1998d:33). I found little evidence of post-conflict attention to female-headed agriculture households as a separately defined group. (There is more experience in this area than I was able to uncover. A UNICEF project in the 1990s for widow-headed agriculture households in Cambodia provides one such example, but documentation was unobtainable.) This may not pose a problem if there are general programmes, such as micro-enterprise institutions on the lines of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, that are large enough to respond meaningfully to the problems of these households. Another reason that donors have cited for not targeting female-headed households is the potential risk of creating tensions in communities where other women would not be eligible for such aid (Kumar 1997:24).

5. Removing landmines and unexploded ordnance

Landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) make many arable areas dangerous for resuming cultivation (as in Angola and Laos). Where people resettle in such areas, family labour continues at risk to mortal or maiming losses. Where mines are numerous, often without location maps, the costs of removal are high and take years, with the continuing toll heaviest among farm families. Clearing of small plastic mines that float into previously cleared fields during periods of flooding is particularly difficult. Since choices have to be made between clearings for agriculture versus for other sectors (such as schools and roads), clearance programmes must be coordinated with agriculture recovery strategies.

6. Shoring up agriculture knowledge

There may be a loss of agricultural knowledge if a refugee population has been long idle in camps. If displaced people are resettled in new areas, their prior production knowledge may be ill suited to their new agronomic conditions. The training of extension workers and the substance of technical advice may require adjustment to meet these problems.
7. Resolving land disputes

There have been many cases of post-conflict disputes over land ownership or access rights. Returning refugees or IDPs may find that their land has been occupied by others. With written records often non-existent or destroyed, claims may be difficult to resolve. The problem is compounded if the recent occupiers themselves had been forced out of their original locations, as in ‘ethnic cleansing’ episodes in Bosnia. Their move to disputed land or housing may have been involuntary. Return to their original homes may not be feasible.

As in Afghanistan, uncertainties over land rights can increase because pre-conflict ‘customary’ access systems have broken down. With factions fighting over traditional legitimacy, opportunistic village chiefs are forcing peasants to cultivate poppies as a condition for getting allocated other plots on which they (the peasants) can grow staples for subsistence (Pons-Vignon & Lecomte 2004:29). Where substantial numbers of farmers are enmeshed in such constraining – even criminal – networks (as also occurs in some South American countries), the areas involved may be outside the reach of recovery programmes.

Highly concentrated land ownership, systems of access dependency, and uncertainties over land rights are likely to make small farmers unwilling to invest in land improvement. Also, exploitative agrarian relations may emerge or re-emerge, creating both a new basis for future violence and a system of servitude harmful to agricultural development. In Sierra Leone, the demobilised ‘have sunk into the rural underclass, in an agrarian society undermined by a mercantilist regime interested more in feeding its followers from food aid than reorganising and modernising the countryside’ (Pons-Vignon & Lecomte: 27). In the face of such problems, recovery efforts may be hamstrung.

In Rwanda the government, with donor support, launched a habitat-cum-agrarian reform programme. It aimed to prevent renewed conflict over land ownership as refugees returned, and to facilitate agricultural modernisation. The programme entailed forcible resettlement, and concentration of scattered households into new villages. In 2001, Human Rights Watch concluded, first, that ‘the “conflict prevention” dimension of this programme may be questioned when its very nature involves state violence targeted at the poor’, and second, that ‘donors could have reacted to the forced nature (of the programme) and attempted to foster a less violent, possibly participatory approach’ (Human Rights Watch 2001, ‘Uprooting the Poor in Rwanda’, cited in Pons-Vignon & Lecomte 2004:31).

The relationships between land, land reform and tenure, and violent conflict have been little explored, although Pons-Vignon and Lecomte make a valiant entrée into the field. Modern land reform efforts got off to a good start with post-World War II programmes in Taiwan and South Korea. The record since, however, has been mixed (McClelland, 1996: 35) and donors should examine possible reform needs. A prolonged conflict may leave the rural poor in more precarious circumstances with respect to land than was the case before the conflict emerged, as in Afghanistan, according to L.A.Wiley (cited in Pons-Vignon & Lecomte 2004:40).

Pending deeper research, a few lessons have been drawn: land tenure experts should be included in planning agriculture recovery; property commissions (as in Cyprus and Bosnia) can be effective tools for restitution; strategies to enhance land use efficiency that
focus on technicalities (e.g. plot registration) are likely to fail if they ignore land politics; without good donor coordination and political understanding, land projects have had poor results (as in El Salvador).

8. Rehabilitating infrastructure

The initial returns to restoration of rural infrastructure can be high. ‘An independent evaluation of (the Haitian Employment Generation Project’s) economic impact indicates that the rehabilitation of irrigation schemes has provided most economic benefits to the country. The rehabilitation of roads and water supply showed also substantial return on investment. The returns on the construction of new roads were not evaluated as being important’ (World Bank 1996a:9). Priority should be given to smaller irrigation systems that can be restored more easily and faster. In Afghanistan, half the irrigation systems were damaged. ‘Traditional irrigation systems which had a temporary intake were easy to put into operation again ... The larger the scheme, however, the greater were the problems encountered, including sedimentation of the conveyance canals and division of the command area among different local commanders’ (FAO 1996-2002:6). Experience demonstrates that returns on investment in farm-to-market roads can be high. In Eritrea, feeder road construction reduced transport costs, stimulated production, and enabled farmers to exploit new markets (World Bank 2002a:6).

9. Retailing financial aid

So-called ‘social fund’ projects can move resources rapidly to meet farmers’, and local communities’, own priorities for recovery through arrays of small sub-projects. ‘Flexibility in project design allowed (the Eritrean Community Development Fund) to make the necessary adjustments during implementation quickly. National ownership, mobilising stakeholder participation, and the strong desire for results were key factors that defined the processes (the Fund) adopted to effectively cope with and respond to the consequences of the war’ (World Bank 2002a: 22).

Aid Management and Project Design

Lessons drawn in regard to planning and managing post-conflict agriculture programmes illustrate that ‘normal’ problems of aid delivery and effectiveness are greatly compounded in the aftermath of violent conflict.

Design of recovery projects commonly suffers from a dearth of reliable information. In-country economic records may be destroyed and reliable current information on the status of agriculture difficult to obtain. Urgency often forces donors to rely on hastily compiled ‘needs assessments’. Nevertheless, programmes can be effective if close monitoring efforts provide rapid feedback to field office staff with the authority and flexibility to overhaul flawed projects as problems arise. ‘Operations intended to strengthen public sector entities in agriculture in El Salvador and Rwanda encountered protracted problems in attempting to work with weak, inefficient, or rigid bureaucracies. This has led to the cancelling or restructuring of operations, and to a search for alternative approaches to such functions as research, extension, and service and input delivery, relying more on the private sector and NGOs’ (World Bank 1998d:30).

Needs assessments should be made in conjunction with a conflict analysis. Drawing on an analysis of the risks for conflict renewal and the requirements for sustaining post-conflict peacebuilding, an agricultural needs assessment can identify, and take account of, the conflict-relevance of sectoral technical policy and project options.
Because rehabilitation demands speed, and good information is often scarce, more mistakes will be made in post-conflict situations than under normal circumstances. In Bosnia, despite a needs appraisal, an emergency project procured machinery that some farmers rejected (World Bank 1998a). In Uganda, a World Bank project intended to revive the extension service used the Bank’s standard extension system design, which proved inappropriate for the context. As a result, the project’s results were unsatisfactory (World Bank 2000).

Project design should allow for inexperience with donor requirements in financial management, procurement, accounting and auditing. Early (re)training for staff of government agriculture policy, research, and services units is essential. In conjunction with training, intensive field-level donor supervision is often cited as critically important ‘to compensate for the limited institutional capacity in the sector’ (World Bank 1997d:46).

Project designs were often too complex, depending on many cooperating entities and coordinated interactions. The quality of aid coordination has varied from excellent to very poor. Coordination is especially important in post-conflict situations since the aid actors, especially international NGOs, are usually extremely numerous, making coordination more difficult than usual. When combined with the often limited institutional experience of state policy makers in post-conflict situations, government bodies are often lack the capacity to accommodate complex programmes successfully.

The literature on post-conflict development mentions many of the same complaints and lessons well documented in the field of development assistance. These include mid-project staff turnover (local and donor), insufficient counterpart funds, red tape, and poor quality of project leadership. It also suggests that measures to mitigate the effects of adverse price movements on smallholders may be advisable for the first two or three seasons when reviving the most financially fragile farms (World Bank 2002b:17).

Conclusion

The evaluations reviewed here have been ‘micro’ rather than ‘macro’, i.e. individual projects and programmes rather than the overall structure of post-conflict foreign aid in the agricultural sector. Most of the evaluations were conducted by the same aid agency units that supported the projects, and not by independent evaluators. Still, internal aid agency reporting and evaluation systems tend to focus on what went wrong in order to correct those mistakes in the future. As a result, one can actually get an unwarranted impression that agricultural recovery aid has been weak, misguided, and poorly administered.

In fact, some of the outcomes have been good. However, the important but still unexamined question remains: under what circumstances has post-conflict agricultural recovery been strong, and what has made the difference between weak and strong outcomes? A second, related question asks, what is the appropriate standard of ‘success’ in post-conflict situations? New private ventures in developed economies have high failure rates; government programmes are also rife with shortcomings. We should be surprised if the ‘success’ rate of public ventures in ‘normal’ developing country situations is higher than what we expect in donor countries. If the purported ‘success’ rate is very high, it would imply that donors are avoiding tackling the difficult core problems. In post-conflict developing countries, the environment is even more adverse, and we should expect even lower success rates than those in ‘normal’ developing areas. Even well conceived sector-level recovery programmes may be rendered ineffective or undone mid-course if the underlying security and political environment is not peace-enhancing and conducive to economic revival.
When designing agricultural recovery programmes it is important to look for ways in which such programmes can contribute to sustainable peacebuilding. As examples, we have discussed the role of agriculture for reabsorbing demobilised combatants, and the need to resolve disputes over land access. The potential for unintended inter-group competition must be kept in mind when donors propose broad policy changes in a post-conflict environment. Trade policy reforms, for example, have been seen to benefit farmers of one ethnicity while harming the economic interests of farmers of another ethnicity, in a situation of violent antagonism between the two ethnic populations. These problems deserve in-depth attention, alongside an exploration of the full range of interactions between agriculture and conflict.

Finally, we must ask: are the governments and aid agencies applying the lessons that have been learned thus far for post-conflict in agriculture? For this, a second round of evaluation review will be needed after the passage of a little more (but not much) time.

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Endnotes

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2 The Bank typically applies three criteria - relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency - when judging project performance. Depending on the individual project, detailed performance measures are specified for judging the outcome for each criterion in a range from highly satisfactory to highly unsatisfactory. A full description of the Bank’s evaluation methodology can be found on the Bank’s website.

References


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