



AFRICA HUMAN CAPITAL HEADS OF STATE SUMMIT

Africa Human Capital Technical Briefs Series

Bridges Without Bricks: How Human Capital Boosts Social Cohesion

July 2023

KEY MESSAGES

- Sub-Saharan Africa is one of the most affected regions by conflict and violence, which erodes social cohesion, and, in turn, makes the delivery of services to build human capital more challenging.
- Investing in human capital is an accelerator of social cohesion and reduces the drivers of violence, conflict, and fragility.
- There is growing evidence that shows how investing in human capital can build social cohesion and mitigate the drivers of fragility, including designing interventions for the inclusion of vulnerable groups and tailoring programs to specific local contexts.

WHY SOCIAL COHESION MATTERS FOR AFRICA

Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is one of the regions most affected by fragility, conflict, and violence (FCV) situations. Currently, 20 of the 48 countries in the region are classified as being under violent conflict or high levels fragility.¹ According to ACLED data, since 2018, the region has recorded more than 88,583 episodes of violence and more than 177,935 fatalities.²

Conflict and violence have a strong detrimental effect on human capital (HC). For instance, conflict exposure is negatively associated with child nutrition and access to immunization,³ and positively associated with a higher likelihood of food insecurity.⁴ There is also strong evidence that violent attacks affect children emotionally and have long-term effects on learning outcomes. Conflict and violence also affect the utilization of HC-related services. For instance, residing within a conflict cluster significantly reduces the likelihood of utilization of healthcare services.⁵ A recent study in Nigeria has shown that every additional conflict event in a 5-km radius from a child's village during the previous academic year reduces the child's probability of school enrolment by two percentage points.⁶

Conflict and violence are also responsible for the large, forced displacement crisis that the region faces. As of 2023, more than

44 million people in SSA are displaced, a 15% increase since 2021. Most (60%) are internally displaced persons (IDPs). Africa hosts three-quarters of all new internal displacements.⁷ This makes the provision of public services that contribute to HC accumulation even more challenging for these groups.

Ultimately, conflict and violence have detrimental effects on economic growth. On average, annual growth in countries in intense conflicts in the region is about 2.5 percentage points lower, and the cumulative impact on per capita GDP increases over time.⁸

However, investing in HC can also work as an accelerator of social cohesion and reduce the drivers of violence, conflict, and fragility. Education, for instance, can help build social capital and stabilize a region where the social fabric is fraying.⁹ Recent evidence shows that an additional year of schooling lowers the probability of voluntary recruitment into an extremist organization by 13%.¹⁰ Some studies have found that a 10% increase in enrollment rates in secondary schools can reduce the risk of conflict by 3 percentage points and reduce the duration of conflicts.¹¹

¹ FY23 List of Fragile and Conflict-affected Situations. <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/69b1d088e3c48ebe2cdf451e30284f04-0090082022/original/FCSList-FY23.pdf>

² NACLED, 2023. Data export tool. <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>

³ NGoli, S., Mavisakalyan, A., Rammohan, A. et al. Exposure to conflict and child health outcomes: evidence from a large multi-country study. *Confl Health* 16, 52 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13031-022-00483-9>

⁴ Makinde, O.A., Olamijuwon., Mgbachi. Childhood exposure to armed conflict and nutritional health outcomes in Nigeria. *Confl Health* 17, 15 (2023).

⁵ Olabayo Ojeleke, Wim Groot, Isaac Bonuedi, Milena Pavlova. 2022. "The impact of armed conflicts on health-care utilization in Northern Nigeria: A difference-in-differences analysis", *World Medical & Health policy*.

⁶ NMolini, V., A. K. Azad, and M. Di Maio. 2019. "How Much Did Boko Haram Forbid Education in Nigeria." Blog post. World Bank, Washington, DC

⁷ UNHCR, 2023. Global appeal 2023.

⁸ Fang, Xiangming, Siddharth Kothari, Cameron McLoughlin, and Mustafa Yenice, 2020. "The Economic Consequences of Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa", IMF Working Paper 20/221.

⁹ De Simone, Martin Elias; Mosuro, Wuraola Olubusola. *Western and Central Africa Education Strategy - Fragility and Education in Western and Central Africa : Constraints and Opportunities - Background Note (English)*. Washington, D.C. : World Bank Group. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/099925506212214693/P1761490c032670010984c058b2e31d99b5>.

¹⁰ UUNDP. 2023. *Journey to extremism in Africa*. <https://journey-to-extremism.undp.org/>

¹¹ Collier, P., and A. Hoeffler. 2004. "Greed and Grievance in Civil War." *Oxford Economic Papers* 56(4): 563– 595

Creating a healthy and skilled workforce that can obtain productive jobs is also critical to mitigating the drivers of fragility. A recent study has found that employment is the most frequently cited need at the time of joining an extremist organization.¹² When job prospects are promising, the cost of engaging in violent activities increases, making it more challenging for extremist groups to recruit new members.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Design for inclusion. Inclusion of all people in service delivery, irrespective of income, geography, race, gender, ethnicity, disability, religion, or sexual orientation.

2. Support resilient communities. Government can tackle deep-rooted social problems through people-centered, participatory solutions that build on local values and institutions.

3. Continue service delivery during difficult times. This requires innovative approaches to ensure that everyone can receive health and education services in times of conflict. For instance, a recent evaluation of learning circles outside of school in times of conflict demonstrated improvements in coverage and academic achievements on national standardized tests and strengthened democratic behaviors, peaceful coexistence, and self-esteem of students.¹³

4. Tailor interventions to build social cohesion and mitigate the impacts on HC. For example, schools can be set up as 'great equalizers', where the distribution of services helps reduce societal inequalities and promote social cohesion/reconciliation. Curricula should be designed to "deconstruct structures of violence" and "construct structures of peace," with teachers equipped to carry this out.¹⁴ Education can prevent conflict and promote peace if services are provided, responding to historical grievances, addressing persistent exclusions, and helping correct inequalities across ethnic, religious, racial, caste, language, or other lines.

How to Measure Success or Failure: Relevant Data

- In the region, the average Human Capital Index for non-FCV countries is 0.42, compared to 0.36 for FCV countries.
- More than 44 million people in SSA are displaced, a 15% increase since 2021.
- Recent evidence shows that an additional year of schooling reduces the probability of volunteer recruitment into an extremist organization by 13%.

Definition

Social cohesion is defined as a sense of shared purpose, trust, and willingness to cooperate among members of a given group, between members of different groups, and between people and the state. Thus, reinforcing social cohesion is critical to preventing and mitigating fragility, conflict, and violence

¹² U United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). 2017. Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment. UNDP, Regional Bureau for Africa. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3841751?ln=en>.

¹³ Cerdan, P., E. V. Bustillo, and V. Colbert. 2020. "The Escuela Nueva Learning Circles: Learning in Emergency Situations." Blog post. World Bank

¹⁴ Holland, Peter Anthony; Sundharam, Joanna Shruti; Miwa, Keiko; Saavedra Chanduvi, Jaime; Abu-Ghaida, Dina N.; Darvas, Peter. Safe and Learning in the Midst of Fragility, Conflict, and Violence: A World Bank Group Approach Paper. Washington, D.C.



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