

## SHORT SUMMARY

# FARMING AFTER FIGHTING

Farming after fighting. Agricultural recovery after conflict: a review of evidence and practice

Steve Wiggins, Rupsha Banerjee, Neema Patel and Kelvin Shikuku

Conflicts in the Global South have increased in the 2010s, usually civil conflicts that persist for a decade or more. They raise the question of how agriculture, which may bear heavy costs during conflict, recovers when peace returns.

We assessed six conflicts that ended in the early 1990s and early 2000s – in Cambodia, Mozambique, Peru’s southern highlands, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and northern Uganda – to review the experience and extract lessons.

War was costly to farmers and herders. Lives were lost, people were maimed and injured; some people fled the fighting never to return to their villages. Physical assets were often destroyed – crops, livestock, barns on farms, government buildings and telecoms in the public realm. Other assets fell into disrepair: roads, irrigation systems. In Cambodia and Mozambique, mines were sown, rendering farmland too dangerous to till. Public services were often suspended, trade was disrupted.

Despite the losses to warfare, when peace returned, agriculture recovered rapidly in all cases other than northern Uganda. To some extent, rapid growth reflected a rebound as farmers returned to their fields, putting fallowed land back to work. It was not just a rebound: levels of production before conflict were soon restored, then surpassed: for many crops and countries, growth of output was faster after conflict than before hostilities.

Increased output came as much, if not more, from crops grown very largely by smallholders as from commercial and export crops typically grown on larger farms.

The speed and strength of agricultural recovery after conflict was even more remarkable because in four cases – Cambodia, Mozambique, Peru and Rwanda – farmers received very little public support when conflict ended. Governments had other priorities, such as keeping the peace, and they had few funds to invest. Leaders often preferred large farms to smallholdings, believing the former to be capitalised, technically advanced and efficient.

### Policy lessons

The recovery of agriculture after conflict should be seen within the wider landscape of rebuilding polity, economy and society in rural areas when peace returns. Three things need to be done for rural areas and agriculture to recover:

1. Rural society needs to rebuild social capital. This is partly a matter of governance, re-establishing both formal local government and informal village leadership; and partly about restoring public services (schools, health posts, water, road maintenance). It is also partly commercial: a rural society needs its shopkeepers, traders, truckers, bus drivers and all those who keep the local economy ticking over.

2. Land may need special attention: disputes may well be more likely after conflict, especially when displaced persons return to reclaim their farms.
3. Smallholder farmers need everything they needed before conflict, but more pressingly: passable roads; extension to learn of new technology; and whatever it takes to overcome the failures in markets that mean formal credit is out of the question, risks cannot be insured, and costs of inputs are higher than they should be.

That is quite an agenda, but not an impossible one. Specific agricultural priorities include making sure that farmers have access to land, which can be difficult when displaced people and refugees return home to reclaim their farms. They include making sure farmers can restart their cultivation and herding. Often the most limiting factor is labour, especially for households who lost their men and are now headed by widows: offer them cash or vouchers to pay for the labour they lack. Draught animals for ploughing may also be a priority.

Restoring roads is central to recovery of farming and the whole rural economy: without trade, farms and villages languish. Similarly, getting schools and health posts up and running again matters. Less obviously, administrative services in rural market centres may be almost as valuable.

These considerations may be taken to mean that smallholders need little else to recover their farming livelihoods. Many farmers in the Global South do manage with very little outside assistance. But to offer nothing more to farmers risks missing out on the potential for something more than just recovering. To leave farmers with the minimal support of some public goods flies in the face of evidence that: most smallholders are desperately short of capital, especially for more costly items such as oxen to plough and pumps to irrigate; they lack reliable technical advice on better methods and access to new technology such as improved seed; rural access roads may just about be passable, but their poor repair drives up operating costs so farmers pay unduly to get their produce to market; and irrigation schemes need repair. It is hard to believe that some additional effort and support to address these issues would not repay greater public investment.

Funded by



This material has been funded by UK aid from the UK government; however the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK government's official policies.