

Financing Of Armed Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Review of Literature on Armed Group Financing In the Democratic Republic Of Congo

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Abstract: This paper reviews the existing literature on the financing of armed rebel groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo, with a view of identifying potential sources of financing of these rebel groups that remain undocumented. Documented sources of armed rebel group financing discussed in this paper are pillage, proceeds from the sale of mineral resources, illegal wildlife trade, illegal taxation and foreign commercial interests which sustain these armed groups financially in exchange of protection of their interests in the Democratic Republic of Congo. This paper then raises the question of the role of Western countries (together with India and China) and the role of the United Nations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in as far as armed rebel group financing.

Keywords: Rebel armed groups.

1. INTRODUCTION

With Collier and Hoeffler (1998) 'On the economic causes of civil war', the field of conflict theory and specifically conflict economics gained insight into a field of study that looked at the linkages between resources and conflict. The study is of significance because even though the study of armed conflict had already been established, most of that study was focused on international conflicts (Ballentine and Nitzschke, 2005) with the trend changing post-Cold War as the nature of wars shifted from international combat to the intra-national. Furthermore, the studies on conflict theory noted that the intra-national conflicts of more prolonged conflict calling for a need for the examination of the causes of conflict which prior were assumed to be based on culture and ethnicity (Samset, 2002). The article from Collier and Hoeffler then provided the foundation for the exploration of conflict economics. The study opened to scholars the idea of conflict financing and whether civil wars have economic causes (Samset, 2002).

Building up on their findings in the study, Collier and Hoeffler (2004) further postulate the relevance of economics as a cause of conflict as they examine from their study that the availability of finance is a key factor that influences on opportunity for rebellion by elevating grievances experienced by rebel groups and providing opportunity towards conflict. The focus of the theory of rebel financing playing a key role and garnering much attention from the literature on conflict is criticized by Ganesan and Vines (2004) who call for a focus on governments and especially governments revenue to mitigate against the financing of conflict. Their call is especially focused on the resource rich countries where it is examined those resources form a large part of rebel self financing leading to prolonged conflicts (Bannon and Coolier, 2003)

Following in the approach of Wennmann (2007) the field of study has had a broadening of emphasis of sources of conflict financing from natural resources. Wennmann calls this unhelpful and instead advocates for focus on the individual methods being adopted for conflict financing. Instead of focusing on individual methods of conflict financing, conflict economies should be approached as a combination of financing strategies. This opens new space for analyzing the vulnerability of organized armed groups (Wennmann, 2007). The issue of conflict financing has been significant and characterized by debates on the approach to studying conflict financing regarding the sources of funding. The research

done on the topic has been led by different motives surrounding the development of policy approaches to guide conflict prevention, peacebuilding efforts and conflict resolution (Ballentine and Nitzschke, 2005). So as to produce policy responses for conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding efforts; (Ballentine and Nitzschke, 2005) focus lies in the political economy of conflict and attribute a number of factors including globalization and weak states in the developing world, business deals between the rebels and criminal networks, arms traffickers, and unscrupulous corporate entities (Duffield 1999) as contributing factors to the common place self-financing of rebel groups in conflict.

Therefore, conflict financing is a valid field of study and in this review, we look into the existing literature surrounding conflict financing of rebel armed groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

2. THEORIZED SOURCES OF REBEL ARMED GROUP FINANCING IN THE DRC

(a) Pillage:

These arguments have been used to mobilise thousands of young people and children who actually did fight for less 'noble' purposes, sometimes even opposite to the ones declared by their military chiefs. Despite the lack of a political project, many young people kept on fighting, taking advantage of their military career which allowed them to pillage and abuse civilians (Jourdan, 2011). In times of desperation, the armed groups found in the DRC have been known to resort to more traditional means of financing their activities- through pillage from the civilian population (Jones, 2012). Communities living in conflict ones suffer the most as regards pillaging. Armed groups pillage to sustain themselves to the detriment of civilians who lose their land, property, food and livelihoods (Dranginis, 2015).

Laquer (2004) advances the premise that rebel groups are prone to violence for tactical objectives and looting opportunities (Keen, 2002). Weinstein (2007) argues that looting transcends from poorly commanded and indiscipline greedy rebels while other scholars attribute the underlying trigger to socio-psychological factors (Abdullah, 1998).

(b) Mineral Resources:

There exist vast amounts of research into the nexus between natural resource and the birth, financing and sustaining of rebel groups in the DRC. The country is endowed with enormous natural resource wealth in the form of mineral deposits that exist in great profusion all across its territory, mostly concentrated in the southern and eastern regions. These mineral deposits include copper, coltan, tin, uranium, gold, cobalt, diamonds and titanium.

Various organizations such as the Human Rights Watch (2005) and Global Witness (2009) have documented exploitation of natural resources by armed rebels in eastern DRC based on the premise that armed groups are guided mainly by economic incentives (Garrett & Mitchell, 2009).

The natural mineral resources of Congo have, in literature, been identified as the primary factor facilitating violent conflict in the region (Olsson & Congdon, 2004; Stearns, 2011; Turner, 2007). The mines in the DRC have continuously been looted by rebels both local and regional rebel factions (Olsson et. al., 2004). The rebels benefitted immensely from the wars in 1996 and 1998 albeit they were not in control of the state, they profited from looting natural resources (Renner, 2002). The world's largest deposit of coltan is found in DRC and is an integral component in electronic devices. Montague (2002) argues that the demand for coltan and the wealth generated from its extraction and subsequent sale is one of the primary causes of the Congo Wars.

Lujala (2010) advances the assumption that natural resources are great incentive and motivation by rebel factions economically. This concept gains support from the work of Stearns (2011) who states that mining companies and rebel groups have had agreements of taxation of minerals and related payments to ensure the continuity of extraction without rebel interference. Both Lujala and Stearns indicate that rebels require motivation to remain in existence. Lujala links natural resources and their ease of lootability to the prevalence of conflict, due to motivation stemming from the prospective gains envisaged by rebels. She also argues that the link between natural resource abundance and conflict is attributable to weak states and poor governing choices (Lujala, 2010, p. 2). Fearon (2004) argues that these conflicts in areas with lootable resources tend to last substantially longer.

The aspect of state weakness and poor governing choices allow for continuous financing of rebel factions (Collier & Hoeffler, 2005). Rebel groups need to meet their financial requirements in order to survive. Further argument of the aspect of rebel faction survival is advanced by Fearon (2004), whose findings revealed that in the cases where conflicts continued for extended periods of time, rebels had access to easily lootable natural resources. Collier and Hoeffler (1998,

2004) reject the premise that grievance is a primary motivating factor of rebel factions and argue that greed is the ultimate motivational factor prompting rebel groups to form and subsequently participate in violent conflict. To this effect, rebel factions are envisaged as economic entities.

In contrast to Both Lujala's work (2010) and Collier and Hoeffler (2004), Humphreys (2005) argues a focus on the hypothesis based upon greed and economic advantage should not be mainstreamed in literature, he instead advocates for research into the field of weak structural institutions, presence of natural resources and the grievances that emanate from them.

Vast amounts of research conducted and literature generated in the field of conflict, resource and rebel faction nexus has prompted policy makers in the DRC to adopt frameworks of intervention, targeted at disrupting the links between rebel factions and resources through transparent resource governance. Mechanisms of transparency based on the rebel-resource nexus appear to ignore one very important actor, the local communities of the conflict zones and the role they play (Cuvelier, Olin, & Vassenroot, 2013)

Garrett and Mitchell (2009, p. 11) advance evidence that rebel factions are not the only motivated parties seeking to benefit from the abundance of natural resource in DRC. A brigade of the DRC army based in a mineral rich region ensured its own sustenance by implementing taxes on transportation routes from mines. This was an unofficial taxation system disconnected from the mandate of the army and targeted at the local communities.

(c) Illegal Wildlife Trade:

Ross (2006) indicates that rebel factions in the DRC do not sell contraband initially, however, as time progresses, to ensure their continuity and survival during a conflict they diversify in their methods of financing. Ivory poaching is prevalent in regions such as Garamba National Park in the DRC (Agger & Huston, 2013). Information elicited from various businessmen, ivory dealers and journalists reveals that ivory from DRC was shipped to Uganda and the Central African Republic CAR (Beyers, et al., 2011). Hart's research reveals that illegal trafficking in ivory experienced a rapid incline after the DRC war began in 1996; and links SPLA rebels (militias hired by Mobutu) and the Congolese army (FARDC) to poaching activities at various intervals (Hart & Mwinihali, 2001).

According to Titeca (2013) traditional poachers, armed militia of South Sudan, Congolese soldiers and, members of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) are all implicated in ivory trade. The LRA participate in the illegal trade of ivory in exchange for arms and food, however their participation in global illegal wildlife trade is minimal (ibid. p.2). The LRA's poaching endeavors are purely sustenance based. Their participation albeit minimal, exceeds the reproductive replacement rate of elephants thus catalyzing local extinction (ICTSD, 2012). The LRA are known to transports ivory from the DRC to the Central African Republic (CAR) where trading happens between the Arab businessmen Sudanese armed forces officers for cash, food, guns, ammunition and medical supplies (ibid).

(d) Illegal Taxation:

Illegal taxation constitutes a source of funding source for rebel groups in the DRC (Prunier, 2008). According to a report released by the United Nations (Gilpin and Funai, 2009); the Militia groups set up illegal barriers on roads between agricultural areas and markets or on commercial waterways and then force the passersby to pay according to the wishes of the groups that are controlling the territory. Militias often block waterways, with boats taxed at 1000 Congolese francs (roughly one US\$) per person (Collier and Hoeffler, 2000).

These taxation extends to artisanal miners (Bekoe and Swearingen, 2009), and the artisanal miners who try to oppose this system are often subjected to torture, imprisonment or death. The presence of the armed groups around mines is also a cause of daily conflict as each group tries to impose their own taxes and warlords are in constant confrontation with each other (Garrett and Mitchell, 2009).

Malango (2016) gives a statistics of interference to mining activities by rebel armed group who impose illegal taxation on artisanal mines in the Eastern and Southern DRC. In two hundred and thirty-six gold mines that were visited, rebel armed groups were present in forty-four mines; and out of the sixty-six tin, tungsten, and tantalum mines visited, rebel armed groups were present in six mines.

Garrett et al. (2009) describe how one rebel armed group (Raia Mutomboki) based in a mineral-rich district of Walikale in North Province sustains itself by relying on a complex mix of mining and the taxation of mineral transport routes. The rebel group sets up illegal checkpoints along movement corridors (roads and footpaths) and sets on extorting civilians by imposing an illegal tax on them in what can only be described as "coercive security governance," that is, "an

institutionalized political and economic system of rules that allows reliability of agreements between the armed group leadership and the civilian population” (Garrett et al. 2009: 11).

Illegal control over, and taxation of, mining, both by the Congolese army and by armed groups presents lawmakers with a most immediate challenge, that would require bringing areas currently under the control of armed groups under state control through military action or negotiation (Burnley, 2011).

(e) Foreign Commercial Interests:

The extensive mineral deposits situated in the DRC has elicited a lot of interest from foreign commercial companies. Minerals found in the DRC are used as raw materials to various components in the cellphone industry, jet engines, cutting tools and jewelry. The raw materials are sold to foreign actors and the partnership is based on commercial interests, profiteering and political aims. The foreign companies that purchase these minerals therefore act as a source of financing to the rebel groups (Fairhead, 2000). Greed as an explanatory factor of armed struggle a considerable number of studies assess armed actors' rapacity or greed for natural resource revenues as a key factor in explaining the onset and persistence of armed conflict (Berdal & Malone 2000; Collier and Hoeffler 2005). Collier, who is generally considered the founding father of this line of research, states that “conflicts are far more likely to be caused by economic opportunities than by grievance” (Collier 2000: 91). His early work, mostly co-authored with Hoeffler, develops the so-called ‘opportunity hypothesis’: violent insurgency occurs when there is an opportunity to loot.

In his later work, Collier reformulated his model and proposed a ‘feasibility hypothesis’ in which rebellion occurs where it is materially feasible both from a financial and military point of view (Collier, Hoeffler and Rohner 2009, as discussed in Mildner et al. 2011: 162–163). While highly influential and being a powerful source of inspiration to policymaking, both the opportunity hypothesis and the feasibility hypothesis have received considerable criticism. Several critics have argued that the evidence in support of a causal relationship between civil war onset and natural resource abundance is rather meagre. In her examination of existing quantitative research on the aforementioned relationship, Rigterink (2010) observes that there is scholarly disagreement over various basic technical issues such as the choice of war database, the choice and source of control variables, the way in which natural resource abundance should be quantified, and the interpretation of observed correlations. As a result, authors using similar theoretical models and testing the same hypotheses have reached radically different conclusions. Ross (2006) argues that much of the literature on the relationship between natural resources and violent conflict has suffered from problems of measurement error, endogeneity, lack of robustness, and uncertainty about causal mechanisms.

Le Billon (2004: 572; 581) criticizes the same literature for failing to explain why an abundance of valuable resources is not a necessary or sufficient factor of conflict. He emphasizes the need to consider the geography and political economy of different types of resources, as these characteristics have an important impact on the vulnerability of societies to armed conflict.

Nathan (2005: 13) warns that that arguments presented in studies of African civil wars relying on Collier and Hoeffler's model (e.g. Anyanwu 2002), should be taken with a grain of salt, since quantitative data on African states are often incomplete and of low quality. As is the case for the literature on the resource curse, a considerable number of papers reviewed in the systematic mapping process analyze macro-level processes rather than micro level dynamics. This macro-oriented approach tends to result in rather unsophisticated analyses, which downplay the importance of various complex political and social processes at the grassroots level. Winslow and Woost (2004) for instance suggest that Collier's feasibility hypothesis is highly reductionist because it only concentrates on the economic considerations of belligerents: Culture, ideology and power struggles disappear to be replaced by simple financial feasibility. Rebel leaders are reduced to a perverse form of that old staple of neoclassical economics, the rationally calculating generic man who, given enough funding and the right advertising, can manipulate almost anyone to follow any cause (Winslow and Woost 2004: 16). Similarly, Cramer (2002) criticizes rational choice theories of conflict such as Collier's for violating “the complexity of individual motivation” and for “razing the individual (and key groups) down to monolithic maximizing agents” (Cramer 2002: 1846).

The ‘greed’ literature relies on the assumption that all rebels share the same two characteristics: they are profit maximizing individuals, and they search for power. According to the same literature, the series of grievances they cite as the official reason for their insurgency is merely to justify their actions vis-à-vis the international community. The validity of these assumptions is hardly demonstrated by any of the authors; it is simply taken for granted that, regardless of the societies in which they occur, civil wars are caused by the feasibility of predation (Nathan 2005: 19–21).

3. CONCLUSION

The availability of sources of finance to rebel armed groups in the DRC see their continued existence that is characterized by instability, statelessness, violence and perpetuation gross human rights violations.

There are the various researched sources from which the rebel armed groups get financing for their activities and survival as discussed herein above, however, there still remains undocumented sources.

Foreign western countries (together with India and China) continue to register their presence in the DRC by opening diplomatic missions, sending “humanitarian aid” to the DRC troubled east and continue to lobby for an increment of their country troops contribution in the DRC under the UN peace Keeping Mission; a mission which has been present in the DRC since 1960 (UNSC resolution 143 of July 1960).

Suffice to say, these troops are situated in the rebel dominated mineral rich albeit troubled mineral rich east and southern regions of the DRC; and are equipped with excavation combat engineering resources to offer “engineering support to roads construction” and sufficient air assets to transport “their troops and combat supplies to and from their country to the DRC”

It is therefore recommended that more research be conducted in the area of rebel groups financing in the DRC, with a view of examining the UN role and western countries (together with China and India) role in the financing of rebels in the DRC.

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