

The proposed title is “International Donors and Local Armed Groups: Understanding the Subnational Effect of Aid on Conflict”. The main idea of the project is to research the relationship between international development and humanitarian aid and violent conflict on subnational level (on the level of ADM1 administrative units - 1st-order administrative units). Most of the existing studies of relationship between conflicts and international aid rely on data that has a national level and yearly of granularity (that is, work with data that is updated on a per year basis and for the whole country).

Our approach is quite different, since, first of all, international aid is distributed on a per project basis, and thus the outcomes are quite specific to a certain location or region of a country. Moreover, patterns of violent conflict exhibit a great degree of geographical variation and thus analyzing it on a subnational level provides an opportunity to obtain results that are much more precise and in-depth as compared to an analysis on a national level.

The project will examine the behavior of donors and conflict actors at the ADM1 level in three different countries—the DRC, Mali, and Nepal—using geocoded data on aid and conflict from 1990 to 2016. These are the databases that we will rely on in order to measure the outcome of interest (level of local violent conflict):

The Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), the Armed Conflict Location and Events Data (ACLED) Program, the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), the Integrated Conflict Early Warning System (ICEWS), and the Social Conflict Analysis Database (SCAD).

The main hypothesis is that observed variation in aid-conflict dynamics within countries hinges jointly on the adaptability of donors and the receptivity of conflict actors at a subnational level.

The importance of the degree of local adaptability of donors is based on the idea donors that have more decentralized decision making are better able to adapt to the specific local conflict circumstances that may affect or be affected by their aid projects. Operationalization and measurement of this dimension is to be done with help of AidData Database, which has compiled extensive project-level information on subnational allocations of aid in dozens of countries around the world. The average degree of adaptability across all donors active in a given spatial unit for a given time period will be calculated, yielding localized measures that can exhibit spatiotemporal variability both within and across countries.

The rationale of the degree of receptivity of local conflict actors to international donors is that conflict actors do not perceive and respond to all donors in the same way. Thus, in order to successfully measure the impact of international aid on the level of local conflict, it is important to distinguish between the different patterns of behavior of the aid recipients. To measure local actor receptivity, the project will rely on several types of data. One type is public statements made by conflict actors. Available sources for these statements include traditional and social media. Another type of information is data on attacks on aid workers. Multiple sources of data on such attacks are available. The most extensive is the Security in Numbers (SiND) Database. This data will be used to classify all actors active in each conflict in each study country according to broad categories of receptivity.

Our initial expectation is that depending on the extent of donors’ adaptability and conflict actors’ receptivity, the results of distributed aid will differ between a strong increase in conflict and a strong decrease in conflict.

The quantitative analysis of the relationship of aid, donor and conflict actor behavior, and conflict will rely on a quasi-experimental matching design to control for prior violent conflict, as well as

subnational (e.g., ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic conditions, infrastructure, terrain) and national contextual covariates. Between the matched pairs, a difference-in-difference statistical test will be used to estimate the average subnational association between levels of aid and violent conflict, expected to be conditioned by local variation in donor adaptability and armed group receptivity.