

## Preventing Violent Conflict in Africa

JICA Research Institute\*

### Policy Recommendations

1. Horizontal inequalities (HIs) can be a major root cause of violent conflict, especially when they encompass economic, political, social, and cultural spheres. HIs, therefore, should be fully investigated in any development assistance for Africa.
2. HIs when subjectively perceived do not necessarily coincide with objectively observable HIs, and people's behavior is often shaped by their subjective perceptions of the self and others. In this light, development practitioners need to avoid actions that could worsen the perceptions of HIs among local groups.
3. Inclusive political institutions, both formal and informal, can contribute to alleviating the sense of alienation and fostering conciliation among groups. Outside actors should respect local initiatives for building effective and long-lasting institutions for power-sharing and decentralization.

Getting through a destabilizing period of deadly conflicts after the end of the Cold War, many African countries have introduced multiparty elections and advanced democratization. This process is truly encouraging, but it must also be noted that structural risks of violent conflict still persist. We should deal head-on with these risks to realize Africa's peace potential.

The concept of Horizontal inequalities (HIs) has been developed and advocated by the Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity, Oxford University (CRISE). While the conventional measurement of inequality is concerned only with inequality between individuals ("vertical inequality"), the horizontal approach looks at multidimensional inequalities between culturally defined groups. As violent conflict in Africa tends to take place between identity groups defined in ethnic or religious terms, it is meaningful to focus on inequalities between groups rather than individuals. When HIs are consistent across different dimensions, i.e., when the same identity group is simultaneously disadvantaged in economic, social, political and cultural dimensions, violent conflict is most likely to erupt.

The JICA Research Institute has conducted a research project on conflict prevention in Africa focusing on the concept of HIs. The research consists of case studies of ten countries in sub-Saharan Africa (Rwanda, Burundi, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya and Nigeria) and quantitative analysis of people's perceptions of HIs. On the basis of the findings of the project, this policy brief presents a set of recommendations for development practitioners and researchers.

**Recommendation 1:**

HIs can be a major root cause of violent conflict, especially when they encompass economic, political, social, and cultural spheres. HIs, therefore, should be fully investigated in any development assistance for Africa.

The formation of salient identity groups and the emergence of socioeconomic HIs generally have a long historical origin. The racism in South Africa, for instance, is a debt of its colonial history. Historical legacies are also observed in the special position of the Buganda Kingdom in Uganda, which predates colonialism, and in the skewed land settlement in Kenya immediately after its independence. In Nigeria and other West African countries, colonialism left divisions between north and south and between settlers and indigenes, which continue to be a cause of violent disputes. Over time, historically shaped HIs tend to strengthen grievances and dissatisfaction beneath the surface as we have observed among the Northerners in Côte d’Ivoire, the Acholi in Uganda, the Hutus in Rwanda, and the Ndebele in Zimbabwe. For the purpose of conflict prevention, the configurations of HIs in each country need to be studied carefully in historical perspectives.

Once HIs are identified, African governments are required to take positive actions to alleviate economic, political, social and cultural HIs in all dimensions, by means of implementing appropriate policies and institutional reforms. On the part of aid agencies, they should avoid giving assistance which could aggravate HIs, and make sure that their aid, whether project aid or budget support, should contribute to the amelioration of severe HIs. In the case that the government itself accentuates HIs by favoring particular identity groups in politically provocative and morally unjustifiable ways, grievances of disadvantaged groups, including “socially excluded” people, may be addressed directly and/or through civil society organizations.

In order to mainstream the HI perspective in the making of development policy, the following actions are required:

1. African governments and development agencies should systematically collect data on HIs and

promote the study of their size and origin.

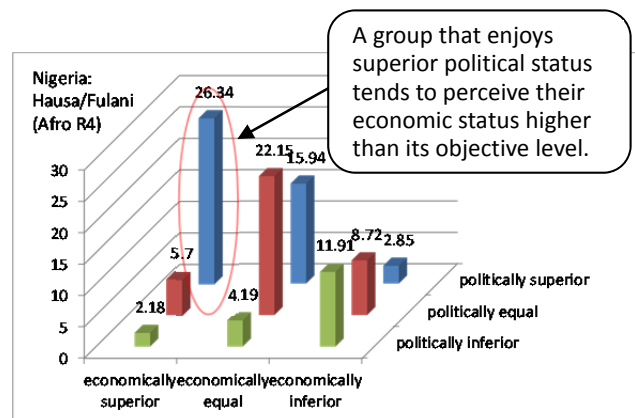
2. Development projects and government budgets should be thoroughly reviewed to ensure that they contribute to alleviate existing HIs.
3. Major development agencies should monitor the state of all inequalities (including vertical as well as horizontal inequalities) and their causes, and strengthen their capacity to evaluate projects and policies in the light of conflict prevention.

**Recommendation 2:**

HIs as subjectively perceived do not necessarily coincide with objectively observable HIs, and people’s behavior is often shaped by their subjective perceptions of the self and others. In this light, development practitioners need to avoid actions that could worsen the perception of HIs among local groups.

The perceptions survey by JICA-RI as well as other surveys indicate that there can be considerable differences between people’s perceptions of socioeconomic HIs and actual HIs. Based on Afrobarometer data, for instance, Figures 1 and 2 present how Hausa/Fulani and Igbo, ethnic groups in Nigeria, perceive their respective economic and political status. Objectively, the economic status of Hausa/Fulani is inferior to that of Igbo, although they are politically more influential. However, Hausa/Fulani feel superior not only in politics but also in the economic sphere. The general perception of Igbo is the mirror opposite.

**Figure 1.** Correlations between perceived political HI and perceived economic HI (Hausa/Fulani)



This result indicates that a group that has better access to political power tends to perceive its socioeconomic status higher than it really is, while a politically excluded group is likely to perceive its socioeconomic status lower than it is objectively. Apparently, the perceptions of political HI affect the perceptions of the other dimensions of HIs. It is therefore important to investigate political HI. Caution, however, is necessary to avoid a radical shift in political power relations because such change could antagonize previously powerful groups.

Drawing on the findings of our case studies as well as the survey analyses, Table 1 illustrates that high political HI is generally incongruent with sociopolitical stability. It may be associated with political stability only when politically powerful groups do not coincide with socioeconomic elites. In contrast, low political HI is usually amicable for political stability but such stability will be fragile if socioeconomic HI continues to be high.

Given the complex relationship between objective and subjective HIs, the following actions are required to foster conflict prevention:

1. Development agencies and their counterparts should guarantee fair ethnic and/or regional representation to development planning to avoid the perception that certain groups or regions are excluded.
2. They should give support to disadvantaged groups without alienating other groups so that no group perceives itself as worse off than it really is.

3. Transformation of political HI should be carefully observed by all stakeholders to monitor its effect on people's HI perceptions.

**Table 1.** Horizontal inequalities and stability

Socio-Economic HI	Political HI	Combination of HIs	Likely socio-political situation
High	High	Consistently high <sup>a</sup>	Prone to instability
High	High	Balanced <sup>b</sup>	Can be stable
High	Low, through power-sharing and decentralization	Uneven	Stable, but fragile because of underlying grievances
Low	High	Uneven	Prone to instability
Low	Low	Even and low	Most stable

<sup>a</sup>. Consistent if same group is in higher (or lower) position in both socioeconomic and political HIs.

<sup>b</sup>. Balanced if one group is dominant in politics, another in socioeconomics, or conversely.

**Recommendation 3:**  
 Inclusive political institutions, both formal and informal, can contribute to alleviating the sense of alienation and fostering conciliation among groups. Outside actors should respect local initiatives for building effective and long-lasting institutions for power-sharing and decentralization.

**Figure 2.** Correlations between perceived political HI and perceived economic HI (Igbo)

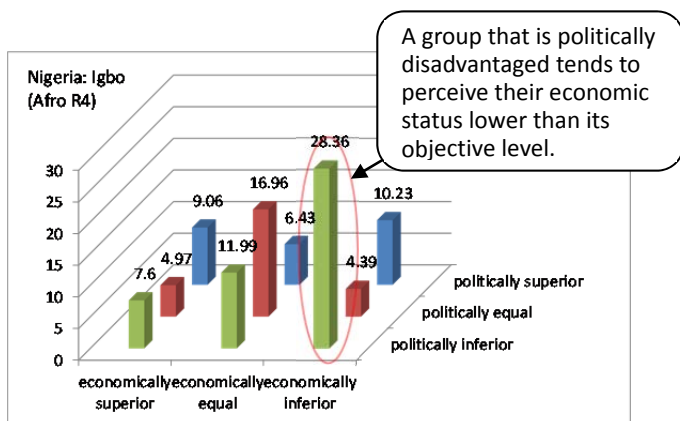
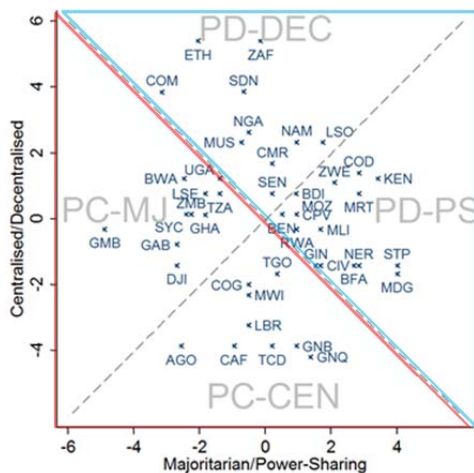


Figure 3 locates sub-Saharan African countries, for which relevant data are available, according to the majoritarian/power-sharing dimension along the horizontal axis and the centralization/decentralization dimension along the vertical axis. According to our quantitative analysis, governance performance is relatively low in PC-CEN countries, which are characterized by the outright concentration of power at the center to the detriment of group autonomy and cultural diversity.

Based on the findings of our case studies, Table 2 shows that formal PS institutions supported by informal, social value of power sharing provide favorable conditions for political stability. The centralized system with the majoritarian representation or a temporary PS arrangement is the most unstable

**Figure 3.** Distribution of PD/PC institutions



**Note:** Power-Dispersing (PD) countries are those whose total degree of power dispersion is more than zero, while Power-Concentrating (PC) countries score less than zero. We subdivide PD and PC countries, depending on the relative contribution of the two dimensions.

**Table 2.** Categories of institutions and stability

	Centralization	Decentralization
Majoritarian	Unstable	Mixed
Ad hoc PS <sup>i</sup>	Unstable	Mixed
Sustainable PS <sup>ii</sup>	Stable	Stable

<sup>i</sup> Typically a post-conflict coalition government of all major political parties.

<sup>ii</sup> A combination of elements of formal PS and a culture of

informal PS.

Although external actors should refrain from imposing political institutions from outside, they can provide information about previous experiences of alternative institutions and help regional organizations serve as mediators or facilitators for conflict resolution or conflict prevention.

1. In the face of escalation of violence, warring parties are encouraged to arrange a power-sharing scheme to alleviate inter-group animosities.
2. Development agencies should assist efforts towards decentralization so as to enhance power-sharing at the local level, while ensuring the reduction of inequalities across regions and localities.
3. In order to nurture a culture of inclusive nation-building and conflict prevention, opportunities for mutual learning should be provided to younger generation leaders in Africa.

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