



Cross-border Conflicts and their Connections: The Case of the African Great Lakes and South Sudan

Roundtable report by Dr Chloé Lewis

What are the cross-border connections between contemporary conflicts in the African Great Lakes and South Sudan? Bringing together perspectives from scholarship, policy and practice, the Conflict Platform Project convened a roundtable on 4th July 2019 to discuss this question from myriad interdisciplinary vantage points. The Great Lakes Region has known some of the most brutal and protracted conflicts of the last half-century, with an immensely heavily toll on civilian populations, including women, men, boys, and girls. Dynamics in the region are underpinned by complex webs of interlocking histories, competing interests, and shifting alliances within and across colonially

demarcated state boundaries. Contemporary conflicts in the region are, therefore, aptly characterised as “internationalised internal wars” (De Waal, et al. 2019). These are directly and indirectly tied through a series of, *inter alia*, political, economic, and humanitarian connectors, each of which has cross-border manifestations with important regional repercussions. As demonstrated throughout this roundtable discussion, foregrounding the cross-border dimensions of conflicts has significant implications for the way we analyse, understand and, ultimately, respond to conflicts in this region.

Against this backdrop and through the case of the African Great Lakes and South Sudan, the roundtable introduced a novel approach to analysing complex conflicts together with visualisations of spatiotemporal conflict dynamics in the region. Highlighting the cross-border dimensions of three conflict connectors – actors, resources, and impacts – expert participants reflected on the current and potential future connections between the conflicts in the Great Lakes Region. Doing so, the roundtable brought to bear the challenges and possible solutions to addressing these complex, shifting, protracted and seemingly intractable conflicts. As such and based on the methodology developed by CCW's Changing Character of Conflict Platform project, the addressed the following three considerations:

- 1) The applicability of CCW's novel methodology to understanding connections between conflicts in the Great Lakes Region and South Sudan;

- 2) The current and potential future connections between the conflicts;

- 3) The main challenges to addressing cross-border conflicts and the flows that connect them, as well as possible solutions.

This report begins with an overview of the Changing Character of Conflict Platform project, including the core components of its methodology, and summarises the discussion, emphasising the cross-border connections between conflicts in “settings of organised violence” (Idler 2018; Idler & Tkacova 2019). It concludes by considering implications for policy and practice and offers questions for further exploration looking forward.

Introducing the Conflict Platform Framework

The Changing Character of Conflict Platform is a knowledge-based platform for academics, practitioners and policymakers. The Conflict Platform analyses and visualises changes in conflict across time, space, and perspectives. The underlying premise being that if we identify patterns of change, we may be able to anticipate and respond, rather than react, to those changes and, ultimately, help reduce suffering of civilian populations trapped in conflict. To do so, the

Conflict Platform offers a new interdisciplinary approach to conflict analysis in ten focal cases, focusing on changes in conflict along five dimensions, including the actor involved, methods employed, resources used, environments affected, and the impact conflict has on individuals, communities and societies (see Table 1). Each of these dimensions can spill over across boundaries, thereby producing cross-border conflict connectors.

Table 1: Five Dimensions of Cross-Border Conflict and Potential Connectors:

Dimensions	Actors (agency)	Methods (form)	Resources (means)	Environments (structure)	Impact (consequences)
Types	Formal authority	Direct coercion	Human extraction	Densely populated spaces	Physical harm
	Informal authority	Indirect coercion	Non-human extraction	Sparsely populated spaces	Non-physical harm
	External authorities	Mobilisation	External sponsorship	Non-physical spaces	Long-term harm

Why is this framework useful?

The increasing complexity of contemporary armed conflicts calls for a new approach to the analysis of conflict-related violence that is able to capture the multi-dimensional, protracted, yet often rapidly changing nature of security landscapes. The majority of today's conflicts are characterised by their longevity and seeming intractability, usually involving several entangled and spin off conflicts that mutate over time and spill over borders (Idler & Tkacova 2020: 1). Existing approaches to the study of conflict – quantitative (macro) and qualitative (micro) – are limited in their ability to capture the dynamic complexities of contemporary conflicts for a number of reasons. Indeed, units of analysis are typically state-centric or dyadic, and are therefore limited by state boundaries or government-rebel paradigm; this overlooks the fact that conflicts tend to be confined to particular regions within states, have cross-border dimensions and consists of multiple actors. Moreover, dominant macro-level paradigms are generally unable to capture micro-level changes in conflicts, including their mutation and diffusion over time; while micro-level analyses, in turn, may not recognise such changes as forming possible patterns (ibid: 3).

The Conflict Platform project addresses these shortcomings by tracing changes in and accounting for the complexities of contemporary, multi-party cross-border conflicts. Bridging macro and micro approaches, the project introduces a new conceptual unit, referred to as *settings of organised violence (SORVI)* that can be translated into geographically visualised *conflict shapes* (Idler & Tkacova 2020: 2). As such, by systematically grouping of closely related smaller conflicts into a larger *setting of organised violence* – the new unit – allows us to observe changes over longer periods of time as well as across larger territories. Those changes are easily overlooked when relying on macro-level analyses

or not recognised as possible patterns in the case of the micro-level analyses. This novel approach, therefore, captures the complexity and dynamic nature of protracted conflict, is not limited by state borders and is able to track spin-off conflicts and changes in contested issues. This way, we are able to produce a more nuanced and grounded understanding of conflict dynamics, their underlying conditions and possible future developments. A failure to do so will mean that our understanding of these phenomena will remain partial and our responses ineffective (Idler & Tkacova 2020: 29).

The Conflict Platform draws on empirical evidence from ten cases of contemporary complex armed conflicts, comprising a variety of contested issues, including around ideology, ethnicity, religion, and competing interests. Each case fits the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) definition of protracted conflicts or have the potential to become one. In effect, these “typically involve a tangled history of several different and sometimes simultaneous conflicts,” which can multiply, mutate, and fragment over time and space, giving rise to new actors and new grievances (ICRC 2016: 9). With this definition in mind, the ten cases included in the Conflict Platform Project are: the wider Afghanistan-Pakistan border area, the African Great Lakes Region, Colombia and Venezuela, Myanmar, the Mindanao region of the Philippines, and the Horn of Africa. The project also includes Mexico's “cartel war,” the Islamist insurgency in Nigeria, conflicts across the Syrian-Iraqi border, and in Eastern Ukraine. As highlighted by the inclusion of Mexico demonstrates, a broad definition of “armed conflict” (conflict) is used.

Why Settings of Organised Violence?

As mentioned above, contemporary conflicts – and the violent events they engender – tend to be spatially clustered around particular regions within states and tend to spread across borders, creating hubs of instability. These are aptly conceptualised as “settings of organised violence.” Conflict research increasingly emphasises the importance of the “borderland effect” (Idler 2019), with borderlands defined as the “space along both sides of the border” (Baud & Schendel 1997). A borderland lens brings into sharp relief the limits of state-bounded approaches to analysing conflict. Indeed, the everyday lives of communities living in borderland regions are typically transnational, with strong ethnic ties existing across the state

boundary. Moreover, the limited governance systems in borderland areas at the peripheries of the state create opportunities for illicit markets to thrive and offer sanctuary for individuals – civilians and combatants alike – on both sides of the border. This facilitates the circulation of arms, combatants and conflict permissive ideologies and means that conflicts and their consequences can spread into neighbouring states. As demonstrated through the Conflict Platform project’s ten focal cases and the roundtable discussion, the novel concept of “*settings of organised violence*” and their visualised geographical *conflict shapes* aptly capture the cross-border and changing character of contemporary conflicts.

Conflict Connectors in the African Great Lakes and South Sudan

Through the interdisciplinary lenses of the Conflict Platform project, the roundtable participants discussed cross-border conflicts and their connections in the African Great Lakes region, which is one the Conflict Platform’s focal cases. The discussion highlighted transnational conflict actors, resources, as well as the humanitarian impacts on populations living their consequences. Given the vastness of the region

and its complexity, it would have been impossible to do justice to the all the conflicts in the region and their cross-border connections during the roundtable and here in this report. Reflecting the experience and expertise of the roundtable participants, focused on the cross-border connections between DRC, South Sudan, and Uganda.

Conflicts in the African Great Lakes & South Sudan

The conflicts in the Great Lakes region are known for their longevity, complexity, and seeming intractability – as well as their vast toll on civilian lives, including on women and girls. The Great Lakes Region is characterised by long interlocking histories, competing interests, and shifting alliances within and across states. As a result, dynamics of the region epitomise many, if not all, of the characteristics of contemporary conflicts encapsulated in the concept of settings of organised violence described above. As long ago as 2004, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), wrote that the region is an “illustrative example of the need to abandon the artificial dichotomy between inter- and intra-state conflicts” (2004: 23). As highlighted throughout the roundtable, there remains a strong need to understand conflict systems beyond state borders, including the prevailing interests for violence at from the international, to the regional, national, and personal levels. These overlapping and competing interests rarely align towards peace.

In the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide in 1994, over a million refugees fled across the border into the DRC. This was a catalytic event in the contemporary conflict dynamics in the region, triggering ongoing conflicts in the eastern provinces of DRC, where security remains elusive. Conflicts in the region have ranged from inter- and intra-state war – as seen in the First and Second Congo Wars (1997-1997 – 1998-2003) – to more localised conflicts, many of which have regional and cross-borders ties, interests, and implications. As such, conflicts in the region are aptly depicted as “internationalised internal wars” (De Waal, *et al.* 2019) Indeed, the security landscape in eastern DRC – bordering on Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, and South Sudan – continues to be defined by protracted persistent, yet shifting, cycles of violence and instability at the hands of myriad armed actors, including armed groups and

government forces. The eastern provinces are also characterised by the sheer number of armed groups, Congolese and foreign, residing within these borderland areas. According to the Congo Research Group, in 2017, there were over 120 armed groups in this region, almost double the number two years prior (Stearns & Vogel 2017). These are, in turn, highly fragmented but increasingly networked, creating “broad, unstable coalitions,” including across state boundaries and/or involving groups from different national origins (Stearns & Vogel 2017: 5). The sources and drivers of conflict are as complex as they are varied and include competition over land and resources, inter-communal strife, and entrenched socio-political mistrust – of which civilian populations suffer the consequences.

Beginning in 2013, the civil war in South Sudan is more recent, but follows a longer history of conflict in Sudan. South Sudan was granted independence from Sudan in July 2011, resulting from a referendum earlier that year. This followed decades of near constant warfare in Sudan, following the First Sudanese Civil War in 1955-1972 and the Second Sudanese Civil War in 1983-2005. In 2005, a peace agreement, mediated by regional and international actors, laid out a timetable and roadmap for a referendum on Sudan’s split, creating South Sudan as a separate country. By December 2013, the country descended into a rapidly escalating civil war, the consequences of which remain very present today. As aptly captured by Peter Martell, through its creation and its ensuing civil war, South Sudan had “won the longest war but lost the peace” (2018).

While the drivers of conflict are more complex, the conflict is widely depicted and conducted through the lens of ethnically based loyalties, grievances, and narratives of fear. As independence, a unity government was

established at independence formed by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) with the two most prominent ethnic groups – the Dinka and the Nuer – sharing the positions of President and Vice President respectively. Friction within the new government came to the fore in 2013 when the ethnically Nuer Vice President, Reik Machar, began vocally criticising the Dinka President, Salva Kiir, who accused the former of planning a coup. Clashes broke out across ethnically based lines – with longstanding tensions and histories of violence – in December 2013 between the SPLM and newly formed SPLM/A-IO, Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army-In Opposition. It is estimated that over 1000 people were killed and 100 000

displaced in the first week alone. Following a series of failed peace agreements and cease-fires, more recent estimates now indicate that close to 400 000 people have been killed and 4.5 million displaced, internally and in neighbouring states (Checchi, *et al.* 2018; SIDA 2019). Their regionally destabilising effects notwithstanding, a huge part of the challenge to bringing conflicts in the Great Lakes to an end, paradoxically, centre on other regional dynamics and vested interests. As SIDA noted fifteen years ago, conflicts in the Great Lakes region have a dual character: while these have a “distinct local and national anchorage, they are at the same time fuelled by or fuelling regional conflicts” (2004: 23).

Conflict Connectors in the Great Lakes: DRC, South Sudan, and Uganda

Following the focus of the discussion during the roundtable, this section highlights the humanitarian, actor, and resource cross-border

conflict connections between DRC, South Sudan, and Uganda.

Cross-Border Humanitarian Impacts

The cross-border humanitarian consequences of conflict are perhaps the most visible connector. The humanitarian impacts of the conflicts in eastern DRC are vast. By 2008, over 5 million people had lost their lives, making this the deadliest since the World War II. As highlighted by Chloé Lewis, these deaths are not only directly caused by conflict-related violence, but are also indirectly linked to the conflict, for example due to food insecurity, epidemics, poor water infrastructure and health services. Earlier this year, UNICEF powerfully stated that more children are killed by lack of access to clean water than by bullets in conflicts, including in DRC (UN News 2019). Today, it is estimated 12.8 million people are in need of assistance in the country. 4.5 million people are internally displaced, with

an additional 735, 000 seeking shelter in neighbouring countries, making the displacement crisis in the country the most severe on the continent (Lamarche 2018: 4). It is estimated that half of Congolese refugees and IDPs are women (UNHCR 2019) The conflicts in DRC, as in South Sudan, have also become somewhat defined by the high rates of sexual violence perpetrated against civilians, including women, men, boys and girls. Recent reports continue to document incidents of conflict-related sexual violence across the conflict-affected regions of the country, with a reported 34 percent increase in the number of cases perpetrated by State actors in 2018 compared with 2017 (UNSC 2019a: 9).

North Kivu province has the highest rates of internal and cross-border displacement in the eastern provinces of eastern DRC due to persistent insecurity in the region. Massive displacement not only comes at vast humanitarian and environmental costs, but are also linked to the spread of conflicts across borders. Indeed, it can be difficult to distinguish civilians from combatants in large refugee populations, which also serve as fertile recruitment ground for armed groups and facilitate the circulation of arms. While these have posed prominent challenges across eastern DRC's border regions, the focus of the roundtable centred on Beni territory, bordering on Uganda. Beni has received particular attention in recent years due to its ongoing Ebola epidemic, its particular conflict dynamics, and the high levels of conflict-related violence targeting civilian populations (Kwirasuva 2019). Indeed, it is the deadliest territory in North Kivu province, accounting for a third of killings committed in the province since the beginning of 2018 (Kivu Security Tracker 2018). Relatedly, the ongoing violence is significantly hampering Ebola response efforts (Bedford & Akello 2018), while high levels of cross-border displacement and mobility more generally into Uganda raise alarming concerns around the potential regional spread of the virus through Uganda (Bedford & Akello 2018). Congolese refugees represent over a third of the overall refugee population in Uganda, equating to an estimated 568, 530 refugees and asylum seekers in October 2018 (Bedford & Akello 2018). Similar concerns exist relative to areas bordering on South Sudan (SIDA 2019) and Rwanda (BBC News 2019). The current Ebola outbreak in North Kivu highlights the additional challenges and regional risks surrounding responding to epidemics in densely populated conflict-affected borderlands, especially when these feature high levels of displacement and mobility.

The conflict in South Sudan has had a similarly immense humanitarian toll on civilian populations within its borders and in neighbouring countries.

Estimates indicate that since the onset of the war in December 2013, 50 000 civilians have been killed, while 7.1 million remain in critical need of assistance and protection. Of these, it is believed that 5.3 million people face the prospect of acute or severe food insecurity, as well as diseases and epidemics, as a result of recurring natural disasters, significantly reducing food production (SIDA 2019: 4). 4 million people have been displaced, both internally and across the country's borders. By 2018, 2 million South Sudanese had sought refuge in neighbouring countries, namely in Uganda, Sudan, Ethiopia, DRC, and the Central African Republic. Those displaced include high numbers of widows and unaccompanied children; in effect, 65% of refugees are believed to be below the age of 18. As highlighted by OPM during the roundtable, such characteristics and vulnerabilities of displaced populations require particular consideration as part of humanitarian responses, within country and across borders. Refugee and IDP camps and settlements are mostly located in marginalised and impoverished borderland areas, exacerbating humanitarian needs, challenges surrounding humanitarian access, and hostilities from host communities due to competition over scarce resources, access to land, and livelihoods (SIDA 2019: 2).

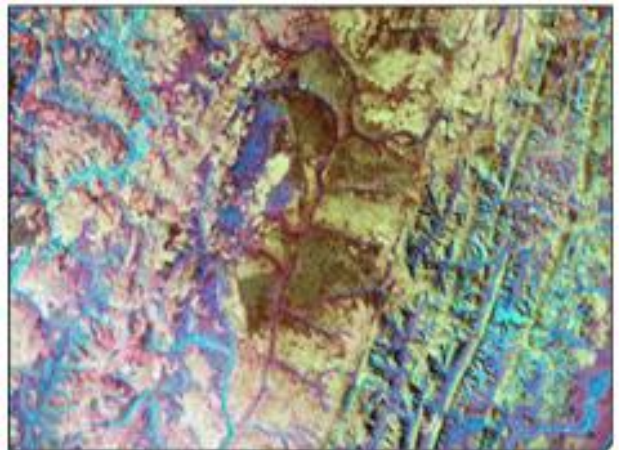
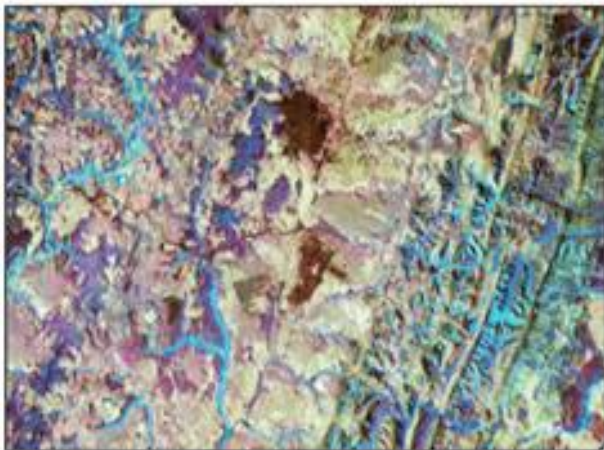
Indeed, research presented by Carlos Vargas-Silva brought to bear the tangible long-term impacts of displacement on the environment and the depletion of natural resources. Through the case study of Rwandan displacement to Tanzania in 1994-1994 – the largest displacement in the shortest time frame – the research adopts a three-pronged methodology, drawing on satellite imaging (see Images 1 and 2), as well as quantitative and qualitative methods. In particular, the study measured deforestation before the arrival of refugees and after their return in Benaco and Mushuhura camps and surrounding areas. Focusing on access to firewood and water specifically, the research findings evidenced that the presence of refugees

increased the distances that populations had to travel to find firewood and water. Given traditional divisions of gendered labour in the region, this had particular consequences for women and girls who are largely responsible for collecting water and firewood for their households. These effects are felt by host communities for up to at least fourteen years after refugees leave. Overall, the results indicated major negative effects on access to natural resources, notably wood and water, with major consequences for conflict and long-term stability

in the region.

Refugees have long been a dominant feature of the life and landscape of the Great Lakes Region and continue to have significant consequences internally within conflict-affected states, as well as across their borders in neighbouring countries. For the reasons highlighted above, the humanitarian consequences of conflict represent an important cross-border conflict connector across the Great Lakes.

Images 1 and 2: Benaco & Mushuhura 1994 vs. 1996



Cross-Border Conflict Actors

Alongside these humanitarian dimensions, the particular characteristics of borderlands can also produce significant opportunities for actors in conflict complexes. Across time and space, armed groups use terrains at state peripheries as safe havens and theatres of operation (Idler and Tkacova 2019: 7). This has long been a feature of life across the Great Lakes' borderlands, including in eastern DRC and in South Sudan, which have a long history of armed resistance. A number of armed actors have become particularly notorious in the Great Lakes in recent decades, notably due to the deadly threats they pose to civilian populations and their destabilising presence

across the region. Notable examples included the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), originating in Uganda and spreading across a number of Central African states. Shining a light on the regional dynamics surrounding the group, Michael Comerford noted that the group had been instrumentalised by South Sudan in response to Uganda's support for the SPLA. Moving from Uganda, through DRC, South Sudan and the Central African Republic, the LRA has left a dark shadow across the region, committing abuses and atrocities, including abduction, rape, maiming, child recruitment, and the killing of civilians.

Other well-known groups include the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and the Sudan People's Liberation Army-In Opposition (SPLA-IO), in South Sudan, which have fled across the Congolese border following recent fighting, the Rwandan Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Rwanda, better known by their acronym FDLR, who have led a reign of terror in eastern DRC since the early 1990s. As highlighted by Adrian Garside relative to South Sudan, however, it is important to account for the multitude of actors located in, linked to, and, often, benefiting from conflicts in border areas. In addition to rebel groups, these include national security forces; government actors and elites; wildlife conservationists and fire services, as well as poaching gangs, and extractive mining and logging companies. A similar array of actors operates in the cross-border regions of DRC, relying on often rapidly shifting alliances and collaborations for survival to adapt to often rapidly changing security landscapes.

Maintaining a focus on Beni and its cross-border connections with Uganda, Chloé Lewis highlighted the transnational character of armed groups in DRC, drawing on the case the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF). The ADF remains one of the least well understood groups in the region, but in recent years has become known as one of the deadliest. The group has also received wider attention due to its role in constraining responses to the ongoing Ebola outbreak in the area (Bedford & Akello 2018). Since its inception in the 1990s, the group has shaped and is shaped by transborder dynamics of Rwenzori borderlands, originally the group's principal theatre of operation. The ADF was initially formed in western Uganda in the 1990s out of the Ugandan Islamic community, specifically the Tabliq sect, to resist the government. In the late 1990's and with support from the Sudanese and Congolese governments, the group launched a very violent military campaign on the Ugandan side of the Rwenzori mountains, destabilising several districts and displacing large parts of the

population (Titeca & Vlassenroot 2012: 154).

Following a military defeat against the Ugandan army in 2000 and having lost most of its operational capacity, the group retreat into DRC to reorganise. Over time, the ADF became increasingly embedded in Congolese communities and the local cross-border economy (Titeca & Vlassenroot 2012: 155). While cross-border trade and resources are addressed in the following section, it is worth noting here that this process of integration was central to the group's survival and its transformation into a powerful local and regional actor. In effect, it facilitated recruitment of Congolese youth and provided resources for the group's survival. By all accounts, the group appeared to co-exist with, and even become integrated in, Congolese communities with relative ease due to the tradition of Ugandan armed resistance in the area as well as ethnic affinity between Bakonjo and Banande groups (Titeca & Vlassenroot 2012: 156). More recently, the group has been associated with brutal attacks on civilian populations in Beni. Since 2014, there have been numerous massacres in Beni territory, with Beni remaining the deadliest territory in the Kivu provinces. While these are likely committed by a range of armed factions, including national security forces, the violence is generally attributed to the ADF (CRG 2018: 3). Indeed, following a series of joint FARDC operations, supported by UN peacekeepers since 2005, the group has shifted its approach to Congolese populations due to its loss of combatants and supply chains, increasingly pillaging, levying taxes, and targeting civilians. Yet, the group's gradual "Congolization" notwithstanding (Titeca & Vlassenroot 2012: 155), recent research indicates that the group's leadership remains Ugandan (CRG 2018: 3). The transnational history of the ADF – like that of the LRA, FLDR, to note just two examples – affirms the value of adopting a cross-border framework of analysis to capture, understand, and respond to changes in conflicts within settings of organised violence.

Cross-Border Trade & Resources

The Great Lakes Region is rich in natural resources, driving and sustaining a number of conflicts, including across state boundaries. As highlighted above, the conflicts in Great Lakes Region are characterised by complex networks of interlocking economic, political, and personal interests. Indeed, writing about the politics of resource extraction in over a decade and a half ago, SIDA remarked that while the heavy involvement of regional military forces and personalities is obvious, it is difficult to evaluate to what extent the profits are for “individual enrichment and to what extent it constitutes a source of financing the war itself” (2004: 28). With this backdrop in mind, the roundtable discussion centred on resource extraction in and cross-trade across South Sudan, DRC and Uganda, pointing to its connections to the conflict the region.

The extraction of myriad natural resource and materials have played a significant role in sustaining war economies in the Great Lakes, the discussion around natural resource extraction during the roundtable centred on the teak economy in the Greater Equatoria region of South Sudan, bordering on DRC and Uganda. Drawing on his expertise in wildlife conservation in DRC, Adrian Garside provided historical and contextual background to the teak trade in the region. Home to some of the oldest and largest teak plantations in the continent, today illicit hardwood trade represents an important dimension of the region’s transnational war economy. Indeed, the teak economy in Central Equatoria alone is estimated to be worth \$50-70 million USD. Framed through concept of the “political marketplace” (De Waal 2016)¹, Garside elucidated the politics surrounding teak extraction and illicit cross-border trade, noting that these are enabled through illicit concessions

linked to elites (local and national) and controlled through armed groups. As highlighted by Garside, armed group cantonment sites correspond to teak plantations (see e.g. UNSC 2019: 39). Indeed, the conflict has greatly increased the value of local armed groups. In effect, traders negotiate with local and de facto authorities for permission to harvest and transport teak out of South Sudan, through DRC or Uganda through to Kampala, from which it is exported to international markets via Mombasa (Kenya).

In effect, illicit taxes are levied for permission and protection to harvest and transit, including through illegal checkpoints. A host of actors are implicated in the teak and natural resource trade in South Sudan, including SPLM/A-IO and SSPDF commanders, among others. There are, in addition, strong links to the military in Uganda – a key trading partner – which is reportedly playing an active and decisive role in deforestation in South Sudan. Echoing SIDA’s earlier analysis in DRC, the UNSC noted in recent years that the extraction of resources in South Sudan is carried out “in the furtherance of, and in parallel to, military operations and the enrichment of elites” (2017: 1). Looking at the SPLM/A-IO in particular, reports indicate that part of the profits are collected by the group’s representatives in Uganda, who in turn, return a proportion of the profits to South Sudan through small batches of ammunition and medical supplies through informal cross-border trade with DRC. Revenues from such illicit trade are also used to pay salaries as well to buy new uniforms for recruits (UNSC 2019c: 39). The roundtable’s glimpse into South Sudan’s cross-border teak economy underscores that the incentives for violence are high in South Sudan, as its history reminds us that violence reaps political and economic rewards.

¹ De Waal’s concept of the ‘political marketplace’ refers to a “contemporary system of governance, characterised by pervasive monetised patronage, in the form of exchange of political loyalty, cooperation [and/or protection] for payment” (De Waal 2016). Crucially for our purposes, these are “usually transnationally integrated: a buyer can purchase political allegiances and services across boundaries” (De Waal 2019: p. 19).

With respect to cross-border trade, roundtable participants highlighted the significance of small-scale informal trade, which represents an important dimension of quotidian cross-border life within conflict complexes and their economies. As highlighted above, refugees are an important feature of cross-border movement, they represent but one form of human mobility across state boundaries in the Great Lakes. Indeed, populations living in the border regions “often live as though it’s the same country, migration and trade being constant features” (2004: 29). For instance, the World Health Organization (WHO) recently identified seventy-one points of entry or crossing between DRC and Uganda, across which the International Organization for Migration (IOM) observed over 12, 000 movements during a two-week period in November 2018. Of these, IOM monitors found

that only 27% were fleeing conflict, instead most were crossing for economic activities and to visit family (Bedford & Akello 2018: 3). The everyday nature of cross-border human mobility, including by small traders, maintains close ties across communities living on either side of state borders and, as highlighted through the example of the ADF above, can help spread and sustain conflicts actors. With this in mind, Chloé Lewis closed her presentation noting that women’s disproportionate presence in cross-border trade, and therefore in the informal and shadow conflict economies in the Great Lakes Region, is often overlooked (Turshen 2014). Further research into the gendered dimensions of cross-border trade in the region, and in particular on the role of women traders in sustaining conflict and conflict actors would contribute to illuminating this important gap.

Looking Forward: Implications across scholarship, policy, and practice

The work unequivocally affirmed the value of the Conflict Platform project framework and methodology to contemporary conflicts in Africa's Great Lakes Region. As evidenced throughout the roundtable, the conflicts in the region are directly and indirectly tied by myriad cross-border connectors. Such connectors include the humanitarian impacts and the environmental and epidemiological risks these engender on a regional level, the transnational nature of conflict actors operating in borderland regions at state peripheries, as well as cross-border natural resource extraction and trade (formal and informal). In light of these ties and the often rapidly shifting nature of conflict dynamics and alliances within and across state boundaries, the study of contemporary conflict requires a methodology that is able to account for this complexity at the micro and macro levels. The Conflict Platform and its new unit – *settings of organised violence (SORVI)* – captures this complexity.

The Conflict Platform Project offers a clear strategy for analysing cross-border conflict complexes and their consequences in the Great Lakes Region – as in its nine additional focal cases – in the study of conflict. Yet, roundtable participants underscored the continued

challenges for responses to contemporary conflicts in policy and practice. Indeed, while internal conflicts may not be bound by State boundaries, sensitive issues surrounding state sovereignty and jurisdictions mean that response efforts largely still are. Considering this question in 2004, SIDA noted that recognition of the strong regional dynamics in the Great Lakes Region did not necessarily mean that “implementation must be on a regional level” (2004: 6). Some fifteen years later, however, it is apparent that that limits of state-bounded programming continue to restrict responses to contemporary conflicts and their cross-border connections. As a result, certain peacebuilding organisations are moving towards new approaches. Search for Common Ground, for example, is moving beyond a country program model towards one centred on geographies of conflict in its regions of operation. This way, programmes can adapt “in accordance with shifting conflict dynamics” (SFCG 2018: 8). Shifts of this kind are promising but remain nascent. It will, therefore, remain incumbent on actors across scholarship, policy and practice to work together, not only in the analysis of the changing dynamics of cross-border conflicts themselves, but also to critically reflect on the possibilities and limits of moving beyond approaches to conflict bound by state-borders.

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