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## **Distributional Conflict, the State, and Peacebuilding in Burundi**

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines the causes of conflict in Burundi and discusses strategies for building peace. The analysis of the complex relationships between distribution and group dynamics reveals that these relationships are reciprocal, implying that distribution and group dynamics are endogenous. The nature of endogenously generated group dynamics determines the type of preferences (altruistic or exclusionist), which in turn determines the type of allocative institutions and policies that prevail in the political and economic system. While unequal distribution of resources may be socially inefficient, it nonetheless can be rational from the perspective of the ruling elite, especially because inequality perpetuates dominance. However, as the unequal distribution of resources generates conflict, maintaining a system based on inequality is difficult because it requires ever increasing investments in repression. It is therefore clear that if the new Burundian leadership is serious about building peace, it must engineer institutions that uproot the legacy of discrimination and promote equal opportunity for social mobility for all members of ethnic groups and regions.

Keywords: Burundi, conflict, inequality, education

JEL classification: O15, O55, D74

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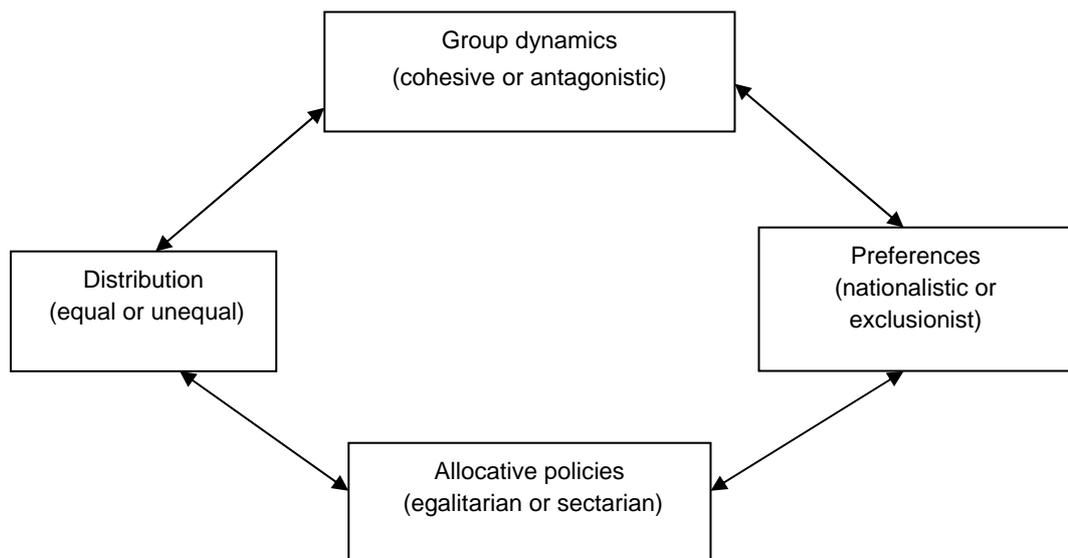
# 1 Introduction

Since the past decade, Sub-Saharan Africa has suffered a disproportionate share of civil wars, and peace in conflict-affected countries has been fragile and short lived (Bigombe, Collier and Sambanis 2000). Countries fall back into civil war when the end of conflict is not accompanied by strategies explicitly aimed at addressing the root causes of conflict.

In the case of Burundi, we argue that civil wars arise from distributional conflict and that achieving political stability will require the establishment of institutional mechanisms that correct the legacy of inequality in access to economic and political power across ethnic groups and regions. This argument is based on an analysis of the complex relationships between *distribution* and *group dynamics*. The relation between distribution and group dynamics is reciprocal, implying that distribution and group dynamics are endogenous.

Distribution of economic resources and political power may be equal or unequal. Equal distribution of resources promotes *cohesive* group dynamics while unequal distribution creates *antagonism* between privileged groups and the marginalized ones. In turn, the nature of endogenously generated group dynamics determines the type of *preferences* which may be altruistic or exclusionist. These preferences in turn determine the type of allocative institutions and policies that prevail in the political and economic system. Altruistic preferences promote egalitarian and nationalistic policies while exclusionist preferences induce sectarian and inegalitarian allocative policies. Hence the distribution of national resources (economic resources and political power) is endogenous in the sense that equality or inequality arise from the type of allocative policies that prevail in the system. These relationships are summarized in Figure 1.

Figure 1  
Group dynamics and distributional conflict



It also follows from the foregoing analysis that while unequal distribution of resources may be socially inefficient, it nonetheless can be 'rational' from the perspective of the ruling elite, especially because inequality perpetuates dominance. For example, the concentration of education infrastructure in the southern province of Bururi in Burundi led to sub-optimal human capital development (Ngaruko and Nkurunziza 2000; Jackson 2000). Yet this policy was a vital mechanism of consolidation of power for the southern Tutsi oligarchy. Obviously, because of the conflict that unequal distribution generates, systems based on inequality are difficult to sustain in the long run as they require ever increasing investments in repression.

This analysis has important implications for our understanding of the causes of civil wars in Burundi and the strategies to achieve peace. First, the analysis helps to clear a major confusion that has always plagued the analysis of civil wars in Burundi (and Rwanda for that matter); that is, the conflation of two distinct phenomena, namely the existence of ethnic groups and antagonism between ethnic groups. Our analysis considers the existence of distinguished ethnic groups in Burundi as a matter of historical fact.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, we argue, ethnic antagonism is an acquired phenomenon, arising from biased distribution of economic resources and political power. This analysis shifts the focus from ethnicity *per se* to distribution as a primary cause of civil wars.

Second and most importantly, by shifting the attention to distribution, the analysis generates useful insights about strategies for building lasting peace in the post-conflict era. The analysis suggests that emphasis should be on policies that alleviate inequality across ethnic groups and regions while promoting institutional accountability. It becomes clear then that while democracy is the necessary route to stability, simply replacing one ethnic group by another in the political hierarchy through blind democratic calculus is not a viable long-term solution to civil wars. This is to say that institutional reform will not end with the simple establishment of a western-style democratic system. Such a system can in fact be counterproductive if it results in the institutionalization of ethnic dominance, regional inequality, or any other form of bias in the economic and political arenas.

This paper reviews the evidence in the literature on the causes of conflict in Burundi with the aim of examining the role of distribution in generating conflict. We illustrate the distributional nature of conflict by examining the role of two key institutions that cemented inequality and exclusion in colonial and post-colonial regimes, namely the education system and the military. We examine the conflicts that plagued the post-independence era, namely the 1965 killings, 1972 massacres, the 1988 uprising and killings, the rebel invasion of 1991, and the conflict that erupted at the assassination of the newly democratically elected president Melchior Ndadaye in October 1993. The analysis refers to four main historical eras, the pre-colonial and colonial eras, the reign of the monolithic military republics (1966-93), and the post-1993 period.

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<sup>1</sup> We do not discuss the issue of existence or nonexistence of ethnic groups in Burundi. We find such an enterprise fundamentally futile for the purpose of explaining conflicts. The relevant issue is not whether ethnic groups exist or not but why and how they arise in the complex interaction among multiple factors that cause conflict. Ethnicity may be a contributor to conflict only if instrumented for the purpose of controlling power and extracting the rents associated with monopolization of power

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: the following section reviews the lessons from the literature on conflicts in Burundi and in Africa in general with an emphasis on the role of ethnicity, patrimonialism, predation, and institutional failure. Section 3 discusses how civil wars in Burundi arise from distributional conflict. Section 4 uses the lenses of distributional conflict to highlight the main economic and political problems that must be addressed in building lasting peace. Section 5 concludes.

## 2 Explaining conflicts in Burundi: what have we learned?

### 2.1 The role of ethnicity

The question of the role of ethnicity in explaining conflict in Burundi has occupied a central place in the literature. Conflicts in Burundi have often been characterized as clashes between two inherently antagonistic ethnic groups. We argue that this characterization is fundamentally flawed and inconsistent with historical evidence.

In his influential book on conflict in Burundi, Lemarchand (1995) pointed out an important ‘paradox’ in the history of Burundi. He noted that uncharacteristically for a sub-Saharan African country, ethnic groups in Burundi have a long history of peaceful cohabitation, speaking the same language, sharing the same culture and having submitted to the same traditional monarchy. However, in the end of the colonial era and throughout the independence era, the country experienced conflicts that, on the surface, opposed the Hutu to the Tutsi. Given that the Hutu and the Tutsi have not always antagonized, the question we must ask is what happened during the colonial and post-colonial periods that generated violent conflicts along ethnic lines. One source of explanation for why conflict happened is the introduction of ethnicity as a primordial determinant of access to power starting from the colonial era. The 1929 reorganization of territorial administration marked a turning point in the history of the country with regard to the role of ethnicity in politics. The Belgian colonizers orchestrated an overhaul of the administration that resulted in the domination of the political system by chiefs from the Tutsi ethnic group (Table 1). In 1929, 20 per cent of the chiefs were Hutu but by 1945 there were no Hutu chiefs in the administration. This administrative reform marked the beginning of marginalization of the Hutu in politics. Tutsi domination of the political system has continued since then and was consolidated especially after the 1972 massacres (Table 2). Table 2 also illustrates the volatility of the political system in the periods leading to and following independence, which

Table 1  
Ethnic origin of chiefs in Burundi, 1929-45

Year	Ganwa		Tutsi		Hutu		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1929	76	57	30	23	27	20	133	100
1933	36	78	7	15	3	7	46	100
1937	35	80	8	18	1	2	44	100
1945	25	71	10	29	0	0	35	100

Source: Lemarchand (1994).

resulted from both antagonism between the Hutu and Tutsi elites as well as fractionalization within the Tutsi elite, especially between Bururi and Muramvya.<sup>2</sup>

Ethnic diversity is not a direct cause of conflict in Burundi but ethnicity is intertwined with other political and regional factors that contribute to conflict.<sup>3</sup> On the one hand, the

Table 2  
Ethnic composition of governments in Burundi, 1961-93

Government head: Name and ethnic origin	Duration and fate of government head	Hutu	Tutsi	Total
		No. and (%)		
Louis Rwagasore, Prime Minister, Ganwa	2 weeks: Sept.-Oct. 1961 (Assassinated)	n/a	n/a	n/a
André Muhirwa, Prime Minister, Tutsi	18 months: Oct. 1961-June 1963 (Resigned)	4 (37)	7 (63)	11
Pierre Ngendandumwe, Prime Minister, Hutu	9 months: June 1963-March 1964 (Resigned)	6 (46)	7 (54)	13
Albin Nyamoya, Prime Minister, Tutsi	9 months: March 1964-Jan. 1965 (Resigned)	5 (38)	8 (62)	13
Pierre Ngendandumwe, Prime Minister, Hutu	1 week: 7-15 Jan. 1965 (Assassinated)	6 (40)	9 (60)	15
Joseph Bamina, Prime Minister, Hutu	8 months: Jan.-Sept. 1965 (Executed)	6 (40)	9 (60)	15
Leopold Bihumugani (Biha), Prime Minister, Tutsi	14 months: Sept. 1965- Nov. 1966 (Arrested)	6 (60)	4 (40)	10
Michel Micombero, President, Tutsi	10 years: Dec. 1966-Nov. 1976 (Overthrown)	5 (36)	9 (64)	14 (Dec. '66)
Jean-Baptiste Bagaza, President, Tutsi	10 years: Nov. 1976-Sept. 1987 (Overthrown)	4 (20)	16 (80)	20 (Nov. '76)
Pierre Buyoya, President, Tutsi	5 years: Sept. 1987-July 1993 (Lost democratic elections)	5 (26)	14 (74)	19 (1987)

Source: Eggers (1997), Ntibazonkiza (1993).

Note: n/a = not available.

<sup>2</sup> The Muramvya province was the historical headquarters of the kingdom. Under the monarchy, the Tutsi from the Hima clan were considered an underclass within the Tutsi ethnic group. Bururi contains a large proportion of Tutsi-Hima, the clan of all the former military presidents (Micombero, Bagaza, and Buyoya).

<sup>3</sup> A similar conclusion has been reached in careful analyses of conflicts in neighbouring Rwanda, including studies of the genocide, an event that has gained world attention and which has by and large been characterized as an ethnic war. For example, Hintjens (1999: 248) concludes that genocide was not the outcome of 'spontaneous outbursts of mutual antagonisms between ethnic groups'. Fedderke, Luiz, and de Kadt (2004) make a similar argument in the case of South Africa. They argue that 'what really matters is not the [social] cleavage, but that it [the cleavage] comes to serve as a political tool in distributional conflict' (Fedderke Luiz and de Kadt. 2004: 19). Collier (2000a) finds that ethnicity has negative effects only in bad political environment (with limited political rights) but has not link with conflict in democracies. Alesina and La Ferrara (2004) argue that diversity (including ethnic diversity) may actually increase productivity through diversity of skills and innovative abilities.

Tutsi-Hima from the southern province of Bururi exploited ethnic identity to control power. In turn, political entrepreneurs excluded from state spoils activated ethnic solidarities to challenge the regime in place. Thus, ethnic diversity became an instrument for political competition in the pursuit of economic and political advantages. It follows that conflicts are caused not by ethnic diversity *per se* but by inequality in the distribution of access to national resources and political power across ethnic groups. When the political system discriminates along ethnic lines, then ethnicity becomes a vehicle of conflict.

## 2.2 Patrimonialism, predation and institutional failure

Under the pre-colonial era, leadership was surrounded by the mythical notion of divine power of the king. The king was above the nation and just under god: *Imana, Umwami, Uburundi* (God, the king, and the nation) was the traditional order (Ngaruko 2003). Everything belonged to the king, including material resources as well as the people. This tradition established the notion that the king not only ruled the country but also owned the country and its resources. A patrimonial system generates rents that accrue to only those who belong to the ‘clan’ of leaders. The smaller the clan the larger the individual share in the rents. Therefore, clan members have the incentives to erect barriers to entry into the club.

During the republic era, leaders perpetuated patrimonialism by actively engineering institutions and mechanisms of exclusion and repression, including the use of force and intimidation against those who were suspected of not adhering to state ideology. The regimes also used ideology and propaganda mainly through the party UPRONA (Unité pour le Progrès National), which was instituted into a single party during the first military regime (1966-76). The unique party played the same role as that of myth under the monarchy in brainwashing the public and promoting the notion of unchallenged submission to the authority.

Two important features characterized the patrimonial state in Burundi: *centralization* and *penetration*.<sup>4</sup> Centralization facilitated control over the economy and the political system while penetration extended control down to the lowest strata of the social structure. The administration and party leadership from the lowest level to the top were controlled by ‘agents of the state’ who were accountable to the central authority only. Local officials were often ‘expatriates’ from other communes and provinces. Officials from the south served as administrators of communes in the north while the reverse was unthinkable. This institutional engineering allowed the central authority to control power at all levels in the country. The system also undermined public accountability on the part of government officials and allowed them to behave like the old king in that they were above the people and just under their ‘god’, that is, the central authority.

The state also hijacked civil society organizations to consolidate state ideology. Youth and women associations and labour unions were branches of the unique party used as propaganda instruments to brainwash the citizenry and enforce the supremacy of state ideology. State penetration extended even to the clergy. The Catholic Church in particular was viewed as a potential threat, especially due to its involvement in formal

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<sup>4</sup> See Laely (1997) for an interesting discussion of the relationship between the centralized state and the peasantry.

and informal education, which was seen as a potential vehicle for alternative ideological beliefs. The independence of the church was nevertheless compromised by the presence of influential clergymen from the south who often served as arms of the state. The state often was able to take advantage of the trust enjoyed by clergymen vis-à-vis the people to extract valuable information from or even influence cooperative behaviour of potential opposition leaders.<sup>5</sup>

While the patrimonial system was effective in repressing potential dissidence, it nevertheless sowed the seeds of conflict by perpetuating alienation among the majority of the population, namely the Hutu and the non-southern Tutsi. Because discrimination had operated along ethnic lines, it is not surprising that the subsequent conflicts had an ethnic dimension.

The regional dimension has generally been overlooked in the analysis of conflicts in Burundi. Integrating the regional dimension allows us to understand why and how ethnicity is not a deterministic factor of conflict in Burundi (see Ngaruko and Nkurunziza 2000, 2003; Ndikumana 1998). Ngaruko and Nkurunziza (2003: 384) put it as follows: ‘Like the ethnic factor, regionalism appears as a tool which has been instrumented for rent-seeking, the root cause of civil wars in Burundi. Ethnic and regional factors complement each other to shape rent collection and sharing, and none of them can explain violence *alone*.<sup>6</sup> Both ethnicity and regionalism are related to conflict only because they are dimensions along which power and resources have been concentrated and monopolized. They are not deterministic factors of conflict in and by themselves.

The post-independence regimes established true ‘predatory bureaucracies’ (Ngaruko and Nkurunziza 2003; Ngaruko 2003) aimed at channelling wealth to the benefit of the Tutsi-Hima elite from the south. Various mechanisms allowed the minority southern elite to gain control over the economy. One of these mechanisms is through *excessive regulation* in the economic system. Excessive regulation allowed leaders to extract rents through bribes and other forms of corruption. Corruption can be decomposed as follows:<sup>7</sup>

$$\text{Corruption} = \text{Discretion} + \text{Monopoly} - \text{Accountability} + \text{Hysteresis}$$

Discretion refers to the power of the state to influence the markets, mainly through regulation and expanded public procurement, which creates opportunities for ‘commercialization’ of the law through bribery and obstruction of trade through extortion. Monopoly refers to exclusive control over the economy by the government and the political elite, which, coupled with monopolization of political power by ethno-

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<sup>5</sup> For example, the very influential Bishop of the Diocese of Bururi, Bernard Bududira, was an important advisor to military presidents who often used the clergyman’s position to gain access to opposition leaders.

<sup>6</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>7</sup> The last term of the above expression ‘hysteresis’ is from Collier (2000b) while the other terms are from Klitgaard (1988).

regional entities, increases the discretionary power of leaders, creates an 'economy of solidarity', and promotes the 'politics of the belly'.<sup>8</sup>

Lack of accountability is a consequence of high centralization and concentration of political and economic power and it is a self-perpetuating process. As Collier (2000b: 197) points out, 'once a society becomes corrupt there are powerful forces tending to keep it corrupt'. Due to monopolization of state institutions, corruption became the norm in public management, then corruption became 'expected', and in the end corruption became a self-perpetuating process.<sup>9</sup> Corruption is vertically and downward contagious, which takes away not only administrative accountability, but also moral guilt.<sup>10</sup>

Excessive regulation serves as a barrier to entry into the private sector for actors who are not politically connected. It is not surprising that a substantial proportion of those who own large private companies in Burundi are former high ranking government officials or their relatives (Ngaruko and Nkurunziza 2003). Concentration of economic power is therefore a result of concentration of political power.

Another mechanism of redistributive politics is through the management of the public sector. Ngaruko and Nkurunziza (2000: 386) find that in 1996, the assets of the 37 fully state-controlled firms represented 48 per cent of the country's GDP. For all parastatals combined, the ratio was a staggering 77 per cent. The parastatal sector constituted a channel of distribution of wealth to members of the southern Tutsi minority. Moreover, the policy of expansion of the public sector suffocated the private sector while diverting scarce public funds away from socially productive investments. Since only a select few had access to jobs and command positions in the parastatal sector, such a policy increased inequality along ethnic and regional lines.

From the foregoing analysis, we conclude that institutional failure constitutes an important cause of conflict in Burundi (Ndikumana 1998). The Burundian state has failed to perform its usual functions of enforcing the rule of law, protecting individual and property rights, enforcing the rules of fair social exchange, administering justice for all, and redistributing national wealth. Institutional failure created a divorce between the *privatized state* and the population while perpetuating a *culture of impunity* as well as incentives to capture the state for personal interests. However, although institutions failed, they have proved resilient to change. Consequently, institutional failure has created an environment that not only predisposed the country to conflict but also contributed to the reoccurrence of conflicts. Ndikumana (1998) discusses this argument in detail.

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<sup>8</sup> The expression 'politics of the belly' is borrowed from Bayart (1993).

<sup>9</sup> Honest behaviour (and assiduity at work) by a new public manager is often regarded as evidence of 'inexperience' and excessive zealotry, or *amavamuhira* (literally meaning 'the energy of someone coming freshly from home'). The idea is that once acclimated, a new public manager will 'join the club' and start shirking his/her duties while filling his/her private purse using public resources.

<sup>10</sup> In Burundi, the code of wisdom in public service is: *impene irisha aho iziritse* (a goat grazes wherever it is tied in the prairie) or *nta mbwa ikugana igufa mu kanwa* (no dog barks with a piece of bone in its mouth). The message is that it is acceptable (expected) to be corrupt under the blessing of a corrupt leader.

### 2.3 Greed and grievance

The ‘greed and grievance’ models of civil wars, which emphasize the motives and costs of organizing and maintaining rebellions, have been used to explain conflicts in African countries and around the world (Collier and Hoeffler 1998, 2001, 2002).<sup>11</sup> Applying the Collier-Hoeffler model (henceforth C-H model) to the case of Burundi yields important insights into the causes of conflict (Ngaruko and Nkurunziza 2003). The model predicts correctly that Burundi is more prone to conflict than the average country in the sample. The results of the C-H model indicate that the average probability of a new war over the 1960-95 period is 26 per cent for Burundi compared to about 7 per cent for the sample.

However, the C-H model, like other models derived from cross-country studies in general, has important limitations in explaining wars in Burundi on any given individual country.<sup>12</sup> The performance of the model is compromised by the inadequate quality of the data for some important factors of conflict, especially ethno-linguistic fractionalization and ethnic dominance.<sup>13</sup> The index of ethnic dominance used in the C-H data is problematic. First the dataset codes indicate Burundi as not having a dominant ethnic group, which is inconsistent with the fact that the Hutu represent a large proportion of the population (about 85 per cent). Changing the dummy of ethnic dominance from 0 to 1, all else being constant, increases the probability of war substantially (Table 4). This is consistent with Collier’s argument that dominance rather than ‘fractionalization’ is the driving factor for conflict (Collier 2001).

In the context of Burundi, the quantitative treatment of ethnic fractionalization is problematic because the quantitative measure does not account for the political significance of ethnicity. Although the Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa speak the same language, over time they became politically distinguishable communities, especially starting from 1929 when the colonial administration engineered the domination of the Tutsi in the administration. Taking the view that the differences among the three groups are indeed relevant for conflict, Ngaruko and Nkurunziza (2003) recalculated the index of ethno-linguistic fractionalization by taking into account the relative proportions of each group (85 per cent, 14 per cent, and 1 per cent for the Hutu, the Tutsi, and the Twa, respectively). This yields a value of 26 for the index (instead of 4 as in the C-H data set).

In addition to ethnicity, regionalism has also been an important dimension of fractionalization and antagonism in the political system. Burundian politics in the 1960s were marked by sharp antagonism between the Tutsi monarchists of Muramvya and the Tutsi from Bururi. The post-independence military regimes dominated by the southern Tutsi systematically sought to limit Muramvya’s political influence. There are also regionalist tensions within the Hutu ethnic group as non-southern Hutu feel that the Hutu from the south have benefited from ‘neighbourhood effects’ and have been less marginalized than the Hutu from the rest of the country.

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<sup>11</sup> Also see Grossman (1999) and Horowitz (1995) for a discussion of the greed and grievance model of conflicts. See Fearon (2004) and De Soysa (2002) for an evaluation of the greed theory of civil war with regard to the role of primary commodities exports for conflict.

<sup>12</sup> See Ndikumana and Emizet (2003) for a discussion of the application of the CH model on the case of the Congo.

<sup>13</sup> See Ngaruko and Nkurunziza (2003) for a detailed discussion of measurement errors in the CH data.

Table 3  
Predictions of the greed and grievance model for Burundi

Factor of conflict	Does the factor increase or decrease risk?	Does the factor make Burundi safer or riskier compared to sample average?*	Comments
Secondary male education	Decreases risk	Makes Burundi riskier	Consistent
Income	Decreases risk	Makes Burundi riskier	Consistent
Growth	Decreases risk	Makes Burundi riskier	Consistent
Primary exports	Increases risk	Makes Burundi riskier	Primary commodities = agricultural products
Social fractionalization	Decreases risk	Makes Burundi safer	Problematic: incorrectly measured; does not account for the political dimension of ethnicity
Ethnic dominance	Increases risk	Makes Burundi safer	Miscoded: Burundi has a dominant ethnic group, making it riskier
Peace duration	Decreases risk	Makes Burundi riskier	Incorrectly measured; e.g., 1965-1975-94; safer in 1960-74 conflict not recorded
Population	Increases risk	Same as average	—
Geographic dispersion of population	Decreases risk	Makes Burundi riskier	May explain duration of conflicts

Note: \* Assessment based on the average value of the regressor for Burundi compared to the average value of the regressor for the C-H sample.

Table 4  
Predicted probabilities of conflict in Burundi: Ethnicity and peace duration

Year	1965-69	1970-74	1975-79	1980-84	1985-89	1990-94
Collier-Hoeffler	0.362	0.255	0.205	0.223	0.232	0.263
Ngaruko-Nkurunziza*	0.630	0.470	0.250	0.280	0.290	0.320
Peace variable modified	0.408	0.380	0.162	0.178	0.195	0.248
Ethnic dominance = 1	0.479	0.356	0.294	0.317	0.328	0.366
Peace modified and ethnic dominance = 1	0.527	0.498	0.238	0.259	0.281	0.348
Ethnic groups = 3	0.304	0.208	0.170	0.191	0.198	0.227
Ethno-regional groups = 5	0.261	0.175	0.145	0.167	0.174	0.199
Ethnic dominance = 1 and ethnic groups = 3	0.414	0.298	0.249	0.277	0.286	0.321
Ethnic dominance = 1, 3 ethnic groups, and peace modified	0.461	0.433	0.199	0.223	0.243	0.304

Notes: The probabilities are based on the Collier-Hoeffler 'alternative' model which includes as regressors the log and growth rate of GDP per capita, the level and square of the share of primary commodities exports, social fractionalization, ethnic dominance, peace duration, the log of population, and geographic dispersion of the population.

\* Ngaruko and Nkurunziza (2003) modify the peace variable as well as the social fractionalization index by considering 3 ethnic groups.

Given these considerations, it is more appropriate to think of ethno-regional fractionalization rather than ethnic fractionalization. Two implications follow. First, fractionalization becomes a dynamic phenomenon rather than a fixed factor, which helps to better explain the pattern and timing of civil wars over time. Second, considering that ethno-regional entities increase measured fractionalization and contrary to the theory's prediction, higher fractionalization, makes Burundi more, not less vulnerable to conflict. To keep the argument simple, we focus on the most recent war. First, one of the reasons why the war broke out in 1993 is because the monolithic army and the southern Tutsi elite were unwilling to accept the shift in power concentration away from the south. President Ndadaye was the first president to be a Hutu, a non-southern, and a civilian. Second, the war has lasted longer because it has been fought on several fronts, not just opposing the Hutu against the Tutsi. For example, the non-southern Tutsi and Hutu have accused the southern Tutsi and Hutu leadership of shielding the south from the killings while allowing destruction of the rest of the country. Non-southern Tutsi have discovered that *not all Tutsi are created equal*, and that certainly a monolithic military is not an insurance for any ethnic group. As the war progressed, ethnic affinity eroded in both camps. It will be harder in the future for divisionist leaders to simply ride on the back of ethnicity as a way of mobilizing political support.

### 3 Distributional conflict

This section explains how the various wars in Burundi arise from distributional conflict and illustrates the argument with an analysis of two of the main dimensions of the institutional apparatus that formed the foundation of the politics of exclusion, namely education and the military. We then identify key factors of each past war that make it a distributional conflict.

#### 3.1 Education and distributional conflict

The goal of the education system is the development of human capital, which is achieved by pursuing two objectives within the limits of the resource constraint: (i) achieving the highest enrolment ratios or mass literacy and (ii) providing the highest quality of education or sophistication. For a monolithic regime, mass literacy is perceived as a threat because it increases the demand for political participation and economic equity. So, mass literacy yields disutility for the dominant group even though it increases welfare for society as a whole. As a result, monolithic regimes tend to under-invest in mass education and concentrate resources to providing the best education to the privileged few.

To formalize the idea, let  $H$  be the amount of education or human capital accumulation produced through education. We assume that the society's utility function is separable into the utility of the dominant group ( $D$ ) and the utility of the rest of the population ( $P$ ). The weight attached to each component depends on the political power of each group. The function can be written as follows:

$$U(\mathbf{H}) = \gamma U^D(\mathbf{H}^D, \mathbf{H}^P) + (1 - \gamma) U^P(\mathbf{H}^P, \mathbf{H}^D) \quad (1)$$

where  $\gamma$  is a measure of the political power of the dominant group.

There are two possible ways of characterizing the optimization process. First, given the antagonism between the dominant group and rest of the population, each group's utility is increasing in its own human capital but decreasing in the rival group's human capital. That is, for the dominant group, less education of the rest of the population is preferred because more mass education may result in higher pressure for power sharing. For the rest of the population more education for the dominant group implies more marginalization and an increase in the political power of the dominant group. Therefore, the utility function has the following properties:

$$U_{H^i}^i > 0; \quad U_{H^i H^i}^i < 0; \quad i = D, P \quad (2)$$

$$U_{H^j}^i < 0; \quad U_{H^i H^j}^i < 0; \quad i, j = D, P \quad (3)$$

Since the dominant group has control over the allocation of public resources, it can effectively influence education for the rest of the population. In contrast, the rest of the population has little influence on the allocation of resources, which provides incentives to rebel against the dominant group. Hence, discrimination in education is a potential vehicle for conflict.

A second way of formalizing the outcomes of discrimination in education is to include the two objectives of education (mass literacy  $L$  and sophistication  $S$ ) explicitly in the utility function. Thus the utility function is written as follows:

$$U = U(L, S) = \gamma U^D(L, S) + (1 - \gamma) U^P(L, S) \quad (4)$$

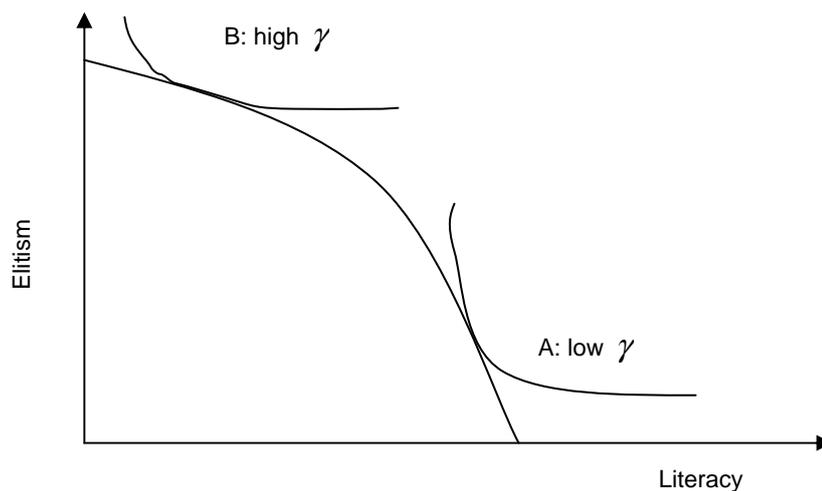
Since the ruling elite prefer sophistication over literacy while the population prefers literacy, it follows that:

$$\frac{\partial U^D}{\partial S} > \frac{\partial U^D}{\partial L} \quad \text{and} \quad \frac{\partial U^P}{\partial S} > \frac{\partial U^P}{\partial L} \quad (5)$$

These asymmetries in preferences affect the allocation of resources for any given production technology (production of human capital). For a given amount of national resources allocated to education, the dominant group will tend to 'produce' more sophistication than literacy (point B in Figure 2) while the rest of the population will prefer to 'produce' more literacy than sophistication (like in Point A). When the imbalance of power is high, that is, with a high value of  $\gamma$ , the equilibrium combination of sophistication and literacy will be closer to point B than point A in Figure 2. That is, fewer people will be educated than is potentially feasible given national resources even though those who do access education will receive a higher quality education simply because resources are devoted to a smaller pool of recipients. The society as a whole will be worse off when elitism overrides literacy, the an objective of the education system, which is the most likely outcome in the presence of high inequality in political power.

The socially optimal allocation of resources is somewhere between point A and point B in Figure 2, where a sustainable balance between mass literacy and intellectual sophistication is achieved. In principle, social bargaining between the dominant group and the majority of the population could induce each group to move towards the 'middle'. The problem is that the dominant group feels threatened by mass literacy because literacy increases competition in the political and economic spheres. A 'gift exchange' mechanism can in principle motivate the migration toward the 'middle'. For the elite, the cost of moving towards the middle is a loss in relative power. However, point B is socially unsustainable in the long term due to alienation and frustration among the excluded population. While increasing access to education for the majority of the population yields stability, the dominant group's desire to preserve political power induces it to depress literacy. This largely explains why the southern Tutsi elite in Burundi maintained a discriminatory education system as a tool of power consolidation.

Figure 2  
Literacy vs. Elitist Education



### 3.2 The military and distributional conflict

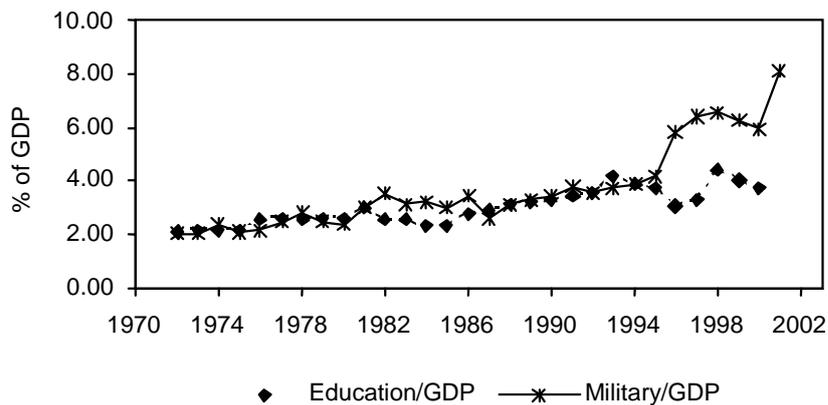
The military, especially its structure and its links to politics, must be at the centre of any objective analysis of post-independence conflicts in Burundi from a distributional-conflict perspective. The contribution of the military in generating distributional conflict arises from (1) its structure, (2) what it provides to those who have access to it, and (3) what it represents for those who are excluded from it. Furthermore, the role of the military is closely connected with state legitimacy, which also has important implications for resource allocation and political instability.

The structure of the military in Burundi changed dramatically in 1965. Following the aborted coup by members of the Hutu elite, the government orchestrated systematic cleansing of the Hutu in the military and the civilian elite (Ntibazonkiza 1993). From that point on, the military became largely monolithic. The Micombero regime (1966-76)

initiated systematic discrimination against non-southern Tutsi and the military became a monopoly under the control of the southern Tutsi-Hima elite.

For the southern Tutsi-Hima elite, the military provided a source of *rent* in the form of political power, a source of employment, and an avenue to other material advantages from the military coup by Micombero in 1966 until the establishment of the transitional government in 2001.<sup>14</sup> Because of the monopolization of the military by the southern Tutsi elite and its role as a guarantor of political power, public expenditures have systematically been skewed in favour of security to the disadvantage of socially productive investments such as infrastructure, education, and health (Figure 3). The biased allocation of public resources to favour security is closely connected to state legitimacy (Ndikumana 2004a). A state that lacks legitimacy invests in security in order to repress demands for political opening. This fiscal policy orientation increases the marginalization of the disenfranchised majority while it promotes rent extraction by the elite in power, which increases the risk of conflict.

Figure 3  
Expenditures on education and the military



### 3.3 The conflicts of 1965, 1972, 1988, 1991, and 1993-ongoing as distributional conflicts

To summarize our analysis of the causes of conflict in Burundi, we highlight key direct and underlying causes of the various civil wars with the purpose of identifying factors that show that these wars arise from distributional conflict (Table 5).

#### *The 1965 killings*

The assassination of the Hutu Prime Minister Pierre Ngendandumwe in January 1965 and the refusal by the king to appoint a Hutu as prime minister despite the landslide victory by Hutu deputies in the May 1965 legislative elections created political upheaval and poisoned the relations between the Hutu and Tutsi political elite on the one hand

<sup>14</sup> Even under the FRODEBU regime of Ntibantunganya from 1993 to 1996, the army had *de facto* control of power. The government was kept hostage and paralyzed, which prevented it from implementing any policies that may adversely affect the interests of the military and its civilian allies.

and between the king and the civilian elite on the other hand. The events demonstrated that the monarch and the elite Tutsi were not ready to share power. Furthermore, the Tutsi elite were afraid of a possible repetition of the bloody overthrow of the king by the Hutu in neighbouring Rwanda in 1959. The events in Rwanda were used to cultivate fear among the Tutsi of an impending danger of extermination in the event of control of power by the Hutu majority. The alleged coup plot by the Hutu against the king gave the Tutsi the opportunity to decapitate the Hutu civilian and military leadership.

### *The 1972 massacres*

The overthrow of the monarchy by army officer Micombero in 1966 intensified the tensions between the Tutsi from Muramvya (the former royal headquarters) and those from Bururi. In 1971, rumours of a possible reestablishment of the monarchy, the return of Prince Ndizeye, and his assassination by the army deepened the tensions further. An

Table 5  
Elements of distributional conflict in Burundi's civil wars

Civil wars	Aspects of distributional conflict
October-November 1965	
Deaths: 5,000 (Hutu)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prime Minister Ngendadumwe assassinated</li> </ul>
Refugees: negligible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The king refuses to appoint a Hutu as prime minister</li> <li>• Rwanda's Hutu 'revolution' of 1959</li> </ul>
April-July 1972	
Deaths: 200,000 (mostly Hutu)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bururi-Muramvya antagonism; suspicions of return of the monarchy</li> </ul>
Refugees: 300,000 (Hutu)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consolidation of Bururi Tutsi-Hima domination (started in 1966)</li> <li>• Ethnic cleansing of the military (started in 1965)</li> </ul>
August 1988	
Deaths: 15,000 (Hutu and Tutsi)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State penetration: 'expatriate' local administrators</li> </ul>
Refugees: 50,000 (Hutu)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Vent d'Est</i> (wind of democratic change from the former communist block)</li> <li>• 18 years of formation of Hutu intelligentsia at home (though constrained) and abroad: a threat to the regime and an opportunity for change</li> </ul>
November 1991	
Deaths: 1-3,000 (Hutu)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intensification of Hutu opposition (armed and unarmed opposition)</li> </ul>
Refugees: 38,000 (Hutu)	
October 1993-ongoing	
Deaths: >300,000 (majority Hutu)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• President Ndadaye declares intention to reform the military: threat to the foundations of power.</li> </ul>
Refugees: 700,000 (Hutu)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rapid dismissal of former government officials: vanishing rent base</li> <li>• Return of Hutu refugees: threat to <i>biens mal acquis</i> (looted property)</li> <li>• Scrutiny of business practices (e.g., the case of AFRIMET gold mining company): threat to rent base</li> </ul>

Source: The death toll and number of refugees are from Ngaruko and Nkurunziza (2003) who compiled the statistics from UNHCR data.

alleged coup plot by the Hutu accelerated the descent into chaos. The southern Tutsi elite took advantage of this chaos to complete the ethnic cleansing of the Hutu from the military and the civil service that had started in 1965. The regime also seized the opportunity to sideline the Tutsi from Muramvya and the rest of the country. The 1972 war was indeed a distributional conflict in that the southern Tutsi elite opted for the 'final solution' to consolidate their hold on power by eliminating the Hutu elite.

### *The 1988 conflict*

In August 1988, the country experienced a civil war in the northern provinces of Ngozi and Kirundo following a long truce of 16 years. What makes the 1988 conflict a distributional conflict is the role played by state penetration and the resistance to it by the Hutu population. In the periods leading to the outbreak of the conflict, the government had been warned of tensions in the northern provinces of Ngozi and Kirundo between local administrators and the population. One major area of contention was that these 'expatriate' local administrators from the south were arrogant and insensitive to the needs of the local community. Moreover, the 'wind from the East', that is, the international drive for democratization energized by the fall of the communist bloc, also contributed to the intensification of mobilization activities by clandestine Hutu opposition movements.

It is important to note that from 1972 to 1988, the country had not experienced any violent conflict. While this allowed the military regimes to consolidate power, it also allowed the rebuilding of a sizeable Hutu intelligentsia abroad and at home. As the Hutu intelligentsia expanded, domestic demand for power sharing increased. This explains the increase in the intensity of the activities of opposition groups but also the response of the Hutu to repression after the outbreak of the civil war in the north. Fearing a repetition of the 1972 massacres, the Hutu intelligentsia decided to challenge the government openly. In a near-heroic move, a group of Hutu intellectuals wrote an open letter to the president to condemn indiscriminate and arbitrary arrests and execution of Hutu intellectuals and to demand a national debate on ethnic discrimination and reform of the political system to achieve egalitarian representation. The open letter marked a turning point in the history of conflict in Burundi: the intelligentsia had decided to watch no longer passively as the government security forces slaughter the people as it had happened in the past. They decided to not only confront the government but also to expose the tragedy to the international community. This largely explains why the repression was less widespread and shorter than in 1972. These reactions of the Hutu intellectuals along with external pressure on the regime were instrumental in the initiation of the process of political opening, starting with the formation of an ethnically balanced 'government of unity' in 1989, the opening of a national debate on ethnic divisions, and the ensuing opening of the political process that would eventually culminate into democratic elections in 1993.

### *The 1991 rebellion*

The invasion by Hutu rebels in November 1991 may be linked to the general dissatisfaction of Hutu opposition groups with regard to the nature and pace of the political liberalization process initiated in 1989. They accused the government of managing the process to preserve the control of power by the southern Tutsi-Hima. The rebellion demonstrated that cosmetic changes such as having more Hutu in top government positions were not enough to satisfy the opposition which demanded more

sharing in the instruments of power, especially the military. The 1991 events demonstrated also that the Hutu rebellion had changed tactics, opting to confront the military head on.

### *The 1993-ongoing war*

The ongoing war that started in 1993 following the assassination of President Ndadaye is by far the most vivid illustration of distributional conflict. Four key factors illustrate how this war is a distributional conflict. First, President Ndadaye announced his intention to reform the military to make it more representative of the ethnic and regional makeup of the society, as part of his plan to build what he called a *Burundi Nouveau* (New Burundi). Throughout the period of transition toward democracy which started in 1989, the military had systematically exhibited strong opposition to relinquishing power. Second, the Ndadaye regime quickly proceeded to replace former government officials in a drive to establish control of power but also to fulfil campaign promises. For outgoing government officials and their allies in the private sector, these reforms meant the loss of the means of extracting rents, which explains the wide support that the military coup received among the Tutsi civilian elite.

Third, the massive return of Hutu refugees and their demand for jobs and restitution of their land and other property constituted a major threat for members of the Tutsi ethnic group who had appropriated the property of the Hutu who fled the country. Reparation and restitution had never crossed the minds of the many Tutsi who had enriched themselves from looting the property of orphans and widows of their Hutu neighbours.

Fourth, the Ndadaye government was also a threat to the Tutsi business sector. As discussed throughout this paper, under the patrimonial regimes, connections with the government were essential for success in the business sector. These advantages were to evaporate with the institution of a broad-based government.

The nature of the war on the ground and its duration also demonstrate its character as a distributional conflict rather than just a Hutu-Tutsi conflict. The multiplicity of belligerents demonstrates that political rivalry matters probably as much as—if not more than—ethnic rivalry. Political parties and rebel groups have split up as leaders fail to agree on mechanisms for rent sharing.

## **4 Making peace work: strategies for post-conflict reconstruction**

### **4.1 The political problem**

As we have argued throughout this paper, a correct diagnosis of the conflict in Burundi must acknowledge the centrality of the political problem, namely the issue of balance of power between ethnic groups and regions. To achieve lasting peace, the country's leaders must find strategies to overcome the legacies of political imbalance. We emphasize three dimensions of the political problem: the military, ethno-regional balance, and the constitutional process and independence of the judiciary.

Building lasting peace will require transformation of the military for the purpose of making it an a-political institution. The accord signed in November 2003 between the transitional government of Burundi (TGB) and the CNDD-FDD for a ceasefire and

mechanisms for organization of the new national defence was a history-making event. The agreement envisages the formation of a defence force that is balanced at all level. The restructuring process has already commenced but a few issues remain. The first issue is that the accord does not include the Front National de Liberation (FNL, National Liberation Front) as this group has refused to take part into the negotiations. Any progress in the peace process means further marginalization of this group. The problem is that the FNL still has the capacity to disrupt peace even though it has no chance of withstanding an open confrontation with the restructured national defence force. For the sake of peace stability it is vital to find ways of convincing if not forcing the FNL to put down its arms and take part in the new democratic process.

The second critical question is that of sustainability of the army. Attempts to accommodate all the political tendencies would result in an unsustainable size of the military. This means that a large proportion of the regular army and the rebel forces need to be demobilized and integrated into civilian life. This especially concerns the estimated 14,000 child soldiers in the rebel forces (Ngaruko and Nkurunziza 2003). Downsizing the army is a politically sensitive enterprise and it can pose a security threat if it is not executed. The country will need significant financial and technical assistance from the international community to manage the reform of the army and to finance the demobilization of former combatants.

The analysis of the causes of the conflicts in this paper implies that the process of peacebuilding needs to take into account both ethnicity and regional balance in the design of new institutions. However, representation should not be reduced to mechanical quotas based on the demographic size of ethnic groups. The objective is to protect the interests of both the majority as well as the minority groups.

The challenge in the post-conflict period will be to establish agencies of restraint that transcend political cycles. These agencies are mainly the constitution and the legal system. The legal system has always been partisan and served as an integral part of the military regime's repressive apparatus. The constitution has had little meaning due to the universal veto power of the president. Consolidation of peace will require independence of these agencies of restraint. In particular, the leadership of these agencies should be either elected directly or confirmed by representative bodies.

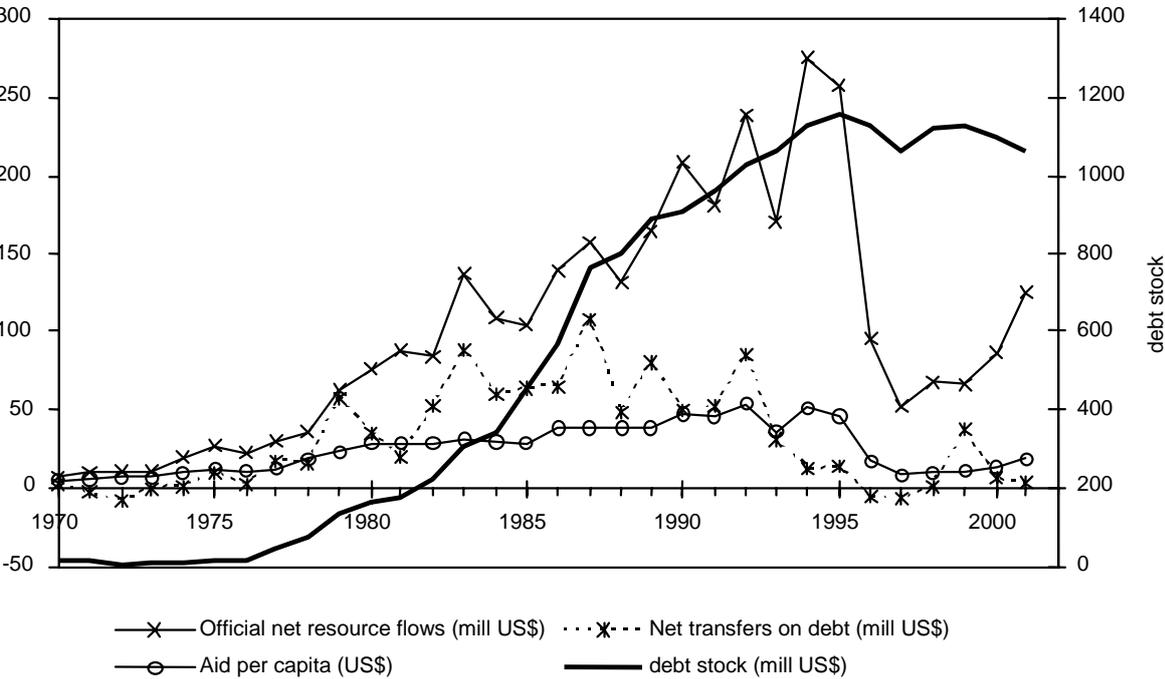
## **4.2 The economic problem**

Building lasting peace requires solving a number of critical economic problems facing the country. Some of these problems are part of the causes of conflict while others are a result of the conflict. But even those economic problems that may seem unrelated to conflict need to be addressed to ameliorate the standards of living of the population and overcome poverty. Poverty may not cause conflict, but a solid economy is essential for political stability and peace consolidation. Poverty produces two effects that are detrimental to peacebuilding. First, poverty erodes the relationship between the people and the state. A state that is economically impotent is unable to perform its other essential non-economic roles, including enforcing the rule of law. Second, poverty increases the temptation for using the state as a source of wealth accumulation. When the returns to investment in politics exceed the returns to labour and capital in the private sector, agents tend to channel energy and resources towards capturing the state,

which inevitably creates instability and leads to conflict. Consequently, economic performance is a vital ingredient for building lasting peace.

Even as the country struggles to finance its immense reconstruction needs, its limited resources are drained by debt service. In 2003, Burundi spent 65.8 per cent of its exports revenues on debt service, up from 39.3 per cent in 2000. By comparison the government spent US\$3 per capita on health care in 2001, but paid US\$5 per capita on servicing debt owed to official creditors alone. Even as debt accumulated, less funds stayed in the country while large proportion of the resources were transferred abroad (Figure 4). Official development aid (ODA) and other forms of official assistance dried out since the start of the 1993 conflict. The best way for the international community to help Burundi achieve lasting peace is to write off its debts and to increase ODA to finance economic recovery.<sup>15</sup> Debt write-offs and new aid obviously should be conditional on commitment to democratic governance by the new leadership. In particular, implementation of the Arusha and Pretoria accords should be a key criterion for aid disbursement. Pressure for debt write-offs for post-conflict reconstruction has gained momentum with the United States’ pressure for cancellation of Iraqi’s debt on the basis of the *odious debt* doctrine. Obviously the same argument applies to the majority of developing countries, including Burundi.<sup>16</sup> The population of these countries should not bear the burden of debts that were used to finance regimes that oppressed them. The

Figure 4  
Debt Indicators and ODS (million US\$), Burundi



<sup>15</sup> In Ndikumana (2004b), we argue that debt relief alone will not be enough to help developing countries ‘graduate’ from aid dependence. Debt relief should be accompanied by increases in aid to allow developing countries to grow faster and increase their rates of saving and investment.

<sup>16</sup> See Boyce and Ndikumana (2003a; 2003b) for a detailed discussion of the odious debt argument.

recent decision by the G8 government to write off more debt for HIPCs is a promising sign. However, more needs to be done to enlarge to pool of relief recipients and to establish mechanisms that prevent new cycles of debt crises.

### **4.3 Education**

In the post-conflict era, education policy has to pursue two objectives that are equally important for peacebuilding: increase the efficiency in resource allocation to maximize human capital formation and promote equity in access to education across ethnic groups and regions. We emphasize two strategies that could help in this transformation of the education system. The first strategy is to design and implement a financial aid scheme for college education. Since recently, there has been an expansion in private higher education in the country, which has contributed to alleviating pressure on the public university. However, private universities are expensive and the majority of the population cannot afford them. Moreover, nowhere in the world has any country been able to establish a solid higher education system without a network of first class public universities. With the support of the development assistance community, the government needs to establish a subsidized loan programme that allows all academically qualifying students to afford education. The government will need to design mechanisms that allow maximum repayment of student loans to ensure sustainability of the programme. The second policy is to increase the decentralization of secondary education by increasing subsidies to district high schools (*collèges communaux*). Foreign assistance should consider the two objectives of reform of the education system as central to decisions regarding allocation and disbursement of development assistance.

## **5 Conclusion**

We have argued that unequal distribution of national wealth and monopolization of power are the primary causes of civil wars in Burundi. Civil wars do not just happen; even the existence of potentially antagonistic groups need not generate conflicts. Civil wars are the result of discrimination and exclusion, which in the case of Burundi operated not only along ethnic lines but also regional lines. Moreover, just as conflicts do not just arise, they need not reoccur. Conflicts will restart when their root causes are not addressed. These root causes need to be addressed by implementing economic policies and institutional reforms aimed at achieving equity in access to power and national resources. The overriding goal of these reforms should be the protection of the rights of all groups, minorities as well as majorities.

While the new Burundian leadership bears the burden of crafting and implementing political and economic reforms, the international community also has a critical role to play for the success of these reforms. Given the long history of patrimonialism, certain interest groups may invest in protecting the privileges acquired under the old regimes and sabotage the reforms. The experience of 1993 with the assassination of the democratically elected president demonstrated that this legacy of patrimonialism is a serious constraint to policy reform. The international community can use its leverage through financial aid as well as military intervention to contain such sectarian tendencies on all sides.

The international community should also assist in financing peacebuilding and economic recovery. However, politically blind interventions are detrimental to peacebuilding. The development assistance community should scrutinize the distributional impacts of foreign aid. For example, aid to education can play a critical role in helping the country to correct the effects of the legacy of exclusion. In particular, the country would benefit immensely from aid channelled to funding complete decentralization of high school education and a student loan programme for tertiary education. Such an orientation of aid to education would serve to alleviate the pressure on the government budget and contribute to equalization of educational opportunities across ethnic groups and regions.

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