

Uncovering Relationships between Resource Governance, Public Authority and (In)Security

In this blog, Tom Kirk, Jeroen Cuvelier and Koen Vlassenroot explore the JSRP's Evidence Paper on 'Resources, Conflict and Governance' and briefly outline how the programme's research is beginning to address the paper's concerns over a lack of literature on resource governance in conflict-affected areas.

The JSRP has focussed on places – including parts of the **DRC**, **South Sudan**, **CAR** and **northern Uganda** – where the state is weak or physically absent, and (low) levels of violence or conflict affect everyday life. It has sought to uncover how security and justice are often provided by local and international actors working beyond, in-between, and in collaboration with state actors. And it has argued that outsiders wishing to intervene or run developmental initiatives in such places must first understand the dynamics of local-level security and justice demands, arrangements and outcomes.

As part of this research, the JSRP has sought to examine the relationship between resource governance in conflict-affected areas by both state and non-state actors, and the provision of security and justice. Indeed, the (in)security of local populations is often intimately tied to different actors claiming public authority and the legitimacy to extract natural resources or impose taxes and fines. However, to understand what is already known about such processes the programme began with a systematic and peer-led review of the literature on the links between resources and resource governance, and conflict.

The review came to the conclusion that 'Many of the existing theories [on the relationships between resource governance and (in)security] rely on normative assumptions and lack empirical support'. Furthermore, much of the available data concerning resource governance by non-state actors is from places that cannot be considered 'conflict-affected'. Worryingly, this weak evidence base leads to the persistence of policies that deploy the idea of a '**resource-curse**' and of combatants as rational actors motivated by '**greed**'. The practical consequence is that in order to stop violence, it is believed that cutting the assumed links between armed actors and resources is the most effective strategy.

To counteract these dominant narratives and provide solid empirical evidence, the paper identified three areas for the JSRP's subsequent research to focus on: hybrid resource governance, rebel resource governance, and the position and strategies of conflict-affected populations in their interactions with local power-holders and their daily efforts to make ends meet in sometimes extremely difficult conditions.

Before proceeding, it is important to say a few words about 'hybrid resource governance', as this was an analytical concept the JSRP explored during the programme and later threw some caution on (as explained in [this blog](#)). At the time of the JSRP's establishment, the idea of '**hybridity**' was popular among those seeking to explore what works in 'fragile' or conflict-affected places, as opposed to merely describing the distance between reality and some ideal model of statehood. They argued that it helped them to centre the analytical attention on arrangements with both formal and informal components, or put another way, on governance practices shaped by both the state's and society's norms. Researchers in this field argued that such arrangements can be instituted by groups of non-state actors working alone or in collaboration with state actors.

The review found that whilst this idea was part of a growing body of literature on interactions between state and non-state actors in conflict-affected areas, this literature has little to say about the legitimacy of the resulting governance arrangements or how conflict-actors deal with pre-

existing informal systems of resource exploitation and control. Whilst the review found quite a number of studies documenting the income-generating strategies of rebel groups, few of them explored how or when these practices may lead to the provision of public goods such as security and justice. There was also little research on how local populations position themselves to cope, live with or benefit from hybrid resource governance arrangements.

Although many of the conflict-affected places the JSRP has studied often appear to be political or institutional voids, it has long been recognised by local people and those working on the ground that they harbour complex social orders that connect local populations to states and international actors. Indeed, multiple claimants to public authority, along with their networks, are often engaged in intensely creative, and sometimes violent, contests over symbolic and material resources. Thus, they deserve attention as 'laboratories of change' in which new ideas, modes of governance and institutional forms meet with the ambitions of local and international centres of power. In many of these processes, stateness remains an extremely powerful notion to give meaning to governance experiments. Our research on armed groups and resource governance indicates that this is mainly because it resonates with local social imaginaries of public order.

Vlassenroot and Buscher's study of Goma in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is illustrative of this approach. It sets the historical background to Goma's boom periods in the 1980s through mining and illicit trade, and again during the Congolese wars (1996-2003) as rebel groups used the city as the centre of their territorial and political control. At the same time, the city evolved into a major centre of the region's natural resource flow, which were mobilised to finance armed groups' campaigns. During the latter period Goma began to be seen as a 'place of opportunity', attracting settlers from across the region, including waves of refugees and international aid agencies. The city was also cut-off from the central state for long stretches, which caused it to experiment with its own forms of regulatory order. The authors argue that contests over these forms have been as much about economic gain as about the survival of different groups and the creation of their identities. Indeed, they suggest that processes of identity formation in places like Goma should be studied as windows onto how populations perceive themselves in relation to broader state building projects and regional developments.

However, in situations in which one country's military occupies another's territory, the relationship between public authority, identity and resources can coalesce into much more overtly violent forms of political order. This is illustrated by **another JSRP study** that examined the rise of 'entrepreneurs of insecurity' during the Ugandan military's repeated interventions into the Eastern DRC. The authors argue that during the Second Congo War (1998-2003), the relationship between conflict, Ugandan military leaders, Congolese businessmen, local armed groups, populations and resources changed. No longer were the latter used merely to finance military objectives; they were the objectives. Furthermore, security alliances that focussed on protecting and extorting the local population sprung up, allowing Ugandan forces to become *de facto* public authorities in some areas and feared abusers in others.

Whilst the Ugandans were largely able to reincorporate the networks that sustained these practices into the central state after the war, the DRC continues to struggle with subsuming former rebels and other armed actors and their economic networks into its army. Indeed, **Baaz and Verweijen's paper** reveals how different military entrepreneurs and their networks are able to bargain with the state over the price and terms of their integration into, or exit from, the military. This freedom stems from the state's limited ability to force allegiance, and the local symbolic and material resource bases many of these networks enjoy. Indeed, the embeddedness of networks in the DRC's peripheral borderlands and their ability to materially sustain themselves beyond the state provides a significant challenge to state centralizing projects.

It is clear from this brief foray into the JSRP's rich studies that creating theories around the relationship between resource governance arrangements in conflict-affected places, populations and developmental outcomes (livelihoods, peace or security) is difficult. Indeed, their diversity necessarily complicates easy predications as to whether these dynamics will lead to peace and prosperity, or fragmentation and conflict. The same research also warns that we should be careful

with building conflict mediating policies based on weak assumptions. Nonetheless, we can draw a few guiding principles for those investigating similar dynamics:

Firstly, these relationships need to be seen over significant periods of time. This is because their nature often changes as different groups bargain with one another and resource governance arrangements come to reflect the balance of power. Secondly, the contemporary legitimacy of such arrangements cannot be assumed without on the ground empirical information. Indeed, in some situations populations may view the innovative governance and public goods provision by non-state groups as a fair price for their extractive activities, whilst in others they may merely feel extorted. Lastly, the state's ability to integrate resource extracting non-state groups will vary widely from context to context, and often be dependent on the groups' links to other national and international actors. The challenge remains to build a significant body of case material to draw out trends across contexts.

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Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the Justice and Security Research Programme, nor of the London School of Economics.

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