

Agriculture and Civil Conflict in Sub Saharan Africa¹

Isin Tellioglu², Harald von Witzke³

ABSTRACT

Among conflict studies explaining conflict by economic factors, none has focused on the role of the agriculture. Some research has already shown the role of international prices of main food staples but the literature still lack the explanation driven by country-level domestic/import prices or import preference structure that affect the composition of imports and total amount spent on food. Sub-Saharan Africa is one of the regions which lacks the agricultural productive capacity and has developed a dependency on agricultural commodity imports especially after 1980s. In this study, we analyze the effects of agricultural commodity import price levels on the probability of conflict focusing on Sub Saharan African countries for the years between 1990 and 2009. For this purpose, a new, weighted aggregate index representing a unique price for imports of different agricultural commodities is developed. Controlling for other confounding variates, results show a significant positive effect of agricultural import price increases on the probability of conflict onset for these countries. On the other hand, this contribution effect is not significant for price volatility. This research has two main policy implications: First, policy makers should take absolute price levels rather than price volatility aboard if the objective is the prevent future conflict occurrences. Second, lagging agricultural transition needs to be completed in Sub Saharan Africa to neutralize the agricultural imports' burden on the whole economic performance and to increase agricultural export earnings as food safety/quality impediments are important barriers to these regions' trade performance.

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²Research Fellow, Department of Agricultural Economics, Humboldt University of Berlin; ³Professor, Department of Agricultural Economics, Humboldt University of Berlin.