

**Understanding the tipping point of urban conflict:**  
violence, cities and poverty reduction in the developing world

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**Understanding the tipping point of  
urban conflict: conceptual  
framework paper**

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## **Working Paper Series**

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# Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. Objectives , scope and methodology of the UTP research project</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>3. The conceptual approach</b>	<b>3</b>
i. Tipping Points	3
ii. Value Chains	6
<b>4. Incorporating tipping points and value chains into the UTP research methodology</b>	<b>8</b>
i. Conflict and violence	8
ii. Conceptualising the relationship between immediate ‘small’ events and broader contextual issues	9
iii. Tipping point characterisation and measurement	9
iv. Sequencing of ‘tipping point’ process	11
v. Levels of analysis of violence chains	11
<b>5. Concluding comment</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>6. Appendices</b>	
Appendix 1: An example of a value chain	14
Appendix 2: Roadmap of categories, types and manifestations of violence in urban areas	15
<b>7. References</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>8. Figures</b>	
Figure 1: Framework of the Urban Tipping Point project	2
Figure 2: Example of violence chain	12
<b>9. Boxes</b>	
Box 1: Recent 2010-11 media usage of Gladwell’s concept of the tipping point	4
<b>10. Tables</b>	
Table 1: UTP field sites	3
Table 2: Conventional determining factors of tipping points	10
Table 3: Alternative determining factors of tipping points	10
Table 4: Potential structural/long term factors that can tip conflict into violence	11
Table 5: Identification of context specific tipping points	11



## **1. Introduction**

This conceptual paper provides a background document for the research project on 'Understanding the Tipping Points of Urban Conflict' (UTP). Its objective is twofold: first, to briefly outline the objectives of the project; and second, to elaborate on the conceptual framework underpinning the research. The project is grounded in recent debates relating to conflict and violence, arguing that while cities are inherently conflictual spaces, this conflict is generally managed more or less peacefully through a range of social, cultural and political mechanisms. At the same time the reasons as to why and when conflict tips over into chronic, generalised or overt violence in some cities and not in others are poorly understood. Globally increasing levels of violence in cities, whether based on endemic gang, crime or drug-related violence, gender-based attacks, ethnic strife, terrorism, or outright warfare, make this a critical issue to consider, particularly as it is widely recognised that violence has implications not only for country and metropolitan level economic development, but also for the livelihoods and well-being of those poor households and communities who are often at the frontline of urban conflict. Preventing and reducing violence is therefore a key priority to be taken into account in designing poverty reduction initiatives and social protection measures for the poor.

Over the past few years, a particular conventional wisdom has emerged within development policy and research circles concerning urban violence, associating it with four key factors. First and foremost poverty - and falling income in particular - has been identified as a critical driver of violent conflict, predominantly at country level. Similarly, the demographic emergence of large youth cohorts has been extensively described as increasing the risk that societies will experience outbreak of internal armed violence. The failure to treat women's security and safety in cities as a specific concern has been widely blamed for the persistence of generalised patterns of gendered violence. Finally, the rise of local governance voids, whereby the erosion of state authority leads to the absence of the rule of law and the informal emergence of "violent entrepreneurs" within local communities, has long been pointed to as a key factor to understanding the logic of outbreaks of violence, particularly in slums and poor areas of cities around the world. Despite a range of widely applied policy initiatives to address this problem, urban violence, fear, and insecurity continue to proliferate globally. This suggests that the conventional wisdom underlying current violence-reduction interventions is flawed; it also highlights the importance of exploring the validity and policy relevance of factors conventionally associated with the propagation of urban violence associated with these four key factors, namely poverty, youth bulges, political exclusion, and gender-based insecurity.

## **2. Objectives, scope and methodology of the UTP research project**

Recent research has sought to determine the 'tipping point' of urban conflict – i.e. the moment when violence breaks out on a large scale. This has generally been conceived in quantitative terms, with an increase in poverty, the number of youth, levels of political exclusion, or gender-based insecurity beyond a certain threshold is seen to lead to a sudden change in social conditions. While recognising that quantitative factors are important, the UTP research project examines how urban conflict can also tip over into violence as a result of qualitative factors, such as the particular articulation of one or more contextual factors, or the involvement of specific groups or individuals in violence-related processes. The project, therefore, seeks to understand the nature of both quantitative and qualitative tipping points, identifying how they can best be measured and the processes that generate them. Ultimately, its purpose is to determine the range of potential means to prevent urban conflict from tipping over into violence.

The UTP project also explores how different forms of violence that are generated by tipping point processes interact with each other, such that they form a 'violence chain' or, in other words, have a knock-on effect. The notion of a 'violence chain' is inspired by the concept of a commodity chain, and is used to highlight the way that violence operates systemically, and involves a range of interconnected processes – that may not necessarily be immediately obvious. A violence chain may involve three levels of analysis: the components of the chain (different types of violence), the way these articulate together (processes), and the way they are embedded within a broader institutional setting (context). The UTP project framework can be schematically represented as follows (see Figure 1):



**Figure 1: Framework of the Urban Tipping Point Project**

The ultimate aim of the research is to identify policy entry points in both tipping point processes and violence chains that allows for the implementation of initiatives to reduce the risk of violence, or break strategic linkages within violence chains. Such changes may be modest, and therefore more effectively implemented within poor urban communities as well as at the metropolitan level. This contrasts with initiatives to address 'macro-level' structural issues such as poverty or demographic bulges.

The research is being carried out in four cities, chosen because they are – or have been in the recent past – each associated with one of the four key factors conventionally assumed to lead to urban conflict tipping into violence. The fact that a particular city has been chosen because of its association with a particular factor does not preclude that other factors may be relevant. Therefore so-called paradigmatic factors are starting points, more than anything else, and the context may include more than one factor. Moreover, not all of the cities display high levels of general violence; two do, while two do not. This choice enables the research project to explore not only the reasons why urban conflict tips into violence as a result of particular factors, but also the potential reasons why it does not.



**Table 1: UTP field sites**

<b>City</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Paradigmatic factor</b>	<b>Level of violence</b>
Dili	Timor Leste	Youth	High
Patna	India	Poverty	Low
Mombasa	Kenya	Political exclusion	High
Santiago	Chile	Gender-based insecurity	Low

The research project combines quantitative city-level secondary data, together with qualitative sub-city level primary research on perceptions of people affected by violence. This is intended to highlight the gaps between quantitative data and the perceptions of local community members. The fact that the objectives of the research project includes new concepts as yet not related to violence studies means that the methodology is highly exploratory and untested. The sequencing of the research methodology means that city profiles are undertaken first, providing the frame for the sub-city data collection.

The city profiles are intended to provide city-level information concerning violence. This is intended to contribute to a comparative evaluation of the four cities, and the urban violence trends affecting them. In some cases profiles may also assist in the selection of communities in which to carry out the more detailed qualitative research which will aim to apprehend the causal mechanisms underlying tipping point processes, as well as the potential knock-on effects of the resulting, i.e. the development of violence chains. The qualitative research-based sub-city studies are intended to better understand how local individuals, household and communities perceive different types of conflict and the tipping point factors that result in violence, as well as the knock-on consequences of such violence. This will involve in-depth field research in one to three different communities in each of the cities, depending on the nature of the city, the factors to be focused on, as well as practical considerations.

### **3. The conceptual approach**

The research project introduces two conceptual concepts of particular importance in the sub-city studies, namely tipping points and value chains, neither of which to date have been robustly theorised in violence studies. Since it cannot *a priori* be assumed that either concept will be conceptually or explanatorily useful in this comparative violence study, it is necessary to start by providing a brief background review of each concept

#### ***i. Tipping points***

The notion of the tipping point refers to small shifts in human behaviour that result in radically altered circumstances within a short period of time. As Gladwell and others have put it, "Small events and actions can induce big changes" (Gladwell 2000, Walby 2009). Gladwell has argued:

*The notion of the tipping point comes from epidemiology, and refers to the moment a given social process becomes generalized rather than specific in a rapid rather than gradual manner. This is usually seen to occur as a result of this social process acquiring a certain critical mass and crossing a particular threshold, but ultimately it is "the possibility of sudden change [that] is at the center of the idea of the Tipping point" (Gladwell 2000: 12).*

The concept of a tipping point has been used quantitatively by social scientists for a number of decades. For instance, in the 1970s, Thomas C. Schelling (1972) described the sudden, rapid movement of white people from central city districts in US cities to suburban areas which occurred when a certain number of non-

white people migrated into their area. The quantitative fraction of non-white people that leads white people to leave their district represented the “racial tipping point” (Easterly 2009, Schelling 1972). A topical academic example comes from Beall et al (2010) who discuss the “statistical tipping point” of urbanisation identified as the ‘inexorability of urbanisation and the imperative for an urban perspective on development.’ (p. 3). They argue that the world is increasingly characterised by urban characteristics such as density (agglomeration effects) diversity (heterogeneity in urban population) and dynamics (migration).

**Box 1: Recent 2010-2011 media usage of Gladwell’s concept of the tipping point**

The tipping point concept has been popularized in media reports on the 2011 economic crisis; Ezra Klein in the Washington Post (5 October 2011) in his article “A tipping point for Occupy Wall Street” described how protests in Wall Street tipped into a movement of wide popular support with public figures such as Representative John Larson showing sympathy with the protests; in discussing the US deficit, Jeff Sessions, also in the Washington Post (24 January 2011), in his article on “Economic policy that’s struck in reverse”, argued that to ensure that current US deficit spending does not tip into an overall economic deficit requires a radical change in the rationale of US financial policy.

Media reports have frequently elicited the concept of tipping points to report current political changes in the so-called Arabic Spring; the Los Angeles Times article “Tunisia as a tipping point” (19 January 2011), for instance, depicted the resignation of Tunisia’s dictator and the call for representative democracy within the country as tipping point for democratisation in the entire Arabic World. In the case of Egypt, the notion of a tipping point was used before actual regime changes occurred; thus Jim Michaels in USA Today (1 February 2011) reported that the sudden increase in Egypt’s democracy movement to more than one million protesters including members of the military was a sign that Egypt has reached a tipping point scenario in which a return to the old political order is impossible.

Tipping point scenarios are also popular in reports on conflict escalation. For instance, the International Crisis Group (8 May 2011) in describing “Sudan: Abyei at a Dangerous Tipping Point”, identified that the Sudanese conflict was likely to tip into violent confrontation, partly because of the sudden involvement of security forces in South and Northern Sudanese conflict parties. In analysing the killing of governor Salman Taseer by his police body guard in Pakistan’s Punjab, Financial Times authors, Amy Kazmin and Farhan Bokhari, wrote ‘Many fear Pakistan,..., has crossed a tipping point, whereby liberal voices will be silenced, while Islamists...increasingly chart the country’s future. This is a kind of pivotal moment’ (8<sup>th</sup> January 2011)

Climate change is another topical phenomenon in which the concept of a tipping point has become popular in the media. Thus Reuters’ David Fogerty ( 3 February 2011) uses the term to discuss potential radical changes in Australian climate change policy, arguing that events such as cyclone Yasi are likely to bring more urgency into political debates around climate change in Australia. Meanwhile, some media reports highlight that the notion of the tipping point is not adequate for all climate change scenarios. In contrast, the New York Times article ,“No ‘Tipping Point’ for Sea Ice in Polar Bears’ Future” (15 December 2010), depicts arctic ice as melting but not in a dramatic and quick way, and hence not conforming to Gladwell’s notion of the tipping point.

More recently Malcolm Gladwell’s book, *“The Tipping Point: How little things can make a big difference”* (2000), not only popularised the term introducing it into public dialogue and media, to discuss themes such as the economic crisis, the Arab Spring, issues around current conflicts and climate change but also highlighted its use in qualitative terms (see Box 1). This popularisation of the term, not only journalistically but also in the academic literature, makes it important to identify how rigorous its usage is.

The concept of a tipping point is influenced by two theoretical disciplines; first, epidemiology, where just as certain diseases change rapidly and through nonlinear patterns into virus advocates, so the tipping point concept highlights the fact that particular social phenomena can rapidly become an epidemic, if certain conditions are fulfilled (Gladwell 2000, Russill 2008); second, though not mentioned by Gladwell, the tipping point concept is strongly linked to the concept of path dependency. Path dependency "(...) means that events that occur at one moment in time have consequences at later times, and that the order in which events and developments occur has consequences. Path dependent processes can involve embedding the outcome of social events at one moment in time in an institution that endures over time, thus carrying the effect of the past onto the present and future." (Walby 2009: 87).

Research on path dependency mainly assesses critical turning points that alter the pathway an existing system is following (Arthur 1994, Capra 1997, Mahoney 2000, Pierson 2000).

*"A critical turning point is an event that changes the trajectory of development onto a new path. It is an event at a point in time that has effects upon the balance within a system, resulting in its internal reconfiguration so as to establish a new path or direction of development."* (Walby 2009: 421).

A critical turning point can represent a long-term process, characterised by significant and complex actions which induce significant changes to a system. In addition, a critical turning point can also refer to a small shift in human behaviour which results in a radical change of an existing system in a short period of time. Thus a critical turning point can be, but does not necessarily need to be a tipping point (Walby 2009).

Gladwell (2000) identifies three general principles which are able to induce a tipping point, i.e. the conditions under which a tipping process occurs. In this way he assesses whether, and how, a social process or product tips into a social epidemic. First is the '*Law of the Few*'; this highlights how specific groups of people can promote a tipping point. Following the 80/20 economics principle, with its connotation that approximately 20 per cent of people do 80 per cent of all the work, Gladwell argues that only a small minority of distinguished, knowledgeable and social individuals have the ability to create social epidemics. He identifies these as connectors (people who have strong and weak ties to all important people and can bring them together), mavens (people with deep knowledge who are willing to spread their own knowledge to others) and salesmen (people who can effectively sell an idea). Together, connectors, mavens, and salesmen are considered to have a disproportionate influence over the spread of social phenomena. Thus it is necessary only to recruit a few of these people in order to create and stimulate a tipping point scenario.

Gladwell's second general principle is the '*Stickiness Factor*'. To attract the 'masses', Gladwell argues that a message needs to be sticky. This makes it necessary to invent messages that are easy to understand, that are irresistible, or that compel tipping points at the right moment. Gladwell illustrates the stickiness factor with examples from children's TV shows<sup>1</sup>. His third principle, the '*Power of Context*', argues that external (social, economic, cultural and political)

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<sup>1</sup> Gladwell (2000) compares the children TV series 'Sesame Street' and 'Blue's Cues' and highlights the fact that their strategies of repetitive storytelling, and extended thinking breaks, represents a successful 'sticky' way to reach children.

contexts significantly influence human behaviour. Instead of ascribing fixed characteristic traits to human beings, Gladwell claims that human action is strongly influenced by particular circumstances and contexts that characterise a place at a particular moment in time. Thus, in order to induce a tipping point it is necessary to change a particular context. Gladwell (2000) illustrates his point through the example of Rudolph Giuliani's crime fighting methods<sup>2</sup>.

In summary, Gladwell's conceptualisation maintains that to stimulate a sudden change (a tipping point), it is necessary to change the messenger (the 'power of the few'), to change the message itself (the 'stickiness factor'), and to change the context of the message (the 'power of context'). Gladwell's tipping point concept illustrates that major social changes can occur through small events and actions, with its sheer simplicity explaining its increasing popularity in the public media. For instance, his claims that by cleaning up graffiti's and punishing minor crimes severely, the municipality of New York could reduce crime rates significantly, follows the same logic as Schelling's (1972) revelation that a small amount of non-white people moving into an area can lead an entire white population to leave this area.

While Gladwell's conceptualisation has been criticised in terms of the way he picks examples to prove his point<sup>3</sup>, more importantly, a number of academics have highlighted the fact that the tipping point concept in itself is unable to sufficiently explain real world phenomena such as social change (Easterly 2009, Russill 2008, Walby 2009). Its single focus on certain small events which happen in a short timeframe has been criticised as excluding potential explanatory variables, which could equally represent the undermining reasons for social change.

## ***ii. Value chains***

The notion of a 'violence chain' has been developed in this research project. Inspired by the concept of a commodity chain, it is used to highlight the way that violence may operate systemically, and involve a range of interconnected processes – that may not necessarily be immediately obvious. As mentioned above, violence chain involves three levels of analysis: the components of the chain (different types of violence), the way these articulate together (processes), and the way they are embedded within a broader institutional setting (context).

By way of background it is useful to briefly review the relevant value chain debates. In essence a value chain maps the sequence of productive activities (value added) leading to and supporting the end use of a product (Sturgeon 2001)<sup>4</sup>. The term chain is a metaphor for connectedness. Hence, the term 'chain' refers to the fact that most goods and services are produced by a complex and sequenced set of activities with different activities split across varying economic enterprises (Humphrey and Navas-Aleman 2010). The term value refers to processes within the chain which create and increase the value of a product (Gibbon et al 2008) (Appendix 1 provides an example of a value chain). In an

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<sup>2</sup> Relying on the 'broken windows theory', which suggests that crime is the result of disorder (i.e. graffiti's, street petty crimes), New York's mayor Rudolph Giuliani introduced policies to remove graffiti's and other minor public disturbances in order to solve bigger problems of crime and homicide rates.

<sup>3</sup> Gladwell does not introduce alternative examples. Russill, for instance, (2008) argues that Gladwell frames his tipping point model through the selective use of particular examples. It is likely that other examples exist, which though they fulfill Gladwell's principles, do not lead to tipping points.

<sup>4</sup> Prior to the use of the term value chain, researchers relied on the term commodity chain to assess sequences of productive activities that lead to the production of a good or service. In fact the two terms are strongly related, generally referring to the same set of connections and activities.

increasingly globalised economic market, value chains tend to go beyond national frontiers and become global<sup>5</sup>.

Amongst the extensive body of theoretical work on value chains, four approaches predominate, in the following historical order. First, the *Global Commodity Chains Approach* originally developed by Hopkins and Wallerstein (1986), which assessed commodity chains from a world systems perspective. With its focus on the role of the state in shaping global production systems through tariffs or local content rules (Bair 2005, Sturgeon 2008), its emphasis was on the characteristics and features of the world economy.

Second, was a redefined *Global Commodity Chains Approach* which departed from Wallerstein's world system approach, and shifted the focus from the state, to the actors in the chain itself, their interrelationships, and the relative power that some firms are able to exert on the actions and capabilities of their affiliates and trading partners (Sturgeon 2008: 8). Gereffi (1994, 1999) identified global value chains along four dimensions: input – output (the process of transforming raw materials into final consumer products); geography (the spatial dispersion of a given chain.); governance (the governing structure which coordinates a commodity chain); and institutional (the institutional context, both within the chain [contractual agreements between firms] and to a smaller degree outside the chain [international trade agreements], that influence a given chain)<sup>6</sup>.

Third, was the *Global Value Chains (GVC) Approach*, popular by the 1990s, along with international production systems, global production networks, global production systems, global interaction and networks of firms (Bair 2005, Sturgeon 2008). The wide variety of approaches lead researchers to identify the need to develop a common terminology, agreeing on the term "global value chain analysis" as a way of promoting a research community studying global production networks ([www.globalvaluechain.org](http://www.globalvaluechain.org)). The GVC approach focuses on three central dimensions of analysis; first, the character of the linkages between tasks and stages in the chain/ value added activities; second, the distribution of power within the chain/ firms; and third, the role of institutions in structuring business relationships<sup>7</sup>.

In turn the GVC approach has been criticised as focusing too narrowly on individual firms and individual value chains, and failing to take into account wider contextual factors including the role of international trade regulations, the politico-economic context of countries and trade unions, as well as current theoretical streams on capitalism, that implicitly or explicitly influence the characteristics of a value chain (Bair 2005, Humphrey and Navas-Aleman 2010). In addition, although the GVC approach identifies the importance of helping "poorer" segments of a given chain through upgrading processes, it remains

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<sup>5</sup> Gibbon *et al* (2008), for instance, define a global value chain as a "(...) set of intra-sectoral linkages between firms and other actors through which this geographical and organizational reconfiguration of global production is taking place." (p 318)

<sup>6</sup> In addition, Gereffi (1994; 1999) focused on the role of lead firms who function as drivers of any commodity chain, identifying the two categories of commodity chains as producer-driven (lead firms that guide the commodity chain are generally based within capital intensive industries which lead firms generally create vertically integrated commodity chains, and buyer-driven (lead firms that guide the commodity chain are generally powerful large retailers, such as Walmart, and which often create commodity chains which weakly connect a set of independent firms.

<sup>7</sup> Two additional differences between Gereffi's global commodity chains approach and the GVC approach includes first, the fact that the GVC approach does not distinguish between buyer- and producer-driven chains, arguing that this typology 'was based on a static, empirically situated view of technology and barriers to entry, but both are dynamic because of technological change and firm- and industry-level learning' (Sturgeon 2008: 9; Gereffi *et al* 2005, Gibbon *et al* 2008). Second, the GVC approach aims to identify mechanisms for "poor" firms to upgrade their position within the value chain<sup>7</sup>.

widely unclear who actually benefits from these upgrading processes (Bair 2005)<sup>8</sup>. Overall, these criticisms highlight the need for a wider political economy perspective in GVC approaches, taking account of regulatory (multilateral trade agreements), institutional (role of IFIs), and systemic (neoliberal) factors. Furthermore, it is necessary to identify whether value chain interventions (i.e. upgrading) contribute to the reduction of poverty and improve the livelihoods of local communities (Humphrey and Navas-Aleman 2010).

#### **4. Incorporating tipping points and value chains into the UTP research methodology**

Underlying the UTP project is the assumption that the two concepts of tipping points and value chains provide added value and introduce new perspectives into an already much debated and contested issue. In both cases the emphasis is less on documenting a static phenomenon, be it conflict or violence, and more on examining the shift from one state to another, in this case from conflict to violence –the tipping point- and from one type of violence to another – a violence chain. A focus on processes rather than phenomenon requires a research methodology that moves from statistical measurements to narrative understanding of social, economic and political processes – but also that is sufficiently robust and not dismissed as anecdotal information. At the outset, therefore, it is necessary to explore how these concepts can be operationally defined for the purposes of the sub-city studies.

##### ***i. Conflict and violence***

Working definitions of these two concepts are not straightforward, since they often overlap, converge or are conflated, as reflected in widely used terms such as 'violent crimes', 'criminal conflict', 'conflictual violence' and 'violent conflict'. The UTP background document defines conflict as 'situations where individuals and groups have incongruent interests that are contradictory and potentially mutually exclusive'. It defines violence as 'forcible impositions by one individual or one group of their own interests to the disfavour or exclusion of other individual or group interests'. These are generic definitions that require further elaboration in relation to specific contexts and specific types of conflict or violence

The World Health Organisation defines violence as 'the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation.'(WHO 2002). Grappling with the complexity of definitions in their extensive research on violence in urban Latin America, Moser and McIlwaine (2004, 9-0) commented:

*'Given its complexity, multiplicity and chaotic nature, as Michael Taussig (1987) has commented, violence is slippery and escapes easy definition. Violence is also highly contested with no agreement as to what actually constitutes the phenomenon...nevertheless the starting point for most generic definitions denotes violence as the use of physical force, which causes hurt to others in order to impose one's wishes (Keane 1996). Expanded, this refers to 'unwanted physical interference by groups and/or individuals with the bodies of others (ibid; 67). Broader definitions, however, extend beyond physical violence to refer to psychological hurt, material deprivation and symbolic disadvantage (Galtung 1996). Most definitions recognize that violence involves the exercise of power that is*

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<sup>8</sup> For instance, labour conditions of employees in firms and the trickle down effects of upgrading to local poor communities are rarely taken into account in GVC approaches (Barrientos and Kritzing 2004, Humphrey and Navas-Aleman 2010).

*invariably used to legitimise the use of force for specific gains (Keane 1996). At the same time, violence is constructed, negotiated, reshaped and resolved as perpetrators and victims try to define and control the world they find themselves in.*

Turning to conflict the OED defines this as (i) a state of opposition or hostilities; fight or struggle; the clashing of opposed principles; (ii) the opposition of incompatible wishes or needs in a person; an instance of this or the distress resulting from this. (OED). Moser and McIlwaine (2004), in turn note that:

*There are important distinctions between violence and conflict. While both are concerned with power, conflict-based power struggles (such as over natural resources) do not necessarily inflict physical or mental harm on others, while violence by its very nature does (Soley 1996). Conflict, therefore, can be peacefully resolved through negotiation without recourse to force, but becomes violent/armed conflict when it includes fighting and killing.*

In researching such issues it is important to recognise the significance of local cultures and power relations that determine who constructs such definitions. What counts as a tolerable level of violence in one society may be condemned in another society as excessive (Robben and Nordstron 1995). This makes it critical for local communities and social actors to be involved in defining their perceptions of conflict and violence. In addition, there may be a continuum from chronic, endemic daily violence to 'acute' violence that is no longer socially accepted. This may vary depending on the scale and type of violence. Finally there are often limitations of dualist divisions such as between conflict and violence. In reality there may be a complex continuum from contradictions, through tensions to conflict and finally violence which renders a dualistic distinction too simplistic in practice.

### ***ii. Conceptualising the relationship between immediate 'small' events and broader contextual issues***

The review of both tipping points and value chains points to the importance of locating immediate small dramatic events (or types of violence) within broader contexts. This has been widely acknowledged; Walby (2009), for instance, argues that tipping points need to be viewed as 'small' causes and processes within the context of a larger system that is already on the edge of criticality. Thus, an assessment of tipping points only makes sense when included within a profounder analysis of a larger social system. Research on the causes of violence has identified the importance of distinguishing between immediate and longer term factors. One such example relates to the causal factors that underlie both intimate partner and sexual violence, that comprise both structural causes and trigger risk factors. While **structural causes** relate to gendered power dynamics, at the same time, broader political and economic conditions such as increasing poverty and inequality, or the presence of armed conflict can exacerbate or challenge gender power relations. In contrast **trigger risk factors** relate to situational contexts that can aggravate the likelihood of such violence occurring, and includes unsafe spaces and alcohol use. In both cases it is important to recognise that not all social actors are violent and that individual acts of gender-based violence are ultimately determined by the agency of individual perpetrators (Moser and Moser 2003).

### ***iii. Tipping point characterisation and measurement***

In characterising tipping points when conflict tips into violence it is important to recognise that while some are statistically measureable (such as when a demographic number is reached) others are not, since they are derived from

narrative information. Table 1 identifies a range of conventional determining factors.

**Table 2: Conventional determining factors of tipping points**

Type of violence	Measurement in terms of time frame and place	Data
Youth	Socio-demographic characteristics on size of youth bulge Narrative information on youth gangs	Statistical and Narrative
Political	Ethnic/religious/caste profile of political class compared to city population; Homicides / no. of riots	Narrative and statistical
Poverty	Macro-economic trends; No. of households below poverty line	Statistical
Gender-based	No. or rape cases; Analysis of legal framework	Narrative and statistical

Table 2 introduces a range of alternative determining measures that are more exploratory in nature. This highlights the breadth of determining factors that may be considered useful for inclusion. These range from statistical measures, such as distributional trends or opinion polls, collected in the city profile; others relate to narrative information relating to actual 'tipping point' events or changing perceptions. In Table 2 the concept of a tipping point has been extended from 'small events and actions that can induce big changes' (Gladwell 2000) to a paradigmatic event (or factor), a term that derives originally from theology.

*"A paradigmatic event may be defined as a historical occurrence that captures the imagination of a community in such a manner as to shape or form the community's way of conceiving the totality of reality, as well as the community's understanding of its ongoing experience of reality" (Grenz 2000).*

**Table 3: Alternative determining factors of tipping points**

Substantive element	Detail	Data
Paradigmatic Event	e.g. Dili 2006; Nairobi 2008	Narrative
Accumulation trend	e.g. of homicide rate, of rapes over time	Statistical
Distributional trends	Violence data cross-referenced with conventional determining factor data represented as % of wards within the city, and % of change over time, also mapped	Statistical
Changing perceptions	Public data (increased or new interventions relative to a specific issue)	Narrative
Opinion polls	Both city-wide or nationally	Narrative
Media coverage	Increasing number of articles associating violence and determining factor	Narrative and statistical

In Table 2, references to the concept of paradigmatic events come from Janet Abu-Lughod (1999); those for accumulation trends are drawn on epidemiology



(S.L. Hatch, 2005), and for distribution trends from climate change (Russilla and Nyssa, 2009)

**iv. Sequencing of 'tipping point' process**

In identifying how conflict tips into violence the introduction of a time element, namely before, during and after the tipping point, assists in distinguishing between the types of conflict that underpin different types of violence. This may be based on individual, household and community perceptions. Table 3 identifies underlying structural factors that may be associated with tipping conflicts into violence. Equally important are context specific tipping points or paradigmatic events. These relate to a range of 'last ditch' unambiguous events, generally identified retrospectively, again by individuals, households or community organisations, or deduced by researchers (see Table 4).

**Table 4: Potential structural/long term factors that can tip conflict into violence**

<b>Structural factors that can tip conflict into violence</b>	<b>Youth</b>	<b>Political</b>	<b>Poverty / inequality</b>	<b>Gender-based</b>
	Lack of employment	Eviction from home / areas	Overcrowding	Male control over resources
	Lack of parental guidance / sense of belonging	Exclusion from decision making/ public office	Lack of adequate basic services	Male control over mobility
	Tattoos	Expulsion from work	Lack of income	Unemployment
	Drugs and alcohol	Impeding access to basic services	Lack of voice	Alcohol

**Table 5: Identification of context specific tipping points**

<b>City</b>	<b>Tipping point</b>	<b>Determining factors</b>
Santiago	Gender-based violence shifts from non-recognition to visible recognition as public concern	Passing of law criminalising violence against women
Nairobi	Political conflict becomes endemically violent to confront exclusion	Declaration of the Kibaki as President
Dili	Everyday violence turns into factional violence	Riot of security sector
Patna	Shift from safe to insecure city	Variety of determining factors particularly kidnapping

Combining these two perspectives it is useful to recognise that a tipping point is most likely to be a conjunction, or a combination of structural and context specific factors (which then affect other groups). The latter may include an institutional policy decision, generally governmental, decision either to implement a punitive intervention, or alternatively the lack of such an intervention

**v. Levels of analysis of violence chains**

As identified above, the concept of a 'violence chain' is inspired by the concept of a value chain. It highlights the manner in which violence operates systemically, and involves a range of interconnected processes though these may not

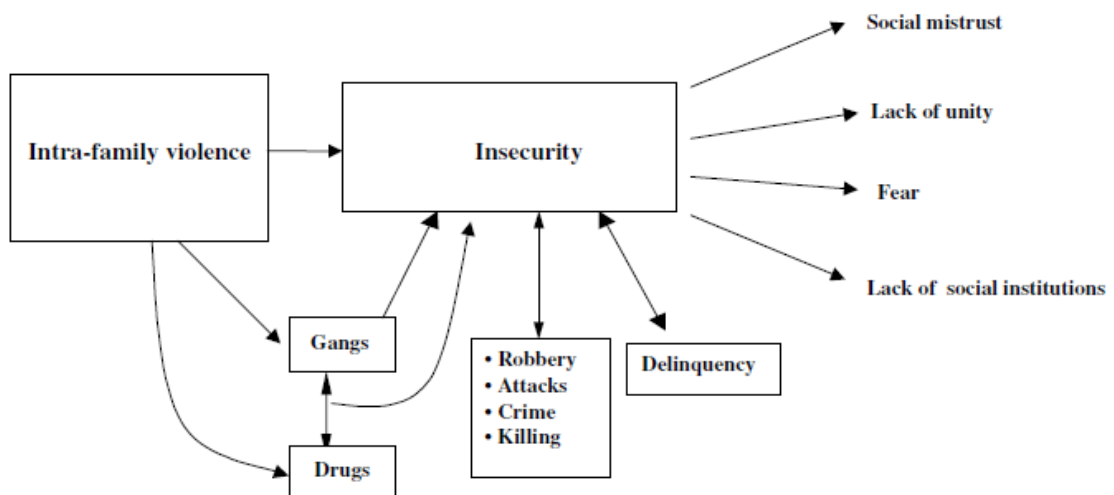
necessarily be immediately obvious. Following Sturgeon's (2008) Global Value Chain threefold level of analysis, the three central dimensions of analysis of violence chains can be identified as follows; first, the components of the chain (different types of violence) and character of linkages; second, the way these articulate together (processes) and the distribution of power within the chain; and third, the way they are embedded within a broader institutional setting (context) and role of institutions in structuring relationship between them. It is important to elaborate in greater detail how each of these three levels of analysis relates to violence.

a. The components of the chain and character of linkages:

Within each city and sub-city study a range of different types of violence may be identified from city-level statistics as well as from primary research. These require identification prior to categorising the relationship with other types of violence, and the character of the linkages. Annex 2 provides one example of an extensive range of characterisations or roadmaps of violence (Moser 2004).

b. The ways these articulate together (processes) and the distribution of power within the chain.

This requires both the identification of the causal relationships between different types of violence, but also the underlying causal factors and the way they are articulated. Which type of violence is responsible for producing (or reproducing) another type of violence? Figure 1, a causal flow diagram undertaken by a group of young men in a study of urban violence in Colombia (Moser and McIlwaine 2004) illustrates how participatory methodology tools can assist in unpacking complex causal relationship. Although the issue of power relations as such is not illustrated in the diagram, the associated explanation provided by the young men articulated that it was the inequalities in male-female power relationships that lead to intra-family violence with young men leaving the household to escape this.



**Figure 2: Example of Violence Chain**

Source: Moser and McIlwaine 2004

c. The way they are embedded within a broader institutional setting (context) and the role of institutions in structuring relationship between them.

One important contribution that the concept of violence chains adds to the study is that it prioritises the importance of looking at the relationship between different types of violence rather than- as is more usually the case – a specific violence-

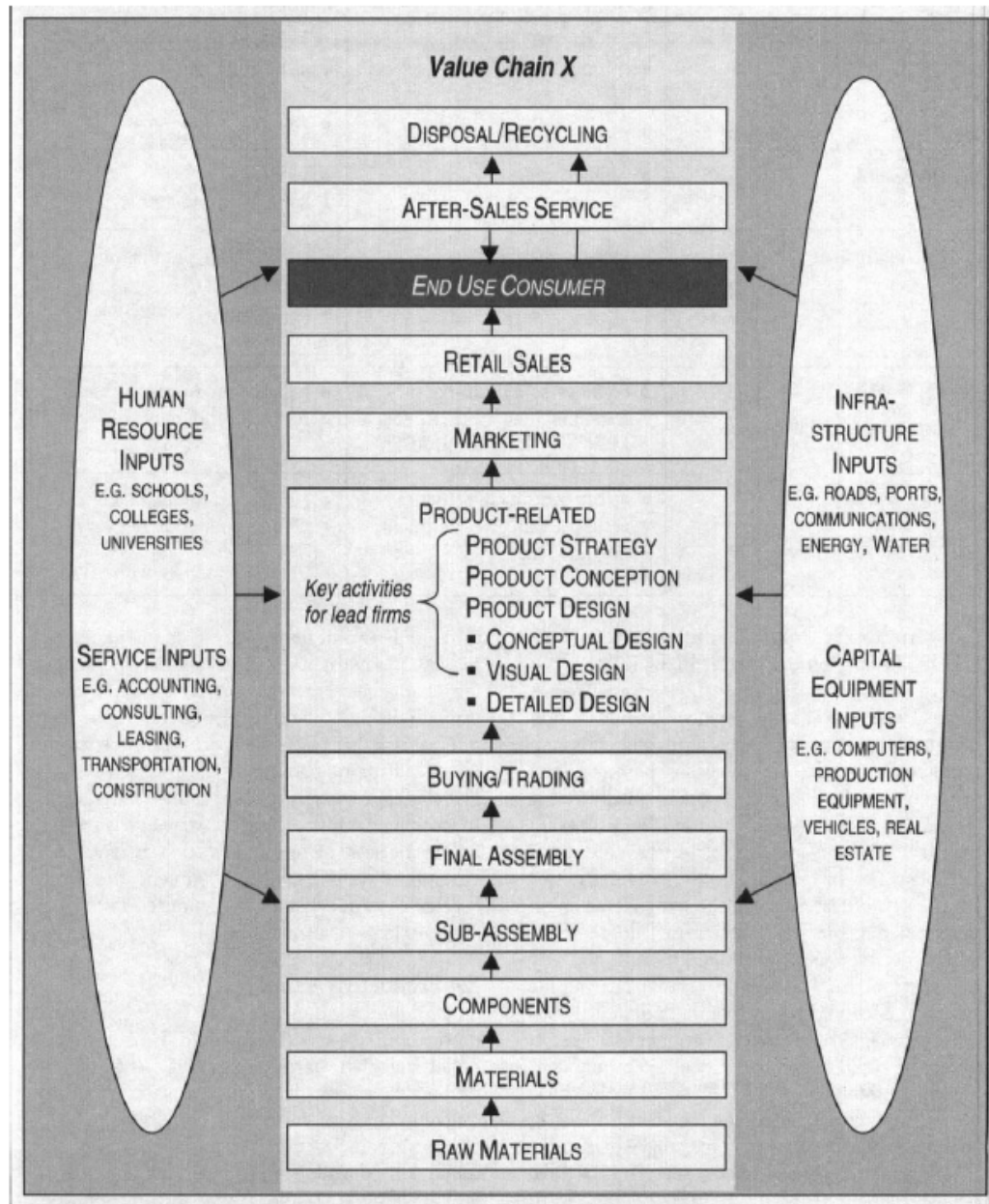
type perspective. While the value chain is a useful methodological tool to identify the way in which a chain creates and increases the value of a product, in the case of violence it is more likely to be a cumulative negative process (for instance eroding capital assets (Moser and Holland 1997; Moser 2006), with important policy implications in terms of reducing violence by 'breaking' such chains.

### **5. Concluding comment**

Cities of the global South experience increasing levels of violence – from gender-based violence, gang-based violence to ethnic strife or terrorism. This paper introduced two new and innovative concepts – tipping points and violence chains – in order to provide added value and to offer new perspectives into the already much discussed topic of urban conflict and violence. The conceptual framework highlights the necessity of understanding not only quantitative but also, more importantly, qualitative factors that tip conflict into violence. Furthermore, this paper, through incorporating the concept of a 'violence chain', highlights that violence operates systemically involving a range of interconnected processes.

This conceptual framework is currently being tested in four different city level case studies as part of the UTP research project. In terms of the issue of conflict and violence, the concepts of tipping points and violence chains will be empirically assessed in terms of their theoretical robustness. Undoubtedly the results of this research will then be reflected in a revised conceptualisation.

**Appendix 1: An example of a value chain**



Source: Sturgeon 2001

**Appendix 2: Roadmap of categories, types and manifestations of violence in urban areas**

<b>Category of Violence</b>	<b>Types of violence by perpetrators and/ or victims</b>	<b>Manifestations</b>
Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State and non-state violence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guerrilla conflict</li> <li>• Paramilitary conflict</li> <li>• Political assassinations</li> <li>• Armed conflict between political parties</li> </ul>
Institutional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Violence of state and other "informal" institutions</li> <li>• Including the private sector</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extrajudicial killings by police</li> <li>• Physical or psychological abuse by health and education workers</li> <li>• State or community vigilante-directed cleansing of gangs and street children</li> <li>• Lynching of suspected criminals by community members</li> </ul>
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organised crime</li> <li>• Business interests</li> <li>• Delinquents</li> <li>• Robbers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intimidation and violence as means of solving economic disputes</li> <li>• Street theft, robbery and crime</li> <li>• Kidnapping</li> <li>• Armed robbery</li> <li>• Drug-trafficking</li> <li>• Car theft and other contraband activities</li> <li>• Small arms dealing</li> <li>• Assaults including killing and rape in the course of economic crimes</li> <li>• Trafficking in prostitutes</li> <li>• Conflict over scarce resources</li> </ul>
Economic/ social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gangs</li> <li>• Street children (boys and girls)</li> <li>• Ethnic violence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Territorial or identity-based "turf" violence; robbery, theft</li> <li>• Petty theft</li> <li>• Communal riots</li> </ul>
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intimate partner violence inside the home</li> <li>• Sexual violence (including rape) in the public arena</li> <li>• Child abuse: boys and girls</li> <li>• Inter-generational conflict between parents and children</li> <li>• Gratuitous/ routine daily violence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical or psychological male-female abuse</li> <li>• Physical and sexual abuse, particularly prevalent in the case of stepfathers and uncles</li> <li>• Physical and psychological abuse</li> <li>• Incivility in areas such as traffic, road rage, bar fights and street confrontations</li> <li>• Arguments that get out of control</li> </ul>

*Source: Moser, 2004*

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