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AN APPRAISAL OF MAJOR CAUSES OF CONFLICT IN AFRICA

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Introduction

Conflict in Africa has dramatically increased in level and scale throughout the 1990s. In January 2000 over half of African countries were affected. Some scholars has argued the causes of conflict has its origin from inequality, economic decline, state collapse and history. Conflict in Africa has changed in nature; wars are now predominantly presence in African region.

Conflict has effected increasingly the combatants and non-combatants over the past decade as a result of increasing factional fighting and violent action against the civilian population. This has caused as many deaths each year as are caused by epidemic diseases, and has uprooted millions of people.

During the four decades between the 1960s and the 1990s, there have been about 80 violent changes of governments (Adedeji,

Abstract

The issue of conflict in Africa has dramatically increased in level and scale throughout the 1990s. In January 2000 over half of African countries were affected. Some authors has highlighted caused of conflict by inequality, economic decline, state collapse and history. The paper was of the view that Conflict in Africa has changed dimension and nature which resulted to serious violence and war that are now predominantly affecting African's State. The paper has a major findings that Conflicts has increasingly affected non-combatants over the past decade as a result of increasing factional fighting and violent action against the civilian population. The conflict has caused as many deaths each year and has caused many

Categories of epidemic diseases, and has uprooted millions of people out of their homes. Conflict is constraining to economic growth on the continent as a whole and its economic impact crosses state borders. The Conflicts in the region has resulted in a marked reduction in food production and serious losses of infrastructure, lives and properties. The paper has recommended that to tackled conflict in Africa we need to dig the roots of the problems and ensure a stronger and more focused international effort encompassing conflict prevention, reduction, resolution and peace building, in order to respond effectively and break the conflict cycle that affect development in Africa.

Keywords: Conflict, Africanism, International Efforts, Crisis

1999) in the 48 sub-Saharan African countries. During the same period many of these countries also experienced different types of civil strife, conflicts, and wars. At the beginning of the new millennium, there were 18 countries facing armed rebellion, 11 facing severe political crises (Adedeji, 1999) and 19 enjoying more or less various states of stable political condition. And some of the countries in the last two categories have only recently moved from the first category. A UNDP representative paints the picture in these terms:

A snapshot of explosive conflict in today's Africa presents a worrying picture: of Eritrea and Ethiopia; of the DRC, Rwanda, Uganda, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Sudan, the last with the longest-running civil war on the continent; of Sierra Leone with gruesome atrocities against civilians; of Somalia, Burundi, Guinea Bissau and Lesotho, the latter reeling from South Africa's recent intervention" (Bere, 2011).

The history of Africa as a continent is replete with conflict. (Alabi, 2006). One may even assert that the major current that runs through Africa: from North to South, East to West and Central is conflict and wars. Since the 1960's, series of civil wars had taken place in Africa. Examples include: Sudan (1995-1990),

Chad (1965-85), Angola since 1974, Liberia (1980-2003), Nigeria (1967-70), Somalia (1999-93) and Burundi, Rwanda and Sierra Leone (1991-2001).

But apart from civil wars, Africa has also witnessed a number of intermittent border and inter- state conflicts notable among which are the following:

- i. Nigeria- Cameroon dispute over Bakassi peninsular since the 1970's;
- ii. Algeria- Morocco conflict over the Atlas Mountains area in October 1963;
- iii. Eritrea- Ethiopian crisis between 1962 and 1979;
- iv. Somalia-Ethiopia` dispute of 1964 to 1978 over the Ugandan desert region;
- v. Chad- Libya crisis of 1980- 1982;
- vi. Kenya- Somalia border war of 1963 -1967 in which Somalia aimed at recovering its lost territories including the Northern frontier district of Kenya.
- vii. Tanzania- Uganda crisis in 1978-79 (Barkindo,1994).

As Ajayi (2005) has rightly observed, “the regularity of conflicts in Africa has become one of the distinct characteristics of the continent ”. However, it is apt to note that Africa has no monopoly of conflict. Other regions of the world are also riddled with considerable violence and social conflagration. For instance, Bosnia, Serbia, Turkey and Northern Ireland are among the trouble parts of Europe. In Asia, one may point to Cambodia, Iraq and Burma among others as conflict ridden. Latin America is also enmeshed in conflicts as evinced by countries like Peru, Guatemala, Mexico and Columbia. (Adedeji, 1999). Perhaps, this widespread existence of conflicts across the continents of the world has prompted scholars to observe that conflict is an inevitable aspect of human interaction. As such, conflict may be ineradicable for as long as people, nations and groups pursue conflicting interests, there will always be disagreements, disputes and conflict. (Bangura, 1999).

The Costs of War and the Role of UN in Resolving Conflict in Africa

It is a fact that the cost of war exceeds by far the benefits that might accrue from the struggle not only in the human and material resources which are expended in the process, but also in the socio-economic as well as the post-war environment hazards. It is in this light that nations tend to preserve or to restore peace whenever this is breached by war. A reason for which the U.N.O

was set up with the ultimate functions of preserving world peace, to facilitate and increase the relationship and interaction amongst nation states. Whenever and wherever any party strains relationships, it usually calls for some concern from the whole world. This is because small-scale wars or conflicts have in the past showed that they have a high tendency of escalating into confrontation among superpowers, which in itself would lead to a mutual nuclear annihilation e.g. the Vietnam War. It was the widespread interest in peace which culminated in the efforts by nations to create the United Nations in 1945, which includes its package, the practice of peace-keeping sought for after the leagues' failure to prevent the World War 11. (Gujerat,2006)

The controversy surrounding United Nations activities in the achievement of its primary function, which is the maintenance of world peace, is clouded by dispositions, which is in itself surrounded by complex, and emotional historical problems of the 20th century. Some students and scholars of the disciplines are of the view that the United nations has failed in its primary objective, and have again gone further to describe it as ineffective irresolute body which creates a forum where diplomats go and let out abuses on each other. While a few hold this view, there are others who hold entirely different view. They on the other hand say that there is nothing wrong with the United Nations, but its members, Kurt Waldheim former Secretary General of United Nations as being micros of the world, and he is of the view that the United Nations has done its best to preserve peace despite the obstacles, which have continued to emerge.

Following the wake of events and trend of activities in the International system as well as the role played by the United nations in its primary role of maintaining peace, there has arisen such rigorous controversy regarding the efficacy of the world Body in carrying out its primary functions which is preservation of peace. The performance of the United Nations organization, in the preservation of world peace has no doubt turned out to be a subject of discussion, which is clouded by a historical and emotional phenomenon. While some are of the view that the United Nations has failed in its primary assignment, others have their reservations and they hold an opposing view as regards the efficacy of the International Organization. This dissension is however not restricted to scholars or people in the discipline, rather it spread amongst people of all walks of life. (Inter-parliamentary Union, 2012)

However, those who are of the view that the United Nations has failed, and has such outlived its usefulness believe that:

“It has fallen in its central role of keeping the world peace and...it seems a little more than a debating chamber...where hot-headed diplomats angrily abuse each and nothing effective ever gets done”?

This idea was further buttressed by the words of German Scholar, Rudiger Jucte, who is of the Institute of Peace Research and Security Policy, at the University Hamburg. He noted as follows, “Conflicts and crises, dominated the agenda of the United Nations and the capacity of the Security Council and the General Assembly, the overall results were well known: the United Nation’s record in maintaining peace and security presents itself as a history of predominant failures; and a few outstanding roles that the organization could play were indeed exceptions to the rule rather than evidence of its functions as a reliable instrument to safeguard the elements of rudimentary peace”

Some have however gone further to suggest that there is need for a complete overhaul and a re-organization of the system if it is to be of any significance to the contemporary International system. Francis (2006) while writing on the rationales and implications of crises research mentioned that: “It is certainly no exaggeration to the hypothesis that since 1945, there has never been less than three crises spots simultaneously active somewhere on the map and they are all prone to the risk of eruption and escalation into confrontation through the involvement of the major powers”

Due to the fact that the international system has become a highly sensitive network of political and socio-economic interdependence any local crises inevitable has its effect on the entire system. So much so that a confrontation amongst or within a nation (local crises) could lead to a threat of mutual annihilation. The United Nations has often been found engaging in the regulation of conflict between international actors in disagreement but the organization was powerless. This was evident however in the non-reaction of the United Nations Organization towards their anti-Libya policy which resulted in the air raid against Libya, which no doubt was a violation of both the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Libya. In our Opinion, however, the issues surround the efficiency of the United Nations in the attainment of its primary objective that are eluded by emotions and disposition towards the

organization, such that a general consensus cannot be reached even within the United Nation structure.

The Nature of Conflicts and Means of Peacemaking

Since the end of the cold War, the world has witnessed some, but not many conflicts between nations. Such conflicts are called international conflicts. More often today, we witness some kind of civil conflict within a nation, called international conflict. Have you ever thought about how to define war and types of war? It is not a pleasant thought. When we think of war – conflict – we think of people shooting each other, of bombs dropping, of tanks firing, of people dying. We become sad, we feel powerless, and we are confused.

What do we know about war? We know war involves the use of violence. We know war means that the political order within a country or between countries has broken down. We know that war means someone or some group could not prevent it. We know that war leave deep scars on any society. Many experts have tried to find out why conflict occurs. One thing these experts all agree on is that in any conflict there are many causes, perhaps a major cause and several others. All the experts agree that studying conflict is complex. Below, five major causes, or types of conflict are summarized. As you read the case studies, keep these types of conflict in mind so that you can apply them in a particular case.

1. **Ideological Conflict:** Is a clash of basic values related to the role of government in society, how economic resources should be owned and used, who should make decisions for people, how decisions should be made, and who is rewarded and punished in a society. Ideology is a “world view”. It is lens through which all things are perceived.
2. **Territorial and Environmental Conflict:** Involves disputes over land, water, control of rivers, the protection and use of natural resources and the environment. Territory very often becomes the place where other types of conflict occur. Or, perhaps control of land, water, or other natural resources becomes the heart of conflict.
3. **Identity Conflict:** Occurs over the questions, which we are? Or alternatively who am I? Individuals and groups of people want to feel secure where they live and how. They do not want to fear for their lives or subject to discrimination. Tribal, religious, ethnic, linguistic, and nationality conflicts fall into this category. As with most conflict, identity

becomes a question of values, norms, and tradition. These beliefs become so central to people that they fear, mistrust, and hate others who are not the same.

4. **Racial Conflict:** Is a type of identity conflict, instead of values and beliefs that become issues, it is the colour of one's skin or the origin of the group from which they came. Perceived differences based on outside appearance, which is often skin colour- often result in one group been considered inferior by a group that considers itself superior.
5. **Governance and Authority:** Conflicts result from the use or misuse of power. Simply stated, the conflicted arises over who makes decisions for a group of people. With decision-making power come the associated decisions related to economic matters, territory, and matter of justice. Often conflict arises because those in authority favour or punish groups of people based on race or religion.

Techniques of Managing International Conflicts

Managing Conflict: Karen A. Mingst, Professor of Political Science at the University of Kentucky, has provided an overview of means of managing conflict. In a paper published with support of the United States Institute of Peace, Professor Mingst offers an analysis of ways conflict is managed. Excerpts from the paper follow:

Low-level conflicts, especially conflicts that arise from miscommunication, may be managed through traditional and routine diplomacy... First, when diplomatic recognition is exchanged, states promise to resolve disputes and conflicts through peaceful and diplomatic means. Second, many diplomatic practices are codified into international law. Diplomacy may, then, provide a means through which communication between disputing parties occurs; it may or may not lead to resolving conflict.

International conflict may also be managed through balance of power-silent and sometimes not so silent diplomacy. A balance of power approach is predicated on the belief that power may counter power. Conflict is managed, kept under control, by putting the power of state against the power of another. Equality or balance of power assures that no other nation or group will become dominant.

Balance of power may become institutionalized into security alliances. Such alliances are the oldest and perhaps the most familiar to conflict management.

Like-minded states, states having similar security interests, or states whose enemies are the same join together. Security alliances serve both an international and external role in managing conflict. States promise to resolve internal disputes and to speak with a unit voice against the outsiders; alliances structure conflict directed toward external actors.

Security alliance may evolve into international organizations – organizations established by member states to fulfil a number of different tasks. Modern international organizations, the most prominent being the League of Nations and the United Nations, are largely products of warfare in the 19th and 20th century.

International peacekeeping: The United Nations was established at the war's end (World War 11), designed by the victors including the United States, to eliminate war and its causes. The United Nations Charter obligates all members to settle disputes by peaceful means, to refrain from the threat or use of force, and to cooperate with UN sponsored actions:

- i. UN peacekeepers serve as observers – traditionally the least controversial of their activities. This has included supervising armistices and maintaining ceasefires, or more recently verifying troop withdrawals, observing elections, or coordinating the voluntary surrender of weapons.
- ii. UN forces may be interposed between two states engaged in conflict or disengage warring factions and observe first-hand the violations of ceasefires. Separation of forces is a technique of conflict managers.
- iii. UN peacekeepers may act defensively to maintain law and order in a country, should central government authority be eroded. Usually UN civilian police assist local police in performing these functions.
- iv. Peacekeepers may use limited force defensively. Use of force has always been controversial: How much is limited force? Is force really used defensively? These controversies are being re-opened with the end of the Cold War and the accelerated demand for peacekeepers pitted against elements having great destructive potential.

International Negotiation: Paraphrased, negotiation process in which parties in conflict make a series of proposals in order to reach an agreement based on their common interest

Negotiations proceed in stages. When the problem is being identified, individuals participating in the negotiations need to be separated from the problem. At the state of presentation of positions, interests need to be articulated, rather than personal positions negotiated. At the stage where options are considered, negotiators should seek options with mutual rather than individual gains. The criteria for option selection need to be objective. The framework, as well as the actions suggested, is appropriate for discussion of negotiations at every level of daily life

Third Party Dispute Resolution: Attempts at conflict management by third parties are very old, dating from the time of the Greeks when city states agreed that if there were disputes, the matter should be “judicially decided” If quarrels broke out, states promised to appeal to other cities which both deemed to be impartial – mediators in fact.

Disputants generally make a cost-benefit calculation – the gains versus the risked and constraints (of a settlement). Although stronger parties are more reluctant to seek third-party intervention for fear that their power will be neutralized, either weak or strong parties may find it in their interest to avail themselves of third party instrumentalities. Likewise, third parties have their own motivations, ranging from a sense of public responsibility to a desire for prestige and honor.(Kadan, 2012)

Track-Two Diplomacy: Track-two diplomacy involves both individuals and organizations from outside the government. Such individuals and groups from disputing countries interact in ways to facilitate conflict resolution.

In track-two diplomacy three processes occur. First, non-government participants from each side meet in informal problem-solving workshops mediated or facilitated by psychologically sensitive third parties. These workshops bring politically influential representatives of parties together to enable participants to see that they have shared problem and to examine the underlying causes of the conflict.

Second, a track-two approach involves influencing opinion, trying to shape the overall political environment. The programme serves to increase communication and understanding between people in conflict.

This, track-two diplomacy involves trying to take concrete actions. Most proposals focus on economic development proposals. However, the key is to find something concrete that parties can believe in for the purposes of building up habits of cooperation and managing conflict. An interesting example has been the role that civilian groups have played in arranging humanitarian ceasefires.

The primary Impact of Conflict in Africa

The Human tragedy

During the last two decades, sub-Saharan Africa has been the most conflict-affected region in the world. Ten of the 24 most war-affected countries between 1980 and 1994 were African, and four of these (Liberia, Angola, Mozambique and Somalia) were ranked within the five most severely affected countries in the world. Conflict has been responsible for more death and displacement than famine or flood. The scale and nature of warfare have directly affected the lives of many millions of Africans. The main elements of this tragedy are the millions of uprooted people who have lost their homes and livelihood, the increasing numbers of direct civilian casualties and increased levels of violence, abuse and mutilation suffered by non-combatants.

Displacement

Africa has the highest level of internal displacement in the world and some of the largest refugee flows, the majority from countries in conflict. In 2000, almost eleven million people in Africa were internally

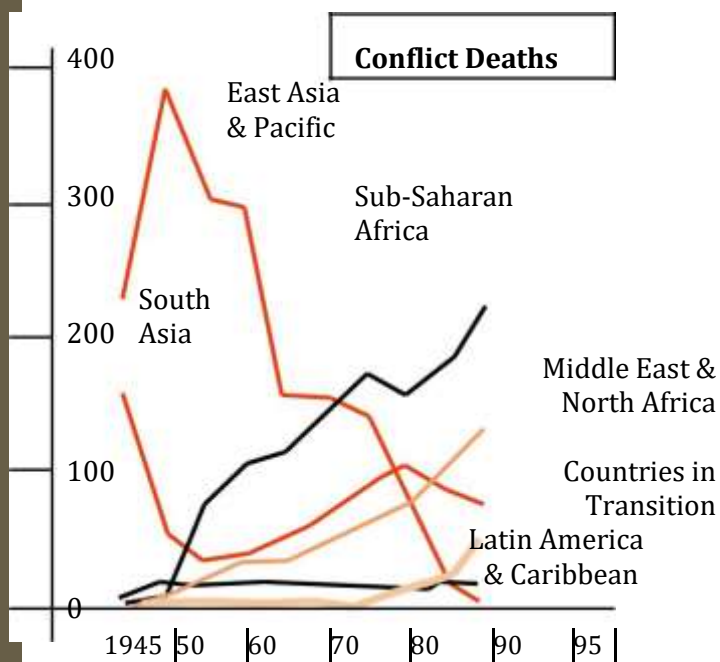
Displaced This is an increase of two million during the past year and is the second consecutive increase in two years, after five years in which the numbers remained relatively stable. Sudan, Angola, the DRC and Congo Brazzaville account for the majority of this increase. In 1999, thirteen African countries each had 100,000 or more displaced persons, compared to eight such countries at the start of the decade. Internally displaced persons now outnumber refugees by a ratio of three to one. Taking refugees and internally displaced people together, 14 million people in Africa are uprooted. (Galadima, 2006)

Civilian casualties

War in Africa causes increasing suffering for civilians. They suffer death and injuries and the indirect consequences of famine and epidemic disease that have followed in the wake of war. Since 1960 over eight million people have

died either directly or indirectly as a result of war in Africa, of whom five and a half million were civilians. The Global Burden of Disease Study established that in 1990, 6% of all deaths in the world were caused by physical violence. In sub Saharan Africa the figure was 13% with one in six males dying from violent causes. Almost 1 in 20 of all deaths in Africa are clearly attributable to war. Epidemiological projections suggest that by 2020, injuries caused by war will have become the eighth most important factor (after tuberculosis) incurring a disease burden on society.

In Africa, the number of civilian casualties has continued to increase year by year, unlike in other parts of the world as is demonstrated in this graph. Recent events suggest that this trend was continuing in thousands.



Source: Bere (2011)

Violence

The most disturbing aspect of conflict in Africa is the increasing use of extreme violence, especially over the last ten years. Violence is now deliberately targeted at civilians rather than armed groups, and at entire groups rather than individuals.⁵ In the conflicts in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Mozambique, Northern Uganda, Sudan and Angola, violence has taken appalling forms. Mutilation, torture of women and children, violent rituals and the forcible involvement of relatives, children and spouses in

killing and rape are used as a means of waging war primarily by militia groups and by some state proxies. In some instances, such violence is part of ritual that binds militia groups together. Extreme violence can be used as a means of humiliation or revenge. More frequently, it is used as a means of intimidation, as is the case with the RUF in Sierra Leone. Here, mutilation was brutally applied as part of a strategy to stop people from voting or from gathering the harvest or to spread control over territory by sheer terror and fear, thus avoiding the need to fight. There is a danger that extreme violence of this kind will erode the social fabric of African societies and further hasten state collapse.

Child soldiers

Children have become one of the main targets of violence and in turn are being used to perpetuate it. Children are deliberately indoctrinated into a culture of violence and used as a specific instrument of war. Militia groups and irregular armed forces such as the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda, the Interahamwe in Rwanda / DRC, the RUF in Sierra Leone, UNITA In Angola, and formerly Renamo in Mozambique, have made a practice of forcibly recruiting children and initiating them through acts of violence against their own community. The intention is to create a fighting force that is separate, reckless towards others and has a tactical advantage over adult conventional forces. There are now approximately 350,000 child soldiers worldwide, of whom some 200,000 are in Africa.

The Impact of Wars and Conflicts on Africa's Socio- Economic Development

The unending political tensions, wars and conflicts in the continent have had lasting negative impact on the socio- economic development of Africa because socio- economic development cannot be sustained in an environment riddled with violence, instability and insecurity (Conteh, 1998). Some of these are briefly examined below.

- i. **Problem of reconstruction:-** This is perhaps the most debilitating impact of wars and conflicts on Africa's development. All countries coming out of conflict face major challenges of reconstruction in order to avoid a recurrence to violence. It is needless to state that during war times,

infrastructural facilities are wantonly destroyed while loyalty, patriotism and mutual relations are broken between hitherto friendly peoples and nations. Such broken relationships must be mended to ensure lasting peace between belligerent groups while the destroyed facilities are to be replaced. It is worthy of note that this amounts to a total waste of material resources and unnecessary dissipation of energy on unproductive ventures. This has been the general trend of events in Africa and has been retarding growth and development in the region (Global Coalition, 2004).

- ii. **Unemployment:** Wars and conflicts in Africa have combined to compound the problem of unemployment in the continent. Today, throughout Africa, high rate of unemployment, particularly of youths, is a major source of concern. It has been growing at an annual rate of 10%. In countries coming out of conflict, many young people not only lack employment; they have also been denied education and economic empowerment because of war. It is instructive to note that without other means of economic support, there is a danger that unemployed former combatants will engage in criminal behaviour, especially with the many small arms in circulation in war-torn countries
- iii. **Death/ Loss of lives:** A great number of Africans: young, old, male, female, civilians and military men alike, have lost their lives to various wars and conflicts on the continent. For instance, in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, (Global coalition 2004:7) about 800,000 Rwandans were reportedly massacred. Similarly, the Burundi civil war claimed over 200,000 lives as at the year 2000,. In Liberia, over 250, 000 lives were lost in the country's fourteen year civil war between 1990 and 2004. The same may also be said of Sierra Leone in which an estimated 200, 000 people were killed during the nation's civil war between 1991 and 2001. But perhaps the most pathetic situation occurred in Sudan. The civil war in Sudan has been one of the longest and costliest on the continent with an estimated two million lives lost to the war (Global Coalition, 2004:10). It is disheartening to note that this unprecedented loss of lives in Africa as a result of

- wars and conflicts is having debilitating impact on human resources available to Africa. The services of the departed souls whom God has endowed with great skills, talents and potentials are no longer available to be harnessed for Africa's development.
- iv. **Refugee problem:** One of the attendant effects of wars and conflicts in Africa is the emergence of numerous number of displaced persons who have become refugee in different nations across the continent (Instituto Del Tercer, 1997:45;Uwechue, 1996:16). According to Article, 1 paragraphs 1 and 2 of the Convention Governing the Specific/ Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa (1969) a refugee is a person who, owing to well- founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinions, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country, who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events in unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it” or “ every person who, owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or the whole of his country of origin or nationality, is compelled to leave his place of habitual residence in order to seek refuge in another place outside his country of origin or nationality”

It is sad to note that violence and lawlessness have caused a severe humanitarian crisis in Africa as many displaced people are now spread throughout the continent. For instance, in Liberia, the 2004 Report of the Global Coalition for Africa (2004) noted that an estimated 700,000 were internally displaced as at 2003. The spill- over effects of the Liberian conflicts were felt in neighboring countries through increased refuges flows. About 3000 Liberians were hosted by Nigeria at the height of the crisis while an appreciable number of them also became refuge in Guinea. In Sudan, an estimated 4.7 million Sudanese were displaced during the nation's prolonged civil war. As at 2004, the total number of African refugees was put between 15 and 20

million (UNHCR, 2004). They became refugees in neighboring countries in the region. As refugee, the affected persons have been exposed to serious risks of diseases and hunger.

- v. **Poverty:** Continued strife and political instability in most countries of Africa hurt the continent's economic fortunes. Indeed, the disruptive impact of war and crisis on the economy of Africa has been considerable. The political stalemate and periodic eruptions of violence have resulted in significant cumulative declines in Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This problem has been compounded by the frequent recurrence of drought in some sub- regions of Africa. Prospective investors in Africa have been turned away of fear of instability, low profit and loss of investment to looting and arson during wars. Hence, the persistent failure to raise investment rates have translated into low GDP growth rates which had ranged between 3 and 4 percent for several years as against the 7 percent annual growth required to reduce poverty and reach the Millennium Development Goals. This has promoted poverty across Africa. As at 2003, an estimated 340 million Africans were living below poverty line. In all, the persistence of low growth rates across Africa means that most countries will not be able to make significant reductions in the 50% of their populations that fall below the poverty line.

The Causes of Conflict

An effective response to African conflict requires agreement on and understanding of its causes. Past responses to conflict have often failed to understand the context within which conflict has operated or to address causes. It is possible to distinguish between the root causes of conflict, the secondary causes that enable and sustain conflict and the tertiary causes or the drivers that hinder resolution.

Primary Root Causes of Conflict

Inequality

Inequality between groups is probably the foremost cause of conflict in Africa. It is inequality between groups – rather than individuals – that increases the

prospects of violent conflict. It exists on three mutually reinforcing levels: economic, social and political. In countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leone and Rwanda, political power and its benefits were monopolized by one group. Unequal access to power perpetuated a similar lack of access to resources and revenue. Where group inequality occurs there is also differential access to education (as has notably been the case in Burundi). This plays a key role in sustaining inequalities. Where a society is divided into two pre-dominant groups, growing inequality between them often leads to conflict.

State collapse

The collapse of state institutions has caused internal and regional conflict. Collapse is rarely sudden, but arises out of a long degenerative process that is characterized by predatory government operating through coercion, corruption and personality politics to secure political power and control of resources. The state finds itself unable any longer to provide basic services or security to its people and loses its legitimacy. The collapse of infrastructure completes the breakup of the state. The combination of breakdown of institutions and physical infrastructure coupled with the use of ethnic violence creates the conditions in which violence becomes self-sustaining and factional warfare develops, as has happened in Liberia and Sierra Leone. One faction may predominate over time, but this does not necessarily result in resolution of conflict. Rather it leads to the creation of “shell states”, where the leadership wishes to maintain the fiction of statehood. When this happens, state building will be a complex task and the process of democratization can easily become a vehicle for consolidating personal rule.

Economic decline and economic shock

Continuous economic decline plays a major part in state collapse and conflict. Economic shock is a more direct and potent cause. This can take various forms ranging from natural catastrophe to sudden large shifts in terms of trade. The Ethiopian famine of 1974 was the main factor in the overthrow of Haile Selassie’s government and the violence that ensued. Famine can cause mass displacement increasing pressure on scarce resources. Other economic shocks have similar effects. The sudden shift in the terms of trade in Nigeria in 1992/3 halved Nigeria’s income, introduced hyperinflation and led to violence and the overthrow of the government.

History

Many conflicts occur where there is a tradition of resolving problems by violent means. Political violence is entrenched and the instruments of the state such as the army, the police and the judiciary sustain the process. Other historical processes may provoke violence. History in places such as the DRC, Rwanda and Burundi created a state model based on the artificial creation and abuse of ethnicity to maintain power. A past pattern of conflict is one of the best predictors of future conflict. Deeply entrenched historical patterns of violence are amongst the most difficult to resolve as they require major societal and political change.

Natural resource wealth

Africa accommodates two types of resource based conflict: wars of resource scarcity and wars of abundance. The most common conflicts of scarcity relate to the control of grazing and water rights for nomadic people.

Countries whose economies are dependent on natural resources such as oil and minerals, face a very high risk of conflict. In these wars of abundance, groups compete for control of these resources, which become the “prize” for controlling the state and can lead to coups, as in Sierra Leone and the DRC. Unfair exploitation of resource rich regions can lead to secession. Abundant resources can also attract external intervention. The role of the private sector is critical in wars of abundance, as belligerents rely on its capacity to exploit and commercialize the resources. Frequently, the military have become involved in developing their own commercial companies. Such wars become self-financing, self-sustaining, and therefore less open to mediation.

Secondary Causes

Unemployment, lack of education and population pressure

Countries with high levels of unemployment among young men and where male educational levels are low face a far higher risk of conflict. Throughout Africa, factional conflict has drawn on a pool of marginalized or socially excluded young men. Increasing insecurity of land tenure in Rwanda and the high levels of rural unemployment provided a ready group of participants in the genocide there. The conflict in Liberia was fought by socially marginalized young men.

The abuse of ethnicity

Political leaders and belligerents in Africa have made increasing use of ethnic hatred. Such abuse prolongs conflict, creates long term divisions that reduce the effectiveness of peace building efforts. The war in the DRC provides a ready example of the abuse of ethnicity. Elements of the DRC government have openly provoked ethnic tensions in the Kivus with the intention of destabilizing areas under Rwandan influence. Equally elements of the Ugandan armed forces have exploited ethnic differences in order to benefit commercially from the conflict. In both instances community divisions have been deepened and there have been a greater number of fatalities and injury than are experienced in more conventional fighting.

Availability of arms

The ready availability of small arms in Africa is a major factor in sustaining and fuelling conflict. Considerable supplies of small arms are in circulation from previous wars. For example, between 1972 and 1990, Ethiopia and Somalia imported \$8 billion worth of small arms and light weapons. In 1992, the Angolan government distributed an estimated 700,000 rifles to the population for their defense against UNITA. Caches of arms exist throughout the continent and Africa has active trading networks that move arms between countries. However imports of arms, primarily from former Soviet Bloc countries, continue to grow and to sustain conflict. The increasing capacity within Africa to manufacture ammunition has removed yet another constraint on the use of small arms. The ready availability and relatively low cost¹⁰ of small arms has been coupled with the emergence of a network of both local and international dealers who trade arms for minerals or other resources. This has been a major factor in prolonging African conflicts, which have become self-sustaining conflicts and consequently less amenable to external mediation or intervention.

Tertiary Causes

Regional and interlocking conflicts

A large swathe of Africa from Sudan to Angola, passing through the Great Lakes and the DRC, is caught up in a series of multiple and interlocking conflicts. The duration of conflict therefore increases with the complexity of regional intervention, and the interrelationship of one conflict with another.

The conflict cycle

Parts of Africa have settled into a conflict cycle in which states or factions move from low-level crisis or open war into long-term and protracted conflict and then back to low level crisis. Often the greatest risks occur when a fragile peace is not properly consolidated. This was demonstrated in Sierra Leone last year. In some cases, states or factions have entered into a framework that provides for “consensual” conflict, where belligerents have more to gain from sustaining low-level conflict than from its resolution.

Lack of guarantors

Internal conflicts are mostly resolved when the parties involved have arrived at a stalemate, frequently a political and military balance. When either party to a conflict feels that it has a perceived advantage or disadvantage, it continues to fight, spurred on by the prospect of victory or a desire to negotiate from a more advantageous position. A “hurting stalemate” where all belligerents have lost, provides opportunity for resolution of conflict. In many cases, the opportunities for resolution are lost because of the lack of credible external guarantors to the peace process. This is particularly important when dealing with demobilization and disarmament, where the stakes are high for the belligerent groups in terms of the potential loss of power and personal security.

Inadequate and inappropriate mediation

External mediation is frequently offered in times of conflict, yet the past decade has seen few obvious successes. While the option for peaceful resolution of conflict must always be available, poor mediation processes can make the situation worse and prolong conflict by giving combatants time to rearm and reorganize as has happened in the DRC and Angola. Peace processes that are based on inadequate analysis and rushed timescales can push the parties to conflict into untenable positions and threaten their power base or chances of survival. Greater emphasis on securing and maintaining a cessation of hostilities as the first priority is critical. Peace processes need to be able to draw on a wider spectrum of arrangements for transitional government to provide the conditions in which a stable peace, which addresses the fundamental causes of conflict, can be established.

Chronology of conflict in Africa¹

Year	Country	Name of Conflict	Type of Conflict
1948–1994	South Africa	Anti Apartheid Struggle	Internal
1955–1972	Sudan	First Civil war	Internal
1960–1965	DRC (Zaire)	Post Independence War	Internal
1960–1964	Rwanda	Ethnic Strife	Internal / Ethnic
1961–1974	Angola	Independence war	Independence
1962–1974	Guinea Bissau	Independence war	Independence
1964–1975	Mozambique	Independence war	Independence
1965–1980	Zimbabwe	Struggle for majority rule	Independence
1966–1990	Namibia	Liberation war	Independence
1966–1969	Nigeria	Biafra civil war	Internal
1966–1996	Chad	Civil War	Internal
1966	Namibia	Caprivi strip secession	Internal / Regional
1970–1974	Burundi	Ethnic strife	Internal / Ethnic
1974–1991	Eritrea	War for Independence	Independence
1974–1978	Ethiopia	Revolution	Internal
1975–1991	Mozambique	War with Renamo	Internal
1976–1983	Ethiopia	Ogaden War	Internal
1977–1978	Ethiopia / Somalia	Somali war	Inter state
1978–1991	Ethiopia	Civil War	Internal
1978–1979	Uganda / Tanzania	Amin invasion	Interstate
1978	Ghana	Rawlings Coup	Internal
1979–1996	Central African Republic	Coups and civil strife	Internal
1980–1984	Uganda	Obote overthrow / Civil war	Internal
1982–	Senegal	Casamance	Internal
1983–	Sudan	2nd Civil war	Internal
1984–1989	Somalia	North West Secession	Internal
1989–1997	Liberia	Civil war	Internal
1990–1994	Rwanda	Civil War and Genocide	Internal / Ethnic
1990–	Sierra Leone	War with RUF	Internal / regional
1991–	Somalia	Civil war	Internal / factional
1992–	Angola	2nd War with UNITA	Internal
1993–	Burundi	Civil war	Internal / Ethnic

1997-2000	Congo (Brazzaville)	Civil war	Internal
1997	DRC	Civil war	Regional
1998-	Ethiopia - Eritrea	Border Conflict	Interstate

Source: Based on University of Michigan database, Federation of American scientists-Military analysis network and "The World Guide 2000".

Conclusion

Since independence in the late 20th, African countries have been betting with the problem of civil wars and inter- state conflicts century. This has taken its toll on Africa's development in a number of ways especially in death of her illustrious sons and daughters and alienation of her peoples which in turn has been hindering the process of integration and cohesion in Africa. Thugery, looting and arson have become part and parcel of Africa's political culture. This should not be allowed to continue if Africa is to witness sporadic growth and development and compete favourably with other continents of the world. All hands must therefore be on deck to halt this negative development and chart a new course for peace in Africa. This will not only enhance adequate security of life and property in Africa, it will also attract foreign investors to Africa for the adequate exploration of her numerous natural resources for growth and development.

Recommendations

At the National Level

Most conflicts in Africa during the last two decades have been internal and occur within countries. They must therefore be dealt with first and foremost at the national level. Each country must develop strategies and policies to deal with the root causes of conflicts and to have effective and efficient mechanisms to deal with and resolve conflicts once they have started.

Conflict Prevention

Preventing conflict is essentially a long-term process and it needs long-term strategies and policies whose impact will prevent the emergence of conditions which give rise to conflicts. These strategies and policies are fundamental to all countries which aim at minimising serious conflict in the long run. We suggest the following:

Nation-building

Given the heterogeneous nature of almost all African countries, a fundamental objective should be to revive the concept of nation-building initiated and developed by the nationalist leadership at the beginning of the independence period but which was later abandoned in most countries.

Furthermore, at the core of this concept is a long-term strategy to develop a national consciousness through cultural policies, mainly implemented through the educational system. Central to this concept is the acknowledgement of cultural diversity within a framework of national unity. Details of these policies will vary from one sub-region and country to another. Countries could benefit from examining the Tanzanian example which has been more successful than most African countries in its nation-building strategy and policies. Where there has been no efforts to develop consciousness of national unity, serious divisive tendencies have led to conflicts, to disintegration of countries or to catastrophic civil wars. A homogenous culture by itself is not sufficient to keep a country united and prevent serious conflict as the examples of Somalia, Burundi and Rwanda clearly show. While in Somalia the state collapsed, in Burundi and Rwanda, they had and still have cultural homogeneity and strong centralised states but with catastrophic civil wars. Tanzania and Uganda are good contrasting examples of what are the implications of having or not having national unity.

Political system

There is a need to develop a political system whose rules allow competition for power and which guarantee the possibility of alternate groups achieving power within a reasonable period of time. The system should allow large numbers and groups to be involved in the selection/election of decision-makers at different levels of the power structure. Several important principles are absolutely critical to such a political system: (a) extensive devolution of power; (b) accumulation of wealth through the use of state institutions must be totally forbidden; (c) the principles of good and democratic governance must be fully implemented, i.e., transparency, accountability, independent judiciary and complete civilian control of the military; (d) extensive involvement of indigenous independent civil society

groups in national and local affairs especially in the monitoring of policy implementation and service delivery.

Economic development

A free market economy is important in the economic development of a country. However, it is now clearly acknowledged that the economy should not be allowed to generate serious poverty and that policies and affirmative action programmes must be developed to minimize and reduce poverty. And poverty is an important cause of conflict. Similarly, it is equally important that economic resources and development funds should be evenly distributed between the regions and groups in the country. Clear and serious uneven distribution of economic resources between regions and ethnic groups is known to have led to conflict, sometime to serious secessionist rebellion.

These are long-term strategies which if carefully and properly implemented are most likely to minimise the development of conditions favourable to the emergence of conflict. But even if these strategies and policies are carefully followed, they do not necessarily guarantee the absence of various types of conflicts. It is most likely that the kinds of conflicts which might emerge in countries with such long-term strategies and policies are likely to be less serious and more amenable to management and resolution. Hence, even in the best of conditions it is important for countries to develop their own mechanism for managing and resolving conflicts as soon as they occur.

Mechanisms for Managing and Resolving Conflicts

Most African countries today have no mechanism for managing and resolving conflicts between groups especially politically instigated conflicts except through the use of military force. It is prudent today for countries to assume that they are likely to have several types of conflict which their judicial systems cannot deal with and that resorting to the military may not be the wisest course of action. Hence, it may be useful for countries to think of having a permanent mechanism for dealing with such conflicts. It is our view that countries have several options:

An independent arbitration council

The first option is for a country to set up an independent arbitration council which could be made up of up to ten elderly and wise individuals from across

the country and walks of life. A Secretariat and a pool of experts should support such a council. The state and the private sector, especially wealthy nationals of the country, should contribute and provide it with adequate finance. Guarantees to enforce agreement should be an essential method of resolving conflicts. However, the moral authority of the council rather than the military force of the state should back its decision. Military force should be used as a very last resort.

Outside mediator

A second method of resolving such conflicts is to involve a mediator from outside the country – a wise man or women acceptable to both parties to the conflict. Again, moral authority and agreement between the parties should back the decision of the mediator rather than military force of the state.

Both these methods of resolving conflicts should involve civil society groups as much as possible – their role being that of witness to the proceedings and decisions, and also to informally persuade the protagonists of the necessity of resolving their conflict through negotiations rather than through force. Their collective moral pressure can play an important role in the process of resolving a conflict. They can also play an important role in the implementation of the agreement reached.

Reform of judicial system

Thirdly, it is suggested that the judicial system of most countries should be reformed and their capacities augmented in order to enable them to deal with these types of conflicts (between groups fighting over land, or politically instigated conflicts between groups, or between one or more groups and the state itself!) In these situations the part of the judicial system dealing with such conflicts should be seen to be independent. And if the state is seen to be willing to listen to grievances through a third party and to accept decision which may go against it, it will go a long way in creating a climate conducive to resolving conflicts through negotiations. The use of a trigger-happy military has never resolved conflicts; it generally suppresses it for a while until it surfaces again with deeper grievances.

Even if a country has not initiated long-term strategies and policies to tackle fundamental causes of internal conflicts, such as Burundi, Sierra Leon, etc., such countries should seriously contemplate setting up mechanisms for

resolving conflicts along the lines suggested above. Other mechanisms could be just as useful. The important issue here is to create a framework and an ideology of reconciliation and confidence amongst the people as a whole, but more so amongst the conflicting parties that the government is serious about resolving conflicts and addressing grievances of those in conflict.

At the Regional and International Levels

Until recently, the OAU was constrained by its Charter from intervening in internal conflicts taking place in African countries. Furthermore, the history of UN intervention to solve internal African conflicts has been, to put it mildly, rather inglorious and unsuccessful. The Congo (early sixties), Somalia, and Rwanda (in the 1990s) come to mind as examples. Yet the UN has enormous capacity – of expertise, financial and military power – for intervention. And such capacity has been demonstrated several times – in Iraq, Bosnia and Yugoslavia (Kosovo), to mention the most recent examples. But such capacity has not been utilised positively and effectively in Africa. And the feeling in Africa is that there is a double standard operating when it comes to the issue of peacekeeping in Africa.

Africans have taken note of this unpalatable international reality. While in the past the OAU was constrained from dealing with internal conflicts of its member states, this situation has now changed. In 1990 in Addis Ababa and again in 1993 in Cairo, the Summits of African Heads of State and Government effectively empowered the OAU to take steps and get involved in resolving internal conflicts taking place in the member states. This empowerment needs to be strengthened, but the basic decision to involve the OAU in internal conflicts of member countries has been made. More importantly a “Mechanism for the Prevention, Management and Resolution of Conflicts” has been set up in the AU and is already operational. This *Mechanism* needs to be strengthened. Clearly, therefore, within the AU, there exists the framework and the commitment for resolving both inter-state and internal conflicts in African countries. What is lacking is expertise and resources for peace enforcement. The AU has already mediated and overseen major and sophisticated mediation and negotiation efforts in central Africa and the horn of Africa. What it lacks is the capacity to enforce peace and ensure implementation of agreements painstakingly negotiated. Our suggestions therefore are:

- the international community and African Member States themselves should contribute to the strengthening of the AU Mechanism for Prevention, Managing and Resolving Conflicts;
- Strengthen the AU links with the sub-regional organisations such as ECOWAS, SADCC, IGAAD, etc., so as to enable the latter to have the capacity to intervene in conflicts such as those in Liberia, Sierra Leon, Lesotho, etc.
- strengthen links with the UN so that the latter can provide resources (financial and expertise) to support AU efforts to resolve conflicts in African countries;
- the AU should, as a matter of principle, involve civil society in the mediation and negotiation process;
- where serious and sustained civil war has taken place, the AU and the sub-regional organisations, should undertake serious study of the process of returning conflict countries to normalcy – the transition of societies from conflict conditions to post-conflict conditions. This is particularly important with regards to the reconstruction of the state and the government, the integration of the various military forces in society, the role of civil society groups, and the reconstruction of the shattered economy. Most crucial is the immediate implementation of programmes to bring about reconciliation.

However this research, should be part of a wider and long-term programme of studying the nature, type and causes of conflict as well as methods of preventing, managing and resolving conflicts at the three levels: national, sub-regional, and regional.

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