

Why conflict resolution is difficult to achieve in Africa

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Abstract

This concept paper attempt to highlight and examine the factors that are hindering expedient, effective and successful conflict resolution in Africa. The paper argues that the major impediments to achieve stability include lack of funding, external interference, lack of unity and dependency syndrome. The paper proffered strategies and made recommendations that may enhance conflict resolution efforts and sustainable peace in the continent. These include unity of purpose and speaking with one voice and self-funding of the continental activities.

Keywords: Conflict, Conflict Resolution, Peace-keeping, Human Rights, Sovereignty, Regime-change.

Introduction

Since time immemorial conflict existed. Today it is still prevalent and it shall remain a permanent feature within the global arena. However, it is the resolution of these conflicts that differentiates communities in the world; hence some nations are labeled peaceful, stable or unstable among other categories in which nations are classified in terms of the existence and non-existence of conflict within their borders. Some societies have since advanced in finding solutions to conflicts that beset them whereas others are still lagging behind in bringing solutions, to an extent that instability has remained a long standing characteristic of their countries or regions. In Africa, conflict has a very long history starting from the slave trade, coming through colonialism and today, the tragedy is still bedeviling the continent. And, unlike other regions in the world that have found recipes for peace and moved on, Africa has been left behind, reeling in violence. A Solemn Declaration at the fifth (50th) Anniversary of the African Union (AU) in 2013 outlined the vision to “end all wars in Africa by 2020”.

Purpose and Relevance

The central aim of this paper is to bring out the contributing factors that are perpetuating Africa’s current status of conflict, poverty and underdevelopment. In trying to give answers to the question, ‘Why conflict resolution seem to be evasive in Africa? The paper will also attempt to suggest ways of bringing lasting solution to the ravaging conflict in Africa. This paper will also be of significance to AU, AU member states, and other organizations such as SADC, UN, ECOWAS, EAC and GAD. The Econ

Sources of Literature

The discussion argument is based on the literature from books, magazines, news-papers, journal articles, internet sources and personal contacts.

Theories of Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution is a comprehensive term which implies that the deep-rooted sources of conflict are addressed and resolved. Duffey (2000) ^[12] expressed the view that this is a new theory of problem-solving in order to achieve the desired results. He maintains that the traditional settlement method merely settles

conflict on the surface rather than resolve conflict as in conflict resolution (Duffey, 2000) ^[12].

Resolution of conflict addresses the deep-rooted sources of conflict, changing behavior, attitudes and structures. This will ensure that behaviours are no longer violent, attitudes are not hostile and structures are not exploitative. The process of conflict resolution includes becoming aware of a conflict, diagnosing its nature and applying appropriate methods. This is in order to discuss the negative emotional energy involved and enable the conflicting partners to understand and resolve their differences. Furthermore, it is to resolve the differences to achieve solution that are not imposed, but agreed to by all the key parties and also address the root causes of the conflict.

Kevin Avruch and Peter Black (1991) ^[3] brought culture question to the fore in conflict resolution. They opined that culture, as a concept, is a powerful analytical tool. Also, they argued that it is necessary to attend to the local understanding of being and action which people use in the production and interpretation of conflict behavior. They referred to this cultural knowledge as the local common-sense about conflict which are determined by language, social, political and economic structure, religion and ethno-psychology (Agada, 2008) ^[1].

Challenges to Effective Conflict Resolution in Africa Speaking With One Voice/Unity

Though Africa is becoming more and more democratic, it has not been speaking with one voice on matters of its strategic importance. Issues of rule of law, human rights, sovereignty, and the principle of non-interference has contributed to this divisive development. A point in case is SADC. In 1998 SADC did not come to a consensus on deployment into Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). South Africa and other SADC states were heavily opposed to military intervention in DRC, but were preferring diplomatic efforts. However, this lack of consensus within SADC with regard to, military intervention infuriated Zimbabwe, Namibia and Angola, who decided to deploy according to Article 2(a) of the SADC Protocol on Politics, Defense and Security Cooperation. The article stipulates that member states should assist any other that may fall prey to external aggression. Finally, there were two groups within SADC, one which was rallying behind South Africa, and the other that was supporting intervention. Ironically, after

a successful campaign in DRC, South Africa was the first country to seek economic advantages from DRC. If the whole SADC region had spoken with one voice over the DRC conflict, the time, resources and human life that was lost could have been saved or minimized.

Another point in case of divisions among Africans is evident in South Sudan. According to Simon Allison (The Herald-Zimbabwe 11 June 2015), the African Union (AU) in its process of finding a solution to South Sudan, there is a counter-productive infighting between Ethiopia, Kenya and South Africa over who should lead the mediation process. Each of these countries push for a different and incompatible solution, and each had its own cheer leaders among South Sudan's various warring parties. And the uncertainty among the peacemakers can make the situation worse than any better. However, to break the impasse, there is need for harmonization of various views from the three countries and come up with one comprehensive resolution package which has support of the full AU. As long as Africa remain divided, it will never realize progress in bringing peace to its territory.

The division among African states also became glaring during the Lybian conflict. When the Lybian issue was brought before the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), the African states (South Africa, Nigeria and Gabon) that sat in that council on non-permanent basis, voted together with other UNSC members in support of the UNSC resolution 1973. This resolution led to the bombardment of Lybia as well the assassination of Col Gaddafi by the North Atlantic Organization (NATO) countries. However, these three African states when they voted for UNSCR 1973, they acted against AU's position over the Lybian issue, that is, Africa was going to find an African solution to the Lybian conflict. There are still skirmishes between rivalry ethnic groups and it is not yet safe to declare Lybia as being in a better situation than before (Kamugisha, 2012) ^[11]. These developments in Lybia where NATO-led offensive toppled Col Gaddafi can also be likened to what happened in Ivory Coast where French sponsored coup led to the overthrow of President Laurent Gbagbo in April 2011 ^[2].

Some are very critical of the African Union's reaction to the conflicts in Rwanda, Congo, Burundi, and the overall instability in the central Africa including Uganda that had been a catalyst for armed operations and arms trafficking. Boulden (2003) ^[4] asks and concludes: "Where were the neighbours who could have helped contain conflicts? Worse than deciding not to undertake multifaceted peacekeeping operations, is undertaking them half-heartedly and ineffectively".

In 1958, Kwame Nkruma of Ghana observed that without a serious commitment to a people-centred development process and collective reliance and without political unity at the continental level, neo-colonialism would be perpetuated. Kwame Nkruma was of the idea that Africa joins hands and faces the problems head-on and pursue internal growth (Nyong'o et al. (eds), 2002).

The Role of External Forces

Thabo Mbeki the former South African president once said that, the West has often defended its violent interventions on the (African) continent by arguing that they act out of the goodness of their hearts with the objective of bringing us, the Africans, the gifts of democracy, good governance, peace and the very lives of millions of Africans who would otherwise

have been butchered by African governments concerned..." (Kamugisha, 2012) ^[11]. He went on further to say, "...we have now seen what happened in Ivory Coast and Lybia ...in both instances to allow non-African countries, ostensibly mandated by the UNSC and regardless of African opinion, to remove the sitting governments by force and thus effect regime change, in the interest of western powers.."

Basing on Mbeki's words, some conflicts that are haunting Africa today are the creation of external players. Divisions within Africa are a golden opportunity for these external forces and enemies that has long been preoccupied by the glutton need to divide Africa and plunder its natural resources. A secret hand of foreigners is found at play. A vivid example is Rwanda. The genocide that ravaged Rwanda in 1994 and the continuing pockets of conflict in the same country today are the making of the Belgians that were its colonial masters. The Belgians successfully brought divisions between the Hutus and Tutsi tribal groups, leading to the massive killing of people and destruction of property. The whole idea behind creating tensions between these tribal groups was for Belgians to maintain its controlling claws in Rwanda. This game between Africa and its former colonizers is seen in the large in zero-sum, win or lose gaming terms as an universe with much of its resources prodigally expended and its last finite reserves increasingly the centre of a tug of war between rich (the West) and poor (Africa). Hartman (1983) ^[7].

It is also prudent to mention the will to power as a cause of war under this sub-theme. Rarely does these powerful nations announce that they are going to war (eg NATO to Libya) because of a desire to conquer, dominate and economically exploit. But however, they state what is sought through war in self-justifying phrases such as 'Justice', 'Human Rights', 'Rule of Law', Honour and Duty (to oneself or one's allies). Observers of this phenomenon have often concluded that the leaders are really fighting because they want power and economic gain. But because it is unwise to confess a lust for power lest one prematurely stir up too formidable opposition, these powers alleged to disguise their will to economic power for public inspection in more appetizing and respectable dress. As Machiavelli pointed out, the vulgar (the many) see the appearance of the thing rather than the thing itself (Hartman, 1983) ^[7]. It is because of such hypocrisy that some fellow African people, leaders or nations fall into the trap of imperialists thereby rising against fellow Africans, paving more way for external forces.

During the SADC-led facilitation process in Zimbabwe, the western machinations were at play, trying to divide Africa and to influence the SADC appointed facilitator President Thabo Mbeki. Chikane (2013) ^[5] wrote, "...by the time Mbeki assumed responsibility for the facilitation in Zimbabwe, South Africa's relationships with the UK and the USA were at their best and were managed carefully. US President Bush even called Mbeki their "point man" on Zimbabwe during his state visit to South Africa. However, these relationships were marred by the radical differences between Mbeki and SADC on the one hand and the US and UK on the other hand in relation to Zimbabwe. The big guns were sent to SADC and AU summits to lobby them to change their views about Zimbabwe without much success. The battle raged on until it reached the UN Security Council where both the US and UK pushed for sanctions against Zimbabwe. The US and UK lost twice on this matter against positions held by South Africa (as a country)

supported by the SADC and AU leadership.... The veto of other UN Security Council members was useful to the course of letting Africans solve their problems without hindrance...."

The best defense against external attacks and influence on Africa is the establishment of a united leadership around which the African people rallies in defense, of their selves. The region should be able to resent any activity that suggest that someone from outside, want to tell them what to do with their lives. What united the African leadership most was the "regime change" obsession of the US and Britain on Zimbabwe that threatened the very existence of these African leaders or the positions they held. Chikane went on further to say, if the major powers could determine who should be part of government of Zimbabwe then all of the countries in the region were vulnerable. They were(African leaders) of the view that if they let the policy of regime change succeed in Zimbabwe it would be used against them as well, and as a result the policy had to be fought at all costs, even if it meant impoverishment. Accordingly, Africa need to guard against leadership or opposition groups leaders which advances or entrenched itself by taking sides with specific imperialists to enhance their chances of success in leadership stakes. The AU also need to resist and rebuke those members who thrive on endearing themselves to the leadership or riches by running down other leaders or the bloc to improve their chances of success or being appointed into positions of influence through Africa's detractors.

Politics and Governance

Africans today are failing to build legitimate and sustainable nations state because of confusion than ever on what constitutes legitimate leadership and governance systems at all levels of society. The African body-politic today is another borrowed Western institution. The argument is that political parties in Africa are today borrowing completely out of context and wrongly from both Western and African thought. Rukuni (2007) ^[10] further posits that, a political renaissance in Africa therefore, requires us to borrow only the best from Africa and other political systems. In the medium term, Africa seem to be stuck in the notion of a nation state, which was adopted from its colonial masters and is now religiously trying to protect it under some misguided notion of a need for nationalism. To make matters worse, governments hide behind the Western political notion of sovereignty to avoid all forms of accountability, locally and internationally.

Inherited Political Boundaries

There is a clarion call today of a one united Africa, typified by a free trade area. However, to achieve such a feat is a mammoth task for Africans due to selfishness, sovereignty, territorial integrity among other issues on which Africans hide from. This lack of cooperation has also been necessitated by the artificial political boundaries which Africans inherited from colonial powers. There is need therefore to dilute the practical negative impact being caused by these boundaries. These man-made boundaries, mere lines on a map are often artificial and impractical which divide rather than uniting African communities. It is no wonder that all the regional institutions that are built in Africa find it difficult to express themselves legitimately in any country or more importantly in an ordinary African village. These include SADC, AU, EAC, ECOWAS and concepts such as NEPAD (Rukuni, 2007) ^[10]. These

institutions should have full meaning and ownership to every African person, otherwise challenges like xenophobia andBoko Haram will remain to cause havoc, thereby delaying rather than accelerating African stability and development.

An example to illustrate the divisions that were created by colonialists as alluded to in the above arguments, in found in the ECOWAS region. Though the vision of ECOWAS as a regional bloc was to realize unity among western African countries in both political and economic front, divisions are still existing within the grouping along Francophone, Saxophone and Anglophone countries. Each cluster gets influence from its former colonizers rather than from the values, beliefs and principles of ECOWAS, or AU in general.

Dependency Syndrome

It is currently estimated that seventy percent (70%) of the AU activities/budget is being financed by external donors. This scenario has given foreign powers too much access and power to African Union, dictating their policies. This state of affairs is existing because all member states' contributions are not adequate and self-sustaining. The vicious circle of poverty and underdevelopment is a major contributing factor to this dire situation in Africa. On the other side, member states are struggling to finance their domestic issues such as health, education and food security, and yet are expected to make contributions to AU, taking from their meager reserves. Countries end up prioritizing domestic issues ahead of AU business, and as a result most African nations are in arrears. Therefore, for Africa to wean itself off the dependence from donors, there must be enough contributions that covers at least seventy-five percent (75%), if not all of its activities. Its high time Africa should consider tough decisions in order for it to start to realize progress. The AU must display political courage when dealing with its errant members who violates terms and conditions of continental deals. However, on the other hand, such developments can result in dire consequences by a pull-out from the membership. But still, it may not be that easy to do due to the importance and benefits derived from the concept of belonging. In this contemporary global political environment it is costly for nations to go solo. Therefore, there is a moral compelling force to belong to a certain common group rather than being in isolation. Further to this, contributions from member states should not be in monetary terms alone, but rather should be in other forms. Some countries are rich for instance, in oil whilst others have plenty of gold, diamonds, and even qualified human resources. All these among others should be brought to AU either for resale to generate income for the regional bloc. A point in case is the contribution made by African Union chairperson, President Mugabe of Zimbabwe to the AU Foundation, a herd of three hundred cattle, during the June 2015 AU Summit that was held in South Africa. The Foundation was created for the collaboration with the private sector, philanthropists, individuals and diasporans to solicit donations and seek voluntary contributions towards financing Africa's development priorities. The whole idea behind this brain child by AU Heads of State and Government was for Africa to desist from relying on partners on funding it flagship projects.

It is the lack of resources that has also affected AU in the conflict resolution area. The region has failed to raise funds for African Standby Force to start kicking. Funds to make deployments in the hot spots are not available. The ASF which

was welcomed as a noble idea to deal with all conflict ridden zones is yet to be established. This situation has left Africa vulnerable to military intervention directed by foreigners, but only to serve their interests. External forces in the form of Europeans and Americans have realized this failure and weakness in the part of Africa and have since capitalized on this folly by coming to Africa as peacemakers but yet in actual fact they come to glut their economic appetite from Africa's plenty of natural resources. Isdore Guvamombe (The Herald June 12, 2015) argues that, the African self-run military brigade will remain a wishful thinking since there is no financial will, though the political will has always been there... He concludes, " ...indeed the solution for Africa is nothing other than simply coming up with its own military entity that can control and protect its own resources and its people, and solve its military conflicts from hot spots without necessarily inviting outsiders."

Dependency theorists (*Franz Fanon, Paul Baran, Andre Gunder Frank & Walter Rodney(1958)*) argued that for the under-developed countries to develop, they must break ties with developed nations and pursue internal growth. The developed nations dominated the poor nations for the provision of raw materials. Once this is achieved, Africa will be able to stand on its own without interference from powerful nations.

Conclusion

It is generally acknowledged that multiple causes trigger modern conflict: malfunctioning states with inadequate political structures that collapse or fail to ensure the orderly transfer of power, repressive and weak governments, a state's inability to forge a single national identity that initially blocks development (Magstandt, 2007) competition for scarce resources or the so-called horizontal inequality of groups of varied ethnicity or race participating in power (Annan,1997) are among the problem. Furthermore, some research has established that Africa, has a volatile mix of poor human security, unstable and inequitable political institutions, limited resources and inevitably, a "bad neighborhood" of similar crises ridden states (Marshal & Gurr, 2005) ^[8]. The multiplication of conflicts in Africa and the inability of the region to resolve these conflicts remains the greatest challenge to African governments and the AU. It is high time that Africa should come of age and start to face its challenges head-on without dependence from outside its borders. The African Union needs to prove that it is an effective body which is capable to guarantee peace to its citizens. The Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement (2000) that ended Burundi's civil war was a success story of African solution to an African problem. So far proven, following expectations of the post-independence Africa is largely a mirage for many Africans as the region continues to be haunted by conflicts that has resulted in widespread destruction of human life and property.

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