# Constraints and Stategies for the Management of Conflicts in Africa

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# Constraints And Strategies For The Management Of Conflicts In Africa

## By

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## Abstract

*The end of the Cold War instigated a new approach into the operation of world politics, with the promotion of peace and security. This assumption is however different n the continent of Africa, because conflicts in this period have been volatile and protracted. While some scholars analysed causes of conflict in Africa as a result of internal wranglings, other viewed it from the standpoint of modernization. In spite of these divergent opinions, conflicts in Africa did not only destabilize the operation of the political system but also make sustainable development a difficult task. The discursion starts with*

*the analysis of the nature, causes and consequences of the conflict. In response to the negative consequences of such conflicts, this paper examines the constraints to the management of conflict in Africa and suggests the relevant strategies to employ in managing the conflicts. The paper concludes that for any meaningful peace and sustainable development to be attained in Africa, nation-building, justice and good governance should be brought to the center stage of continental politics and international relations.*

**Keywords:** Conflict * Peace * Good Governance * Sustainable Development

## Introduction

In his book, Lewis Coser (1969) has identified or traced the origin of conflict to early man. For this reason, conflict is inherent in human nature. However, while many parts of the world have moved toward greater stability and political and economic cooperation, Africa remains one of the cauldrons of instability (Rugumamu 2000:1). In a critical survey 11 out of 25 civil wars that were being fought in the world were being waged in Africa. Thus, living Africa in a state of confusion, poverty stricken citizens, numerous refugees, unproductive and underdeveloped. A snapshot of explosive conflict in today's African presents a worrying picture: Eritrea and Ethiopia of the DRC, Rwanda, Uganda, Namibia, Zimbabwe. Sudan, the last with the longest running civil war on the content; of Sierra-Leone with gruesome atrocities against civilians; of Somalia, Burundi, Guinea Bissau and Lesotho, the latter reading from South Africa's intervention (Adedeji; 1999:3).

While it is a general belief that conflict is inevitable, it is also important to understand that pre-colonial Africa managed conflicts successfully. It was colonialism and modernization that eroded some of the values and strategies used in managing conflict in Africa. This is because traditional mechanism of mediation, conciliation and consensus building, have been neglected.

The thrust of this paper is to examine the nature, causes, and consequences of conflicts in contemporary Africa. In doing so, the paper identifies some of the management strategies employ to prevent future occurrences of conflict and attaining good government vis-à-vis sustainable development. With these measures, the ideal of nationhood which have been destabilized will be restored and a

genuine social environment that will bring economic cooperation, harmony and justice in African can be created.

## Conflict:        A Theoretical Discourse

Conflict can be classified into various ways, but the most important classification is that of violent and non-violent. Although there are many theories of conflicts, but two are germane for this paper.

First is the Marxist theory of conflict which postulated that in a divided society, antagonists are irreconcilable. According to this theory, human society becomes more complex with the growth of technology. Division of labor leads to stratification, and the relations of production determine the way these classes relate to each other (Kayode et al: 1994:32). The exploiting class appropriates more of what is produce, enjoys special privileges, and is exempted from the drudgery of heavy labor, while the exploited class receives less. These two classes are often referred to as the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. It has been argued that the Marxist theory of conflict also fell and is identified as a structural theory. Structural factors include inequalities among groups in obtaining access to socio-economic and political privileges and benefits; education, income distribution, unemployment and control of political power, as well as low levels of national integration which encourages zero-sum contest for state power (Wehrp, 1979).

The second theory of conflict is what is referred to as rationalist theory. This theory holds that conflicts arise in human societies as a result of friction over rational issues. Prominent among these issues are history, religion, ideas, territories, economic factors, racial factors, nationalism, sensationalism, personality factors and so on. Of these,

ethnic and religious conflicts (which are most prevalent in Afri
tend to be most serious, partly because they are most important ba
of identity for most individuals and as such attract strong loyalties
the groups involved. As Nnoli (1999) rightly observed, class for
have been found to underlie supposedly ethnic or religious confli
in Africa largely because of the fragmentation of the elite.

However the two theories are mutually reinforcing at the interface
African political system. It was on these bases that we can ident
"intense" or "severe" conflicts. These are conflicts in which a lar
number of conflict group members attach overwhelming importan
to the issue at stake. or manifest strongly held antagonistic belie
and emotions towards the opposing segment or both (Azar: 1990)

Similarly, scholars have identified what is known as protract
social conflict theory. The theory of protracted social conflict refe
to the prolonged and often violent struggle by communal grou
for such basic needs as security, recognition and acceptance, fa
access to political institutions and economic participation (Mia
et al, 2000:71). It is through the PSC that we can understand th
complex processes rather than one singular factor, often lead
conflict in Africa.

## Nature and Causes of Conflicts in Africa

If it has been accepted that conflict is an ubiquitous phenomenon in a
social systems, then it is also relevant to manage it properly. In tryin
to achieve meaningful management strategies to conflict in Africa
it is imperative to examine the nature, causes and consequence
of such conflicts. It is when these factors have been identified tha
conflicts can be resolved and be managed effectively.

Conflicts in Africa have been broadly classified into two, namely, inter-state and intra-state conflicts. Erksine (1992) identifies variants of inter-state conflicts. These are:

(a)    Struggle for National Liberation and Independence e.g. SWAPO against South Africa, Polisaro against Morocco.

(b)    Border Disputes e.g. Nigeria and Cameroon over Bakassi Penninsula, Ethiopia and Somalia over the Ogaden regions and Libya and Chad over the Aouzou strip.

(c)    Destabilization Activities as Neighboring states sponsor Dissidents against another to achieve certain objectives. Examples included Museveni's Uganda, Uganda against Rwanda, Burundi and Mobutu's Zaire: Nyerere's Tanzania against Idi-Amin's Uganda, Charles Taylor's Liberia against Sierra Leone.

Most conflicts in Africa are however intra-state and they fall in the following categories:

(a)    A rebellion to overthrow a government such as the cases in Said Barre's Somalia, Angola, Ethiopia before 1991, Samuel Doe's Liberia, Sierra Leone (1996); Chad in the 1980s and Mobutu Zaire.

(b)    Secessionist rebellion as in Nigeria (Biafra), Zaire (Katanga) and Ethiopia (Eritrea)

(c)    Coup d'etats, through which at least 24 Heads of

government have so far been killed in over 80 such attempts.

(d)     Cold War sustained conflicts notably in Ethiopia, Angola, Mozambique and the Southern African Sub-region.

(e)     Rural conflicts over resources such as cultivable and pasture, water as in East Africa and the Horn of Africa.

(f)     Urban violence which have become recurrent especially following dwindling resources and the pauperization that accompany the implementation of Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) across Africa (Akande. 2000).

Having examined the nature and dimensions of conflicts in Africa, it is also important to analyse the causes of conflicts in this particular region. Firstly, the concept of "nationalism" which is common ideology in western societies is alien and unsuitable for Africa. In a political system where peoples are subject to economic exploitation, social and political inequalities, and denigrating racial prejudice, the struggle for statehood has often been rife. This has often manifested in the emergence of nationalist or liberation movements, fighting against colonialism and imperialism for their independence.

Secondly, irredentism (terrae irredenta) is another cause of conflict in Africa. This is a legacy of colonialism. Conflicts arise as a result of the indiscrete balkanization of different nations into artificial states, bearing no relations to ethnic, cultural and historical frontiers. Consequently, people of the same ethnic group find themselves straddled between two or more states. Several attempts to restructure political frontiers, regroup ethnic diaspora in Africa, retrieve ancient

empires on cultural and linguistic grounds, have often met with armed conflicts. Morocco and Somalia are notable examples of irredentist African countries. Following this, is the ethnocentric nature of the society. This has been attributed to the European intervention and activities, whereby one group dominated other groups, as witnessed in the Sudan and Nigeria cases. The argument here is that multinational states are prone to ethnic instability than poly-ethnic states (Williams, 2000). This multi-ethnic character of most African state makes conflict even more likely, leading to an often violent politicization of ethnicity.

Similarly, struggling for economic resources have been identified as another cause of conflict in Africa. In this vein, Adedeji (1999:10) admits that:

*Competition for resources typically lies at the heart of conflict. This accounts for intensity of the struggle for political power in many African countries.*

It is pertinent to state here that competition for economic resources often led to political competition. The character of the commercial relations instituted by colonialism also created long-term distortion in the political economy of Africa. The consequences of this pattern of production and exchange spilled over into the post-independence state. As political competition was not rooted in viable national economic systems, in many instances the prevailing structure of incentives favored capturing the institutional remnants of the colonial economy for functional advantage.

Foreign military intervention in inter-state relations is another cause of conflict in Africa. In recent times, overt military involvement of

foreign powers in intra-African disputes, have been rife for no other reasons than economic and geopolitical interests. In most cases, what is essentially an internal crisis has often been exacerbated, and the tempo escalated to a regional or continental conflict by the military support to the conflicting parties by some colonial powers. The Saharan conflict typifies this issue, and the remnant of such issue is the result of Angola, Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo), Mozambique and some East African countries. The inflow of Western weapons to this zone save the 'guerilla warfare" the opportunity to advance their course of action for attaining power.

More importantly, specific case studies of the causes of conflict in Africa have been carried out by researchers. These researchers clearly are attracted by the arguments that political forces are largely responsible for the many conflicts in the respective countries they discuss. They clearly describe the complexity for the processes which lead to conflict, poverty, youth unemployment, inequality in the distribution of resources, ethnicity, elite manipulation of grievances and the use of sectarian ideologies for mobilization purposes-all these come to play (Bujra, 2000, Osaghae, 2001. Suberu 2004). The political arena is wide and the struggle to capture state power ostensibly in order to redress grievances lead to the awakening of the state, its eventual collapse and capture by one group or another sometimes with support from outside.

In addition, there is the pervasive effects of globalization, and its inherent contradictions. Mohapatra et al (1999:65) emphasized that the resurgence of conflicts in Africa can be seen as a reaction to the process of globalization and also as way of coping with modernities. As Adejumobi (2005:20) succinctly put it:

*The content and character of globalization promote social fragmentation, disintegration and disaggregation; splits groups and identities into warring factions; undermines the state by emptying it of its social content and relevance; and sacrifices the "human soul" for the fundamentalism of the market.*

This is evident in the crises of Structural Adjustment Program implemented since the early 1980s (Olukoshi, 2004). The implication of all these factors is underdevelopment and political instability. To the extent that Ake (2001:7) argued that Africa been besieged by a multitude of hostile forces, authoritarian, and exploitative attitude of those in power, the problem of development could not be addressed.

## Consequences of Conflicts in Africa

The social impact of conflict in Africa is negative rather than positive. Thus, cases of armed conflict in this region is the major harbinger of misery, death, destruction and political instability; a process which has increasingly claimed, as victims the lives of numerical children in their hundreds of thousands.

Similarly, conflict cases in Africa reveal the heavy inflow of refugees and displaced people across the continent. Thousands of children have been orphaned and many youths have been exposed to arms and the use of dangerous drugs. Although, other countries assisted in refugee settlement in collaboration with international assistance e.g. (UNHCR, Red Cross and other NGOs). but the local hosts tend to suffer, because the refugees make heavy demands on existing medical and educational facilities, and refugees compete with local residents for scarce food stocks, medical supplies, arable land, and

wage labor opportunities (Kassim, 2005:184). The consequence of this is inflation.

Essentially, this internal conflict has adverse effects on development. However, due to the persistent barter trade economy prominent in African countries, the upsurge of internal conflicts leads to the discouragement of agricultural population, to a drop in production and in people's standard of living.

Furthermore, it should be emphasized that the management of internal crisis in Africa weigh heavily on the budget as a greater part of resources is devoted to the purchase of weapons and the maintenance of expensive large pool of army. In fact, military expenditure is sub-sahara Africa totaled an estimated US $11 billion in 1998, representing a 12 percent increase over the previous year (Adedeji, 1999). This was at a time when the region's aggregate economic growth rate rose by less than 1 percent in real terms.

Admittedly, internal conflicts lead to massive destruction of economic and social structures built to promote development thereby placing a risk the few facilities installed as a basic requirement for economic and social development in future. Thus, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) envisaged by the United Nations through its development agencies may become an illusion as a result of conflicts that spread across African continent.

More importantly, internal conflicts in Africa threatened national cohesion as exemplified by the destabilizing effects of civil wars in Liberia. Somalia, Angola, Burundi and Rwanda. More often than not, people are mobilized on the basis of their adherence to a determined social group which is generally of an ethnic, religious or

regional nature with interests considered infringed upon another by another social group or political authority. Although, this internal conflict may be contained and settled, however, it may increase existing cleavages, destroy the political fabric and increase distrust and suspicion among actors and groups.

## Constraints to the Management of Conflicts in Africa

African conflicts cannot be managed because of some peculiar problems. These problems range from lack of economic resources, limited information, foreign interest and war mongers in the continent and their local stooges. In the first instance, no meaningful strategies can be employed without a strong economic involvement. In the 1990s, conflicts have drain the resources of African countries, which made it difficult to invest in peacekeeping operations. A few statistics reinforce this point:

(i)     Between December 1992 and November 1994; $1.6bn was spent on the US-led military operation in Somalia, an amount equal to two years of US development aid to sub-Saharan African.

(ii)    The UN has spent over $3.6bn on peacekeeping operations in Africa since 1991, while UN agencies have dramatically increased their emergency relief budgets.

(iii)   In 1990, the ratio of military personnel to doctors in Africa was 83.1, compared to 19.1 in developing countries as a whole (Africa Discovery, 1994:21).

The implication of this is that it is impossible to find a lasting solution to African conflicts with the help of external organization.

Secondly information precedes communication, and this is often regarded as power. Information in Africa is insufficient; in fact, most African leaders only communicate to their fellow African leaders when there is a regional meeting like OAU (now African Union) and ECOWAS. It is this lack of information which jeopardized the effort of mediators to see to the conflict before escalating to violence. Foreign interest in the political events in Africa is also a problem. Here, the western capitalist and their African comprador bourgeoisie (collaborator, sponsor war and supply) sponsors wars and supplies weapons and ammunitions. Where Africans were involved in such a negative act, conflict will continue to surface and destabilize the entire society.

If such problems are peculiar to Africa in conflict management, then the overall is a continuous wrecking of the socio-economic development of the continent. In this manner, citizens were displaced internally given rise to inflow of refugees in the neighboring countries. thereby creating obstacles to development. This refugee crisis will bring cross-border clashes, which will strain relations among nations. as epitomized in the Central-African Republics. The crux of this argument is that if the refugee problems are not addressed, it will be difficult to develop meaningful strategies in managing conflicts in Africa.

## Conflict Management Strategies and Sustainable Development

Human beings have capacity for both conflicts and cooperation. As a matter of fact, conflicts have to be managed if the society needs

sustainable development. The first strategy in managing conflict in Africa is the early warning system and preventive diplomacy. It is vitally important to recognize the fact that carefully designed, and coordinated actions to address the root causes of the conflict should always be based on reliable and accurate early warning analysis. Most of the conflicts show early warning but they are not followed up with early action by the political authorities. As clearly argued by Rugumamu (2000,14)

*effective early warning combines historical, social political and humanitarian information in order to forecast the dynamics of a particular conflict, and the instrument necessary to effectively address it before it reaches crisis proportions.*

Essentially, most communities in conflicts blame the political authorities especially the central government. In most cases, they do not believe that the state government can mediate and transform conflicts. An effectively early warning system required overcoming two fundamental problems; the informational problem of obtaining both the necessary quantity and quality of intelligence in a reliable and timely fashion; and, the analytic problem of avoiding misperceptions or faulty analysis of the likelihood of diffusion and escalation of the conflict, the impact in interest, and the potential risks and costs of both action and inaction (Rugumamu, 2000). The early warning analysis provides insights into developing conflicts, suggest modes of response, and feed these analysis and suggested intervention responses to critical organs that are responsible for taking the necessary preventive action.

In the same vein, preventive diplomacy can be employed; this is possible when warning is shared with the protagonists to a conflict

with the intent of tempering their conflict generating activities, or when it is shared with a political decision-making body that can initiate prompt preventive action. The concept of preventive development cknowledges that some of the conflicts in Africa have been exacerbated by the economic crises of the past two decades, which can fuel a breakdown in the social and political orders. Therefore, food security, relief-to-development activities, regional integration and cooperation and human resource development should al be pursued as key elements of a development strategy which continuously tackles the root causes of conflict (Africa Discovery, 1994). The philosophy of human security is freedom from disaster, anxiety, attack and violent disruption of the normal day to day existence. Its components are good health, community, environmental, personal, economic and political security (Williams, 2001).

Another strategy to manage conflicts in Africa is known as bargaining or negotiation. This involves a delicate balance between giving what is asked and getting what is wanted.

It is a process in which two or more parties who have both common interests and conflicting interest, put forth and discuss explicit proposals concerning specific terms of possible agreement. Kayode et al (1994:33) identified three main element of bargaining:

(i)     Trust: trust is required in order to ensue that an opponent will honour a bargain.

(ii)    Time: there must be enough time to consider offers from both sides to prevent escalation of the conflict.

(iii)    Psychology: the opponent has to be understood if meaningful negotiation is to result.

For effective negotiations, issues are looked at on their merits. The two parties wish for mutual gains wherever possible and where there is conflict of interests the outcome of the negotiation is based on some fair standards, independent of the preference of either side. In such a situation, the relationship between both parties becomes interdependent; both parties listen to and learn from each other; what ensues is a compromise.

In a situation where the conflict is unable to achieve a meaningful bargaining and negotiation fails, there must be a mediation. Once a given conflict escalates into violence confrontation, intensive diplomatic pressure and other resources should be promptly expended in order to achieve early, and indeed decisive, conflict mitigation and peace making. The presence of a third party is useful in the sense that it is said to offer his good offices when he tries to persuade the disputants to enter into negotiation. Richmond (1999:56) explained that the role of the third party must incorporate the facilitation of cross-cutting contact between groups which are not primarily driven by ethnic identity (e.g. professional or civilian groups, NGOs, etc) in order to reduce the effects of ethno-nationalism in negotiations at the diplomatic levels. Mediation however, differs from good office mainly in the sense that once a mediator is invited to act, he is free not only to transmit, but also to initiate suggestions for solutions, or influence decision making. In this circumstance, a mediator has to enjoy the confidence of both parties in a dispute. As experience has amply demonstrated, mediation is a risky process with no guarantee to success. What might be painstakingly achieved can be easily destroyed overnight. In order to be effective and enduring,

conflict prevention and peace building approaches must be coherent, comprehensive, integrated and aimed at addressing the root causes of the conflict (Rugumamu. 2000).

Peace education and peace keeping is an important strategies for managing conflict in Africa. Peace making in Africa is taken very seriously as can be testified by the existence of many structures that can be called upon to play such a role. Of the many structures, the military is reckoned with, as witnessed in Liberia and Sierra-Leone with the presence of ECOMOG. Thus, the concept of regionalism becomes an important strategy in managing conflict in Africa. Even the transformation of organization of African Unity (OAU) to African Union (AU) in 2001 saw Africa taking some bold steps towards launching the continent into the global standard of regional governance within the context of contemporary democratic pressures or demands (Omelle, 2004:127). Regionalization as a dominant trend on the continent has meant that countries would identify themselves as regions and as such commit themselves to undertake collective action. At a regional level, there is the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); the Southern African Development Council (SADC); Inter-Governmental Agency for Development (IGAD) that are among the regional institutions which are meant to assist the African Union in dealing with conflict. Indeed some of these regional bodies have been and, are still involved in conflict resolution initiative. The setting up of this mechanism meant that for the first time, the OAU (now AU) made conflict management and resolution its central focus (Solomon and Deconing, 2000:17). The point we are making here is that the role of Inter-Governmental organizations is inevitable in managing conflict in Africa.

It is equally important to put in place a research oriented strategy in managing conflict. The essence of conflict research must be to institutionalize strategies that can prevent or transform and manage conflicts. Our research efforts must address inadequate socio-economic benefits in terms of resource mobilization and distribution and the socio-political exclusion in terms of relative deprivation (Williams, 2001). For this reason, action research is needed rather than an abstract one, and practitioners must also realize two serious limitations amongst others, i.e., dependence on case studies and the need of sources of information and building confidence.

It is imperative to note that reconciliation, reconstruction and peace building is another strategy for managing conflict in Africa. The process of reconstruction and reconciliation is usually long, arduous and expensive. The war reconstruction efforts in Africa cannot be achieved without significant increase in international and multilateral financial and technical assistance The starting point should be to undertake a comprehensive impact assessment of the short, medium and long-term effects of an intervention on a country's social economic and physical environment. Donor countries, international organizations, and regional development banks like African Development Bank Group must allocate adequate funding and technical expertise to assist in restoring basic services and implementing both post-civil war and peace time demobilization and reintegration schemes (Rugumamu, 2000:19). The types and amounts of assistance to be made available should be precisely specified during the negotiation process as an integral element in brokering a peace settlement.

In addition, a process of peace building must be created in any conflict management techniques. Peace-building as noted by Nwoise

(2004: 31-32) is more meaningful after the cessation of hostilities, and involves things like assisting refugees and displaced persons to return and resettle in their homes: removal of abandoned mines especially in residential areas; provision of food, water, drugs, and clothing; activation of damaged electricity and water supply lines; organization of elections, election monitoring; reconstruction of infrastructure like roads and bridges; rebuilding of damaged schools and hospitals; retraining of the army and police etc.

Finally, for any effective management of conflict, good governance is very essential. The constitution must be drawn to accommodate the interest of the minorities. Lijphart (1977), shared the same view in his popular study of consociational politics, which can be applicable to African political life in accordance with the politics of accommodation. Quite obviously, the constitutional institutions and competitive processes of a truly democratic system assure some voice or representation for diverse ethnic views and interests, prelude the systematic transgression of basic groups rights, provide for an interactive bargaining process among ethnic elites and, consequently, reduce the likelihood of violent ethnic confrontation and polarization (Diamond and Suberu, 2000). In essence peace, justice and good governance are the most appropriate and effective strategy for preventing conflicts from reaching such a volatile level.