

The Quest for Peace in Africa. Transformations, Democracy and Public Policy, edited by Alfred G. Nhema. OSSREA, with International Books (2004)

The Quest for Peace in Africa

Transformations, Democracy and Public Policy

"It is now accepted that without enduring peace, there can be no meaningful development in Africa. The search for novel and nuanced peace initiatives must, therefore, be put high on the agenda. Africa cannot claim its place among the stable and prosperous nations if the issue of civil strife and conflict resolution mechanisms are not addressed in a holistic manner. The fundamental question that has to be posed is whether the various actors at the national, regional and international levels have the political will and capacity to free the continent from the yoke of conflicts and social instability." (Nhema, p. 12)

This statement neatly summarises the views and opinions reflected in most of the contributions that constitute the major part of the book. A total of seventeen chapters are presented under three categories of themes: Conflicts: Sources, Management, Resolution and Prevention; Democracy and Democratisation, and Public Policy.

The book is the outcome of the deliberations of the Seventh OSSREA Congress, which was held in Khartoum, Sudan, from 15–19th December, 2002. The Congress brought together a number of academics and social scientists from universities, research institutions and international organisations around the world.

The root causes are political

The book asserts that although historical legacies can be traced as some of the causes of African conflicts, the bottom line is that the root causes of these conflicts are found in the socio-economic and exclusionary political configurations. Such unrepresentative governance systems place very little regard on the rights and civil liberties of their citizenry, thereby, creating a conflict-prone political environment. Most African countries have yet to succeed in creating relationship between the state and society that subordinates politics to law and one that provides legal safeguards for rights and liberties consistent with a sustainable democratic order.

In a broader perspective, some conflicts emanate from international factors, which can be subsumed under the global political economy in which African countries are among the weaker contenders and are losing in all aspects of global interaction. This is eroding the political economic status of African countries and creating an environment conducive for conflicts. Further, the economic and political conditionalities that have been imposed on African countries in the last two or so decades by the West have either directly or indirectly

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As part of Swedish development co-operation, Sida supports the strengthening and development of research capacity in the South and the promotion of research of central importance for sustainable development and poverty reduction.

Many of the research results in the South are published in books, conference reports and journals which have limited circulation in the OECD-countries. To a certain extent they are available on the internet. However, in the North this research is normally known only to a small group of researchers, and unknown to a wider audience.

To remedy this deficiency, Sida's Department for Research Co-operation, SAREC, intends to publish briefs based on publications from Sida-supported social science research networks. During a pilot period, the focus will be on research from Africa.

The briefs will be written by both SAREC and external staff in their individual capacities and areas of responsibility. They will go beyond the "executive summary" concept, as they will also contain some reflections on relevance and potential use in Sida's and Sweden's policy discussions and development co-operation practice.

It may be argued that at least some of the briefs have already been published by the African networks, and that therefore a special series of this kind is unnecessary. Our point of view is that both the selection of material and the reflections included make it easier for the reader to position the research in a Swedish policy context.

I hope that the series Perspectives from researchers in the South will be read by colleagues working with global development as well as others with an interest in these issues. I also hope that the series will inspire readers to study the original documents. If the response is positive, we may broaden the scope both geographically and topically. Feedback is welcome!

Berit Olsson
Director of SAREC, Sida's Department
for Research Cooperation

caused social instability, making African states vulnerable to conflicts. In a related vein, ethnicity is taken as one of the most important factors generating conflicts in Africa, followed by the uneven development and unbalanced distribution of resources that are viewed as instigating and fuelling conflicts in the various parts of the continent.

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Why are they fighting?

Most of the chapters subscribe to the prevailing notion that attempts to deal with conflicts in Africa are not yielding significant results. The failure is attributable to lack of authentic data regarding the nature and sources of the conflicts. There exists research evidence that contends that, at times, those who are involved in conflicts do not understand and even know why they are fighting. It is sometimes difficult to identify the actors behind these conflicts. It is also true that those seeking solutions to conflicts may not comprehend the socio-economic and cultural settings of the conflicts. Sometimes they deal with symptoms or immediate causes, but not with the actual problems and their root causes. What also emerges from the arguments in these papers is that some of the people, organizations and institutions involved in the conflict resolution process are in fact themselves the engineers of these conflicts.

Conflict resolution attempts may escalate the problems

At times, the conceptualised conflict resolution mechanisms and processes have escalated the problems instead of providing solutions, which complicates the situation even further. Against this realization, the attempts to manage and resolve African conflicts are not readily yielding significant results; the alternative that is gaining support is that if one cannot deal with conflicts, then one must prevent them.

Pontian Godfrey Okoth recommends alternative mechanisms that include pressure on adversaries to negotiate (maintaining that pressures of a non-military type seek to raise the costs against governments that persist

in policies viewed by the international community as grievously harmful to the well being of other states or to a significant section of the target's own citizenry); involvement of non-official mediators (such as the World Council of Churches [wcc], All Africa Conference of Churches [AACC], and other non-official actors); mediation by the "great powers"; the United Nations, and mili-

tary-diplomatic interventions for peace enforcement, restoring states' capacity for effective leadership and ensuring responsible sovereignty.

In short, the range of identified strategies include, among others:

- Negotiation and reconciliation efforts within the framework of existing local socio-economic, political and cultural structures;
- Legal approaches like the use of truth commissions;
- Interventions by international actors and regional organizations; and
- The role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) especially in rehabilitating and improving the status of women, children and other minority groups through civic education, training and material aid.

Are conflicts preventable?

Although conflict prevention as an alternative way of creating and sustaining peace is a valid and viable looking innovation, in practice, however, it presents complex and delicate challenges. Factors that are outlined include the following:

- Conflict may not be easy to identify and perceive;
- Things may spiral out of control before solutions are found;
- The same causes may not produce the same effects everywhere;
- Factors thought to be decisive may turn out to be insignificant or vice versa;
- The root causes emerge only once the conflict is in place;
- Even the most accurate forecasts do not produce desirable outcomes; and

- The process of predicting a social problem and preventing it entails a great deal of prudence and skills in evaluating situation.

Kasaija Philip Apuuli's review of the Inter-Governmental Authority for Development's (IGAD) protocol on the Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN) argues that it is "one of the most interesting initiatives that has been receiving attention regionally and internationally". The strengths and weaknesses of the CEWARN are critically analysed. The chapter notes that the issues at times is not lack of information on early warning per se, but lack of political will and enforcement mechanisms. This is so mainly because the IGAD's protocol on CERWAN has no enforcement mechanisms, and governments of member countries are not obliged to act on early warning information. This calls for IGAD to develop a strong mechanism that enables it to enforce the information gathered from the CEWARN mechanism.

Weak democracy creates polarization

When seeking solutions to conflicts in Africa, the volume contents that one cannot ignore examining the emergence and types of governance systems prevailing in Africa. The foundation of current undemocratic and exclusionary governance in Africa is traced back to the dawn of independence. As the political elite who led in the struggle for independence by advocating the ideals of democracy, economic development and Pan-Africanism succumbed to the trappings of power and personal gain, the ideals of democracy and economic well-being gave way to authoritarianism. In their bid to consolidate their hold on to power and subjugate the citizenry, the elites suppressed any move towards genuine democracy and democratisation, thereby creating fertile grounds for polarization, and hence, conflicts.

Punitive conditionality – a drawback

Cephas K. Lumina's discourse examines the democracy and democratisation process in Africa from a different perspective and echoes the view shared

by many. The central line of his argument is that the political conditionality subscribed to by the World Bank and donors and imposed on recipient countries as a fundamental pre-requisite to access international aid entails a lot of drawbacks and requires serious re-examination. While the policy of conditionality has, admittedly, provided the impetus for political reforms in a number of countries, it has also resulted in allegations of interference in the sovereignty of recipient states. Using Zambia as a case study, the author investigates the impact of political conditionality and draws his conclusion as follows:

First, despite donor-induced political reform in 1991, there remained (and still remain) some concerns in the area of human rights. Second, the Government resented/resents the donors' use of (punitive) conditionality to promote good governance in the country and this reduced its commitment to implement donor demands. Third, an enduring promotional approach to political conditionality which clearly identifies the main areas of concern and targets these for improvement would be a more acceptable and effective way of promoting human rights within the context of political conditionality than the punitive one of withholding aid for failure to adhere to the rather ambiguous demand of good governance (pp. 344-5).

In conformity with these conclusions, the author proposes an acceptable and effective intervention strategy that promotes human rights within the context of political conditionality.

Too little interest in public policy

In its discussion of Public Policy in Africa, the volume asserts that, notwithstanding the differences prevail-

ing in the understanding and interpretation of the very concept of Public Policy, African scholars have, for long, shown little interest in the concept. In general, public policy is viewed as a systematic and deliberate intervention in social life for the purpose of ensuring the well being of the majority of the people. As such, it embodies both policies and the area of study that confronts issues of human sustenance and well-being, covering a wide range of concerns and topics such as health, education, employment, income security, social welfare and social security, among others.

Social problems, which breed conflicts in Africa, have direct implications on the study and praxis of social policy objectives. Although much effort has gone into the discussion and analysis of specific elements of public policy such as health, education, housing and social security, not much has been done in terms of addressing public policy as an integrated theme that is closely related to issues of democracy, human rights and peace.

This is partly because the public policy domain has not been greatly professionalised and, at times, has been reduced to the field of social work, social welfare and social administration. Similarly, not much debate has ensued between public policy researchers and other social science disciplines. This is a real challenge to social scientists in the region.

Little regard for empirical facts

The chapter by Felician S. K. Tungaraza, drawing on the Tanzanian experience examines the origin and development of public policy and the challenges confronting social policy formulation and application. According to Tungaraza, despite the

existence of public policy making machinery in the government structure, social policy issues have been addressed without a consciously formulated national social policy since independence in 1961. In spite of the ruling party assuming the primary role of public policy making in the period of 1967-1991, the president of the United Republic of Tanzania as head of the government and chairman of the ruling party was the final and major decision maker in social policy issues. Consequently, not only was social policy making politically motivated, but also social policies continued to be sector based, and were formulated with little regard for detailed empirical facts, needs assessment, values of the people, manpower and resource inventory. Policy making in the period from 1992 to the present has remained fundamentally the same as in previous periods. This is because there is very little participation of the target population, private associations to share their perceptions, develop skills and exercise leadership for their own development.

H.M Mushala's chapter investigates the impact of HIV/AIDS on subsistence agriculture in Swaziland in relation to policy implications. The author notes that the country has developed a National Development Strategy encompassing most critical aspects for the betterment of quality of life. But, while the policy pronouncements seem attractive, they have not been supported by appropriate legislation to effect implementation. One instance in this regard is the empowerment of individuals and communities, which is of outmost significance in the fight against HIV/AIDS and poverty alleviation.

Comments

The main message of this book for readers in the North is that the root causes of African conflicts are strongly linked to socio-economic basics and politics that exclude some groups in the society. Many African countries have not succeeded to create a relationship between the state and society that subordinates politics to law. Sufficient legal safeguards for rights and liberties that are part of a sustainable democratic order are often lacking. Other important factors making African states more vulnerable to conflicts are the economic or political conditionalities, imposed on them as part of the

aid agreements, which directly and indirectly are causing social instability.

The broad coverage of the book emphasises the multidimensionality of conflict issues and therefore also the complexity of conflict management, conflict resolution and conflict prevention. The case studies fetched from different countries provide tangible empirical aspects.

The chapter on the role of international actors in conflict management is of obvious interest to development practitioners in the North. It emphasises the need for a new combination of actors, combining the skills and legitimacy of such organisations

as the UN and AU or well placed unofficial or small power mediators with the leverage of a great power. This is however not a frequently found combination.

Other useful chapters discuss child-soldier rehabilitation and reintegration, the IGAD protocol on conflict early warning and response mechanism and prospects for peace-building through Truth commissions. Country case studies with various perspectives increase the understanding of conflict development, democratization processes and the role of public policy. They cover Mozambique, Tanzania, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Ethiopia.

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The Organisation for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa, OSS-REA, is a regional research and capacity-building network of social scientists from the region. It was founded in 1980 and in the beginning of 2005 it has national chapters in 21 countries. The head office is located in Addis Ababa. The OSSREA website is: www.ossrea.net