Peace, Conflict and Development Programme Initiative Conflict Researchers Experts Meeting – Eastern Africa and the Horn of Africa

Nairobi, Kenya

Tuesday, February 21, 2006

Meeting organized by IDRC

"**The Role of regional and sub-regional organizations in conflict management and resolution**"

by

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Addis

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A. Introduction

The OAU was established in 1963 in Addis Ababa. The issue of political integration was at the core of the OAU agenda at the time. The advocates of step by step integration won the debate over the those who wanted immediate political integration. The step by step school thus urged movement towards economic integration which they argued will eventually lead to political integration.

The first step towards economic integration was thought of in terms of trade and economic relations between countries within the five sub-regions defined by the OAU – the continent being divided geographically East, West, South, Central and North Africa.

Development would be achieved through economic integration, and this became the basis for the formation of the sub-regional groupings recognized by the OAU. The Abuja Treaty of 1990/2 formalized the establishment of the sub-regional groups – officially known as RECs

(Regional Economic Communities). It defined the principles and areas of cooperation between countries as well as providing a time frame for the achievement of full economic integration by the RECs.

Up to 1990, the OAU thought of conflicts mainly in terms of inter-state conflicts. There were a few of these for which the OAU mediated solution to them. Internal African conflicts were seen as being purely internal matters to be resolved by the states. These internal conflicts were kept in check because they were seen from the perspective of the cold war and the intervention of external powers supporting states in suppressing these conflicts.

The four most functional sub-regional groups vary tremendously in their size, internal cohesion, linguistic/cultural, diversity/homogeneity, inter-state relations and suspicions etc. These differences have affected their respective capacities to deal with internal conflicts/civil wars as well as with inter-state tensions and conflicts. Despite these problems and differences, some sub-regional groups (SRGs/RECs) have moved much faster in facing the challenges posed by conflicts.

ECOWAS is the most advanced while IGAD is still struggling to formulate its internal structures and strategies for peace and security. ECOWAS was formed in 1975 but its treaty does not mention the issue of conflict and peace and security. It was only in 1993 that its Protocol was changed to recognise the link between Security and Development. Yet its success is in this area and has one of the most advanced conflict management mechanism. The Protocol relating to this Mechanism came into being in 1999. And its Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance was approved in 2001. ECOWAS now has a Parliament, a Community Court of justice, Community Citizenship and talk of a Common Currency. These are all relevant

steps in the right direction towards not only Regional Integration in the broader sense of the word but also as part of the Conflict Management and Peace and Security Mechanism.

SADC was formed in the 1990s after South Africa became independent. It has a chequred history in dealing with conflicts – it could not deal with Angola or with DRC but has intervened in Lesotho. SADC has established a committee on Defense and Security as well as an Inter-Parliamentary Committee.

Both ECOWAS and SADC have what is known as "big brother" syndrome – Nigeria and South Africa – which tend to unduly influence policies of their respective SRG/RECs. This is a fear in IGAD and the EAC – where presently there is no big brother.

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) is the last SRG/REC to be created and is the weakest in terms of dealing with conflicts and maintaining peace and security. It faces deep political divisions within the member's states, which have frustrated the management of regional conflicts.
IGAD is poorly staffed, lacks peacekeeping experience and does not have permanent mediation body, rendering any interventions in a conflict ad hoc. However, even as some participants called for IGAD to establish its capacity for Peacekeeping as the ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) has done in West Africa, others cautioned against the establishment of such a force. But the lack of a potential regional hegemony comparable to Nigeria in West Africa and South Africa in Southern Africa to lead such an intervention force is seen as a weakness in IGAD.

Nevertheless recently IGAD began to take some tentative steps in the process of supporting the Peace Support Mission in Somalia.

The EAST African Community is the most advanced of the SRGs (it has only been recently recognised by the AU). It is the only community which explicitly has political integration as an objective in its Treaty. It has a long history and is more homogenous than any of the other SRG. Although there are conflicts in the members states – Uganda, most serious, Tanzania and Kenya, the EAC has not intervened in any of these conflicts. There are voices now that it should intervene – especially in Uganda and Tanzania.

The EAC has a strong Secretariat, a Legislative Assembly and a High Court. It also has important Committees which deal with various important issues including the role of Civil Society. However it has no mediation mechanism – because until now all conflicts within the community have been left to each member state to deal with.

There is close military cooperation between the member states – especially in terms of training. It recently formed a joint Battalion to deal with terrorism.

During the 1990s – post cold-war – African internal conflicts spread, deepened and increased considerably. Withdrawal of external support to client states, led to their weakening which in turn led them to increase their oppression of emerging rebellion against the states. Some states simply collapse under the pressure from internal rebellions while others continued to strengthen their military capacity and therefore increased oppression of any form of rebellions.

However it soon became clear to most leaders that development or any form of economic integration cannot take place without peace and security in countries and therefore the sub-regions. The focus of

the sub-regional organisations (RECs) thus began to shift towards giving serious attention to the issue of peace and security. This in turn raised serious challenges which the sub-regional organisations had to and are facing such as (a) what kinds of conflicts were taking place in a given country and sub-region; (b) what are the causes of these conflicts; (c) how are the states dealing with these different types of conflicts; how to deal with conflicts which have developed into major civil wars to the point that the states themselves have simply become another party to the conflict; (d) how to deal with states which are collapsing or have collapsed; (e) what role can the OAU and now the AU and the sub-regional organisation (RECs) play in dealing with these conflicts eg. resolving them through mediation, intervening to maintain peace, and reconstituting the collapsed state in the post-conflict situation; (f) what role the UN and the Western powers can play in mediation and reconstructing the states as well as in dealing with the enormous and many economic and social problems.

During the 1990s sub-regional organisations, especially ECOWAS, took a leading role in facing internal conflicts through mediations and sometime direct intervention. The issue of sovereignty was always a stumbling block as well as an excuse for not dealing seriously with some of the conflicts which persisted to the point of states collapsing. However the mediation and Agreements resulting from them, often did not succeed and were flouted openly by both states and the organized rebellions. The Arusha Agreements, the Lusaka Agreements are well known example of these. There are others – the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement on the Sudan.

However as conflicts widened and deepened and increased in numbers, both the OAU and the sub-regional organisations were

forced to become more interventionist and develop strategies and capacities to deal with the conflicts.

The OAU evolved into the AU with strong emphases on the issue of peace and security, while the sub-regional organisations developed strategies and capacities for interventions. In particular, special attention began to be given to the question of good governance as well as developing both mediation and military capacities for intervention. A detailed analyses and mapping of these evolving strategies and structures, is urgently needed – both at the level of the AU and the level of the sub-regional organisations. Just as important is the role of the UN and the Western powers in supporting the sub-regional organisation in their efforts to manage and resolve conflicts and in post-conflict peace-keeping.

Types of Conflicts

It is important to distinguish between the different types of conflicts, for a better understanding of African conflicts as well as for deciding as to whether the conflict comes under the sovereignty of a government or that the AU and SROs/RECs have the right to intervene. This was a contentious issue during the OAU period. However the AU now has the right to intervene in conflicts which are causing extensive and serious human rights violation. This is easier said than done given the nature of the AU and the SROs/RECs as we will see below.

For purpose of brevity we have categorized African conflicts into four types. Some of these conflicts evolve from one type to another.

1. Inter-state conflicts. Since independence there have been very few of these. During the last few years we have had two such rare

conflicts (a) the Ethiopia/Eritrea – which has not been finally resolved; and (b) Uganda/Rwanda – whose armies fought each other in the DRC and then were preparing to fight each other across their border – but external intervention stopped it from starting. Tension between these two countries is still there because the root cause has not been resolved. The type of war waged by Tanzania and Uganda in the 1970s in which the former over ran the latter and changed the regime of Idi Amin without the intervention of the OAU or open intervention of external powers – this kind of war is no longer possible, even though Uganda and Rwanda jointly invaded the then Zaire and removed Mobutu, and even though Ethiopia is threatening to do to Eritrea exactly what Tanzania did to Uganda in the mid 1970s.

Most inter-state conflicts/wars however, tend to be small in scale and confined mainly at the border areas and unlike European wars, which cover the whole country.

The OAU/AU, the UN and Western Powers generally intervened before and after the war have started. Extensive negotiation takes place through OAU/AU and other powers mediation and generally the conflict is stopped before it starts (Uganda/Rwanda) or shortly after it has started. African states do not have the capacity to sustain a long military war. It is important to note that these mediation generally bring about ceasefire – they stop the fighting – but do not bring about final solution by resolving the root cause of the conflict. The Algerian Moroccan war of the early 1960s has not finally resolved – the territorial claims of the two countries have not been resolved. The same goes for the Ethiopia/Eritrea and Uganda/Rwanda conflicts.

2.   The most important conflicts from the perspective of the AU and SROs/RECs are major civil wars. These vary in terms of their territorial coverage within a country, in terms of the number and size of groups involved, and the number of years they continue. Example of these major civil wars during the last 20 years are or have taken place in the following countries:-

Sudan, Uganda, Somalia, Ethiopia, DRC, Burundi, Rwanda, Cote d'Ivoire, Siera Leon, Liberia, Angola, Mozambique.

The most important characteristics of these major civil wars are;-

(a)   they quickly become regionalised and so involve, directly or indirectly, neighboring countries supporting the different sides. Hence direct intervention by the AU becomes difficult and mediation becomes complex and prolonged. The most complex of these civil wars was and still is that of the DRC;

(b)   external intervention – again directly or indirectly – in support of the government or another side in the war, inevitably takes place. This was very obvious pre-1990 during the cold war, but has been less obvious since then.

© some of these conflicts started small and developed into a major war involving many groups. Some states – such as Sudan, Ethiopia were able to survive the conflict for a long time – until either the state is defeated (Ethiopia) or makes major concessions and accepts peaceful resolutions through mediated negotiations (Sudan). Other conflicts lead to the state collapsing (Somalia). Given the variation and complexity of these conflicts and also the interest of the Western powers in the resources and geo-strategic position of some countries, - - these determine the intervention of the AU, UN and the

Western powers. This explains the interventions of the AU, UN and the SROs/RECs in any given specific conflict or the absence of such interventions.

3.   A third type of conflicts are those within an ethnic group or between ethnic groups in a country – a conflict over resources especially land; in most cases these conflicts are managed, controlled or suppressed by strong states – e.g. Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, Senegal etc. However such solutions are generally temporary and the conflict or revolts reappears later;
However such conflict/revolts against the state sometimes spread and involves other suppressed ethnic group revolts. And this kind of revolt may develop into a major civil war in which the state, if it is not very strong, is reduced to being one of the party to the conflict and eventually collapses.

4.   A fourth type of conflict specifically involves mobile border pastoral communities fighting over water resources or cattle as a commodity. These conflicts are difficult to resolve, partly because the states often do not understand pastoralist culture and often looks down on such communities, partly because the communities are mobile and live in hostile environment, and partly they are often used by other rebel groups. Also the fear of governments on both sides of the border of such conflict developing into an inter-state conflict, makes governments use excessive force or simply ignore such conflicts. These are some of the most intractable conflicts facing many governments in the Horn and in East Africa. But strangely enough these conflicts which ideally could be dealt by the EAC or

IGAD, are left entirely to the governments to manage and resolve – which they do badly. Hence their persistence.

Given these different types of conflicts and their complexities, it is often difficult to draw the line as to whether intervention should be by the national government, by the SROs/RECs or by the AU. There are very few conflicts which are totally immune from influences emanating from outside a country where they occur and therefore are subject to purely internal government management and resolution of the conflict. In fact most conflicts are subjected to outside influences – within the region or by foreign powers – influences in terms of providing arms, shelter, training, finance, and even directing the course of the fighting of the parties against a government. Most conflicts thus become quickly regionalised and hence the difficulties of resolving these conflicts by looking at them as purely internal conflict to a country. But precisely because such conflicts become quickly regionalised, intervention by sub-regional organisations becomes just as difficult. Clear examples are the conflicts in Somalia, Sudan, DRC, Uganda, Burundi and the internal Ethiopian conflict.

OAU/AU-Political and diplomatic intervention –mediation role

The most significant intervention of the OAU/AU have been in terms of mediation by bringing together the parties in conflict and by holding conferences of neighboring countries. In both these mechanism, the UN and representative of Western powers attend as observers but use their influence informally – outside the negotiating room or the conference. While the objective of mediation is to bring the parties in conflict and to convince them that they have a common interest in running the government together rather than by fighting

and thus reach an Agreement which balances the powers of the respective groups; the objective of conferences of neighboring heads of states is also to negotiate the balance of power of the neighboring countries in terms of their interest and so reduce their negative influence on the conflicting parties – some of which are their clients.

The most famous mediations and the conferences which accompanied them were the Arusha meetings of the 1990s on Rwanda, Burundi, the Lusaka meetings (and later Sun City) on DRC which produced the famous Arusha and Lusaka Agreements for Rwanda, Burundi and DRC. There were similar mediations and Agreements in West Africa including the ongoing mediation by the AU and ECOWAS on Cote d'Ivoire.

In the case of the Horn (Ethiopia/Eritrea conflict) and in the case of Sudan and Somalia, the Agreements reached through many mediations by various regional and external governments, the AU played a strong and direct role in the negotiations only in the Ethiopia/Eritrea conflict. In the case of Sudan and Somalia, neither IGAD nor the EAC played any role in the mediations and Agreements reached. Rather foreign powers, the UN and Kenya played critical role in the mediations.

In the case of Darfur, the AU was very reluctant to intervene because of objection from Sudan and only after Sudan had been pressurized by external forces to agree, did the AU intervened. The entire intervention exercise is being financed by Western governments and the peace keeping force being managed from Addis Ababa and Khartoum jointly by the AU, the EU and the USA. And now the UN is expected to take over the peace keeping operations in Darfur because the AU has no funds to go it alone and donors prefer the UN

over which they have a direct control They find the politics of the AU to be too cumbersome.

The argument that the AU, through its members states, have no money or equipment to finance AU peacekeeping, is in my view, not correct. African government's spending on their military is very high – a military which is not fighting any wars (Ethiopia/Eritrea and Sudan being an exception). There are enough African financial resources and military equipment and manpower to support several peacekeeping operations in the continent either directly by the AU or by one of the SRG/REC. Why such resources are not made available thus forcing the AU and SROs/RECs to be totally dependent on outside support, is a challenge which needs to be seriously addressed

Post-Conflict Peace Building

As indicated earlier the issue of post-conflict reconstruction and peace keeping has not been dealt with by either the AU or the SROs/RECs. What is being done in the various counties which are being reconstructed now – Siera Leon, Liberia, South Sudan, Somalia is based on a model of reconstruction entirely imported from outside and also entirely financed from outside. There is no greater challenge facing the AU and the SROs/RECs than to begin seriously to think of a model for post-conflict reconstruction based on African thinking and reality. However, can African policy makers think of a better model of reconstruction than the dysfunctional model of states and development they have in their own countries? And even if they come up with a better model than that presently imported and ideally better than their dysfunctional situation, the same old question will arise – who will fund the reconstruction? If finance is from outside, the model will be altered to conform to outside interests. Back to square one!

Research Themes

If we want to have some understanding of the complex issue of peace, conflict management and its relationship to development at both the regional and sub-regional levels, it will be necessary to differentiate between the OAU and AU at the regional level and between ECOWAS and other SROs/RECs (e.g. IGAD) at the sub-regional level. In making this differentiation, there will be a need to focus on the evolution of the thinking and strategies on this issue at the two levels as well as the processes of evolving structures, implementation mechanism and capacities as well as case studies of actual interventions.

1. At the regional level it is necessary to look at the role the OAU played in various crises situations – Rwanda, Burundi and DRC as well as others before the 1990s. The OAU experience is absolutely necessary to understand the emergence of the AU, its focus and evolving strategies on Peace and Security and its first major intervention in Darfur.

At the sub-regional level ECOWAS is unique amongst the SROs/RECs given its experience in interventions in Siera Leon, Liberia, Togo and presently in Cote d'Ivoire.

In both cases the role of the UN, Western Powers and their Humanitarian Organisations is also critical especially at the phase of interventions. The AU intervention and its reasonable success in Darfur, could not have been done without this external intervention. The same applies to the various successful interventions of ECOWAS.

If however we limit our focus on East Africa and the Horn i.e. IGAD and the EAC, the three major crises in this region – Ethiopia/Eritrea

conflict, the Sudan (North/South) conflict and the Somali conflict – IGAD played very little role in the process of managing and resolving these conflicts. In the case of the Ethiopia/Eritrea war, the OAU and external powers and the UN played a critical role in bringing about secession of fighting – but not necessarily security. While the Sudan and Somali crises, it was the parties themselves, helped by Kenya and external powers which have and are still helping with the long process of post conflict reconstruction – especially the reconstruction of the state. There are of course many reasons why IGAD did not and is not playing an important role in these crises. One important reason is that these conflicts have preceded IGAD and that they have been regionalised with extensive interventions of neighboring countries. Hence the difficulties to find consensus on intervention by IGAD.

It is therefore necessary to look at IGAD itself and the internal dynamics of the organization in order to find out its potential for managing and resolving conflicts and thus bring about peace in the region.

The case of the EAC is very different. In its second life it is the most advance SRO/REC in terms of its objective towards political integration as well as economic integration. If Rwanda and Burundi become members of the EAC, its process and speed towards political integration may be affected and possibly slowed down.

One important feature of the EAC, despite its advance towards political integration, is the fact that it has not so far dealt with any of the important conflicts in the Community – major conflicts such as those in Uganda and the Tanzania/Zanzibar or the numerous smaller conflicts in Kenya. If Burundi and Rwanda become members of the

Community, it may be be forced to intervene, as a Community, in the various conflicts. There are already voices that it should intervene in Uganda and Zanzibar! Nevertheless, it is important to try and find out the reasons why the Community has kept out the internal conflicts of its member states especially in the case of the long standing conflict in the north of Uganda.

The joint battalion which has been set up by the Community is, and I may be wrong on this, specifically tasked to deal with the issue of "terrorism" – presumably terrorism originating from outside.

2. Hence there is a need to look at both these organisations - IGAD and the EAC - in terms of their strategies and capacities towards the on going conflicts in the regions and generally towards the wider issue of peace, conflict and development in the region.

3. The region has an actual case of a collapsed state – Somalia – and a potentially collapsing state – Eritrea. The Somali state was militarily powerful to the extent that it invaded Ethiopia and was driven out of Ethiopia only after external intervention to help Ethiopia. Why did such a State collapse? There is a serious need to understand the forces and process which lead to a strong state collapsing. Is Eritrea not on the same path as Somalia was in the early 1990s? We need to find out the forces and process which leads a state to collapse – Somalia in the 1990s, and Eritrea in the process of collapsing?

4. In the case of states which are militarily strong and have capable institutions to keep the states functioning in their attempts to use force to resolve their internal conflict/s such as Sudan, Uganda, and possibly Kenya and Tanzania – these countries have strong states

but which are considered as dysfunctional. They have been characterized as "constitutionally failed states" because the states serve only a small section of its population – mainly the elite – and are incapable of providing security and constitutionally binding functions to the majority of their people. One very obvious and pertinent characteristic of these states is that liberal democracy and good governance functions only at the elite level and for their benefit, but does not function for the majority of the population.

These "dysfunctional" or "constitutionally failed states" need to be studied carefully in terms of their ability (a) to use resources for putting down by force genuine conflicts amongst communities and rebellions against the state, instead of using resources to provide services to these communities and rebellious groups as a way of resolving conflicts; (b) to manipulate an electoral system and state institutions to maintain themselves in power when there is no good governance for the majority of the people most of whom are very poor and experience serious physical and economic insecurity.

5. The Mediation initiatives which took place in, Addis Ababa, Algiers, Arusha, Lusaka, Sun City, Nairobi/Machakos etc. are important initiatives which lead to Agreements which often brought about cessation of fighting. These mediations are essentially method of balancing power of the different groups with regards to which faction of the elite will control what in the reconstructed state. These mediation often succeed in stopping the fighting but do not necessarily bring about lasting peace and certainly not security. This is because they do not tackle the root causes of the conflict. Hence often fighting restarts after sometime. Yet mediation sometimes succeeds and is, in the case of major conflicts (civil wars etc), the

only method available to the AU or the SROs/RECs. Studying the mediation process, the Agreements reached and the reasons why they failed and fighting restarts or succeeded and some form of peace prevail, is necessary and important if we want to understand and improve this important method of managing and resolving conflicts – major or minor conflicts;

6. To really go beyond temporary cessation of fighting or achieving Agreement with precarious peace amongst the elite through strong pressure by the UN or external powers or by the AU and SROs/RECs, to achieve peace and security, there is a need to understand the root causes of any conflict – major or minor – and then to address these causes. Hence in-depth study of underlying causes of conflicts are essential if post-conflict reconstruction and peace and security is to be achieved.

7. In most post-conflict situation, focus is on putting together a functional government in order to maintain some form of peace. And when such a government is set up and especially if it is followed by a multi party election, and some loans and grants to the government, at this point the UN and external powers withdraw from the country complimenting themselves as having accomplished their mission of bringing peace and security in the country. In most of these cases they leave behind a weak government run by the elite, the formal economy destroyed, and deep antagonism amongst the various ethnic groups and classes which were at war. None of the root cause have been tackled seriously. At most some small funds are given for some combatants to join the new army or police force while the rest are expected to go back to the rural areas. Also a few children are

treated for trauma by some Humanitarian organisations. This essentially is considered to be post-conflict reconstruction which it is thought will bring about peace and security.

There is a serious need to look at this model of post-conflict reconstruction carefully and identify its weakness. Its one thing to quickly set up a minimally functioning government and another thing to try and build a foundation of a democratic state which will be inclusive, functioning fairly and well. It takes time. There is a serious need to look closely at what kind of economy can be restarted on the basis of an expanding so called informal economy which has grown during and after the war. Truth and Reconciliation Commission are important but such commissions do not bring reconciliation amongst the affected rural people, unemployed urban workers, youth and child soldiers. Massive countrywide concientisation and education is required to heal the wounds of a deeply divided and war affected people.

There is therefore a need to look at the existing model of post-conflict reconstruction from a holistic perspective, identify its weakness and develop a better model of reconstruction by starting with basic foundations for a longer term democratic society based on equity. This would mean interrogating the kind of governments, economy and other institutions set up in Sierra Lion, Liberia or to be set up in South Sudan and Somalia. It also means doing more in areas of reconciliation, education and taking health and other basic needs services to all the rural areas.

8. Finally we need to look carefully at both the positive and negative role of the UN and external forces, including outside Humanitarian and Developmental NGOs. We need to look at these various external

forces before a major conflict take place, or when they latch on to an on-going conflict (e.g. Somalia, Darfur etc) and particularly in the phase of post-conflict reconstruction. It has been pointed out earlier that most of the successful interventions of the AU and ECOWAS could not have been done without the support of external donors. But we know that there are serious reservations about some of the external interventions (or lack of it) in the past (e.g. Rwanda, DRC) and the present e.g. Uganda. Some external Humanitarian organisations have often been accused as not only meddling in conflict situations but also advancing the interests of particular external governments. It is therefore important to carefully look at the role both the positive and negative role of the different external forces – UN, WB/IMF, EU, individual Governments, and NGOs. How far are these interventions – on humanitarian grounds – merely a cover for a hidden agenda to further strategic, commercial and cultural interest or a combination of them.

These briefly are the general themes which could be the subject of research whose findings could help the AU, the SROs/RECs the UN and Western Governments as well individual African Governments and NGOS