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Reflections on Our Knowledge in Peacemaking

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Never mistake knowledge for wisdom. One helps you make a living, the other helps you make a life – Sandra Carey

Theory is when things do not work and we tried to find reasons; practice is when things work and we do not know why – Albert Einstein

The local blind man knows the local bush paths more than any stranger – a Zambian proverb

Introduction

In the last three decades, Africa in general and West Africa in particular went through a simultaneous decline in inter-state and an increase in intra-state conflicts in the form of political crises in Guinea-Conakry and civil wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea Bissau. There are isolated but deadly continuums of skirmishes in the Cassamance region in Senegal and in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria to mention but a few. On the other hand, we have seen a mix of regional, sub-regional institutional with personality and leverage based interventions succeeding in preventing the escalation of political crises into deadly civil wars as in the case of Guinea-Conakry and also in restoring political stability to Liberia and Sierra Leone. This mix has already provided motivation for internal resolutions of the crises cum conflicts in Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea Bissau. It is also obvious that ECOWAS, its member states and CSO's could not say that we have succeeded in preventing many conflicts.

The reasons for these successes and failures are many and multifaceted. However, it is important to state at this juncture, what we mean by peacemaking and what we expect from peacemaking as the end product of a continuum of activities.

I borrow from the reflections of Col. A. J. Rossouw of SANDF in an occasional paper on “Peace Mission” in which he says ‘... and organisations now attach different meanings to certain terms and definitions’. He argued for a common and clear understanding leading to mutual agreement in Africa on the ‘exact meaning’ of these ‘terms, terminology and definitions’. To him, peace missions have the following components: ‘Preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace enforcement’. He excluded peace-building. What is of importance to us is his definition of peacemaking which is ‘primarily a political process designed to bring hostile parties to a negotiated agreement through peaceful means’. This process which is mandated by Chapter 6 of the UN Charter may also require military support for an enabling environment for the political process.

This definition does not only provide the meaning but also what the end product is to an extent. It would appear that, in West Africa most negotiated agreements are not respected. Therefore, many agreements have to be negotiated over a period of many years before the acceptable end product, which is when the peace accord is signed. That end product, to me, should be stability. By stability I mean the continuum in which a conflict or a crisis-ridden state moves from chaos or ‘ungovernability’ to a stable political environment based on the restoration of social capital. The latter is obligatory, because it is the loss of trust and confidence by the various interest groups within a country which leads to crises, strife and deadly conflicts. It is also the most difficult to restore or rebuild in African conflicts.

In most accords, more attention is paid to the political process, thus neglecting the social capital restoration process which is obligatory to:

- establishing law and order and freedom from fear and want
- sustaining the right to life through regeneration of economy and relief of suffering.

In short, peace is an abstract situation that in the real world may never exist. Therefore, I argue that Stability Restoration Missions is what we are doing in Africa especially because since, before and after colonialism there has been no peace to manage, keep or build. Lowering our ambitions from Peace to stability, based on social capital may help us to deal with African crises and conflicts in a better way.

Having said the above, where and how does all this Western theory blend with traditional African practices that African academics have been studying? Why have we neglected our philosophical and cultural heritage in using Western Template for negotiating agreements and before the agreements ceasefires that do not hold?

The Western academics have for long given theoretical explanations for these failures while developing new principles and methodologies which are tried out in workshops and in negotiations worldwide. The success of this methodology

is also mixed. However, it has never resulted in infallibility of Peace Accords or final agreements signed once and for all.

It is obvious to all academics, students and practitioners of peace making in Africa that the western philosophy and methodology dominates up to the point that most of the negotiated processes follow the same method, the same template and most of the Peace Accords are very similar'.²²⁷ The CHD Report on Charting the Roads to Peace, Facts, Figures and Trends in Conflict Resolution' Western styles of mediation were examined and it concluded that there are three main types of intervention i.e. Facilitation in which the mediation team provides the enabling environment and open communications channels for all parties while overseeing leading to the resolution of the conflicts by themselves. The second is the Formulation where the mediation team suggests ideas and options to all sides for resolving the conflict. The third is Manipulation in which the mediation team backed by the UN and major western countries use that influence and power to get the parties to sign an agreement. We have seen examples in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire.

Nearly all agreements end up with an interim government with rebels who then go on to contest elections. Some win and some lose and some try to go back to war. In the case of Liberia unlike other peace agreements, the rebel leaders neither served as Head or Deputy Head of State or government and those who served in other positions did not contest the post interim Government elections. They were discouraged from transforming rebel movements into political parties. They were levered into joining existing political parties.

There is no doubt that the mediator team at the Liberian Peace Talks succeeded because of the full backing of the Western countries, especially USA and the European Union, while Nigeria and Ghana played a highly commendable role. Unlike the Liberian case, many of these agreements are not respected because when Rebels negotiate, they are pressurised to sign with the carrot-and-stick incentives knowing that this is not what they want. It is from these well-known observations as a practitioner both at national and sub-regional levels that one can discuss peacemaking under these headings, namely, Instruments, Institutions, Resources and Capacity. In what follows, I examine each of these elements one after the other.

Resources

In discussing the subject of resources, I am considering the financial and human resources that are obligatory for the peacemaking process. While Africa is not short of human resources, we pretend to be short of financial resources as I will discuss later. This pretension has made us to act as if we do not have the human resources such as knowledge and wisdom.

If we accept that knowledge is what is known and embedded in language, culture and tradition, it can also be situational and contextual. As the Zambia proverb says, Africans cannot but understand their own past and contemporary situations and contexts better than outsiders. Is this the case, knowledge is power, when it is based on truth and belief, and becomes a foundation for accumulating experience over time. The combination helps to demonstrate confidence in peacemaking. In Africa, age, personality and political position determine the choice of a peacemaker. This is why present and ex-Heads of States or ex-Ministers or ex-Chief Executives of Inter governmental Organisations are mostly accepted as heads of peacemaking/mediation teams or as key persons in the mediation process. We have had so many successful examples that maybe ECOWAS Council of Elders should include only former Ex-Heads of States or ex-Presidents of the ECOWAS Commissions. We have seen the recent successes of Gen. Ibrahim Babangida of Nigeria in brokering the appointment of ex-ECOWAS Chief Executive as Prime Minister in the then turbulent Republic of Guinea.

President Blaise Compaore of Burkina Faso also played a role in getting President Gbagbo and his 'enemy' Guillaume Soro to negotiate and agree to co-habit as President and Prime Minister respectively in the hope that the battle line between North and South will disappear. We have also had Gen. Abdulsalaam Abubakar doing the same in Liberia which is gradually becoming a stable state.

One should recall the roles of the late Presidents Gassingbe Eyadema of Togo who was the host and facilitator of the Sierra Leone Peace talks that led to an Accord and Houphouet-Boigny of Cote d'Ivoire who introduced an annual Peace Prize before he died. All these high-profile mediators mentioned above are usually advised by a group of diplomats, and sometimes academics with the knowledge and local understanding or on the ground experience before and during the crises and civil wars. In most cases personalities, leverage, wisdom and respect by all sides of the divide are the key factors that determine failure or success. So far ECOWAS has succeeded in the choices of these groups of mediators, giving them all the free hand to choose their advisers with the knowledge and sometimes negotiating experience too.

It is crucial to point out here that ECOWAS with these mediators do not really succeed in preventing escalations of crises up to the point of deadly riots or even civil wars. ECOWAS through Gen. Obasanjo of Nigeria did succeed in bullying the General and his officers in Guinea-Bissau to form an interim civilian government rather than a Military Ruling Council. On the other hand, the pre-emptive interventions conflict in Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea-Conakry and even in Liberia with Charles Taylor could not succeed. Therefore, there is need to develop new methodology for dealing with this important process of having successful pre-emptive intervention. In addition, the success of President Blaise Compaore in brokering the Ivorian Peace Process demonstrate that a former

'enemy' to one side and a 'friend' to the other can become a facilitator in reconciling the two. Above all, while guidelines and timelines are good for the process of negotiating accords or agreements, rigid templates and models are to be avoided. This is because, getting parties to agree cannot be determined by time even by formulation and manipulation because deadly conflict is a result of loss of social capital and complete breakdown of National and Traditional Conflict Management Mechanism. In addition, parties want to be in a vantage political position and thereafter derive economic benefits from the agreement. We must not forget as it was demonstrated in Lomé (RUF rebels from Sierra Leone) and in Accra. (The Lord and Model from Liberia) living in a 5-star hotel with free meals and daily allowances is an enabling environment for talks not to end quickly. Where parties have been manipulated into signing Peace Accords (and in some cases some refusing to sign), the parties always go back to war. In most cases, enough time is not given to deal with the issues of social capital and consensual management of local resources.

It is also true that negotiations are costly and cannot go on forever. It is better to reduce costs by suspending talks as it was done with the Liberian case and spend more time to reach an agreement acceptable to all sides outside the full negotiating meetings. It is also obligatory for agreements or Accords to be situational and contextual.

In concluding this part, ECOWAS has confirmed the adage that West African Heads of States can douse the fire in the West African neighbourhood. In fact, the Cote d'Ivoire experience demonstrated that we can find African solutions to African problems despite the post election situation. The Somali did that in Somaliland while the other Somalia with outside intervention is still in chaos, as long as the warlords are supported financially and with arms by outsiders and Somalis in Diaspora.

However, any conclusion has to take into consideration what I have earlier said with respect to finance and leverage. To some extent, very few African countries have the finance and the leverage to broker agreements and accords. In West Africa, it is only Nigeria while Ghana did support the Liberian Peace talks and Togo did same for Sierra Leone. In all cases, the United States as *primus inter pares* followed by the European Union, former colonial masters France and UK, depending on the country, are usually part of the mediation team and the International Contact Group. These Western countries not only put down the money but also want to influence the process and the end product. This is because they also put down the money for post-conflict peace building activities including DDR and reconstruction. PANAFSTRAG is working hard to get West African Businesses to take up their own responsibilities too in these exercises.²²⁸ It is in line with this exercise, PANAFSTRAG in partnership with the ECOWAS and the African Business Roundtable (West African Chapter) facilitated a West African

Roundtable in Lagos on Peacebuilding and Economic Development in West Africa' on 5 and 6 September, 2006.²²⁹

There were Economy, Finance and Defence Ministers and officials, operators in the private sector and other stakeholders. This was followed by another meeting in Abidjan in April 2007 with NEPAD Business Groups from Togo, Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea-Bissau. There is now a NEPAD (WA) Business Forum which was recently inaugurated in Abuja. It had its first International Business Forum in Abidjan in the first week of March 2008.

It is obvious that the support of the major western countries and their financial contribution to the Swiss fund have helped ECOWAS engagement in Peacemaking this is apart from other omitted activities funded by EU, Canada, and USA etc. Whereas many of our Heads of States with their domestic resources can afford to fund these activities, they are reluctant to do so except these are on a bilateral basis. Most member-countries have refused to contribute their own quota because of lack of cum dependencies on external budgetary aid, other domestic priorities and the belief that the international community and UN will provide the support required under the umbrella of maintaining global peace and security. Sometimes you wonder whether a presidential jet is a priority when, in actual fact, such countries can contribute the equivalent of the maintenance cost of that jet to the Peace Fund. In short, we cannot become self-reliant in terms of complete ownership of the negotiating process, the peace accords or agreements, the implementation of the agreements and post-conflict reconstruction. While these Presidents-mediators may have done an admirable job in respect to the sub-region, their track records at home are conflict-prone rather than conflict-preventive. In addition, they crave more for respect abroad and do not respect or care for the admiration or respect from their compatriots except the interest groups that share mutual benefits with them for political or business reasons at home. Increased Corporate Responsibility from the level of the small local private sector operators to trans-national corporations are important to bring about the changes we need now.

Capacity

The discussion so far does demonstrate that we have the capacity to carry out stability restoration operations by diplomatic and/or military means. I have avoided discussing the military because peace support operation is a huge subject on its own with millions of words on paper on ECOMOG role from Liberia to Guinea-Bissau.

However, we need to come up with the tools and the techniques/methodologies for succeeding with pre-emptive intervention, which can avoid the situation we had in Cote d'Ivoire with President Henrie Bedie and in Guinea Conakry with President Lansana Conte. Lives were lost (more in Cote d'Ivoire

through civil war) in both cases. We are yet to have Constitutions that are conflict preventive rather than conflict inducing, in giving powers to the President who do not know how to manage it and in promoting the rule of law while having social justice within a liberal economic system. There is also the decreasing role of Labour Unions, the weak linkage of political parties to the citizens they represent, the intolerance of opposition by the party in power and the wish of the opposition parties to be part of a government of national unity so as to share the spoils of office.

Political parties in the sub-region are dominated by the rich as other members are not ready or encouraged to contribute financially or voluntarily to building the party in order to have good internal governance that can be transferred to government on winning elections. Whether it is elections or negotiations or implementation of peace accords, we are suffering from double AIDS, i.e. Acute and Increasing Dependency Syndrome on Western and Arab money and Acute Integrity Deficiency Syndrome in politics and business where bad and old politicians refuse to quit the scene and are provided with the financial but illegitimate support by the business groups that benefit from the corrupt liberal economic system in place. It is, therefore, surprising that business groups in our countries and their overseas partners and friends are left out of peacemaking, the implementation of peace accords and in post-conflict reconstruction.

Coming back to the tools and techniques, ECOWAS, the academic community and sometimes the countries involved in conflict and those involved in the mediation are yet to understand the importance of 'lessons learnt' exercises as a feedback to better performance in the immediate future through non-repetition of the mistakes of past efforts. The UN, unlike AU and ECOWAS, has a Lessons Learnt Unit for feedback and learning.

On the academic side, our conflict prevention and management theoreticians, for lack of the above, do not analyse these lessons enough in order to develop case studies for the students and, much more, so in developing new tools and techniques within our situation and context, based on our traditional system. In fact there is need to develop a toolbox of African conflict management techniques and methods with flexible models and templates that we can use in re-building national and local conflict management mechanisms in our various countries. The success of this development will enhance ECOWAS conflict prevention capacity and may make intervention unnecessary.

In short, there is need to capacitate ourselves without ECOWAS through regular interaction between academics, students, practitioners-diplomats and non-diplomats, military officers etc to develop case studies, develop better techniques and methods, conduct simulation exercises and share knowledge and experience through workshops and seminars, nationally and sub-regionally.

As it is structured, ECOWAS, like EU, is a bureaucracy and cannot think but need inputs from outside to initiate policies, gets its summit to decide, for the bureaucrats to implement with the monitoring and feedback into the bureaucracy by NGOs cum think tanks and other relevant institutions.

Institutions

Discussing capacity cannot be concluded without looking at ECOWAS as an intergovernmental body and its member countries. A South African academic, Anthoni Van Nieuwkerk, examined the whole issue of transforming African conflicts into 'Peace' through the regional or sub-regional intergovernmental organisations in his article entitled 'Regionalism into Globalism War into Peace'. He compared SADC and ECOWAS and rightly called both of them 'hegemonic regional organisations'. This form of hegemonic regionalism emphasise realist thinkers' view of the role of regional great powers like Nigeria in ECOWAS and South Africa in SADC and what they offer to small and weak countries. He gave the reasons for this dominance as

- a. UN and AU not living up to their promise of ensuring global and continental security. In fact, UN and AU flag does not stop violence in itself amongst factions nor against itself.
- b. Non hegemonic regional groups from the South do not have effective alliance with roles as in the North e.g. EU, OSCE, NATO. This missing gap – according to Van Nieuwkerk in the same article quoted above – has led to the degeneration of mediation into highly personalised and politicised process of diplomacy that achieved little success in settling the myriad interstate conflicts such as civil wars.

This statement may be partly true for Africa but not for West Africa as discussed above under resources. However, we have had more successes than failure through the 'personalised and politicised process'. However, I do agree that we must also develop institutional approach for this process through the Council of Elders, now The Wise. The establishment of the Council of Elders by the AU and the ECOWAS has not been too successful but can institutionally evolve. There is now an African Forum, made up of individuals who are ex-Heads of States, with more influence and leverage than the present 'Council of the Wise'. It is a newly created forum of former African Heads of states with 'good governance' credentials. The forum can replace the Council of Wise at African Union and at sub-regional organisations, i.e. SADC, IGAD, ECOWAS, etc. The forum can be maintained from the Peace Fund and by African-owned foundations, e.g. MOI FOUNDATION in London. When these national leaders are elevated to the level of seeing the bigger picture than their own country, they are also in a better position, singly or collectively, to take pre-emptive actions in an institutionalised

manner. No matter the development of institutional approaches, personality, leverage, influence, etc, are still key factors while at the same time developing obligatory national internal mechanisms based on local cultures and practices.

National institutions that are either weakened or destroyed by crises and conflicts have to be strengthened or rebuilt in order to be able to implement the peace accords or agreements. In many cases, some new institutions have to be put in place as recommended by the agreements or accords.

The key area that is of priority within the public sector which consists of the Executive, the Parliament and the Judiciary is the machine that runs the three arms i.e. the Civil Service. The restructuring and strengthening of the civil service after crises and wars have not been given the same priority as the security sector. In fact, in spite of all the reforms in the public sector, the civil service is still too bureaucratic, ineffective and inefficient in the delivery of services. In addition to the civil service, there are other service delivery agencies of the government which are part of the public sector. Most governments in West Africa are now privatising these agencies and setting up regulatory agencies which is another bureaucracy if not structured to be lean and efficient.

The security sector has got the priority it deserves but again it also depends on the civil service machinery for administrative and budgetary support. This means that the DDR exercise cannot be seen as successful when there is no harmony between the DDR and the Civil Service. Presently, no government is thinking of privatising the national security agencies. In fact, most countries are increasing the number of policemen and introducing community policing. In order to provide employment for demobilised armed men, women and youth, many private security companies have now been set up and the number is increasing because the public-owned security agencies no longer enjoy the confidence of the people in providing safety for them.

The judiciary has also seen its role increasing in order to ensure that the rule of law is respected. Peace agreements or accords and security sector experts do mention them but not in details, since these agreements are in themselves interim constitutions of the various countries where part of the constitutions have to be suspended. The experience so far is that even though the revision of constitution is envisaged when the agreements end with the elections, the new government is always resistant to change the status quo instead, and the powers of the presidency are increased with the resultant crises.

Presently, NGOs are increasingly becoming involved in mediation but more in a supporting role because they do not have the resources, the leverage and the influence and in most cases they are dependent on financial support from western governments, institutions and foundations. African NGOs do claim some achievements, as in the case of women impact on the Sierra Leone and Liberia Peace Talks. There was much more impact in Sierra Leone than in Liberia. Putting

it succinctly, Chester Crocker in 'Lessons on Intervention in Managing Conflict in the Post-Cold World, The Role of Intervention'²³⁰ at the Aspen Institute Conference wrote that NGO interventions are likely to be more effective than governments give them credit for but are somewhat less effective than they themselves claim to be. This is an experience from the West's point of view. However, if the NGO terminology is expanded to include think tanks and other NGOs with experience and if provided with the Resources, they can play more than the limited role Northern NGOs such as Saint Egido in Italy and the Carter Centre in USA is playing.

At the Regional level, only one country – Nigeria – has played a veritable hegemonic role. Cote d'Ivoire, had elections in October with the run in November 2010, with the results becoming, unfortunately, an object of intense national and international contestation after from deadly ethnic conflict. However, the country can still become a future competitive hegemony with reasonable resources. Senegal has the human capital but appears to be too dependent on external financial resources.

When we add up the resources available to ECOWAS through cut-off percentage on imported goods from outside the sub-region, the resources in member countries especially Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana and Senegal and some of the NGOs, including think-tanks, the enhanced capacity is there for peacemaking.

In addition, hundreds of training workshops, seminars, conferences, programmes, diploma, graduate and post-graduate courses have been done and are on-going especially on Western concepts, philosophy and cultural approach to Peacemaking. In fact, western style mediation is being professionalised in Africa today. Simultaneously, however, a lot of studies are now on-going on traditional and cultural practices. It is also well-known that many Africans in the rural areas still rely on their traditional leaders and chiefs to resolve crises and conflicts between individuals and groups. A visit to a traditional ruler's palace in Ibadan or Kumasi will confirm that in urban areas – let alone in rural areas – the traditional dispute resolution mechanism is still very much alive. Efforts are ongoing to strengthen the customary laws and practices.

The gap to be filled by both academics and practitioners is how to translate these practices into a national socio-political mechanism which is non-adversarial. Adapting local practices will go a long way to enhancing our capacity at the national, sub-regional and continental level in producing implementable peace accords/agreements that are respected by all parties.

Instruments

Peacemaking is successful when the opposing sides agree that they want stability to be restored. Therefore, in a situation where one of the two parties in a conflict situation does not accept the existing legal *status quo* instruments and institutions, a

new legal framework has to be developed. It is important that the framework should first and foremost be legitimate and acceptable to all sides in which all can participate fully in formulating, concretising and finalising the legal framework.

Therefore in developing peace instruments, we must first seek legitimacy and acceptability before making them legal and binding through signatures. Most of the legal instruments are not usually respected because of their illegitimacy and non-acceptability by all sides. This is because there is the mistaken notion that there are key and minor actors even though it is well known that minor actors have little more than a nuisance value in ceasefires and all forms of agreements. I must say that the determination of a legitimate instrument is both easy and difficult.

It is easy when there are agreements to key articles in the accords by all the sides. In addition, on many occasions, the Western countries use the carrot-and-stick approach to pressurise the parties into signing the peace accord within a particular date and time. A good example was the Lomé Peace Accord for Sierra Leone and many of the previous agreements in Liberia or even Cassamance in Senegal or Niger Delta in Nigeria. In this case, refusal to take hard political decisions on the issue of decentralisation of political and economic powers and implementation by the Government of the day is also a stumbling block. This, in itself, creates enormous difficulties.

The implementation of instruments requires huge human and financial resources which the country itself cannot generate. Therefore, the success or failures are not dependent on the signatories alone but, much more so, on the fulfilment of pledges made at the Western Donors (with Japan) Conference. There are no African donors' conferences by African countries for their own development without external participation and it is very rare to find countries like Russia, China, India and South Korea, which benefit from trade with African countries, participate in these conferences where pledges are made. Even with these pledges, only few countries deliver and hardly up to the level of the amount that is pledged.

Conclusion

The challenge and the work cut out for us, as Africans, is not only to restore the best of our local traditional mechanism but also to develop from this mechanism a national template for resolving our internal conflicts, with collaboration from CSOs and political parties, the private sector and other stakeholders. This is a mechanism that may not be perfect but it has traditional and cultural foundation.

Restoration allows for taking the best from other cultures in preventing and managing conflicts in the continent's own situation and context. Even within a globalised world, culture and traditions continue to assert itself and, to that extent, can form the foundation of our reflections as we continue to develop our knowledge in peacemaking in West Africa.

