

Africa: 'Intractable' Conflicts and the Imperative of the Indigenous Idea of Peacebuilding

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Abstract: *The post-Cold War political situation, more than it did in the other parts of the world, aggravated the existing sectional interests and led to the proliferation of civil conflicts in Africa. The efforts of the international community towards the attainment of peace in the continent has not yielded much and hence the advocacies for the evolution of alternative peacebuilding models. Moving beyond the prevalent suggestions for the active involvement of local actors, this research intends to identify the flaws inherent in the modern international peacebuilding mechanisms and to recommend the active involvement of the African Indigenous ideas of the concept. The rationale for such an advocacy is that societies differ in their cultural worldviews and, since each conflict tends to possess unique characteristics, it becomes expedient to identify those indigenous ideas of peacebuilding that could complement the existing formal structures in resolving the seemingly intractable conflicts in Africa, especially within culturally homogenous entities.*

Keywords: *Peacebuilding, Africa, Intractable Conflicts, African Ideas, Conflict Resolution.*

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Introduction

The heightening complexities that go with the interaction among states in the international system, especially as a result of the increasing level of sophistication of modern means of communication, tends towards persistent conflict of interests and open confrontations. Fortunately, the early realization of the inevitability and necessity of conflict in human dealings led mankind to the idea of 'managing' the conflicts, as a way of reducing their destructive tendencies. This predisposition among nations towards collective responsibility in the at-

tainment of international peace and security greatly influenced the establishment of the United Nations. However, the incongruent ideological differences of the Cold War era hampered the actualization of the laudable idea and even “threatened to immobilize the UN”, as it “constrained the organization’s ability to respond to and seek to mitigate problems arising from conflict situations” (Adisa & Aminu, 1996, p. 85).

The end of the Cold War ushered in a kind of mixed blessings. On the one side, it brought renewed hope in the pursuit of international peace and security. The UN became invigorated to intervene and enforce the peace, even in internal and some hitherto ‘intractable’ conflicts, as the non-interference encumbrances associated with the concept of sovereignty began to give way (Zacarias, 1996). The then UN Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, extolled the potentials of the new phase with regard to the ability of the UN to meet the demands of the changing times, especially in the areas of preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding (Boutros-Ghali, 1992). Among others, the situation facilitated the efforts of the UN in both the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan and the Gulf Wars (Amaechi, 2009). On the other side, however, the hope that most of the wars in Africa, especially the seemingly ideological ones, would cease was dashed. Although the Cold War stifled wars within the domains of the major contenders in the ideological divide, the reverse was the case for Africa and other Third World countries. As Lederach (1997) wittily captured it, “the Cold War was, for the most part, cold only in Europe and North America while in many parts of the developing world it was in fact very hot” (p. 6). Regrettably, for various reasons, the trend spilled into the post-Cold War period. Between 1989 and 1996, “the majority of wars and protracted intermediate conflicts are still located in the developing countries of the South”, especially Africa (Lederach, 1997, p. 9). Umukoro (2016) has observed that “almost half of the 51 UN peacekeeping missions have been deployed in the post-Cold War era” in Africa and that “several countries in Africa have been involved in internal armed conflicts resulting in human losses and suffering” (p. 18), as could be seen in the case of the Rwandan genocide which claimed the lives of over 800,000 people within the space of three months in 1994 and that of Burundi where over 200,000 people were killed in 1993.

As an indispensable aspect of the post-Cold War phase of the pursuit of international peace and security, peacebuilding is a bold step that was borne out of the need to recognize the peculiarities of particular conflicts and conflicting societies with a view to strengthening or setting up vital structures that could help to sustain the peace or restore peace between warring groups. As has been observed, “since societies differ in their cultures and worldview, and since each conflict or war tend to possess unique characteristics, especially in terms of causative factors, it became expedient to profoundly study each conflict situation and society, in order to design a suitable roadmap to long-lasting peace in the particular society” (Amaechi & Okoro, 2014, p. 118). Consistent with the idea of ‘managing’ conflicts or steering the naturally occurring competing values and clashing interests to peaceful ends, as opposed to the rather feeble and futile

endeavours towards the complete 'resolution' of conflicts (Nolan, 1995), peacebuilding involves the provision of favorable conditions that could sustain political, social and economic development, progress and stability and in such a way that would conform to the distinctive attributes of particular societies. By visualizing the provision of needed conducive atmosphere and solution to the spasmodic relapses and escalation of conflicts, especially during the post-ceasefire stage, peacebuilding was seen as harboring immense panacea for the then emergent intra-state conflicts which bedeviled Africa from the immediate post-Cold War period.

Considering the number, intensity and rate of proliferation of conflicts in Africa since the 'end' of the Cold War, one is wont to ask some pertinent questions. Is the nature of conflicts in Africa different from what obtains in the other regions of the world? Does the inability of the UN to manage or contain the conflicts support the ascription of 'intractability' to some of these conflicts or does it reveal the inadequacy of the mechanism being used? In view of suggestions for the adoption of alternative models of conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Africa, and having perused the differences between the modern and an aspect of the indigenous idea of peacebuilding in an earlier paper, the author seeks to move beyond these prevalent suggestions to look at the nature of conflicts in Africa, identify some of the flaws inherent in the modern international peacebuilding mechanisms and to advocate the active involvement of the traditional ideologies of or approaches to peace and peacebuilding especially in Africa.

The Nature of Conflicts in Africa

It is reported that by mid-2014, the continent alone accounted for nine (Nigeria (Boko Haram and Christian-Muslim), Mali (Tuaregs), Central African Republic (Christian-Muslim), North Sudan (Darfur and SPLM-North), South Sudan (Murle and Nuer/Dinka), Democratic Republic of Congo (northeast and Katanga), Ethiopia (Ogaden), Somalia (al Shabab), and Egypt (Islamists)) of the twenty-three countries that were experiencing major armed conflicts within their territory (Marshall & Cole, 2014). In the same vein, reporting on the *2015 Report on Conflict, Human Rights and Peacebuilding*, the School for a Culture of Peace (ECP), Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (2015), pointed out that "throughout 2014, 36 armed conflicts were identified, a similar figure to that observed in recent years," and that "most of them were concentrated in Africa (13) and Asia (12), followed by the Middle East (6), Europe (4) and America (1)" (p. 1). These are apart from the minor conflicts and countries that are recovering from various kinds of conflict, where only 'peace of the grave yard' exists. The more worrisome aspect of the situation is that some of these conflicts have become protracted and hence the 'intractable' tag. The most irritating aspect is that Africa is perpetually tied to the quagmire of socio-political and economic backwardness as a result of the effect of the conflicts. With regard to the seemingly intractable posture of the conflicts, Africa is currently seen as a problem continent whose predicament has defied even the best peacebuilding

models. Some analysts only stopped short of arrogating the situation to genetic traits. However, a closer look at the nature or characteristics of these conflicts would reveal the existence of extra-ordinary motivating factors or root causes that may have led to such ostensible distinction, stigmatization, and rushed conclusions in favour of intractability of conflicts in Africa. As observed by Lederach (1997),

The challenge for peacebuilding remains monumental. As a global community, we face forty-four wars in nearly as many countries. If we are to address such situations constructively, we must understand with more clarity the nature and characteristics of these conflicts and their settings (p. 10).

The Role of the Cold War

It is common for the influence of the Cold War to be felt in almost all the major conflicts that bedeviled the African continent, especially while the rivalry between the two ideological blocs raged. This was the case in countries like Congo DRC (Zaire) and Angola, among others. This led most writers and analysts to derive the eruption and proliferation of conflicts in Africa to the Cold War struggles between the superpowers, as such wars were seen as 'proxy wars'. Invariably, it was the popular view that the end of the ideological tussle would sound a death knell to the numerous wars or, at least, arrest the rate of proliferation (Mueller, 1989). At some places, especially within the domain of the superpowers where the Cold War tended to suppress popular agitations, it was conversely predicted that the end of the ideological rivalry would open bottled-up sentiments that could lead to more wars and the escalation of existing ones (Mearsheimer, 1990). However, the predictions were not confirmed by the post-Cold War conflict trends in Africa. In most of such places, there appears to be no substantial increase or reduction in the number of conflicts at any point in time, as Wallensteen (1993) and Lederach (1997) posit. In other words, the Cold War may not provide an adequate explanation for the numerous wars that plagued Africa during and after the Cold War. The reason for the arrogation of such enormous influence on the ideological rivalry has been traced to the fact that "the leaders involved in conflicts knew full well how to play the rhetoric of a particular superpower to their maximum benefit," as aptly explained by Lederach (1997). According to him,

The fact that the post-Cold War era, which has seen the crumbling of animosities between former enemies, has witnessed neither a drastic reduction nor a dramatic increase in the numbers of wars suggests, however, that ideology was not an adequate explanation for the conflicts of the Cold War (pp. 7-8).

Whichever way one looks at it from, the influence of the Cold War and its end on conflicts in Africa cannot be entirely denied. But, as far as the present study is concerned, it is important to state that the impact of the Cold War on conflicts was not restricted to Africa as it was also evident in Eastern Europe, South and Central America, Asia and

other parts of the world where the interest of the superpowers needed to be protected. So, the Cold War and its influence cannot ultimately provide any tangible explanation and solution to the seemingly intractability of conflicts in Africa.

The Role of Ethno-Religious and Nationalist Agitations

Another easily noticeable trend in conflicts in Africa is the prevalence of ethnic, religious, and nationalist sentiments. Appearing in various colorations and cloaked with different rationales (Nyuykonge & Ojigho, 2016), these conflicts are mainly intra-state in nature and manifest in the form of agitations for a separate state, redefinition of territory and the control of state power and resources (Regehr, 1996). This could easily be discerned from the experiences of such African countries as Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Rwanda, Burundi, Somali, Chad, Sudan, South Sudan, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Kenya, Cote d'Ivoire, Nigeria and Mali, among others. Today, it is common to see these conflicts as ethnic or religious wars because of the fact that they are mainly driven by group interests among which are existential needs for survival and recognition. It is not surprising, therefore, that some writers prefer to designate them as 'identity conflicts' (Lederach, 1997, p. 8). Besides, the problem of disguised ethno-religious and nationalist conflicts is not confined to Africa. It is evident in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, especially since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, as well as in the Middle East. Similar to the role of the Cold War, to hold ethnicity or religion responsible for the outbreak and 'intractability' of such conflicts may be deceptive and likely not lead to a sustainable solution to Africa's numerous conflicts. This is because of the reason that such conflicts usually result from the attempt by a group to fight against both perceived and real socio-economic and political deprivations which affects the well-being and security of members of the group. As has been confirmed,

The process by which this happens has its roots in longstanding distrust, fear, and paranoia, which are reinforced by the immediate experience of violence, division, and atrocities. This experience, in turn, further exacerbates the hatred and fear that are fueling the conflict. Such a process is common to the sociological dynamics inherent in the progression of conflict at any level (Lederach, 1997, p. 13).

The Role of External Linkages

Like what obtains in the other parts of the world, but more so for most conflicts in Africa, the existence of external linkages is a common trend that contributes towards the perpetuation of the 'protracted' and 'intractable' nature of conflicts in the continent. As has been observed,

Although most conflicts are intranational in primary composition, they *internationalize* to the degree that some conflictants, particularly opposition movements, inhabit neighboring countries; weapons and money for the con-

flict flow in from the surrounding region and from more distant locations; and displaced refugee populations cross immediate and distant borders (Lederach, 1997, p. 11).

This remains the fate of most war-torn societies and states and regions in Africa, like the Congo DR, Sierra Leone and the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa regions, whose 'foreign' sponsors and appendages are mainly attracted by the political and economic potentials of such a mission, not necessarily for the interest of the beleaguered nations. This syndrome is widespread among states that are rich in natural resources. Ironically, most of the states that sponsor warring groups across their borders prop-up the 'Non-intervention' clause enshrined in the charter of most international organizations, in order to frustrate any genuine peaceful intervention by well-meaning actors.

Response to Arms Flow

Most of the conflicts in Africa maintain a steady response to the flow of arms and weapons from outside. Arms trade remains a very lucrative industry in the international system, especially since the Cold War era. Incidentally, these weapons of war are largely produced in the countries that make up the global North from where they are exported to countries of the global South and are sold to states and groups with sufficient funds, regardless of moral considerations, since the profit motive on the part of the producers and dealers alike is high and overrides every other consequence (Ives, 1987). The end of the Cold War slightly altered this trend. The monetary value of arms traded began to decline, not necessarily as a result of the decrease in the number of wars but as a result of the shift from the demand for heavy weapons to that of small arms and light weapons which is a booming business at present.

Going back to the issue of 'protracted' and 'intractable' wars in Africa, much as the volume of trade on weapons does not necessarily translate to the number and duration of wars, it is obvious that the ready availability of weapons increases the likelihood of a group to resort to violence, exacerbates existing wars, improves the capacity of a group to sustain wars for a longer duration and wreaks havoc on both the local population and the environment. This is apart from the socio-economic welfare implications of diverting a larger percentage of the resources of a group or state towards the purchase of weapons. It is true, according to Lederach (1997), that "the Cold War meant that weapons, the loans needed to finance the purchase of weapons, and ideologies came from the North; the South contributed its environments, peoples, and national economies" (p. 11).

Deductive Analysis of the Root Causes of Africa's 'Intractable' Conflicts

Judging from the above major conflict trends in Africa, it is interesting to note that there are no extra-ordinary features, different from what obtains in other parts of the world, which could be held responsible for the protracted and intractable nature of

most conflicts in Africa. The trends, including the fall-outs of the Cold War, ethnicity, religion, inflow of weapons, and the influence of external linkages are easily identifiable in conflicts around the world, not necessarily peculiar to Africa. However, in trying to identify the root causes and the solution or the appropriate peacebuilding mechanism for Africa's conflicts, it is useful at this stage to point out that these features only play a supportive role to the causal factors such as inadequate or breakdown of governmental structures, exclusive governance, inequity in the distribution of goods and services, insecurity, etc. Usually, these lead to fear (both real and imagined), distrust, hatred which, in turn, motivates and sustains sectional conflicts for as long as the motivating factors remain unresolved.

The emphasis here is that it is in the course of trying to redress the felt anomalies that ethnicity, religion, availability of weapons of war and other external influences are resorted to in a bid to protect group or sectional interests. In other words, that a conflict is cloaked in ethnicity, for instance, should not detract one from searching deeper for the root cause/s of the conflict. This stance tends to rationalize the preference of the tag 'identity conflicts' in the description and analyses of conflicts which manifest with 'ethnic' or other parochial colorations. To continue to blame ethnicity for the numerous conflicts in Africa may take us back to the endless and futile arrogation of Africa's woes to colonialism and the rationalization of the dismantling or re-delineation of the boundaries of the existing African countries along ethnic lines – a return to the *status quo ante*. No doubt, none of the sovereign entities would prefer this option. Much as one is not trying to absolve European colonialism of Africa from the blame of hammering hitherto autonomous ethnic groups together in an inconsiderate manner, it is also obvious that we have blamed colonialism and neo-colonialism for too long. If and when the right attitudes and structures as well as appropriate peacebuilding mechanisms and approaches are adopted, ethnicity and neo-colonial hindering influences as well as 'identity conflicts' would naturally wither away.

Inadequacy of the Existing Peacebuilding Mechanisms

It follows, therefore, that any peacebuilding mechanism or approach that seeks to arrest the number and the seemingly intractable nature of conflicts in Africa must first understand the socio-cultural milieu of the people, the root causes of the particular conflict and must be ready to adapt the existing international mechanisms and approaches to the socio-cultural, political, and economic environment of the conflict. This conforms with the view of Thomas (1987) that conflicts that occur within the developing countries are usually driven by political disputes, economic imbalances and socio-cultural challenges that originate from both the enormity of inimical international settings or conditions and the interests of the various constituent groups within.

In Africa, it has not been easy for the UN and other international agencies to effectively actualize most peacebuilding programs and activities, especially in societies that are

torn apart and polarized by ethnic rivalries. In addition to faulty conceptual definition and theoretical basis, such peacebuilding activities are usually and excessively bugged by the imposition of actors and non-incorporation of local or indigenous imperatives. Besides, sometimes, their efforts are skewed in favour of a 'beautiful bride' between or among the conflictants. So, in most conflict situations in Africa, the UN-coordinated peacebuilding activities have not been able to considerably promote confidence, halt the conflict and create the necessary environment for reconciliation and good neighborliness. Ryan (2005) supported this view by saying that "despite the inherent problems in attempting ethnic conflict resolution, it may be that the lack of success may also be a consequence of the inadequacies of the methods used" (p. 15). This section seeks to briefly look at some identifiable shortcomings in the contemporary principle and practice of peacebuilding and how the African indigenous idea of the concept can assist in strengthening the weak areas.

The Problem of Definition

There is a saying that 'a problem properly defined is a problem half-solved'. In principle, it has not been easy to achieve a generally acceptable definition of peacebuilding as a concept and the situation has continued to pose inhibiting challenges, especially with regard to the formulation and execution of associated policies. Although the term 'peacebuilding' was first used by Galtung (1976), it was popularized by Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the former UN Secretary General, in 1992. The former used it in favour of the discovery and preservation of peace structures that could help in the prevention of wars and the deployment of peacekeeping and peacemaking forces through the removal of the root causes of violent conflicts. Unfortunately, this original idea has been gradually watered down. Boutros-Ghali (1992) supported the idea espoused by Galtung but his definition of peacebuilding as an action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict tended to underplay the preventive aspect. Though he made effort to correct the parochial view in favour of the preventive aspect, the post-conflict bias of the concept has continued to dominate the definition of the concept in the available literature and among practitioners (Boutros-Ghali, 1995). This could be discerned from the Brahimi Report on UN's peace operations which sees peacebuilding as "activities undertaken on the far side of conflict to reassemble the foundations of peace and provide the tools for building on those foundations something that is more than just the absence of war" (United Nations, 2000, p. 3). Conversely, a later UN document explained that,

Peacebuilding involves a range of measures aimed at reducing the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities for conflict management, and laying the foundation for sustainable peace. It is a complex, long-term process aimed at creating the necessary conditions for positive

and sustainable peace by addressing the deep-rooted structural causes of violent conflict in a comprehensive manner... (United Nations Department for Peacekeeping Operations, 2008, p. 18).

So, while some see peacebuilding from a holistic view, in line with the earliest known usages of the concept, which sees the concept as an all-involving and on-going process that should be part of every society, both during minor disagreements and violent conflict situations, others equate it with UN's post-conflict peacemaking and peacekeeping operations. This tends to give the wrong impression that peacebuilding must wait until after the eruption of violent conflict and the attainment of ceasefire or the view that only the UN or governments could be involved in peacebuilding. Invariably, upon the fact that the UN Peacebuilding Commission was established in 2005 to play both preventive and post-conflict peacebuilding roles, the former was later whittled down because of the fears expressed by some countries concerning its inherent potential to interfere with their sovereignty and internal affairs (HPCR International, 2007-2008). Among others, this confusing situation has continued to make it difficult to decide the aim, process and organization of peacebuilding and when to start or end it as well as whether the actors should be insiders, outsiders or both.

In conformity with recent research findings which projects the view that peacebuilding should encompass a wide array of activities and processes aimed at both operational and structural prevention of violent conflicts (HPCR International, 2007-2008), the African indigenous conception of peacebuilding supports the holistic view. Traditionally, Africans see conflict of interests and friction among humans as natural and inevitable phenomena that need proper management in order to avoid the outbreak of violence. They also recognized early enough that the pursuits of life are better accomplished under a peaceful atmosphere. This led to the adoption of a very high level of peace consciousness which is ingrained in the people's individual and collective religious, socio-political and economic value systems and everyday living in order to ward off both natural and man-made calamities that tend to distort the peace cycle. Also, in order to maintain the much-needed social and religious stability, African traditional societies established durable socio-political and religious institutions and structures that are adequately imbued with peace consciousness and which help enormously towards the daily management of both the naturally occurring and the unavoidable violent conflicts. The African traditional or indigenous cosmology, therefore, sees the pursuit of peace as a thing of the mind that involves ongoing and all-involving process of resolving both violent and non-violent conflicts through carefully chosen institutions and approaches that constantly help to maintain social equity, fairness and stability. The inability of the UN coordinated activities to see peacebuilding from this holistic angle greatly accounts for the woes of peacebuilding programmes in Africa.

Inadequate Theoretical Framework

Probably drawing from the problem of narrow definition, there is no generally acceptable theory of peacebuilding and most of the existing theories that seek to explain the concept and practice of peacebuilding are inadequate and can hardly sustain the attainment of set goals in every conflict setting. The categorization of some conflicts in Africa among the 'protracted' and 'intractable' ones may not be unconnected with this theoretical gap. As observed by McCandless and Bangura (2007), "... in Africa the challenges are compounded when the concepts and tools used to theorize are detached from African realities" (p. 55). Fetherston (2000) attributed the situation in Africa to the fact that the existing frameworks and practices are largely influenced by a Western 'rationalist' viewpoint of the world which does not necessarily conform to what obtains in other cultures.

In peace research, Paffenholz and Spurk (2006) have identified four schools of thought with different terminologies, conceptual perceptions, approaches and actors, and whose evolution are closely tied to that of peacebuilding. These include the Conflict Management, Conflict Resolution, Complementary and Conflict Transformation schools of thought. Respectively, the first three are criticized for disregarding the root causes of conflicts, being too lengthy and rigorous, and for not considering the complex and diverse nature of the societies where peacebuilding operation is to take place or their worldviews. The Conflict Transformation School is preferred since, in the words of Fetherston (2000),

The goal is to open space for transformation which significantly restructures institutions and social meanings, or which, to put it in another way, has the potential to shift societies from a culture of violence to a culture of peace, a long term project which must encompass, and perhaps be drawn primarily from, the specific localities in which the violence is produced or reproduced (p. 5).

Its major proponent, John P. Lederach (1997), envisaged a long-term 'bottom-up' approach that would see peacebuilding as an endeavor towards the systemic reconciliation of relationships because, "the immediacy of hatred and prejudice, of racism and xenophobia, as primary factors and motivation of the conflict means that its transformation must be rooted in social-psychological and spiritual dimensions that traditionally have been seen as either irrelevant or outside the competence of international diplomacy" (p. 29). Paffenholz and Spurk (2006) noted that "it has become the leading school of thought in the field" (p. 23). Unfortunately, the approach seems to be more concerned with the escalating, escalation and post-conflict phases of conflict and, by so doing, disregards the preventive aspect of peacebuilding. This could explain why international peacebuilding activities are yet to succeed in some places, especially in Africa, where conflicts become protracted and seemingly intractable because they are 'allowed' to reach the escalating or escalation phases before the commencement of peacebuilding intervention.

On the contrary, the indigenous idea of peacebuilding among African societies revolves around a systematic and continuous sustenance of peace and order even in the face of threatening conflict of interests (positive peace), as opposed to imposed peace or what is usually referred to as the peace of the graveyard (negative peace) which follows the end of violence or the attainment of ceasefire. Although Lederach's conflict transformation approach subscribes to the long-term 'bottom-up' approach to the management of ongoing conflicts, the African indigenous approach supports the idea that peace can be built even at pre-violence or incubation stages and continuously too. Besides, it involves the establishment of structures imbued with peace consciousness and which act systematically and continually towards the peaceful ordering of the societies. In order to operationalize this, the transformational approach needs to be supported with the Systems theory, or what may be referred to as Systems Survival theory of peacebuilding. The theory tries to explain how each part or sub-system strives to sustain it and interact with the other parts, according to natural procedures, in order to ensure the stability or adaptability of the whole in the face of internal and external pressure (Amaechi & Okoro, 2014). This also means that the failure of a sub-system to live up to its role could automatically destabilize the entire systemic network for as long as the disruption lasts.

Lisa Schirch's (2003) compilation on systems theory and peacebuilding aptly captures this. It identified seven attributes of a system and how each could assist towards a better understanding of the intricacies associated with peacebuilding programmes and their implementation. The first of the identified attributes is that 'each part of a system can only be understood in relationship with every other part'. The second is that 'in systems there are multiple causes that contribute to effects'. The third is that 'systems are processes'. The fourth is that 'each part of the system is involved in either sustaining or changing existing patterns of relationship'. The fifth is that 'patterns are preferred ways of interacting in systems'. The sixth is that 'power is the ability of one part of a system to affect other parts of the system' while the seventh is that 'it is a complex issue to attempt to change systems'. These exactly describe the African indigenous arrangement and idea of peace and peacebuilding because while individuals, villages, communities and even socio-cultural structures or institutions try to maintain their separateness, they recognize the fact that their stability and existence are tied to happenings 'around'. This idea forms the bedrock of the African "humanistic and holistic conception of peace" and peacebuilding, as could also be seen in the notion of '*Ubuntu*' which is common around East, Central and Southern parts of Africa (Francis, 2006).

The Post-Conflict Bias of International Peace-building Activities

Inadequate definition and theoretical framework usually beget improper timing of peacebuilding activities. One of the major inadequacies of international peacebuilding activities is the issue of when to commence or at what stage of the conflict cycle to embark on such efforts. From available evidence, it is obvious that most contemporary

peacebuilding activities, either by the UN and its agencies or the non-governmental organizations, usually occur after the outbreak of violence or after the attainment of ceasefire to the utter disregard of the virtues of prevention. Even though the former UN Secretary-General modified his earlier statement in the form of *Supplement to An Agenda for Peace* which supported the preventive aspect of peacebuilding, the misconception is yet to be fully rectified (Boutros-Ghali, 1995). Sometimes, the way and manner some agencies and major powers stay aloof until the outbreak and escalation of violence lends credence to the suspicion that they instigate some conflicts and nurse it to the escalation stage to enable them invade for their ultimate political and economic gains. This post-conflict bias not only creates operational hitches, with regard to when peacebuilding activities should start or end, and increases the budget of peacebuilding but also the chance of rendering a conflict intractable as it obtains in Africa. Regardless of the opinion that this trend can be rationalized on the fact that about half of all terminated conflicts tend to resurge even in more violent manners within the space of five years, peacebuilding should be a long-term activity that needs to go beyond the instantaneous obligation to stop armed conflict or prevent its resurgence (Call & Cousens, 2007).

In the case of the African indigenous tradition, peacebuilding is an ongoing process that involves conflict prevention, resolution and post-conflict activities. In other words, the root causes of friction and conflicts are usually attended to through inbuilt systemic mechanisms without waiting for them to turn violent first. It is important to note that an essential aspect of the indigenous approach to peacebuilding is that it considers the system of complex of causes and effects as well as the interaction among groups, the living, the dead ancestors, and the supernatural forces. When conflict, insurrections or natural disasters occur, the system searches itself and even the sub-systems in order to identify the root causes of the feelings of discontent and deprivation which are immediately resolved.

The Imposition of External Peacebuilding Actors

Most of the peacebuilding efforts in Africa fail as a result of the imposition of the major actors from outside the system. This is commonly referred to as 'top-down', as opposed to 'bottom-up', approach whereby most of the contemporary peacebuilding programmes in Africa are implemented from outside, by outsiders, and sometimes for the interest of outsiders. Haugerudbraaten (1998) has condemned the usual practice of paying little attention to the fact that peacebuilding should be an indigenous undertaking. No doubt, the use of neutral external actors confers a considerable level of trust and confidentiality among the parties to a conflict but most times the external actors do not maintain the level of neutrality needed to attract the confidence and trust from all the warring parties. It not also uncommon to hear of situations where the actors set out with preconceived biases, ideas, programmes, and instructions. Even when no such sentiments exist, the efforts of the external actors are jeopardized by their lack of the knowledge

of the root causes of the conflict and the conflict terrain. The ultimate result of this has been the dismal achievement of the peacebuilding efforts and which translates to the susceptibility of conflicts towards protraction and 'intractability'. According to Mohamoud (2006), "through top-down approach, twelve national reconciliation conferences were convened with the goal of restoring a central authority in Somalia, yet no success was achieved" (p. 158). This has been attributable to the fact that "Somali people are very alert and sensitive to any kind of authority that is imposed from outside their country or from above through a top-down approach to peacebuilding" since such fail to adequately address the root causes of the Somali civil war and the consequent deep-rooted animosity, suspicion and fear (Netabay, 2007).

This situation is different from what obtains in the African indigenous idea of peacebuilding which assigns important preventive and resolution roles to various in-built structures and mechanisms like the deities, title and secret societies, various women groups whose existence and decisions are regarded as sacrosanct and even neighbouring communities, especially those with filial affiliations, whose social, economic and religious needs are affected by the strife in the neighbouring community. On the important issue of neutrality, the fear of ostracism and nemesis from the gods, ancestors, and deities alike whose watchful eyes remain unflinching, is enough to deter any person with ulterior motives from participating in such a peace mission. Overtime, this consciousness has been inscribed in the minds of individuals and collectives. When wars become inevitable, the factions are usually guided by existing rules and taboos against extremist actions on even the enemies. To a very large extent, this helps in retrieving the peace at the post-conflict peacebuilding or reconciliation phase. In other words, in the African indigenous tradition of peacebuilding, the political, economic and religious ideologies and structures always combine to play important roles in ensuring that conflicts are managed or resolved in such ways that ensure positive changes in the society. Systemic powers are diffused among the sub-systems and even the subsets through the assignment of roles to each. The practice ensured healthy checks and balances of power within the system. This confirms with the view of Schirch (2003) that 'each part of the system is involved in either sustaining or changing existing patterns of relationship'. However, it is necessary to point out that much of this has been eroded by the influx of Western culture which, ironically, is yet to provide an adequate alternative. Even so, the idea of drawing a larger percentage of peacebuilding actors and structures from within the conflict environment and supporting same with those indigenous socio-religious traditions that harbor immense peace potentials may be advantageous.

Non-Recognition and Incorporation of Indigenous Ideas

Similar to the last issue, the present international peacebuilding programs tend to jettison the need to recognize and incorporate the culture and traditions that have been sustaining particular societies over the ages. It is common for peacebuilding programmes

and actors to try to impose western standards or ideologies, practices and structures on societies with different ideological backgrounds and in a way that disregards the need for the attainment of sustainable peace and security. The failure of most peacebuilding programmes has been attributed to the undue influence of socio-political policy impositions that are foreign to the conflict situation and environment (Paris, 2004) such as “the current peacebuilding paradigm of ‘liberal internationalism’ which assumes that the best way to consolidate peace is to transform states into stable market democracies as quickly as possible” (Paffenholz and Spurk, 2006, p. 19). Regardless of varying individual perceptions, it is safer and more peace-sustaining to build on the existing traditions and structures in a particular society than to seek to entirely ‘re-create’ the society along different cultural lines and which, nevertheless, is not achievable within the short period usually mapped out for peacebuilding programs.

Unfortunately, for the imposition attempts and their perpetrators, genuine systemic changes usually emanate from within the system, mostly as a result of the need to suitably adapt and sustain itself in the face of pressure from within and outside. It is true that Africans and African societies have accommodated a lot of cultural influences from the different globalizing epochs, or so it seems, since the continent came into contact with the rest of the world, the continuing superficial nature of such cultural borrowings keep betraying not only their imposed nature but also the lopsided nature of such contacts. This could be discerned from the present religious, social, economic and political lives of the people. For instance, the two dominant religions in the continent at present, Christianity and Islam, were able to go this far because they later realized the exigency of the ‘survival’ strategy of accommodating some local imperatives, like the choice of liturgical languages, given names and some cultural festivals. Such an accommodating disposition can be applied to peacebuilding practice in Africa as way of supporting the inadequacies of the present western-oriented peacebuilding approaches. So, as recognized by Schirch (2003), “rather than focusing on how to change the other parts of a system, most of our efforts in peacebuilding should go into identifying the wisest and most emotionally intelligent ways for ourselves to behave in our systems” in order to maintain the existence, or continued ‘survival’ of the entire system (p. 2).

Conclusion

Though a well-conceived and auspicious concept, peacebuilding has not been able to achieve the dreams of the conceivers with regard to the attainment of peace and order due mainly to both structural and implementation defects. At present, the ugly trail is discernible from the handling of most conflict situations in various part of the world. However, the Third World generally and especially Africa, being at the receiving end of most international socio-political, economic, and even religious maneuvers, has been going through the most horrifying experiences. There exist more of the seemingly ‘intractable’ violent conflicts in the continent than what obtains in other parts of the world.

The situation does not, and should not, render the concept obsolete. The half-length perception of peacebuilding which restricts its application to mainly post-conflict situations, a later contrivance, is rather prone to anarchy and does not conform with the African indigenous or traditional cosmology of peace and peacebuilding. Africans see the activities of life from an interconnected perspective and such applies to the pursuit of peace. Like in a system where mutual sustenance among the constituent sub-systems subsists and where defects, deprivations and even deceitful acts suffered by or meted on a section affect all, peacebuilding should not be restricted mainly to sectional views or ideologies and post-conflict situations and should not be entirely imposed from outside or seen as a one-off activity. Invariably, in support of an alternative approach that draws from African indigenous experiences, it should be a well-rounded, preventive, all-involving, and long-term process. It would not condone situations where, in the course of extreme pursuit of national, ethnic, or sectional interests which may likely be detrimental to others, some 'powerful' nations or groups deliberately decide to destabilize other nations or groups only to turn around later to initiate and impose obviously ostensible peacebuilding measures, as if injured feelings, injustices, deprivations, and destructions can be healed overnight. Like the Early Warning and Early Response models of conflict resolution, such an alternative approach would start from the peculiar historical, political, economic, socio-religious, and psychological foundations and policies to build the peace in particular societies.

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