

NEPAD AND THE URGENCY FOR CHANGING THE 'WAR ECONOMY'

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Between 1963 and 2003, Africans experienced 26 conflicts; seven interstate and 19 internal conflicts are internal which spared none of Africa's sub-regions. It is estimated that 474 million Africans (or 61 per cent of the total population) is directly or indirectly affected by conflict. This grim picture is reflected in 20 percent of the continent's population or one out of every five of is affected by war hampering their changes for economic recovery. The relationship between the social and economic consequences of war and poverty cannot be overemphasized and in a continent like Africa where the resources are meagre, conflicts would only aggravate the situation and make miserable conditions worse.

Conflict is really not just about religious and ethnic differences, it is also about the use or abuse of these differences to mobilise the support of the poor and vulnerable for civil war. Youth in situations where job opportunities are meagre, they become target of recruitment by adventurists and bounty hunters. Youth and child soldiers become the fighting force that destroys the very resources on which their future rests.

The locations of conflicts in Africa are closely related to the war economy because these conflict ridden regions are endowed with valuable natural resources often turned by conflicts into battlefields between competing rebel groups, militias and even worse government armed forces. The prizes for the military and rebel leaders are gold, diamonds, timber, oil and other riches.

The gain to the ordinary peoples is resources denied, wealth squandered and development opportunities lost particularly to the poor and the most vulnerable. Coupled with the destructive consequences of violence, war destroys human and financial capital, decimates infrastructure squanders savings, shatters investment opportunities, contributes to capital flight and creates food shortages and famine. It is difficult to quantify the economic cost of conflicts, but its estimates have been given by Ali 2001.

If Africa is able to redirect its resources from military expenditure to development, it will not need development aid or foreign emergencies often based on humanitarianism and not humanism. The figures are telling. African military expenditure has risen from little less than eight billion US Dollars in 1995 to about 12 billion US Dollars in 2002.

NePAD approach to conflict prevention, management, mitigation and resolution is informed by the United Nations Millennium Declaration, adopted in September 2000. The Declaration confirms the global community's readiness to support Africa's efforts to address the continent's underdevelopment and marginalisation. It also emphasises support for the prevention of conflict and the establishment of conditions of stability and democracy on the continent, as well as for the key challenges of eradicating poverty and disease (Article 36).

Inspired by the Millennium Goals and the need to Develop a global partnership for development, NePAD takes three factors as the major sources of conflict (Article 37):

1. The rapid increase in the numbers of the socially excluded, contributing to political instability, civil war and military conflict;
2. A new pattern of mass migration and displacement which creates a vicious circle by creating a pool of impoverished and exploitable pool of advenurists;
3. Environmental degradation and the shrinking of the environmental space caused by land appropriation for export crop production and accelerated poverty.

NePAD answer is the following four priority areas in order to:

- Infrastructure, especially information and communications technology (ICT) and energy
- Human resources, including education, skills development, and reversing the brain drain
- Health
- Agriculture
- Access to the markets of developed countries for African exports

In how to deal with conflict, NePAD proposes the need for fostering:

1. Democracy, the deepening of the culture of human rights and the reinforcement of civil society voices, including women, youth and the independent media; and
2. Regional economic cooperation and integration in order to consolidate the gains of the economic turnaround and to reinforce the advantages of mutual interdependence.

The idea here is that resources freed from conflict prevention and containment could be used for development. In NePAD words, “The resources of the world currently dedicated to resolving civil and interstate conflict could therefore be freed for more development” (Article 183).

In particular, NePAD makes a discernable between peace, security, democracy and political governance initiative and sustainable development. The peace and security initiative consists of three points:

- Promoting long-term conditions for development and security;
- Building the capacity of African institutions for early warning, as well as enhancing African institutions’ capacity to prevent, manage and resolve conflicts;
- Institutionalising commitment to the core values of NePAD through leadership (Art. 72).

To achieve these objectives, the need to take joint responsibility for strengthening mechanisms for conflict prevention, management and resolution at the regional and continental levels, and to ensure that these mechanisms are used to restore and maintain peace are emphasized (Art. 49).

The second prerequisite to these achieving these objectives is to create long-term conditions for ensuring peace and security in Africa. It requires policy measures to address the political and social vulnerabilities on which conflict is premised. These are dealt with in NePAD sections on the Political and Economic Governance Initiatives, the Capital Flows and Market Access Initiatives and the Human Development Initiative (Article 73).

The third prerequisite to ensuring conflict prevention and peace is capacity building. NePAD aspires to build Africa's capacity to manage all aspects of conflict must focus on the means necessary to strengthen existing regional and sub-regional institutions, especially in four key areas:

- Prevention, management and resolution of conflict;
- Peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace enforcement;
- Post-conflict reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction;
- Combating the illicit proliferation of small arms, light weapons and landmines (Art. 74).

NePAD also emphasizes the role of ICT in conflict management and control of pandemic diseases and the organisation of an efficient early warning mechanism by providing the tools for constant monitoring and immediate response.

Comments

- NePAD good intentions will never succeed without investing on the human security of the African peoples and promoting peace among African countries.
- NePAD is deficient in its apparent lack of enthusiasm for African home-grown conflict management tradition and culture. It is African traditional leadership which maintains Africa's real sense of peace and security vis-à-vis power hungry political elite long divorced from their peoples aspirations.
- Although I do not agree with claims that NePAD provisions on peace, security, conflict resolution and governance will take precedence over social issues such as poverty alleviation, it is important that a sense of balance be maintained. Some Western analysts working on the anti-terrorist effort envisage a particular role for African in post-September 11 policies.
- Putting the emphasis on peer reviewing countries rather than corrupt leaders and their practices, would fuel rather than reduce conflict;
- NePAD is inadequate in appealing to the need for opening the borders of African countries to its people to move freely. There would be no real regional and economic integration in a continent that has not only kept its internal ethnic boundaries intact, despite their artificiality, but also has not experienced trans-border exchange between its educated elite and particularly the youth, let alone its peoples. Regional integration between high level government officials can hardly trickle down to the African people and will be confined only to poorly orchestrated clichés;
- While NePAD is right in emphasizing the need for long-term vision with massive and heavy investment to bridge existing gaps and an emphasis on economic governance as an extension to the anti-corruption derives, there is no mention of corporate social responsibility. Corrupt corporate practices, tax evasion, environmental negligence, putting profit over community, child labour, low wages and disrespect for human rights at work, could also be sources of conflict. Such social conflicts could also contribute high intensity conflict between local communities and corporate power. As the current African conditions have shown, African governments tend to stand by their investment partners vis-à-vis the interests of their impoverished communities;
- If the architects of NePAD really aspire to make serious developmental gains for the African people, they and their partners should work hard to eliminate about 12 billion US Dollars military expenditure and use these resources for development. It is only then that NePAD could be able to change the war economy.

