“AFRICAN SOLUTIONS FOR AFRICAN PROBLEMS:” WHERE IS THE RESEARCH?

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Introduction

The nature of the conflicts the world has to contend with is changing, and so is the need to adopt new analyses and approaches to their management, resolution and post-conflict reconstruction. These changes do not only affect Africa but the entire global community. Starting from wars fought by armies facing each other on battlegrounds--there has been a notable shift towards conflict characterised by asymmetric warfare that is not and cannot be fought the same way as traditional wars. In recent years, in addition to current intra-state conflicts, the world has seen an upsurge in violent extremism and terrorism in some parts of the world, linked to resurgence in fundamentalist Islam with its reinterpretation of religious duty and the rise of Islamist movements and their response to the age-old Middle Eastern Question. As if things were not bad enough, these developments have coincided with the exponential growth of new communications technologies accessible to every part of the globe. The consequence of accessibility to these mass communication technologies is that disaffected persons all over the world can now mobilise support for their cause, or join up their causes. They have also been enabled to recruit any number of people to adopt their ideas and execute extremist projects inspired by those ideas. Thus the islamization of political grievances has not only increased the intensity of existing conflicts, but, with the aid of communications technology, has increased the speed of contact and the spread of who constitute the “Them vs Us,” as opposing parties to a conflict. These emerging issues require fresh and sustained thinking to develop credible responses.
On the peacebuilding front, efforts to assist countries emerging from conflict to build peace in order to pursue development have largely not yielded the desired results. I maintain that “Peace is to a nation, what oxygen is to the human being”. Without peace, there is no scope for assuring anything other than physical security for the populace. Funds that would have been used to provide necessary amenities to improve the lives of the populace have to be diverted to support security personnel needed to maintain a modicum of peace; and energies needed to tackle issues of development would be invested in efforts to make or find peace, leaving room for nothing else. Peace is thus a necessary condition for development and peacebuilding; a critical activity to secure that needed space for development. Conversely, it has also been demonstrated that sustainable and equitable development in a country is a necessary condition for durable peace. There is thus a symbiotic relationship between peace and development: it is only when there is peace that the creative energies of the people are released for accelerated development, and it is only when there is ordered development characterised by equitable distribution of national goods, that societal peace may be best assured. The relationship between peace and development has been too well established for further debate.

‘African solutions for African problems’ has lately been the boast of the continent since it found its voice and some muscle to attempt to confront its problems. However, implicit in the slogan is the notion that some problems are African problems which must be left to Africans to solve. Whatever the reality of the situation, solutions must be generated on the continent, for, should Africans import solutions to African problems, then the solutions would be no more African than if they had been imported by non-Africans. Therefore the slogan risks being an empty boast without research generated from the continent in response to continental realities. The challenges facing Africa are many and complex. From issues of governance through socioeconomic development to development of peaceful and cohesive
societies, there are many unanswered questions. For instance, over the last twenty years, many countries opted for a system of governance based on principles of liberal democracy, believing that it would lead to the stability and prosperity that the continent desperately needs. Why are they not achieving the expected results and progress in governance and development? Do we know what the real issues are, and what action might serve to address them?

I propose to examine some of these issues in order to demonstrate the critical need for home grown research as a contribution to resolve some of the difficulties currently confronting the world.

The changing terrain of conflict

Unlike the wars of old where objectives were known, the parties determinate, the fighters participating as part of a fighting machine, rules guiding armed conduct well laid down and accepted by the parties to a conflict, the new conflicts are somewhat different. Now, the objectives are more diffuse; the parties somewhat indeterminate; the fighters each driven by personal or collective grievance or motivation; and it is an all and out war with no barriers or forbidden targets. The challenge to conventional strategies and tactics has also meant that non-conventional participants in war have been drawn in as the new modes of warfare appear to have no barriers/rules. The changing nature of war has thus succeeded in blurring the distinctions between civilian and military, combatant and non-combatant, victim and perpetrator, all of which categories had implications under humanitarian and human rights law. The September 9th 2001 (9/11) terrorist attacks in the United States of America were aimed at the United States, but the choice of a target known to house global representation of people and interests, as well as the use of airplanes, which have become the key means of transportation in a globalized world, were by no means accidental. In one fell
swoop, the leadership of Al Qaeda, who planned and executed those attacks, “globalized” the conflict in what amounted to a hostile confrontation with the whole world. Their action thus transcended attacks on one world power, by taking on the symbols of globalization. This thinking appears to be the basis of attacks on trains and train stations in UK and Belgium, hotels and entertainment venues in France, Mali, Burkina Faso U.S. and Cote d’Ivoire and now a Russian airplane and an international airport in Belgium. All of these show clearly an expansion of the notion of “Them vs Us” that underlies every conflict, with the “democratization” of communication technology not being the less culpable. Thus, persons with extremist views and terror groups have successfully recruited others who but for information technologies, would otherwise have been completely out of their reach and scope; and by a number of mechanisms, such as “franchising”, ‘radicalised lone wolf operatives’ and by copy-cat operations, have made the determination of who qualifies as an ‘enemy combatant’ a difficult task. This has been made worse by the easy availability of online information on bomb-making and other IEDs, rendering otherwise law abiding and unarmed people into lethally-armed warriors. From heavy weapons indiscriminately used, ‘human bombs’ deliberately detonated in crowded areas to cause maximum casualties; these groups have stopped at nothing to press their point. Initially presented and characterised as a clash between Islamic and secular western civilisations, it has become clear that such characterization could not be entirely accurate on account of the large number of their co-religionists who have been targeted, attacked and massacred as part of the groups’ modus operandi. All of these developments have changed the dynamics of conflict for the international community, and truly globalized the contest for hearts and minds, leaving the world baffled as to what to do next. In the midst of all this confusion, there is the loud sloganeering of ‘African solutions for African problems’. What and where are the ideas with which Africa intends to confront these manifestations of conflict on the continent? The need
for research into causes and effects, as well as the modes of response and the efficacy of existing tools in the management of the conflicts of today is almost self-evident.

While the international community is wrestling with these challenges, some of the groups involved in acts of violent extremism and terrorism, such as ISIL, Boko Haram and Al Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM) claim to be fighting to create Caliphates and establish Islamic forms of government, with no regard for existing national boundaries. Indeed, they desire to displace them all – a posture in complete contradiction to the post-Westphalian State, and International Law as currently practised. Again, their goals are maximalist, and do not admit of moderation, dialogue or negotiation. Thus, just as the unanticipated eruption of intra-state wars in the immediate post-cold war period challenged the instruments the international community had designed for dealing with conflict between and among its member states, so these emerging forms of conflict are challenging the available tools. Mechanisms for exacting compliance and for sanctioning leaders by putting them on travel bans etc; have been used to achieve desired outcomes when such persons have contravened norms of the community. Not so with these new protagonists of intra-state wars - non-state actors, who sometimes are even unaware of a legal regime of humanitarian law and of human rights; who have no need to travel or deal with the outside world such as to make travel bans effective as sanctions; and who have no external economic interests that could be blocked in order to force compliance with the standards and demands of the international community. Any African solutions would definitely make a contribution towards improving the efficacy of measures that could be employed to bring these aggressors to heel.

As if that were not enough complications to worry about, Africa’s response to peace and security challenges based upon notions that there should be African solutions for African problems have come under pressure. The African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) has been fashioned on the nature and manifestation of the features of the threats of yesterday.
Its Panel of the Wise and Friends of the Panel are ready to mediate and negotiate with parties in conflict, but these new protagonists are not interested in such negotiation because first, they are not ready to emerge from the shadows, and second, they are in an all-or-nothing contest. On the military front, one of APSA’s central pillars, the African Standby Force (ASF), is a continental military arrangement organised around the five regional groupings in Africa: North, South, East, West and Central. This has caused its existing economic communities or other regional bodies or mechanisms (RECs/RMs) - – NARC, ECOWAS, ECCAS, EASF, SADC to undergo fundamental mission shifts in order to support military action under the so-called principle of subsidiarity. However, while the ASF is still being formed and only now getting operational, a terrorist group such as Boko Haram has emerged with operations across four countries - Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon - two of which are in the West African community of ECOWAS and the other two in the Central African community of ECCAS. This has presented an immediate challenge to the design of the ASF; thus undermining the efficacy of existing arrangements and blunting the edge of the newly-designed instruments. This reality has necessitated the development of a new mechanism – the Lake Chad Basin Commission - of which all four affected countries are members. However, the task of fashioning new structures out of strictly civilian ones for the management of the resources of Lake Chad, to now offer a military response has been caught up in issues of hegemonic politics and other considerations. All of these developments have created new security challenges for governments and their security apparatuses as well as challenges to the tools that had been fashioned out to deal with the continent’s existing challenges.

Yet another trait manifested by, ISIL and Boko Haram on the one part and Al Qaeda and Al Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM) on the other, is the effort to join forces to perpetrate outrages. Thus, Boko Haram has sworn loyalty to, and been accepted, by ISIL, whilst AQIM
is clearly a branch (or franchise) of Al Qaeda. This has not only increased its reach, and possible access to heavy weaponry, but has also placed West Africa at the centre of possible turf wars between the two groups, for they are known to be bitter rivals. A realistic appreciation of these challenges would suggest that new thinking is required since the ‘enemy’ is not a determinate entity restricted to the theatre of war, but everyone whose death would produce terror and headlines in the news media. The world has now been set on its head, as with baffled exclamations it struggles to combat the new threats with its outdated weapons/responses. What can we do? What must we do? Clearly, new and fresh thinking is required, and this is where academic thinkers and theorists could make a difference.

In 2014, the appointment of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO), coincided with the appointment of two other Panels by the General Assembly to review the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women Peace and Security, and to advise it on its Peacebuilding agenda. These three Reviews operated concurrently and so were able to profit from synergies of joined up consultations. Indeed, the Chair and one other member of the 1325 Panel were fully-fledged members of the HIPPO as well, and this made for easy and meaningful linkages. Beginning its work in November, 2014, and handing in its report titled ‘Politics, People and Partnership’ in June, 2015, the HIPPO engaged in extensive consultations with all the major stakeholders to rebuild the lost consensus on peacekeeping and reaffirm the role of the UN in managing threats to international peace and security.

**UN Partnership With African Union**

The framers of the Charter of the UN, in confiding world peace and security to the Security Council, also had the prescience to prescribe a role for regional bodies and other organisations committed to the same ideals as the UN, and so made provision for such
eventuality in Chapter VIII of the Charter. The AU, which had set out to attempt to solve its own problems on account of the general feeling that the Security Council was slow to act when African lives were at risk, soon confronted the reality that taking on the task of protecting African peace and security was a much more expensive endeavour than the AU could support on its own. Changing tack, the AU has now revised its stance on ‘African solutions for African problems’ by adopting the approach that although it expects to be in the lead when issues arise on the continent, the UN has a responsibility towards its African Member States and therefore it must retain its primacy as confided to it under Chapter VI of the UN Charter. The AU has thus fashioned its approach as a manifestation of Chapter VIII of the UN Charter; and that whenever it purports to act, it would do so as a partner of the UN. This partnership has now been fully recognised under the HIPPO report, and its operational details are being worked out.

The HIPPO Report has recommended that the UN-AU partnership must be underpinned by a baseline of principles that include; “consultative decision making and common strategy; division of labour based on respective comparative advantage; joint analysis, planning, monitoring and evaluation; integrated response to the conflict cycle, including prevention and transparency, accountability and respect for international standards”.\(^1\) This translates into the UN’s reliance on the AU and other partners, such as ‘coalitions of the willing’, when it is unable to perform required tasks involving peace enforcement or counter-insurgency. In such situations, the partnership framework prescribes that the UN must provide assistance and support to the AU, to enable it undertake the task. All of this means that the voices of African scholars must be heard in the various spheres of peace and security on the continent so as to help shape the discourse of the future.

Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding is a necessary component of the peace agenda underlying any intervention by the international community. Defined variously as “international support to national efforts to establish, redevelop and reform institutions for effective administration of countries emerging from conflict” \(^2\); “action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid relapse into conflict” \(^3\); and “a multifaceted concept that includes the process of building or rebuilding the political, security, socio-economic and transitional justice dimensions of societies emerging from conflict”; \(^4\) these many definitions all refer to assistance from the international community to undertake post-conflict reconstruction.

The inclusion of peacebuilding in peace support agenda is motivated by the desire of the international community to support societies in crisis to achieve durable peace and prevent a lapse or relapse into conflict by addressing the root causes of the conflict; strengthening state institutions to perform their functions; delivering justice and respect for human rights; and supporting socio-economic wellbeing including livelihood. The notion of peacebuilding became associated with post-conflict activity consequent upon the definition accorded it in the Brahimi Report which defined it 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.” \(^5\) The placement of peacebuilding as a post-conflict activity has undergone a shift. Under the HIPPO and AGE Reports, peacebuilding is recognized as a legitimate activity to prevent a lapse into conflict,

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\(^3\) – Boutros Boutros-Ghali ‘Agenda for Peace’, para.21.

\(^4\) Center for Conflict Resolution (CCR) 2009.

thus making it part of the package of activities aimed at preventing conflict in the first place. Again, the current mantra is ‘sustaining peace’ and no longer just ‘peacebuilding’. The notion of ‘sustaining peace’ is conceptualized as “encompassing not only efforts to prevent relapse into conflict, but also to prevent lapse into conflict in the first place.” Clearly then, peacebuilding is not sequential to peace-making only, but present throughout the conflict cycle, and as conflicts are not linear, so peacebuilding cannot be tied to a particular phase. Currently, with emphasis on sustaining peace, peacebuilding is not referable only to post-conflict activities as it was represented under the Brahimi Report, but also a component in prevention activities. It is acknowledged that when undertaken appropriately with good programmes and activities, it holds real promise for reconstruction, either post-conflict or as a conflict-prevention measure as it enables the widest spread of the citizenry to appreciate the value of peace and secures their commitment to sustain the peace. Yet again, this is where relevant research could make a difference, for engaging in peace-building as conflict prevention has the potential to upset host governments and be seen as interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state, etc.

Despite the goodwill and good intentions underlying the support extended to post-conflict countries, the world has gradually come to the realization that the record of successful post-conflict peacebuilding is dismal, as countries that have received such assistance soon relapse into conflict when the international community departs. Under pressure from growing UN peacekeeping budgets, now almost $9 billion, as well as other expenditure on conflict-related activities, attention has turned to how to create more peaceful societies so as to prevent a lapse into conflict, or how to make peacebuilding more enduring so as to minimise the danger of relapse into conflict once foreign intervention in a post-conflict situation has abated. The move to redefine the goal of efforts to assist post

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conflict societies as one not just of building a peace, but of building sustainable peace, has led to “sustaining peace” being the preferred expression rather than “peacebuilding”.

The HIPPO Report also recommended that the one-size fits all approach to peace operations and peacebuilding should be jettisoned in favor of situation-specific responses/approaches. In fact, the one-size-fits-all approach to peacebuilding has been blamed for conflict relapse in post-conflict countries. While all agree that not all contexts require the same arrangements, there has as yet been little thought as to context specificity after peace agreements have been signed and the international community has moved in. Again, not all activities are required in all post-conflict countries, nor even when required, are needed in the same order. For instance, it is the norm for peace agreements to contain clauses requiring elections within twelve months, etc. However, experience has shown that not all elections hurriedly organized achieve or confer legitimacy on the ruling government, and not all national budgets can support institutions of a certain size and yet countries variously situated are fed the same medicine. The group of post-conflict countries in a state of fragility, known as g7+, is doing its bit to sensitize the world about their real needs and how they feel about assistance extended to them, but these ideas are not backed by hard evidence or independent scholarly research. It is clear that there is still a lot that is neither known nor properly understood about the societies that have been at the receiving end of peacebuilding activities. What can African academics and researchers contribute so that the one-size fits all approach can be safely abandoned?

It has also been recommended by both HIPPO and AGE Reports that there must be strong engagement with civil society if national ownership is to be assured. Civil society plays critical roles in various aspects of reconstruction and building sustainable peace. From enabling peace agreements to be inclusive by assuring the involvement of women and youth; through assisting in the promotion of a culture of peace by implementing grassroots
programs; to support for activities aimed at promoting good governance, civil society has no peer. Active civil society, represented by CSOs, can play critical roles in ensuring sustainable peace. It is well known that CSOs are a great resource for translating peace processes to the grassroots; assuring the utilisation of local knowledge; mobilising communities to improve their own circumstances; and building bridges of understanding in broken communities. For what other ends may their participation be tapped in support of sustaining peace? How may the resources of their Diasporas be tapped to support the peace instead of being left to fuel renewed conflict? Certainly only field research could provide the necessary answers. Again, how may Development Agencies and IFIs be persuaded to line up behind peacebuilding efforts in particular contexts in order to maximise the peace dividend? All of these issues need to be researched to stop us from groping in the dark for answers.

Host countries tend to be critical of the international community and the lack of transparency in the manner of spending allocated funds. Recipients of Development Assistance have valid expectation that funding support publicly announced is going directly to fund local programmes. However, sometimes inordinate amounts are expended on “international experts’ leaving very little for programmatic activity. Surely the existence of local experts or at least African experts who understand the context would yield more dividend than the current dearth of African presence in the higher echelons of multilateral organisations. If Africa is to step up to the plate then it is going to need its own locally-generated research and expertise.

**Conclusion**

In this piece, I have tried to show that the slogan ‘African Solutions to African problems’ will remain hollow unless African researchers step up to the plate and produce relevant research to ground proffered solutions in local realities. Although Africa is one continent, realities in
the West may not necessarily mirror realities in the East and therefore research grounded in local realities would be more beneficial than solutions that have been imported from other parts of the world.

I have also tried to show the very many ways in which sound research from Africa could contribute to the discourse in the international community for the benefit of all. From assisting to create an understanding of the new imperatives determined by the changing nature of conflict and threats to international peace, to the enterprise of building sustainable peace in troubled communities, evidence-based research is necessary, but lacking. New ideas are required to tackle new manifestations of old problems, and the need to let communities that receive international assistance derive maximum benefit from the investment continues to be paramount. Research, particularly field-based research is critical and so funding agencies such as SSRC through the APN make invaluable contribution when they enable such research to be undertaken by Africa’s brightest and best.

I am not in doubt that the topics lined up for you the Grantees, would equip you to better pitch yourself into the battle to rescue Africa from too much experimentation by foreign interests. In the end, Africa would be better off if initiatives adopted to assist Africans would have been generated from research by African scholars so that there would, indeed, be African solutions to African problems.

Thank you.

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