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# TEACHING PEACEBUILDING IN AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES: BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN THE FIELD AND THE CLASSROOM

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AFRICAN PEACEBUILDING NETWORK APN WORKING PAPERS: NO. 13

#### ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Launched in March 2012, the African Peacebuilding Network (APN) supports independent African research on conflict-affected countries and neighboring regions of the continent, as well as the integration of high-quality African research-based knowledge into global policy communities. In order to advance African debates on peacebuilding and promote African perspectives, the APN offers competitive research grants and fellowships, and it funds other forms of targeted support, including strategy meetings, seminars, grantee workshops, commissioned studies, and the publication and dissemination of research findings. In doing so, the APN also promotes the visibility of African peacebuilding knowledge among global and regional centers of scholarly analysis and practical action and makes it accessible to key policymakers at the United Nations and other multilateral, regional, and national policymaking institutions.

#### **ABOUT THE SERIES**

"African solutions to African problems" is a favorite mantra of the African Union, but since the 2002 establishment of the African Peace and Security Architecture, the continent has continued to face political, material, and knowledge-related challenges to building sustainable peace. Peacebuilding in Africa has sometimes been characterized by interventions by international actors who lack the local knowledge and lived experience needed to fully address complex conflict-related issues on the continent. And researchers living and working in Africa need additional resources and platforms to shape global debates on peacebuilding as well as influence regional and international policy and practitioner audiences. The APN Working Papers series seeks to address these knowledge gaps and needs by publishing independent research that provides critical overviews and reflections on the state of the field, stimulates new thinking on overlooked or emerging areas of African peacebuilding, and engages scholarly and policy communities with a vested interest in building peace on the continent.

# TEACHING PEACEBUILDING IN AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES: BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN THE FIELD AND THE CLASSROOM

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SEPTEMBER 2017

A version of this working paper was originally delivered by Professor Isaac Olawale Albert as the Keynote Lecture at "Peacebuilding Education in African Universities: A Consultative Meeting," hosted by the Social Science Research Council's African Peacebuilding Network and Next Generation Social Sciences in Africa programs.

While conflict is a normal, healthy part of all communities, teaching people how to deal with conflict without resorting to violence by helping them to use new approaches to overcome barriers can be effective in bringing about progressive change.<sup>1</sup>

Educating for peace is crucial due to the normalization of violence and its influence on well-being. As a human right, students must learn about a healthy life, for everyone can be sustained without violence as a response to conflict. In peace education lessons about the sources of and responses to conflict, students analyze current problems and how they can be avoided, as well as responsibly managed. They need a vision of a peaceful future as a foundation for peacemaking and skills for constructing it.<sup>2</sup>

#### INTRODUCTION

A major factor in Africa's underdevelopment is the perennial problem of violent conflicts in almost all sub-regions of the continent. With 16 percent of the world population, Africa witnessed more than half of the violent conflicts in the world in 2014.3 Even now, the situation is not getting significantly better. Governments and the international community still invest heavily in the management of violent conflicts around the continent. The causes and nature of these violent conflicts vary from one sub-region to another. In all, none of the sub-regions of the continent is spared from having a peculiar problem of its own. Egypt and Libya in North Africa have yet to put the negative effects of the Arab Spring behind them. In Libya particularly, armed groups frustrate all efforts at political stabilization. The Mali-Algeria-Libya triangle has been turned into a terrorist hotspot by several terrorist groups, most especially al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. In Central African Republic (CAR), Sudan, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), armed rebel groups wantonly take human lives and the problems do not seem to be abating. While the Boko Haram sect holds Nigeria ransom through its terrorist attacks, an equally sinister form of violent extremism is perpetrated against the people in Somalia and Kenya by the al-Shabaab movement. In South Africa, there is the incessant problem of xenophobic attacks on other Africans. Added to these problems is the perennial problem of electoral violence in many parts of the continent.

The intensity of these violent conflicts across Africa is not as worrisome to the international community as the lack of internal capacity to deal with them. The continent is still dependent on the ever-changing mood of the frustrated international community to further develop the capacity to deal with challenges posed by violent conflicts on the continent. Some efforts are being directed towards preventing any further perpetuation of the present situation, but there are still huge gaps to fill through collaborative efforts. Former U.S. president Barack Obama tried to drum this into the ears of African leaders in the speech he delivered to Ghana's parliament on July 11, 2011, in which he said, inter alia: "Africa's future is up to Africans." That advice is salient today.

African leaders are not totally oblivious to their responsibility to deal with the challenging peace and security situations. They have several measures in place for dealing with different aspects of the problems.<sup>5</sup> These include:

- <u>The African Union Peace and Security Architecture</u> (APSA), which speaks holistically to the different mechanisms for preventing and managing African conflicts;
- The African Union Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD) Framework, which contains strong provisions for post-conflict peacebuilding and addressing the root causes of conflicts;
- Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, which articulates how Africa
  would be among the best performers in global quality of life
  measures including good governance, democracy, respect
  for human rights and rule of law, ethical practices, economic
  soundness, and environmental safety; and,
- <u>Silencing the Guns by 2020</u>, which commits African leaders to breaking the vicious cycle of violent conflict and turning Africa into a war-free continent by 2020.

Attaining the objectives of the foregoing requires two conflict management approaches: hard and soft. The hard approach involves the use of force in managing the violent conflicts in different corners of the continent. By this is meant the use of military force, economic sanctions, and all other approaches resulting in what Johan Galtung refers to as "negative peace." This approach is fraught with different problems. The crises in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, and Sudan readily show that African militaries find it difficult to easily subdue rebel movements. Hence, most of the armed conflicts in the continent end up involving international peacekeeping operations. But the use of peacekeepers in Africa also causes its own problems, the most prominent of which are the human rights abuses—from sexual violence to other forms of abuse and exploitation—committed by peacekeepers against those whom they are meant to serve. These actions soon attract the attention of international human rights organizations, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

Hence, watchers of the African peace and security environment often call attention to the soft approach to managing African conflicts. This includes the use of diplomacy, co-option, and transformation of attitude and behavior through training and removal of the root causes of conflict. This approach leads to positive peace. All of these are peacebuilding initiatives.

#### UNDERSTANDING PEACEBUILDING

The term "peacebuilding" was popularized by the former UN Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, in his widely cited *An Agenda for Peace*, published in 1992, and the supplement to the document, published in 1995. In the documents, Boutros-Ghali called policy and academic attention to four key peace terms: "post-conflict peace-building," which he defined as "action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict"; "peacemaking," action to bring hostile parties to agreement; "peace-keeping," a way to help countries torn by conflict create the conditions for lasting peace; and "preventive diplomacy," action aimed at preventing disputes from arising or disputes from escalating into conflict.

Of all these peace terms, "peacebuilding" has been of the greatest interest to policymakers and the academic discipline of peace and conflict studies. This is because it captures the whole essence of the other peace terms. For example, Luc Reychler and Thania Paffenholz have observed that the:

aim of peacebuilding is to transform conflicts constructively and to create a sustainable peace environment. Transforming a conflict goes beyond problem solving or managing a conflict. It addresses all the major components of the conflict: fixing the problems, which threatened the core interests of the parties; changing the strategic thinking; and changing the opportunity structure and the ways of interacting.... The term peacebuilding refers to all the efforts required on the way to the creation of a sustainable peace zone: imagining a peaceful future, conducting an overall needs assessment, developing a coherent peace plan, and designing an effective implementation of the plan.<sup>7</sup>

In his own work, John Paul Lederach has argued that the term "involves a wide range of activities that both precede and follow formal peace accords. Metaphorically, peace is seen not merely as a stage in time or a condition. It is a dynamic social construct." In its effort to mainstream conflict prevention in its work, the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) aptly captures this issue when it observed that:

Peace-building covers a broad range of measures implemented

in the context of emerging, current or post-conflict situations and which are explicitly guided and motivated by a primary commitment to the prevention of violent conflict and the promotion of lasting and sustainable peace.<sup>9</sup>

Even within the UN system, peacebuilding has continued to enjoy a pride of place. The activities captured by it keep expanding. The term has gone through such an interesting transformation that it today encapsulates all the other peace terms promoted by Boutros-Ghali in *An Agenda for Peace*. Of course, the transformation of the term started with Boutros-Ghali himself when he expanded its definition in 1995 to encapsulate the activities that take place at all phases of a violent conflict: before, during, and after. In December 2005, the UN Commission for Peacebuilding was established to underscore the importance attached to the concept of peacebuilding in the promotion of international peace and security.

# **CORE ACADEMIC QUESTIONS**

The search for knowledge about peacebuilding should revolve around five core questions: (1) why privilege peacebuilding – rationale or justification; (2) when to do peacebuilding – timeline or sequence; (3) how to do peacebuilding – method or approach; (4) who does peacebuilding – agency or actors; and, (5) "so what" or what to expect from peacebuilding – impact. Those teaching peacebuilding must first come to terms with these five questions before appreciating the gaps to be filled in their enterprise.

**Rationale or justification:** Why is peacebuilding preferred to the other methods (peacemaking, peacekeeping, preventive diplomacy, etc.)? What is the weight given to peacebuilding in the curriculum and problem-solving strategies? Above, this piece argues that peacebuilding encapsulates the other peace tasks, and therefore provides a more sustainable approach to the promotion of peace. This explains why more institutions are committing to it. Academic institutions cannot be an exception.

**Timeline or Sequence:** The emphasis here is on the time element in peacebuilding. This takes us back to the "ripeness" debate in peace and security studies. When is a conflict ripe enough for intervention? At what time should peacebuilding be done? The "when" perspective has three aspects: (1) Should the intervention come at the latent stage of the conflict in the form of preventive diplomacy, involving putting in place

diplomatic, economic development, social, educational, health, legal, and security measures addressing potential sources of instability and violence? (2) Should peacebuilding come during the violent conflict with a view to reducing its adverse effects on the population? Or, (3) should it be done after the cessation of hostilities in the form of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration; reconciliation; and rebuilding government, economic, and civil society institutions? The consensus is that it should be done at all three phases of conflict: before, during, and after.

**Method or Approach:** What should be the issues in the peacebuilding engagement? Several scholars, institutions, and agencies have suggested different approaches to peacebuilding. Two of these models are examined here and integrated. The first model favored by this paper is that recommended by James Notter and Louise Diamond in which attention is called to three types of peacebuilding:

- (i) Political peacebuilding;
- (ii) Structural peacebuilding; and,
- (iii) Social peacebuilding.<sup>11</sup>

For our context, "political" peacebuilding has to do with putting in place a political and legal system supportive of sustainable peace and development. On the other hand, "structural" peacebuilding relates to managing the structure of a society in a manner that ensures inclusivity at the social, economic, political, or gender level. "Social" peacebuilding addresses building or rebuilding relationships at the different strata of the society; it has to do with connecting people.

The second model is suggested by the OECD. It presents peacebuilding as containing three mutually reinforcing dimensions:

- (i) Security:
- (ii) Governance and political; and,
- (iii) Social, economic, and environmental. 12

The "security" dimension concerns itself with how to ensure the security of the country and the individuals living there, including removing the root causes of armed conflict; restricting the flow and availability of surplus arms and light weapons; promoting security sector reforms in a manner that is supportive of civilian control; and ensuring transparency and accountability with regard to the military, police, judiciary, and the penal services. It also includes efforts at disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of ex-

combatants, as well as mine clearance and weapons stockpile destruction in post-conflict societies.

Regarding the OECD model's "governance and political" dimension, the issues raised are the same as those understood as part of "political" peacebuilding by James Notter and Louise Diamond above. Finally, the OECD's "social, economic, and environmental" dimension is aptly captured by Notter and Diamond's "structural" peacebuilding dimension. All of these dimensions must be well represented in any peacebuilding effort.

**Agency or Actors:** Who should carry out peacebuilding activities and whom should benefit from them? "Who should do the work?" calls attention to the role of five possible actors or stakeholders:

- (i) Intergovernmental organizations, such as the UN, AU, African RECs such as ECOWAS, etc.;
- (ii) Governments and state agencies;
- (iii) Non-governmental organizations;
- (iv) Communities; and,
- (v) Individuals.

Inclusivity is the golden rule of any effective peacebuilding project. The project must be done or implemented in a manner that benefits everybody across the different strata of the society and should not exclude anybody.

**Impact:** What should be expected from peacebuilding projects and what are the indicators for ensuring that positive changes have actually taken place? The ultimate goal of peacebuilding is what Galtung has called "positive peace." By this is meant the peace that comes from the people because the root causes of their problems have been removed. This is different from "negative peace," which comes from the state, or other actors, forcing people to be peaceful, or not to commit violence, by using force on them.

#### TEACHING PEACEBUILDING

What constitutes peacebuilding education? The concept refers to all forms of educational practices aimed at understanding, preventing, containing, and transforming conflicts constructively with a view to creating sustainable peace in a society, whether in the present or the future. This kind of initiative has long been recognized and supported by various global, regional, national, and local organizations around the world. Global attention was particularly

called to it in 2009 when the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council highlighted education as one of the five priority areas for those building peace in post-conflict societies of the world in their joint report.<sup>14</sup>

Several other initiatives followed this landmark position of the UN. These included the Secretary-General's Global Education First Initiative; the World Bank's Global Center on Conflict, Security and Development; the Global Partnership for Education's Strategic Plan, culminating in the pilot launch of the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and South Sudan.<sup>15</sup>

However, most of these initiatives pertain to non-formal peace education. The promotion of formal peacebuilding education is still unfolding very slowly, though some progress has been made in different parts of the world. The present working paper seeks to contribute to the African process, in support of the attainment of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). In particular, SDG Four promises to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." <sup>16</sup>

Peacebuilding education, as a development initiative, can be provided at two levels: non-formal and formal. Non-formal peacebuilding education incorporates a multitude of knowledge dissemination activities outside the formal school system, aimed at: enhancing stability at various levels of society; building understanding of "the other," especially amongst young people; promoting tolerance in society; and working constructively towards an inclusive society.

On the other hand, formal peacebuilding education is provided in classrooms where the primary goal is to secure paper qualifications that empower one to play an active role in conflict prevention and management. This kind of education can be provided in primary, secondary, and tertiary school settings and under context-specific conditions. The focus of this piece is formal peacebuilding education at the tertiary level, precisely in universities.

Peacebuilding education concerns itself with the objectives of three levels of a society: macro (policy) level, meso (community) level, and micro (individual) level. Shedding light on each of the levels, Rebecca Herrington has observed that:

At the meso and micro levels, for example, the positive face

of education rests in its ability to help people critically assess historical narratives and the dynamics behind the groups that shape them. Education can be used to foster dialogue and tolerance along ethnic, linguistic, and other identity lines. Education that emphasizes these practices helps to address grievances and strengthen the values, attitudes and beliefs that support peace. However, at the macro level education can also be a driver of conflict when delivered without consideration of conflict dynamics, equity of services, or peacebuilding dimensions. This can exacerbate systematic exclusionary practices such as manipulating curriculum or textbooks for political gain, unequal distribution of education resources, segregating certain groups from accessing quality education, and enforcing discriminatory stereotypes and beliefs among children and youth. These harmful practices are culturally repressive and engender prejudiced attitudes and oppressive systems.<sup>17</sup>

There are three entry points to teaching peacebuilding in a university system. The first is provided by the **power-based** approach to peace. This has to do with injecting peacebuilding issues—respect for human rights in military operations; responsibility to protect; just war theory, etc.—into the curriculum of formal security institutions, such as military academies, police universities, and others. In Nigeria, this kind of education is provided at the Nigerian Defense Academy, Kaduna, and Police College, Wudil—both of which award degrees in addition to providing general security management trainings. The central focus of the training provided by these institutions is how to provide peace through the use of force.

The second entry point is provided by the **human rights** approach to peace work. In this case, peacebuilding concerns such as negotiation, conciliation, mediation, and non-binding arbitration are injected into legal education curricula as alternatives to the adversarial approaches conventionally identified with law schools. The goal here is ensuring that students are provided requisite skills for doing "out-of-court" settlement of civil and commercial cases.

The third entry point is the **needs-based** approach to peace work. This approach assumes that a society lacks peace largely because of some unmet life-sustaining needs. The society becomes more peaceful once these basic human needs are met.<sup>18</sup> This approach to peacebuilding education manifests

essentially in the form of **development studies** with a strong emphasis on peace themes. Such an enterprise includes the need to build the "capacity for sympathetic identification with others," and "getting oneself to attend to the reality of other persons." <sup>20</sup>

#### TEACHING PEACEBUILDING IN AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES

The focus of this working paper is more on the needs-based approach to peacebuilding education. Two kinds of academic institutions in Africa provide this kind of education:

- (i) Mainstream; and,
- (ii) Peripheral.

"Mainstream peace studies" institutions formally bear names such as "institutes," "centers," or "departments" of Peace Studies, and are solely committed to teaching peacebuilding knowledge, skills, and values to students. There are universities in Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa, and Uganda offering this kind of academic program.<sup>21</sup> However, this working paper will focus on the ones in Ghana and Nigeria to illustrate the points to be made.

In Ghana, the two leading peace studies academies are the University of Cape Coast, which offers a Master of Philosophy (MPhil) degree in Peace and Development Studies, and the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC), which offers a Master of Arts and an Executive Masters in Conflict, Peace and Security, and a doctoral (PhD) degree in International Conflict Management. In Nigeria, the federal institutions in this category include the Institute for Peace and Strategic Studies of the University of Ibadan, the Centre for Peace and Strategic Studies of the University of Ilorin, and the Centre for Conflict Management and Peace Studies of the University of Jos—all of which offer masters and doctoral degrees in peace studies.

While these mainstream peacebuilding academic institutions focus exclusively on issues relating to peacebuilding, the "peripheral" ones are represented by academic departments where peacebuilding issues are embedded in the curriculum as subsidiary issues to be taught. These include departments of International Relations (with integral courses on diplomacy, international conflict, and peace); Political Science (war and peace); Sociology (human relations); Psychology (attitudes and behaviors

supporting peace); History (experiences of peace or lack thereof over time); Religion (spiritual traditions of and basis for peace); Communications; and others. Students graduating from these departments do not see themselves primarily as peace scholars, but they are not ignorant of relevant issues.

There is a thin dividing line between the mainstream and peripheral peacebuilding academic institutions. Those in the mainstream approach education from the context of peacebuilding programming, with peace being the primary intended outcome. To this extent, mainstream peacebuilding academic institutions relate more closely with the field than the classroom. But the main goal of those in the peripheral is to enhance learning outcomes and educational objectives; peacebuilding is not treated as an explicit priority but a secondary expected outcome. Hence, a person studying within the peripheral context can graduate without knowing the fundamentals of peacebuilding education. Yet, some of them end up applying to be employed as peace workers after graduation.

#### THE FUNDAMENTALS OF PEACEBUILDING EDUCATION

A careful look at the requirements for peacebuilding education is necessary to come to terms with the gaps that exist between the classroom and the field in this specialized academic activity. In this respect, peacebuilding education has three aspects:

- (i) Learning and knowledge;
- (ii) Tools and skills: and.
- (iii) Personal values, convictions, or dispositions.<sup>22</sup>

**Learning and knowledge:** The knowledge domain in a peacebuilding process has three key elements. The first has to do with understanding the causes, goals, and strategies of violent individuals and groups. The second has to do with understanding how violent groups communicate or reach a wide audience. The third relates to understanding human rights issues in conflict, from the point of view of not just the victims of violence but even the perpetrators whose rights are often taken for granted by those countering insurgency, terrorism, or other forms of violence.<sup>23</sup>

In a knowledge-based system of education, the teacher hands down new knowledge to students as captured in existing literature. In this didactic approach, the knowledge belongs to the teacher, and students are tested through their ability to remember what has been taught. Thus, a student can acquire a first class degree without knowing how to apply the information learned beyond the classroom. This presents a problem for peacebuilding education because the focus is more on the ability to practically apply knowledge in the field.

**Tools and skills:** The alternative to knowledge-based peacebuilding education is the skills-based approach. In this case, a skill has to do with the ability to solve a complex problem practically on a systematic and sustained basis. It has to do with prowess, mastery, and competence. It manifests practically and is not hidden. There are three types of skills: the cognitive, which has to do with the acquisition of the right ideas; the technical, which has to do with making things practically happen; and the interpersonal, which has to do with relationship management and refers to all forms of social skills, especially emotional intelligence.

What skills are needed in peacebuilding education? They include the ability to do scientific analysis of conflict and peace, to design an intervention that works, to monitor and evaluate intervention programs, and to write peacebuilding reports and policy briefs, among others.

**Personal values, convictions, or dispositions:** This aspect has to do with one's commitment to an opinion or belief. Peacebuilding education requires that the educator is passionately committed to bringing about positive change in the conflict environment. In this case, peacebuilding work is not just a matter of earning one's living; it is a service to humanity and must be done passionately.

Good peacebuilding education must combine knowledge, skills, and personal conviction. UNICEF took this into consideration in defining peace education as "the process of promoting the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to bring about behaviour change that will enable children, youth and adults to prevent conflict and violence, both overt and structural; to resolve conflict peacefully; and to create the conditions conducive to peace, whether at an interpersonal, intergroup, national or international level." All of these attributes of peace education are difficult to attain in Africa today, where peace work and peace scholarship have become more of a career than a passionate commitment.

What makes mainstream peacebuilding education unique is that it is value-based. In other words, the students coming to a university to study

peacebuilding are not just coming to receive a degree; they are seeking a process of personal transformation. This is because peace is basically a value system. In this context, values mean "socially shared ideas about what is good, desirable or important," or positive ideals or ideas held by individuals about what is good or bad and what should be desirable for a healthy society. The values of peacebuilding education include a commitment to contributing to sustainable peace in the society. To this extent, teaching peacebuilding strategies must draw from existing knowledge on teaching values strategies. Joseph Zajda has provided some guidance in this respect by calling attention to five different approaches for teaching values strategies. These are:

- (i) The trait approach, which posits that some people inherently possess positive moral traits and so would always work for peace;
- (ii) Values inculcation, which argues that socially desirable values can be instilled in people through formal and informal learning methods;
- (iii) The cognitive development approach, which promotes positive values through decisionmaking tasks and discussions;
- (iv) The clarification of values approach, which encourages positive values through practical activities aimed at clarifying the feelings of others; and,
- (v) The service learning approach, which provides knowledge in school and community settings.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, values are not acquired exclusively from the classroom, but more importantly adopted through observation, contemplative exercises, and practice.

#### THE "FIELD" AND THE "CLASSROOM"

It is necessary at this point to remember that the main task of this piece is to identify the gaps in the "field" and the "classroom" in peacebuilding education in Africa, and then suggest how to bridge them. What is the "field" and what constitutes the "classroom" in our analysis? The field consists of the following three major components that must be constructively engaged:

- (i) The geographical locations where conflict takes place and where solutions must be found to the problem of conflict (meaning either the specific country or the particular towns, villages, etc. that have been affected);
- (ii) Institution-based mechanisms for promoting peace and security

- by different stakeholders; and,
- (iii) The institutions that make peacebuilding policies (national governments, African RECs, the AU, the UN, etc.) and promote their implementation at local, national, regional, and global levels.

On the other hand, the classroom refers to where formal knowledge production, reproduction, and transmission take place. It is owned by two sets of people: teachers and learners. Both depend on the existence of each other: without the learners, there are no teachers, and vice versa.

To what extent are the field and the classroom linked in peacebuilding education in African universities? Are the learners and teachers close to peace and conflict constituencies for enriching knowledge acquisition in peacebuilding? In answering these questions, it is argued that a degree can be received from a peripheral peacebuilding academic institution without any significant contact between the field and the classroom. This is because the system is largely dependent on knowledge dissemination in which lecturers simply tell students what they are expected to know, and their knowledge of what is taught is tested through classroom examinations. Field trips undertaken as part of degrees in history, sociology, political science, and related disciplines are often tagged "excursion trips." These are considered to be more leisurely or recreational for the students than an integral part of their learning experience. The situation is different in mainstream peacebuilding education, where field experience is often, but not always, essential. The gap between the field and the classroom in both types of academic institutions must be bridged for African universities to produce more effective peacebuilders.

#### THE GAP BETWEEN THE FIELD AND THE CLASSROOM

The goal of any mainstream peacebuilding academic institution is not to produce narrow-gauged scholars but broad-based professionals able to make a significant contribution to conflict prevention and management. Hence, the objective of students taking this kind of academic course is not just to get a degree, but more importantly to acquire the relevant skills and right convictions to make a difference in the attainment of peace by their society. On graduation, students could decide not to take any paid employment but to set up their own organizations for doing peace-related work. The implication is that this kind of academic training cannot

be exclusively provided in the classroom. The learner must get closer to the field to understand a conflict's issues and the challenging methods for dealing with them. It is in this respect that mainstream peacebuilding education differs from peripheral education.

The challenge of effective peacebuilding education that narrows the gap between the field and classroom starts with curriculum development. Who designed the university's peacebuilding curriculum? What do they know about peacebuilding? What do they know about curriculum development? What do they know about the need to bridge the gap between the field and the classroom in peacebuilding education? Do they have the knowledge, skills, and conviction required to design a curriculum that produces a broad-based peacebuilding professional? These are the starting point of the problem.

Course evaluations and reviews of peace studies programs in Africa have shown that scholars from peripheral peacebuilding academic institutions have designed many of them, because most of the course developers are themselves from peripheral disciplines such as history, political science, and international relations. Often, they are not properly educated about the need to align the field and the classroom in curriculum development. A good indicator of the problems faced by the institutions manifests in the required courses that students have to take for graduation. All the courses are usually knowledge-based and tested exclusively through examinations. As in history, political science, sociology, and other peripheral disciplines, the courses taken by students in peace studies often have little or no strong provisions for field-based skill development nor for motivating the students to become career peacebuilders.

The second problem, even when the course is well designed, arises when teachers adopt the classroom methods of peripheral academic institutions that are not sensitive to field requirements. In a worst-case scenario, a lecturer was found dictating notes to his students rather than adopting a facilitative approach that exposes them to imaginative understanding of peace and conflict. This problem results from the fact that most of those teaching peace studies in Africa are hardly provided the opportunity of any training on the pedagogy of peacebuilding education. When the students taught under these circumstances graduate, they are not too different from those that studied peacebuilding in peripheral academic institutions. It is therefore common to find some peacebuilding graduates "learning on the job" after finding employment.

Beyond the curriculum and pedagogical issues raised above, it has been observed that many mainstream peacebuilding academic institutions in Africa today focus more on the dissemination of knowledge than the provision of field-based skills. The reason is that those managing these academic programs are classroom specialists and know little about peacebuilding practice. By this is meant that they are not in touch with the situations in conflict environments or aware of how peacebuilding work is practically done on the ground by governmental and non-governmental organizations; consequently, it is difficult for them to expose their students to such activities.

There is a gap between the field and the classroom in that the academic papers written and published by scholars fail to reflect the realities of the field but merely review existing literature and come to conclusions not backed up by empirical evidence resulting from sound fieldwork. The problem is compounded when such academic papers are published in outlets that are inaccessible to the African students and practitioners who might use them for immediate social actions.

Just as scholars, who control the classroom, fail to take full advantage of the opportunities in the field in order to improve the quality of what is taught and how knowledge is disseminated, the field (controlled by conflict management practitioners) equally misses out on the theoretical insights of the classroom that could improve the organization and operation of peacebuilding projects. In this regard, it is clear that some of the conflict management works conducted by governments and non-governmental organizations in Africa are not based on any sound baseline research and information. This is because most of those designing and managing these interventions do not have any actionable research desks. Hence, the work they carry out is sometimes based on misleading assumptions or incorrect information.

#### **BRIDGING THE GAPS**

The point made above is that the teaching of peacebuilding in Africa suffers when the field and the classroom keep their strengths apart rather than linking them. Bridging these noticeable gaps requires a proactive response to the following questions, to which all academic peacebuilding programs in African universities should try to respond:

- (i) How do we bring the field to the classroom?
  - (a) Add action research methodology to one's knowledge and reduce "literature review-only scholarship" in peacebuilding education;
  - (b) Be trained in skills-based peace practice;
  - (c) Be trained in curriculum development, monitoring, and evaluation:
  - (d) Be trained in peacebuilding pedagogy; and,
  - (e) Organize capacity-building workshops for students as a strategy to link them with practitioners.
- (ii) How do we bring the classroom to the field?
  - (a) Share knowledge with peace practitioners;
  - (b) Engage in development-relevant research;
  - (c) Belong to relevant associations for practitioners; and,
  - (d) Invite practitioners to the classroom.

How do we bring the field to the classroom? To elaborate on the above suggestions, this question must be answered first and foremost around the concept of curriculum development. To develop a field-sensitive peacebuilding curriculum, scholars must have several years of experience working with state and non-state institutions, and working on peace and conflict issues in relevant communities. If the scholars do not have relevant field experience, the best option is to work closely with those familiar with the field and factor their opinions into not only the identification of what to teach, but also how to teach it both within and outside the classroom.

It is common for developers of peacebuilding curricula to organize stakeholders' meetings before designing the program. This can help in identifying what to teach but might not sufficiently inform how to teach the topics, as pedagogical issues are very technical when it comes to peace studies. Those disseminating knowledge on peace are expected to be more facilitators than teachers, which requires a kind of technical training often taken for granted.

Our first response to this question at the University of Ibadan is to recognize the enrolled students of the Peace and Conflict Studies program as coming from the field themselves, as senior security officials, managers of nongovernmental organizations, civil servants, and individuals working in other critical sectors of the African continent. They are attended to as individuals coming with a wealth of knowledge from the field, while many classroom teachers do not have such field-based knowledge. Hence, all efforts have been made to capture students' own knowledge systems in the educational process.

Instead of "teaching" the students, those managing the courses were trained by the program to use "facilitation skills." What is facilitation? Patricia Prendiville has presented it as:

a developmental educational method, which encourages people to share ideas, resources, opinions and to think critically in order to identify needs and find effective ways of satisfying those needs.... A facilitator helps people to decide what they want to accomplish, reminds them of their responsibility in achieving it, and encourages and helps them to complete an agreed task or activity. The facilitator ensures that the needs of individuals within the group are recognised, acknowledged and responded to; this is seen as an integral part of the task at hand and not superfluous to it.<sup>28</sup>

Unlike the conventional methods of disseminating knowledge, which assume that the teacher owns said knowledge, facilitation acknowledges the fact that the "ownership" of knowledge is dispersed; both students and teachers are knowledgeable but probably differently. Hence, the classroom is managed in such a way that enables both learners and teachers to actively contribute to the learning process. The facilitator prepares the course outline indicating things to be covered and the expected outcomes of the course module. The teacher would then ask questions; encourage the students to voice their own understanding of the issues; and assign tasks, roles, and functions aimed at unearthing more information and enabling greater understanding. The role of teachers, in addition to making their own points, is to moderate the discussion in a manner that reduces any sharp disagreements among the learners. Students with ideas different from those of the teacher must be tolerated and not condemned, as the latter would discourage others from talking. In the process of this kind of exchange, the scope of knowledge disseminated is constructively widened. It is common within this type of atmosphere to find a soldier or policeman just back from a peacekeeping operation in Liberia, Sierra Leone, or Sudan, who is able to take the class beyond the theoretical concepts taught by a teacher by sharing experiences from the field. This helps the lecturers to update their own knowledge, in addition to bringing the other students closer to the field by providing them with a greater understanding of different peacekeeping activities and the challenges associated with each of them.

The second essential rule is for lecturers to be ready to open their classrooms to the participation of professionals from the field. Such resource persons could be asked to give a talk, lead a seminar, or organize a workshop for the students. Calling attention to the significance of this approach in bridging the gap between the classroom and the field, Janelle Cox has observed that such guest speakers:

expose students to real-world life experiences from the position of someone who has been there. Students get to see the insight and perspective of the guest speaker's particular field. One important benefit that is derived from having a guest speaker is the enhancement of the students' educational experience. They essentially get a glimpse into the everyday life of the speaker, which they can't get anywhere else. Another added benefit is the link that students get to make between what they learn in their textbooks and what they learn from the guest speaker.... Guest speakers offer something that you can't offer your students; a different perspective.... A quest speaker supports a topic that you may know little about and can offer your students a different point of view, one that they may better understand. It gives them the opportunity to learn something new, while it gives you a break. You may find that you end up learning something new in the process.<sup>29</sup>

The resource person for this kind of classroom engagement does not need to have any strong paper qualifications but rather a sharp understanding of the goings-on in the field. Leaders of communities experiencing conflict or going through post-conflict reconstruction are excellent speakers in this regard. Representatives of NGOs serving in divided societies are also productive resource persons, as they often have ideas and knowledge systems that are yet to be captured or may not ever be represented by existing publications. They also know what works under certain contexts. All of these insights can be brought out when students ask them questions based on existing theories and other knowledge parameters.

Field visits or trips constitute the third possible method of linking the

classroom and the field. This involves taking the students outside of the classroom with a view to achieving certain learning objectives that cannot be easily achieved through other means, particularly traditional teaching methods. In this case, the students would visit and try to insert themselves into the communities where the activities they seek to understand are taking place. It could be in the form of an internship with relevant organizations or agencies, or a short visit to the community. The longer students are able to interact with those affected in the field in this respect, the better the understanding they will develop about peace and conflict situations. Existing studies have shown that these experiences have lasting cognitive and socio-cultural effects when incorporated into the learning system. They not only facilitate learning as a way of connecting with the curriculum, but also provide new learning experiences, foster interest, motivate students, promote lifelong learning, and encourage engagement with local communities.<sup>30</sup>

Another method adopted at the University of Ibadan for bringing the field to the classroom is commissioning colleagues to do field-based research on specified issues and publishing the resulting papers as a book. The books published in this manner cover issues related to peacebuilding and elections, communication, research methods, gender-based violence, and more. Students are then able to read these departmental publications as part of a larger strategy to help them better appreciate the happenings in the field. The publications also motivate the students to identify their own field-based research questions and methods.

#### THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY

The world is now in the twenty-first century, in which technological advances make it possible for the classroom and the field to meet, not necessarily physically but virtually. In the modern world, technological innovations affect the way people communicate, collaborate, learn, and teach. Technology creates digital natives, digital immigrants; a twenty-first-century school, twenty-first-century education, twenty-first-century teacher, twenty-first-century skills. Commenting on this, Frank Withrow has observed: "With today's digital world, the classroom is not as critical as it was in a book based learning system. Today, information stored digitally can be retrieved 24/7. Moreover, lessons can originate anywhere in the world.... Schools will enter into agreements with research and business concerns that can foster interactions with learners."<sup>31</sup>

Under this kind of arrangement, a professional peacebuilder located at the African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa can deliver a lecture to students of Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Ibadan via my computer and a Skype discussion can be organized around it. Similarly, teaching staff in Ibadan can address a peacebuilding practitioner gathering in Addis Ababa. The point being that teaching in the twenty-first century might not necessarily involve the physical contact recommended above. It is possible for students to be taught more effectively without leaving their physical classrooms by using modern technology that brings the field to the classroom.

In an interesting piece, Tsisana Palmer has outlined some fascinating characteristics of the twenty-first-century teacher and learning environment.<sup>32</sup> These could help the teaching of peacebuilding in African universities. First and foremost, students could be better linked to the field through blogs, movies, infographics, how-to videos, digital stories, chat, text, calls, and other online tutorials. Through modern communication technologies, students can now watch events as they unfold, learn about other countries and people first-hand, and even "visit" any part of the planet virtually. Students will take advantage of modern technology in bridging the gap between the field and the classroom when encouraged to go paperless in the learning process. This requires that teaching resources and activities such as assignments, discussions, and presentations are organized on institutional and institutionalized websites differently from the traditional use of paper. This helps to better organize learning and provides more room for teaching resources to be drawn from different outlets and parts of the globe.

## CONCLUSION

This piece calls attention to the challenges of teaching peacebuilding in African universities with a particular focus on the gaps between the classroom and the field. For Africa to experience the much talked about "sustainable peace," there must be increased investment in peace education. How many African countries have a policy for integrating peace education into their primary, secondary, and tertiary education systems as done in some other parts of the world? How many African universities offer degrees in Peace Studies today? How many of these universities offering Peace Studies are doing the right things in terms of developing and sustaining an actionable curriculum, appropriate pedagogy, and carefully considered

## learning resources and outcomes?

Africa needs to learn some lessons from the motto of UNESCO, which says: "We must construct the defenses of peace in the minds of women and men." The best response to this is peacebuilding education. The opportunity provided us by the Social Science Research Council's African Peacebuilding Network and Next Generation Social Sciences in Africa is to take a critical look at our present situation and make actionable recommendations for the future. In this piece, I have suggested as many issues as time would permit. I challenge us to start our policy-relevant discussion from here.

Is peacebuilding education the silver bullet for conflict prevention and management in Africa? Lynn Davies has tried to answer this question in an interesting manner. According to her:

In terms of the global motivations for people joining extremist groups, schools cannot solve the problems of poverty, unemployment and grievance (except at very long term levels perhaps). They cannot change foreign policy. They cannot compete with the scale and sophistication of global extremist operations. But schools can try to build some resilience to extremism for young people at local levels.<sup>33</sup>

Peacebuilding education would achieve the most where those promoting the academic specialization give sufficient attention to bridging the existing gaps between the field and the classroom in this specialized knowledge domain. It is hoped that the issues in this piece will contribute to this process.

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