

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

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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

The APN Lecture series provides an avenue for influential thinkers, practitioners, policy makers, and activists to reflect on and speak to the critical issues and challenges facing African peacebuilding. This publication series documents lectures given on the platform of the African Peacebuilding Network (APN) program, and its institutional partners. These lectures provide an analysis of processes, institutions, and mechanisms for, as well as the politics of peacebuilding on the continent, and contribute towards broadening debates and knowledge about the trajectories of conflict and peace in conflict-affected African countries and regions. The APN Lecture series seeks to address knowledge gaps in African peace and security, including its links to local, national, and global structures and processes. These publications also provide critical overviews and innovative reflections on the state of the field, including new thinking critical to knowledge production and dissemination in overlooked or emerging areas of African peacebuilding.

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INTRODUCTION

The nature of the conflicts the world has to contend with is changing, creating a need to adopt new analyses and approaches to conflict management, resolution, and post-conflict reconstruction. These changes do affect not only Africa but also the entire global community. Shifting away from wars fought by armies facing each other on battlegrounds, conflict today is characterized by asymmetric warfare that is not and cannot be fought the same way as traditional wars were fought in the past. In recent years, in addition to current intra-state conflicts, the world has seen an upsurge in violent extremism and terrorism, linked to the resurgence of 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 in every part of the globe. These mass communication technologies have enabled disaffected persons all over the world to mobilize support for their causes or, alternatively, to join up with causes they support. They are also

now able 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 recruitment, fueling the "Them vs. Us" mentality, as opposing parties to a conflict. These emerging issues require fresh and sustained thinking in order to find and 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 otherwise have been used to provide necessary amenities to improve the lives of the people must be diverted to support security personnel needed to maintain a modicum of peace, and energies needed to tackle development issues must 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 characterized by an 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 this 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 to socioeconomic development, to the development of peaceful and cohesive societies, there are many unanswered questions. For instance, over the last

twenty years, many countries have opted for a system of governance based on principles of liberal democracy, believing that such a system 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 best serve to address them?

I propose to examine some of these issues in order to demonstrate the critical need for homegrown research to contribute toward the resolution of some of the difficulties currently confronting Africa and 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 understood and accepted by the parties to a conflict—the new conflicts are vastly different. Now, the objectives are more diffuse, the parties often indeterminate, the fighters each driven by personal or collective grievance or motivations, and it is an all-out war with no barriers or forbidden targets. This 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 or 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 have implications under humanitarian and human rights law. The September 11, 2001 (9/11) terrorist attacks in the United States of America were aimed primarily at the United States, but the chosen target was known to house global representation of people and interests. Additionally, the use of airplanes, which have become the key means of transportation in a globalized world, was by no means accidental. In one fell swoop, the leadership of al Qaeda, which 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 for later attacks on trains and train stations in the UK and Belgium, hotels and entertainment venues in France, Mali, Burkina Faso, the U.S., and Côte d’Ivoire, and now a Russian airplane and an international airport in Belgium. All of these clearly show an expansion of the notion of “Them vs. Us” that underlies every conflict,

with the “democratization” of communication technology being no less culpable. Thus, persons with extremist views as well as terror groups have successfully recruited others who, but for information technologies, would otherwise have been completely out of their reach and scope. Using a number of mechanisms, such as “franchising,” “radicalized lone wolf operatives,” and copy-cat operations, they have made the determination of who qualifies as an “enemy combatant” a difficult task. This situation has been made worse by the easy availability of online information on how to make bombs and other IEDs, transforming otherwise law-abiding and unarmed people into lethally-armed warriors. From the indiscriminate use of heavy weapons to “human bombs” deliberately detonated in crowded areas to cause maximum casualties, these groups have demonstrated that they will go to any length to press their point. Although this particular conflict was initially presented and characterized as a clash between Islamic and secular western civilizations, it has become clear that such characterization could not be entirely accurate on account of the large number of Muslim co-religionists who have been targeted, attacked, and massacred as part of these 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 practiced. 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 that the international community had designed for dealing with conflict between and among its member states, so too are these emerging forms of conflict challenging the available tools. Mechanisms for exacting compliance and for sanctioning leaders by means

of travel bans and other disciplinary measures have been used in the past in hopes of achieving desired outcomes when such leaders 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 the legal regime of humanitarian law and of human rights, who have no need to travel or deal with the outside world (which makes travel bans ineffective 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 toward improving the efficacy of measures that could be employed to bring these aggressors to heel.

As if those 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 has come under pressure. The African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) is a response to the nature and manifestation 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 organized around the five regional groupings in Africa: North, South, East, West, and Central. This has caused its existing economic communities and other regional bodies or mechanisms (RECs/RMs)—NARC, ECOWAS, ECCAS, EASF, and SADC—to undergo fundamental mission shifts in order to support this military action under the so-called principle of subsidiarity. However, while the ASF is still being formed and only now becoming operational, the terrorist group 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 in order to offer a military response has been complicated by 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 to deal with the continent's existing challenges.

Yet another tactic of ISIL and Boko Haram on the one hand 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, while AQIM is clearly a branch (or franchise) of al Qaeda. This has not only increased the reach of these groups, along with their access to heavy weaponry, but it has also placed West Africa at the center of possible turf wars between the two groups, for they are known to be bitter rivals regardless of their lip service to cooperation. A realistic appreciation of these challenges would suggest that new thinking is required since the "enemy" for these terrorist organizations is not a determinate entity restricted to the theatre of war, but rather 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 and 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 combined consultations. Indeed, the Chair and one other member of the 1325 Panel were full-fledged members of the HIPPO as well, and this made for easy and meaningful linkages. Beginning its work in November 2014, and completing its report titled *Politics, People and Partnership* in June 2015, the HIPPO engaged in extensive consultations with all the major stakeholders in an attempt to rebuild the lost consensus on peacekeeping while also reaffirming the role of the UN in managing threats to international peace and security.

UN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE AFRICAN UNION

The framers of the Charter of the UN, in entrusting world peace and security to the Security Council, also had the prescience to prescribe a role for regional bodies and other organizations committed to the same ideals

as the UN and so made provision for such participation in Chapter VIII of the Charter. The African Union (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 realized that taking on the task of protecting African peace and security was a much more expensive endeavor than the AU could support on its own. Taking a new tack, the AU has now revised its stance on “African solutions for African problems” by adopting a different approach; although it expects to be in the lead when issues arise on the continent, the UN has a responsibility toward its African Member States, and therefore it must retain its primacy as entrusted 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 so that whenever it should decide to act, it would do so as a partner of the UN. This partnership has now been fully recognized 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, which include “consultative decision making and common strategy; division of labor 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 to the UN’s reliance on the AU and other partners 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 to 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 discourses 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 the effective administration of countries emerging from conflict;” “action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid relapse into conflict;” 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;" these many definitions all refer to assistance from the international community to support post-conflict reconstruction.²

The inclusion of peacebuilding in the peace support agenda is motivated by the desire of the international community to support societies in crisis to help them achieve durable peace and prevent a lapse or relapse into conflict. The aim of these efforts is to address the root causes of the conflict, to strengthen state institutions in the performance of their functions, to deliver justice and respect for human rights, and to support socio-economic wellbeing, including the means of making a livelihood. The notion of peacebuilding has become 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."³ The placement of peacebuilding as a post-conflict activity has, however, undergone a shift. Under the HIPPO and AGE Reports, peacebuilding is now recognized as a legitimate activity to prevent a lapse into conflict, 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 a lapse into conflict in the first place."⁴ Clearly, then, peacebuilding is not sequential to peacemaking 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 refers not only to post-conflict activities as it was represented under the Brahimi Report but also to prevention activities. It is acknowledged that when undertaken appropriately with good programs and activities, peacebuilding holds real promise for reconstruction, either post-conflict or as a conflict-prevention measure, as it enables the widest cohort of the citizenry to appreciate the value of peace while securing their commitment to sustain the peace. Yet again, this is where relevant research could make a difference, for engaging in peacebuilding as conflict prevention has the potential to upset host governments and be seen as interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state.

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 often relapse into conflict when the international community departs. Under pressure from growing UN peacekeeping budgets, now almost \$9 billion, as well as other expenditures on conflict-related activities, attention has turned to how to create more peaceful societies so as to prevent an original lapse into conflict, or how to make peacebuilding more enduring so as to minimize 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-conflict societies as one not just of building peace, but of building sustainable peace, has led to “sustaining peace” becoming 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 and approaches. In fact, the one-size-fits-all approach to peacebuilding has itself been blamed for conflict relapse in some post-conflict countries. While it can be agreed 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 the same activities are required in all post-conflict countries, nor even when required, are they needed in the same order. For instance, it is the norm for peace agreements to contain clauses requiring elections within twelve months. 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 the assistance extended to them, but these ideas are not backed either by hard evidence or by 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 on the receiving end of peacebuilding initiatives. 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 the HIPPO and the 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 assuring the involvement of women and youth, to assisting in

the promotion of a culture of peace by implementing grassroots programs, to support for activities aimed at promoting good governance, there is no substitute for civil society engagement. Active civil society, represented by civil society organizations (CSOs), can play critical roles in ensuring sustainable peace. It is well known that CSOs can be a major resource for translating peace processes to the grassroots in broken communities, assuring the utilization of local knowledge, mobilizing communities to improve their own circumstances, and building bridges of understanding. For what other ends may their participation be tapped in support of sustaining peace? How may the resources of their diasporas be accessed to support the peace instead of being left to fuel renewed conflict? Certainly, only field research could provide the necessary answers to these and other questions. Again, how may development agencies and international financial institutions (IFIs) be persuaded to support peacebuilding efforts in particular contexts in order to maximize 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 regarding the spending of allocated funds. Recipients of development assistance have a valid expectation that funding support publicly announced is going directly to fund local programs. 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 dividends than the current dearth of African presence in the higher echelons of multilateral organizations. 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 surely 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 in the creation of 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, yet lacking. New ideas are required to tackle new manifestations of old problems, and the need to allow communities that receive international assistance to derive maximum benefit from the investment continues to be paramount. Research, particularly field-based research, is critical, and so funding agencies such as the SSRC through the APN make invaluable contributions 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, will equip you to better position yourselves in 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 could be generated from research by African scholars so that there would, indeed, be African solutions to African problems.

Thank you.

NOTES

1. United Nations, *Uniting Our Strengths for Peace – Politics, Partnerships, and People: Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*, A/70/95 S/2015/446 (June 2015), available at: http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2015/446.
2. Security Council resolution 1645, *Operationalizing the Peacebuilding Commission*, S/RES/1645 (December 20, 2005), available at: [https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1645\(2005\)](https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1645(2005)); Security Council resolution 2086, *On Highlighting the Role of Multidimensional Peacekeeping Missions*, S/RES/2086 (January 23, 2013), available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/511b8fef2.html>; UN General Assembly, *An Agenda for Peace: resolution/adopted by the General Assembly*, October 8, 1993, A/RES/47/120B, available at: <http://www.un-documents.net/a47-277.htm>; Chris Saunders and Dawn Nagar, *Security and Development in Southern Africa*, Centre for Conflict Resolution, 2008, available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep05164>.
3. UN General Assembly, *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations ("Brahimi Report")*, August 21, 2000, A/55/305S/2000/809, available at: <https://undocs.org/A/55/305>.
4. United Nations, *The Challenge of sustaining peace: Report of the Advisory Group of Experts on the Review of the Peacebuilding Architecture*, June 30, 2015: para.6 and 7, available at: http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/69/968.

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