

**CONFLICT AND POST CONFLICT
PATTERNS, ISSUES, IMPACT ON ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT
AND
POVERTY CYCLE IN COUNTRIES IN AFRICA**

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Introduction

Two decades ago, as great euphoria defined the emergence of most African states from colonial administration. The general impulse was one of bright future and hope as well as confidence in the capacity to exercise the right to self-determination.

The expectation was that Africa's nascent Nation states would grow and foster in an environment characterised by sound democratic principles, social equity and justice, driven by an effective judicial system, efficient private and public sector services.

It was indeed envisaged that the future would be sustained on good principles and practice of governance, stable political environment, social equality and dominance of the rule of law.

However, with the passage of time, the world watched with trepidation and unbelief as each promising African State gradually but surely slides into unforeseen trajectory of political instability characterised by dictatorship, social unrest and civil wars. Prevalent military interventions punctuated the learning process in democratic evolution.

Declining or at best stagnated economy due to poor management of resources and corruption, deterioration of social and physical infrastructure in the absence of institutionalised maintenance culture, increase in the proportion of the population falling below poverty line became endemic features of most African States.

One major outcome is declining opportunity for the youths in Africa.

Educational system collapsed, unemployment figure soared high and violent crime became prevalent in most urban cities of African states.

In the absence of efficient social services and infrastructure base, there was no foundation to foist economic development initiatives.

Declining institutional processes and systems as well as massive brain drain negated the structure for revitalising and rebuilding the economies of most nations. While perversity of political instability, corruption, anti free market practice, laid the roof of most nations in Africa open and unattractive to private sector investment.

As a result, most African states began to shudder under what most people diagnosed as the birth pangs of nation building, but not knowing that these were symptoms of deep rooted institutional dysfunctionalities on which these states were built.

The result is a predictable pattern and cycle where a diminished bright start gave way to authoritarian rule, authoritarianism paved the way for declining economy and depressed social well being. Stunted economic performance exacerbated poverty condition, which in turn serve as the catalyst for violent social tension and conflict. However such violent conflict further reinforced the condition of poverty.

It seems African states have established an average period of 10-20 years of post colonial administration experience within which nations commence the process of decline.

This cycle is repeated over and over in many African states. In short most African states were making transition from Potential nation states to failed state, from failed state to rogue states – a shifting quick sand of conflict pattern which is emerging in some regions of Africa.

The consequences are that well planned economic reforms, solidly designed systems of good governance and measures for the rebuilding the civil society as well as investment in social capital became major elements of international assistance to many African states.

Most of these measures are yet to take firm root as capacities to support decentralised governance have diminished, the foundation for economic reforms have been severely damaged and the ability to mobilise civil societies have waned.

Social and political conflicts are not only normal but also could serve as constructive catalyst for effecting desirable change in the society.

However the key barometer for measuring social and political maturity is not in the ability to avoid conflict but in the capacity to conflict and resolve it without major violent social breakdown. This latter dimension is evidently lacking in many African states.

Dimension of conflict in Africa.

Geopolitics and mineral resource

Conceptually, one might see the roots of the current increasing insecurity in African countries as grounded in the historically defined geopolitical and natural- resource-based boundaries set during the continent's experience of colonialism.

Artificial boundaries were established without due consideration to linguistic as well long-standing traditional, social and cultural relationship.

The nations found most of their natural resources based in the border regions with other countries or in some instances overlapping with many other countries. These regions are increasingly becoming attractive centres for the initiation of rebel wars.

Over Centralised administrative System

Highly centralised administrative systems that emerged in post-colonial African states did not help much as it made the centre very strong, marginalised constituent regions and minority groups and limited access to opportunities. Thus creating a critical mass of disaffected members of the population particularly the youths.

The result is the scramble for the control of the centre and the natural resources in various countries. In such context, complex political and ethnic issues are manipulated in order to plunder and control the mineral wealth of the countries.

Failing state subverted democratic process, corruption and despotism as well as lack of opportunity provided a situation of criminal economic activities sustained by breakdown of law and order, violence, banditry and brutality.

Limited Enabling Environment:

Many African states failing to provide rudimentary conditions for stability and development - the rule of law, basic services, predictable commercial environment, and personal security and well being – found warlords, international criminal elements along with some key government officials to conspire to undermine existence of the state through their unbridled pursuit of wealth under the guise of social revolutionary movements.

These conflicts have reduced security and increased risks for legitimate private foreign investors, as well as brutalised communities and undermined social capital and trust. The capacity of such conflict to undermine local capacity for law enforcement has forced most war-torn countries to rely on privatised military protection.

From Military dictatorship to mineral resource-based rebel war

The introduction of coups and military dictatorship in the 1960s was thought to be more of an aberration that would self-correct. Subsequent event proved most observers wrong as coups became very rampant and military dictatorship contributed significantly to the failure of most African states.

A new emerging pattern is that of mineral resource-based rebel wars.

Diamond is the current fuel to the Angolan and Congo conflict as well as in the Sierra Leone conflict, destabilising the country for the better part of three decades and robbing an entire generation of children their future.

The war has claimed over 80,000 lives, created over 500,000 refugees and displaced half of the country's 4.5 million people. In addition, it has not only impoverished the people but also made the government entirely dependent on external donor support as its revenue base dwindled with the rebel control of the mineral resource region of the country. Most of the country's diamonds are exploited by the rebel forces in partnership with international criminal elements that provide them with the arms to prosecute the war.

Official government of Sierra Leone records revealed that in 1998, the country's diamond export stood at 8,500 carats. However the Diamond

High Council (HRD) – the official voice of the diamond industry in Belgium – recorded 770,000 carats of diamond from Sierra Leone.

The entire West African region remains threatened as the war in the country is allowed to persist. The pattern is the same in the Congos and Angola. No African country is immunised against this sort of conflict provided it has a mineral resource.

What we are experiencing and confronting is a variety of new actors with a common agenda on mineral resource exploitation. These are mainly equipped with small arms and light weapons and using the critical mass of disaffected youth in the countries to render it ungovernable. This approach has fundamentally altered the face of conflict in Africa, the impact, scope and duration. It is largely affecting the security of individuals and destroying trust, dividing communities and weakening social cohesion.

The effect on governance and on social capital can be devastating. It is evident that such wars frequently lead to the diversion of government expenditures away from the provision of social services to an already bloated and ineffective military force.

Child Soldiers: Light arms, young guns

As these wars are prosecuted with light arms and children can handle light weapons, an ever-increasing number of under aged children and youths, have been forced into armies or gangs of rebel units. The recruitment of children and the involvement of youths in armed conflict not only destroy lives of children and squander development opportunities but also erode the ability for rapid recovery after the conflict.

Fundamentally, the use of light arms and children in such conflict are driven by greed, insecurity and perceived sense of insecurity, reinforced by a vicious cycle of fear of poverty

Most of the rebel wars last an average of 10years and most children are recruited at an average age of 9-10years. The protracted and intractable nature of such conflicts implies that most productive and formative age bracket are lost and wasted. Children are forcefully recruited and separated from their families as well as their communities, their education and learning process is disrupted as they found themselves oriented towards destruction rather than trained for productive enterprise.

The critical challenge in most post conflict environment is what to do with these children who are now in their late adolescence with neither basic education nor even the desire to learn. In most cases their expectations are no longer in consonance with the needs of their age. In Sierra Leone for instance, the current estimate for children and youth involved in armed conflict stand at 12-15% of the 45,000 combatants.

Psychological scars and traumas that these child soldiers have suffered need to be addressed as well as complemented with measures for alternative means of livelihood and other strategies to wean them off from the command and control structure of their respective fighting forces.

The situation is most compounded by the moral dilemma of balancing the demands of this group with those of other war-affected population who to a considerable extent are victims of the conflict.

Most aid agencies usually find themselves compelled, by evident acts of horror committed by the rebels, to focus on the victims rather than the perpetrators. However successful measures are those that search for common ground, stabilise post conflict situation and seek to address the antecedent conditions to the conflict.

The Scale of the Problem

By the late 1990s, available statistics indicate that over 32 countries in Africa are either in armed conflict, or undergoing crisis situation and other forms of social tension which have the potential to explode into full armed conflict.

The Congos, Uganda, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia and Eritrea, Rwanda, Guinea Bissau, Angola, Sudan are countries typically involved in armed conflict. Liberia, Mali and Guinea, Algeria, Nigeria and Zimbabwe are examples of countries experiencing crisis situation, which hold out potentials for armed conflict.

It has been established that overall lending to post-conflict countries accounted for more than 16 percent of World Bank lending commitments for the fiscal year 1998. The volume of lending to post-conflict countries has increased by over 800 percent, to some \$6.2 billion.

Of this amount 56 percent, or 3.5 billion, has gone to the African region¹. Yet Africa has remained under developed.

The evidence points to the fact that a growing number of the recipient countries are affected by conflict. Instructively, the countries with high prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa are those that have experienced conflict-driven population migration.

Without considerable attention to security, the volume of foreign investment declined in Africa, existing portfolio of assets came under risk and people stopped to invest in their own communities².

The dominant features of most of these conflict and crisis are:

- Conflict driven population migration and social displacement compounded with abject poverty conditions, acute level of malnutrition due to chronic food insecurity and deteriorating health condition exacerbated by the collapse of the health system
- Disrupted production and exchange system coupled with conflict related economic and systemic distortion as evidenced by illegal economic activities
- Severely diminished institutional capacity due to destruction of national and local administrative structures and linkages
- Extensive destruction and deterioration of social and physical infrastructure

Typical Responses in post conflict situation and opportunities for poverty reduction measures

Post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation process is usually very complex. Each conflict has its differentiating dynamics, which in turn shape,

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the emerging character. The environments differ and mostly require different approach.

Elements of transition from war to post conflict

However the essential elements of transition from war to peace remain the same. These usually consist of,

- political commitment of the various conflicting factions to negotiate an end to hostilities,
- defining a new security framework for sustaining the peace,
- elaborating a generally acceptable, inclusive and transparent system of post-conflict governance
- Designing and implementing a wide range of post-conflict economic recovery measures.

These elements complement the other and are organically inter-related. The framework for implementation of any peace programme must be comprehensive.

Post conflict intervention measures

Most intervention measures in post- conflict environment focus on the following:

- re-establish a framework for governance at all levels,
- reinforce active involvement of the civil society, institutions of moral persuasion as well as for inculcating civic leadership among the youth;
- create the conditions for jumping starting the economy by restoring key financial, legal, and regulatory institutions;
- initiate measures to repair social and physical infrastructure; support health and educational needs;
- promote measures for reactivating dormant capacity for food production,

- promote measures targeting war-affected populations through reintegration of internally displaced people as well as demobilised combatants and soldiers;
- revitalise local communities and create a system of financial intermediation through small grants and micro-credit assistance;
- Promote measures for skills development and job creation through apprenticeship programme and labour-based rehabilitation works.

The emerging patterns of conflict and their implication on poverty cycle.

An essential condition for poverty reduction and sustainable development is the enabling and secure environment. Violent conflicts don't foster such environment and its relationship to poverty is the cyclical phenomenon we need to break with the design of poverty reduction strategies.

Any strategic and policy framework on poverty Reduction Strategy need to recognise this linkage between poverty and conflict.

We need to develop an analytical framework to promote our understanding of how human security needs affect the objectives of Poverty Reduction Strategy as well as how we need to articulate supportive policy environment.

Development took off rapidly in most of industrialised west, particularly Europe, the moment they stopped fighting among themselves, learned to protect their productive assets and invest in human capital development. African countries must learn this lesson and measures to foster this process need to be promoted.

It is not only possible but also inevitable that Poverty Reduction Strategy must explore conceptual and programmatic linkage with measures for conflict prevention as well as transition from war to peace initiatives.

Intervention measures must be designed and geared towards undercutting precipitating conditions to conflict or in stemming the potential reversal to conflict by addressing the antecedent conditions to the conflict.

The delivery mechanism should be localised and decentralised to ensure effectiveness in reaching the vulnerable group and areas/regions.

Substantial flexibility in the design and use of such instruments as the social fund as currently being used in the Community Rehabilitation and Reintegration Project (CRRP) in Sierra Leone are vital in the development of poverty reduction initiatives. In post conflict conditions, such assistance can play a central role in reducing the impact warfare. The Community Rehabilitation and Reintegration Projects as part of the post war recovery programme in Sierra Leone relies on solid partnership with the government, the World Bank, the African Development Bank, the DFID, the UNDP and other bilateral and multi-lateral agencies.

Three broad flexible mechanism were established under the project,

1. the Emergency Recovery Social Fund in support of demand-driven community-based initiatives,
2. the Training and Employment Fund to promote effective and targeted measures of reintegration for the ex-combatants.
3. and the complementary poverty alleviation measures under SAPA supported by the ADB and for vulnerable members of the community.

The various mechanisms allowed for flexible disbursement and funds management system, substantial stakeholder participation and ownership of the process as well as decentralised decision-making process in support of community participation.

However, these programmes have experienced a scaling down following the outbreak of hostility and fragile security situation resulting from lack of political commitment by one of the parties to the conflict.

The key issue here is that we can explore PRS measures under post-conflict environment or within countries making the transition from war to peace.

Furthermore, a prerequisite for sustaining effective poverty reduction strategy is the existence of adequate institutions to respond to individual as well as community needs. In post conflict conditions, institutional capacities are diminished but the widow of opportunity lies in providing support to

indigenous capacity as means of fostering ownership of the process and subsidiarity in intervention measures as well as easy identification of target population. Conflicts affect the poor most and they are easy to identify in post conflict environment.

The logic of linking PRS measures to contribution to internal security under the rule of law or promoting transition to peace could be one of the critical design considerations in the formulation of Poverty Reduction Strategy. Law and order as well as peace are public goods, which we cannot ignore in development analysis as well as design of PRS.

Strategic targeting of vulnerable groups particularly the urban and rural poor or captive communities adjoining boarder regions with major mineral resource-base need to be the focus for any major PRS initiative. This critical mass of disaffected population has always been the potential source of recruitment for the warlords. We must use PRS measures to reduce if possible eliminate this pool of potential rebel soldiers in our respective countries. Rebel leader should not be allowed to beat us in this respect.

The unfortunate contradiction in the development process of most African states is the pattern of neglect suffered by regions rich in mineral resources. The reality is that most of these regions are left behind in the development process and do suffer the dire consequences of environmental degradation, abject poverty and low socio-economic rating in most countries. These regions should be the focus of PRS measures.

In addition we need to ensure that PRS measures are not used to reinforce pre-existing social and regional imbalance or cleavages of inequity among beneficiary groups.

Finally, eligibility criteria, instruments and methods of implementation must be flexible and consistent with the profile of the target population.