Inclusive multi-stakeholder community early warning and conflict prevention briefing

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Policy & Practice Brief

Knowledge for durable peace

The Role of Inclusive Multi-stakeholder Partnerships in Enhancing Conflict Transformation in the Great Lakes

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Executive summary

Cyclical conflicts which continue to plague the Great Lakes region of Africa necessitate a reflection on the effectiveness of peacebuilding interventions. While many reasons account for this, without knowledge of triggers of relapse into conflict, and without enhancing grassroots-based approaches to managing the causes of conflict, peace will remain elusive under existing intervention frameworks.

The Great Lakes Project (GLP), a collaborative initiative by the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD), the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), and the Nairobi Peace Initiative – Africa (NPI-Africa) – developed a three-year project in 2012, titled "Consolidating Peacebuilding in the Great Lakes of Africa". The overall purpose of the project was to ensure that local communities were mobilised to engage with, and address, conflict factors through grassroots civil society organisations (CSOs). The project also sought to identify and address the capacity gaps of local CSOs working towards peace and ensure that systems were established to continuously address conflicts in the region. The International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) was identified as a critical partner in building peace in the region, considering its extensive network and access to state and non-state actors. This engagement therefore facilitated partnerships between existing CSO-platforms; strengthened their early warning systems and strengthened their conflict management capabilities towards building resilient infrastructures for sustainable peace.

While undertaking its mandate, the GLP identified various challenges and policy gaps, which included the lack of strategic approaches to prevent conflict relapse. This paper illustrates and interrogates the dynamics of these shortcomings, and defines the role of inclusive, multi-stakeholder partnerships to address these.

Introduction

In contemporary terms, the Great Lakes region can be viewed as an environment saturated by conflict interventions and actors. These interventions have, however, achieved very little in the way of positive results. A key factor contributing to the lacklustre results of interventions is that issues in the region are analysed in a myriad different ways, by different actors, resulting in incoherent and uncoordinated approaches. There is, therefore, an urgent demand for actions towards a sustainable and community-owned peace and security agenda that is geared for inclusivity and long-term development.

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The main questions that need to be addressed are around why conflicts in the region are so violent, mostly intractable and usually highly cyclical. It is also important to find out why past and present interventions have not been successful in providing sustainable solutions. Whereas different countries may have different historical, contemporary and potential factors, it is clear that these conflicts have similar patterns. One such pattern common to these conflicts is the theories that explain their genesis, trends and dynamics. All these theories – political theory (there is competition for the control of state power); human needs theory (people are fighting for better living conditions); relational theory (conflicts are caused by identity-related problems) and transformational theory (demand for change against resistance to change)[1] – can be used to explain sources of conflict in most, if not all, of these countries.

This policy paper seeks to analyse the conflict dynamics of the Great Lakes region, based on the above theories, and proffers insights on GLP interventions, approaches and empirical outcomes. It also seeks to outline present GLP interventions, whilst putting forward a number of strategic recommendations.

Historical Background of Regional Conflict

Nearly all violent conflicts in the region, irrespective of their nature, have cross-border overlap characteristics.[2] Some specific comments on the violent cross-border conflicts have been made, in which certain observations have demonstrated that:

African boundaries are characterised by a high level of porosity/permeability and poor or lack of management… which make them easily penetrable by smugglers of people, drugs, weapons and contrabands and because they are not easily monitored, patrolled and controlled, they experience most violent conflicts.[3]

Fundamental contributing factors *include* "unsecured borders", *which* "allow for the free movement of… militants and criminal actors who spread violence and insecurity from state to state… and militant groups regularly cross the border with impunity, attacking civilian populations on both sides".[4]

Further, poorly managed or unresolved problems around, and the movements of refugees across borders can also be used to explain certain trajectories of violent conflicts in the region. Two levels of historical understanding emerge, especially with regard to the Rwandan genocide: first, its genesis and direct link to regional violence, and second, its role in other peripheral conflicts.

The genesis and direct link of regional conflict with regard to Rwanda can be understood when one looks at the political dynamics in Uganda in the 1980s. The 1994 Rwandan genocide can be partly traced back and linked to the initial movement of Rwandan refugees into Uganda "between 1952 and 1959 when the Belgium political reforms threatened the intermediary position of the Tutsi oligarchy in the colonial state and provided some limited autonomous political space to the Hutus, which challenged the privileged position of the Tutsis".[5] The refugees' movement into – and subsequent acceptance by – Ugandan communities in the west of the country could be attributed to the "close cultural and kinship ties between the Mpororo kingdom in Uganda with the ruling houses of Ankole (Hima) and Rwanda (Tutsi)".[6] Given that this situation did not have an adequate solution in either country, the consequent environment spurred the creation of an agenda towards their "enemies" – the Hutus. In addition, the ascent to political power in Uganda by the National Resistance Movement (NRM) in 1986, which brought a semblance of peace to the country, provided Rwandan refugees with a conducive environment within which to consolidate their base and strategic agenda. Hence, in "1989, an abortive armed invasion of Rwanda by the Rwanda Patriotic Army (RPA)"[7] followed. The RPA were also militarily "prepared" by the National Resistance Army (NRA) when they participated in the Acholi,

Teso, Kasese and West Nile counterinsurgencies.[8] This generated negative sentiments towards the RPA from the Ugandans, and demands for them to leave the country increased.

The second level refers to the role and impact of the Rwandan genocide vis-à-vis the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and its respective conflicts. It has been observed that:

> [w]hile the genocide and its consequences did not cause the implosion of the Congo basin and its periphery, it acted as a catalyst, precipitating a crisis that had been latent for a good many years and that later reached far beyond its original Great Lakes locus… the genocide has been both an enormous African crisis: its occurrence was a symptom, its non-treatment spread the disease.[9]

From this observation, it is clear that intrastate socio-economic and political dynamics, if not internally and peacefully resolved, are capable of plunging an entire region deeply into turmoil. The violent conflicts emerging from such intrastate dynamics and the subsequent flow of refugees into neighbouring countries can adversely affect peace in the region and the way in which states manage their internal political affairs.

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It can, therefore, be noted that the inadequately managed periodic violent conflicts in Rwanda and the related regional movements of refugees sparked a wide range of violent dynamics across the entire region. Further, what is emerging in most of the region's countries are cases where citizens are rising to demand inclusive political and economic policies and the equitable distribution of resources. If adopted, these can lead to participatory constitutional changes and, ultimately, peaceful transformation. Cases in point include the political situation in the DRC and the just-concluded electoral process in Uganda, where the question of electoral management processes and institutions are at the centre of the current and potential disputes. However, scenarios have already demonstrated that the tightening of political spaces and development of dictatorial policies and laws that hinder political

freedoms have become the order of the day. The current situation in Burundi is a clear example of where, apart from the contestation of electoral and political transitional processes, repressive measures have been implemented – resulting in arrests and detention without trial, the disappearance of political leaders and people who oppose the regimes, and a total objection to dialogue by the government, among other things. These create the heightened possibility of the recurrence of violent conflict, especially with the emergence of identity-based and politically supported violent groups and gangs, which have become a common feature. In 2011, the World Bank recognised and explained this by stating that:

> [c]ivil wars tend to recur in countries where the government can neither defeat a rebel movement nor credibly commit to a peace plan. If a government was strong enough to defeat the rebels, or trustworthy enough to negotiate a peace settlement, it would eventually do so and war would end. As long as the government can neither defeat the rebels, nor negotiate a settlement, the only remaining option is continued conflict.[10]

There is a clear need to define, develop and promote the implementation of new policy orientations in conflict prevention. The GLP underscored the central importance of this, as well as the consolidation of local efforts towards attaining sustainable peace and stability, and effective conflict transformation efforts.

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The GLP's Strategic and Innovative Approach to Sustained Stability, Peace and Conflict Transformation

In the region, the development of strategic interventions and approaches to conflicts – whether violent or not – need to take into account the past and existing dynamics. The key features of the regional post-war political (and socio-economic) landscape include an enduring centralised government, a fractured opposition and shifting regional alliances.[11] Arising from this have been many cases of turbulent electoral processes and cycles in which the key theories behind conflicts, detailed above,

come into force. In respective countries in the region, there are those who, while in power, would wish to retain and use it to control the economics of the country, on the one hand. On the other hand, there are also those out of political power, struggling – sometimes violently – to change the political systems. A confrontation occurs between those resisting change and those fighting for change. The constitutional debacle becomes the frontier of either the perpetuation of violence, or creating spaces for the mitigation of violence.

Past and contemporary approaches that have faced myriad difficulties include a series of peace agreements and the cessation of hostilities through politically oriented agendas. These agreements and policy development approaches are often not inclusive, lack local buy-in and are sometimes signed without looking at the local dynamics. The following three key examples are illustrative:

First, while there have been several previous agreements on ending violence in the DRC, the most prominent agreement – and which links to the current situation – is that signed on 23 March 2009 between the government of the DRC and one of the non-state armed groups in the country, *Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple* (CNDP). The failure to implement this agreement gave birth to another rebel group – M23. This group was formed on the basis that the government had failed to respect the 23 March agreement (hence the name, M23), and had not given the soldiers integrated into the national army the ranks they had been promised.[12]

Second another agreement that falls into the same category is the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi of 28 August 2000, which was at the centre of the 2015 electoral crisis. The agreement did not prospect and put in place a mechanism to manage, amongst others, critical issues such as the eligibility of transitional presidents under a new constitution. And thus, a new inclusive constitution inspired by the 'spirit' of the Arusha agreement, gave birth to different interpretations on the term limit of the second transitional president. Arising from these interpretations, on his side, President Pierre Nkurunziza, contemplated that, under the constitution, he was entitled to two terms, while his opponents argued that such an interpretation transgressed the 'spirit' of the Arusha Agreement upon which the constitution was founded. It can be argued that such nuances of disagreement and

confusion wouldn't have arisen if the Arusha dialogue process and subsequent agreement were completely locally-driven and void of any foreign influence. The Agreement, therefore, created potential fault-lines for the post-constitutional process. For instance, under Protocol II Article 7 (1) (a) and (c), which speaks to electoral matters, it states:

a. The Constitution shall provide that, save for the very first election of a President, the President of the Republic shall be elected by direct universal suffrage in which each elector may vote for only one candidate. The President of the Republic shall be elected by an absolute majority of the votes cast. If this majority is not obtained in the first round, a second round shall follow within 15 days; and

b. (c) For the first election, to be held during the transition period, the President shall be indirectly elected …[13]

It can be opined that there is a lack of clarity in terms of elections and term limits when this is read alongside Article 7 (3), which states:

She/he shall be elected for a term of five years, renewable only once. No one may serve more than two presidential terms.[14]

The third example, and the latest set of peace agreements – which also has certain implementation challenges and which potentially is exposed to various dilemmas – is that relating to South Sudan. In its Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR), as part of its Permanent Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements, the Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in Republic of South Sudan (ARCRSS) refers to "the unification of the army, and security forces and the amendment of defence and security related legislation such as National Security Services, National Defense Forces of South Sudan (NDFSS), and Police Service Acts (PSA)."[15]

The above agreements were – or are, in the case of South Sudan – supposed to provide mechanisms and policy guidelines towards sustainable peace in the relevant countries. However, their greatest dilemma, ostensibly, can be attributed to their failure (or potential failure) to lead to sustainable peace in the respective countries, arising from a lack of inclusive multi-stakeholder partnerships to sustain the dividends of stability and peace.

It is also highly common to find that upon the signing of the agreement, the non-state armed groups are delegitimised or are set-aside or de-prioritised.

In looking at the current interventions – including the peace agreements mentioned – in terms of the desired results of peace, it can easily be noted that they performed dismally. There could be several factors behind this poor performance. One reason is that these interventions do not take the need to develop local capacities, networks and systems that are conflict-sensitive and peace-promoting seriously. They only serve the interests of political leaders and international communities.

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As a result of the above dilemmas, the GLP recognised the need for a paradigm shift that takes cognisance of the historical and contemporary dynamics of conflict, and which analyses the challenges of ongoing interventions before offering innovative approaches centred on enhancing community engagement. The GLP focused both on determining the levels of skills, capacities and experiences of conflict prevention actors; following which it reflected on how multi-stakeholders, mostly non-state actors could participate in state-driven stabilisation and peacebuilding engagements. The project also responded to the empirically identified capacity gaps while enhancing community and local ownership of conflict prevention strategies.

Key GLP Guiding Principles and Dynamics

The GLP is guided by the following key operating principles in its work:

- The first principle is that of peacebuilding reflective practice and the building of learning communities, based on "making explicit the

underlying assumptions about how things work, about how particular actions or processes create consequences, in environments of conflict and change".[16]

- The second principle is being context-sensitive in approaches to issues, and the identification and development of intervention strategies. This ensures that local and national CSOs and state actors are given the opportunity to direct and suggest issues at the local level and contribute to how they can be addressed.

- The third principle is based on the principle of free and uninhibited expression of ideas and issues, as well as independent operations of the involved organisations – in which decisions on issues and leadership are left to the members of the identified organisations.

- To sustain and enhance ownership, the fourth principle involves building structures, systems and norms. The GLP also ensures the development of an exit strategy, by facilitating and strengthening the relationship between the respective national civil society forums (NCSF) and national coordination mechanisms (NCMs), as well as the Regional Civil Society Forum (RCSF) and the ICGLR.

It is important to note that the above principles should form the foundation, and need to be enhanced by actors working for and towards peace and stability in the region. If adopted, they are likely to contribute to sustainable peace and/or the peaceful resolution of conflicts in the ever-changing regional conflict dynamics.

Key Findings and Policy Recommendations

In the lifeline of the GLP, there are several lessons learnt or findings from which key policy recommendations can be made.

Key Findings/Lessons Learnt

- Conflict relapses in the region have resulted from inadequate context-based policy development and implementation, and the deliberate or systematic non-adherence to good governance and universal human rights principles. This argument has been illustrated by some writers, who note that "the failure of policy makers to understand how weak responses to warring factions can generate even greater conflict, and increase the likelihood of conflict…

and the failure to understand how values promoting conflict reduction mechanisms such as democracy and human rights can lead to actions that might actually promote the risk of state failure".[17]

- The region has been lacking a joint framework of conflict analysis and information-sharing frameworks among and between the regional CSOs, state agencies and interstate agencies, which can enhance coordinated responses. This situation has contributed to "the failure to anticipate the moral hazards that are generated by efforts to ameliorate the symptoms of conflict, such as refugee flows, ethnic cleansing and clan warfare".[18]

- The region has experienced identity-based conflicts that can be attributed to the four theories – political theory (there is competition for the control of state power); human needs theory (people are fighting for better living conditions); relational theory (conflicts are caused by identity-related problems) and transformational theory (demand for change against resistance to change). Based on these theories, the conflicts have become intractable since violence based on "cultural identities – those based on common descent, experience, language, and belief – tend to be stronger and more enduring than most civic and associational identities".[19]

- Generally, the regional governments have embarked on the development and implementation of harsh laws and policies that impede the free operations of CSOs.

Policy recommendations

- One way of ending the recurrence of conflict is to "build stronger political institutions and more credible governments so that negotiated settlements can be reached and implemented … and that political interventions, among others, are the key to reducing the incidence of repeat violence".[20] Based on this, it is recommended that established forums and existing non-state actors must support, facilitate and encourage multilateral political dialogue;

- Strategies and mechanisms that can assure security and protection to different groups during and after the dialogue and negotiation must be put in place. This must also include

assurance of participating in and benefiting from national economic and political arrangements. This is crucial, especially during peace negotiations and implementation. To this end, CSOs must have the capacity to understand and interpret specific clauses of peace agreements. It is therefore recommended that the established national and regional forums be trained on policy development and peace negotiations;

CSOs must have the capacity to understand and interpret specific clauses of peace agreements.

- Governments must make deliberate efforts to build strategies that can promote and create systems to advance the principles of affirmative action, targeting those groups perceived to be in the minority, politically excluded and economically marginalised. This will contribute to the reduction of grievances, which mostly lead to the development of negative cleavages and rebellion;

- A strategic agenda for the inclusion of ex-combatants and former non-state armed groups in conflict mitigation must be developed and implemented. This will contribute to preventing a relapse of conflict; and

- Capacities among non-state actors in contributing to and interpreting the various conflict mitigation efforts, such as the agreements, must be enhanced to ensure local ownership of the process and the identification of potential fissures that could lead to future conflicts.

Conclusion

That the Great Lakes region faces challenges and the possibility of a relapse into conflict is not debatable – especially given the trends, historical factors and emerging issues such as presidential *"third termism"* debates. Many countries in the region are shrouded in negative political contests and constitutional changes that favour the incumbents. From what has happened and continues to take place in Burundi and Uganda (arising from contested elections and electoral processes), scheduled elections in the DRC (later this year), Rwanda (2017) and South Sudan (not yet known) have the potential to plunge the entire region into another full cycle of violent conflicts.

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It is therefore imperative that the established forums broaden their collaboration with the existing state and non-state institutions to hedge the risks of relapse into conflict; and ensure that fault-lines are adequately identified and addressed to prevent their threat to stability and peace.

Endnotes

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