

Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution: Essential Ingredients for Sustainable Development in Africa

By

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Protocols.

I would like to begin by thanking the Chancellor, the Vice Chancellor, and the organizing Committee for the Conference for putting together this exciting and intellectually stimulating conference. I am pleased to be back at Covenant University. When I first came here for a conference organized by the Department of Political Science two years ago, I was very impressed, not only by the outlay and infrastructure in the Campus, but also with the quality of research and teaching in this University. As one of the many Nigerian academics in the diaspora, it is a particular source of pride for me to see this campus and the quality of research going on at this university. I am pleased to be associated with this University and urge the University authorities to keep up the good work.

The theme of this year's 3rd Covenant University International Conference on African Development Issues is: *"Driving Inclusive and Sustainable Development in Africa: Models, Methods, and Policies."* This is a timely and relevant topic, given the challenges that many African countries face today. To me, the key words in the conference' theme are *"inclusive"* and *"sustainable"*. In an age of economic uncertainties, conflict, terrorism, militancy, political instability and social upheavals, how can African states drive inclusive and sustainable development? What are the key political, social and economic ingredients that must be put in place to facilitate development? As many studies have shown, a country's development cannot be measured simply in terms of economic growth and GDP indices. As the late Julius Nyerere, the former president of Tanzania

put it, the African poor cannot eat GDP. Ultimately, development must be measured, not solely in terms of GDP and economic output but in terms of sustained improvement in the quality of life of the mass of the people.

By most measurable indices, the Nigerian economy has grown significantly over the past decade, recently surpassing South Africa as the largest economy in Africa. This is good news. But the more pertinent question to ask is: Has the growth in the economy translated into an improvement in the objective living conditions of the ordinary Nigerian? Until we can answer this question in the affirmative, all the talk about growth and GDP have little relevance. To be meaningful, development must be *inclusive* – everyone must benefit to a certain extent. Development must also be *sustainable* and less subject to changes in government and the fluctuations of oil and other commodity prices.

Peace, Conflict and Development

In the discussion of sustainable development in Africa, one topic that has not been given enough attention – which I will focus on in my talk - is the question of *peacebuilding* and *conflict resolution*. Unless there is sustainable peace, there can be no sustainable development. A country in a state of war or one that is crippled by political and social crisis, terrorism or militant insurgency cannot be in a position to put in place the necessary building blocks for development, even if the government and citizens have good ideas about how to do this. So, any discussion about national development must begin with a conversation about conflict prevention and resolution, proactive peacebuilding, human rights and justice.

The link between peacebuilding and sustainable development is very clear when you look around our country today. With Boko Haram terrorizing and ravaging the North Eastern parts of the country, can we really talk about economic and social development there today? Similarly, there can be no lasting development in the Nigeria Delta without addressing the grievances and lingering youth militancy in that region. The lack of

peace and security in the Niger Delta and other parts of the country has significantly hindered efforts at infrastructural development. For example, construction companies have avoided or abandoned major development project contracts due to insecurity arising from conflict. What about the current climate of tension and conflict between cattle herders and farmers in various parts of the country? Does this create conducive environment for sustainable development? I think not.

So, it seems to me that the conversation about sustainable development in Africa must begin with a conversation about how to bring peace to a conflicted continent.

Unfortunately, African leaders and policy makers only seem to think about peace when there is already an outbreak of conflict. Peacebuilding is an active ongoing process. Even before conflicts breaks out, political and civil society leaders need to think about proactive ways of fostering a culture of inclusion and dialogue, conflict prevention and conflict resolution.

The Cost of Conflict



As a professor of peace and conflict studies who has taught global peace and conflict studies for over two decades now, I have come to the conclusion that the world is a more dangerous place today than at the height of the Cold War, when the threat of mutually assured destruction kept the world's superpowers in check. Today, we live in a world where the weapons of mass destruction are in the hands of terrorists, insurgents and militias with no fixed addresses and have no scruples with using these weapons. This poses unprecedented threats to the stability of local communities, the integrity of states and a fragile international political and economic order. Politically weak and economically fragile African states are particularly vulnerable to this global trend as we see in ongoing conflicts across the continent, from South Sudan to Burundi to the Democratic Republic of Congo.

We need to think of peace as a crucial factor not only in attaining political stability but also in sustaining economic development. The Institute for Economics and Peace, a

policy think-tank, issues an annual *Global Peace Index (GPI)* that uses a variety of indicators to score and rank peacefulness in 162 countries around the world. In its latest report, the Institute stated that while the overall number of wars being waged around the world is declining, the world has become much less peaceful. In fact, such *peacelessness* cost the global economy about thirteen hundred dollars (\$1,350) per person last year. So, what is the cost of conflict and value of peace? In 2012 the Institute for Economics and Peace estimated that world peace was worth \$9.4 trillion. A year later, that number had grown to \$9.8 trillion - or 11.3 percent of global GDP. I like to recite these numbers because they get the attention of politicians and policy makers who typically do not think of economic development in terms of peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

The Conflicted African State

The past three decades in Africa have been defined by wars and conflict. There are currently fifteen African countries involved in war, ethnic or religious insurgency, or are experiencing post-war conflict and tension. Civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone in the 1990s claimed thousands of lives and devastated both countries. It took the concerted intervention of the international community, including West African ECOMOG forces, to bring an end to the wars. In 1991, there was the Eritrean War of Independence between Eritrea and Ethiopia and a few years later, the Rwandan genocide that claimed 1 million lives. The ongoing conflicts in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo threaten to explode into yet another full scale war. In Sudan, there were mass killings in Darfur which has been followed by a civil war in the newly independent country of South Sudan. North Africa has witnessed the outbreak of armed conflicts in Egypt and Libya following the Arab spring revolutions. Somalia, has been devastated by two decades of civil war and continues to be terrorized by the al Qaeda's affiliate *Al Shabaab*. And then there are the lingering Islamist insurgencies and terrorism in Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, Mali, Libya, Egypt and Kenya.

Why I am outlining these conflicts? I am outlining these conflicts to underscore the point that African states, being exceptionally fragile and prone to political instability, social upheavals and conflicts, cannot afford to exclude peacebuilding, conflict prevention and conflict resolution from their economic development agenda. I argue that given the fragility of the African state and the history of wars and conflict in the continent, we need to devote more time to exploring how the issues at the roots of conflict can be addressed. Political and social stability is essential to nation building. Economic prosperity is only possible in an environment of relative political and social conduciveness. But political and social stability are only possible where there is equity and justice, a culture of peace and tolerance, and respect for human rights.

African solutions to African Problems

How do we address the problem of peace and conflict in Africa in the context of sustainable development and nation building? For one, our Universities and scholars have an important role to play. Research and knowledge must be relevant to national and continental development. Our quest for solutions must also be Africa-focused. Recently, I read in the online edition of several Nigerian newspapers of the advice given by the Chancellor, Bishop Oyedepo, to the graduating PhD students of Covenant University. The Chancellor reminded the graduates that they should strive to make their knowledge relevant to solving society's problems. The Chancellor reportedly stated that a doctorate degree has little relevance, except the knowledge acquired is used to impact society and human lives positively. He challenged young scholars to use the knowledge that they have acquired in this university and their critical thinking skills to solve the country's problems and challenges. I strongly agree with the Chancellor's views.

Since one of the major developmental problems in Africa today is the prevalence of wars, insurgency and armed conflict, we should ask: How do we build peace and put in place structures to prevent conflict? Just as African scholars and researchers in Medicine, Engineering and Science must focus on solving societal problems in the areas

of healthcare, building infrastructure and generating power, so too must our legal and social science scholars focus on solving societal problems relating to governance, social justice, corruption, conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

Very often when stories about Africa are told, particularly in the Western media, the focus is on challenges that confront our continent – wars, violence, terrorism, corruptions, poverty and diseases. These stories paint a picture of a continent afflicted, conflicted and constantly at war. But Africa is not just a continent of war. It is also a continent of peace. Across Africa, there are many peacemakers - a traditional chief, a religious leader, a community activist - working quietly to resolve conflict through dialogue. Although sensational stories of war and horrific images of violence make the news, there are also many unreported and under-reported stories of peacemaking and conflict resolution in our continent. As Africans, we need to propose and sustain these peacebuilding initiatives. We also need to highlight positive stories about peacebuilding in our communities to amplify the voices of peace over those of conflict.

Just like our foreign policy, our models of development should be Africa-focused. Our intellectual frame of reference should also be Africa-focused. This does not mean that we cannot learn from the rest of the world. However, we must realize that our quest for African solutions for African problems must begin in Africa.

Transitional Justice and Nation building

The quest for solutions to conflict can begin at both national and local levels. Today, many countries have begun to pay greater attention *conflict resolution* and *transitional justice*, especially when moving from an authoritarian state to a democracy, or emerging from a violent conflict. Some countries have used dialogue to address injustices of the past through national transitional projects which typically include 5 key elements:

1. Criminal investigations and prosecutions of human rights violations.
2. Truth Commissions established to investigate and report on abuses.

3. Reparations programs to repair the material and moral damages of past abuse
4. Institutional reforms aimed at transforming security and legal systems to prevent future abuses.
5. Memorialization projects in the form of museums and public memorials that preserve memory of victims and raise moral consciousness about past conflicts.

These transitional justice and reconciliation initiatives after conflict are integral to nation building.

In the aftermath of civil wars and political conflicts, several African countries have established transitional justice projects as a way of promoting human rights and fostering peace and national reconciliation. In 1995, South Africa established a "Truth and Reconciliation Commission" to address Apartheid era human rights violations. Four years later, Nigeria established a "Human Rights Violations Investigation Commission" to investigate human rights violations through three decades of military dictatorship. In the same year, Rwanda set up its "National Unity and Reconciliation Commission" to foster reconciliation and culture of peace and human rights after the genocide in that country. Other African countries have established similar Commissions to address conflicts and human rights violations. Ghana and Sierra Leone in 2003, Liberia in 2006 and Kenya in 2007.

How effective have these national transitional justice projects been in addressing human rights violations and redressing political, socioeconomic and gender inequities? The results are mixed, and time does not permit me to dwell on these in detail in this talk. Although these peacebuilding and reconciliatory initiatives have not always produced the desired outcomes, they provide models of how African states can address the challenges of political crisis and conflict at national levels.

However, the task of peacebuilding and conflict resolution is not simply the responsibility of government and political leaders alone. It requires concerted and collective efforts. Community groups, civil society organizations, traditional rulers and

religious leaders must all play their parts in creating the structures and cultures of peace within their communities. Scholars and students of law, political science, international relations, sociology, peace and conflict studies need to come up with African-centered models and policy frameworks for conflict prevention and peace building.

Development and peace go hand in hand. Without peace there can be no development and without development there can be no peace. The absence of equitable social and economic development ultimately fosters the anger, distrust and alienation that are at the roots of many African conflicts. We know from the Nigerian experience that the lack of basic infrastructure such as roads, water, electricity power and employment opportunities for restive youth has bred militancy, radicalization, social instability and political conflicts. These conflicts, in turn, have impeded the state's modest developmental efforts. So, my message today is that we must put peacebuilding, conflict prevention and conflict resolution at the center of the sustainable development agenda in Africa.

Thanks you for listening.

