

# CONFLICTS IN AFRICA: THE CASE OF BURUNDI AND DAFUR

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## Abstract

*The conflicts in Burundi and Dafur had interesting nature and dimension that because it proved to be universal and its causes and impact multifaceted. This forms the thrust of the paper. Conflicts especially when it is in the negative create dysfunctionality and disarticulate the developmental process of the society. The African continent has become a theater of war as each of its sub-regions has experienced one form of conflict or the other as a result of the scramble for resources or political power, ethnic chauvinism and nepotism, poverty and external influence among others. The persistence of conflicts in Africa has shown that the orthodox strategies designed to prevent and resolve conflicts has not been fully effective. To comprehensively prevent and or resolve conflicts in Africa, this paper recommends that African societies should embrace core democratic culture and principles such as good governance, rule of law, justice and equality. It is believe that this will prevent the high premium on the scramble for resources and political power and will also provide for the effective distribution of resources to the people in terms of provision of basic amenities. This will create a society where there will be no inequality hence peaceful co-existence.*

**Keywords:** Conflict, Burundi, Dafur, Africa and shift

## Introduction

Studies such as Ndarubagiye (1995), Mugambi (1996) and Mpangala (2000) have viewed the conflicts in Burundi and Darfur in Sudan from the cause and effect approach without advocating for paradigm shift in preventing or/and managing similar conflict in Africa. Thus, this is the conceptual premise that the thrust of this paper is predicated. This is because conflict is by no means a new phenomenon in Africa. There is a large body of literature and arguments in support of historical foundation of conflicts in post-colonial Africa. Many scholars and commentators in Africa agree that most of the conflicts have their roots in colonialism. While not denying the fact that many pre-colonial societies in Africa were often engaged in inter-tribal wars, the people also took mutually beneficial relations long before the colonial authorities came to forcibly, “pacify”

the continent and subjugated its people to almost a century of colonial rule and economic exploitation. Ironically, post-independence Africa especially Burundi and Darfur in Sudan have had devastating conflicts.

Today, conflict resolution and peace building are typical issues which have become very fundamental in the unity and peaceful coexistence of the various ethno-religious nationalities in Africa not only in Burundi and Darfur in South Sudan. This is not only because most African countries are bedeviled by conflicts, but rather, it is due to the realization that conflicts have negative impacts on Africa's socio-economic and politico-cultural development. With the dynamism and dimensions that conflicts have taken in Africa with their multiplier effects, the idea of conflict resolution and peace building processes have become very essential in solving conflicts on the continent.

Despite this centrality of conflict resolution strategy to resolve the Burundi and Darfur in Sudan conflict proved problematic, it is worthy to note that, Africa has not developed a concrete conflict resolution mechanism that is peculiar to African conflict problematique. Where attempts are made, the conflict management mechanisms are weak, this in turn perpetuate the menace of conflicts in Africa and distort mutual socio-political relationship among ethnic-religious groups in African States. It is within this background that this paper seeks to examine what constitute conflicts in Burundi and Darfur in Sudan and the strategies develop in the management of these conflicts. Cases of Burundi and Darfur in Sudan shall be considered to make generalization.

### **Conceptualizing conflicts and conflicts prevention**

There is a large body of literature that dwells on the concept of conflict and conflict prevention. Francis (2007:p20) viewed conflict as the pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by different groups. According to him, armed conflict is the resort to use of force and armed violence in the pursuit of incompatible and particular interests and goals. He described the worst forms of armed conflict to include mass murder and genocide against unarmed civilians. Thus, if the worst conflict is the use of arms and weapons of destruction against unarmed and defenseless civilians, then African countries such as Burundi, South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwandan, Ivory Coast, Central African Republic, Kenya and Nigeria have had their ugly experience.

We can therefore, argue that, conflict can be conceptualized as the violent expression of disagreement among groups over values and hard held interests which results to the use of dangerous weapons against unarmed civilians which leads to the destruction of lives and property.

According to Tsuwa (2014:p23) conflict takes place at the individual level, societal, state and international levels. In all of these conflicts, there are highly contested values, resources and issues that the parties are usually reluctant to relinquish. In most cases, these valuables bother on the corporate existence and survival of the parties involved. In essence, it can be argued that,

conflict arises from the unmet needs and desires especially when the party or parties that feel deprived engage in conflictual disagreement with the other party(s) they perceived as being privileged or have advantage over them. Tsuwa (2014:p30), therefore, insist and argues that other issues such as poor decision making, environmental factors (pollution, climate change) have also caused starvation, distrust amongst people and severe communication which results to conflicts.

It is worth to argue therefore that irrespective of these theoretical standpoints, it is a truism that, conflicts do occur in human relations as individuals or groups have different needs and methods of acquiring them. Francis (2007:p20) defined conflict management as the whole range of development and crisis intervention efforts to reconcile parties and groups with incompatible interests, and to prevent the pursuit of divergent goals from degenerating into armed violence. Simply put, when strategies are institutionalized through governance process to prevent divergent interest and aspiration of groups from escalating into violence is described as conflict prevention.

Tsuwa (2014:p34) argues that, conflict management involves a whole gamut of activities that can even start from prevention to resolution which brings in amicable resolution to the contested differences. This dynamism starts from the ability of the parties or a third intervening party to nip the conflict in the bud or to development strategies that will de-escalate the conflicts. This is a stage of reconciliation and re-establishment of the old order. It is a stage where peace agenda is develop and implemented by the parties in a conflict. The parties are once again united and reconstruction and rehabilitation commences to ensure unification cooperation. Efforts are made politically, economically, culturally or socio-religiously towards concrete peace building peace. It involves de-militarization, demobilization, arms control among many other strategies.

There are several theories that try to provide theoretical explanation to explain why conflicts occur. This paper adopts the Psycho-Cultural Conflict Theory on the basis that most conflicts in Africa found expression in socio-cultural cleavages. The Psycho-Cultural Conflict Theory is associated with the ground works of Ross (1993), Burtton (1990), Crighton (1991), Rothschild and Groth (1995) and others. This theory emphasizes the role of culturally induced conflict. It shows how enemy images are created from deep-seated attitudes about human actions that are learned from early stages of growth in the explanation of conflict.

Ross (cited in Faleti, 2007:p48). It contends, therefore, that even though there are different forms of identities, the one that is based on people's ethnic origin and the culture that is learned on the basis of that ethnic origin is one of the most important ways of explaining violent conflict. Identity is thus seen to be the reason for social conflict that takes long to resolve. However, despite their belief that ethnicity is the biggest sources of identity-based conflicts, those who hold this view agree that this does not mean that conflict is unavoidable wherever there are difference (Faleti,2007).

The theory believes that social conflicts often occur when groups of people feel that they are discriminated or deprived of their material or immaterial aspirations on the basis of their ethno-

religious origin. Rothchild and Groth (1995) argued that a history of humiliation, oppression, victimization, feelings of inferiority and other forms experiences which wear away a person's dignity and self-esteem and lead people to resort to vengeance constitute part of what has been referred to as the 'pathological dimensions of ethnicity (cited in Faleti,2007:pp50-51).

Be that as it may, it was the feeling of oppression and subjugation that made of the people of Darfur region to revolt against the Sudanese government; the Tutsi tribe against the Hutu tribe in Burundi. Therefore, the fear of ethno-religious domination and discrimination whether real or imagined has high tendency to resort to protracted violent conflict.

### **The Conflict in Burundi: The Dimension and Management**

Within the context of the long post-independence period, the conflicts can be traced into three phase. The first phase was the period between 1962 and 1966. During this period conflicts were mainly due to political competition for power based on ethnic lines between the Tutsi and the Hutu. At independence it was the UPRONA party which formed the government because it won the 1961 election. At the time UPRONA was a non-ethnic national party, incorporating all ethnic groups. However, the assassination of its national leader, Prince Rwegasore, in1961 had deprived the party of a leader that will bring the unity of the party and the people.

Between 1962 and1996 UPRONA degenerated into an ethnic party dominated by the Tutsi. This was a result of violent struggle between the Tutsi and Hutu politicians such that Hutu Prime minister got assassinated, speakers and deputy speakers of parliament, ministers and military leaders got executed and other politicians got killed (Ndarubagiye,1995). The situation culminated into the overthrow of king Mwambutsa IV who was the Head of State, and thus a republic was declared. Multipartims was also abolished in 1996 and a one party system under UPRONA was also declared. Thus conflicts during this period result into changes from national political into euthanized politics.

The second phase constitutes the period between1996 and 1993. Periodic conflicts during this period were due to ethicized euthanized politics in which the minority Tutsi who monopolized state power and controlled the army and oppressed the majority Hutu and minority Twa. The state itself was a military-state arising out of military coups of 1966, 1976 and 1987. The Hutu and the minority Twa ethnic groups found themselves not only dominated and oppressed politically but also excluded, segregated and marginalized in tars of socio-economic relation (Ndarubagiye, 1995). Violent conflicts during this phase were, therefore, a product of such relations. Wherever the Hutu resisted and reacted in form of riots they were faced with violent repression from State organs. This resulted into mass killings and massacres. Thus the violent conflicts of 1969, 1972/73 and 1988 were of such nature. The most serious was the 1972/73 massacres' during which nearly 300,000 people lost their lives (Mpangala 2000).

The third phase constitutes the period from 1993 to the present. This has been a period of protected civil war. The civil war erupted in October 1993 after the assassination of a democratically elected Hutu president Melchior Ndadaye (Reyntjens, 1993). With the introduction of multiparty system in 1992, the first election was the Parliamentary elections followed by the presidential 1993. FRODEBU, a Hutu based political party won the election with a Hutu president. These political changes threatened the Tutsi who had been monopolizing State power for nearly 30 years. Thus, soon after the election, unsuccessful coup attempts were made culminating into the assassination of the president. This instigated some Hutu groups to being fighting the government of Burundi which against came to be dominated by the Tutsi particularly after the military coup of 1996 which brought president Buyoya once more into power (Reyntjens, 1993).

In October, 1993, following the installation of a pro-Hutu parliament under a new constitution and democratically elected Hutu President Melchior Ndadaye was assassinated by Tutsi soldiers. This resulted into ethnic conflict that claimed about 300,000 lives. As at April 1994, a newly elected president Cyprien Ntaryamira died alongside with the Rwandan president in a plane crash over the Rwandan capital of Kigali. Exactly a year later, in April 1995 to be precise, there was a massacre of Hutu refugees that led to a renewed ethnic violence in the capital, Bujumbura.

In the wake of the crisis, another Hutu, Sylvester Ntibantunganya was appointed president in October 1995. Ntibantunganya was replaced in July, 1996 through a military coup with self-proclaimed interim president, Major Pierre Buyoya, who is a Tutsi. To legitimate the regime, in June, 1998 Buyoya announced a coalition between the government and the opposition led National Assembly. This gave arise to signing of agreement to embark on transition programme.

In October, 2001 late Nelson Mandela oversees talks to implement a transitional government with certain people appointed from the Hutu and Tutsi power bloc, but the main Hutu rebels refused to sign ceasefire pact. This non-cooperated attitude frustrated the Mandela led peace talk which further intensified the conflict. As the conflict got intensified, an effort was made to bridge ethnic divide with the election of the leader of the main Hutu party, Frodebu, Jean Minani as the president of the National Assembly in January, 2003. This strategy brought to a good turning pointing to Burundi conflict. To crown it all, In November, 2003, another mile stone was made at the Summit of African leaders in Nigeria when president Ndayizeye and Pierre Nkurunziza the leader of the Hutu Forces for the Defence of Democracy (FDD) signed agreement to end the war. As a follow up in 2005, an election was conducted and Nkurunziza won the election under FDD.

In a reaction to the new development, in February, 2007 UN shut down its peacekeeping mission and strategically refocused its operations to facilitate reconstruction, rehabilitation and retransformation of the Burundian societies. The FNL finally lays down their arms and officially became a political party in April, 2009. Relative peace return to Burundi than in the past and the peace was sustained until president Nkurunziza was re-elected in June 2010 of which the poll was

alleged to be marred by violence and many observers lamented on the of absence of multi-parties in the contest.

### **The Conflict in Darfur, Sudan: the Dimension and Management**

Darfur is an oil-rich region in southern part of Sudan now known as the Republic of South Sudan. The conflict in this region flared up in 2003 when two rebel groups, Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) rose up against the Sudanese government, accusing it of neglect. The Sudanese government moved swiftly to crush the rebels. The government was widely accused of arming militias (Janjaweed) drawn from Arab tribes who have used scorched earth tactics against the rebel's communities. The 'Janjaweed' had blamed by the Darfur people for killings, widespread rape and abductions. Refugees describe them as ferocious gun-wadding men riding camels or horses who burn villages and steal whatever they can carry. Sudanese government has repeatedly denied any links with the Janjaweed, dismissing them as baseless allegations.

The people of Darfur region complaint of government neglect in the areas of basic infrastructural development. They also complaint that the motives behind their rebellious act were predicated on the aged long political exclusion, lack of roads, schools, and portable water and health services in the Darfur region. The Darfur people saw these as pragmatic injustice and as such their frustration led to revolt against the Sudanese government. The exact number of people killed in the conflict in Darfur was hard to ascertain. But, the United Nations said that many as one million people may have died since 2003. While the numbers of people displaced from their homes are by far more than those killed. This situation made the Southern Sudanese to lament that the displacement of many people from their homes appears to be part of Sudanese's government policy of ethnic cleansing, and its bid to cripple support for the rebel movements. The displaced people were mostly Sudanese farmers from the Fur, Zaghawa and Massaleit tribes.

As regards to the strategies adopted by stakeholders to resolve the conflict and peace building in Darfur region. As we earlier started, there are methodologies for conflict resolution usually adopted by individuals, governments or organizations which seek to resolve conflict and peace building. Thus, in the case of Darfur, the continental organization, AU and other stakeholders mostly used mediations and peacekeeping in their quest for peaceful resolution of the conflict in Darfur region. Mediation was the first strategy adopted to resolve the warring forces thus the vacuum of mediator was filled by the African Union which stepped in and mediated between the Janjaweed and the Government forces on one side, and the JEM and SLA on the other side. At the initial stage, African leaders like Nelson Mandela, Thurbo Mbeki of South Africa, Olusegun Obasanjo and Adulsalam Abubakar of Nigeria mediated between the conflicting parties under the auspices of AU.

As a follow up, the African Union in its fourth ordinary session of General Assembly held between 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> January, 2004 at Abuja, Nigeria unanimously appointed Dr. Salim Ahmed

Salim as Chief Mediator and African Union Special Envoy for the Darfur talks. Subsequently, Dr. Salim organized talks under the auspices of the African Union, in attendance were the representative of the Government of the Sudan, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and the Sudan Liberation Movement Army (SLMA) as well as observer capacity by the following partners: the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU) Presidency (Netherlands) and Commissions, the League of Arab States (LAS), France, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, Canada, Germany and Italy attended as invited guest (Ochoga,2013).

The Abuja meeting adopted agenda comprising the following issues; humanitarian, security, political and socio-economic issues which the parties were scrupulously compared with the N'djamena ceasefire Agreement of 8 April 2004 and the provision of the humanitarian and security protocol. Because, decisions of mediators are usually non-binding, the African Union appealed to the conflicting parties to accept the wards (the decisions) in the interest of humanity and Africa in general. While mediations continued, the AU established keeping operations with the belief that it is only when a stabilized environment is provided by the peacekeeping mission that mediation can be effective towards peace-making and peace-building.

The peacekeeping forces at the beginning were as observer mission who did not carry arms nor use force even in self-defense. But, the situation got more intense, the peacekeeping mandate was changed for officers and men to possessed arms with the ultimate aim to protect civilian, protection of law and order, public safety and services, facilitation of political resolution, enforcement of the consensus of the peace and security council, preservation of a tenuous and threatened peace, punishment of violation of agreement or security resolutions/decisions and other mandates incumbent upon the mission in Darfur region.

As the crisis got intensified, AU wrote to UN Security Council to weigh into the security situation in Darfur region and as such the UN Security Council established the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) based on resolution 1590 in March 24, 2005. This swift was because the Security Council deemed the situation in Darfur to be a threat to international peace and security. The UN finally took over the peacekeeping Mission in 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2007.

Even as the UN took over the management of the crisis, mediation and negotiation were used simultaneously with peacekeeping method of conflict resolution to manage the Darfur crisis. Series of mediation and negotiation made the Sudanese government and the two leading rebel groups, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and the Sudanese Liberation Army (SLA), signed two short-term Peace Agreements which eventually gave birth to the Referendum that was conducted in January 2011 across the Darfur region, and the with support of the international community, the people of South Sudan finally got their Independence in 9<sup>th</sup> July, 2011.

By looking at the analyses of the Burundi and Darfur conflicts, the stakeholders only intervened in the crisis through mediation, negotiation and peacekeeping only when the conflicts turned violent. Therefore, this paper considered the absence of institutionalized preemptive and

preventive strategies to manage the flash points of these conflicts by preventing them from degenerating into violent crisis as ‘a gap created in managing African conflicts, and as such, this missing link calls for a shift of paradigm. And this missing links is what forms the focus of the next section of the paper.

### **A Search for a Paradigm Shift**

The two conflicts discussed above are examples of many other conflicts in Africa where national government’s efforts were geared toward resolving the conflicts. The untold effects of erupted conflicts in the continent called for a paradigm shift from conflict resolution to conflict prevention. This reawaking call for the institutionalization of conflict prevention mechanisms in Africa countries is predicated on the view that it is by far cheaper and safer to prevent conflicts than resolving conflicts. In other words, if the conflicts in Burundi, Rwandan, Darfur region, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the on-going insurgency in Nigeria were prevented and properly managed at the early stage, the death of thousands of Africans would have been avoided, and the funds used for resolving the conflicts could have been channeled to development purposes. Looking at the conflicts in Burundi and Darfur, Sudan all the mechanisms used were basically conceived during when the conflicts were at their violent stage.

Absence of strong institutions to prevent and management conflict before escalating to uncontrollable violent level has been identified as the gap created by governance in most African countries. Most of the conflicts in the continent would have been prevented with the existence of viable conflict prevention and management institutions to swiftly respond to Early Warning Signs of possible outbreak of conflicts. When government policies and programmes are centered on conflict prevention, then the entrenchment of good governance will invariable render the approach of conflict resolution unnecessary in Africa. This could be why Zartman (cited in Ajayi, 2002:p36) argues that:

The management rather than the resolution of conflict as the maximum attainable goal is more clearly in internal governance than in international politics. Zartman also viewed governance to include-institutionalization, legitimization, lawmaking, problem solving, nation-building, integration, allocation, and others. All these elements of governance. Zartman believed that they are relate to the processes of handling conflicting demands in a way that retains the allegiance and participation of citizens in the national political system.

Thus, it is believed that state-building, therefore, becomes a matter reliable support for those who carry out task; lawmaking becomes the formulation and of implementation of rules for managing conflict demand; problem-solving becomes a matter of creating the power and procedures for providing appropriate answers to groups demands; nation-building means transferring of a sense of belonging from the group to the managing of a state unit; integration and allocation means bringing such groups into a national interaction in such a way as to provide and distribute returns to them (cited in Ajayi, 2002:p36).

If the culture of good governance is entrenched and strongly upheld in African States, Africa development crisis will become less in public discourse in the continent. As a result of the absence of good governance, ethno-religious and political crisis, therefore, took the center stage in Rwandan, Burundi, DRC, Ivory Coast and even in Nigeria. While we are calling for the entrenchment of the 'culture of Good Governance' in the democratization process in African states, the establishment of Conflict Prevention and Management Commission (CPMC) is being advocated for African States. The Commission should be saddled with the responsibility of preventing conflict by closely monitoring early warning signs and swiftly initiating mediation between conflicting parties' for the purpose of preventing disputes for further escalation. Findings and recommendations of the Commission on any mediation exercise should be swiftly act upon by the relevant governments.

Before the advent of the contending western methodology of conflict resolution, African societies have their own African Traditional Dispute Resolution (ATDR) that was hitherto used to settle disputes. The re-strengthening of the traditional structures to handle local crisis will add weight to the value of bottom- up approach to conflict management. Thus African traditional institutions (traditional rulers) should be legally empowered to settle disputes within their domain and forward feedback to Conflict Prevention and Management Communication for further action when necessary. This is institutionalized the tendency for disputes to escalate into to violent crisis will be reduced to some large extent. The practice of democracy by most African States should not send the role of the traditional rulers in governance particularly African traditional reconciliatory structures into extinction. The reinvigoration and sensitization of traditional African values of peacefully co-existence at the grass root by government and the civil society organizations is necessary.

For example, the consequences of excluding traditional institutions from the process of conflict management in modern states have being reiterated by Edward (2009:p2) with his experience in the Darfur crisis:

Before now, flash points of the conflicts were settled with little or no violence by respected local councils. This traditional conflict prevention mechanism believed to was abolished by the Khartoum Government after it came to power in a coup in 1989, leaving no mechanisms for resolving disputes peacefully. The disbanding of the councils coincided with droughts and the encroachment of the expanding Sahara-Desert, which forced Arab herders from the North into competition over land with farmers based in villages. To make matters worse, ethnic differences between the two groups-who used to co-exist peacefully in the past was exaggerated by local leaders in the battle over resources.

The non-exclusion of the traditional institutions in the process of conflict management is tantamount to ignoring the efficacy of the certain values which can be important in facilitating conflict management. Mugambi (1996:p34) has under scored this premise when he pointed that modern African Governments have mainly been state governments while traditional African

governments were community governments. In Africa democratic process, there is need to merge traditional community governments and modern State governments in order to establish community based states that can ensure new types of democracy.

Thus, the usefulness of traditional African societies politics of reconciliation is imperative, considering the fact the most political parties in Africa are not ideologically formed rather they pay more allegiance to primordial sentiments to national interest. To make the matter worse, the perforation of political parties along cultural cleavages in the name of multi-party system has undermined the spirit of collective bargaining for nation-building. Multi-party politics in Africa have potential negative consequences due to deeply divided African societies, and as such politics of reconciliation orchestrated by the traditional structures are necessary in order to avert the negative effects of competitive multi-party politics in conflict management.

Also, the growing phenomenon of agitational groups otherwise known as micro-nationalism is no doubt a hot pot for breeding groups against themselves and the State. This trend is worrisome because most of the devastated crisis in Africa recruited their arsenals either through the platform of socio-cultural agitational groups or religious bodies. This anti-national unity phenomenon found expression in the Burundian political system in the name of Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups' dichotomy. While in Nigeria, some agitations from interest groups like the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), Oduduwa People's Congress (OPC), Ohaneze Ndi Igbo, Movement for the Survival of Ijaw Ethnic in the Niger-Delta, Niger-Delta Human and Environmental Rights Organization etc. on national issues are capable of fermenting conflicts and breach of public peace.

Again, post-election violence can be prevented when the electoral bodies in every African states are allowed to organize and conduct elections in accordance with the rules of engagement. Unaccepted of election results marred by irregularities was what orchestrated the Ivory Coast post-election crisis of 2010 and that of Nigeria in 2011. The bitter experiences of post-election crisis in the continent are enough recipes for African States to grant their electoral empires full autonomy and enabling environment as a strategy for conflict prevention.

### **Concluding Remarks**

This paper has admitted that in as much as the mechanisms of conflict resolution are important for reducing incompatibility among disputed groups, African leaders should seek conflict prevention strategy as an alternative approach to conflict management. The imperativeness of this paradigm shift is on the basis that experience have shown that the resolution of one conflict often leads to the emergent of another conflict; which perpetually put most African States in the State of conflict resolution. This justify why there is no better time than now to advocate for the adoption of bottom-up approach to conflict prevention rather than the usual approach of addressing conflicts when they have erupted into violent stage.

Taking from the experience of Darfur and Burundi, several factors have accentuated the violent conflicts in these countries. The issue of bad governance, pervasive corruption, absence of democratic culture, the neglect of traditional structures, the manipulation of ethnic and religious difference by politicians, and weak institutions to protect and enforce human rights are recipes for breeding conflicts in Africa. Thus, adherence to the principle of good governance and devolution of power to traditional rulers will not only prevent conflict from degenerating to violent stage rather it will engender national cohesion and development.

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