

Africa after the Africa Commission: What Priorities for the German G8?



Working Group Report

Conflict Management

Funmi Olonisakin

Funmi began her presentation by stating that it was encouraging to see so many people from both the development and humanitarian communities, as she believes this is the only way that successful conflict management can be achieved. She also stated that it will not be possible to make progress on wider development goals unless effective responses to conflict are developed.

She went on to say that there have been many conflicts in Africa over the past 5 years. Key messages conveyed by conflict and conflict management trends over this period have included:

- Regional and sub-regional organisations are an integral and are becoming increasingly more proactive.
- The incidence of large-scale armed conflict between and within states are on the decline.
- International policy responses are still heavily focused on short-term measures, which consist largely of military approaches.

As such, implications for actors responding to African conflicts include:

- The need to sustain the capacity to cope with current conflicts.
- The AU lacks considerable capacity, both in terms of logistics and human resources.
- The absence of a strong civilian component in most African peace missions.
- This limited capacity for operationalising other aspects of the AU peace and security architecture.
- The capacity to anticipate future conflict and to understand the nature of the terrain that will shape conflict management.
- A gradual reduction in major armed conflict in Africa suggests that while regional organisations remain pre-occupied with ongoing conflicts, the prevalence of low intensity conflicts in countries where there is neither peace nor war, will present a growing challenge.
- Many low intensity conflicts will be potentially disruptive with adverse consequences for security and development.

Thus, it is extremely difficult for actors to be more strategic and the real crises will be in countries experiencing low intensity conflicts.

She stated that the future conflict management 'terrain' will be determined by both the proliferation of security providers other than those sanctioned by the state, and a surging youth population which will create pressure for jobs, education, health care, etc. Both these factors have serious implications for security and development in Africa. They may mitigate

conflict in the short term, whilst still retaining the capacity to cause maximum disruption in the longer term.

The challenge which now confronts African policy makers and regional and international organisations, is to sharpen and align available policy instruments to effectively meet the challenges of this new terrain. To do this, policy-makers must look beyond current crises and prevailing circumstances to construct longer-term security and development scenarios. A multi-track approach is required which deals explicitly with the military and broadens the current constituency of actors. In addition, regional policy frameworks must move beyond the military solution. Current responses are geared towards the prevention of violent conflict but there is a need for a more proactive approach to common governance and security challenges, which generate conflicts that may not necessarily escalate to large-scale armed violence.

The success of current and future conflict management efforts will depend on a sound knowledge base in African institutions. Sustaining the capacity to respond to conflict situations requires greater civilian capacity at both field and HQ level, and a residual knowledge base within regional organisations.

Funmi concluded by stating that the responsibility for future crises will ultimately lie with states, as that is where the potential for future action lies, but there is also a need to pierce the veil of sovereignty in order to address the common security challenge which faces all African states.

Phil Vernon

Phil began his presentation with the observation that the first plenary of today's event had consisted mainly of listing things which have already happened or been achieved. He termed this the 'technical approach to progress,' stating that he preferred a more 'impressionistic' approach, as if looking through slightly blurred glasses.

He explained that he would be covering three main areas in his presentation:

1. Trends in African conflicts
2. Fragile states
3. Some recommendations for higher-level action

On the first point, he stated that 25 countries in Africa have experienced armed conflict since 1995, which constitutes approximately 50% of the continent. Between 9 and 11 African countries are still experiencing conflict but it is important to remember that conflicts don't just go away and there is no room for complacency.

Two inter-related trends which can be observed with regard to African conflicts are: factors which act as causes of conflict; and Africa's geo-strategic position within the world.

Causal factors which contribute to conflicts in Africa include:

- Divergence between the 'haves' and 'have-nots' (i.e. rural/urban, ethnic/religious groups, etc).
- The growing strength of some African states.
- Environmental factors, especially climate change, which will affect all African countries.

Africa's geo-strategic position in the world is also important when analysing the causes of conflict in Africa. Three factors act to influence this:

- The 'war on terror' (especially in Somalia in recent weeks) has had a deleterious effect on the continent. The G8-led approach to combating terror has the potential to play out like the Cold War did in Africa, and acts to put African countries' interests behind those of the G8 countries themselves.

- The role of China in Africa – the scramble for Africa’s natural resources by the Chinese is contributing to local conflicts within Africa. This is especially evident in the Sudan currently.
- Some people, particularly in the US, want to create a discourse around the conflict between China and the West for Africa’s natural resources, which is itself also having a deleterious effect on Africa.

On fragile states, Phil stated there is much evidence showing that transition states (in the process of transition from autocratic to democratic regimes) are more likely to succumb to armed conflict. A more descriptive term for a fragile ‘state’ could be a ‘fragile polity’ as this moves away from a state or government-oriented focus. ‘Fragile’ means weak at managing conflict peacefully, which means that many more situations will be resolved by resorting to violence than would otherwise be the case. This means that the West should handle its relationship with Africa with care, and with ‘conflict sensitivity’. Phil observed that the G8 is not yet handling Africa with the sensitivity it deserves.

In suggesting some higher-level recommendations for action, Phil observed that the issue of governance had received much attention but as most aid goes directly to governments, it has the effect of strengthening any power distortions which may already exist. For example, Uganda receives huge amounts of G8 aid but the Ugandan parliament and civil society have to strengthen themselves in ways that cannot be done primarily via aid supplied from outside. It is possible to improve judiciaries, but it is impossible to make ineffectual judiciaries effective purely through aid. It is possible to spend much aid money through the Executive, but if this is not done carefully, it will simply act to entrench existing power distortions, giving rise to a situation which in which armed conflict is more likely to arise. The G8’s focus therefore should actually be on aid quality and outcomes, rather than volume, but the primary aim however should be for a reduction in fragility. At the moment, aid is largely conflict-blind because most aid is viewed as technical, rather than political.

Phil also suggested that peace-building should be at the heart of the G8 agenda. Africans should also be encouraged to improve their own polities.

The “socialisation of China” into the international system should also be a priority. China will respond to certain types of pressure, but this will only be successful if the G8 countries work together.

In conclusion, Phil observed that civil society needs to challenge the way the G8 engages with Africa in general, especially with regard to conflict, and there is an urgent need for non-violent solutions to conflict need to be found.

Discussion

Points and questions raised in the discussion included:

- On the role of the private sector: security providers - the challenge of how to ensure that they conduct themselves in a responsible way. Also, the need to create an environment for investment to enable job creation. Also, the role of multi-national corporations, the actions of which sometimes contribute to conflict. How can we ensure that they do not increase the likelihood of, or exacerbate conflict?
- On China’s involvement in Africa – there is a need to examine the motivation behind their interest, and after the havoc caused by external interference on the continent during the Cold War, this needs to be managed very carefully. The recent Ethiopian attack on and kidnap of Chinese workers symbolises the position China now occupies in Africa. Will Chinese involvement in Africa also include risk-taking, i.e. intervening in conflicts?
- On Human rights – these are not optional, they are a priority for a stable society and should be treated as such. Funmi replied that there was no specific reference to human

rights in her Opinion, but that the current pace of democratisation in Africa cannot deal with all these concepts at once. For example, the recent Nigerian elections demonstrated that we cannot necessarily expect it to take a lead role in the issues affecting the continent.

- On the 0.7% argument – this is very dangerous as a basis for an aid programme, but it is required politically, otherwise the argument itself will become marginalised.
- On African solutions to African problems - solutions need to come from within and need to address religion, tribalism, etc. Diaspora populations must also be involved in Africa's development, often they are highly qualified to do so. The involvement of Africans in solving their own conflicts is vital. External interventions and aid often cause more problems than they solve. Funmi replied that to expect solutions to come from within Africa is a huge challenge. The ruling classes manipulate tribalism and religion and do not deal with poverty. She also commented that 'conflict management' necessarily implies the need to build the peacebuilding capacity of Africans themselves, particularly to aid the transition from conflict to development. Previously, military capacity has been the sole focus, which is necessary in order to reach the peacebuilding stage, but that is only the first step. If there was a development goal from the outset, the military approach would be different. 'Backstopping' has a very limited use. Even the UN is still grappling with these challenges. There is definitely still a role for external peacekeepers however, even though the reality is that non-Africans are reluctant to die for Africans. Phil replied that asking whether external or African interventions are the answer was the wrong question, as the solution would depend upon each individual situation.
- On what 'conflict management' really means - is it how we help prevent to conflict and broker peace afterwards? Does it involve the protection of civilians? What role is there for the responsibility to protect? What role for the UN Peacebuilding Commission, the International Criminal Court (ICC) and international justice? Asylum policy needs to be included as can't always support people in situ. These are all interrelated sub-agendas. Funmi replied that local justice processes are important too and these need to be faced head-on.
- On bringing development and security together – this needs to go further. There is still a big divide, especially with regard to the UN Security Council agenda. It will take time, but it is necessary.
- On the G8 countries - there is a need for more commitment/willingness to intervene.

Recommendations for the G8

Since Gleneagles, the 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P) has been adopted. This has to be taken into account. Africa is also a continent of fragile states.

This means:

- Reducing fragility through a long-term sustainable approach as a way of achieving the MDGs, e.g. sustained youth engagement and employment, economic investment as part of peacebuilding, e.g. Darfur.
- Resolve the contradictions between the rhetoric and the geo-strategic interests of the G8 members in Africa, e.g. in Somalia.
- Expand the constituency of actors to include the African diaspora, the private sector, non-military groups, and promote the socialisation of China.