CODESRIA Reports

An Advanced Research Project on Peace, Security and Post-Conflict Reconstruction in the Great Lakes Region of Africa: A Reflection on a New CODESRIA's Social Science Initiative and Its Policy Implications

This reflective essay is a critical commentary on the nature of the issues raised, and pertinent questions posed regarding CODESRIA's ongoing initiative on Peace, Security and Post-Conflict Reconstruction in the Great Lakes Region of Africa. Another targeted objective is to inform CODESRIA's constituencies and African political communities and their associates about the intended goal of African researchers' contributions toward sustainable peace and security, a sine qua non for progress to occur. By and large, this article aims to share information and to also seek feedback on the project, as we continue to think about this initiative and its impact and policy implications in the long run.

In the field of international relations, we often tend to presuppose that peoples who do not have any tangible common interest – imagined, invented or real – are very much unlikely to go to war against one another. In the Great Lakes Region of Africa, a complex nexus of factors is shared by its peoples including their histories, cultures, and politics, the dysfunctionality of the contemporary nation-states, the contradictions related to the functioning of global capitalism in its peripheral extremism, and the local power struggles framed in absurd liberal democratic jingoism. The nature of the conflicts reflects the layers of assumptions, claims and practices associated with the dynamics of geo-politics. The major questions are: What does this region represent for itself and in itself and its peoples in terms of progress? And what does it represent in terms of global capitalism and the imperatives of unipolar global liberalism?

Without sustainable peace and a pragmatic and programmatic collectively agreed upon security arrangement in the

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Great Lakes Region, there will not be any genuine progress, despite some legal and political efforts at peace. Dialogues, sovereign national conferences, or *les concertations nationales* among the political elites will continue to only be the maneuvering arenas of power sharing, power struggle, and essentially empty avenues for the ordinary people.

There is no tangible historical evidence that supports the assumption and the claims that the conflicts related to or caused by, the structures of the contemporary state or nation-state and its capitalistic economy can possibly be solved either by *enchantements*, general ritualism, or by the psychology of denial. The so-called postmodernist theories, for instance, of explaining the conflicting world and their embodied solutions have little relevance, as they are not grounded in the specific historical and materialistic foundation of the society.

Furthermore, the conflicts cannot be solved by simply describing their symptoms. The conflicts in this region should be dealt with from structuralist perspectives of state-societal relations, and from the state and international relations' perspective of cost-benefit analysis through which the real causes are identified and examined. These conflicts can also be maintained for many years if preventive transformative measures are not structurally factored in as part of the agreements. The conflicts of the Great Lakes Region are not exceptions from the above reasoning and

general principles. It is necessary to search for a multipolar peace arrangement within the perspectives of global capitalism that more strongly re-enforces its expressed ideology of unipolar liberalism but also advocating functional regionalism.

I was privileged to be selected as the facilitator of this advanced research project on peace, security and post-conflict reconstruction in the Great Lakes Region of Africa – the initiative of the Council for Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), which is managed by Bernard Mumpasi Lututala, the Deputy Executive Secretary of CODESRIA and with the support of Ebrima Sall, the Executive Secretary. Both would agree with me that given the importance of this project – as a search for durable peaceful solutions in the region – its potential impact toward the implementation of peace and security, and the special composition of the researchers, a reflective comment on its values needs to be articulated and shared. What are the ultimate objectives and expectations associated with this complex advanced research project? How will this team of African researchers deliver the outcome of their works? And what should be done with their findings and policy recommendations upon the completion of their research projects?

A dynamic group of knowledgeable researchers was selected from a rigorous process, which emphasizes the high quality of the research projects, that of the candidates' publications and the professional engagements of the candidates in development of the region.

Understanding the context of the region is of critical importance in comprehending the nature of the issues in this project.

The context and the issues should be examined structurally and historically, though I am not proposing a historiography here. Many efforts toward peace have failed and the social devastation and the degradation of the environment continue, as well as distrust among peoples, governments and militia groups. In short, life continues to be a nightmare for the majority of people. What should be done?

Based on the mission of CODESRIA, I categorize this initiative to be essentially a social scientific, interdisciplinary, and multidisciplinary project to produce socially defined critical knowledge and paradigms. Based on the agendas of the participants, it can also be added that this project offers an African-centered perspective on protracted conflict and post-conflict reconstruction processes. In terms of its potentiality, it can also be called a grand reconstructive project. What do all these categorizations mean as it relates to bringing real peace, security and progress as part of post-conflict developments in the Great Lakes Region? Within these categorizations, we have to deal with the nature of the actors involved, the structures of their interests and actions, and the forces behind these political and social theaters.

This region is one the most politically unstable, economically unproductive, and socially unprogressive subregions in Africa. In many cases, the symptoms of this debilitation have appeared over the past three decades or so. The people, especially the poor peasants and farmers in rural areas, women, and children have been seriously suffering from the devastating effects of wars without any clear prospect for getting out of them. As discussed below, the rise of militia politics, decay and the dysfunctionality of the African political regimes, and dominance of a world system that exploits the institutional weaknesses without any pity or apology, have led to paralysis and *désenchantement*. Most of the bilateral, multilateral and international efforts and agreements toward the establishment of a perceived durable peace and consistent dialogues have either been truncated, failed or remained immature without any collective or individual political will toward the production of tangible peaceful actions needed in the Great Lakes Region. If complex and rigorous analyses of the situation and the conditions are not structurally made with complex recommendations, we might compare the political landscape of this region to scenarios in the Japanese Kabuki Theater in which the actors/dancers come and go on the stage but the songs used are the same, originated from the same menu.

Thus, this new CODESRIA initiative is one the most important endeavors that it has undertaken, armed with brilliance, social commitment for knowledge making, intellectual engagement and leadership for policy input into solutions to end the tragedy of the Great Lakes' states and peoples. This initiative is founded on the strong conviction that genuine efforts to propose any sustainable peaceful solutions and physical and social security to the nature of the crisis and post-conflict reconstruction requires a comprehensive and structuralist understanding of the multifaceted nature of this crisis itself and that knowledge matters, and finally that the truth is socially relevant in rethinking the Great Lakes Region.

The selection committee, constituted by Bernard Mumpasi Lututala, Joseph Gahama, Rémy Bazenguissa and this author as the Chair, selected highly capable researchers based on the high quality of their research projects methodologically speaking, the clarity of their objectives, the feasibility of the research projects, the nature of projected policy implications of these projects, and the place and the role of these research projects in their overall professional development in their individual disciplines.

All these researchers are faculty members with strong research credentials. They are all highly motivated and enthusiastic about the continuous role of African researchers towards African progress. This project is both a challenge and an opportunity to propose alternatives about changes from the African researchers' perspectives. It is a challenge partially because it has to produce new knowledge that ought to be both strongly empirical and interpretative. Thus, a dialogue between researchers and political regimes and governments is strongly expressed. Another challenge is that we have to imagine, reclaim, or project the new Great Lakes Region based on concrete outcomes of research projects and not based on generalized speculations and within regional projects. Thus, any reductionism to be projected in this work has to be measured by the laws of probability based on the cost-benefit analysis.

Despite some recent economic growth in some countries of the Great Lakes Region and some presidential, parliamentarian and local elections, at large, the region is known for producing some of the deepest political violence in Africa with the rise of militia politics that initially produced presidents who were not elected by anyone and regimes that were either totalitarian with some elements of nationalism or militaristic regimes without any national vision. The gross national income (GNI) per capita has been significantly declining in conjunction with all the implied consequences. Thus, according to the World Human Report of 2013 and the African Human Development Report of 2012 (the first), comparatively, Africans at large have become economically poorer today than they were 30 years ago. Social and economic conflicts due to poverty and underdevelopment have been deepening.

These militia politics have been consolidated in various forms by a combination of the power of guns, sporadic and planned elections and international support. This sub-region with its officially recognized 11 countries, including, Burundi, Angola, Central Africa Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of Congo, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Zambia, has produced tremendous violence in the history of post-colonial state and its political economy. However, not all the countries have had similar reasons for, and manifestations of, political and economic instability. For instance, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere of Tanzania was a noted African leader in the region who believed in self-reliance and in gradual pan-Africanism. Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia with his African humanism produced a vision of combining Africanity and socialism. Some earlier Afro-Marxist-Leninist experiments were produced in this subregion as well.

The dynamics of the Great Lakes Region of Africa, its layered historical and social configurations in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras, the power struggles within geo-politics during and after the Cold War era and the uncontrolled expansionism of the savage capitalism and the weaknesses of the peripheral states have produced major wars, social disruptions, and quasi-permanent political instability in this region.

One country in the region, Rwanda produced a genocide in which the Hutu purposefully massacred the Tutsi and the so-called moderate Hutu of about 800,000 people in a matter of a few months in 1994. The consequences of this genocide and its impact in the region can be compared with the consequences of the United States dropping the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan. Biological and medical scientists are still studying the consequences of such a tragedy in physiological and psychological terms.

In 1994, two presidents from Rwanda and Burundi were killed at the same time by a plane crash. This also created another national and regional trauma. The violence continues in Uganda by the militias who have been fighting the regime in Kampala. South Sudanese nationalist movements fought the government of Khartoum. Their negotiations led to the comprehensive peace agreement through which the South Sudanese gained independence based on a voting yes in a referendum on the question. Once, the extreme military dictatorship in "Zaïre" led to the near disappearance of the secular state for many years when president Mobutu became himself the divined, individualized and personalized state. Secular state's institutions vanished.

The conflict in this region led to wars in which some people have been buried alive in some cases. Though he had a long history of national revolution, President Laurent-Désiré Kabila of the DRC came to power through the means of a heteroclite coalition of guerrilla and militia politics, and was killed, adding a new dimension of power struggle and politics of invasion into the equation of the conflict in the region. The war in the East of DRC with peripheral capitalist dimensions has killed more than 5 million people in the DRC alone. Militia groups continue to kill and terrorize the people in the Central African Republic. The movement of refugees has become endemic. The phenomenon of the child soldier has exploded with devastating consequences in the society. Furthermore, the victimization of women and level of brutality against females has been alarming in the region.

The contributions of researchers collectively in examining and understanding the true causes of the conflicts, their social, local and regional ramifications, and their policy implications cannot be understated. The policy recommendations of the researchers toward the transformation of conflict into peace are thus the ultimate aims that we pursue in this project. The researchers should make a difference in approaching the conflict and the reconstruction from knowledge based perspective. Understanding the reality of the situation requires questioning the existing perceptions of the subject matter, and the creation or appropriation of tools to be used for any critical analysis. Researchers must deconstruct the perceived realities based on the objectivity of facts and a combination of the principles of positivism and empiricism. However, it should be noted that the process of forming social theories of post-conflict reconstruction has to be influenced by philosophical questions about what kinds of state, economic systems, and cultural choices, despite the imperatives of liberal globalization, people would prefer or choose and what kinds of mechanisms and institutions of peace should be established.

The workshop of August 2013 that brought together the team in Arusha, Tanzania, was unique for the following reasons: (1) The high level of the intellectual commitment of the researchers as reflected in their direct involvement in what is taking place in the region. All the researchers directly or indirectly have been touched personally or through their research works (teaching, research or policy) by the conflict; (2) All the researchers are members of teaching and research units in institutions of higher learning in this sub-region; (3) The interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary nature of their works transcends the parochialism of specific disciplinary approaches; (4) the dialogical relationship between and among the disciplines; and (5) the importance of both empiricism and policy implications.

The workshop was enlightened by the brilliant researchers' specific presentations of their own research projects, participants' comments on the presentation, shaped and guided by Joseph Gahama's presentations from a historian's comprehensive perspective and also commented and elaborated by critical and practical views of each presentation with an emphasis on methodologies and policies by Bernard Mumpassi Lututala. He not only commented on each presentation, identifying the major elements of the problematic, but also insisted on how to go forward in connecting research and government. This author had interventions on almost each major aspect of the project, including theories, conceptualization, and politics and policy outcome and interrogated the reviews of the existing literature and discourses on the topics. The presentation and the discussion on historiography and scholarship on gender by Magdalena Rwebangira shaped the epistemological foundation of our methodologies and theories in this workshop by creating a dialogue on the role of gender, women, and men-dominated institutions in the peacemaking processes. A critical reflection on what remains to be done within interdisciplinary framework by F. E. M. Senkoro, a member of the Executive Committee of CODESRIA, provided another key element of our intellectual guide. Senkoro also commented on the values of indigenous knowledge systems as an asset in this new way of thinking.

This research project is taking another level of critical dialogue between theory and practice as scholars interrogate the complex roles of political ideology, economics, ethnicity, gender, legal systems, women, multinationals, political parties and civil society, labor and the youth in post-conflict reconstruction processes in the region and in Africa at large. These factors and actors are being examined from a holistic perspective. This implies structuralist and historical perspectives within the world system as it functions in Africa.

We are examining the nature of these actors, beyond the identification of their behaviors, in their relationship to one another, the internal and external base of their motivations, the structures of their actions, and domestic and international sponsorships. Policy recommendations will promote necessary constructive dialogues between researchers and policy makers.

A conference on peace will be held as the first step toward the conceptualization of the implementation of all the aspects of this advanced research project on peace, security and post-conflict reconstruction. Finally, this advanced project addresses the issues about the nature of the connectivity and that of progress of peoples and the states within the imperatives of the Great Lakes' cultural, geographical, political, and economic borders and their potential and real capital, as well as their constraints.

For regional peace to be created, the existing borders and their current meanings both theoretically and practically must be

challenged. Furthermore, within a world of states with their claimed sovereignty, the concept of multipolar peace should be explored as it opens up a possible dialogue between the states, local forces, and the peoples on the question of relocation of the peace base. Peace should not be located only in the state's institutions and appropriated only by these institutions. It ought to also be located within the local peasant and farmer's institutions and their values as well. If 28 European states and their internal colonization histories, deep cultural hatred and wars among their small political entities and various levels of industrialization, have been finally capable to unite under the European Union institutions, there are many lessons to learn from this pragmatic unity within cultural and ideological diversities. Where there are a strong will, trust and confidence, everything is possible. There is no natural law (or physiocratic norm) of gravity that determines the place of violent conflict in the Great Lakes Region.

I project that the final product of our research be articulated on the basis of a call and the need for consolidating a new Pax-Africana agenda, one that has to be regionally, politically, economically and culturally imagined within the existing African objective conditions. The role of the African Diaspora is significant in this rethinking as sources of human and material resources and as citizens in their respective countries. The new peace and security can be the instruments of political decolonization and a unifier across transnational space. Such a project has to be essentially scientific, ideological, and political before it can become practically economic. Each country and its people have more to gain collectively through the establishment of peace and security than some individualistic gains associated with peripheral state and capitalism, and corporate militarism. In this project, we are rethinking the Great Lakes Region, a requirement for self-definition and self-identity.

I think that a multipolar peace approach with multi variables base should be privileged, as it is conceptually holistic in its philosophy and decentralized in its pragmatism within the framework of Pax-Africana. CODESRIA's initiative can be considered as a panacea toward the new remapping of the Great Lakes Region of Africa.

The expression "progress" as used in this context is not part of an evolutionary assumption of "developmentalism" advanced by so-called modernity on a planetary scale, a classification that is predetermined, unidirectional and cumulative. Peace, like progress, cannot be produced only through a simple formula of signing agreements. It can be produced through the understanding and changing of the complexity of existing relationships between imagined and invented realities. This is a lesson that can be obtained from all sciences and the humanities.