ECONOMIC IMPACT OF AFRICA'S CONFLICTS

GEORGE B. N. AYITTEY, Ph.D.

[Associate Professor of Economics at American University and President of The Free Africa Foundation, both in Washington, DC.]

> "Africa as a whole has begun to make significant economic and political progress in recent years, but in many parts of the continent progress remains threatened or impeded by conflict . . . Since 1970, more than 30 wars have been fought in Africa, the vast majority of them intra-State in origin. The consequences of those conflicts have seriously undermined Africa's efforts to ensure long-term stability, prosperity and peace for its peoples."

- UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan in an April 1998 Report to the UN Security Council.

INTRODUCTION

Africa is now synonymous with war, destruction, famine, refugees, starvation, instability and chaos. Year after year since 1985, one African country after another has imploded, scattering refugees in all directions: Ethiopia (1985), Angola (1986), Mozambique (1987), Sudan (1991), Liberia (1992), Somalia (1993), Rwanda (1994), Zaire (1996), Sierra Leone (1997), Congo DRC (1998), Ethiopia/Eritrea (1998), Angola (1999). And year after year, grisly pictures of emaciated bodies of African famine victims are paraded on Western television in urgent appeals. The most senseless of all these war is that between Ethiopia and Eritrea, two of the world's most poorest nation. The war resulted from a border dispute over a tiny piece of territory at Badame, where the colonial boundary is not clearly delineated. The two poor African nations pound each other, apologize for innocent civilian casualties, take a break to bury the dead, re-arm and then pound each other again.

The economic costs of Africa's senseless wars and conflicts are incalculable. First and foremost is the wanton destruction they wreak. Infrastructure is reduced to rubble. Roads, bridges, communication equipment are bombed by combatants, houses and building destroyed. Second, the conflicts uproot people, forcing them to flee the general atmosphere of insecurity and war. Most of the refugees are women and children but women constitute about 80 percent of Africa's peasant farmers. Refugees fleeing conflict do not produce food crops. Thus, conflicts have a direct impact on Africa's agricultural production and are partly explain why Africa, with all its rich natural endowments, cannot feed itself my import 30 percent of its food needs. Third, conflicts create an "environment" inimical to development and deter investment. According to Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, Algeria's civil war that started in 1991 has "killed 100,000 and caused $20 billion in economic losses" (*The Washington Times*, July 14, 2001; p.A5).

Africa, consisting of 54 countries, is the least developed region of the Third World despite its immense wealth in mineral and natural resources. The statistics on Africa's postcolonial development record are horrifying. Indices of Africa's development performance have not only been dismal but have also lagged persistently behind those of other Third World regions. In 1997, GDP per capita for Africa was $560, compared to $4,230 for Latin America and $730 for Asia. Economic growth rates in Africa in the 1970s averaged only 4 to 5 percent while Latin America recorded a 6 and 7 percent growth rate. From 1986 to 1993 the continent's real GNP per capita declined 0.7 percent, while the average for the Third World increased by 2.7 percent. For all of Africa, real income per capita dropped by 14.6 percent from its level in 1965, making most Africans worse off than they were at independence.

Agriculture, which employs the bulk of Africa's population, has performed abysmally. Since 1970 agricultural output has been growing at less than 1.5 percent -- less than the rate of population growth. Consequently, food production per capita declined by 7 percent in the 1960s, by 15 percent in the 1970s, and by 8 percent in the 1980s. Over the postcolonial period 1961 to 1995, "per capita food production in Africa dropped by 12 percent, whereas it advanced by leaps and bounds in developing countries in Asia" (*The Economist*, 7 September 1996; p.45). Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of the Congo, exported food when it was the Belgian Congo. Today, it cannot feed itself, nor can postcolonial Zambia, Sierra Leone and Tanzania. In 1990, about 40 percent of black Africa's food was imported, despite the assertion by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations that the Congo Basin alone could produce enough food to feed all of black Africa. The situation has deteriorated so rapidly in Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo that many people eat once a day.

Prospects for satisfactory economic recovery in Africa remain bleak at the dawn of the new millennium. In 1996, for example, a ray of hope did indeed appear on the horizon when Africa registered a respectable 5 percent rate of GDP growth. However in 1997, real GDP growth fell to 3.7 percent from 5 percent the previous year (*The Economist*, 6 June 1998; 44). In 1998, it dropped further to 3.3 percent, according to the U.N. Economic Commission for Africa (*The African Observer*, June 7-20, 1999; p. 23). Though they are all higher than the 2 percent growth rate of the early 1990s, subtract an average population growth rate of 3 percent and that leaves miserly rates of growth of less than 2 percent in GDP per capita. These rates are woefully insufficient to reduce Africa's average poverty rates, which are among the highest in the world. In fact, a 1997 report from the International Labor Organization estimated that in Sub-Saharan Africa, the proportion of the population living in poverty will increase to over 50% by the year 2000. According to *The African Observer* (June 7 – 20, 1999): "Four out of 10 Africans live in absolute poverty and recent evidence suggests that poverty is on the increase . . . If Africa wants to reduce poverty by half over the next 15 years, it needs to attain and sustain an average annual growth rate of 7 percent – an enormous task" (p.23).

Investment – both domestic and foreign – is the way out of Africa's economic miasma or the key to economic growth and poverty reduction. But Africa does not attract, rather it repels, investment. Increasingly, the continent has become unattractive to foreign investors. Even to the donor community which supplied much of the capital for development projects, now suffers "donor fatigue" after so many failures. For example, between 1980 and 1988, sub-Saharan Africa received $83 billion in aid from the donor community. Yet all that aid failed to spur economic growth, arrest Africa's economic atrophy, or promote democracy. The continent is littered with a multitude of "black elephants" (basilicas, grandiose monuments, grand conference halls, and show airports) amid institutional decay, crumbling infrastructure and environmental degradation.

Net foreign direct investment in black Africa dropped dramatically from $1.22 billion in 1982 to $498 million in 1987. From 1989 to mid-1994, over half of British manufacturing companies with African subsidiaries disinvested from those operations. In mid-1989 there were 90 British companies with 336 equity stakes in Anglophone African manufacturing enterprises. By mid-1994 only 65 companies with 233 equity stakes remained (*African Business* May 1995, 16). The French also have become disillusioned: "French direct investment in sub-Saharan Africa ran at $1 billion a year in 1981-1983; by 1988 that had translated into a net outflow of more than $800 million" (*The Economist*, 21 July 1990, 82).

Between 1990 and 1995 the net yearly flow of foreign direct investment into developing countries quadrupuled, to over $90 billion; Africa's share of this fell to only 2.4 percent.[1] According to the World Bank, in 1995 a record $231 billion in foreign investment flowed into the Third World. Singapore by itself attracted $5.8 billion, while Africa's share was a paltry 1 percent or $2 billion -- less than the sum invested in Chile alone (*The Economist*, 9 November 1996, 95). "Even that meager proportion has been disputed by some analysts who believe the true figure to be less than $1 billion," said *The African Observer* (11-24 April 1996, 20). Although it increased dramatically to $4.7 billion in both 1996 and 1997, it dropped to $3 billion, leading United Nation's Conference on Trade and Development

---

The percentages in the five previous years, beginning with 1990, were: 3.5, 5.2, 3.2, 2.6, and 3.7 percent.

(UNCTAD) to conclude that "Africa has lost attractiveness as market for Foreign Direct Investment as compared to other developing regions during the last two decades," (*The African Observer*, 30 November - 13 December 1998, 21).

Africa has not attracted foreign investors because the prevailing "environment" repels even domestic investors. As Kofi Adusei-Poku, a Ghanaian student, observed: "Crisis, chaos, famine, diseases, civil wars, coups, dictatorships, social disorder, corruption and legitimizing military regimes seem to be the most outstanding elements of post-independence Africa" (*West Africa*, 1-7 March 1993, 320). Who would invest in such an "environment"? If the ruling elites and government officials prefer to invest their ill-gotten wealth in Switzerland, why should foreigners invest in Africa?

Investment or development is a creative activity that results in the production of goods and services. In Africa, the people who produce the bulk of these goods and services are the peasant majority. They are the producers of Africa's real wealth: cocoa, coffee, gold, diamonds, and other commodities. The elite minority constitute the parasitic, extractive class who use the government machinery to milk the peasants. The true challenge of development is to spur and release the creative energies of Africa's peasants. Creative activity, however, does not occur in a vacuum but in an environment. Various government legislation, policies (taxes, duties, and subsidies), institutions, and attitudes shape this environment. Thus, politics, law, ecology and culture all form part of what may be called the development environment.

When this environment is such that it encourages or induces people to greater effort, it is described as "enabling" or "conducive" to productive effort. Although an "enabling environment" is an intangible, amorphous concept, certain pertinent features can be isolated for purposes of study with respect to their impact on development. The World Bank (1989) identified "incentives and the physical infrastructure" as crucial. But a more expansive set of requirements for an "enabling environment" would include the following:

> Security of persons and property
> System of incentives
> Rule of law
> Basic functioning infrastructure
> Stability: economic, political, and social
> Basic freedoms: intellectual, political, and economic

It should be obvious to even the most casual observer that the requirements for an "enabling environment" have not been met in most African countries. African governments have recklessly banished the rule of law and wreaked mayhem across the continent, scattering human debris and wanton devastation in their wake. Even Julius Nyerere, former president of Tanzania and spokesman of African leaders, noted in a speech at the University of Edinburgh on October 9, 1997:

> The necessary conditions for attracting foreign direct investment are simply not there yet in most African countries. In my view, three factors militate against economic and social growth in Africa. The first of these is corruption. This is a widespread cancer in Africa. Its negative impact on the economic, social, and political development of our continent is undeniable. The primary responsibility for eradicating this cancer from our societies, is our own in Africa . . . The second factor which makes business reluctant to invest in Africa is political instability . . . But even if African countries were to become paragons of good governance and political stability, despite the corruptive and disruptive nature of poverty itself, foreign investors would not be coming rushing to Africa. Most African countries still lack the necessary physical infrastructure and the education and training in skills needed for rapid economic and social development. This, in my view, is the third and the most important factor militating against significant flows of foreign direct investment to Africa. Until this lack is remedied through substantial and sustained investment in those areas, African countries could pass all the laws the IMF and the World Bank might prescribe, and privatize everything including their prisons, but the foreign investors will not come; instead they will go to

such Asian, Latin American or East European countries where the infrastructure is more developed and the modern skills are available.

We now examine two of the most critical requirements.

Security of Persons and Property

Security derives from the commonsensical fact that a person's first interest is survival. No farmer, regardless of his level of education, would go to his farm and double output, when bombs go off in the middle of the night and his own life is in danger. Nor would any entrepreneur or investor establish a company, which can be arbitrarily seized by gun-toting bandits.

In most places in Africa, people live in fear of their lives and property. In 1996, civil war and strife raged in at least 17 African countries: Algeria, Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Mozambique, Liberia, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda, and Zaire. These senseless wars uprooted millions of peasants and caused severe dislocations in agricultural production. By that year, Africa's refugee count, including internally-displaced persons and returnees, had reached 22 million -- about the third of the world's total. The cost of these wars are impossible to calculate, but most experts believe that Africa's agricultural production would increase by as much as 30 percent if the civil wars would end.

In Ethiopia, former dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam's socialist regime, which ruled for 16 years and was known as the Dergue, forced peasants into cooperatives, stirring profound resentment among farmers who had to share their crops with less hard-working countrymen. As Stephen Buckley, a foreign correspondent for *The Washington Post* (May 25, 1998) noted, "Security was such a problem that they never knew if they would return safely from the market. Government officials regularly snatched their sons away for army duty. On top of that, the Dergue made farmers sell crops to the state Grain Marketing Corp., which paid them prices that were sometimes one-fifth of what they could get in a open market" (A18).

In Liberia, "The economy is stagnant and no jobs are being created, largely because few Liberians or foreigners will invest amid fear and public insecurity. I used to incorporate new businesses every week but I haven't done one in six months," said Tiawan Gongloe, a human rights attorney in Liberia (*The Washington Post*, 14 January 1999, A23).

African governments do provide security -- not for the people but for the ruling gangsters. According to General Ibrahim Babangida, the former military despot of Nigeria, "State security, in government parlance, is any measure, offensive or defensive, taken to protect the state from acts or whatever that even annoy the head of government. You can take any measure to stop the country from being subjected to acts of sabotage or terrorism. You can take any measure to make sure that the head of government or state or the president does not get annoyed. It's all part of security" (From an interview in *Tell* magazine, 24 July 1995). Note that it is the <u>state</u> which is being protected against the people.

For the people, "security" has been a pattern of heinous brutalities. The worst offenders have been military rulers. According to the World Bank (1989), "Sometimes the military have deposed unpopular regimes. But often this had led to more, not less, state violence and lawlessness. Occasionally it has led even to civil war. These disruptions have driven many to become refugees, both directly by threatening lives and indirectly by making drought and other natural calamities harder to cope with" (22).
    Consider the following:
    Despite of all the ceremony and media spotlight surrounding its determination to deal with lawlessness in Ghana, the Police Administration appears incapable of arresting a group of heavily armed soldiers from the Military Police who descended on Gomoa Buduburam to terrorize the family of the Bamfos, popular in the community for their entrepreneurial spirit.

On September 29, 1997, six heavily-armed soldiers from the dreaded Military Police unit landed at Buduburam, a village near Kasoa on the Accra-Winneba road, split into two groups and invaded the homes of the Bamfo family, their fingers on their AK 47 triggers.

With just one furious kick each from their boots, the first group broke down the metal gates of Mr Isaac Bamfo, one of the `wanted' men. Unable to find him, the invading soldiers spent 30 minutes vandalizing the house, and finally cursing their intended victim when they realized to their chagrin that he might have slipped away" (*The Ghanaian Chronicle*, Oct 15, 1997; p.6).

The Osolu family complained to the Nigeria Air Force headquarters that their house in Afube village, Amichi in Nnewi-South Local Government Area of Anambra State, was recently invaded by Air Force personnel. The airmen allegedly shot a gun in the air and chased everybody out after beating them up and vandalizing their property.

NAF director of public relations, Wing Commander Alex Usifoh disclosed to the *Daily Champion* that the NAF has identified the officer who led four other armed airmen to the Osulus' house. All of them came from the 81 Air Center, Benin, Edo State. Usifoh said if found guilty, the airmen might be dismissed and handed over to the police for persecution. [They never were.] (*African News Weekly*, March 3, 1995, 13).

Sudanese government troops attacked Kalkada, a village in the Nuba mountains of central Sudan. Villages were burned; food stocks destroyed and animals stolen to make life impossible; civilians were robbed, kidnapped and tortured; women raped. (*The Washington Times*, July 27, 1995, A19).

When students of Khartoum University marched in 1992 against the rising cost of education, soldiers moved onto the campus, shot several demonstrators, arrested others, and closed the university for the rest of the year. (*The Atlantic Monthly*, August 1994, 32).

In order to rid Mauritania of the independent-minded black population and to consolidate control over the River Valley, the regime of President Maouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya carried out systematic human rights violations against the black ethnic groups, including arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial executions, expropriation of land, and denial of cultural identity. Two campaigns were particularly shocking: the massive deportations of some 70,000 blacks from Mauritania in 1989-1990, which targeted professionals in the cities, land-holders along the Senegal River, and nomadic herders; and the massacre of over 500 blacks in the late 1990/early 1991. This latter group was among the 2,000-3,000 black Africans in the military and civil service who were arrested without charge, held incommunicado in detention, and subjected to vicious physical abuse (*Africa Report*, January/February 1994, 45).

People suffer brutalities not only from the "forces of law and order" but also from the so-called liberators. Consider Liberia in September 1996 for example:

"Tubmanburg, Liberia -- In a small shack in the countryside, a young woman with both arms sliced nearly to the bone flapped her paralyzed hands about and wailed in bewilderment, "I can't do anything with them." Blood oozed from the festering wounds, inflicted by ropes used to bind her arms behind her back during a rebel attack. An emaciated old woman was sprawled on the filthy floor nearby, pleading for the grown sons she said were somewhere in America.

This is what passes for peace in Liberia" (*The Washington Post*, 24 September 1996, A12).

Next door in Sierra Leone, the people have been trying to pull themselves up by their bootstraps, establishing more than 1,200 cooperative societies, whose activities ranged from savings to farming, from fishing to handicrafts. In 1991 the total membership was about 100,000 mostly women with aggregate savings of about $353,000. But the cooperatives were laid to waste by the insurgents and renegade soldiers.

In April 1995, rebel soldiers raided Port Loko and hit the Kamuyu Rural Income Generating and Vocational Center, a cooperative. They abducted 60 girls and destroyed the center. According to Alpha

Jallon, the national registrar of cooperatives, the Center was founded in 1982 to equip women and girls with vocational skills so as to help them to set up small business.

"The April attack forced the Kamuyu Center to close down, says Patricia Forkoi Sonkoi, who fled to Freetown along with other instructors and some of the remaining trainees. "We could not continue in the face of serious insecurity to our lives," she said.

The Young Rising Women's Cooperative at Magburaka, 272 kilometers from Freetown, collapsed after a rebel attack on the town early in 1995. "They destroyed everything at our factory," says Aminata Kamara. "We were lucky to have escaped." (*The African Observer*, 22 August - 4 September 1995, 5).

In the Central African Republic in February 1996, soldiers at the Alpha Yaya military camp went on the rampage to demand a salary increase. "To show they meant business, they fired shots in the air and seized vehicles from innocent civilians . . . Foreign investors have been thoroughly frightened by the violence and insecurity. Many Lebanese who were victims of the looting have packed their bags and left" (*New African,* May 1996, 26). Over 50 civilians were killed with more than 100 wounded. But what have innocent civilians got to do with salary increase for soldiers?

Basic Functioning Infrastructure

In production, inputs have to be procured and labor trained and employed. The finished product must be marketed. Telephone calls have to be made to contact prospective customers. Goods have to be shipped and deliveries made on time. Some basic infrastructure, such as roads, schools, electricity, water, and telephone services, are essential to facilitate this process. More important, they must function reliably. A factory will have difficulty with production if there are frequent interruptions in the power supply. And if factory owners must install their own power generators, water supply or mobile telephone systems, the cost of production will increase and be passed on to the consumer in the form of higher prices. Even then, such prices would place the business at competitive disadvantage, making it difficult to compete with imports.

Infrastructure has crumbled in many African countries. The educational system is a shambles. Roads are pot-holed. Hospitals lack basic supplies, and patients are often asked to bring their own bandages and blankets. When former president Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire fell ill, he flew to France for treatment. "Zimbabwe's phone system is notoriously bad [that] many businesses use messengers and personal visits instead" (*The Economist*, 2 March 1996, 44). In Nigeria, "besides the collapse of the fuel distribution system, the telephone network is decaying. The electrical grid is failing. Almost no part of Lagos -- the steaming, teeming financial and commercial capital -- gets electricity all day, and vast tracts of the city of 8 million never get power at all" (*The Washington Post*, 9 June 1998, A19).

THE CAUSES OF AFRICA'S CONFLICTS

A serious study of Africa's interminable and innumerable crises reveals that they all share a similar evolution. Each crisis begins when an "educated" thug, civilian or military, assumes power through an election or a coup d'etat. He then proceeds to entrench himself in office by amassing power and surreptitiously debauching all key government institutions: the military, the civil service, the judiciary, and the banking system. With all powers in his hands, he transforms the state into his personal property -- to benefit himself, his cronies, and tribesmen, who all then proceed to plunder the treasury. All others who do not belong to this privileged class are excluded -- the politics of exclusion.

The tyrant employs a variety of tactics to decimate opposition to his rule: co-optation, bribery, infiltration, intimidation, and "divide and conquer." Opposition leaders compound their weakness by their constant bickering. Out of frustration, a rebel group emerges from the excluded class and mounts a guerrilla campaign to oust the despot and his cohorts from power or to secede, as in the Biafran secession in 1967. In the course of the insurgency, the guerrilla movement splits into several factions, often along tribal lines. If

the campaign to overthrow the regime is unsuccessful, the war drags on for years, even decades, as in Angola, Mozambique, and Sudan. If the head of state is ousted or killed, a power vacuum emerges and factional leaders battle ferociously to fill the void, as in Somalia and Liberia.

Chaos and carnage ensue. Infrastructure is destroyed. Food production and delivery are disrupted. Thousands are dislocated and flee, becoming internal refugees and placing severe strains on the social systems of the resident population. Food supplies run out. Starvation looms.

The Western media bombards the international community with horrific pictures of rail-thin famine victims. Unable to bear the horror, the international community is stirred to mount eleventh-hour humanitarian rescue missions. Food, tents, blankets, portable toilets, high-protein biscuits, and other relief supplies are airlifted to the refugees.

Factional leaders, who initially welcomed the humanitarian mission to feed refugees, turn against the mission and refuse to cooperate with it because its presence accords some legitimacy and recognition to the hated regime. Factional leaders then demand that relief organizations deal with them and not the regime. The demands soon turn into extortion. At some point, relief supplies are attacked and aid workers are taken hostage or killed. The mission loses public support and is terminated; relief workers are pulled out and the starving refugees are left to fend for themselves. That is, until another African country blows up and the whole macabre ritual is repeated. Nothing -- absolutely nothing, it seems -- have been learned.

Two factors underlie Africa's never-ending political violence and civil wars: the absence of mechanisms for peaceful transfer of political power and for the peaceful resolution of conflicts. As we argued carnage and chaos often result from a mad grab for power centralized at the capital. Long-term solutions would involve decentralization or diffusion of power, and the adoption of power-sharing arrangements; namely, democratic pluralism. There are far too many oppressive dictatorships in Africa. The democratic reform process, which gathered momentum after the collapse of communism in 1989, has stalled. In 1990, only 4 of the 54 African countries were democratic. Although this number grew to 14 in 1998 (Botswana, Benin, Cape Verde Islands, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Namibia, Sao Tome & Principe, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa, and Zambia), there reversals to the process when the civilian governments of Tejan Kabbah of Sierra Leone and Pascal Lissouba of Congo (Brazzaville) were overthrown in 1997.

Admittedly, some countries listed above would not meet a rigorous definition of a "democracy." Senegal is an example. One of Africa's oldest experiments in democracy, it has been a disappointing *de facto* one-party state. Technically, it is a multi-party system but the opposition parties are too small and numerous to challenge the dominant party's lock on power. For example, in the May 24, 1998 elections, 18 major political parties vied to end 38 years of domination by President Abdou Diouf's ruling Socialist Party. In addition, fraud and the rewards system ensure that the ruling party never loses: "People are rewarded with bags of rice; workers in pro-government trade unions get the best pay and conditions; student party members are first in line for scholarships. All this binds people into a blurred entity consisting of the state, the government and the ruling party" (*The Economist*, 18 April 1998, 44).

Though Senegal is not too oppressive, political tyranny is still the order of the day in most other parts of Africa. Wily autocrats quickly learned new tricks to beat back the democratic challenge by inflating voter rolls, manipulating the electoral rules, and holding fraudulent elections to keep themselves in power, as in Algeria, Angola, Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, and Zimbabwe. Nigeria, for example, is in a perpetual state of transition to democratic rule under the watchful eyes of its ever-competent military bandits. Benin, Cape Verde Islands, Malawi, Mali, South Africa, and Zambia held democratic elections and peacefully changed governments. There were no refugee crises in these countries. In the rest, the only way to remove an incompetent, corrupt, and oppressive regime from power is by waging a destructive civil war.

Second, there has been a near-total absence of mechanisms or institutions for peaceful resolution of conflicts, internally and continentally. Disputes arise in *all* societies. Two people may claim the same plot of land. Five political parties may claim the presidency of a country. A society that does not have the means or structures for resolving disputes simply self-destructs. In prehistoric times, Neanderthals resolved their disputes with clubs. Naturally, the one wielding the biggest club always won. The modern equivalent of this barbaric form of dispute resolution is resort to the bazooka. The one with the largest arsenal, of course, wins the dispute, with the country thoroughly destroyed.

There are *civilized* ways of resolving social, economic, and political disputes. Society establishes a structure, forum, mechanism or institution to settle them. These mechanisms are of two general types. The first is the direct, face-to-face dialogue, or negotiation, which may be formal or informal. The informal kind occurs when a disputant invites the other over, say, to his home for dinner, to talk over their disagreement. No third parties are involved and the deliberations are strictly private. However, when two parties enter into formal dialogue, third parties or the press may be present.

Of course, African leaders are aware of dialogue and are quick to recommend it to others. When the Liberian crisis flared up, members of the Economic Community of West Africa, led by Nigeria and Ghana, urged the warlords to dialogue. Ghana even held at least four peace conferences in Accra for the warlords. But the military regimes in Ghana and Nigeria refused to sit down to dialogue with their opponents. Nigeria's military ruler, General Sani Abacha for example, decided that the best way to dialogue with Chief Moshood Abiola was to keep him in jail.

Dialogue or negotiation is not possible if one or both parties are not interested in talking. A dialogue can redress a grievance only if *both* parties are willing to sit down to talk, *both* show good faith in the deliberations, and *both* are willing to abide by the results. If any of these conditions cannot be satisfied, then the alternative is to present the dispute to some other body to adjudicate.

Thus, the second general type of dispute settlement technique is to engage the services of a third party. The parties may take their dispute to a court or submit it to arbitration by a panel or commission. But for any of these modalities to work, the independence and impartiality of the third party must be assured and the disputants must agree to abide by the rulings.

For the court system to work in resolving disputes, it must not only act impartially but also be seen as impartial and independent; that is, free from intimidation or control from any quarter. A supreme or district court that is packed with government lackeys, as in Kenya, Ghana, or Togo, is not impartial. Establishing an impartial court is only half the story. Both parties must accept a court ruling; if one side is not willing to accept the ruling, then the whole exercise would be a monumental waste of time and resources. This can be overcome by empowering the court to enforce its ruling. For example, if one party disregards the court's ruling, he could be arrested, fined, or jailed for being in contempt of court. If the erring party is the president of the country, he could be impeached for the same offense.

Binding arbitration is another form of third-party dispute resolution. A panel or commission of respected personalities, such as retired judges, professors, army generals, or traditional leaders, deliberate on the dispute and render a judgement, which is binding on both parties. Both must agree to the constitution of the panel and its terms *before* it begins deliberation.

Each modality has its own advantages and demerits. Face-to-face dialogue can be quicker since the disputants face each other and each can adjust or modulate his position as the horse-trading proceeds. But the two parties must have the capacity to be flexible. Dialogue is not likely to succeed when bitter enmity exists between the two parties or when disputants enter with hardened positions. The court system has the advantages of legal backing and the possibility of appeal. A district magistrate court's ruling can be appealed to a higher court, but that can take time and cost money. Binding arbitration can be quicker but it allows no appeals.

Whatever the modality, successful resolution of disputes must have three key features. First, the forum must be recognized by all as the place to take disputes to. Second, the adjudication process must be transparent; that is, judges must be impartial and the process open with no backroom deals struck. Third, the rulings must be accepted by all. If not, an appeal must be allowed, but a limit should be placed by establishing a final court of appeal.

In much of Africa, these structures are woefully lacking. Thus, a trivial political dispute can easily escalate into a full-blown civil war that sends refugees streaming in all directions. A typical example was the February 1994 deadly ethnic conflict in northern Ghana between the Konkomba, the Nanumba, the Dagomba, and the Gonja, which claimed over 2,000 lives. The conflict was started by a simple dispute over the price of a fowl. This dispute flared up into a general conflict because there was no local institution for resolving disputes.

If impartial and formal mechanisms for the peaceful resolution of disputes do not exist or are not supported by the government, then people with grievances will seek alternative, unorthodox means, such

as protest marches (peaceful or violent), civil disobedience, strikes (work stoppage and obstruction), sabotage of government machinery, riots, coups d'etat, a revolution (to overthrow a tyrannical government), terror or intimidation campaigns and civil strife or war. None of these, of course, is palatable. Each is disruptive, costly, and destructive. African governments are right in disapproving of such courses of action. But then, most of them refuse to open up legal channels for redress of grievances or peaceful resolution of disputes and claims. And if a dispute cannot be solved within a country, then recourse must be made to regional or continental bodies. Here the prospect is even more hopeless because that scandalous Organization of African Unity, whose mandate is conflict resolution, is yet to resolve one.

Back in 1993, Ghana's state-owned paper, *The Mirror* (June 26, 1993), wrote a scathing editorial on the OAU Summit of that year:

> The socio-political situation of Africa continues to grow from bad to worse as millions of lives are being lost with the passage of each day. The OAU seems to have lost its grip on affairs on the continent. Looking at the number of hot spots, one wonders if the wishes and aspirations of the founding fathers of the organization, still continue to be a dream.

> Although other speakers at the meeting criticized the industrialized countries for tending to regard Africa as a hopeless disaster continent, *they did not fail to admit that many of the continent's problems were due to mismanagement by the leaders.*

> The time has come for African leaders to re-examine themselves and find out whether they are prepared to face and overcome the challenges facing the continent to make it what the founding fathers had meant it to be. The future of Africa lies in the hands of her sons and daughters and we must do everything in our power to save our continent. The time is now or never! (p.2). (Italics added).

All these, however, fell on deaf ears. Commenting on 1996 OAU Summit held in Cameroon, even the state-owned daily, *The Cameroon Tribune* (5 July 1996) could not resist taking a swipe: "At 32, neither the OAU nor most of its members actually behave at that age, in terms of conflict resolution, democratic practices and acceptable governance." (4)

African children, holding their own parallel mini-summit in Cameroon, were also bitter. Said 17-year-old Christopher Kello of Uganda that has been ravaged by civil war for most of its post-colonial history: "You are the leaders, you are the adults creating problems for us." He said the children noted with regret that African leaders spend vast sums of money on arms. "We wish that money to be used for economic activities, education, peace and more children's summit. Africa is full of mess," he admonished (*The African Observer*, 7-15 July 1996, 3).

The absence of mechanisms for conflict resolution means that a minor political dispute can escalate into a full-blown civil conflagration and rage for years until foreign powers intervene to impose a settlement or mediation, as in Angola, Ethiopia, and Somalia. Unfortunately, foreign intervention does not always work, as recent experience in Somalia attests. It must be stated categorically that it is not the responsibility of the international community to feed Africa or solve every African crisis. The international community can help, but the initiative has to come from Africa itself. Ultimately, it is Africans who must craft their own durable African (home-grown) solutions to their African problems. Additionally, apart from upholding the principle of self-reliance, African solutions are far less expensive than foreign ones. The international rescue mission into Somalia, for example, cost the international community $3.5 billion without even ending the carnage and the collapse of the country.

INDIGENOUS AFRICAN SOLUTIONS

More maddening, the solution to all these crises can be found in Africa itself. Conflict resolution mechanisms can be found in Africa's own indigenous systems, almost everywhere castigated as backward and primitive. A hierarchical system of jurisprudence existed in most traditional African societies. Back in 1911, Casely Hayford (1911) wrote this about Ashanti courts:

> At a "palaver," which is the word for a suit before the Court, the King sits with his Councilors; and the Court is an open one, which any member of the community may attend. There is no secrecy

about the proceedings. The complainant states his case as fully as he can, and he is given a patient hearing. In the course of his statement questions are freely asked him by the Councilors, and doubtful points elucidated. The same process is gone through with the defendant, and with the witnesses called by either party. The Council then retires to deliberate upon the facts, and its verdict is given by the King's Linguist (p.256).

For the Fanti of Ghana, James Christensen (1952) wrote:

[Since time immemorial] the Fanti have had a rather complex system of courts and hearings. Presiding at any dispute or trial may be a group of elders, a chief and elders, or a panel of chiefs, depending on the nature of the case. A dispute, after submission to a group of elders for arbitration, may be further referred to a higher authority, such as a sub-chief or the paramount chief of a state. The latter, known as the *omanhene*, was the ultimate authority. The plaintiff and defendant generally present their own case to the court, call witnesses and cross-examine those who give testimony for the opposition. During a hearing, proverbs are quoted by the litigants. Proverbs may be regarded as the verbalization of social norms or "laws" which govern interpersonal relations.

 Many proverbs may be regarded as legal maxims since they are utilized most frequently in disputes. For example, a request for the postponement of a case may be supported by the statement, "it takes time to make a dress for the hunchback." Another proverb often quoted to indicate prior ownership in a land dispute is, "The bathroom was wet before the rain fell" (p.236).

Within the tribe, mechanisms and procedures existed by which disputes could be settled. Unfortunately, no such systems existed for the resolution of intertribal disputes, except a few ad hoc measures or attempts at diplomacy. This was why the Konkomba and Nanumba disputes flared up into tribal war.

Africa's traditional institutions, often castigated as "outmoded," can be useful. Indeed, this was exactly what the multinational force that was sent into Somalia in 1993 to maintain peace and ensure delivery of relief food supplies to famine victims found. The centralized government structure and other institutions established by the elites, such as schools, the postal service, and the central bank had all collapsed. But Somalia's traditional form of local government survived, and the U.S.-led military force tried to use it to revive the others. In the traditional system, decision is taken by clan elders, gray-haired men who have won inherited status in their communities as scholars, clerics and business leaders. "`They represent legitimacy in this country,' said Colonel Serge Labbe, the commander of Canadian forces, who meets frequently with elders to discuss how to end lawlessness, reopen schools and generally restore some degree of normal life. `They're considered to be wise, almost supernatural in what they say.'" *The Washington Post*, 28 March 1993, A30).

Carl M. Peterson and Daniel T. Barkely offered a reason why Somalia imploded:
The previous government [Siad Barre's] failed to incorporate the institutional aspects of Somalia's indigenous culture into a functioning national body. [Therefore] a stable, viable and fair political system must comprise the essential characteristics of Somalia's complex society. This means revitalizing indigenous institutions, restoring traditional powers and giving clans a legitimate outlet for political expression. (*New African*, June 1993, 20).

After its long civil war, "Mozambicans settled 500,000 property claims with only verbal agreement mediated by village chiefs. Mozambique has no psychiatric care, but local healers cleared up numerous cases of severe post-traumatic stress disorders" (*The News & Observer*, 4 January 1998, A18).

Institutions that have helped Africans survived for centuries cannot be that deficient. At least, they are superior to the hastily imported systems that could not last for even 30 years. According to Hitchens (1994,) "The Swahili word for this concept, now coming back into vogue after a long series of experiments with foreign models, is *majimbo*. It stands for the idea of local initiative and trust in traditional wisdom" (*Vanity Fair*, November 1994, 117). Adebayo Adedeji, former executive secretary of U.N. Economic Commission for Africa and director of the African Center for Development and Strategic Studies in

Nigeria, would agree: "Unfortunately, the leadership that took over from the departing colonial authorities did not go back to our past to revive and revitalize our democratic roots. They took the line of least resistance and convenience and continued with despotism, autocracy, and authoritarianism. But the basic democratic culture is still there" (*Africa Report*, November/December 1993, 58).

E. F. Kolajo of Thoyandou, South Africa, concurred: "The Japanese, Chinese, and Indians still maintain their roots, and they are thriving as nations. Africa embraces foreign cultures at the expense of its own, and this is why nothing seems to work for us" (*New African*, February 1995, 4). In fact, according to The *Bangkok Post*,

> "Japan's postwar success has demonstrated that modernization does not mean Westernization. Japan has modernized spectacularly, yet remains utterly different from the West. Economic success in Japan has nothing to do with individualism. It is the fruit of sheer discipline -- the ability to work in groups and to conform" (cited by *The Washington Times*, 9 November 1996, A8).

Furthermore, institutions exist at the traditional level for peaceful resolution of political crises. When a crisis erupted in an African village, the chief and the elders would summon a village meeting. There the people debated the issue until a consensus was reached. During the debate, the chief usually made no effort to manipulate the outcome or sway public opinion. Nor were there bazooka-wielding rogues, intimidating or instructing people on what they should say. People expressed their ideas openly and <u>freely</u> without fear of arrest. Those who cared participated in the decision-making process. No one was locked out. Once a decision had been reached by consensus, it was binding on all, including the chief.

In recent years, this indigenous African tradition has been revived by pro-democracy forces in the form of "national conferences" to chart a new political future in Benin, Cape Verde Islands, Congo, Malawi, Mali, South Africa, and Zambia. Benin's nine-day "national conference" began on 19 February 1990, with 488 delegates, representing various political, religious, trade union, and other groups encompassing the broad spectrum of Beninois society. The conference, whose chairman was Father Isidore de Souza, held "sovereign power" and its decisions were binding on all, including the government. It stripped President Matthieu Kerekou of power, scheduled multiparty elections that ended 17 years of autocratic Marxist rule.

In South Africa, the vehicle used to make that difficult but peaceful transition to a multiracial democratic society was the Convention for a Democratic South Africa. It began deliberations in July 1991, with 228 delegates drawn from about 25 political parties and various anti-apartheid groups. The de Klerk government made no effort to "control" the composition of CODESA. Political parties were not excluded; not even the ultra right-wing political groups, although they chose to boycott its deliberations. CODESA strove to reach a "working consensus" on an interim constitution and set a date for the March 1994 elections. It established the composition of an interim or transitional government that would rule until the elections were held. More important, CODESA was "sovereign." Its decisions were binding on the de Klerk government. De Klerk could not abrogate any decision made by CODESA -- just as the African chief could not disregard any decision arrived at the village meeting.

Clearly, the vehicle exists -- in Africa itself -- for peaceful transition to democratic rule or resolution of political crisis. If Benin and South Africa could be saved, the rest of Africa can be too. And they can be saved if only the ruling elites would be willing to implement genuine reform and return to their roots. After independence, African nationalists and elites abjured their own native institutions and rushed to blindly copy foreign systems they did not understand. Had they looked in their own backyard, they would have found the solutions to many of Africa's recurrent crises there.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Achebe, Chinua (1985). *The Trouble With Nigeria*. Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishing.

Ayittey, George B.N. (1991) *Indigenous African Institutions*. Dobbs Ferry, NY: Transnational Publishers.

_____ (1992). *Africa Betrayed*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

_____ (1998) *Africa In Chaos*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Casely Hayford, J.E. <u>Gold Coast Native Institutions,</u> 1897. Excerpted in Langley (1979).

Christensen, James Boyd. "The Role of Proverbs in Fante Culture." <u>Africa</u>, July; Vol. 28, No. 3, pp. 232-43, 1952.

Chazan, Naomi, Robert Mortimer, John Ravenhill, and Donald Rothchild (1992). *Politics and Society In Contemporary Africa*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Riener Publishers.

Hitchens, Christopher (1994). "Africa Without Pity," *Vanity Fair*, November: 43-52.

Holmes, Kim R., Bryan T. Johnson, and Melanie Kirkpatrick, (1997). *Index of Economic Freedom.* Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation and Dow Jones & Company.

Soyinka, Wole (1996). *The Open Sore of a Continent.* New York: Oxford University Press.

World Bank (1989). *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Self-Sustainable Growth*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.

_____ (1995). *Ghana: Is Growth Sustainable?* Operations Evaluations Department. Report No. 99. Washington, D.C.: World Bank Publications.

---------- *World Development Report*. New York: Oxford University Press, annually.

-----------World Bank/UNDP (1997). *African Economic and Financial Data*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.