Comparative Analysis of the Impact of Armed Conflict: On Child Education in Selected Africa States

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Abstract
This paper critically examines the place of youth restiveness and armed conflict and its impact on education and future of a state. This paper argues that armed conflict children and youths are brutalized and forcefully recruited to serve armed factions. Armed conflict traumatizes children, leaving deep and lasting scars that remain for longer than the violence. Addressing the youth restiveness and armed conflict has become one of the most important fundamentals of any governments both 'in developed, developing, and in third world country ravaged by conflict and crisis on a daily. The paper sets out to examine the causes of armed conflict and youth restiveness on education in Africa. It argues that the escalating rate of internal conflict or domestic violence demonstrated in varying dimensions is not unconnected with frustration caused by high rate of unemployment particularly among the youth. The paper also emphasizes that armed conflict in the continent are employed sometime by political elites to fight their political opponents and also to gain relevance and popularity in the political market with serious consequence on the youth and children. The research work recommends that, there should be strong synergy among various government institutions within and outside the Africa continent to minimize the activities of internal wangle, armed conflict within the continent. We got all the information used in this work from both primary and secondary sources.

INTRODUCTION

Armed conflict both internally or externally generated, in most cases have setback the educational dreams and aspirations of million of young people around the world and African countries is not an exemption. Having said that is important to emphatically note that the cognitive development of children is harmed during war, as skills such as literacy, social activity, numeracy, and critical thinking is delayed Akeju (2010).

According to protocol I (1977) schools and other buildings used for civil purposes are guaranteed protection from military attacks. Protocol II also states that children shall receive an education in keeping with the wishes of their parents. Refugee children are also protected under the 1951 Refugees Convention, which guarantees the right to elementary education, and states they should be accorded the same opportunities as nationals from the host country. The regulations has stated in the various instrument are constantly being violated in conflict situations. Attacks on schools are one of the most easily quantifiable ways of gauging the effect of a conflict on education.

Due to conflicts, many countries are lagging behind on achieving the Education for All goals of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Convention and the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG). Enshrined in all relevant instruments is the right to free, compulsory primary education for all children irrespective of color, class, status or creed.

Graca (2000) submits that armed conflict does not only harm children physically, but emotionally, socially, economically, academically and psychologically which put the children and youth on the edge of vulnerability. Not only that large numbers of children killed, maimed and injured or taken as sex-slaves, but countless others grow up deprived of their material and emotional needs, including the structures that give meaning to social, economic and cultural life. The entire fabrics of their societies-their homes, dignity, schools, health systems and religious institutions-are torn to pieces (Akeju 2010).

In Nigeria the ongoing terrorism activities against the Nigerian state by the Islamic Sect (Boko Haram) that started in the mid- 2009 in the northern part of Nigeria with major casualties in North East have destroyed between 50% and 67% of school buildings and related infrastructure in many state in that region (IPCR-ECPR 2012). Education infrastructures were also targeted during the Arab Spring especially in the Libyan conflict that consumes the else-while leader Mumaman Ghadaffi in 2011. The Central Africa imbroglio is another major dilemma that is crippling children education recently. The impact of conflict on education may also be felt more indirectly, as part of a wider pattern of disruption and dislocation and the effects of state collapse (Nicolai and Triplehorn 2003).

According to UNICEF, more than 2 million children have died as a direct result of armed conflict and more than 3 times that number have been permanently disabled or seriously injured. The same report estimates that 20 million children have been forced to flee their homes, and more than 1 million have been orphaned or separated from their families, and that 3 hundred thousand child soldiers (boys and girls) under the age of 18 involved in more than 30 conflicts worldwide. Most recently in 2010, 11,393 children (8,624 male and 2,769 female) benefited from reintegration assistance supported by United Nations agencies, funds and program (UN

SRSG report A/66/256, 2011).

OBJECTIVE

The major objective of this research work is to critically do a comparative analysis of the impact of armed conflict on Child Education in selected Africa States by extension suggest way forward on how this can be reduce if not eradicated.

Conceptual clarification

Armed Conflict: Armed conflicts are political conflicts involving citizens fighting for internal change. Some are secessionist movements, generally spearheaded by a group of people, more often than not a minority within a community, who take up arms to fight for the establishment of either an autonomous entity within an existing state or an entirely new and independent state of their own.   Such conflicts have been relatively common in Africa such as issues related to ethnic conflicts, political crisis, identity crisis, are some of the major causes of armed conflicts in African.

According to Erik Melander (2015 An armed conflict is a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in one calendar year.

In a related development armed group are people who are armed and ready to fight for the goal of seizing governmental power. Sometimes conflicts are matters of organized crime as opposed to politics. Money is the motivator for these groups. Unlike members of secessionist movements, such groups are generally prepared to continue to live in the same territory with other groups, regardless of the outcome of the conflict (Armed Conflict Report 1998). Most armed conflicts are fought not only by regular armies but also by militias and armed civilians with little discipline and with ill-defined chains of command. Such clashes are in fact often guerilla wars without clear front lines.

In his opinion Akangbe (2014) argues that armed conflicts is a major feature collapse institutions of the state, especially the police and judiciary, with resulting paralysis of governance, a breakdown of law and order. In some cases, not only are the functions of government suspended but its assets are destroyed or looted and experienced officials are killed or flee the country. He further submits that armed conflicts are usually intermittent, with a wide range in intensity. It usually occurs not on well- defined battlefields but in and around communities, and is often characterized by personalized acts of violence, such as atrocities committed by former neighbors and, in extreme cases, genocide.

There are three types of conflicts that are recognized by international humanitarian law: international armed conflict, internationalized armed conflict, and non-international armed conflict. International humanitarian law does make it clear what an international armed conflict is. According to the Geneva Conventions of 1949, common article 2 states that "all cases of declared war or of any armed conflict that may arise between two or more high contracting parties, even if the state of war is not recognized, the convention shall also apply to all cases of partial or total occupation of the territory of a high contracting party even if the said occupation meets with no armed resistance" (Geneva Convention, 1949, common art.2).

This means that the occurrence of international armed conflict is clear, that is, it would be a conflict between the legal armed forces of two different states. A good example would be the North Korean- South Korean war of 1950. The second armed conflict recognized by international humanitarian law is a new phenomenon known as 'an internationalized armed conflict'. The situation of an internationalized armed conflict can occur when a war occurs between two different factions fighting internally but supported by two different states (Stewart, 2003, p 315). The most visible example of an internationalized armed conflict was the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1998 when the forces from Rwanda, Angola, Zimbabwe and Uganda intervened to support various groups in the DRC (Stewart, 315). Non-international armed conflicts, according to common article 3 of the Geneva Convention, are 'armed conflicts that are non-international in nature occurring in one of the High contracting parties' (Geneva Convention, common article 3, 1949). For a situation to be classified as a non-international armed conflict, it has to achieve two variables: first, the hostilities have to reach a certain minimum level of intensity (Vite, p 75; ICRC, 2008, p 3) and form in a collective character; and second, there has to be a level of organization of the parties (Vite, p 75).

In a related development the concept of youth can at best be described as a social category in crisis being excluded, marginalized, threatened, victimized, abused and consequently angry, bitter, frustrated, desperate and violent. (Ikelegbe 2006) But arising from these crises and the nature of responses, contemporary African conception of youth has dramatically changed from that of hope and development, to the representations of the youth as dangerous, criminal, decadent, delinquent, defiant and resistant (Mamadou 2003).

In a related development Mamadou (1996) further describes the attributes and characteristics of the youth as having "set about promoting new solidarities and producing new parameters, confronting the state, parents and educators or simply ignoring them.

As a result of these contradictions, challenges and ensuing responses, youth participation in conflicts, violence and wars may merely provide media for the expression of power and the search for recognition and identity. The violent conduct of conflicts to them is sometimes, in reality, a registration of dissent and frustration and a challenge against the forms, practices and conduct of the state and its officials and local elite.

For example, in relation to the O'odua People's Congress militia in Nigeria, Human Rights Watch (2003:7) notes that while some members joined for reasons of identifying with the political ideology and self-determination agenda, the need for protection against perceived political, economic and social discrimination, others especially the mass of young, unemployed men, have simply taken advantage of the organization as a channel for venting their general frustration. This is the mindset from which we mirror and discuss the Charlse Taylor's Small boys (SBU) and Gronna boys in Liberia, Museveni's boy soldiers – Kidogos – in Uganda, the 'technical' operating Moryham youth in Somalia, the lumpen rarray boys in Sierra Leone, Bayaye in Kenya and Uganda, Manchicha in Tanzania, Hittiste in Algeria, Tsotsi in South Africa, and Area boys, Egbesu boys, Yan Daba Boko Haram in Lagos, Niger Delta, Kano and north east of Nigeria respectively, and several others across Africa; though circumstances under which they have become active participants in armed conflicts are as varied as the conflicts themselves.

Momoh (2000) points at militarism and the culture of violence that it nurtured. Others point at economic crisis and accentuated poverty, unemployment and job losses. But, one explanation for the emergent youth culture is the issue of failing social control, the distortion of social values, the loosening of the cultural and social fabric on social behaviour, the decay of society's moral and ethical fibre and the disintegrating family and communal cohesion. These have loosened the restraints, controls and standards that made for socio-cultural order and released all kinds of unruly, alien, self-interested and decadent behaviour, which are particularly prevalent among the youth.

International crimes

Certain gross or serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law have been considered of such gravity by the international community that they have been regulated under international criminal law (Antonio Cassese 2008), establishing individual criminal responsibility for such acts. Individual criminal responsibility is fundamental to ensuring accountability for violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.

The Nuremberg International Military Tribunal famously noted that "crimes against international law are committed by men, not by abstract entities, and only by punishing individuals who commit such crimes can the provisions of international law be enforced." Since the 1990s the international community has intensified efforts to create adequate mechanisms through which individuals can be brought to justice for serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.

According to ICC (2000) Genocide: article 6 states: "[f]or the purpose of this Statute, 'genocide' means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) killing members of the group; (b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group";

In a related development International Criminal Court in its article 8 of 12 August 1949 Geneva Convention states that "war crimes" means: (a) violations of the laws and customs applicable in international armed conflict; and (c) in the case of an armed conflict not of an international character, serious violations of common article 3 and other serious violations of the laws and customs applicable in such a conflict.

While Human security; can be defined as the "safety from chronic threats such as hunger, disease, and repression, as well as protection from sudden as harmful disruptions in the patterns of daily life, whether at homes, in job or in the communities' (UNDP, 2007). This definition identifies the close link between livelihood security, human security and well-being, which is expected to become threatened by the advent of unexpectability such as war, genocides, violent, crime against humanity, climate variability change etc.

The concept of rebellion in international law refers to the situation of short-lived insurrections against the authority of a state, according to Cullen, "a rebellion occurs if the faction seeking to seize thepowerof the state seems susceptible to a rapid suppression by normal internal security" (Cullen, p 9). Therefore a rebellion according to traditional international law is a political upheaval within a state which the state's internal security, specifically the police, can handle, for example, the political upheavals in Kenya in 1992 with citizens demanding for the promotion of democracy.

Peace: The term peace is highly emotive; when peace is defined narrowly it can imply passivity and the acceptance of injustice. Peace is more than the absence of war. It is also "the maintenance of an orderly and just society," Howard (1971) submits that orderly in being protected against the violence or extortion of aggressors, and just in being defended against exploitation and abuse by the more powerful.

In another development Ojomo (1999) argue that peace is divided into two the negative peace, which is simply the absence of war, and positive peace, which is the presence of justice. He submits that "Peace can be slavery or it can be freedom; subjugation or liberation," peace means progress toward a freer and more just world. In a related development (Galtung 1969) developed the concept of "structural violence" to describe situations of negative peace that have violent and unjust consequences. Violence in Galtung's expansive definition is any condition that prevents a human being from achieving her or his full potential.

In Akangbe's view Peace does not mean the absence of conflict, although it does not have to be and usually is not violent. The challenge for peace practitioners is to find ways in which communities can resolve differences without physical violence. In this context peace is understood as a dynamic process not an absolute end point. The goal of peacemakers is to develop more effective ways of resolving disputes without violent conflict, to identify and transform the conditions that cause crisis (Akangbe 2011).

The Causes of Armed Conflicts
Many complex factors lead to armed conflicts within States. Some conditions that increase the probability of war include the inability of Governments to provide basic good governance and protection for their own populations (Aduloju 2014). In many instances, weak Governments have little capacity to stop the eruption and spread of violence that better organized and more legitimate Governments could have prevented or contained. Armed conflicts can also be seen as the struggle for power by a section of the elite that has been excluded from the exercise of power in authoritarian systems of one-party rule. Countries afflicted by war typically also suffer sharp inequalities among social groups. It is this, rather than poverty, that seems to be a critical factor, although poor countries have been far more likely to be involved in armed conflicts than rich ones. Whether based on ethnicity, religion, national identity or economic class, inequality tends to be reflected in unequal access to political power that too often forecloses paths to peaceful change (Nwachukwhu 2015). Economic decline and mismanagement are also associated with violent conflicts, not least because the politics of a shrinking economy are inherently prone to conflicts as compared to those of economic growth. In some instances, the impact of radical market-oriented economic reforms and structural adjustment imposed without compensating social policies has been seen to undermine political stability.

Ethnic and religious animosities, mass violations of human and minority rights, and ethnic cleansing resulting from extreme forms of nationalism propagated by hate media are factors that exacerbate conflict. The relative ease with which arms are trafficked all over the world, particularly in countries and regions afflicted by civil wars, is also a contributory factor (Abegunde, 2011). Although not in itself a cause of conflicts, the wide availability of such weapons tends to fuel them, undermine peace agreements in situations where combatants have not been completely disarmed, intensify violence and crime in society, and impede economic and social development (Smith 2009). It is estimated that some 500 million light weapons are in circulation in the world. At least nine million small arms are in West Africa, where they have killed more than three million people since 1990, more than 70 per cent of them women and children (UNDP 2015). Induced, mass movements of populations have also contributed to the spread of conflicts, as in Central and West Africa (UNHCR).

In some countries in the sub-Saharan region, struggles over religious tolerance such as the atrocity cause by Boko Haram terrorist in North East Nigeria where several schools and property worth billions of dollar had been destroyed, they have rendered millions of children and youth out of school, they have killed and maimed several others or for control over key natural resources, such as diamonds and gold, coupled with wider political ambitions, have increased the level of intensity of armed conflicts. For example, in Angola, where the rebel movement UNITA controls a substantial part of the diamond production, estimated revenue of $3.7 billion from the sale of diamonds between 1992 and 1998 allowed UNITA to maintain its armed forces. The Angolan Government, for its part, is financing the war mainly with revenue from oil concessions granted to foreign multinational companies (Ajibola 2015).

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a number of complex factors, including the desire to get a share of the country's rich potential wealth in minerals, especially diamonds and gold, have drawn six States in the region into a battle either for or against the Government. In Sierra Leone, control of the diamond mines by RUF has been a source of power and wealth for the rebel movement. Rebels, according to reports, purchased arms through the sale of diamonds and paid in diamonds Liberian soldiers who fought alongside their counterparts in the RUF/Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (Margareta 2008).

The Impact of Armed Conflict on selected African States
Present-day internal wars typically take a heavier toll on civilians than inter-State wars, and because combatants increasingly have made targeting civilians a strategic objective (UNDP Reports 2014). This disregard for humanitarian norms and for the Geneva Conventions on the rules of war also extends to treatment of humanitarian workers, who are denied access to victims in conflict zones or are themselves attacked (Sadako 2000). Societies ravaged by armed conflicts have paid a massive toll in loss of human life and economic,

political and social disintegration. More than four million people are estimated to have been killed in violent conflicts since between 1999-date 2016, (Utowa, 2016). Women and children, in particular, suffer unspeakable atrocities in armed conflicts. In the past decade, according to one estimate, up to four million of those killed in armed conflicts were children (UNDP, 2015).

Three times as many have been seriously injured or permanently disabled, many of them maimed by landmines, and millions were psychologically scarred by violence. Countless others have been forced to witness or even to take part in horrifying acts of violence. The widespread insecurity and trauma due to the atrocities and suffering of the civilian population is another terrible legacy of these conflicts. Conflicts create extensive emotional and psychosocial stress associated with attack, loss of loved ones, separation from parents and destruction of home and community. Many children develop problems, such as flashbacks, nightmares, social isolation, heightened aggression, depression and diminished future orientation. These problems of mental health and psychosocial functioning persist long after the fighting has ceased and make it difficult for children, who may comprise half the population, to benefit fully from education or to participate in post-conflict reconstruction. The psychosocial impact of war is often an aspect poorly addressed by Governments, as are the root causes of conflicts, such as exclusion and polarization of groups, in their efforts to rebuild society and prevent a relapse of violence (Michael, 2008). Sexual violence is another ruthless weapon of war. Warring parties resort to rape and sexual slavery of women to humiliate, intimidate and terrorize one another, as, in the ongoing onslaught against Boko Haram in North East Nigeria. Rape has been a weapon of ethnic cleansing aimed to humiliate and ostracize women and young girls for bearing the "enemy's" child and to eventually destroy communities. In Nigeria and several other African countries ravage with conflicts many women were forced to give birth to babies conceived during rape, while other women were forced to have abortions (Williams 2015).

In Nigeria as a result of Boko Haram terrorist activities millions of children suffer from starvation and disease while several thousand others have been killed as a result of armed conflict in the country. The high incidence of malnutrition, disease and deaths among young children is attributed to armed conflict tactics of disrupting the production and distribution of food supplies. Children are also tortured and raped to extract information about peers or parents, to punish parents or simply for entertainment. Girls are sometimes obliged to trade sexual favors for food, shelter or physical protection for themselves or their children, causing intense psychological trauma (Adakole 2015). Displaced children are also most abused, raped, tortured, exploited and drafted as child soldiers.

The creation of conflict-free zones or cease fire has proved effective in some cases in protecting children from harm and providing some essential services. So have periodic ceasefires agreed to by Governments and rebels to allow health workers to immunize children against common diseases, such as polio, measles, diphtheria and tetanus, and to deliver medical services and supplies. Such practices have been used in Uganda, and the Sudan. In Eritrea, alternative sites for schools destroyed by armed conflict or war include caves, camouflaged huts or under trees. In Sierra Leone, mothers and adolescents were trained to teach. Liberia used public media to reach out-of-school children and other sectors of the community. Vocational training that leads to employment has in some cases eased the reintegration of former child soldiers into the community (Ajakaye 2014).

Arms flow from various civil war sites in Liberia and Sierra Leone has not only fuelled the conflicts in region, it has also precipitated criminal activities such as poaching, armed robbery and drug trafficking among the youth in Senegal. This has also resulted in the growing isolation of the older generations of MFDC leadership whose influence has fast diminished and replaced by younger elements, with fluid motives. The Senegalese government's tradition of defining the Casamance conflict as an issue of 'law and order' with the separatists referred to as *bandes armies au Sud* (meaning, armed bandit in the South) makes the conflict fester on while yet giving international public opinion the impression that a negotiated settlement is in process. One sad effect of this is that having realized how impossible it is to win the war by military might, both the government and the MFDC start recruiting innocent civilians who are regularly subjected to all forms of arbitrary arrest and detention, murder and extrajudicial killing, rape and torture, intimidation and extortion (Chudu 2013).

The Democratic Republic of Congo is one of African mineral rich nations that have been engulfed by civil strife over the last decades. The United Nations has declared the latest conflict in the 1990´s to be "the most deadly humanitarian catastrophe in 60 years" (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2006, cited in Bell and Huebler 2011). Although the death toll in the DRC has been contested, experts agree that the total is much more than 4 million people (Bell 2006 cited in Bell and Huebler 2011).

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs stated in 2006, that 1.66 million people have been internally displaced, mostly in the eastern part of the country, notably the regions of Kivu and Katanga. Children and youths were mainly targeted during the war. Most of them including females were forcefully recruited to serve as child soldiers. UNICEF ranks the DRC as the country with the highest number of children used as soldiers, sexual slaves and laborers (Bell 2006, cited in Bell and Huebler 2011). According to UNESCO 2010 report many children have been abducted on their way to school by rebel groups to

serve as child soldiers, and schools have been ransacked by police and rebels and occupied by the army and the rebel group CNDP.

Right to Education

The right to education for all young people has been spelled out in many International organizations ratified by nearly all countries. Countries also have in their constitution the right to basic education for children, but it is has not been adhered to. The most notable instruments that point to Education for All are: The Education for All strategy, Convention on the Rights of the Child, Universal declaration of Human Rights, and the Millennium Development Goals.

Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the child (United Nations, 1989) states the following:

1. Make primary education compulsory and available free to all;
2. Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, make them available and accessible to every child, and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering assistance in case of need;
3. Make higher education available to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means.

The right to education also measured in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and became applicable to the status of Refugees in 1951. Populations affected by war, displacement and calamities have the right to education, under the International covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1967) and other human rights instruments, notably the 1989 convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by all nations (Bensalah, 2001).

The United Nation Sustainable Development Goals makes it clear that the entire world is expected to achieve universal primary education by 2025. The goal is to ensure that children everywhere, boys and girls, alike will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

The Dakar framework of Action drafted in Dakar 2000 recognized that one of the barriers to attaining Education for All (EFA) was the existence of countries and regions affected by current or recent, or natural disasters (UNESCO 2000). The Dakar pledge to mobilize strong national and international political commitment for education for all, develop national action plans and enhance significantly investment in basic education. The forum also pledged to meet the needs of education systems affected by conflict, natural calamities and instability and conduct educational programs in ways that promote mutual understanding, peace and tolerance, and that help to prevent violence and conflict (Dakar Framework for Action, para 8, April 2000). Quality, relevant education is a right of all children. Children in crisis situations often need new and different knowledge, skills and learning experiences in order to survive and to thrive in changed circumstances. They are particularly vulnerable, facing increased risks of physical and emotional trauma.

Conclusion

The nature of armed conflicts all over the world the continent of Africa inclusive has been that of situations intense hostile, volatile of human right, killing, maiming, arsons, etc. The state's tendency of being an agent of powerful state officials and hegemonic groups has destroyed its credibility and legitimacy and that of its security agencies, particularly in the mediation of conflicts. The failure of the state to provide security and stability has weakened people's confidence in its ability to prevent crime, settle conflicts and contain violent clashes. State persecution, arbitrariness, excessive force, repression, brutalities, and human rights abuses furthermore tend to create politics of counter-violence. Refugees and internally displaced persons are the symptoms of armed conflicts, wars, communal violence motivated by ethnic or religious hatred, persecution and intolerance. The number of refugees increased from 17 million in 1991 to 27 million in 1995 and then declined to 25 million in 1999, it also increase back 29 million 2015. Countries affected by armed conflicts or internal strife generally have large numbers of refugees and displaced persons, although such factors as natural disasters and widespread human rights violations have also contributed to the number of displaced persons. Refugees may be cared for by a recognized international agency (such as UNHCR).

In Burundi, for example, in the last quarter of 1999 alone, 30,000 new refugees fled to the United Republic of Tanzania. The total number of Burundian refugees in that country is now about 300,000.20 The number of internally displaced people has also increased. There are an estimated 300,000 people in "regroupment" sites, virtually people who are internally displaced by a government policy. Access by humanitarian agencies to these people has been difficult since, among other problems, the Government has provided no clear guarantees for the security of humanitarian staff in these sites. Internal displacement poses a threat to political and economic stability at the national and international levels. The communities left behind and the towns and villages in which the displaced find refuge are often ravaged. In many situations of armed conflict, the violence generated in one country often spreads through entire regions, forcing neighbouring States to bear the brunt of massive refugee flows. Even countries that are continents away may have to contend with waves of desperate refugees.

A government's use of force against people who think that they have a just cause is likely to inspire fear and caution in the short run, but in the longer run, repression provokes resentment and enduring incentives to resist and retaliate. Economic decline, blocked mobility and aspirations, unemployment and poverty generate frustrations which tend to increase the intensity of political competition. It's important to understand that, violent political, ethnic and communal conflicts may be "rooted in popular alienation". There is also the problem of growing dissatisfaction with the achievements of democracy particularly as it relates to material economic improvements and peace in spite of the huge hopes and euphoria that followed democratization. For example, trickle and fleeting democracy dividends in Nigeria have made the people impatient, restless, alienated, hopeless and disappointed

In some cases, the fighting spills over to neighbouring countries used by one of the parties in the conflict as supply routes or hideouts for combatants. Brief ceasefires characterize most armed conflicts. Armed conflicts may end in many ways, including through peace agreements entered into by the warring parties to explicitly regulate or resolve contentious issues. They may also end through outright victory, where one party has been defeated and/or eliminated by the other. For some experts, conflicts may also be considered to have ended in situations in which even though there has been no formal ceasefire fighting has been dormant for years.

Youth involvement in conflict is sometimes a product of strategic manipulation and mobilization. Youth are particularly amenable to mobilization of different kinds be it ethnic, religious, oppositional, regional, communal and particularly in relation to change, domination and oppression. In most conflict ridden society, it has been noted that youth community, ethnic and regional militias are mobilized and recruited by political and business elite and ethnic entrepreneurs. West Africa has been the epicentre of conflicts in Africa, having recorded some of the most atrocious post-Cold War brutalities. This ranges from civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone, armed insurrections in Guinea, Mauritania, Guinea-Bissau, to secessionist attempts in the Casamance region of Senegal, sectarian violence in Cote d'Ivoire, and most recently the Boko Haram insurgent in Nigeria as well as other low intensity violence that occasionally plague Niger, Mali. A simplistic categorization of a number of these numerous conflicts reveals them as local conflicts, national conflicts, rebellion and insurgencies, civil wars and interstate conflicts. Quite associated is the incidence of warlords, armed bands and cults, vigilantes, private armies and gangsters. All this has precipitated damning human carnage and maximum collateral damage that have manifested in the weakening of states' capacity to guarantee effective security for their citizens, just as it has, in some other instances, set back genuine democratization efforts in Burkina Faso, Togo, the Gambia and Guinea.

Recommendations

- Youths and children associated with fighting forces must go through a proper reintegration process which should be followed by a comprehensive education package.
- The task of rehabilitating children victims and soldiers is daunting. Malnourished, uneducated, without skills and psychologically scarred, children in armed conflict need urgent attention if they are to become participants in peace. Attaining and maintaining future peace in these war-torn countries will depend on these children, who know of no way of life except war.
- The international community is as a matter of urgency effectively assists countries that have experienced violent conflicts and are now grappling with the enormous task of rebuilding their shattered societies.
- Psychosocial training to counsel war affected youths and instill a sense of patriotism and civil responsibility must take place in many countries around the world.
- For lasting solutions to armed conflicts, respect for human rights is imperative, with a special sensitivity to the human rights of ethnic, religious, racial and linguistic minorities.
- Because young people have fought for so long, life skill training and employment opportunities to better their lives and improve their standard of living is imperative.
- There must be a total restoration and support for education during and after armed conflict.
- Vocational education programs to build skills in a specific trade such as agriculture, animal husbandry, baking, carpentry, crafting, masonry, mechanics, tailoring and a variety of other trades should be inculcate into the youth so as to support the family.
- Protecting the human rights of children is increasingly viewed as a priority in peace negotiations.
- Equally, good governance and the strengthening of civil societies are essential for addressing the deepest causes of conflict: historic antagonism, economic despair, social injustice and political oppression.

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