

# WISDOM FROM AFRICA: AFRICAN APPROACHES TO MEDIATION

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# Introduction

- Conflict Transformation (CT) approach
  - Mediation, facilitation, negotiation, peace-building etc.
- Content
  - Formal African conflict transformation mechanisms
  - African conflict dynamics
  - Characteristics/applicability of traditional approaches to conflict transformation with examples
  - Important issues to be considered
  - Strengths/weaknesses of traditional approaches to conflict transformation
  - Way forward

# Formal African Conflict Transformation Mechanisms

- Golden Jubilee of OAU (2013)' 21<sup>st</sup> AU Summit
  - Positive economic outlook vs. unaddressed social, economic and political problems
  - African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA)
    - AU & Commission
    - Regional economic communities/mechanisms (REC)
    - Peace and Security Council (PSC)
    - Continental Early Warning System (CEWS)
    - African Standby Force (ASF)
    - Panel of the Wise and the Peace Fund
    - Horizontal and vertical co-operation at all levels/regions
- (Sellstrom, 2013)

# African Conflict Dynamics

- Entanglement of actors, issues and motives
  - Regionalisation, privatisation and commercialisation
  - State fragility/failure – PMCs/NGOs/MNEs etc.
  - Hybrid “socio-political exchanges” (Boege, 2006)
  - Formal (Western) approaches/structures for conflict transformation are not effective (Zartmann, 2000)
  - Hybrid approach to addressing conflict transformation
  - “New” look at traditional methods of conflict transformation
    - What could traditional approaches address?
    - In what format do they appear and apply today?
- (Woodman & Morse, 1987)

# Characteristics Of Traditional Approaches to CT

- Indigenous (inherent to a society); endogenous (emerging from a society) (Murithi,2008)
- Based in values but dynamic – endogeneity can facilitate links to “Western” methods
- Pre-colonial and pre-contact approaches (Boege,2006)
- Time immemorial (Brock-Utne,2001)
- Central threads (Malan,1997)
  - Group negotiation led by elders
  - Attitude of togetherness in spirit of humanhood
  - Ubuntu (SA), Ujamaa (Kiswahili), Kparakpor (Yoruba)
- Conflicts are always seen in their social context – not isolated events

# Characteristics Of Traditional Approaches to CT

- Emphasis on (restoring) relationships
- Rectification of wrongs done and restoring justice
- Consultative and participatory
- Sense of belonging – looking to the future
- Mediators playing various roles
- Role of the elders (Boniface,2012)
- Cultural practices and rituals (Brock-Utne,2001)
- Examples (Murithi,2008)
  - Jiir (mediation session) of the Tiv (Nigeria)
  - Shir (guurti) of Somaliland
  - Mato Oput of the Acholi (Uganda)
  - Abunzi Mediation (Rwanda)

# Issues To Be Considered

- Traditional societies/methods have been impacted upon by colonialism, evangelism, globalisation etc.
- Changes might add to “interoperability” with Western methods - endogeneity of approaches
- Traditional societies/methods destroyed
- High degree of variance - regions, societies, cultures
  - Danger of over-homogenization
  - 5000 ethnic groups (Murithi,2008)
- Danger of the over-romantization of traditional approaches

## Strengths Of Traditional Approaches

- Fits situations of state fragility, failure or collapse
    - Based on local structures and dynamics
    - “Islands of peace” can be created
  - Can be legitimate as they are not state-centric
    - Lack of legitimacy at the core of state fragility
    - Legitimacy can be used for initiating and broadening conflict transformation
  - Process oriented and takes Time into account
  - Comprehensive inclusion and participation
    - Social Context; Consensus; Cultural aspects
  - Focus on psycho- social and spiritual dimension
    - purification, reconciliation, healing
- (Boege, 2006, Murithi, 2008)



# Weaknesses Of Traditional Approaches

- Does not always terminate violence in the long run
  - Violent self-help is a “normal” option
- May contradict universal standard of human rights
  - Exclusion of women by patriarchal structures
  - Violation of personal integrity through punishment
- Has a limited sphere of applicability
  - Usually applies to smaller/local communities
- Geared to the preservation of the “old” order
  - Status quo ante / conflict transformation
- Open to abuse/Time consuming
  - Traditional authorities overstepping

# The Way Forward

- Capacity building of women mediators and gender mainstreaming of issue
  - Track II / Traditional approaches
- Use of mediation and diplomacy (Panel of the Wise)
- Unanimous concurrence (fairness)
- Institutional trustworthiness (social capital as “cement” for moving forward)
- Civic education and political socialization
- Training/Capacity-building of mediators
- Ongoing research and case-studies

Thank You  
Dankie

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