Report of Workshop on
Building Sustainable Peace in Africa

Dakar, Senegal
November 7–10, 2006

Workshop Objectives

TrustAfrica's first workshop was held in Dakar on November 7–10, 2006 on the theme of "building sustainable peace in Africa." The workshop, which was preceded by extensive discussions and exchange on an electronic forum moderated by Pambazuka News, brought together leading peace advocates, scholars, policy makers, and media experts from 25 countries and the Diaspora to discuss ideas and strategies for sustainable peace in Africa. The choice of sustainable peace was based on two primary needs. The first is the need to go beyond the predominant focus on conflict resolution in Africa to critical issues such as conflict prevention, post-conflict reconciliation, and pursuit of post-conflict justice against impunity. The second is the need for grounded analyses of conflict and pre-conflict situations before peace efforts are initiated, in order to achieve lasting peace.

Against this background, the workshop focused on the political and social contexts of peace and conflict rather than on military and humanitarian aspects. The overarching goal was to flesh out ideas and strategies for tilting the social and political balance toward sustainable peace across Africa. The discussions, organized primarily in small group sessions, addressed three objectives:

1. To identify the lessons learned from initiatives for peace and building and conflict prevention in Africa;

2. To reflect on capacity needs and formulate strategies for strengthening key organizations; and

3. To identify priority areas and strategies for strengthening collaboration and fostering an active peace movement in Africa.

Background: Building Sustainable Peace in Africa

Prior to the workshop, TrustAfrica organized an electronic discussion forum for more than sixty participants (some of whom attended the Dakar workshop). Facilitated by Pambazuka News, the forum (archived at http://www.trustafrica.org/forum/index.php?board=1.0) helped to shape the agenda and build momentum for the workshop in a participatory manner.

The Executive Director of TrustAfrica staged the workshop with an introductory statement in which he outlined five aspects of the challenge of building sustainable peace in Africa. First, he pointed out that although peace is indispensable, it is by itself not enough. To be

sustainable, peace must go hand in hand with social justice and democratic practice. Second, evidence shows that whenever and wherever peace has been denied or remained fragile in Africa, the single most important imperative has been to think and act creatively and boldly beyond traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. Third, such peace building efforts must be preceded by "grounded" analysis of what the systemic issues and challenges are, as well as what opportunities might be embedded in the context itself. Fourth, we have learned that the best way to build and sustain peace in Africa is to address the root causes of armed conflict, focus more on prevention, and share the lessons and strategies of success with those who might need them. Finally, it is obvious that Africa needs a popular and active peace movement that consistently and effectively keeps the spotlight on the many devastating violent conflicts on the continent, such as Somalia and Darfur.

Following Akwasi Aidoo's introductory statement, three expert presenters (Mr. Adekeye Adebajo of the Center for Conflict Resolution in Cape Town, Abdel-Fatau Musah of ECOWAS in Abuja, and Ms. Jessica Nkuuhe of Isis-WICCE in Kampala) submitted think pieces on the three objectives of the workshop. Several discussants (Mr. Joseph Yav Katshung, Ms. Roselynn Musa of FEMNET in Nairobi, Ms. Aseghedech Ghirmazion of the Heinrich Böll Foundation in Nairobi, and Brig-Gen. Pal Martins of Safer Africa in Pretoria) then responded to the presentations. This pre-workshop forum generated some very useful insights that are worth reiterating and commenting on here. The first presentation, by Adekeye Adebajo, called for a new "Pax Africana" founded on civil society activism. Set against the dominant "statist" paradigm of peace and security in Africa, this was a refreshing call, for the corridors of peace negotiations are routinely narrowly-focused, exclusive and disempowering of peace movement builders, such as women and youth. Hence, Adebajo spoke to the need to focus on a popular-based peace movement in Africa; one driven by informed, assertive, and concerted advocacy and campaigns for peace and social justice. Roselynn Musa and Jessica Nkuuhe amplified this point in relation to women and youth. But it was noted that the need goes beyond social groups; it's also multi-issue and crosscutting, incorporating the social movements for democracy, human rights, and environmental preservation, for example. It's not incidental that Africa's Nobel Peace laureates — Albert Luthuli, Desmond Tutu, Nelson Mandela, and Wangari Maathai — have come from social movements that did not necessarily bill themselves as pacific or of the peace movement.

The presentations raised the issue of the role of the state. Adekeye Adebajo's point on this was at once refreshing and contentious: "a few well-governed African states should eventually create an inner core within the African Union to enshrine term limits for heads of state in regional and domestic constitutions. Africa needs political and economic role models." He reasoned that "the failure to transform inherited colonial political structures and to adapt them to fit local contexts has been a major source of poor governance on our continent which has often contributed to the sources of conflicts." Joseph Yav Katshung made a pertinent call to affect the political will of Africa's leaders for peace-promoting governance, and Aseghedech Ghirmazion made an illuminating point about proxy wars: States using non-state actors to fight their enemies (such as Ethiopia/Eritrea in Somalia, Sudan versus Uganda in Southern Sudan). Abdel-Fatau Musah articulated the question of the state differently: "If there is one strength that may be identified in the evolving state in Africa, it may well be the increasing rejection of unconstitutional accession to power across the continent. In a way, the civil wars that are unfolding today may well be the

death throes of coups d'etat, authoritarian rule and other unconstitutional forms of government that were à la mode in the 1970s." Roselynn Musa, on the other hand, stressed peace education among Africa's youth.

The question arose as to the role of democracy in securing peace. This, it was noted, is an old question with two contending responses: one holds that democracy must produce dividends, including peace; and the other maintains that democracy is a good value in itself and should not have to be seen in instrumentalist terms. On this issue, the forum discussion provided some very useful insights. The first was Abdel-Fatau Musah's point that: "The development before democracy paradigm of those years is giving way to a democracy before development model. However, in this inverted logic lies the fly in the ointment… The task before us is to shift gears to the 'democracy and development' paradigm. And the (African) state does not appear to be equipped for that transition." Aseghedech Ghirmazion took it further, analytically, when she called for analysis of "how differences in political ideology have sparked some of the nastiest conflicts ever seen. (There is a) need to look closely at how warped democratization has been used to kill and maim innocent people in the name of getting rid of the dictator as in the case of Uganda, Sudan, Somalia, etc."

In the end, the primary question was this: How can TrustAfrica and other donors help to strengthen the peace movement in Africa? This implies some tensions. For example, how do peace organizations sustain their work by institutionalizing it and at the same time break out of institutional (and bureaucratic) limits to connect with broader social movements and with each other for peace and social justice? A veritable peace movement would be a solid anchor not only in relation to countering the internal factors and dynamics that feed wars in Africa, but would also be an effective response to the external factors and global forces that were highlighted by Pal Martins and Adekeye Adebajo.

Concluding the online discussion, Akwasi Aidoo suggested that a social movement lens on building sustainable peace shows two important realities. One is that the peace movement in Africa has never stood alone, isolated from other social movements. In the first and second World Wars, when Africans fought as colonial soldiers, the movement was anchored in the pan-Africa movement, whose broader agenda was to end colonialism and racism. During the Cold War of the 1950s and 1960s, the movement was tied to the Non-Aligned Movement (starting with the Bandung Conference of 1955). During the 1970s and 1980s, the Anti-Apartheid Movement became the anchor, and today, the peace movement is connected to a multiplicity of mass movements, as noted above. The second point worth bearing in mind is that the movement is critically conflicted between progressive and conservative forces, trends, tendencies, and perspectives. For example, as Roselynn Musa and Jessica Nkuuhe emphasized, even though women leaders are among the most active in peace efforts, they are often excluded from the table when "peace deals" are negotiated.

Lessons from Peace Building and Conflict Prevention

This session of the workshop focused on identifying strategies and initiatives for peace building and conflict prevention that have proven successful. Discussions covered (a) the lessons that can be distilled from African peace building initiatives, and (b) the prospects and strategies for disseminating the lessons of successful initiatives to societies and

countries that might be on the verge of armed conflicts, experiencing armed conflict, or emerging from armed conflict.

Workshop participants reflected on some of the definitional challenges related to the concept of peace. The tendency to reduce peace to conflict resolution was considered in adequate, for peace was not the mere absence of conflict. Further, it was stressed that conflict does not necessarily need to be violent, and that some non-violent conflict conducted in civil terms could produce positive outcomes. It was also noted that the infrastructure of peace includes a society's ability to manage conflict in a non-antagonistic ways. Finally, participants stressed the link between aggressive notions of masculinity and violent conflict.

Reviewing the landscape of violent conflicts and the dynamics of peace building and conflict prevention initiatives in Africa over the past fifty years of post-colonial rule, participants highlighted many major lessons that need to be reflected upon, analyzed, and documented. The main lessons identified are as follows:

1. Early warning systems, upon which many conflict prevention initiatives in Africa are anchored, are at best only partially effective since they focus only on the triggers of violent conflict. This is because, often, it is too late to prevent a conflict from assuming a violent form by the time the warning system kicks in. In addition, many violent conflicts have systemic causes that require social justice initiatives, not early warning mechanisms. Finally, incorporating gender sensitive indicators into early warning systems can have added impact.

2. Military and peacekeeping forces continue to receive undue emphasis in situations of violent conflict, while the evidence shows that a more integrated approach, anchored on diplomacy and social justice concerns, produce more lasting results.

3. There is a critical need for approaches that ensure that externally funded peace building initiatives can continue even after the external donors have left. The absence of such approaches is behind the recidivism (reversion to war) that has characterized countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, Burundi, and Sierra Leone in the past. On the other hand, an over-emphasis on a hurried exit strategy can be counter-productive unless local ownership and capacity is strengthened from the very beginning of externally funded initiatives.

4. Peace building and conflict prevention initiatives are often structurally designed to fail because they exclude the "silent" and marginalized stakeholders (such as women, youth, and the private sector). This tendency to exclude is due to a penchant for "depoliticizing" the sources of conflict.

5. Sustainable peace building requires a measure of constructive engagement between civil society and governments. Civil society needs to change our paradigm. As Tandeka Nkiwane put it, "We need a new paradigm. We can't always be challenging government; throwing stones at them and expecting that alone to produce results." There is a need to go beyond seeing governments as rivals, and looking for a cooperative ground. Even where critique of government is imperative, we should bear in mind the saying that: "The perfect is the enemy of the good."

6. The fact that many of the potent "feeders" of violent conflict are external to Africa requires that sustainable peace building initiatives must have strong capacity for monitoring, analysis, and advocacy. Darfur, for example, demonstrates that a rush to intervene without analysis of the external feeders does not produce solutions.

7. There is a direct relationship between sustainable peace building and externally solidarity. When neighboring governments and civil society organizations and Diaspora organizations play a constructive role, peace-building efforts have a greater chance of success.

8. The nature of media coverage is critical to the outcome of peace initiatives. In Rwanda, hate radio helped trigger the genocide, while in Liberia and Sierra Leone, the strategic use of media by women's peace groups was instrumental in securing sustainable peace agreements.

9. In cases where credible elders and eminent persons with credibility have been deployed and backed up by technical support, peace initiatives have been more successful, as with Nelson Mandela's role in Burundi.

10. Peace building initiatives are most successful when they are pursued in parallel with nation building and democratization, as seen in the case of Mozambique.

11. Some of the most effective strategies for disseminating successful peace initiatives are: using university students to research and conduct advocacy on peace issues, maintaining and sharing a database of peace experts, using local languages for peace education, use of audio-visual aids to transmit messages from community to community, and posting research results on the web for free access.

Strategies for Organizational Strengthening

This session of the workshop sought to identify the strengths and weaknesses of key African institutions and organizations (including official institutions and civil society organizations). The discussions focused on two main issues: (a) the kinds of support needed to strengthen the organizational capacities of groups working on peace issues, and (b) how civil society organizations can become more effective as advocates for peace vis-à-vis regional organizations.

Overall, the consensus sentiment at the workshop was that TrustAfrica should support efforts that have long-term impact, since building sustainable peace is a long-term process that needs long-term frames. Specifically, participants prioritized the following needs, opportunities, and strategies for TrustAfrica and other donors to help strengthen the capacity of African institutions in the field of peace and security:

1. Institutions at all levels (from civil society to intergovernmental organizations) require support for performance effectiveness. The African Union's Peace and Security Council, for example, has yet to become fully operational. What is most needed is a combination of advocacy to prioritize institutional reform and political will on the one hand, and well-targeted support to enhance institutional performance on the other.

2. There is a need for coordinated engagement between civil society and intergovernmental organizations. Civil society organizations, for example, need to

rethink their strategy of holding parallel summits and to find productive ways to engage with official bodies within the same space and time. To facilitate such engagement, especially at the African Union, civil society organizations need an intermediary resource center that can provide technical assistance to them.

3. Related to the second point above is a critical need for civil society organizations to acquire effective advocacy skills. The requisite skills range from knowing how to gain access, getting and retaining attention with a compelling message, being equipped with information and knowing how to effectively communicate to policy makers, knowing how to build and retain relationships with policy makers, and being able to maintain organizational independence while effectively engaging with official organizations.

4. TrustAfrica and other donors should prioritize core support, which will provide needed flexibility for civil society organizations to focus on their programs over the long term.

5. Leading and long-standing organizations could benefit from support to become sustainable. Much of such support can be obtained from local sources (such as the large numbers of millionaires on the continent many of who have a stake in sustainable peace) if there is sufficient investment of resources in nurturing those local sources.

6. There is a significant lack of pan-African emergency relief capacity, a need that requires focused attention if we are serious about building sustainable peace. This requires taking ownership and providing solutions by Africans, and not having the agenda set by outsiders.

7. Leaders of civil society organizations could benefit from support to reflect and learn organizational development skills. Participants recommended that TrustAfrica offer support for developing core skills on running effective organisations, and for organizational leaders to find space within which to safely develop their capacity

8. Participants recommended support for research that links grassroots research with peace building institutions. It was noted that there was a considerable amount of grassroots research, but that grassroots organizations lack the capacity to publish or disseminate this information.

9. Participants also prioritized the need to support leading organizations to become centers of excellence and to serve as realistic models, rather than looking up to external organizations that don't share the same concerns imposed by the African context.

10. A special recommendation was made to allocate resources to strengthening peace-building organizations in countries that are emerging from protracted periods of violent conflict. Support was also recommended for strengthening the efforts of civil society organizations that engage in direct peace negotiations, since in some cases official organizations have limited leverage for political reasons.

11. Finally, participants recommended support for research, training, and advocacy to stem the tide of HIV/AIDS within African military establishments. It was noted that the military serves an important function in Africa's security infrastructure and that a military devastated by HIV/AIDS is a blow to peacekeeping operations.

Strategies for Collaboration and a Peace Movement

In this session, participants reflected on how African organizations can build a vibrant "community of actors" capable and willing to actively campaign for peace and against war. The discussion will focus on: (a) ways in which peace organizations can effectively work together across borders, and (b) how to foster the development of a peace movement in Africa. It was noted that many of the workshop participants already collaborate among themselves and that what was needed was perhaps not so much more collaboration as better collaboration. To this end, participants made some important recommendations:

1. The potential of Internet-based communications was stressed by many participants, who noted that efforts to realize this potential are few and far between. Pambazuka News, for example, is alone in setting up an electronic platform, called the "African Union Monitor", which holds much promise for facilitating participation by civil society organizations in African Union summits in Addis Ababa. It was recommended that Pambazuka's efforts to set up an Arabic Edition should be supported.

2. TrustAfrica was urged to consider engaging consultants in Central and North Africa who could assist in linking organizations based there with their counterparts in other parts of the continent, especially around issues of civil society engagement with the African Union.

3. A public campaign approach, based largely on media strategies and vigorous outreach to other social movements (such as the labor movement, students movement, and women's movement), was highly recommended for mobilizing popular support and nudging political leaders to take action on some of Africa's most devastating conflicts, such as in Darfur and Somalia.

Conclusion

The workshop and preceding electronic forum provided a safe and congenial opportunity for peace activists and experts, who are burdened by wars and other forms of instability, to share ideas, explore common ground for collaboration, and reflect on how to take present work to higher levels. The recommendations produced by the workshop will feed into TrustAfrica's efforts to help build a popular peace movement in Africa and to strengthen the work of leading organizations in that movement. In particular, TrustAfrica will follow-up on the recommendations that represent new approaches, such as the following:

1. Promoting increased and quality media coverage of peace building efforts;

2. Amplifying the voices and ideas of African peace builders within regional and international forums;

3. Stemming the tide of HIV/AIDS in African militaries;

4. Strengthening the efforts of women's organizations in post-conflict societies;

5. Effectively protecting vulnerable peace advocates in situations of violent conflict; and

6. Disseminating the lessons of successful peace initiative across the continent.

Participants

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